



Association for the Development of Education in Africa



**Uganda:
The Integration of Child Soldiers into the School System**



By Col. Kale Kayihura

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Preface

Uganda is delighted to contribute towards the creation of a series of papers describing “Successful African Experiences”. This was one of the objectives agreed upon in 1994 by the Bureau of Ministers of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA). Our paper “Uganda: the integration of child soldiers into the school system” describes how the Government conceived, designed, funded and managed a program to reintegrate child soldiers into the community. After the liberation war in 1986, by law, because they were below 18 years of age, they could not be recruited into the Army.

The “Kadogo School Program” was introduced in 1987 after the National Resistance Movement (NRM) came to power in 1986. All these children had initially either fled to the nearest National Resistance Army (NRA) Camp or been found in the bushes by NRA Patrols or Fighting Units. The NRA did not have a policy of recruiting children into the Army.

A major question needed to be answered: what was to be done with the many “child soldiers” who were no longer ordinary children or had not become ordinary soldiers. They had varying educational backgrounds ranging from illiterate to those with some primary schooling, and they represented various age groups. In 1986, there were some 1,600 “child soldiers” registered, but by 1991, there were only 300 such “child soldiers” remaining.

The Uganda Government, having recognized the problem of child soldiers as a reality, and especially the orphaned children who were adopted by the NRA, took a firm decision to implement a rehabilitation programme. This was done through the Ministry of Defence in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Sports, by establishing what were popularly known as “Kadogo Schools”.

On the whole, the challenges and shortcomings encountered in the course of integrating the “child soldiers” into the army and community at large was a worthwhile experience. It is that experience that we would like to share. But what remains most important is the realization that the initiation of this program was largely dictated by the peculiar circumstances Uganda was faced with in the liberation struggle. It is our hope that other countries with similar predicaments and circumstances might learn something from our experience, which, we hope, will remain part of history and will never be repeated.

In this paper, therefore, the author outlines the key issues and challenges, explains the origin of the problem, describes the workings of the Kadogo School Program and assesses its achievements. But the peculiar circumstances of the Ugandan experience are perhaps less important than the lessons learned. It is, indeed, a blessing in disguise that this work has been undertaken by an insider in the person of Col. Kale Kayihura.

I commend Col. Kayihura for the clear exposition, analysis and articulation of his child soldier aspect of Uganda's recent history of liberation. I also commend the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) for agreeing to bring this paper to a wider audience.

Hon. E. Khiddu-Makubuya
Minister of Education and Sports
The Republic of Uganda.

List of Abbreviations

NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NRA	National Resistance Army
NRM	National Resistance Movement
RIF	Reduction in Force Program (World Bank)
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
UNLA	Uganda National Liberation Army

1. Introduction

Definition of a “Child Soldier”

The term “child soldier” in Uganda, refers to a soldier below the age of 18. Under the laws of Uganda, it is prohibited to recruit into the army a person below that age. Such soldiers are affectionately called “Kadogos”, (meaning “small one” in Kiswahili).

When the National Resistance Movement (NRM) came to power in Uganda in 1986, there were as many as 300 child soldiers in the National Resistance Army (NRA), the new national army. However, these child soldiers, some of them as young as five years old, had not been deliberately recruited by the NRA to fight its bush war, as was widely alleged in 1986. Rather, they were orphaned or abandoned children, victims of the “scorched earth” policy of the then government army, the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA), in its campaign against the NRA, during the bush war that raged in the country between 1981 and 1986. They were children who had either fled to the nearest NRA camp or been found in the bushes by NRA patrols or fighting units.

The Kadogo School Program

In 1987, the “Kadogo School Program” to take the child soldiers back into school was initiated. Although only 276 out of a total of 1,580 Kadogos registered by 1991 are still pupils or students, we rate the program a success for a number of reasons.

First, more than 400 soldiers originally registered as Kadogos were, at different stages, found to be above age and reintegrated back into the army. Therefore the number of 1,580 Kadogos registered in 1991 was exaggerated. But even then, such soldiers, many of them illiterate, were exposed to elementary education and returned to the army knowing, at least, how to read and write. They have since contributed to the efficiency of the units where they were deployed, serving especially as instructors in military training schools.

