



# STRATEGIES FOR SELF- HELP

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**The project is leading to a custom-made tool set and workshops to induce self-help in a post-crisis recovery phase or in long-term refugee camps. The aim is to involve the community and facilitate its economic development, initially showing the possibilities of employing local resources and following teaching them using new materials. It is demonstrated on the example of sustainable school furniture for children.**

**System purposes:**

- facilitate economic growth of the community
- engage the community, people feel useful and not victimized
- community building, facilitate socializing through learning together
- providing knowledge to improve people's skills
- create a sense of hope for the future
- providing furniture to the children's school in the community, which are a media and an example to develop the system.
- possible creation of micro industry

The term self-help (or self-improvement) refers to self-guided improvement - economically, intellectually, or emotionally - often with a substantial psychological basis. Self-help often takes place on the basis of self-reliance, of publicly available information, or of support groups where people in similar situations join together. (Wikipedia)

Self-help became the central hub of the project and it is considered the appropriate approach to a community experiencing a crisis or post-crisis period. The main idea is to involve the community and show them possibilities based on local and new resources, so they can gain knowledge of it and do by themselves.

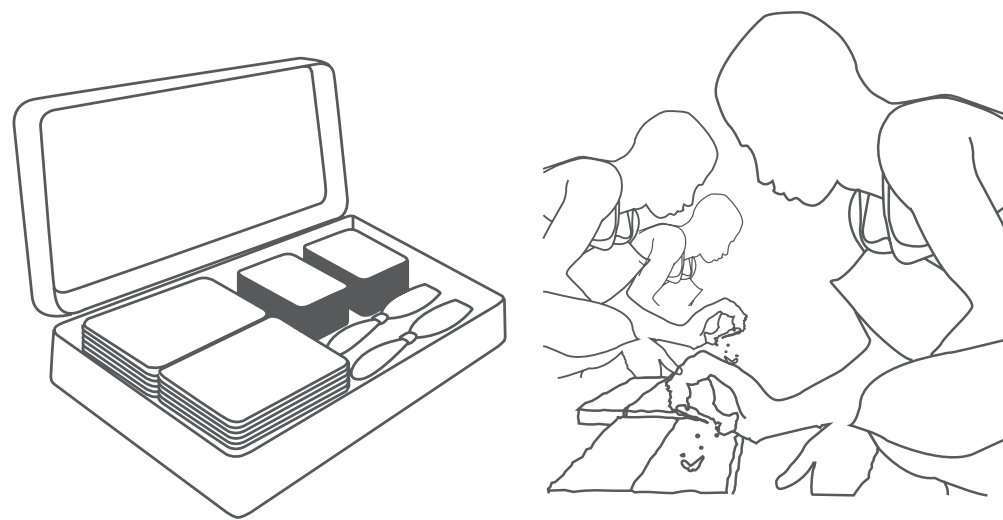
The case-study area is northern Uganda, Africa. Civil war has ravaged this country for over 20 years, making it one of Africa's longest-running conflicts. The fighting has primarily been between government forces and the infamous Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The LRA is a paramilitary group that has been accused of mass violations of human rights, including murder, torture, rape, mutilation, abduction and the widespread use of child soldiers. The United Nations estimates that over 25,000 children have been kidnapped since the conflict began.

Uganda is just an example. This project aims to respond to the needs of any community and any child in a post-crisis recovery phase and in long-term refugee camps. When a catastrophe occurs different NGOs such as UNICEF, Save the Children and Red Cross, create clusters, taking care of different problems. UNICEF concentrates especially on children and to guarantee the right to education through the project "child friendly schools". After a disaster UNICEF sends the "school in a box", a product that assures children to go back to school as soon as possible.

There is anyway a lack of school furniture. Generally this is not seen as a priority on the agenda.

There is the possibility that people affected by crisis end up living in refugee camps. In average people live in refugee camps for seventeen years.

In a long-term refugee camp or in a post-crisis recovery phase, there are problems related to economy. In some parts of the world, especially in Africa the main problems are unemployment, very low salary, children's work, sexual violence on women working and people surviving with just one meal per day. Helping organizations respond delivering food. This can be one solution, but not the only one. Another way to go is to use the school as a central device to involve a community and facilitate its economic development.



