React and Respond:  
The Phenomenon of Kony 2012

Written on behalf of the Outreach Council of the
African Studies Association

by

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Contents:

I. A Brief Guide to the LRA & Joseph Kony, Patrick Vinck

II. A Guideline for Teaching about Issues Raised by Kony 2012, John Metzler

III. Media Literacy: Discussion questions on the video & on social media, Barbara B. Brown

IV. Further Resources, Christine Root for Association of Concerned Africa Scholars

V. What Can We Do about Uganda and the LRA?, Association of Concerned Africa Scholars

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A Brief Guide to the LRA & Joseph Kony

Since 1987, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), a violent rebel group, has been fighting the Ugandan government and terrorizing the population in the northern part of the country. While fighting now seems aimed at plunder and disruption, it is rooted in a longstanding divide between Uganda’s north and south.¹

The Origins

Armed conflict erupted in its current form after current president Museveni, a southerner, seized power in 1986 from the northern-dominated government. Museveni’s coup was followed by revenge killings and massacres against people of the north that fueled resentment and led to the emergence of several rebellions.

The LRA emerged in this context, headed by Joseph Kony, a former army commander with little formal education. Kony saw himself as a messenger of God and a liberator of the Acholi people (a large ethnic group in northern Uganda). He had his own belief system and set of rituals, drawn from a mixture of Christianity, Islam, and traditional religions. Joseph Kony, however, failed to garner popular support and was rejected by the population and local leaders.

The Violence

Rejected by local leaders and the population, Kony increasingly turned against the civilians, falsely accusing them of aiding the government in seeking his defeat. Kony’s military campaigns became increasingly focused on “cleansing” the Acholi population, although he also preyed on civilians in neighboring regions.

The conflict in northern Uganda escalated, resulting in large-scale killings and mutilations. By the end of 2005 over 1.8 million people had been displaced and lived into squalid camps. To fill its ranks, the LRA abducted as many as sixty thousand civilians, often children, to serve as porters, soldiers, or sexual and domestic servants. LRA human rights abuses cannot be overstated.

But the LRA was not alone in committing abuses in the north. The Ugandan government forces have also committed serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. The Government of Uganda forced the population to move into camps, often near military bases, and failed to provide adequate protection, making life in the displacement camps a daily misery.

Ending the War

A number of attempts have been made over the last 20 years to end the war, both militarily and through dialogue. Large-scale military campaigns over the years have failed to weaken the LRA significantly or to capture Joseph Kony. Each time the LRA managed to escape and regroup, responding to the military operations by carrying out massive attacks on civilians. With a vicious war continuing, the newly established International Criminal Court began to investigate the situation in northern Uganda. In 2005, it released a warrant for the arrest of Kony and his top commanders. Various peace talks, as recently as 2008, also failed, allowing the LRA to regroup and launch new attacks.

¹ Since colonial time, the two regions have rivaled to capture political and military power. Legitimate grievances have emerged on both side due to the history of violence and discriminatory practices of subsequent governments.
In 2006, Kony withdrew the LRA from northern Uganda and moved to the neighboring countries of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, and South Sudan, where he could once again hide and continue marauding. The LRA has been substantially weakened by successive military attacks and by successful attempts to bring combatants out of the bush through offering amnesty to LRA forces who defect.

In northern Uganda (and the country as a whole), the population enjoys peace, or at least the absence of violence, for the first time in decades. Children no longer have to walk for miles at night to seek a safe haven. With international support, people are rebuilding homes and planting their fields. However, this region remains economically marginalized, a situation that has only been exacerbated by the Museveni government’s interest in “developing” the region by transferring land ownership to foreign interests and political allies. Poverty and other problems related to long term impact of war, government neglect and social upheaval continue to make life difficult for many northerners.

In 2012, the remaining forces of the LRA are estimated at no more than a few hundred, living in the DRC (Dem. Rep. of Congo), South Sudan, and the Central African Republic (CAR). A diminished LRA survives in remote regions of these countries, far from government control. The Ugandan army has crossed the border into the CAR to fight the LRA. There, new accusations against the Ugandan army have come out. Already known for humanitarian abuses, the Ugandan army now stands accused of involvement in sex and mineral trafficking in a neighboring state.

