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# Conflicts, Poverty and Human Development in Northern Uganda

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**ABSTRACT** *The long-running conflict in Northern Uganda has led to major violations of human rights against civilians, destruction of infrastructure and reduced access to social services, and has paralysed economic activity. Creating peace and fostering reconciliation in the region have not been successful either, thereby hindering development and relief activities, which are further constrained by insufficient funding, and lack of capacity at the district and community levels. The main challenges for reconstruction in Northern Uganda are therefore to: 1) achieve peace and reconciliation; 2) provide basic social services to the affected areas; 3) strengthen government capacity to coordinate development and relief activities; and 4) harmonize interventions by the various stakeholders to achieve increased flexibility and transparency.*

**KEY WORDS:** Conflict, insecurity, poverty, human development, Northern Uganda

## Introduction

Violent conflict and insecurity have long plagued Northern Uganda. The brutal and relentless war between Ugandan government forces and the rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), has lasted nearly 19 years. Karamojong pastoralists and tribesmen have also raided and terrorized neighbouring districts in the northern and eastern parts of Uganda for over four decades. The results have been gross violations of human rights, especially those of women and children, destruction of infrastructure, paralysis in economic activity, and a general social and cultural breakdown. As a result the northern region remains the poorest area of Uganda with an estimated 63% of the population living below the poverty line in 2003 (UBOS, 2003b). With the failure to achieve peace impeding the restoration of service delivery, the region's human development lags significantly behind the national average.

This article discusses the effects of conflict on poverty and human development in northern Uganda. It consolidates results from the region's reconstruction efforts to date, and draws some lessons for ongoing and future operations in post-conflict areas. The paper is organized as follows: the next section provides a background to the conflicts in northern Uganda, while the following section discusses its effects on

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poverty and human development. Section four outlines the reconstruction efforts being carried out in northern Uganda, and identifies the pitfalls. The final section concludes and draws recommendations.

**Background to the Conflicts in Northern Uganda**

The northern part of Uganda comprises 13 districts located in five sub-regions (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> But the political boundaries encompass five other districts in Teso sub-region (Katakwi, Kaberamaido, Soroti, Kumi and Pallisa) which have suffered under armed conflicts, although they are statistically included in the eastern region (MFPED, 2004). Thus, northern Uganda is politically defined as including 18