**Figure 1**

*Custom made tool set "UNICEF-IKEA workshop in a box".*

*Community people employing local resources.*

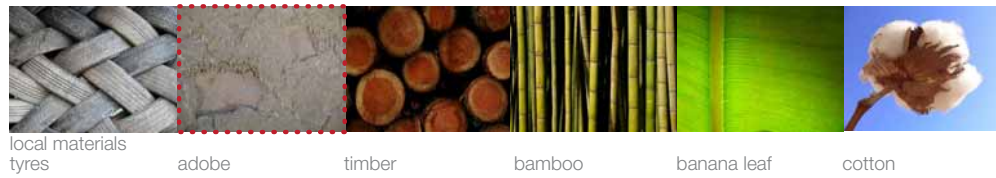
"Strategies for self help" rises from the thought that producing school furniture locally may have some unexpected and positive effects to the local communities and their economy. Moreover, it is important for children to feel safe and comfortable at schools. This improves the learning process and makes children perceive the school as positive experience.

It is important anyway to understand the specific needs and problems of a community. A good strategy to achieve this knowledge is through a questionnaire. The questionnaire states the community needs, what are the available local materials and if there are people within the community that has a special knowledge about building with those resources.

Once the questionnaire has been analyzed the "school in a box" is already in use, UNICEF sends the custom made tool called "UNICEF-IKEA workshop in a box" (figure 1). IKEA has an important role in the project. Nowadays this company exploits some cultures, especially in the third world, to get well-manufactured products at low prices. In this project instead IKEA play a central role, teaching the community how to build furniture through workshops called "School for adults". In fact the course is thought especially for those people that haven't been able to attend school before in their life or that want to learn a job. The course is open to anybody, without any limits of age or sex. The "UNICEF-IKEA workshop in a box" is the main strategic tool in the course to generate self-help. The box contains instruments that help and teach people to work with the chosen local materials.

The first task of the course is to build, with local supplies, sustainable furniture for the children's school. In this project the local material chosen as an example is adobe, which is available in northern Uganda.





