



STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2025



HASHTAG GULU

"LIFE ON THE STREET IS NO LIFE FOR A CHILD"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ACRONYMS

CBO	Community-Based Organisation
LRA	Lord Resistance Army
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
SCCY	Street-Connected Children and Youth

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 ORGANISATION

Hashtag Gulu is a community-based organisation (CBO) that cares for children and youths who live or live and work on the streets. Our work focuses on rehabilitation, reformation and reintegration. Hashtag Gulu takes on activities that aim at providing alternatives to crime and violence by teaching children who live and work on the streets to become productive citizens.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

This strategic plan was developed accordingly to the following objectives:

- Providing direction and guidance for the organisation's future developments and projects
- Defining the priorities of the organisation
- Setting the ground for effective accountability of the organisation's management relatively to the goals and objectives developed in the strategic plan
- Providing clarity and clear information to all our stakeholders, current and future partners on Hashtag Gulu's vision and goals
- Reflect on the accomplishments, strengths and weaknesses of the organisation in order to improve the quality of our work

1.3 METHODOLOGY

In order to develop this strategic plan, Hashtag Gulu first consulted with many stakeholders, including community members, representatives of local authorities and especially our beneficiaries, as we give the utmost importance to their opinions. We indeed strongly believe that we can only be successful by making sure that our goals and strategy are aligned with the wishes and aspirations of the people we aim to empower. For the same reason, the methodology includes research on street-connected people's life and challenges that we have undertaken to deepen our understanding and knowledge about their situation. It is all the more crucial as our work involves highly vulnerable and stigmatized girls, boys, women and men.

Another important aspect of the methodology is internal brainstorming, involving every member of our staff, including trainers hired as part of our vocational training program. We are convinced that everyone's opinions and ideas are worth taking into consideration in order to maximize the quality of our work. In that sense, Hashtag Gulu's strategic planning is the result of a bottom up process, as opposed to a top down approach which would likely make us miss critical insights.

Following external and internal consultations, a significant part of the strategic plan was developed during a participatory workshop involving all staff of Hashtag Gulu led by an external consultant. The consultant consecutively drafted the strategic plan in close collaboration with our management.



2. ORGANISATION PROFILE

2.1 HISTORY

Hashtag Gulu was registered in Gulu in March 2018 as a community-based organisation that cares for children and youths who live or live and work on the streets. Our work focuses on rehabilitation, reformation and reintegration. We take on activities that aim at providing alternatives to crime and violence by teaching children and youths who live and work on the streets to become productive citizens.

We work with vulnerable children, youths, teenage mothers and child prostitutes who depend on the streets for their survival whom we assist by supporting them with knowledge and skills to seek work to enable them to live a life free from dependency on the streets. We equally carry out mediations and reintegration of SCCY who are willing to return home or start life afresh within the community as changed citizens as well as challenge stereotypes and stigmatising tendencies towards streets connected children and youths by reaching out to communities and key stakeholders with the right mandate to cause change.

Hashtag Gulu has partnered with several like-minded organisations and individuals to provide key and necessary service to street-connected children and youths in Gulu and undertaken community outreaches to ensure street-connected children and youths are treated with dignity deserving of any other human being. We have provided shelter to over 70 SCCY in Gulu during the Covid19 lockdown which is the third-worst time in the history of Gulu after the LRA insurgency and Ebola. In year 1 of our skills program, we trained and graduated 60 SCCY's in hands-on vocational and life skills, established a carpentry and tailoring workshop to provide employment opportunities to the trainees; we have provided medical care to SCCY's in need and this we continue to do on a daily, and we have reunited over 20 SCCY's with their families since inception including providing mediation and support to start life or a business while at home.

VISION

"A society where no child has to depend on the street to survive."

MISSION

"To empower children and youth who live and work on the streets to become productive members of the society."

CORE VALUES

- Compassion & Respect
- Collectiveness & Equity
- Transparency & Integrity
- Justice
- Courage
- Humility

2.2 CURRENT APPROACH

In 2020, we started our first project as a formal organisation. We have been focusing on the areas where we have the most expertise, i.e. vocational training, reintegration and advocacy, whereas we partner with other organisations with the experience to carry out psychosocial support and counselling services. We offer three months of training in carpentry, brick-laying and concrete practices, tailoring and garment cutting, agriculture and hairdressing. We have managed to equip our place with multiple machines and tools, in order to develop workshops where trained SCCY can either get a first employment opportunity or use the space for their private mandate. We also provide continuous mentoring to our beneficiaries and are working closely with private actors to offer apprenticeships opportunities or employment when possible.

