RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT POLITICS
Options for Sustainable Peacebuilding in Northern Uganda

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NORDISKA AFRIKAINSTITUTET, UPPSALA 2011
Indexing terms:
Uganda
Ethnic conflicts
Civil war
Dispute settlement
Peacebuilding
Post-conflict reconstruction
Peacekeeping
Economic recovery
Development plans
Government programmes

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### Glossary

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<tr>
<td>ADRP</td>
<td>Amnesty, Demobilisation and Reintegration of ex-combatant Programme</td>
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<td>CAR</td>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
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<td>CPA</td>
<td>Comprehensive Peace Accord</td>
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<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
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<td>FPA</td>
<td>Final Peace Agreement</td>
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<td>GoU</td>
<td>Government of Uganda</td>
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<td>HSM</td>
<td>Holy Spirit Movement</td>
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<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Criminal Court</td>
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<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Person</td>
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<td>IFIs</td>
<td>International Financial Institutions</td>
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<td>IMTC</td>
<td>Inter-Ministerial Technical Committee</td>
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<td>LGDP</td>
<td>Local Government Development Plan</td>
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<td>LRA</td>
<td>Lord’s Resistance Army</td>
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<td>MoFPED</td>
<td>Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development</td>
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<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Non Governmental Organisations</td>
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<td>NRA</td>
<td>National Resistance Army</td>
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<td>NRM</td>
<td>National Resistance Movement</td>
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<td>NUREP</td>
<td>Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Programme</td>
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<td>NURP</td>
<td>Northern Uganda Reconstruction Programme</td>
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<td>NUSAF</td>
<td>Northern Uganda Social Action Fund</td>
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<td>OPM</td>
<td>Office of the Prime Minister</td>
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<td>PEAP</td>
<td>Poverty Eradication Action Plan</td>
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<td>PRDP</td>
<td>Peace Recovery and Development Plan</td>
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<td>SPLA</td>
<td>Sudanese People’s Liberation Army</td>
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<td>SPLM</td>
<td>Sudan Peoples’ Liberation Movement</td>
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<td>SWAY</td>
<td>Survey of War-Affected Youth</td>
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<td>UBOS</td>
<td>Uganda Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UPDA</td>
<td>Uganda Peoples’ Defence Army</td>
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<td>UPDA/M</td>
<td>Uganda People’s Democratic Army/Movement</td>
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Foreword

This Discussion Paper explores the efforts of the government of Uganda and various stakeholders in rebuilding Northern Uganda’s economy and society following decades of war and the recent fragile peace in the marginalised region. The author holds that the present moment presents a critical opportunity for positive transformation and a move towards sustainable peace. This view is based on an analysis of the background to and evolution of the conflict in Northern Uganda; the north-south divide in Uganda and the marginalisation of the Acholi people of the Northern region; the legacy of the militarisation of Ugandan society from colonial times till the present; the character of the LRA and its leadership and connections between the conflict in the north and the wider regional conflict dynamics in the sub-region. The paper then analyses the current state of affairs in Northern Uganda following the lull in fighting that has resulted in a fragile peace, marked by the persistence of potent human insecurities, concerns about the possible return of the LRA and a regression into bloody conflict and the challenge of coping with the legacies of prolonged conflict, human suffering and trauma. In this regard, the author raises critical questions about the prospects for post-conflict economic recovery and sustainable peacebuilding under conditions of fragile peace and imposed policies. Some of the key challenges identified include closing the developmental gap between the north and other regions of Uganda; resettling the large number of internally displaced persons who had lived under poor conditions in IDP camps over long periods and lack skills, capital and tools; reintegrating ex-LRA fighters into their communities and addressing the formidable challenges that women and youth face in the context of armed conflict and post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding. The fundamental question raised relates to whether the opportunities to address the root causes of the war, its consequences and the threat of a return to violent conflict are being adequately addressed in existing plans, programmes and policies. The Discussion Paper gives a brief overview of the international debate on post-conflict recovery and development to frame the analysis. It briefly analyses the various peace processes that have sought to bring an end to conflict and the reasons for their failure. The paper then delves into the economic legacies left by the war, underlining the depth of the challenge in achieving economic recovery in the region to build sustainable peace. It reviews the current recovery plan, particularly the Peace Recovery Development Programme (PRDP) and the roles played by government, development agencies and the private sector with regard to recovery in the north. The paper also outlines risks as well as opportunities for tackling a series of priority areas that threaten to derail recovery, as well as peace, if left unaddressed. These are essentially tied to the need for people-centred policies that give primacy to local needs, experiences and cultures and the need for
government security forces to respect the rights of the people of the north. The paper ends with recommendations to the Ugandan government, regional organisations and the international community, hinged upon a conflict-sensitive, socially just and inclusive peacebuilding agenda for Northern Uganda. This is a well-researched paper that provides a deep understanding of one of East Africa’s most protracted and traumatic conflicts and is of interest to scholars, peace and security practitioners, activists and humanitarian and development workers with a keen interest in contributing to economic recovery and sustainable peace in Africa.