Second, the program was able to start in spite of the fact that the government had neither adequate revenue nor the capacity to generate it. In addition, Uganda faced many other problems at that time: pacification of the country after the five-year war; rehabilitation of the shattered physical and social infrastructure; and economic recovery. Nonetheless, the government conceived, designed, funded and managed the program with only negligible outside assistance. The government has managed to sustain the program, and we can confidently say that it has realized the

objectives for which it was designed.

Third, the Kadogos who have continued studies are of high caliber in terms of both discipline and performance. They are exemplary in every institution in which they are presently studying. In fact, some of them have been among the best students in Uganda.

2. Background

Nature of the problem

When the NRM took power in 1986, there was a real problem concerning the future of the child soldiers. Since they had not attained the minimum age of 18, they could not continue in active service. Yet they could not just be demobilized and brought back into civilian life.

To begin with, since most of them were orphans, they had become “adopted” children of the NRA from the days of the struggle in the Luwero Triangle. They looked to the army for their security, welfare and future. Furthermore, were they to be discharged, where would they go? Perhaps they would have ended up in orphanages. Yet such orphanages were in a run down state at that time. Aside from that, were orphanages the appropriate place for the Kadogos to go? The army and the government had a moral and national obligation to ensure that its Kadogos were not abandoned to an uncertain future.

Secondly, these Kadogos could not be dealt with either as ordinary children or as ordinary soldiers. They were children who had seen combat. They had faced the hardships of war and even death. Some of them had even led men in battle. They were proud soldiers of a victorious army who would not be willing to be relegated to obscurity at a moment when the NRA was enjoying its greatest moment of glory.

Thus, it was difficult simply to demobilize them and send them into the civilian school system. Demoralized, they would either have refused to go to school or, once in school, they might have been extremely difficult to handle by school authorities unfamiliar with or even insensitive to their delicate situation.

The government was put under considerable pressure by both international and local agencies, immediately after it took power in 1986, to demobilize the child soldiers and send them to school. A campaign was waged by some agencies and by the international media concerning the issue of the child soldiers. President Yoweri Museveni and the NRA were criticized for “exploiting children” by misusing them in combat.

The Uganda Group for Human Rights, based in London, writing to the then Deputy Minister of State in the Uganda Prime Minister’s Office, alleged that around 3,000 children were involved at the time NRM took power in 1986 and that *“this constituted 15% of his (President Museveni’s) total army, a substantial number indeed”*. The Group demanded that the children immediately be removed from violence, guns and war; be given an opportunity to begin or continue their education; be given the choice of either continuing in the army or not; be allowed to reunite with their parents or relatives.

Obviously, this is a misunderstanding of the situation. For instance, it was not true that there were 3,000 child soldiers in the NRA in 1986 or at any other time. In 1986, there were only 300 Kadogos, and the highest number ever to be registered, as noted earlier, was 1,580 Kadogos in 1991. Most of these child soldiers had come either from other fighting groups, which joined the NRA in 1986 or from rebel groups that surrendered to the NRA between 1987 and 1990. Only a small fraction was constituted by the original Kadogos whom the NRA came with it from the “bush”.

Moreover, as the then Assistant Minister of Defense, Hon. Amana Mushega noted in 1987 in a brief to some concerned quarters in the United States, the Kadogos were far better off than other youngsters in the war-ravaged areas who did not have the fortune of being rescued by the NRA. *“They are even better off than thousands of young Ugandans who suffer from illiteracy, malnutrition, etc. because of the backward and primitive conditions under which many people in Uganda, in particular, and Africa, in general, have been forced to live”*, he observed.

Nevertheless, the campaign had the effect of putting pressure on the government to solve this problem as a matter of urgency, whether or not it had the resources to do so, and despite the fact that it had other, more pressing problems of economic recovery. The insurgency began in Northern and Eastern Uganda in August 1986. Inadequate resources hampered the implementation phase of the program.

Furthermore, there was an additional problem: the Kadogos had varying educational backgrounds. Had they led a normal life, some of them would have been in primary school grade 7 and above. Yet others had never gone to school. The rest had stopped school at different levels of primary education.

The roll taken on February 27, 1987 shows the following:

Grade level										
attained in school:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No. of Kadogos:	60	21	84	137	115	123	87	38	9	4

These varying educational backgrounds presented a planning and management challenge.