Part of our approach is also to reintegrate SCCY with their family whenever possible and safe. This demands a substantial amount of work and mediation, yet we strongly believe that it is the best option,

especially for the youngest of our beneficiaries. We also organize community dialogues, radio talk shows and online campaigns to sensitize the community and the stakeholders on the issues of SCCY, and why we believe that we should all work together to empower them and restore their dignity. We also conduct prevention campaigns in local schools under the name "Stay in School, School is Cool".

We are also looking to develop our partnerships and create new ones in domains where we lack the expertise. In this way, we successfully started trauma therapy for some SCCY in Gulu with a local partner specialized in psychological support.

2.3 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Our Strengths

- Team members with diverse backgrounds
- Small, young and committed team
- Flexibility & adaptability
- Good communication channels with stakeholders
- Connections and partnerships
- Close relationship and trusts built over time with beneficiaries
- Learning organisation
- Building relationship with local authorities

Our Weaknesses

- Insufficient infrastructure (including no permanent site)
- Young organisation
- Limited funding
- Margin for improvement in planning, procurement and reporting
- Unclear policies
- Coordination between team members can be improved

Discussion on the strengths and weaknesses

Our strengths and weaknesses were identified by the team of Hashtag Gulu as what makes us a standout organisation, and what needs to be improved. We believe that one of our bigger strengths regarding our line of work is the relationship that we managed to build with SCCY in Gulu, and the trust thus gained, without which we hardly can reach our mission. In the relatively short period operating as a formal organisation, we have also managed to develop our network of partners, by identifying those who share our desire to help, support and empower young people living in the streets of Gulu. We have also strengthened our relationship with local authorities and police forces, key stakeholders in the fate of SCCY.

Then, on the other hand, we also have the weaknesses that our youth implies, such as limited funding and insufficient infrastructure. So far, we have been able to count on a local partner on that matter, although we do wish to be able to operate in our premises in the future. We also have a considerable margin in terms of institutional capacity building, something we are very well aware of and aim at improving in the coming years. We also still lack office items such as computers, which forces us to rely on staff's items, which is not optimal. By developing strong interventions in the future and extending our portfolio of donors, we hope to address these issues to improve the effectiveness of our programs and projects.

3. CONTEXT

3.1 ENVIRONMENT

Gulu District was particularly affected by the violent civil war between President Museveni's government forces and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) led by Joseph Kony from 1987 to 2005. This war was characterized by a high number of abductions of children, with boys forcibly recruited as soldiers and girls often reduced to the rank of sex slaves. At the same time, more than 1.5 million people were forcibly displaced by the government into IDP camps and often mistreated and abused by soldiers.

15 years later, while the LRA has fled the country and peace has generally returned, Northern Uganda is still suffering the disastrous consequences of this war and is slowly recovering. In the Gulu region, infrastructure has been destroyed and the economy deteriorated, which negatively impacted the knowledge and skills of the population. As a result of internal displacement, the region is still prone to numerous land conflicts, which in particular hamper investment and are a source of recurrent violence. Several generations have experienced enormous trauma and the lack of adequate and sufficient psychosocial support has condemned a significant part of the population to suffer from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Ex-combatants, child soldiers and ex-wives of soldiers are still today victims of stigmatization and rejection by the rest of the population. Violence against women and girls is also still very common, with more than two-thirds of girls being married before the age of 18. The number of women and girls who are victims of violence remains high.

Overall, while Uganda has made great strides in the fight against poverty, the north of the country continues to be mired by high rates of poverty, which are above the national average. In 2013, more than half of the people living below the poverty line lived in the north of the country, with the number shrinking to half this rate in the south. Nevertheless, the city of Gulu is rapidly growing, supported in particular by the international community in conjunction with the government, and is absorbing as much as possible the number of young people who leave the poor villages in the surrounding area in the hope of finding work in the city. As a consequence, this has increased the degree of inequality between the different social strata, and many find themselves in a situation of considerable precariousness. Unemployment is also high throughout the country, especially in the North. Official statistics speak of 15% unemployment in the whole country, a figure that is already high but undoubtedly underestimated (some claim that the real figure is as high as 80%) since it does not take into account all those forced to engage in precarious forms of work that are insufficient to guarantee them a decent standard of living.