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Introduction: Conflict and poverty in Northern Uganda

Most parts of Uganda have for the last two decades enjoyed relative peace and economic stability. Uganda has been able to improve the welfare standards of its population and to reduce the number of people living below the poverty line from 56 per cent in 1992 to 31 per cent in 2006, while access to primary education, healthcare and water has improved significantly. However, these developments represent only part of the picture and there remain significant regional disparities. Northern Uganda has been in the grip of civil war since the 1980s and has not witnessed many of the improvements seen elsewhere in the country.

Northern Uganda has been affected by a long-running and violent conflict led by the Lord’s Resistance Army. The current districts of Amuru, Gulu, Kitgum and Pader have been at the centre of the LRA war. The violence in the north, which escalated in the late 1980s, has its roots in the colonial era. Resistance to the imposition of colonial rule by the Acholi people during the Lamogi rebellion was quelled by violence, instead of through negotiations and agreements, as was done in other parts of Uganda. This led the British colonialists to label the Acholi ethnic group of Northern Uganda as a violent, militant and barbaric people who were only good as labourers and combatants. This label was later taken up by some Ugandans and outsiders to stereotype the Acholi.

Since independence from British colonial rule in 1962, Uganda has seen decades of bloodshed and devastation. Northern Uganda has suffered more than other parts of the country. When Idi Amin overthrew President Milton Obote in 1971, his military regime carried out mass killings, particularly of Acholi politicians and government soldiers, as a way of preventing an uprising by soldiers who had served and supported Obote. This trend was continued by the then National Resistance Army (NRA) after Museveni took power in 1986 from Tito Okello Lutwa, who had ousted the Obote II regime in 1985.

This Discussion Paper seeks to address the issues outlined above with a view to drawing lessons from the GoU’s experience of drafting and implementing various plans for recovery and peacebuilding in Northern Uganda. This includes thorough reflection on the difficulties encountered in early recovery efforts in the region and exploration of how recovery efforts can be geared to strengthen-

ing a sustainable peace economy – an economic recovery plan that redresses the economic causes as well as legacies of war and contains those economic factors known to contribute to stability. These include broadly shared economic opportunities that are equally accessible to different groups in society and can satisfy people’s needs and aspirations; and diversified, regionally balanced and integrated economies and markets that can withstand shocks. Analysis of the political economy in northern Uganda will be undertaken to identify context-specific factors that can help and hinder peace efforts.4

Background to the conflict, 1986–87

The conflict in Northern Uganda was predicated mostly on political contestations hinged on underlying ethnic tensions. The war is rather complex and defies the usual stereotypical narrative whereby African conflicts pitch one “tribe” against another. To apply a simplistic narrative to the complex and interconnected nature of the war in Northern Uganda can only lead to wrong conclusions. However, this is not to deny that ethnicity and culture have to some extent been used as instruments for mobilising some of the forces engaged in conflict. The conflict in Northern Uganda is rooted in Uganda’s history, with its complex mix of uneven social and economic development, violent regional conflict and marginalisation of minorities by successive post-independence governments and ruling elites.

The Uganda People’s Democratic Army/Movement comprised mainly Acholi soldiers who had served under the Milton Obote and General Tito Okello regimes and had fled to the north when Museveni came to power after his National Resistance Army (NRA) ousted Okello’s regime in January 1986. The UPDA/M had then taken up arms against the Museveni government, as it believed that the new NRA regime was intent on revenge against the Acholi. Although some writers, including Chris Dolan,5 allege the UPDA participated in looting, killings and abductions in the late 1980s and 1990s, this has not been substantiated in a systematic manner.

4. “Political economy analysis is concerned with the interaction of political and economic processes in a society: the distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals, and the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time. When applied to situations of conflict and crisis, political economy analysis seeks to understand both the political and the economic aspects of conflict, and how these combine to affect patterns of power and vulnerability … A political economy approach should incorporate a wide historical and geographical perspective, explain why the relative power and vulnerability of different groups changes over time and explain how the fortunes and activities of one group in society affect others.” See S. Collinson, “Power, livelihoods and conflict: Case studies in political economy analysis for humanitarian action”, *Humanitarian Policy Group Report*, No. 13. London: Overseas Development Institute, 2003, p. 3.