Genesis of the Problem

To understand the problem of the child soldiers in Uganda and, therefore, assess the way it was handled, it is necessary to know how it all began.

In February 1981, Yoweri Museveni began a guerrilla war against the government of Milton Obote which had come to power through rigged elections. This war was based in what came to be called the Luwero Triangle in Central Uganda.

In March 1983, the then government army, the UNLA, launched a campaign to dislodge the NRA from its base areas in the heavily populated Luwero Triangle. In the process, they attacked villages, destroyed homes and indiscriminately killed innocent men, women and children.

The NRA, the then guerrilla army, established population centers for the survivors of this “genocide” and provided them with protection, food and medical and other care. In so far as possible, the NRA tried to send women, children and old men to safer areas in other parts of the country, including Red Cross camps.

However, many children, especially orphans, and those whose parents or relatives could not be traced, remained with the NRA. They were the children who were to become the Kadogos. The NRA “adopted” these children as its own. Since the war in the Luwero Triangle had no frontline, it was essential that the children be prepared to defend themselves as, inevitably, they would find themselves caught up in fighting between the NRA and the UNLA. They were therefore taught basic self-defense and other fighting skills, such as how to handle a gun, and took part in battle drills. They were given political instruction so that they could understand the reasons for the war and who the enemy was. Whenever circumstances permitted, they also learnt how to read and write.

With time, these children became attached to individual commanders and lived under their care. They carried out light duties such as housekeeping, escort and courier work. During combat, they carried out guard duties and reconnaissance, and participated in intelligence gathering. Some older Kadogos participated directly in fighting. In fact, some of them distinguished themselves in combat and were promoted to the rank of corporal or sergeant.

Later, however, between 1985 and 1986, in the last stages of the war, a new category of child soldiers developed. As mobile units of the NRA moved across the country, children joined them, mainly out of excitement and a sense of adventure, especially when they saw other children in the ranks of the victorious army. These children were not orphans. In fact, a number of them were undisciplined children who saw an opportunity to run away from home.

After 1986, yet another category of child soldiers was created when other anti-Obote fighting groups were integrated into the NRA, and brought with them child soldiers.

In August 1986, insurgency broke out in Northern and North Eastern Uganda. The rebels forcibly recruited and used children in the war. Between 1986 and 1989, child soldiers were among surrendering rebels from various rebel groups. This new category joined the Kadogos who were then being assembled to join the school system.

Thus, the problem of child soldiers in Uganda was more complex than the NGOs and the international media understood and presented it. Instead of seeking to understand the background of the problem and working with the army to solve it, they attacked the NRM government and purported to be more concerned about the Kadogos than the NRA, which had looked after them for so many years. Their hostile and high handed stance was not at all helpful in the effort to find a solution to the future of Kadogos.

3. Objectives and Strategy of the Kadogo School Program

Objectives

The program for the reintegration of Kadogos into school was designed and implemented by the Ministry of Defense in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education.

In designing the program, government had to take into account, first of all, the unique circumstances of the child soldiers. Although the Kadogos were not recognized by the law as soldiers, in fact, they were soldiers and they desired to remain so. Although they were largely confined to light duties as couriers or runners, escorts, domestic or office staff, they were essentially military. They had military ranks and lived a military life. A survey carried out in the army at the time showed that the Kadogos wished to remain in the army. It was vital that the program recognize this reality and respect the wishes of these children.

Secondly, it was decided that the program would incorporate the national curriculum of Uganda. This was essential if the Kadogos were to meet the national standards and requirements of education in Uganda and be able to fit into the country's overall school system.

Thirdly, the program would have to include practical training, in addition to what was contained in the general syllabus, so that each Kadogo would gain skills useful both to himself/herself and to the army. Furthermore, this would cater for the Kadogos who, at various stages, had dropped out of the formal education system.

The program was therefore designed to educate soldiers who happened to be children. It aimed to give them both academic education as well as practical training in order to equip each Kadogo with as much knowledge and as many skills as possible. This would give him or her a wide range of options when the time came to decide on the course his or her future would take. *“The program is to produce a well educated soldier with special and practical skills, who, at the same time, has all round knowledge, comprehends and is ready to tame his environment not by witchcraft but by using science and technology”*, Hon. Amanya Mushega, then Assistant Minister of Defense/Chief Political Commissar, explained.