local materials  
tyres

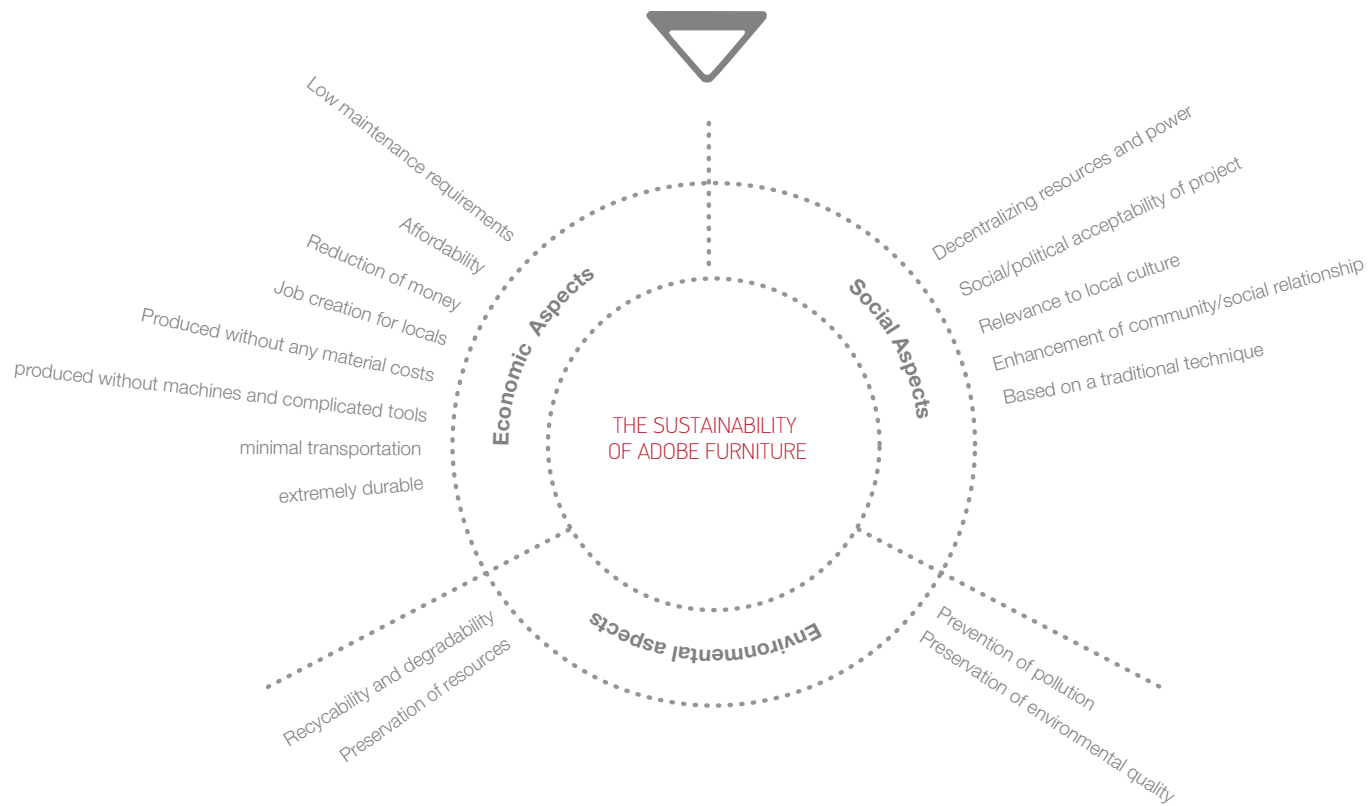
adobe

timber

bamboo

banana leaf

cotton



**figure 2**  
**The sustainability of adobe furniture**

*The diagram explains how adobe can be a sustainable material based on economic, social and environmental aspects.*



Process  
made from sand, clay, and water, with some kind of fibrous or organic material (sticks, straw, dung), which is shaped into bricks using frames and dried in the sun.



Results

Adobe is a very sustainable material, from the economical point of view, but also from the social and environmental points of view. (figure 2). Of course if the case-study area had been rich in other resources (e.g. bamboo, timber) the project would have been carried out using those.

There are also cushions added to the adobe structure. Their function is to provide softness and colors to the furniture and to make it appealing for the children. People are going to make the cushions according to the local traditions and with local textile. In this project, because of the situation of extreme poverty in Northern Uganda, the idea is to fill in the cushions with grass, at least in the beginning.

The choice of teaching people to build furniture and shelters has been taken because after a catastrophe probably there is a concrete need, but also to teach them a job, making them feel useful and engaged.

The decision of demonstrating the project on school furniture for children is because:

-after a catastrophe or during a long term emergency, it is very important for children to go back to school as soon as possible to restart a sort of normal routine in

their life.

- a good school environment, with well designed and colorful furniture would attract children to go to school but also, sitting well, in a comfortable and secure atmosphere it would guarantee them a better learning experience. Access to appropriate educational supplies is essential to the fulfillment of children's right to education. The furniture is designed especially for children in between 5 and 8 years old, It is comfortable, in fact it considers the local sitting position, to improve the learning experience. It is colorful, appealing and playful; the colors of the cushions are bright because in Africa people like artificial shades; it can be used outside and inside; it is a furniture to share to improve the interaction between children, but also because children need contact and in these schools their number is always undefined; it is almost no cost furniture.

Therefore design can be very important for a community experiencing a post crisis or long-term emergency period.

After certain knowledge of working with the material is gained they will start to learn building shelters in adobe.

Once they have learnt that, IKEA holds another workshop to teach them to build with a new material. In case of Uganda it is going to be wood. Wood it is not an economically available material in that country, so for people can be an important opportunity to learn to use it. Of course wood is an important material also for IKEA, which bases its production mostly on it.

The same steps followed for the adobe are taken. Initially they produce school furniture that is going to complete the adobe furniture previously produced. After they make other kinds of furniture and in the end they learn to build shelters and community houses.

After the learning process, if the School for adults has a good respond (in terms of good quality products), IKEA is going to establish a factory locally, where the people that have been trained in the school are going to be employed. It is another valuable strategies to generate self-help for the community. Out of it IKEA can get well-manufactured products at good prices without exploiting people and cultures. In case IKEA decides not to establish a factory locally, anyway people are going to be able to start their own company or to teach their new knowledge to other communities in other villages.