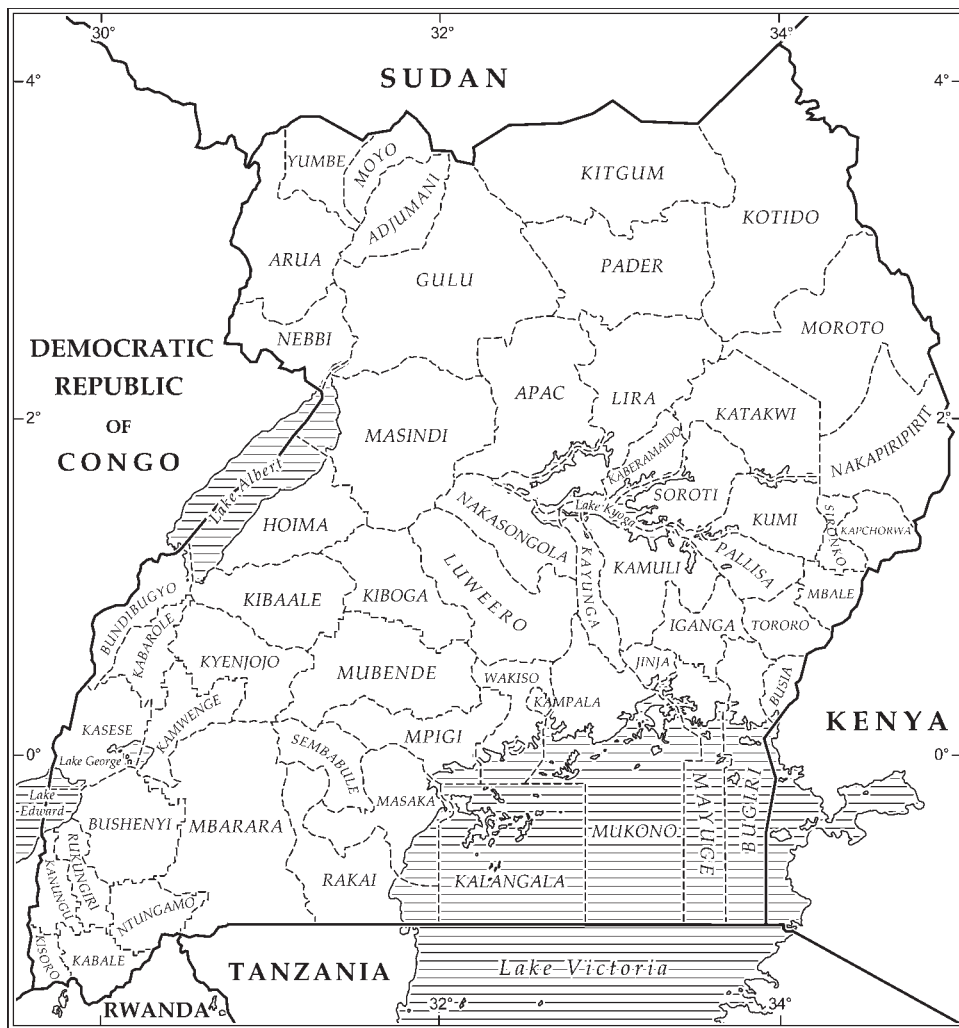


Figure 1. Uganda.

districts, of which Gulu, Kitgum and Pader, Lira and Apac, Kotido, Moroto, and Nakapiripirit have been most devastated by conflict.

*Background to Conflicts in the Acholi and Lango Sub-regions*

The current conflict in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions between the LRA and the Ugandan government has deep historical roots resulting from ethnic hostilities, colonial-era marginalization of the north, institutional weaknesses, troubled politics during the post-independence period when military sectors of different ethnic groups aspired to regain power from a succession of Uganda governments, and from certain external factors.

The main tribe in the northern region, known today as the Acholi, are a merger of the Luo-speaking Nilotes and Nilo-hamites. "When the British colonialists entered Acholi in the 18th century, they did not find any strong central administrative system in Acholi from which to start, unlike in Buganda and Bunyoro where there were centralized monarchies" (PACMU, 2002, p. 26). The British created socioeconomic divisions between the north and the Bantu-dominated South, by establishing in the South (Kampala and Jinja) more productive ventures such as agricultural plantations, and industrial and commercial centres. The north and other regions of Uganda became economically marginalized, and the northerners, especially the Acholi, provided the plantation and industrial labour, while southerners were preferred for white-collar jobs. Collier and Hoefler (2001) argue that rebellion can typically be explained by severe grievances such as inequality, lack of political rights or ethnic and religious differences in society. These factors might partly explain why the division between the north and south caused friction between their populations, rather than between Ugandans as a whole and the colonialists. In addition, the development of the southern regions at the expense of the north led to an economic imbalance, and subsequently to higher rates of army recruitment among Northerners as they attempted to improve their livelihoods. This imbalance persisted well into the postcolonial era; the Acholi dominated the army as Uganda became increasingly militarized.

From the early post-independence period onwards no effort was put into making the army a national institution; it was used instead to promote the political survival of the governments in power. Collier and Reinikka (2001) argue that using repression, particularly via the military, for 'solving' political problems indicates that Uganda at independence lacked resilient democratic institutions. The army was not only biased in favour of northerners but also tribally skewed towards the Acholi, Langi and West Nilers.

Uganda's first prime minister, Milton Obote, was overthrown by his army commander Idi Amin in 1971. During Amin's regime (1971–79) Langi and Acholi soldiers, perceived to be Obote's agents, were treated harshly. Amin was overthrown by rebel Ugandan soldiers and the invading Tanzanian army in 1979. Contested national elections brought Milton Obote back to power in 1980, only for him to be overthrown again in July 1985 by Acholi officers in the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) led by Tito Okello Lutwa. Meanwhile, Yoweri Museveni had started the National Resistance Army and Movement (NRA/M), which overthrew the UNLA government led by Tito Okello in January 1986. Okello's military junta of

Acholi-dominated forces withdrew to their homelands in northern Uganda and later to Sudan, where they formed the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA) to oppose the NRA. The NRA was renamed the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) in 1995. Since taking power in 1986 the NRA has faced continuous opposition from armed rebel movements. In 1985 Alice Lakwena (Auma), an Acholi from northern Uganda, created the Holy Spirit Movement, but these forces were defeated in late 1986. When the UPDA finally called off hostilities in June 1988, the majority of these troops joined the government to fight other rebel groups.

In April 1987 Joseph Kony started his own military movement by drawing support mostly from the Acholi UPDA deserters. His movement, first called the Lord's Salvation Army and later the United Democratic Christian Force, became the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in 1994. The LRA is said to have no political aims beyond opposing the NRM government, but it is conducting a reign of terror mainly against the local Acholi in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader, who are accused of being supporters of the government. This has effectively disrupted normal life, as the LRA is said to be the most brutal rebel group in sub-Saharan Africa.