Strategy

In 1986 and 1987, a number of NGOs and individuals made proposals to the Ministry of Defense concerning the education of the Kadogos. A local NGO, the “Molly

and Paul” Education Institute of Kampala, owned and managed by former soldiers, proposed that a special primary school be set up for the Kadogos and offered to run it. They proposed that it be established within the army infrastructure.

Mr. Francis Byaruhanga of the Office of the President, proposed short term and long term programs. In the short term, he proposed that the young soldiers be classified on the basis of their level of education; that a special primary school combining both theoretical and practical training be established; and that for those who had left secondary school, special classes be set up for them as private students. In the long term, he suggested establishment of a military academy to educate those who intended to remain in the army.

In May 1986, UNICEF communicated its view to the Prime Minister, saying that the two programs were “a focal point of donor discussion” on the question of schooling for the child soldiers. UNICEF proposed the following:

- All child soldiers who had not attained their 16th birthday by June 1986 would be eligible for assistance;
- a census should be undertaken and registration completed (including a basic personal history for each child soldier).
- a three to five year program would be established to provide each and every child with:
 - basic primary school educational proficiency;
 - skill competencies in at least two fields: mechanics, carpentry, agriculture, electronics;
 - secondary school education for those with academic aspirations.

He suggested that a process of program formulation, fund mobilization, and quick implementation would be necessary. He estimated that the total project would cost between US\$3 and US\$5 million over a five year period.

The government held lengthy consultations on the education of Kadogos with international agencies and donors. Although they expressed interest in helping the children, they insisted that the Kadogos be settled outside the military context. They insisted on separating them from the NRA, which had cared and looked after them during hard times. The Kadogos themselves did not wish to be settled in civilian life. They regarded themselves as an integral part of the NRA.

Moreover, the army feared that giving up responsibility for the welfare and future of the Kadogos to either NGOs, relatives or even any other government departments, had its dangers. The NGOs did not really understand the situation of the child soldiers. To decide to entrust them to relatives of Kadogos, first of all, assumed that all Kadogos had relatives, which was not the case; and secondly, even if it was the case, the program would run the risk that the relatives would divert whatever resources were given to them to solve their own problems.

Sending them to civilian institutions was not wise either. A survey carried out by the NRA Department of Education indicated that many headmasters of civilian schools were unwilling to have child soldiers in their schools, fearing that they would not manage to discipline the child soldiers and that they would be a bad influence. This clearly confirmed the army’s fears that civilian institutions would not

be able to handle the sensitive situation of the Kadogos.

However, the debate with the NGOs proved useful in certain respects. Their proposals helped the government to shape the program for the education of the Kadogos. There was consensus in all their proposals that a special institution should be established for the Kadogos; and that the syllabus should combine academic education and practical training.

Eventually, it was decided that the army should bear the primary responsibility of looking after, educating and fostering the development of the Kadogos. Any assistance had to be channeled through the Ministry of Defense. This responsibility included designing and managing the program.

In designing the program, the Ministry of Defense adopted a “gradualist” approach whereby the Kadogos would be integrated into the country's general school system in a gradual and progressive manner. The only educational infrastructure available in the army at the time was for primary education. Post-primary education had to be pursued outside the army. (Recently, an army secondary school was started. However, it is intended mainly to cater for orphans of fallen comrades.) The Kadogos were to be demobilized, not from the army, but from active service. They were to remain members of the army, but would not carry arms or do military service. Nevertheless, they would be entitled to all benefits as soldiers, commensurate with the ranks they held.

This approach ensured that the Kadogos would attend school without being distracted from that purpose. At the same time, they would not be demoralized because they were no longer NRA soldiers. In addition, it ensured that Kadogos would remain close to the army so that, on completion of their education, they would be able to continue their military service with as little disruption as possible.

The Kadogo School was created in the army as a special independent unit under Army Headquarters. It was established under the Office of the Assistant Minister of Defense/Chief Political Commissar, which was, *inter alia*, in charge of education matters in the army. The school was to be a complete primary school from grades 1–7.

In the School, the Kadogos would complete (or, in some cases, begin) their primary education. The syllabus would be based on the national primary school curriculum enriched with practical training in skills such as carpentry, agriculture, computer science, simple mechanics and electronics, and in languages such as English and Swahili. The Kadogos would continue with elementary military science and political education.