Finally, one of the major challenges facing Uganda is population growth, which some experts refer to as a 'demographic bomb'. Indeed, in 2014, half of the workforce was under 30 years old and 60% of the population was 18 years old or younger. While this may be seen as an opportunity, given the size of the labour force, it creates a mismatch between labour supply and demand and is likely to increase the problems of structural unemployment. Moreover, public investment is currently insufficient in light of the growing demand linked to population growth. In a few decades, Uganda's population will have doubled and the consequences could be dramatic. The high level of corruption at all levels of government and within most public services is also not conducive to the development of an enabling environment for effectively addressing the many challenges facing the country.

In this fragile context, SCCY is an extremely vulnerable population. In particular, they face a high level of stigmatization and are often blamed for the many issues happening in the streets in Gulu City. They are regularly targeted by the police forces and the local leaders; therefore, they hardly feel safe anywhere, which reinforces their feelings of being rejected and further jeopardizes their chances of reintegrating into their community and/or their family.

3.2 RESOURCES

As of the beginning of 2021, Hashtag Gulu benefits from the following own resources to implement its activities:

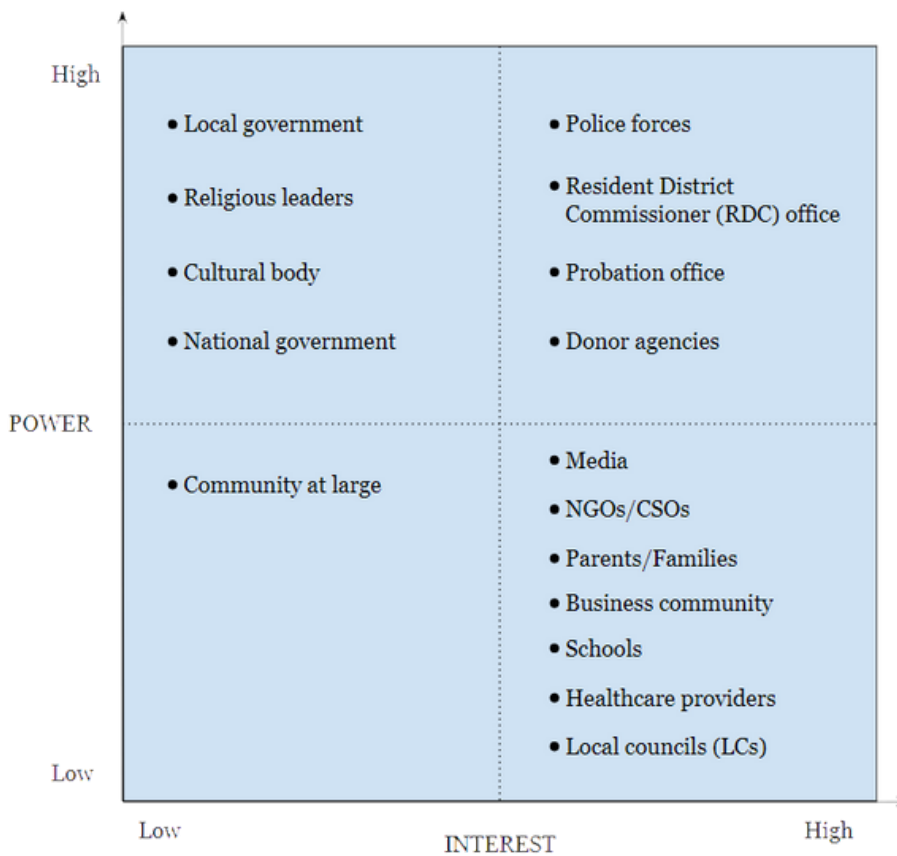
- Training Center
- Training Tools
- Carpentry and tailoring workshops
- Committed trainers and staff members
- Office space
- Computers and printer
- Furniture
- Own land in Paicho

Thanks to our institutional donors and well-wishers, we have been able to acquire some material allowing us to pursue some of our activities. There is yet more to acquire in order to complete the objectives stated in our strategy, the most important being our own place as we currently depend on one partner for the area where most of our activities are implemented.