It is rumoured that the LRA received military equipment, medicine and food from the Sudanese government particularly in the 1990s, which may partly explain why the northern insurgency has persisted. Sudan also offered the LRA a safe haven in return for assistance against the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) based in the South, and apparently as retaliation for Uganda's support for the SPLA.

### *Background to Conflicts in the Karamoja Sub-region*

Karamoja (consisting of Kotido, Moroto and Nakapiripirit districts—see Figure 1) is a semi-arid region with scant rainfall, located in northeastern Uganda, bordering on southern Sudan and northern Kenya. It has a population of some 921 000 people (UBOS, 2003a) and is dominated by herdsmen: the Dodoth in the north, the Jie in the centre, and the Bokora, Matheniko and Pian in the south. The Tur-speaking Labwor inhabit the west and a Kalenjin-speaking group, the Pokot, live in the southeast. Karamoja is marginalized and isolated—economically, socially and culturally. It also has the worst socioeconomic indicators of well-being in Uganda.

Karamoja has long been plagued by persistent insecurity, unrest and instability, primarily because of the tradition of cattle raiding and the widespread availability of small arms among the herders of the region. Until the beginning of the 1960s guns were not available to the Karamojong cattlekeepers, there was no cattle raiding and hostilities, mainly over waterwells during the dry season, were traditionally fought with spears.

This changed in the 1970s as the Turkana from the west and the Toposa of northern Kenya and southern Sudan, armed with modern weapons, launched frequent cattle plundering trips into Karamoja. By the late 1960s the Karamojong began to manufacture homemade guns in self-defence. They also supplemented their stocks after Amin's overthrow by looting an army armoury in Moroto in 1979, and through illegal trade in small arms across the Sudan–Kenya borders. Once armed, the Karamojong began to retaliate with cattle raids and by terrorizing the Katakwi, Pader, Kitgum,

Kumi and Lira districts, as well as neighbouring Kenya and Sudan, particularly when pasture in Karamoja became scarce. These raids have persisted despite attempts by successive governments to disarm the Karamojong and establish peace.

Poverty and a harsh environment also perpetuate insecurity in Karamoja. Prolonged drought and shortages of food and water are facts of life in this region.<sup>2</sup> During a prolonged dry spell herdsman leave permanent homesteads and move their animals to search for pastures, water and disease-free land, often crossing into neighbouring tribal territories or countries. This has induced a conflict-prone environment, as the struggle for the control of these natural resources escalates. Unemployment and inadequate economic opportunities also generate conflict and insecurity. The only source of livelihood for the 15–35 year old youth, who are well armed with illegal guns, is cattle raids on other clans or tribes.

### **Effects of Conflicts on Poverty and Human Development**

#### *Displacement of People*

Continuous acts of violence by LRA rebels and Karamojong warriors have displaced more than 1.3 million people in northern Uganda, who now reside in camps mainly in the districts of Gulu, Kitgum, Pader and Lira (Table 1). More than 80% of the population in Acholiland are displaced, consisting mainly of women and children. The level of displacement increased dramatically from July 2002 after a government order for all Acholi residents to move to protected camps or centres, in efforts to protect the civilian population from rebel attacks and abduction.

#### *Security and Abuse of Internally Displaced Persons*

Although the protected camps are intended to protect civilians from rebel hostilities, internally displaced persons (IDPs) do not appear to be adequately protected in them, as they are attacked regularly by the LRA. Property has been destroyed or looted, homes burnt, people remaining behind in the villages killed, and vehicles ambushed. All this has increased vulnerability within the IDP camps and has added to the trauma and to the numbers of IDPs and ‘night commuters’, the children who flee at night to the safety of the cities. It has also restricted the movement of people and caused inter-ethnic clashes among the Langi in Lira district and the Acholi,<sup>3</sup> thus, posing a potential threat of further violence.

The UPDF forces are also alleged to have inflicted on northern Ugandans inhumane cruelties of torture, rape and sexual assault, child recruitment and instant execution during detention. The UPDF are rarely prosecuted for these crimes, and investigations of abuse are not made public, creating the appearance of impunity, with a subsequent loss of public trust.

Intertribal clashes, armed robberies and ambushes on the roads by the Karamojong raiders have caused considerable anxiety in Karamoja and neighbouring districts, particularly the bordering Katakwi, where more than 70% of the population was displaced in February 2004 (Table 1). The raids can be very violent; killings, rape, theft of animals, and malicious destruction of property have occurred.