Rather, the evidence suggests that the UPDA sought civilian support and solidarity because it believed it was fighting a just war for a just cause – defending the Acholi and their interests. Those who lived and grew up in Northern Uganda (Kitgum) at the time witnessed rampaging NRA soldiers (now the Uganda People’s Defence Forces) looting and burning villages and perpetrating violent acts against local people, only to turn and blame the early atrocities on the UPDA. The UPDA then saw itself as defending the Acholi from the excesses of the NRA. Thus, its view of the war was based on clearly defined enemies and aims.

The NRA, for its part, looted cattle and burnt villages and granaries, since it associated everyone in the north with the rebels. This onslaught apparently fuelled the UPDA/M rebellion, since the Acholi whose homes were destroyed and cattle stolen began to support the movement. This in turn reinforced the NRA’s resolve to break the spirit of the Acholi people by destroying their economy and driving them from their farms and homes. Since cattle were the measure of wealth among the Acholi, the looting of cattle by people believed to be NRA soldiers was perceived as a tactic by the Museveni government to marginalise and destroy Acholiland and the Acholi – the first phase of “economic genocide.”

With time, new rebel movements (other than the UPDA/M) emerged in Northern Uganda. As Finnström notes, some of the movements sought to “cleanse” the returning Obote soldiers of the crimes they had committed in order to remove the curse of violence from Acholiland. This is because at this time the Acholi community perceived the Museveni regime’s pursuit of fleeing soldiers as a pretext for seeking revenge in response to perceived Acholi non-support for Museveni’s plan to take power from Obote. Alice Auma Lakwena’s Holy Spirit Movement was dedicated to this mission of resistance to the NRA. Despite being defined by “spiritual rituals and beliefs,” HSM’s political propaganda was designed to mobilise people to oppose Museveni’s regime. Lakwena’s HSM met its end in 1987 when it marched to Jinja, east of Kampala, and was defeated by the NRA.

Joseph Kony, alleged to be Lakwena’s cousin and reportedly possessed by Lakwena’s spirit, soon formed his own movement, the Lord’s Resistance Movement, with the Lord’s Resistance Army as its armed wing. Initially, Kony reportedly mostly focused on his ability to heal and communicate with the spirits, much like Lakwena. However, in 1988 the LRA movement took a more political turn when Museveni’s NRA and the UPDA signed a peace agreement. However, when the peace agreement between the NRA (government) and UPDA rebels unravelled in late 1988, many UPDA rebels joined the LRA.

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These movements acted as vehicles for perceived grievances, including feelings of marginalisation, victimisation and exclusion among the Acholi. Omara-Otunnu asserted that people in Northern Uganda joined the UPDA, HSM and later the LRA as a way to express their dissatisfaction with social conditions in Uganda at that time. These movements served as platforms for their struggle and as a medium for their redemption.  

The war, 1986–2006

At the end of the Cold War in 1990, the geostrategic concerns of some Western states (especially the US and UK) shifted from the perceived threat of communism to the perceived spread of Islamic extremism. It is believed such Western states established a listening post in Uganda with the intention of keeping an eye on and halting the spread of Islamic extremism from the Sudan to other parts of the region, particularly after President Bashir took power in Sudan in 1989. Such fears became magnified as Bashir aligned his regime with the National Islamic Front. The Sudanese government under Bashir supported the LRA to get the movement to, in turn, support the Sudanese army against the rebel Sudanese People’s Liberation Army, which was supported by Museveni’s government. It was also an attempt by Sudan under Bashir to support a local rebellion against Museveni in retaliation for his allowing the US and UK to ‘watch’ Sudan from Ugandan soil.

On the Ugandan side, both the LRA rebels and the government army increased their activities in Northern Uganda, looting, burning villages and killing civilians. Rather than enjoying popularity and winning the hearts and minds of the Acholi people, the LRA targeted the civilian population – in defiance of international law – and committed severe human rights abuses in the process. Beyond its stated aim of overthrowing the Ugandan government and its purported commitment to establishing a government based on the biblical Ten Commandments, the LRA appeared to have no clear political agenda.