**Toward the Future**

Joseph Kony remains wanted by the ICC. In 2006, UN Special Operation Forces trained in jungle combat failed to capture Kony. In May 13, 2010, the U.S. Congress passed the “Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act” to fund efforts to apprehend Kony. A hundred advisors were deployed to support the Uganda army but Kony has continued to escape, and civilians continue to pay the price. Most recently, the African Union announced the deployment of 5,000 troops.

But in the past, military attempts to capture Kony have only resulted in increased violence against civilians. At the same time, Kony has ultimately rejected every peace process, and current peace agreements do not grant amnesty for serious crime. Ultimately the strategy that has proven to be the most effective is to target and communicate with lower ranking LRA members to persuade them to demobilize, while at the same time bringing effective protection to civilians.

*Dr. Patrick Vinck, Harvard University, in collaboration with the African Studies Outreach Council*

*March 25, 2012*

**To learn more about the LRA:**

[www.peacebuildingdata.org/uganda](http://www.peacebuildingdata.org/uganda)  
Guidelines for teaching about issues raised by *Kony 2012*

I. Introduction

The unprecedented attention generated by the *Kony 2012* video, which has been viewed by approximately 100 million people worldwide since March 5, provides a unique “teaching moment” about a number of crucial issues, including representations of Africa, resolving international conflicts, evaluating charities and social justice organizations, and campaigns spread by social media. We would like to share suggestions about how educators can engage and address issues raised by *Kony 2012*.

Teachers have communicated to us that it is important to affirm students’ interest and engagement that the *Kony 2012* campaign has sparked, even while raising questions about the campaign. Our classroom colleagues bring a wealth of experience in engaging their students in meaningful learning activities about controversial and difficult current events. We invite – and would welcome – your feedback. (See contact information below.)

II. Risk of accepting stereotypes or untested generalizations

For people who saw the video with little or no contextual knowledge of recent African history, and particularly of the Great Lakes region of east and central Africa, the video may have reinforced - or even created - stereotypes about Africa.

**Here are some stereotypes of particular concern.**

1. **Violent crises are part of the “African condition.”** There is a popular conception that violent crises are endemic to Africa—almost genetically part of the *African condition*. There is, of course overwhelming evidence that challenges this perception.

2. **Africa is all the same.** Africa is often seen as homogenous, and a place of the exotic, primordial loyalties (*tribalism*), poverty, underdevelopment, and corrupt and ineffective governments, as well as a tendency towards violence. Again, the evidence overwhelming challenges this perspective.

3. **Africa & Africans have little capacity to solve problems.** Both African states and societies and African individuals and members of civil society are often perceived as having little capacity to solve their problems, including, as in the *Kony 2012* video, the ability to deal with violent movements and their aftermath. In fact, there are recent cases of creative African initiatives from across the continent to deal with violence and its aftermath:
   - The women’s peace campaign in Liberia (West Africa), which brought together women of all religions and all economic classes in a protest movement that led to a negotiated settlement of the brutal Liberian civil war.
   - The Gacaca Village Courts in Rwanda were established in 2001 as an indigenous response to the need to “bring to justice” thousands of Rwandans who took part in the 1994 genocide. The Gacaca courts, adopting traditional Rwandan values, aim to establish a mechanism of *restorative justice*, with the primary concern of restoring community relations between perpetrators and victim, while holding perpetrators accountable for their crimes.
   - The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), while not fully successful in realizing the goal of national reconciliation, was highly regarded by most South Africans. The TRC model has been adopted by other nations in Africa, Latin America, and Asia for establishing post-conflict restorative justice.
III. The core approach: Critical inquiry

As Africanist educators, we have long embraced pedagogical methodology of critical inquiry, believing that it can ameliorate people’s understanding of Africa and reduce unfounded stereotypes.

