



POSITIVE
DEVIANC
INITIATIVE

Sunflowers Reaching for the Sun

Positive Deviance
for Child Protection
in Uganda¹

by Arvind Singhal & Lucía Durá

Child protection PD program participants in Northern Uganda photo: Lucía Durá and Arvind Singhal



POSITIVE DEVIANCE is an approach that is uniquely effective in addressing intractable and highly complex social problems. What could be more complex than the reintegration of unwelcome abductees like Cecilia?

"When you're given to an LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) commander, you are his forced wife. You are expected to take care of all his needs. Everything! I returned from the bush a few days ago but am still haunted by frightful dreams. I hear children crying. We are being attacked, or fighting, walking for days in the hot desert without food or water."

"I'm happy to be back, but I have no hope of returning to school. I don't know what the future holds for me."
- Cecilia, a returned abductee in Northern Uganda²

Seventeen-year old Cecilia, abducted from her home in Gulu district of Northern Uganda and held in captivity for five years, is one of the lucky survivors of the brutal civil conflict that has ravaged the Northern Ugandan landscape since 1986.

For over two decades, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), in the name of the local Acholi people, has engaged in guerrilla warfare against the Ugandan government, avowing to establish a theocratic state based on the Ten Commandments. The conflict has claimed tens of thousands of innocent lives, displaced over a million people, and led to the abduction and enslavement of over 50,000 children, including the likes of Cecilia. Accused of widespread human rights violations, the LRA's crimes against humanity include murder, abduction, mutilation, sexual enslavement of women and children, and forced soldiering.

"They (the LRA) take an axe and split your head with it. They don't waste any bullets on you," recounted Cecilia.

Instead of being welcomed home, returned abductees like Cecilia are often treated by their community members as pariahs. After all, the abducted children were forced to side with the rebel army, killing and ravaging their own people. Physically scarred and emotionally-traumatized, some returned abductees also bear the burden of mothering an enemy's child: "My eldest is Elma Alimo, meaning 'difficult moment.' I named him that because I was just 13 when I had him," noted Cecilia.

Unwelcomed and having no education or skills, many girls like Cecilia resorted to transactional sex, that is, sex in exchange for food, clothing, or even a place to sleep. How might these young vulnerable girls take more control of their lives?



An Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camp in Uganda's Pader District where the PD Project for reintegrating young mothers was piloted

photo: Lucia Dora and Arinda Singh

A POSITIVE DEVIANCE INQUIRY can help identify people in the community who, without any extra resources, address the problem more effectively.

LIFE AFTER THE LRA

In March of 2007, Save the Children launched a pilot project to assist in the empowerment and reintegration process of vulnerable girls in northern Uganda's Pader district using the Positive Deviance approach. The PD project targeted 500 young mothers and vulnerable girl survivors as well as 50 adult mentors who provide community-based guidance, farming and financial advice, and general psychosocial support. One of the participating young mothers in this PD pilot is Hélène, a Positive Deviant among her cohort, whose daily practices led her to not just survive, but rather to thrive.

Anyira, lagam me pekowa, tye botwa...
Girls, the answers to our problems lie within us...

Much like a sunflower reaches toward the sun, Hélène's garden grows nurtured by her dreams and aspirations. In the same soil, with the same amount of water and sunlight, a few sunflowers still find ways to plant their roots more firmly and reach higher. Some tower high over Hélène.



Hélène's sunflowers



Hélène with her child

"I mixed all of my seeds, sunflower, cucumber, and others, in one basket and spread them in the field. These plants grow well together. I learned this skill from my father, he was a good farmer. He taught me about intercropping."

Positive Deviance is rooted in the belief that the answers to a community's problems lie in existing local wisdom.

Bed lanyut maber
Be exemplary

The role of local and outside experts in PD is to act as listeners and facilitators. They can facilitate community-wide PD Inquiry, which allows community members to self discover the existing demonstrably successful strategies used by some to solve or prevent a particular problem.

A PD Inquiry can help identify people in the community who, without any extra resources, address the problem more effectively. The idea is to make the PD behaviors visible and actionable so that others can replicate the uncommon but effective practices.