3.3 STAKEHOLDERS

Hashtag Gulu has identified numerous stakeholders, with more or less power and influence. The following matrix illustrates the main stakeholders and where we believe them to stand regarding the street connected people in Gulu. That matrix is particularly helpful in the sense that it provides insights on which stakeholders should particularly be involved in our activities, and why.

Graph 1 Stakeholders Power/Interest Matrix



Our stakeholder's matrix involves different strategies with regard to the level of power and interest of each stakeholder. Stakeholders with low power and high interest need to be empowered so that they can act themselves in favour of SCCY in Gulu. It is important to listen to these stakeholders and integrate their wishes in our programs when realistic and achievable. Developing and maintaining good coordination between these actors is key. It is equally important to initiate dialogue and sensitize the stakeholders identified as powerful but have not yet shown interest. If properly engaged, these actors have a lot to offer in order to achieve our goals. Finally, stakeholders with high power and high interest require specific attention to make sure that they are involved as much as possible in our interventions.

3.4 EXTERNAL OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

Our Opportunities

- Community support
- Partnerships, connections and network
- Consistency in funding
- Human resources development/trainings
- Government policies Raising awareness
- Team building
- Untapped potential

Our Threats

- Government policies
- Community attitude
- Unhealthy competition
- Political threats
- Over-expectations of beneficiaries
- Pandemics and natural disaster

Discussion on the strengths and weaknesses

There are more partnerships that we can explore to improve our interventions. Moreover, the subject of SCCY is a growing concern of the local government and other stakeholders, which we see as a potential opportunity for us to strengthen our position as an organisation focusing on that issue. Due to the fact that we are a young organization, there are still many opportunities to build the capacity of the team and improve our knowledge of SCCY in Gulu. Government policies are both an opportunity and a threat, as we hardly know which direction they may take. For local policies, we believe that our advocacy work can have a positive influence on the outcome.

The attitude of the community remains a threat to our work, as decreasing the stigmatization of SCCY is not easy. We are yet well aware of that issue, which is why we try to always include activities such as community dialogues and radio talk shows in our projects. Over-expectations from our beneficiaries regarding what support we are able to offer have been hard to manage in the past, although we have identified better ways to communicate. We make it a priority to avoid creating unhealthy dependencies as it would ultimately run counter to our objectives.



4. PLAN FOR 2021 TO 2025

This chapter provides detail on Hashtag Gulu’s goals from 2021 to 2025. The main objectives are explained in the first section. We then show our key indicators relative to those objectives, before describing our target population and geographical areas. Our strategic approach is then detailed. Finally, we provide a description of the activities and programs we hope to implement during that period of time to achieve our main objectives.

4.1 OBJECTIVES

Our main objectives for the period 2021-2025 are the following:

1. **Acquire and manage our own space:** establishment of a half-way home
2. **Economic empowerment:** SCCY in Gulu are self-sustainable by having access to their own decent income
3. **Physical and mental wellbeing:** SCCY are physically and mentally healthy
4. **Reintegration:** SCCY are reintegrated in their family when it proves to be safe and secure for them
5. **Community outreach and awareness:** community members and authorities are made aware of the issues faced by SCCY and take actions
6. **Research:** our understanding and knowledge of the SCCY problematic are deeper and more accurate

4.2 KEY INDICATORS

The key indicators for our objectives and the expected outcomes are the following:

Outcomes	Indicators	Frequency
SCCY have access to steady and sufficient income	# of SCCY who can cover their needs with legal (self)employment	Every 6 months
SCCY are physically and emotionally healthy	# of SCCY who reports an improvement in physical and mental health	Every 6 months
SCCY do not relate on the street to survive	# of SCCY who left the street	Every 6 months
Objectives	Indicators	Timeline/ Frequency
1. Acquire and manage our own space	Land is legally acquired	2021
	The half-way home is built	2022
	The half-way of home is functional (including human resources and policies)	2023
2. Economic empowerment	100 SCCY are trained per year (500 in total)	Yearly
3. Physical and mental wellbeing	500 SCCY are targeted by our program over the entire period	2021-2025
4. Reintegration	50 SCCY are reintegrated with their family over the entire period	2021-2025
5. Community outreach and awareness	30 community outreaches and awareness are carried out every year (150 in total)	Yearly
6. Research	1 research document of quality is produced every year (5 in total)	Yearly

4.3 TARGET GROUPS

The target group consists of SCCY below 25 years old. In everyday speech, people use lots of different words or terms to describe who a street-connected child is. ‘Street children and ‘homeless children or homeless youth are used interchangeably, but there are some differences.