**Table 1.** Geographical distribution of IDPs in Uganda

Districts	Oct 98	Dec 99	Nov 00	Dec 01	Jul 02	Nov 03	Jan/Feb 04	March 05
Adjumani		10 000	2000					
Bundibujjo	11 000	101 000	105 000	63 000	87 000			
Gulu*	261 206	237 710	370 000	292 160	368 417	419 258	438 000	515 309
Kibaale		12 000						
Kabarole		20 000	14 595	15 416	100	0		
Kapehorwa		5000						
Kasee		35 000	16 000	18 000	200	0		
Katakwi*			15 000	88 500	77 000	104 254	160 000	
Kitgum*	122 121	93 000	82 645	82 645	133 000	281 372	223 883	269 809
Lira*	13 000					79 097	283 709	299 283
Masindi		46 958	5000					
Kaberamaido*						97 561	97 561	
Kotido*							3000	
Kumi*	67 000					59 207	3000	
Pader*					17 000	229 115	229 859	279 589
Soroti*						136 112	109 441	
Total	474 327	560 668	610 240	559 721	682 717	1 405 976	1 548 453	1 363 990
Acholi land	383 327	330 710	452 645	374 805	518 417	929 745	891 742	1 064 707

*Notes:* \* = districts in Northern Uganda.

The number of IDPs (as of March 2005) can fluctuate according to the security situation. The number here reflects those receiving food from WFP and is not necessarily the total IDPs for the whole country. Night commuters are also excluded.

*Source:* Global IDP (2003); UNOCHA (2004); UNOCHA (2005).

*Abductions*

The LRA has abducted over 40 000 civilians. It is estimated that at least 25 000 are children, the main target of the armed conflict (Human Rights Watch, 2003; UNICEF, 2004; Liu Institute for Global Studies, 2003), to be exploited as front-line soldiers and forced labour, or forced to carry out extreme forms of punishment, such as killing fellow child captives trying to escape. Many are still believed to be in captivity, others have died in battle or from mistreatment, disease and hunger. Girls are coerced into sexual slavery to become the ‘wives’ of LRA commanders and subjected to rape, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

Fearing abduction, every evening about 40 000 children in northern Uganda (the ‘night commuters’) pour into towns, where they seek sanctuary in poor conditions in hospitals, schools or mission grounds; they return home in the morning. No official assistance is provided to these children, and they can be abused as they make the nightly treks between home and shelter.

*Access to Education*

With the destruction of schools, looting of supplies and shortage of teachers, education in northern Uganda has been severely affected by conflict. Schools have been closed or relocated, and those still operating have been forced to limit their teaching times to those considered to be safe for children to attend (10 am to 3 pm). Many are not attending school for fear of LRA killings and abductions, while others, teachers included, have moved to more secure districts where they add to the congestion of the towns. This has created shortages of shelter for teachers and students, and of scholastic materials, classrooms, drugs, water and sanitation, and recreation facilities.

In addition, the learning and effective participation of children in the classroom is affected by their traumatic experiences. Moreover, universal primary education is not matched to the curriculum needs of traumatized or displaced children. The skills of teachers in particular are limited for coping with these children. Traditional support mechanisms have been greatly weakened and efforts at school-based counselling are easily eroded by other community factors such as lack of shelter, abuse and poverty (UN, 2003, p. 69). As Table 2 indicates, the quality of education

**Table 2.** Education statistics, 2003

	Ratios		Rates of failure in examinations at leaving primary school (%)	Dropouts in total district enrolment (%)
	Pupil-to-classroom	Pupil-to-teacher		
National	87	52	25.9	4.5
Kitgum	124	71	29.3	4.8
Pader	151	80	40.6	6.3
Lira	84	56	32.7	5.0

*Source:* Ministry of Education and Sports (2003).

in the affected districts is generally lower than the national average. For example, Pader has a pupil-to-classroom ratio of 151, a pupil-to-teacher ratio of 80, a 41% failure rate of examinations for leaving primary school and a 6.3% dropout rate. These are much higher than the national averages of 87, 52, 26 and 4.5%, respectively. Limited access to quality education denies children their basic human right, and restricts their future involvement in mainstream economic and social life, also compromising the overall development prospects of the country.

#### *Water and Sanitation*

The forced resettlement of people into camps in an effort to protect the population has resulted in overcrowding and woefully inadequate basic facilities, including water and sanitation. Latrine coverage is estimated at over 145 persons per latrine stance, as compared with the standard of 20 persons per stance for emergency situations. Availability of water from non-rain water sources is currently at 4–12 litres per person per day when the emergency standard is 15 litres (UN, 2003, p. 42). This situation is particularly acute in Pader, Lira and in areas of Teso and Soroti, where a growing number of displaced people are living in newly established camps where water and sanitation facilities are still being developed.