The child soldiers who passed the Primary Leaving Certificate Examinations would join civilian secondary schools. Dropouts would be given refresher military training and deployed in various units, depending on whether or not they wished to remain in the army. Otherwise, they would be discharged from the army and helped to settle in civilian life.

Those who failed at ‘O’ and ‘A’ levels would be divided into categories. Those apt to undertake vocational and technical education would be sent to relevant polytechnics in the country. The others would undergo military training, if

they had the inclination, and be deployed in the army. Otherwise, they would also be discharged.

The Kadogos who completed University education would be commissioned, and again, depending on their choice, be deployed in various departments in the army corresponding to their respective areas of specialty. Otherwise, if they chose to join civilian life, they would be demobilized according to standard procedure and assisted to settle in civilian life.

During vacation periods, the school would provide lodging and boarding for Kadogos attending secondary and post secondary institutions.

The school would be phased out as soon as the last pupils in Grade 7 had completed their exams, the last drop-outs had settled, and the School was no longer the "mother unit" of the Kadogos.

4. Making the Program Operational

The Preparatory Stage

A number of tasks had to be undertaken simultaneously. The first task was to establish the school. This involved locating a suitable site for the school; establishing its syllabus, its organization and management; setting up a school administration; identifying and preparing teachers for the school; and putting the necessary logistics in place. It also involved identifying, collecting and registering the Kadogos in the various units all over the country.

Hon. Amanywa Mushega, then Assistant Minister of Defense/ Chief Political Commissar, together with Major Kaliisa Bakali, then Director of Education in the army, and myself, a staff officer at the army headquarters at the time, were the principal officers who took charge of these responsibilities.

◆ Identifying a suitable location

The school had to be located within army barracks. The task was to find a barracks with enough room and other infrastructure to accommodate it. Although there were primary school buildings in the various barracks all over the country, they were in disrepair. There had been no renovation, let alone construction of barracks since 1970. Most structures in the barracks were in a sorry state, largely out of neglect. Buildings needed major renovation; water and sewage systems were broken down; electricity supply was unreliable, etc.

A survey team of officers from army headquarters was sent out to find a location for the school. They visited all the barracks and army primary schools throughout the country.

In the end, it was decided to locate the school in the Mbarara barracks, in the suburbs of Mbarara town, in Western Uganda. Although they suffered the same problems as other barracks, they had enough room for classrooms and living quarters for pupils and teachers. In addition, the surrounding areas had an abundance of cheap and varied foodstuffs.

The barracks served (and still serve) as army division headquarters; they also house a military training school, which was an additional advantage for the Kadoga School.

◆ Organization and management

The school organization combined elements of an ordinary NRA military training unit, as well as elements of an ordinary civilian boarding school. The school was

essentially a military unit and therefore had to be administered as such, in order to ensure discipline and efficiency.

The administrative staff included: the Commandant, head of the School; an administrative officer; the chief instructor; a chief clerk; a secretary; the political commissar; an intelligence officer; a medical officer; a school bursar/financial controller; a welfare officer; the matron (for the female Kadogos); the quartermaster; kitchen staff and company commanders (the Kadogos were organized in platoons and companies, mainly for discipline purposes).

The teaching staff included instructors in the following subjects: maths, science, social studies, languages (Swahili and English), work study program, music, dance, drama; tailoring; wood work/carpentry; elementary electronics and mechanics; pottery; agriculture; computer science; military science.

◆ Designing the syllabus

A syllabus suitable for all categories of Kadogos, taking into account their age, background, expectations and the overall objectives of the program, had to be designed.

The syllabus of the Kadogo School was designed by the Director of Education in consultation with the Ministry of Education and the office in charge of military training. In line with the objectives of the program, the syllabus combined the basic curriculum of primary education, practical skills training and politico-military education.

◆ Setting up school administration; identifying and preparing the teaching staff

It was decided that the commandant would have to have the following qualities: high ability to command; have a high level of discipline and morality; have a background in the teaching profession. It proved so difficult to find the right combination of qualities that the school had four different commandants in the first year alone.