Not all children who are homeless end up living in the open on the street. Many end up sleeping in very inappropriate but out of sight places – on the floors of friends or strangers or sleeping in temporary accommodation like hostels.

Conversely, not all children who can be described as ‘street children are necessarily homeless. They may work, play or spend their time on the street, but may go back to sleep with their family or parents.

We use the term ‘street children or ‘street-connected children to describe children who:

1. Depend on the streets to live and/or work, either on their own or with other children or family members; and
2. Have a strong connection to public spaces (e.g. streets, markets, parks, bus or train stations) and for

whom the street plays a vital role in their everyday lives and identities. This wider group includes children who do not live or work on the street but regularly accompany other children or family members in the streets.

In other words, 'street children are children who depend on the streets for their survival – whether they live on the streets, work on the streets, have support networks on the streets, or a combination of the three.

4.4 TARGET AREAS

We aim at working with street-connected youth who end up in the streets in the Gulu in Northern Uganda. However, due to their varied and sometimes distant origins, our work will involve working in different areas, especially concerning our objectives 4, linked to reintegration within families, and 5, linked to community outreach.

4.5 STRATEGIC APPROACH

Due to the high vulnerability of SCCY, our holistic approach voluntarily focuses on a relatively low number of beneficiaries to give them the best chances of reintegrating their family, community and society, which is our main goal. SCCY in Gulu and around the world are likely to be amongst the most vulnerable people and suffer plenty of issues that need to be addressed. Hence, we developed a strategic approach that focuses on multiple areas. It is worth mentioning at this stage that we strongly believe in partnerships, well aware that one organisation can hardly master domains as different as healthcare, literacy or economic empowerment. For that purpose, we aim at partnering with local organisations that are experts in what they are doing and can deliver the best services, while we serve as intermediaries, facilitators and coordinators when we do not have the ability to deliver the best outcome ourselves. Indeed, SCCY lack trust and are constantly stigmatized by the community at large, police forces, healthcare providers, etc. Thus, it becomes as challenging as necessary to gain their trust and develop respectful relationships with them before attempting to undertake interventions. Thanks to our work in the past years with them and our good knowledge of and relationship with SCCY in Gulu, we strongly believe to be well suited to efficiently support them on the path of a better and more dignified life.

Our approach is therefore based on several pillars that are complementary rather than substitutable. In order to take care of themselves and become productive members of society, SCCY needs to acquire basic literacy skills and professional skills, as well as be provided with the opportunity to generate an income through employment or entrepreneurship. Due to their generally poor state of physical and mental health for many reasons such as violence, poverty, lack of hygiene, risky sexual behaviour and alcohol and substance abuse, SCCY's are furthermore impeded to leaving the street. This is why our approach also includes a physical and mental health component. Direct reintegration within their family, when possible and safe, is also key to the wellbeing of SCCY, especially the youngest. Finally, we strongly believe that sensitizing the community and stakeholders on the tough reality of SCCY's life is a key component of their successful reintegration and acceptance from the rest of society. Our approach encompasses multiple sensitizations and training activities through different channels

.A significant objective of our strategic approach for the 2021-2025 period is to acquire our space where we will be able to deliver our services and support to SCCY. This will take the form of a halfway home, where the most vulnerable will be offered shelter, food and security on top of social, health and skilling support until they can take care of themselves. Our experience with running a temporary shelter during the peak of the Covid-19 crisis. We are fully aware that this would be a huge step for Hashtag Gulu and demands plenty of resources. Until then, our activities will continue to take place in the space that we occupy now and that is already well known by SCCY in Gulu. It is indeed paramount for them to feel secure and safe wherever our interventions happen.