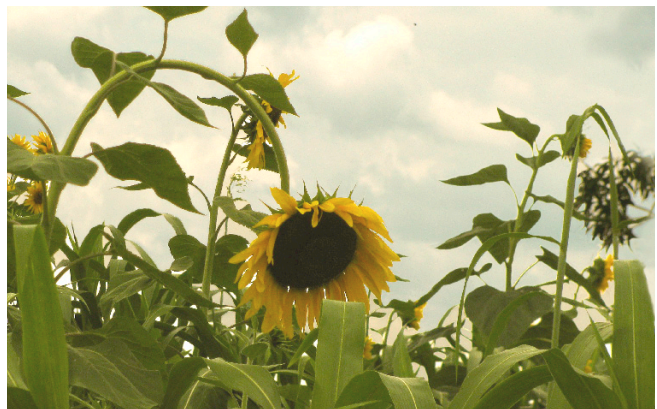


photo: Lucia Dora and Arvind Singhal

What Positive Deviance practices does Héléne engage in?



Picks up extra load of firewood for personal use and for selling

Works collaboratively with her friends to be more efficient in farm work, child care, and buying and selling

Fills an extra jerry-can of water and sells it

Listens to cropping and business advice provided by her aunt, parents, and community elders

Exhibits polite interpersonal behaviors

Works an extra hour or two in the garden each day

Saves money and reinvests in productive enterprises

Grows multiple seasonal crops and sells them

Attends school

POSITIVE DEVIANCE

practices must be accessible to all; they are often simple and can be implemented immediately.

Program participants in Northern Uganda who replicated PD practices successfully called themselves “PD girls.”

Similar to the sunflower plant that sinks its roots deeper to reach higher, Hélène, despite the hardships of abduction, early pregnancy, and motherhood, engages in certain practices which make her a valuable and integrated citizen in her returned community.

Through her PD practices, Hélène presents social proof to her peers that overcoming the odds is possible. If she can do it, so can they. And since Hélène’s behaviors are already in action, others can begin immediately, without extra resources.

Tii pi kwoni
Work for your life

Hélène’s practice of intercropping produces a healthy harvest. She has access to the same resources as other girls in her community, yet Hélène maximizes her harvest by practicing the wisdom passed down by her father. Her intercropping method is a rich source of local scientific wisdom.

With guidance from Anna, her *abayo* (aunt and mentor), she will hire others to help with the harvest and will be able to sow more for the next season. From a mentor’s perspective, Anna is very proud. As she builds the capacity of children, she builds her own capacity.