Atrocities committed by both sides in the conflict led to the displacement of people from their rural homes, forcing them to seek safety in towns. The war had tragically pitched the government troops and the LRA against each other, but also both of them against the Acholi people. Though both the Uganda Defence Forces and the LRA claimed to be fighting each other, more often than not most local people in the north could not distinguish which side committed the acts of brutality and violence.


9. Ibid. p. 49.
Hopes and disappointments

Violence and the attendant atrocities against the local populace in Northern Uganda subsided in 1993 when peace talks, led by the former minister for pacification of the North, Betty Bigombe, began between the LRA and government. Negotiations, however, failed after Museveni issued a seven-day ultimatum to the LRA rebels to surrender their weapons to the government. When the rebels failed to comply, fighting flared up again in 1994.

In the ensuing conflict, serious war crimes and human rights abuses, including maiming, abduction, forced conscription, the use of children as soldiers, murder, rape and other forms of gender-based violence took place. Most of these atrocities were attributed to LRA rebels. In turn, the government/UPDF forcibly moved civilians from rural villages into IDP camps, claiming they were being moved to afford them better protection. Both sides (LRA and UPDF) were responsible for the widespread abuses perpetrated in Northern Uganda. With deliberate attacks on civilians by both parties, a clear definition of what either side was fighting for was no longer possible.

In early 1999, there was a change in the political climate as LRA activities subsided and a measure of calm returned to the north. This was attributed to Museveni’s indication to community leaders and peace activists of his willingness to reopen talks with the LRA. In late 1999, the Ugandan government announced an amnesty for LRA fighters willing to surrender and denounce the rebellion. This amnesty was formalised with the passing of the Amnesty Act into law by parliament in 2000. In December 1999, the governments of Uganda and Sudan also signed a reconciliation agreement that envisaged a series of steps to build mutual trust and, eventually, normalise diplomatic relations. These developments again raised hopes for peace in Northern Uganda. However, within weeks of the signing of the agreement, the LRA rebels re-entered Uganda from southern Sudan and the prospect of an early peace was quickly shattered. LRA attacks on villages and IDP camps, abductions, killings and looting in Northern Uganda resumed with a vengeance.

For 22 years, Northern Uganda has remained an arena of brutal conflict. The scale of violence, destruction and death since the war began, though marked, is difficult to estimate, since the atrocities were so widespread. Anthropologist


Michael Jackson describes a similar situation in his 2004 ethnography, *In Sierra Leone*:

> The most conspicuous thing about suffering is its banality. The sun is shining, someone is eating, or opening a window, a torturer’s horse is scratching its innocent behind on a tree, and in a mere second someone we love is dead. But the cosmos does not comply with our grief ... And we are dumb to comprehend what has occurred, and how suddenly and irreversibly our life has been changed. When we try to describe it we are reduced to a spare recitation of events that moves the listener only because it so obviously fails to convey a fraction of our pain. In relation to others, and to language, our suffering is like an island lost in the mist, or an ice floe whose mass is all but invisible. This is why, when we talk about war – those of us who have not been touched directly by its horrors – we tend to fall back on the statistics, names, and dates that float like so much jetsam in its wake, as if the experience of human suffering were at once too deep, too elusive, and too ineffable for us to fathom.13

Although in the past, Acholi warfare was based on a defined enemy and moral codes of war, the LRA targeted Acholi identity. The LRA rebels and UPDF soldiers aimed to destroy aspects of life that were meaningful to the Acholi. Unprecedented levels of violence and crimes continued with short lulls until 2006, when both parties agreed to a cessation of hostilities and two years of peace talks began in Juba, Sudan.

The reality of suffering in Northern Uganda – displacement, death and dependency

Describing the conditions of IDPs in Northern Uganda in 2007, John Baptist Odama, the Catholic Archbishop of Gulu, lamented that “the people in the camps have not had anything for themselves and for their children. They have been reduced to total, total dependence, until they go back to their original places where they have lived and they begin to work in the fields to dig and so on.”

In 1996, Northern Uganda witnessed mass displacement: people in some rural areas relocated near trade centres and military bases in order to find safety from rebel attacks. In other places, however, the UPDF ordered civilians to move into “protected villages” at short notice following a declaration by President Museveni.14 Following this order, anyone who remained in the rural villages was considered a rebel and would be subject to military attack. UPDF

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operations to clear the countryside of suspected LRA support bases in terms of supplies and potential recruits and conscripts led to atrocities such as the burning of homes and granaries to force people to leave and move into “protected areas.” Such violent operations sometimes resulted in the death of civilians and did not tally with the government’s professed “intention to protect” civilians. Thus, the Acholi people who fled and lived in the camps were not necessarily running from the LRA insurgency – many were actually running from the Ugandan army.