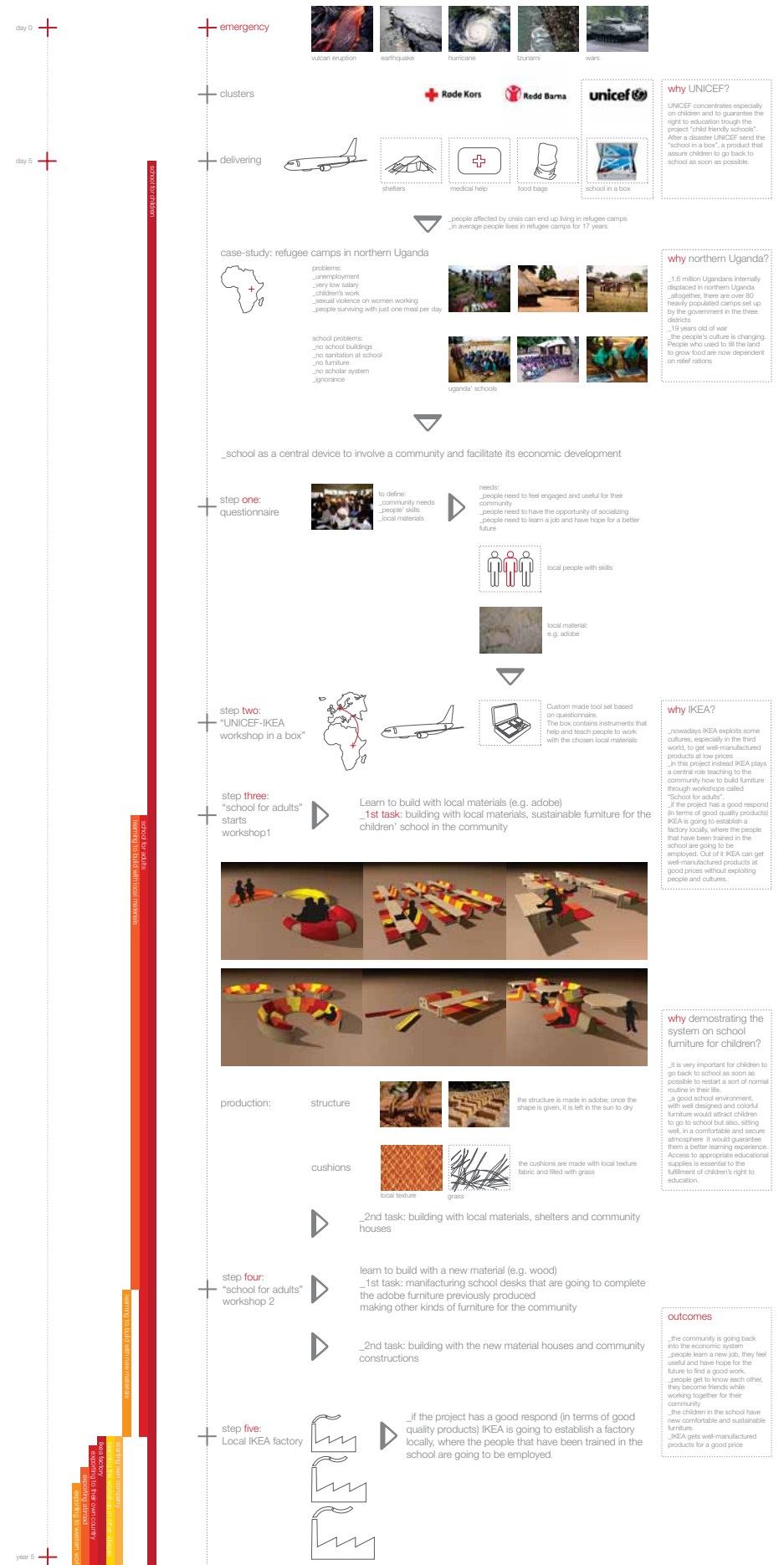
The project is related to system thinking because it is a product that wouldn't subsist without the system it is part of. The system in "Strategies for self-help" is part of a larger system which is the international help given from NGO to people experiencing crisis. Especially the plan is to fit with UNICEF already existing programs, because they address their efforts in the same field. It consists in parts, which are the different time phases it is divided in and the different strategies used to develop it. The results getting out of the system are more valuable than the sum of all the single parts, because simply employing strategies that show the possibilities of using local and new materials it is possible to achieve a society that will not be anymore dependent from relief rations.

Grameen Bank is also a system based on help for self-help. It gives tools to people to make it possible for them going back into the economic system. It has reversed conventional banking practice by removing the need for collateral and created a banking system based on mutual trust, accountability, participation and creativity.

Grameen Bank provides credit to the poorest of the poor in rural Bangladesh, without any guarantee. For them credit is a cost effective way to fight poverty and it serves as a catalyst in the over all development of socio-economic conditions of the poor who have been kept outside the banking orbit on the ground that they are poor and hence not bankable. This bank started in 1976. Today the rural poor whom it serves own this bank. Borrowers of the Bank own 90% of its shares, while the government owns the remaining 10%.

**Figure 3**  
**Process diagram**

# STRATEGIES FOR SELF HELP







- Phase2: day 5 till 3 months: rehabilitation period
- Phase3: 3months onward: reconstruction period

Once this was clear, the research has been focused on understanding the consequences of crisis periods especially on children, their needs and problems. These are some findings: (figure 5)

**Children on emergencies' needs:**

To go back to their family if soldiers or displaced; sharing the post crisis emotions; play; protection; go back to school; normalcy and routine; meeting other children / friendship; self esteem / confidence

**Children on emergencies' problems:**

Violence; death; becoming disabled; displacement from families; malnutrition; leave their home, going to refugee camps; fear that it will happen again; fear that someone can get injured or killed; anxiety; loss of education; becoming orphans; becoming soldiers.