#### *Health and Nutrition*

Health services in the affected areas are faced with shortages of drugs, health workers, food supplements, medical equipment and infrastructure. Consequently, the health and nutrition conditions of the conflict areas are said to be very poor in comparison with the rest of the country. For example, BCG immunization rates in the districts of Kitgum and Pader fell by almost half over the period 2001–03 (see Table 3), while the national average increased from 90% to 96%. Infant mortality stands at 290 per 1000 for Gulu, and 274 per 1000 births each for Kitgum and Pader. The national average is 88 per 1000. In Kitgum and Pader in 2002 there were on average 70 and 68 health centres per one million people, respectively, compared with the national average of 124.

Malnutrition is acute in the affected areas because of food insecurity, and is considered to be the underlying cause of death at present, although parents also report cases of diarrhoea, fever and respiratory infections. For example, assessments

**Table 3.** Immunization rates against major diseases (%)

	Year	National	Kitgum	Pader	Lira	Soroti
Bacillus Camete Guerin (BCG)	2001	90	105	89	146	171
	2003	96	48	48	74	120
Measles	2001	62	95	57	82	98
	2003	83	42	45	55	87
Diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus	2001	60	66	38	64	122
	2003	81	39	27	54	101

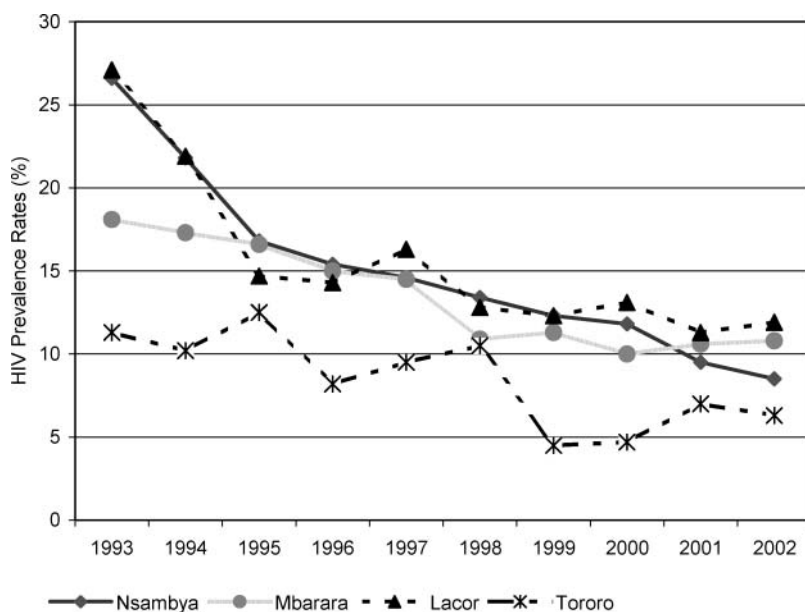
*Source:* UBOS (2004).

in the IDP camps of Gulu and Kitgum indicate that the malnutrition rates of children under five are 31.6% and 12.5%, respectively (UN, 2003, p. 36).

Although the overall prevalence of HIV in Uganda has reportedly declined substantially in recent years from its previous peak, this is a considerable problem for northern Uganda. An antenatal site (Lacor hospital) in Gulu district registered 11.9%, the highest HIV prevalence among pregnant women in 2002, compared with 10.8% for the western region, 8.5% for central region and 6.3% for the east (Figure 2). Several factors are seen as causing the spread of HIV/AIDS in the North: 1) disruption of the cultural and social system so that children lack proper parental instruction; 2) increased sexual activity due to over-crowding in camps and redundancies from jobs; 3) rape, sexual abuse and exploitation of girls and young women; and 4) lack of concern over health issues resulting from traumatized experiences (Human Rights Watch, 2003). It is therefore essential to increase awareness among the IDPs to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in the camps.

*Decline in the Social and Cultural Structure of Society*

The conflict situation has led to a breakdown of social and cultural values in northern Uganda. Displacement and resettlement in camps caused a degeneration in social values and order, resulting in such behavioural changes as neglected responsibilities, increased crime rates, high rates of alcohol and drug consumption, and lack of respect for traditional values. Separation, orphanhood and increased domestic violence have disrupted the family structure (UN, 1999).



**Figure 2.** HIV infection prevalence rates (%) at selected antenatal sites. *Note:* Data on HIV prevalence are obtained from the four respective districts that had the highest HIV infection rate; Nsambya for central region, Mbarara for the western regions, Tororo for the eastern regions and Lacor for the north. *Source:* Ministry of Health (2003).

*Poverty and Human Development*

Northern Uganda lags behind the rest of the country in terms of human development. The insecurity of the north has led to gross human right violations, loss of productive assets of the poor, retarded economic activity and restricted access to social services and markets. The human development index (HDI) for northern Uganda in 2001 was 0.350, which is lower than the national average (0.449), or that of the central district (0.552), for example (UNDP, 2002). The region has also persistently had the highest incidence of poverty, at an average of 66% over the past 10 years (see Table 4). This is much higher than the national average of 46% or that of the other districts.