1. Providing historical context: The Kony 2012 video vividly depicts the atrocities of Joseph Kony and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) committed over the past two decades. While these atrocities certainly took place and should be condemned, the video does not provide, nor does it suggest that it would be appropriate to explore, the historical context that gave rise to the LRA.

2. Encouraging students to “complicate” their analysis: As educators, we encourage our students to “complicate” their analysis of important, complex issues. This is certainly true when trying to understand the issues related to the atrocities committed by the LRA and the failure of central African governments to arrest Kony.

3. Encouraging Students to differentiate between cause and effect: History and social studies standards and benchmarks include students developing the analytical ability to distinguish between cause and effect of events. When discussing the issues raised in the Kony 2012 video, it is important to explore the history of the conditions under which the LRA arose, how it was moved out of northern Uganda, the several efforts to negotiate with the LRA, and why it continues to exist in neighboring countries.

4. Importance of Timely and Appropriate Response: The Kony 2012 video requests immediate actions from its viewers, with the goal of capturing Joseph Kony by the end of 2012. Clearly, there are times of crisis—natural disaster, genocide—when immediate humanitarian action is essential. However, there are other conditions when some people call for military action and others call for a more deliberative process, out of concern for possible unintended consequences that may worsen the crises. We should critically engage in a discussion of the type(s) of intervention that are most appropriate regarding the LRA and are most likely to produce the desired results while minimizing negative consequences.

5. Listening to Ugandan & African perspectives: The voices and perspectives of Ugandans and others in Central Africa who have been affected by the LRA are conspicuously absent from the Kony 2012 video. Their absence may reinforce the negative and erroneous stereotype of Africans as lacking agency, of not having the will or capacity to act in their own interest. Fortunately, the enormous reach of the Kony 2012 video has led to lively debate in the United States and many statements by Ugandan journalists, civil society leaders, and scholars that are accessible on the Web. (See attached resource list.)

6. Supporting open-ended evaluations of social justice organizations: The Kony 2012 video provides an opportunity for educators and students to reflect upon how to research and select civic organizations with which to be civically engaged as local, national and global citizens. When you’re looking to support a civic or social justice organization, what are your criteria for supporting them? What criteria might make you want to know more? What would you be made uneasy by? How would you learn more?

A more detailed version of these guidelines is available upon request. Write: metzler@msu.edu.

These guidelines were developed on behalf of the African Studies Association Outreach Council by John Metzler (African Studies Center, Michigan State University metzler@msu.edu, with invaluable input from Barbara Brown (African Studies Center, Boston University bbbrown@bu.edu) and Christine Root (Michigan State University and the Association of Concerned Africanist Scholars).
Media literacy inquiry:  
Thinking about the Kony 2012 video & about social media

Media literacy is a key goal in education today. We, and especially young people, learn through the media, much more than through print. Kony 2012 provides an opportunity for critical thinking. Using open-ended questions and critical inquiry, diverse perspectives can be heard and a variety of aspects investigated. The questions below are divided into two sections: 1) analyzing the video’s content and appeal and 2) analyzing the impact of social media.

In order to have enough time for discussion, we recommend audiences watch the video in advance, if possible: [http://vimeo.com/37119711](http://vimeo.com/37119711). You may find that a transcript (unofficial) of the video is useful: [http://lybio.net/joseph-kony-2012-raise-support-for-his-arrest/people/](http://lybio.net/joseph-kony-2012-raise-support-for-his-arrest/people/).

Leading a discussion based on the questions below:
The video raises compelling questions on a wide range of topics, many more than can easily covered in a single discussion. To focus your discussion, we suggest using one of two approaches: select a few questions, ones you find most useful for your audience or “jigsaw” the discussion. (For a “jigsaw”, break up into small groups, giving different sets of questions to small groups. After a time, either the groups write a summary report, or everyone comes back together to hear summary reports from each group.

I. Analyzing the Video

1. A few factual basics
   - Who made the video?
   - What audience did they create it for?
   - Who speaks on the video? (How much time for each?)
   - What are the main types of visuals used?
   - What are the main topics or points?
   - Do a content analysis of how much time is spent on each of the main topics in the 29-minute video. (How much time was spent on understanding the crisis? On the support for the earlier campaign to send US military advisor to Uganda? On supporting the current campaign?)
   - How much of the video time is spent in the US? In Uganda?