Another part of the research has been focused on understanding which role has the school institution for these children in Africa.

For most of Africa's children, education represents the only way out of a life of entrenched poverty. Across the continent, millions of children currently subsist on less than EUR 1 a day. Only those who can read, write and do arithmetic can hope to get a better-paid job when they grow up.

But school is about much more than just job skills. It's playing an increasingly vital role helping children protect themselves against the diseases that can ravage poor communities. Simple information on day-to-day hygiene and prevention saves lives and keeps families together.

Schools also provide sustenance through the provision of school meals wherever possible. For many growing children, the meal they get at school is their only hot meal of the day.

Finally, school builds confidence, cohesiveness and community. Educated children are less likely to become victims of violence and abuse. They are more likely to invest in improving their community when they are grown. And the follow-on effects of even basic education quickly multiply, as children who have benefited from schooling themselves strive to secure even better opportunities for their own families.

([http://www.schoolsforafrica.com/aboutsfa/11\\_whyeducation.htm](http://www.schoolsforafrica.com/aboutsfa/11_whyeducation.htm))

These findings underline how the school is important and how this project could be relevant.

Anyway, after a crisis period, in Africa and especially in Uganda there are still many problems related to the school:

Destroyed schools / no school buildings; no teachers, no system; children involved as soldiers; no water facilities at school; no furniture / school material; no toilets; more guys than girls going to school / discrimination; ignorance; social inequality between villages and cities; mistrust of a culture that is not religious or taught by the elders; school can be far from home; parents need children at home for working.

Also globally the situation is problematic. Nowadays there are 72 million children out of school worldwide, 37million of these live in conflict-affected fragile states. In addition 750.000 more children have their education disrupted or miss out entirely because of humanitarian disasters each year. Obtaining a quality education is a fundamental human right and if it doesn't get provided, this deny affected children crucial survival skills, a sense of hope and the capacity to be productive citizens on-



On going disaster



**Figure 5**

*The diagram shows the everyday living situation of children experiencing emergencies.*



KARSTEN GJEFFLE  
Social science major  
Working for Unicef and Norsk Form  
Norwegian