**Reconstruction Efforts**

Reconstruction efforts in northern Uganda include development initiatives, emergency relief and preparedness, and peace and reconciliation.

*Development Initiatives*

In collaboration with development partners the government of Uganda has implemented several programmes in the northern region. The aim has been to empower communities by enhancing their capacity to systematically identify, prioritize and plan for their needs and to implement sustainable development initiatives through various projects to improve socioeconomic services and opportunities. Examples of such projects are the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF), and the EU – Karamoja and EU – Acholi projects.<sup>4</sup> Programme activities include:

- institutional development to strengthen project management capacity, disseminate information, monitor and evaluate activities;
- capacity building at the local government and community level, to undertake bottom-up planning, deliver and manage services, mobilize and organize communities for peacebuilding and conflict management;
- infrastructure development;

**Table 4.** Regional poverty trends 1992/3–2002/03

Region	1992/3	1993/4	1994/5	1995/6	1996/7	1999/ 2000	2002/03	Average
National	55.5	52.2	50.1	48.5	44	35	37.7	46.1
North	71	69	64	68	59	65	63	65.6
East	59	58	65	58	54	37	46	53.8
West	53	56	50	47	42	28	31	43.9
Central	46	36	31	30	28	20	22	30.2

*Notes:* Estimates for 2002/03 exclude Kitgum, Gulu, Pader, Kasese and Bundibujjo. Estimates for the poverty line were based on six household surveys: the Integrated Household Survey, 1992/93, four subsequent Monitoring Surveys (1993/4–97/8) and the 1999/2000 and 2002/03 Uganda National Household Surveys (UBOS, 2003b).

- vocational training for war returnees and orphans;
- promoting time- and labour-saving technology in IDP camps;
- development of micro credit schemes;
- community counselling and training.

The programmes have, however, only achieved limited success because of a number of problems.

- Insecurity has retarded the speed at which projects are implemented and monitored, by hindering access to communities, limiting contributions from the community, and increasing the costs of project implementation.
- There is a lack of capacity at the district- and community levels.
- Cross-cutting issues such as gender discrimination and environmental concerns exist, making it difficult, for example, to integrate women into programme activities.<sup>5</sup>
- The issue of survival has made many people focus more on the basics of daily life rather than on community development. This has contributed to inflexibility and a narrow scope in the programmes.
- Integration, conflict management and reconciliation as part of the development agenda are lacking in many communities, organizations and institutions, e.g. the NUSAF project.
- The nomad nature of the communities in Karamoja, combined with insecurity, makes it difficult to provide services or gather information to better address development needs (e.g. the EU – Karamoja projects).

#### *Emergency Relief and Preparedness*

Several international and local organizations provide emergency relief and follow-up assistance to IDPs. These include the distribution of food and non-food items and support for the social sectors (education and health) in the form of essential drugs; support for HIV/AIDS-infected persons; psychosocial, socioeconomic and nutritional support; provision of water and sanitation facilities; provision of temporary classrooms, scholastic materials, school sanitation and water supply; teacher skills training for psychosocial care; tracing abducted children and their reintegration into the community; immediate care and psychosocial support through counselling; promotion of sports and games in schools; and peace education and community-based reconciliation.

Emergency relief to improve the welfare of IDPs in the camps has, however, been insufficient because of financial constraints. For example, the WFP currently faces a funding gap of US\$50 million in providing food relief assistance to over 1.3 million IDPs in northern Uganda through December 2005 (WFP, 2005). Other constraints to programme implementation include the following.

- The insecurity, which limits regular humanitarian assistance to the affected areas, means that there is no sustainable health, education and other basic services.
- Although in effect since August 2004, the national policy on internal displacement enacted to establish the operational principles for the government, and

for humanitarian and other development agencies, in providing assistance and protection of IDPs in Uganda has not yet been implemented;

- A lack of capacity at relevant government departments for humanitarian affairs<sup>6</sup> limits the effective coordination and facilitation of these activities, as well as hindering the collection of relevant information concerning the affected population;
- The government recently announced its intention to have the line ministries, the districts and other stakeholders implement recovery efforts primarily through their own budget frameworks. This raises concerns over how the additional resources needed for the reconstruction of northern Uganda will be reconciled within the budgets and the overall balance (e.g. sector ceilings) of the national budget.

### *Efforts to Create Peace and Reconciliation*

The government of Uganda and actors from the national, regional and international communities have undertaken numerous initiatives towards creating peace and reconciliation in northern Uganda. A combination of methods has been tried, including disarmament, amnesty, military operations, peace negotiations, community mobilization, political education and research.