A small administrative staff was put together at a reception center in Bombo barracks, near Kampala, where the Kadogos would be received from the various units and registered before they proceeded to the Kadogo School. Simultaneously, a concerted effort was made to identify soldiers with professional teaching background. Fortunately, there were teachers for all grades who, like other Ugandans, had joined the bush war, at various stages, as volunteers. A number of teachers including graduates, diploma holders and teachers in grades 2, 3 and 5 were identified, registered and sent on a refresher course in teaching methods, school administration and child counseling, before they were deployed to the Kadogo School. The purpose of the refresher course was to prepare them to handle the delicate situation of the child soldiers.

The Ministry of Education also seconded primary school teachers to the

army. It paid their salaries while the accommodation and boarding were provided by the army.

◆ Putting the necessary logistics in place

In the meantime, arrangements were being made to prepare classrooms and dormitories in Mbarara barracks and to secure logistics for the school. Since the buildings earmarked for the school had formerly served as an army primary school for the barracks, they were appropriate. However, they required major renovations. The many requirements for starting the school had not been included in the budget of the 1986/1987 financial year (as noted earlier, the program was designed under pressure and there was no time to prepare it thoroughly).

There were urgent operational needs and other competing demands. The army was still actively involved in a pacification campaign which later developed into a counterinsurgency campaign when open rebellion broke out late in 1986 in the Northern and Eastern parts of the country.

Yet, funds to run the program had to be mobilized. It required the personal involvement of the Assistant Minister of Defense and the Secretary for Defense, before some renovations could be carried out and the logistics necessary for the school to begin could be set in motion. Sometimes, even His Excellency the President, who was also the Minister of Defense, had to intervene.

It must be stated clearly that, although the NGOs made many statements about the Kadogos, and a few made negligible contributions, the program was not assisted from outside. The budget of the Kadogo School is part of the Defense budget fully funded by the Uganda government. The program suffered from inadequate funds and facilities, not out of design, but because of budgetary constraints due to the limited government revenue that the NRM government had inherited.

Even then, however, the education of the Kadogos was considered as a priority and was facilitated to a reasonable extent. The situation improved over the years, as the financial situation of the government improved.

◆ Identifying and registering the Kadogos

Messages were sent to all military units directing commanders to release and send all Kadogos under their command to the army headquarters in Bombo barracks near Kampala. By the end of 1986, a total of 300 Kadogos had been registered; of whom 40 were girls. They ranged between seven and sixteen years of age. Ten of them were under seven years old; the youngest was four. The Kadogos were registered in Bombo barracks and by June 1987—when the Kadogos were moved to their new School in Mbarara barracks—the number had increased to 638.

The process of removing the Kadogos from the units did not go smoothly. Most of the Kadogos were attached to their commanders and had developed very strong ties. They were extremely reluctant to separate. After the School began, Kadogos kept trickling in. At the same time, after reporting to the School, a number of Kadogos would escape, return, and be welcomed back to their original units. This problem would continue to plague the program at the administrative level.

The Implementation Stage

◆ The number of Kadogos under the program

The School formally began in June 1987 with an intake of 638 pupils, including 40 girls. By 1990, the number of Kadogos registered in the school had reached 1,580, as they kept reporting from various units. It was the highest number ever recorded. For several reasons however, this number was not sustained.

First of all, there was a very high rate of desertion from the school, especially at the beginning. The deserters returned to their original units and, because of the camaraderie of military life and the liberal attitude in the units, they were welcomed back into them. To date, 582 deserters have been recorded. Many of these soldiers, however, were over 18 and therefore, were not child soldiers. They were either not interested in studying, or found school life and regulations too demanding.

Second, many Kadogos were, for various reasons, and at various times, referred to military training schools for retraining and reabsorption into active service. Between 1991 and 1992, 514 Kadogos were transferred to military schools and, later, deployed to different units of the army. This includes those who were directly reabsorbed into various units. They were dismissed from the School because they were either overage, or not interested in studying, or had grave and persistent discipline problems.

Third, 125 Kadogos officially, and at different times, applied for and were granted discharges from the army. They benefited from resettlement packages given under a World Bank-sponsored Reduction in Force (RIF) program. Like other veterans, they are under the care of the respective district veteran offices in the country.

Fourth, to date, 30 Kadogos in the program have died, mainly from natural causes.

As a consequence of the above factors, the program currently has 276 Kadogos, at different academic levels.

The state of the Kadogo school

A number of factors impacted the management and performance of the School.