Even though the Ugandan government insisted that the LRA’s military capability was almost totally destroyed by UPDF military efforts, and that the military protection provided civilians in IDP camps was effective, suggesting that IDPs would be able to return to their homes in safety in the very near future, the camps were not immune from violence. These acts were believed to be perpetrated by some LRA rebels, UPDF soldiers and local defence units deployed to protect civilians in camps, and were particularly distressing. According to a Uganda Ministry of Health/World Health Organization survey, between January and July 2005 about 4,000 people in the IDP camps of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader died as a result of violence. This is equivalent to 146 killings per week, or 21 people killed each day, resulting in a violent death rate of about 0.17 killings per 10,000 people per day.

The IDP camps never actually provided the civilians the protection claimed and instead served as targets for rebel and UPDF attacks. Acholi people became trapped between a rock and a hard place: if people stayed in their villages, they were seen as rebels by the UPDF, mistreated in the most inhuman way possible or even killed. If they went to the camps, they were seen as government sympathisers by the LRA rebels and subjected to vicious attacks. Life in the IDP camps was not ideal, with families crammed in small huts that are dangerously close to each another, and distinctly different from the traditional Acholi way of living. Thus the conditions for disease contagion were ripe. Moreover, fires often destroyed entire rows of huts at a time. The trauma of the war and pain of daily

16. Ibid, p. 4: In December 2005 the GoU announced plans to begin the resettlement of 700,000 people in their original homes. According to this official GoU letter, these IDPs would be resettled “on the recommendation of their elected local leadership and government.” No indication is given of whether the IDPs themselves were ready or willing to move.
life made suicides highly prevalent in camps. Even though there is currently no fighting, the village-camp dichotomy is still a source of affliction for Northern Ugandans.

The internecine history of Northern Uganda has not only had profound economic and developmental effects on the region, but it has also left lasting psychological scars among the Acholi. The violence induced physical and mental suffering in the region and it is for ethnic and political reasons that addressing the suffering is complicated. In Acholiland, suffering came to be deeply entrenched as a result of people witnessing or experiencing multiple acts of violence, coupled with fear, neglect and aid dependency, which have combined to undermine peace and development in the region.

As opposed to the outsiders’ sense of suffering resulting from lack of food or medical attention, among Acholi suffering does not strictly refer to burned villages, life in IDP camps, loss of limbs, torture wounds or babies born in the bush. It is manifest in the understanding that the war’s atrocities have altered themselves and their culture. Suffering is viewed in terms of a deliberate attempt to disrespect Acholi culture and the intentional act of leaving bodies unburied so as to harm the community.\(^{19}\) Suffering refers to the deep-seated pain that Acholi people are forced to cope with as they learn to welcome their “contaminated” loved ones back into the community after years of captivity by the LRA.

Observers have described the suffering in Northern Uganda in a number of ways. Sverker Finnström, drawing on ethnographic research and the voices of his respondents, talked of how people struggle to live “with bad surroundings.”\(^{20}\) Jan Egeland, the then UN secretary general’s special representative for humanitarian affairs, described Northern Uganda in 2004 as one of the world’s worst humanitarian crises.\(^{21}\) Certainly it had by that time become the world’s third largest instance of internal displacement. Olara-Otunnu, former UN under-secretary general and special representative for children in armed conflict, in 2006 described the situation in Northern Uganda as one of genocide and argued that the so-called “protected villages” were akin to concentration camps.\(^{22}\) Chris Dolan made the case that the situation is better described as one of “social tor-

\(^{19}\) Richard M. Kavuma, “Will Acholi now vote Museveni?”, The Weekly Observer, 14 March 2010. See response of an old woman in Cwero IDP camp to a UPDF general on what really the problem of Acholi people was in 2003.


\(^{22}\) “Profile of a Genocide”, in The Monitor, 8 January 2006.
ture,” in which the symptoms of torture, normally found in individual victims, are inscribed in society as a whole. In social torture, the arena is not the torture cell, but rather the day-to-day environment normally labelled the “war zone.” And in social torture, as in individual torture, the general idea is to keep the victim alive as an example to others who need to be intimidated, though, of course, things at times get out of hand.