The Karamoja Disarmament Programme was initiated by the government in December 2001. Its main objectives were to: 1) enlist the support of the people at the grassroots level for the peaceful disarmament, with sensitization programmes; 2) end the terrorism of the armed Karamojong; 3) stop illegal trafficking of guns from Sudan/Kenya and work closely with Kenya to ensure a concurrent disarmament of the Turkana and Didinga; 4) resettle and rehabilitate those voluntarily surrendering their arms; 5) train and deploy security forces (UPDF and local defence units—LDUs) at strategic areas in Karamoja and along various border-points to stop armed incursions and gun trafficking; and 6) support the police and judiciary to ensure peace and administration of justice. Some 11 000 guns, out of an estimated total of 40 000 held by the Karamojong warriors, have been relinquished to date. But the exercise has encountered difficulties.

First, the programme, received with mixed feelings, has also generated panic among the pastoral communities who are reluctant to surrender weapons for fear of attacks from neighbouring tribes (ADOL, 2000). Second, weak enforcement of law and order in Karamoja makes it difficult to ensure timely arrests and prosecution of the offenders. Third, the small arms trafficking along the Uganda/Sudan/Kenya borders erodes supervision of the warriors in the region because their activities cut across borders into states where government is non-existent. Consequently, cooperation to facilitate the control of trafficking across common borders cannot be established officially. Fourth, the government has failed to provide a timely and effective response to the identified requirements needed for the programmes, i.e. provision of adequate funds, opening up of secure roads and construction of wells. Fifth, the paucity of remunerative livelihoods for the youths voluntarily surrendering their weapons has triggered a reoccurrence of cattle rustling and conflicts. Sixth, the deployed local defence units are often ill-trained and poorly supported because of a mismatch between the timeframe and availability of resources, while UPDF forces

are not adequately prepared to back up these units. Seventh, lack of cooperation, trust, commitment, common cause and sincerity among the senior local leadership perpetuates clashes and raids between clans. Finally, the insecurity of Karamoja spills over into the neighbouring districts where the Karamojongs have migrated in large numbers to search for pasture and water. Human rights violations by the Karamojongs often lead to violent clashes between these and the government forces.

To provide assurances of no retaliation and to offer incentives to all those willing to abandon the uprising, the government of Uganda, with support from donors, introduced the Amnesty Act 2000, which is overseen by the Amnesty Commission. The major goals of the Amnesty Act are 1) to improve public and political leadership with regard to conflict resolution and reconciliation; 2) to promote dialogue and reconciliation among rebel groups; 3) to demobilize and process applicants seeking amnesty; 4) to provide resettlement assistance that includes psychological support and health care, and financial assistance to those seeking amnesty; and 5) to facilitate long-term social and economic integration through income-generating and skills development programmes. Since the enactment of the Amnesty Act in 2000, over 15 000 insurgents have surrendered, but only about 4000 have received the reintegration package.

Fulfilment of the Amnesty Act 2000 goals are challenged by delays in formulating a national framework for coordinating and implementing the amnesty. Inadequate funding, together with weaknesses in the Commission's financial management and procurement systems, has also delayed the implementation of priority activities. LRA fighters do not have enough information on the amnesty offer because of the lack of safe zones. And ongoing investigations by the International Criminal Court (ICC) leading to the possible prosecution of the LRA leaders are said to have discouraged many potential defectors and to have instilled fear in others who have already benefited from amnesty.

There have been continuous efforts at the national, regional and international level to broker a peace agreement between the government of Uganda and the LRA. Although these efforts generally failed in the early 2000s, the situation appears to be improving and there is optimism concerning the possibility of a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The chief negotiator between the government and the LRA, Betty Bigombe, continues to maintain contact with LRA leaders. However, the negotiation process is fraught with difficulties, including the lack of direct face-to-face negotiations with Joseph Kony, and limited logistical, political and diplomatic support. The number of security incidents has decreased over the past few months, and more LRA defectors are reporting to the Amnesty Commission. Regional security has improved. Uganda is actively participating in regional peace processes, with active diplomacy and the signing of agreements. Despite considerable problems in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, threats from this area appear to have diminished. The relations between Uganda and Sudan have also improved over the past year, increasing the effectiveness of UPDF's counter-insurgency effort. However, counter-insurgency measures by the military are criticized for adding to the death toll of civilians, to abductions, as well as to fear and displacement. The recent agreement between the Sudanese government and the SPLA in the south has also renewed hope of peace in northern Uganda; Sudan has reduced its support for the LRA. The success of the

Sudanese peace agreement is critical to stabilizing both southern Sudan and the relationship between Uganda and the Sudanese government. Civil society initiatives at reconciliation and bridge building are showing promise.<sup>7</sup> Finally, ICC investigations are putting pressure on both the government and the LRA. Nevertheless, total peace remains elusive in some parts of the north; thus human suffering continues and poverty is still a major challenge.