◆ Infrastructure and logistics

The barracks where the School was located were, like all the other army barracks, in bad condition. The Mbarara barracks had been destroyed in two wars: the 1978–79 war that removed the Idi Amin regime and the 1981–89 NRA bush war. The water supply system, the sewage system and the electric installation were destroyed. By the time the School opened, there was no running water and no electricity. It was necessary to improvise. Water was collected with the help of water tankers; lanterns were used for lighting; and pit latrines were dug.

Today these problems remain. Renovation of all the barracks is needed,

which would necessitate considerable funding requirements.

In addition, most of the logistics required were not in place by the time the School began. The child soldiers needed such essentials as beddings, uniforms, footwear, school supplies, furniture, school transport, medical supplies, etc. Partly because of inadequate funds and bureaucratic delays, it took two years before some of these essential supplies were available.

However, in spite of the shortcomings, the facilities available for the Kadogos were sufficient for the School to begin and, certainly, were better than what most schools could provide.

◆ Staffing

The establishment of the School required 52 teachers. The policy is to have 40 pupils per teacher. However, because of inadequate staffing, the pupil-teacher ratio was high. The table shows the number of pupils per class in 1987.

Class	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No. of pupils	181	143	212	120	186	115	100

To solve this problem, the Directorate of Education continued to carry out intensive recruitment of teachers with the assistance of the Ministry of Education.

◆ Discipline problems

Discipline problems in the School took various forms. As we noted earlier, Kadogos frequently escaped back to their original units. It was possible to escape, largely because of administrative laxity. When a stronger administration was put in place in 1991, this problem ceased. Among other measures taken, a regimental police unit was set up in the School to enforce discipline.

In addition, there was a high rate of absenteeism, especially in the initial years. Again, this problem was due to weak administration. It was substantially reduced in 1991, when discipline was reinforced. Those Kadogos who consistently showed lack of interest in academic studies, after continuous counseling, or who were too old for their level, were referred back to active military service.

Furthermore, some Kadogos engaged in criminal and other negative social behavior, including drug abuse, prostitution, violent behavior and alcoholism. This behavior occurred mainly among Kadogos above 15. This problem was solved by rigorously enforcing the army code of conduct, which banned such habits; those pupils who were incorrigible were screened and sent back for retraining and redeployment into active service.

In addition, the Kadogos held their teachers in low esteem because the teachers had relatively little or no military experience and low military ranks. Many Kadogos had been in the NRA since the beginning of the war and had higher ranks than their teachers. The Kadogos had a superiority complex, while the teachers had an inferiority complex. This explains why, for a long time, the Kadogos were left to do whatever they wanted.

The teachers were commissioned to officer ranks so that they could give orders to the Kadogos. This, together with the strengthening of the School administration, improved discipline in the School.

5. Results of the Program

Academic Performance

The main objective of the program was to provide the child soldiers with the best possible education, while at the same time respecting their wish to remain soldiers.

The first group of Kadogos (45 students) was admitted in various civilian secondary schools in 1989, after passing the Primary Leaving Examinations. It was convenient for purposes of monitoring and control to admit them in schools in and around Mbarara town, near the Kadogo School. Moreover, some of the children attended day school in the town, within walking distance of the barracks. Most headmasters were initially reluctant to take them. However, the Kadogos have proved to be some of the most disciplined students in the various schools they attend.

In 1995, the first group of Kadogos sat for University entrance examinations. Some of them passed and were admitted in university.

Presently, of the 276 Kadogos pursuing studies, 210 are in secondary school; 33 are in technical colleges; 16 are in tertiary institutions; and 17 are undertaking different courses at Makerere university. Of the 40 girls, only one is continuing education; she is pursuing an advanced course in nursing. The rest of the girls were, for a variety of reasons, referred back to the women's wing of the army. The group at the lowest academic level is in year one of secondary school; the group at the highest academic level is in its final year at Makerere University.

Although the number of Kadogos who are continuing studies is relatively small, the group is of high quality. In fact, some Kadogos have been among the most outstanding students in the country. One of them, Lt. Pollar Awich, is already prominent in public life. He stood (though unsuccessfully) for a parliamentary seat in the national elections held in 1996. He is currently an undergraduate at Makerere University.