2. Analyzing the problem
   - What did you learn about Uganda? (Is there more you would like to know?)
   - As every conflict has its explanations or origins, what explanations are offered for this conflict?
   - What did you learn about the Central African region? (Kony is no longer in Uganda.)
   - What goal does the video seek in order to achieve social justice?
   - What specific strategies does the video endorse to achieve this end?
   - What additional information would you like, if any (or questions you need answered) in order to understand or agree with the goal and the strategies to achieve this goal?
   - After the Kony 2012 video received wide publicity, it was shown to a large group in northern Uganda, a different audience than it was designed for. What problems did these Ugandans express in this 2:40 min news report: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rU_1jnrrj5VI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rU_1jnrrj5VI).
   - Understanding the larger context: What else do you know about Africa? Where did you learn this? (such as church, school, the news)?
     - Kony 2012 is a story about a grossly unjust man. Do you know of any positive movements or leadership within Africa for social justice?
• Do you know the names and stories of any of the 10 African leaders who’ve won the Nobel Peace Prize? [These are: Albert John Luthuli (South Africa) – 1960; Anwar el-Sadat (Egypt) – 1978; Bishop Desmond Tutu (South Africa) – 1984; F. W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela (both South Africa) – 1993; Kofi Annan (Ghana) – 2001; Wangari Maathai (Kenya) – 2004; Mohamed ElBaradei (Egypt) – 2005; Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Liberia), Leymah Gbowee (Liberia) – 2011.]

3. Analyzing the proposed solutions
• What solution does Invisible Children propose for ending this violence? Is it targeting an individual or an institution? [Bringing Kony to the ICC]
• What are the several strategies that Invisible Children wants used in order to bring Kony to justice? [sending US military advisors to Uganda & funding the Ugandan army]
  o What are the potential benefits of these strategies? What are the potential drawbacks?
  o Is there more you’d like to know?

4. Analyzing the appeal of the video
• This is an emotional video. Name the different emotions that the video seeks to elicit. How does it elicit them?
• What role does Jason Russell, the head of Invisible Children, play?
  o What are the benefits of having a white American man tell the story? What are the drawbacks?
• What role does the son of the head of Invisible Children play?
  o What are the benefits of him playing this role? What are the drawbacks?

II. Analyzing Social Media as a Political & Educational Tool

1. How information can spread
• How did this first come to your attention?
  a. Through a friend? An organization? A celebrity?
  b. Through which media (talking? Facebook? Twitter? Email?)
  c. What was the message you received—to see this video? to help?
• Did you share it? Through which media (talking? Facebook? Twitter? Email?)
• Why did you decide to share it? How many people did you share it with?

2. Your response to the video
• Did you watch the whole video? Why/why not?
• What response/s did you have to the video?
• Have you seen information critical of the video? What was the criticism?

3. The political campaign of Kony 2012
• Think about how social media was used in different ways by the Arab Spring and by the Kony 2012 campaign. (who initiated it; why they used it –e.g., for both: its broad reach and for the Middle East: censorship problem)
• One innovation from this campaign is the ability to click on the images of selected celebrities and politicians to send a pre-typed tweet to them. Comment on the use of celebrities.
• What are the benefits of using Facebook and Twitter for a campaign for social justice? What are the drawbacks?
Resources about Uganda, the LRA, and the Kony 2012 video

Note: Use the URLs containing “bit.ly”; they are “tiny URLs” that connect to the full-length web address.

1. Kony 2012 Video and Invisible Children


Letter to President Obama from Invisible Children, Resolve, and Enough Project http://bit.ly/H7k5Yp

2. Sources of continuing coverage about Uganda and the LRA

Uganda Speaks – Trending Our Own Story http://ugandaspeaks.com/


AfricaFocus http://www.africafocus.org and particularly http://bit.ly/GSm8BS AfricaFocus is also on Facebook and Twitter.