At last, we are convinced that we will be able to achieve our goals only by strengthening the capacities of our staff and deepening our knowledge of SCCY in Gulu. In order to achieve it, we aim at undertaking relevant capacity building training as often as possible, while also doing our own research in partnership with institutions, organisations or individuals showing interest in doing so. We also aim at developing social businesses in order to sustain our support to SCCY and reduce our dependence on donor's funds.



4.6 PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

Our main programs are related to our objectives and are strongly interconnected, as they should be in order to achieve our mission. This section introduces first our main programs and then explains how we intend to achieve other objectives. Hence, it does not necessarily follow the order in which our objectives have been introduced above.

Economic Empowerment through vocational and life skills trainings and employment

In order for street-connected youth to achieve economic self-sustainability through decent and legal income, they need to acquire the relevant knowledge to undertake professional activities. It is worth noting that many of them dropped out of school at an early age and lack basic literacy (they cannot write, read and count), which is a big challenge in terms of work. Moreover, even when fully equipped with skills, it remains difficult for them to find a job, because of the overall economic situation in Uganda and the stigmatization that they often face. Our economic empowerment program includes therefore the following activities:

- Literacy classes
- Vocational and life skills training on different domains
- Apprenticeship and linkages with enterprises
- Continuous mentorship and support
- Development of social businesses

Creating and supporting the development of social business is a core activity of this program, as it serves two main purposes. First, it allows for the creation of workplaces for some of our beneficiaries where they will gain first work experience and put in practice the skills acquired during training. Second, it also offers the possibility for Hashtag Gulu to generate profit which will, in turn, contribute to financing our activities and reduce our dependence on external funding.

Addressing the physical and mental health issues of SCCY

As stated in the strategic approach, street-connected youth suffer many physical and mental illnesses which impede their reintegration into society and the labour market. Due to lack of trust and stigmatization from healthcare providers, they also tend not to seek healthcare when they need it and/or be refused to be taken care of by professionals. To address these challenges, the following activities will be implemented:

Art/Sport therapy activities

- Counselling
- Drug rehabilitation
- General healthcare
- Trauma therapy
- Medical camp/outreach

This program involves specific skills that can hardly be internalized. Therefore, we aim at developing partnerships in order to conduct some of these activities.

Reintegration of SCCY with their families

Many SCCY's have expressed the desire to return to their family, although many different reasons are holding them back. Successful reintegration is the best that we can hope for them, hence the importance of this program. It however requires plenty of resources and time, as the process is complex and demands caution and patience. In order to achieve this objective, this program involves the following activities:

- In-depth assessment of the situation
- Family visits
- Community dialogues
- Mediation
- Follow-up visits

Sensitization and advocacy program

In order to create awareness of the situation of street-connected children and youth and push for more collective and official actions, conducting sensitization activities is very important. It is equally important to prevent as many children as possible from leaving school and ending up living on the streets. Thus our awareness program includes various activities targeting different groups:

- Schools outreach through our "Stay at school, school is cool" sensitization activities
- Community dialogues to raise awareness among community members
- Radio talk shows
- Online campaigns
- Stakeholder engagements
- Child protection training for law enforcement agencies
- Development of manuals for practitioners and local authorities

Management of a half-way home

Managing a halfway home is surely one of our biggest goals, yet it is also the most challenging one, especially financially and in terms of human resources. Therefore, the objective is to have it operational by 2023.

While we are fully aware of the danger of institutionalizing SCCY, our experience tells us that in certain cases, having a roof and a balanced diet is a necessary first step toward true empowerment. Our goal is to centralize our activities around a place where vulnerable SCCY feel at ease and that they trust. During the Covid-19 crisis, we experienced the management of an emergency temporary shelter. Although this was very challenging, yet very necessary due to the dangers faced by SCCY when the streets were locked down, we plainly realised the need for and the potential of a permanent site. This would offer the possibility to provide holistic help including all of our interventions mentioned in our programs, adapted to the specificities of each of our beneficiaries.

Research


As a learning organisation, we attach great importance to deepening our knowledge and understanding of the issues met by SCCY and what their desires and aspirations are. Only thorough and serious studies will provide us with the information we need to understand in the best possible way the social and individual constraints that prevent the reintegration of SCCYs into community life. We aim at producing at least once a year one in-depth study on various topics related to SCCY in Gulu. We also look to partner with organisations and institutions expert in their field and keen to participate in research to understand better one the most vulnerable and underlooked population in Uganda.




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