In 1996, when the last group of Kadogos sat the Primary Leaving Examination, the Kadogo primary school technically ceased to exist. However, it has remained as the "mother unit" of the Kadogos. The Kadogos stay there during their school holidays to receive military training and political education. Those who prefer to go to their home areas are given a leave with enough funds to cover for transportation and a small allowance.

The army is responsible for ensuring that Kadogos are admitted in higher institutions of learning. For those who fail to go to university, the army ensures their admission in other institutions such as technical colleges. It is responsible for paying their school fees in the respective institutions. Every financial year, this expenditure is included in the budget of the Ministry of Defense. However, the pro-

gram has, from time to time, suffered delays in payment of fees. As a result, the children have been expelled from school. In such cases, the army negotiates with the respective school authorities to allow the children to continue studying until the fees can be paid.

Literacy and Adjustment

Those Kadogos who, for various reasons, failed to pursue formal education, were retrained and deployed into active service. Many of them were illiterate before being given instruction in the Kadogo school. However, by the time they returned to the army, they at least knew how to read and write.

Moreover, the Kadogos have not been left to their own devices. By taking them back, the army has been able to provide them with care and with a future. One of the merits of the Kadogo program is that the Kadogos who opted to leave the army were assisted to resettle in civilian life. As funds become available, welfare projects will be organized for them so that they can live a reasonably comfortable life.

6. Conclusions

Assessment

By and large, the program has been successful in the sense that the child soldiers were offered the opportunity to obtain formal education, without ceasing to be soldiers. For some of them, it was the first time they had ever gone to school. Although the number of Kadogos pursuing further studies is relatively low, the program has achieved its objectives. It would be unrealistic to expect that most of them would continue on to secondary school. Even in normal circumstances, in the general school system, this is not the case. But even then, the low numbers of students in higher institutions is compensated for by their high quality.

Most Kadogos, who did not continue in school are secure in the army. They still have opportunities of developing their intellect and acquiring practical skills, as well as pursuing a military career.

Lessons

There are a few lessons to be learned from the experience.

First, the program encountered problems due to a lack of preparation—this was because the program was implemented hastily. This inadequate preparation became costly at the implementation stage. For instance, it was not until 1991 that a reasonably strong administration was put in place to stem the desertions and other discipline problems encountered in the School. The government should not have allowed the NGOs to precipitate its action when it was not ready.

Laxity, both in the units and at the school, should not have been allowed in handling the Kadogos. Kadogos left the school without permission easily and were too easily reabsorbed into their original units. Many young Kadogos lost the opportunity for education because of this laxity.

However, the success of the program proves that, whatever the difficulties, what is crucial is resolve and innovative spirit. Despite scarce resources and multiple obstacles, the government succeeded in solving the problem of its child soldiers, largely through determination and improvisation. The army leadership, in particular, and the Ministry of Defense, in general, must be saluted for its resolute and parental stand on the question of Kadogos.

The refusal of the army to be distracted by NGOs—who had promised aid—regarding its obligation to ensure the education, welfare, and future of the Kadogos, is an example to be commended and, even emulated.

The program for the integration of child soldiers into school in Uganda was largely dictated by the peculiar circumstances of the country. To what extent it can be adapted to other countries facing similar problems depends on those countries' specific circumstances and on how similar their situation is to that of the Uganda experience. Suffice it to say that the Ugandan experience is one worthy of note.

Successful Experiences Series

At the instigation of African Ministers, ADEA has undertaken the publication of reports describing successful African experiences in the field of education, thereby enabling African Ministers to tell their story of how they have dealt with a specific issue in the education sector.

This paper on the reinsertion of child soldiers into the school system was written by Col. Kale Kayihura who played an important role in Uganda's program to integrate child soldiers into the school system.

Note on the author

Colonel Kale Kayihura was born in 1956 in Kisoro County, Western Uganda.

Kale Kayihura's initial training is in law. He holds a diploma in legal practice at the Law Development Centre in Kampala, a LLB (Bachelor of Law) degree from Makerere University and a Masters degree from the University of London (U.K.).

As a young staff officer for the Uganda's People's Defence Forces (UPDF), Kale Kayihura was one of the principal officers involved in the program to integrate child soldiers into school. He went on to become Chief Political Commissar and the Director of Political Education for UPDF up to 1998, when he joined the State House. He is currently Military Assistant to the President of Uganda.

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