OSCAR QUAN LAINFIESTA  
Industrial designer  
Norsk Form  
Guatemalan



PETER SSENYIMBA  
Teacher  
Teaching in Norway through exchange  
Ugandan



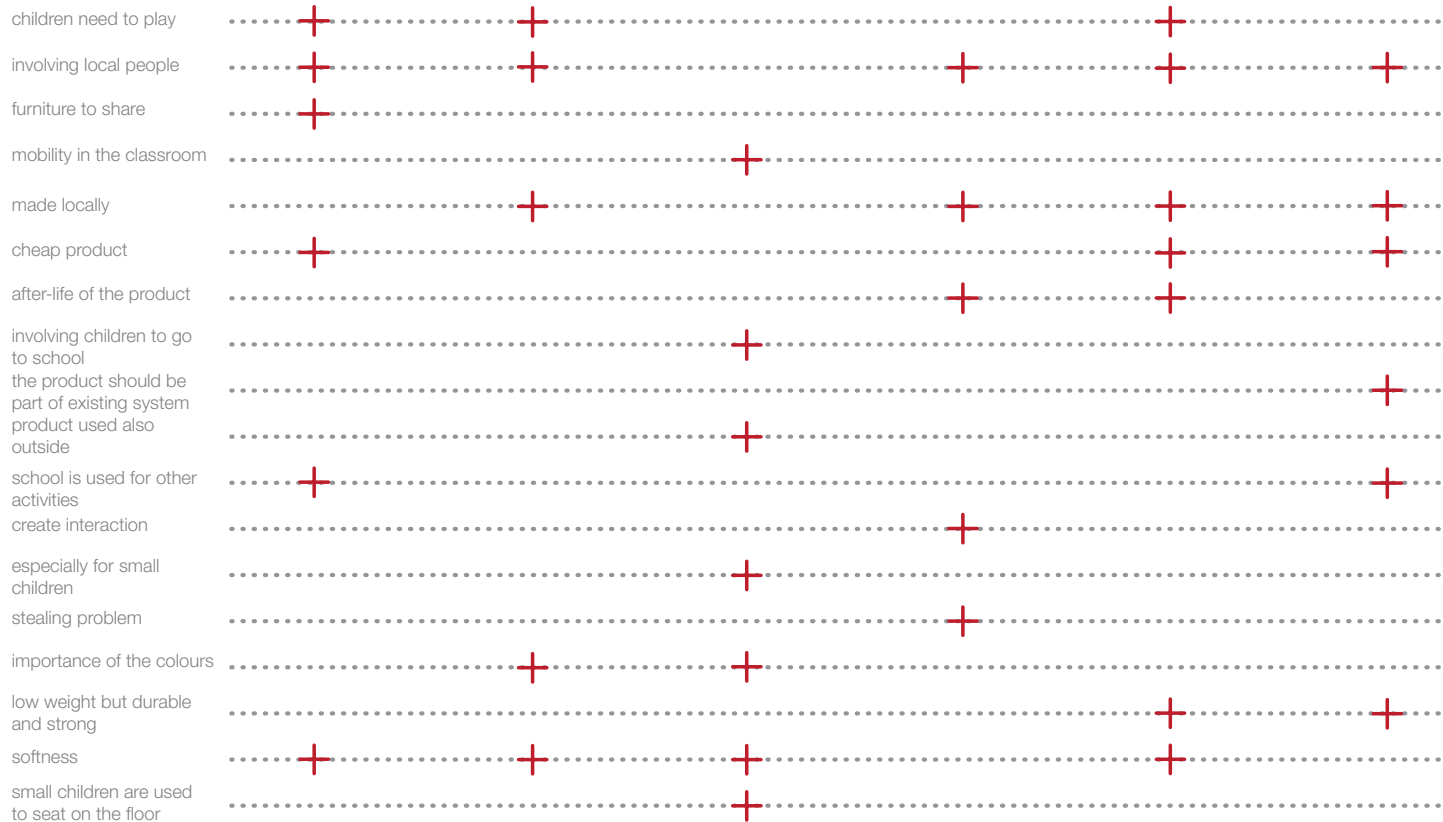
HALLDOR GISLASON  
Architect  
Khjo  
Icelandic



REDD BARN  
Philip Crabtree, Lisetta Trebbi,  
Trine Wengen  
Norwegian



RED CROSS  
Jan Egli Mosand  
Disaster Management Advisor  
Norwegian



**figure 6**  
**Interviews with experts**  
*This diagram helps to visualize the importance of the information collected having interviews with experts in the field.*

ce the emergency is over.

In the immediate aftermath of a disaster education can help protect children from death or bodily harm, it can impart critical lifesaving information on simple hygiene and health issues and save children from being recruited into armed groups.

The goal of UNESCO is that by 2015 all boys and girls worldwide will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

Because of the impossibility to do field research in Uganda, it has been essential to create a network of experts that had knowledge about this topic.

First of all I have been in touch with Oscar Quan Lainfiesta at Norsk Form that gave me advice about the design and suggested some people to talk to.

Soon there has been a meeting with Karsten Gjeffle, social science major, that has been working for Unicef, been in many countries experiencing crisis and now has his own practice called “Sustainable Sanitation Design”.

After, there has been an interview with Peter Ssenyimba, teacher from Uganda and then one with Halldor Gislason, architect that has been working in developing countries.

Following I had meetings with Save the children, Red Cross and UNICEF. Their contribution to the project has been very relevant.

I have been in touch with these people/organization during the entire project and these are some suggestions that everybody gave: (figure 6)

- the furniture should be made locally, by local people and with local materials
- involving local communities in the project is the best way to go
- children need to play
- colors and softness are very important for children
- a furniture made for many children to share is much better than a single furniture for every child

Another part of the research has been dedicated to find already existing examples of school furniture made for post-crisis education or in developing countries. Mostly the school furniture was made in wood, but there were also some examples made in concrete and in adobe. The furniture made with these materials was not designed based on the materials characteristics but it tried to resemble as much as possible the wood design.

The investigation has been carried out also on existing school furniture produced in the Western World, to have a wider inspiration.

Through research and system thinking theory it became clear that, simply designing school furniture for post-crisis education and ship it to the area where needed, wouldn't be a sustainable solution. To design a product specific for this area it was important to involve the local community and make the product become part of a system.

If the product had delivered, probably the people receiving it wouldn't feel it belonged to them. People need to be involved in the making process of the product they will own. Moreover, this way to proceed would have been too expensive and unproductive (the furniture would have taken too much space and weight when shipped, compared with food and medicine).