Research carried out in the conflict areas by international and local organizations and individuals has been important to building peace. Field research, which included participatory methods, and discussions of the findings at conferences, in particular, have influenced donor and national policy interventions. Such research has been used as a vehicle for breaking down barriers in the community and for creating a link between the parties concerned—the region, central government, and local/state and international actors (see for example Doran, 2000). However, coordination and wide dissemination of research results seem to be lacking. This study noted discrepancies in the findings of similar research studies.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The insurgency in northern Uganda has done enormous economic and social damage and has hindered development and relief activities. Insufficient funding and lack of capacity at the district and community levels are further constraints to relief efforts and development. Effective action requires not only a massive injection of resources, but also a clear strategy for peace building and post-conflict reconstruction in two broad areas.

The first is *peace and reconciliation*. Obviously greater effort is needed by the government and other stakeholders to end the conflict. This should include increasing resources directed towards initiatives such as the Amnesty Commission and Karamoja disarmament programme, and urging both sides to pursue peaceful conflict resolution within the framework of the United Nations and regional mechanisms. The Amnesty Commission needs to link up with community-based reintegration initiatives such as NUSAF to ensure the sustainable socioeconomic reintegration of those taking up the offer of amnesty. Those guilty of crimes against civilians should be brought to justice, including individuals within the UPDF ranks. However, concerns have been raised that the investigation of LRA leaders may increase the risk that children will be targeted and prosecuted by the LRA, since children are exempted from the ICC prosecution. Ensuring that the path to peace negotiations is open and unobstructed by such obstacles to possible prosecution of the LRA leadership by the ICC is important.

Civilians in the affected areas must be effectively protected, and government forces must respect the rights of civilians in northern Uganda. In particular, the protection, rights and well-being of children must be integrated into the processes of peace, post-conflict recovery and reconstruction, with special attention to the needs and capabilities of girls. The LRA is obliged by international law immediately to cease cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and deliberate killing of civilians or abductees; to release all abductees still being detained; and to allow the humanitarian agencies full, safe and unhindered access to the affected areas.

The disarmament programme in Karamoja needs to focus on strengthening the defence forces that supervise security in the region, on community mobilization and sensitization at the grassroots, and on cooperation among the regional stakeholders, the senior leadership and local politicians. More effective joint regional action is called for to prevent, combat or eradicate small arms trafficking.

A clear strategy is also needed in the area of *relief and development interventions*. It is important to strengthen capacity, particularly in the areas of participatory and bottom-up planning to reflect the priority needs of the communities as well as government capacity to coordinate development and relief activities in the affected areas. Speeding up the enactment of the Disaster Management and Preparedness Bill and implementation of the policy on internal displacement is also crucial. Two other priorities include harmonizing development interventions by different stakeholders (donors, the government, NGOs and the private sector) to achieve increased flexibility and transparency, and addressing cross-cutting issues such as gender discrimination and environmental concerns in the implementation of the projects. This is a tough agenda but, given the scale and depth of poverty in Northern Uganda, it is the bare minimum. As with other conflict-affected countries, the objectives of peace and poverty reduction in the region must be viewed as a whole, and integrated into the cross-cutting measures that deal with the country's overall development problems.

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### **Notes**

1. The districts are Gulu, Kitgum and Pader in Acholi sub-region; Apac and Lira in Lango sub-region; Moyo and Adjumani in Madi sub-region; Arua, Yumbe and Nebbi in West Nile sub-region; and Kotido, Moroto and Nakapiripirit in Karamoja sub-region.
2. Short rains come during April and the longer rainy season extends from June to early September.
3. The Langi and Acholi groups clashed following an LRA attack on a camp in Lira district, because the LRA is composed mainly of ethnic Acholi.
4. The EU-funded projects are being implemented by the Karamoja Projects Implementation Unit, which was established in 1995. Communities are required to contribute 25% of the estimated costs of the projects. See the RoU and EC (2001). Similarly, the community contribution in the EU – Acholi Programme is 25%. This programme covers Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts and its projects work through the local government structure.
5. Acholi communities have a predominantly patriarchal society with the men as figureheads in all sectors of the community.
6. The office of the prime minister is responsible for the overall coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the government strategies, in partnership with the ministry of finance planning and economic development, which has the key role in the financial aspects of the recovery.
7. Acholi district representatives and religious leaders have participated in the peace talks between the government and LRA leaders.

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