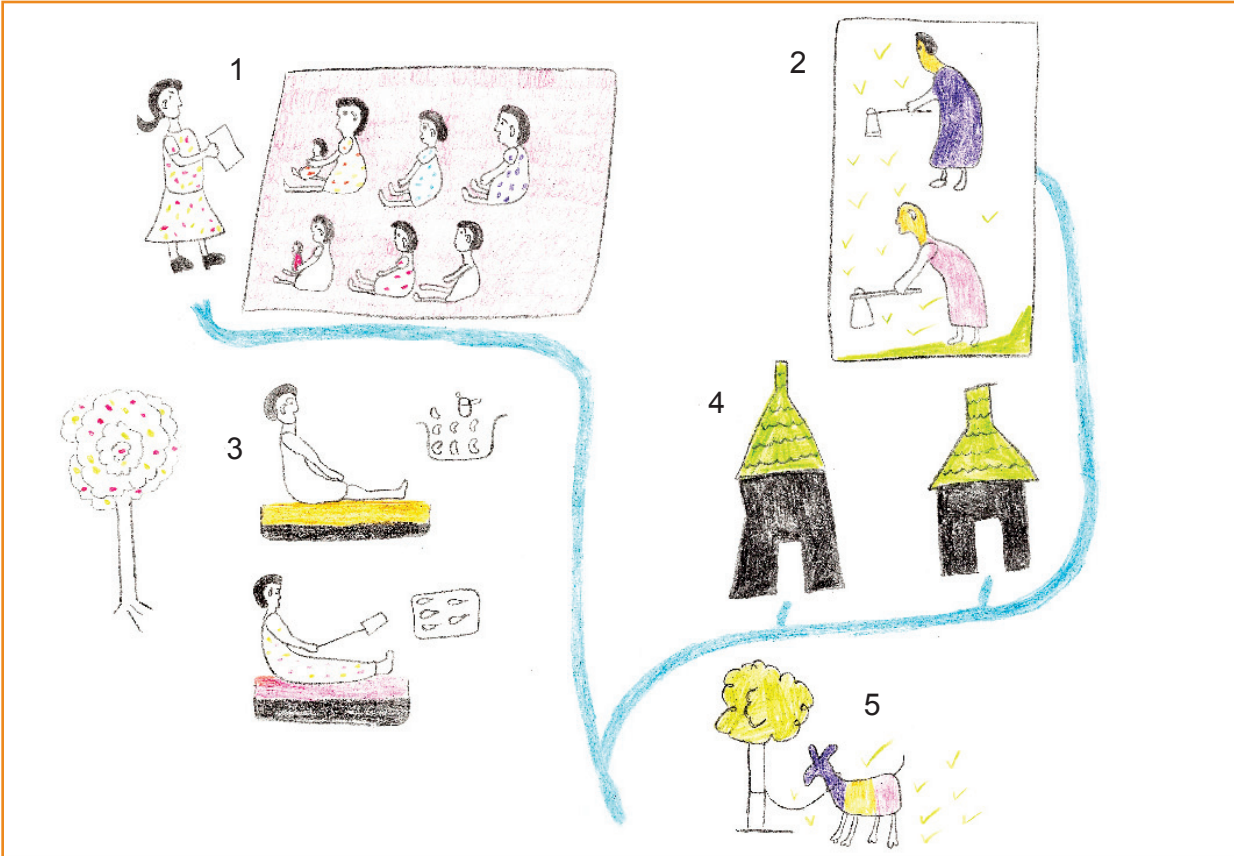
Anna, a mentor, with Hélène

In Save the Children’s PD program in Northern Uganda, whose purpose is to better reintegrate returned abductees, *abayos* aunt mentors serve as trusted guardians and advisors of young girls, in keeping with the local Acholi cultural traditions. They make PD practices, such as Hélène’s intercropping actions, more visible, enabling wider adoption.

The PD process allows other community members to adopt successful strategies like those of Hélène and other PD individuals. They can work longer,



Some crops are harvested and sold, while others, like g-nuts (peanuts), are stored as “savings” for future use or sale



Sketch drawn by several PD girls explaining five specific PD practices

harder, and together; or seek guidance from *abayos*; or employ intercropping for more bountiful and pest-free harvests. Program participants who have replicated PD practices successfully call themselves “PD girls.”

In this collective sketch made by several “PD girls” in Northern Uganda, we see how they share their knowledge about farming and work together to maximize their time and profits. Pointing at the sketch, one of the girls explained:

“After our capacity-building training with Save the Children #1, we began sharing information about

what crops to grow. We worked in the field together #2, and gathered our produce and together sold them in the market #3. We have built our houses #4 and have bought goats together #5 and if they reproduce in good number, we will divide the earnings among ourselves.”

Edmond, father of one of the “PD girls,” emphasized: “The ‘PD girls’ work in their gardens whenever they can find time. When not in school, they work all through the morning. While most other women return home for other domestic chores or rest, many ‘PD girls’ return back to their gardens in the afternoon or evening.”

PD behaviors and strategies are simple, actionable and sustainable, and thus can be easily shared within the community, creating community-wide ripples of change.



photo: Lucia Durá and Arvind Singhal

“PD girls” harvest the fruits of their labor

Jane, one of the “PD girls,” added: “After finishing work in my garden, I work in my friend’s garden. Or I work in another community member’s field to earn extra money.”

Marie, another “PD girl” noted: “If I dig in a mango garden, I bring back some mangoes to consume or sell.”

Grace, a mentor, added: “When they go to fetch firewood, some girls bring back an extra load. One they use for cooking, the other they sell or use the next day. One girl makes extra money by filling up an additional jerry-can of water by the hand pump, strapping it behind her bicycle and delivering it to a construction site.”

An evaluation of girls who participated in the PD pilot in Uganda showed:

93% of girls engaged in crop growing activities to enhance reintegration and reduce engagement in transactional sex as a means of survival.

54% of girls reported savings of above 50,000 shillings after one year.

96% of girls reported regaining self-respect by participating in group activities such as debates, songs, and plays.

Sunflowers with firmly planted roots reach for the sun and grow high.

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²Cecilia is a pseudonym of a young girl abducted by the LRA who spent several years in captivity. Narratives of returned abductees are available at Irin, a project of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (see www.irinnews.org).



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