It became clear that a system could have been the right answer to reach a good solution.

A system is an assemblage of entity/objects, real or abstract, comprising a whole with each and every component/element interacting or related to at least one other component/element. Any object that has no relationship with any other element of the system is not a component of that system. A subsystem is then a set of elements, which is a system itself, and a part of the whole system (Wikipedia).

It is also a set of interrelated elements that perform a function, whose functionality



is greater than the sum of the parts.

System thinking is looking beyond the object, understanding the processes that lay behind the objects creation.

According to system thinking, nowadays, the problems we face are increasingly global. They are more interconnected and affect different knowledge fields. Consequently designers need to develop means to respond to more interconnect issues.

The new generations of system oriented approaches is more focused on relations than on defining the systems as such. Working with relations implies working with time. It is necessary to create a life plan of the product and his immediate and long-term impacts.

A system needs a scenario to apply to and northern Uganda became the chosen area. Here there is a war going on for more than twenty years. People live in long-term refugee camps and this context became the most suitable to apply the project.

Children fought much of the war in northern Uganda. The rebel forces, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) abducted between 20,000 and 40,000 children and forced them to fight, become sex slaves or otherwise enslaved them in service to the rebels.

Torture, beatings and mutilation of civilians and abducted children were commonplace. Abducted children were also used by the rebels to clear landmines, as human shields, and as tools of espionage.

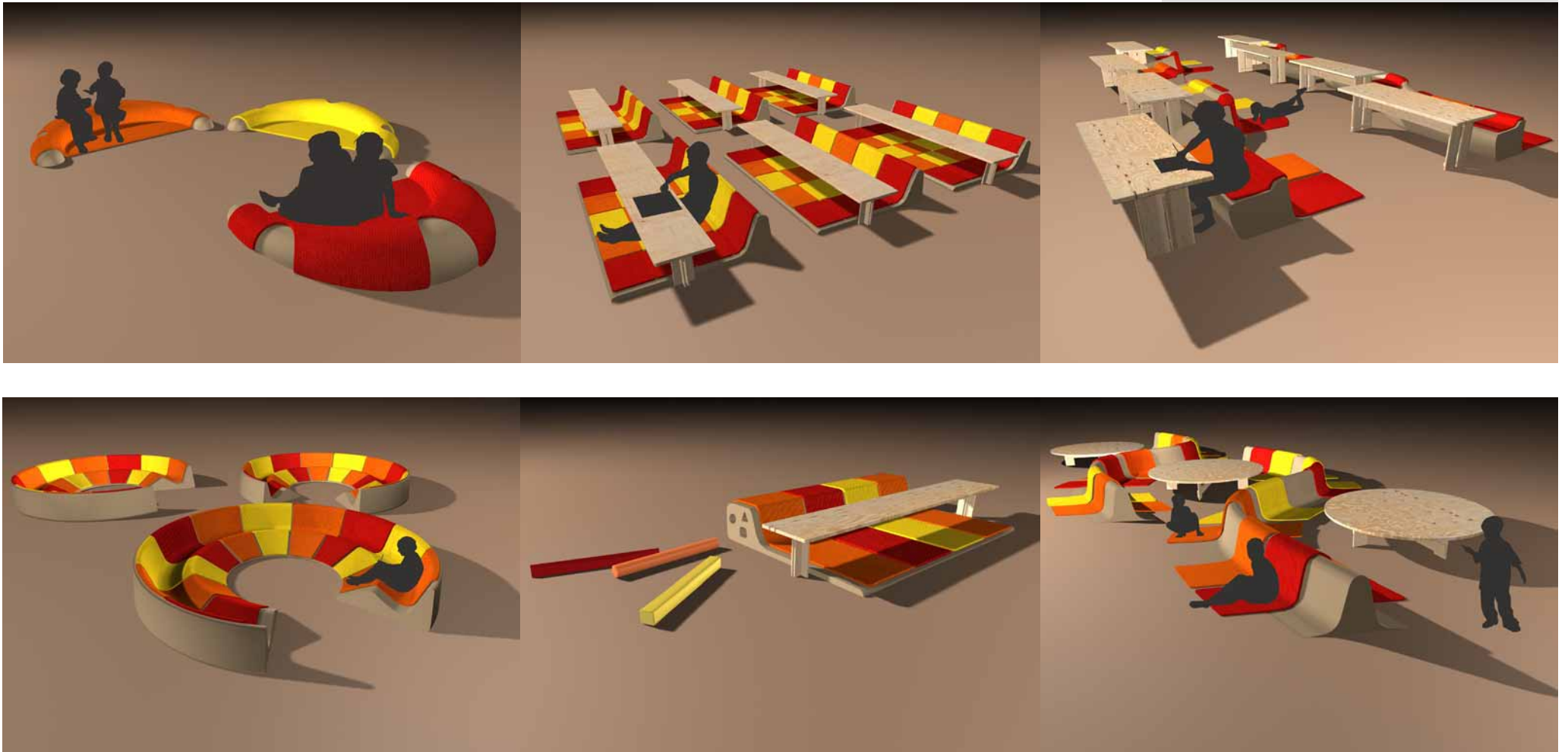
At the moment there are 1.6 million Ugandans internally displaced in northern Uganda. They live in 80 camps set up by the government in the three districts. The camps are heavily populated. The Kalongo camp in the Pader district has over 51,000 people, the Pabbo camp in Gulu district has over 40,000 and the Palabek Kal camp has over 25,000. Congestion, sweltering heat, food shortage, malaria and diarrhea infections are the main problems. People's culture is also changing. They used to till the land to grow food but now they are dependent on relief rations.