African Arguments http://africanarguments.org/

Association of Concerned Africa Scholars – Resources about Uganda, the LRA, and Central Africa http://concernedafricascholars.org/uganda-lra-central-africa/

Twitter http://twitter.com/#!/search-home Some hashtags to search for include: #Kony2012, #StopKony, #StopStopKony, #Uganda2012, #Ug2012, #UgandaSpeaks

Ugandan media http://www.monitor.co.ug/ http://www.ntvuganda.co.ug/

3. African critiques of Kony 2012 video (from the continent and the diaspora)

See: Uganda Speaks http://ugandaspeaks.com/ (above) and sections 5 (below)


Kony 2012 Video is Misleading by a Ugandan American teenager. 5:47 minute video viewed more than 3.7 million times on YouTube. (There is one brief expletive.) http://bit.ly/GUbA8U

4. Other Critiques of the Kony 2012 campaign

See also: African Studies Association list of resources: http://bit.ly/GTALni

Juice Rap News with Robert Foster: Yes We Kony - An irreverent parody of Kony 2012 – a rap about then “white man’s burden” and the role of AFRICOM. 3:37 minute video http://thejuicemedia.com

5. History of the conflict with the LRA policies proposals


The downside of the Kony 2012 video: What Jason did not tell Gavin and his army of invisible children by Mahmood Mamdani, Director of the Makerere Institute of Social Research at Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/80787

What will it take to end the LRA conflict? By Kennedy Tumutegyereize of Conciliation Resources, reporting on perspective of people in Central African Republic, Republic of the Congo, and South Sudan who are affected by the LRA. At: http://www.c-r.org : http://bit.ly/HcK3z2


Conflict and Conflict Resolution in Northern Uganda Books and articles included in syllabus by Andrew Branch, Fall 2011 http://bit.ly/H1r993

6. Recommendations and commentary on current U.S. policy


Kony: What’s to be done? by Alex de Waal, Executive Director of the World Peace Foundation at the Fletcher School, Tufts University, discusses the military and non-military framework proposed by the International Crisis Group, at: http://africanarguments.org : http://bit.ly/GQzbaf


Interview with Ethan Zuckerman by WBZ NewsRadio 1030’s Suzanne Sausville, discusses difficulties of capturing Kony and need to listen to Ugandans about solutions, 2:20 minute audio at: http://cbsloc.al/GSQYO

7. How KONY 2012 went viral


Useful reads on Kony 2012 by Ethan Zuckerman http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/

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Association of Concerned Africa Scholars http://concernedafricascholars.org/
What can we do about Uganda and the LRA?

Many of the millions of people who watched the *Kony 2012* video were touched by the Ugandan children it portrayed and the need for an end to the wars and violence involving the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). But what are the most effective – and least potentially damaging – ways we can respond?

The *Kony 2012* video has been widely criticized by many Ugandans, who fear more military intervention and believe the video misrepresents them, their situation, and their pressing needs (see: [http://ugandaspeaks.com/](http://ugandaspeaks.com/)). Africa experts also have criticized it for being overly simplistic, out-of-date, and too narrow in focusing on capturing Joseph Kony of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). It also has been criticized for contributing to stereotypes of Africans as needy and unable to solve their problems and of Africa as a continent in perpetual conflict. Invisible Children, which produced the video, has been scrutinized as well; much of its budget goes to the U.S. “awareness” campaign – for showing the video across the country and product merchandising. And *Invisible Children* is only one of many organizations with projects in Uganda and surrounding countries, and it has obtained more funding than most.

1. Learn about Uganda & Central Africa

Before advocating that the U.S. government adopt a particular policy or deciding to donate to an organization, it is important to learn more from a variety of sources, especially people from the countries involved.


Here are some issues to learn more about.

- **What are the conditions in northern Uganda today, and what support are its people seeking from us?** Children are no longer in danger of being abducted in northern Uganda, and the LRA has not operated there since 2006. Today, northern Ugandans are focused on post-conflict reconstruction, renewing farming, and health issues such as **nodding disease** that emerged during the war in the resettlement camps where the Ugandan government forced them to live. And, as people have returned to their land from the camps, their rights to land ownership have been challenged in some areas.

- **Where is this conflict and the violence now?**
  The LRA is no longer in Uganda, and its forces have been reduced to only a few hundred, but their brutal attacks have continued in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR), and South Sudan.

- **Why does this part of Africa seem so conflicted?**
  There are powerful competing international, national, and local interests that seek advantage and that are prepared to initiate and support violence. Multiple militias and armies have disrupted the CAR, DRC, and South Sudan for many years. And national governments often have not given priority to ending the violence and protecting their populations. (Resources for learning more about this conflict are on the ACAS website.)

Association of Concerned Africa Scholars
2. What should we urge the U.S. government to do?

The *Kony 2012* video calls for an expanded military effort to capture LRA leader Joseph Kony, arrest him by the end of 2012, and bring him before the International Criminal Court (ICC). But increased cooperation between U.S. Army Special Forces, Ugandan, and other armies in the region to find and arrest Kony is highly likely to have dangerous consequences for civilians. Often in the past, they have been caught in the crossfire or become targets of retaliatory attacks by the LRA. Most people want to end the violence, find justice for the victims, and reintegrate the LRA soldiers into society. But how can that best be achieved, and are foreigners far from the region in the best position to know how to make this happen? An end to these wars needs to be negotiated by the local people directly affected by the conflict – recall the long negotiations of South Africans for ending that conflict and for seeking justice through their *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. 

➔ Here are some policy recommendations from ACAS.

- **Urge President Obama and the Congress:**
  - To focus primarily on *negotiated, not military, solutions*. In March 2012 the peace-building organization *Conciliation Resources* reported from its study of the impact of the LRA on local communities in the DRC, CAR, and South Sudan: “Those who bear the brunt of the LRA’s violent retaliations are … all too aware of the risks of a renewed military strategy… An overwhelming majority of those consulted expressed a desire for a solution based on protection and political engagement.” [http://ow.ly/9QfpO]

Similarly, in June 2009, Ugandan Acholi Religious Leaders Initiative (ARLPI) said, “The military option has been explored numerous times in the past… Military strategies launched against the LRA have time and again led to severe reprisal attacks on the innocent civilian community… [We] advocate for dialogue and other non-violent strategies to be employed so that long term sustainable peace may be realized. Let us learn from the past experiences where we have seen that violence only breeds more violence.” [http://ow.ly/9Qg4S]

- To cooperate closely with the *African Union (AU)* and *United Nations (UN)* for a negotiated settlement and give them the financial and logistical support needed to support negotiations and to increase security for civilians of the affected regions without further escalating violence.

- To actively seek an effective *United Nations Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)* [http://www.un.org/disarmament/convarsms/ArmsTradeTreaty] to end trade in weapons, munitions, and other military and policing equipment that often inflict misery and carnage on civilians, especially in Africa.

- To take a strong stand against child soldiers by fully enforcing without exceptions the *U.S. Child Soldier Prevention Act*, unanimously passed by Congress in 2009, to prohibit military assistance to governments not taking action to demobilize child soldiers. <www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/childrens-rights/child-soldiers>. *Amnesty International* has campaigns on both child soldiers and small arms. Use of child soldiers and raping of women and girls are common horrors of war, not just by the LRA – and not only in Africa.

3. Do you want to donate for urgent human needs in Uganda and this region of Africa?

Research what organizations are doing, how they work with the people who are affected, and how much of their donations go to activities on the ground. Many people urge providing support to locally-based organizations.

➔ As a start, two international agencies have focused on the child soldiers and displaced people in Central African Republic, Congo, South Sudan, and Uganda. They are very short of funds to care for and rehabilitate the injured. These are:

**UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)** - Addressing urgent needs of children, women, and men affected by insecurity and chronic conflict in the four countries. <http://donate.unhcr.org/>

**UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF)** – Working with former child soldiers, refugees, rape and abuse victims, and displaced by the LRA, other militias, and national armies. <http://www.unicef.org/>