At this point it was clear that the way to go was to find other possibilities for this community to survive and then develop, trying to stop their dependence from relief rations.

Other project that deliver strategies for self-help were inspirational, especially Grameen bank.

Following, the research focused on Uganda local materials.

**Figure 7**  
**Different examples of possible results of furniture made in adobe during the "school for adults" workshop**



The most available and no cost materials are adobe and banana leaves. There is accessibility also to cotton, bamboo and timber, but those materials are more expensive. There has been an investigation also on how the already existing system works when a catastrophe occurs. It became clear that my system could have been inserted easily in the bigger one.

When a catastrophe/crisis occurs, different NGO create clusters taking care of different problems. UNICEF focuses on children, especially to deliver them free, compulsory and quality education and gender equality. During a crisis or after it this has vital importance. Education enhances lives. It ends generational cycles of poverty and disease and provides a foundation for sustainable development.

The School-in-a-Box has become part of the UNICEF standard response in emergencies, used in many back-to-school operations around the world. The primary objective of the School-in-a-Box is to help re-establish learning as the first step towards the restoration of normal schooling following an emergency. The kit contains supplies and materials for a teacher and up to 80 students, if taught in double shift classes of 40. The purpose of the kit is to ensure the continuation of children's education in the first 72 hours of an emergency.

Observation, research, diagramming and synthesizing have been central means to understand the case. Especially diagramming and synthesizing kept a large amount of information "alive" through the process.

While traditional analysis is based on the fractioning of information, diagramming instead has been relevant because it kept visible, during the process, relations and patterns.

Synthesizing solved the conflict between thesis and antithesis, finding a common truth and creating a new plan.

Once the system "Strategies for self-help" was defined has been tested as a design

experiment. Tester has been the network of experts and especially UNICEF, Redd Brana, Karsten Gjefle and Oscar Quan Lainfiesta. The test consisted on showing them the system and have a feedback about it to underline strengths and lacks. The general response has been positive especially regarding involving local communities and using local resources to build inexpensive school furniture.

## Conclusions

The conclusions, reached by my investigation and observation are:

- the community is going back into the economic system
- people learn a new job, they feel useful and have hope for the future to find a good work.
- people get to know each other, they become friends while working together for their community
- the children in the school have new comfortable, colorful, sustainable and inexpensive furniture.
- IKEA gets well-manufactured products for a good price

## Consequences

To be developed, the system should be tested on a real situation. It would request UNICEF and IKEA collaboration in the project and cooperation between them. This would underline strength and potential weaknesses of the system, so it will be possible to improve it.

It would be valuable to test the system initially in one area and following in terri-



**Figure 8**  
**Product setting**



stories with different local resources, to see the different results and how the project applies to the different contexts.

If it will work the main consequence would be the self-relief of many communities that before were depending on relief rations to survive.

For IKEA this project could be also the start for promoting a new image of the company. Showing that through helping (and without exploiting) a community they can get back good quality products, they could make people in the Western world more aware of communities living in refugee camps.

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## Special thanks

- UNICEF\_Nina Kolbjørnsen
- Rød kors\_Jan Egil Mosand
- Redd Barna\_Philip Crabtree\_Lisetta Trebbi\_Trine Wengen
- Sustainable Sanitation Design\_Karsten Gjeffe
- Norsk Form\_Oscar Quan Lainfiesta
- Peter Ssenyimba
- Halldor Gislason
- Anne Lene Hårstad
- Daniel Wikström

**Figure 9**  
**Product settings**