Whichever of the descriptions and analyses one adopts, some things are undeniable. First, a community cannot have 20 years of violence and deprivation without both social change and a backlash against such change. Second, the fate of Northern Uganda is being played out on a global stage, as evidenced in the UN Security Council resolutions pressuring the Ugandan government into action; in the attempts of the International Criminal Court to establish its credentials as the arbitrator of international justice by indicting certain actors in the conflict; and in the lobbying activities of civil society actors in an ever more congested global village. Third, Northern Uganda has for long been and will continue to be a testing ground for a variety of experiments and approaches. In the three-year post-Juba period envisaged in the Peace Recovery and Development Plan, which UN policy-makers refer to as the “early recovery” period, Northern Uganda is set to become a testing ground for how to “do” transitional justice where there has been no political transition.

Whatever direction the PRDP moves Northern Uganda towards, it will not be simply a recovery of what was there before, but will include a fundamentally changed society, whether in terms of its internal arrangements, its engagement with the outside world, its economy or its significance to the international community.

The war and violence victimised the Acholi and left them traumatised, impoverished and dependent on handouts and foreign aid. To the perpetrators of the violence and the rest of the Ugandan population, the Acholi brought violence and suffering on themselves. Major General James Kazini, a member of the Ugandan army’s high command, illustrated this trend when he blamed all military violence on the Acholi. “If anything, it is local Acholi soldiers causing the problems. It’s the cultural background of the people here: they are very violent. It’s genetic,” he claimed in an interview with Human Rights Watch. To some in the Western world, violence and poverty are innate in Africans. But what many fail to realise is that the defect is not due to the victims’ genetics, the defect is at the societal level.

Drivers of the conflict in Northern Uganda

The marginalisation of Northern Ugandans follows from a history of militancy, ethnic tension, political marginalisation and the proliferation of small arms. Despite promises in the earlier period of NRM rule to create a less ethnically divided and more integrated nation state, stark divisions remain, particularly between north and south, compounded by the long years of conflict. Instead of narrowing the socioeconomic divide between north and south, the NRM’s years in power have seen the exacerbation of divergent development indicators across the country, symptomatic of an ever-deepening spiral of rebellion and neglect.

In addition, the LRA conflict has taken a long time to resolve, leading some observers to conclude the government has no keen interest in bringing about peace in the region. The failure of government to ensure that developmental gains enjoyed elsewhere spread to the north and its inability to protect civilians adequately during the long years of bloody conflict have created deep distrust of government among people of the north, posing challenges to long-term peace and recovery.

Some influential individuals have exploited the conditions created by war to enrich themselves. Reports show how in Northern Uganda payments to “ghost soldiers” on army payrolls have ended up in private pockets. In a bid to be seen as arresting the trend, a sham investigation led to the sentencing of three top army officers for their involvement.\(^\text{25}\) Others have exploited business opportunities and illicitly bought land and property in the north during the war.\(^\text{26}\) Their ability to exploit the chaotic wartime economic environment in Northern Uganda has been a contributory factor in the prolongation of the LRA conflict.\(^\text{27}\) Such “peace spoilers” – those who stand to lose the most from peace – have an interest in perpetuating conflict.\(^\text{28}\) The activities of politically connected individuals profiting from the war and spoiling the chances for peace pose one of the major challenges to post-conflict economic recovery efforts in Northern Uganda.

The conflict context demonstrates how the betrayal of trust between the government and local people has compounded the conflict. Grievances have been further fuelled by UPDF’s failure to protect civilians during the worst atrocities by the LRA and the UPDF’s own involvement in abuses and the forceful dis-


\(^{26}\) “Corruption prolonged LRA war, says insider”, Daily Monitor, 10 September 2007, interview with Betty Bigombe.

\(^{27}\) Ibid; also Museveni quoted in New Vision, 29 November 1996: “It is true that in the past army officers were doing business out of the suffering of the people of Acholi and they did not want it [the war] to end.”

placement of the northern population into displaced persons’ camps.\textsuperscript{29} Instruments of accountability and reconciliation, such as the 2000 Amnesty Act and the ICC arrest warrants, have so far failed to call the government to account for its role in the atrocities committed against the people of Northern Uganda.

The road from Gulu to Juba (2006–08) – A fragile peace process

After years of conflict that inflicted immense suffering on the people of Northern Uganda, the protracted efforts to end the war culminated in peace talks in Juba. In May 2006, a video recording was aired in which Kony denied committing atrocities and blamed President Museveni for oppressing the Acholi. It also seemed that Kony, in the same breath, was calling for an end to hostilities through peace talks.\textsuperscript{30} Museveni, on the other hand, pledged to grant Kony total amnesty if he gave up “terrorism” and announced he would guarantee the safety of Kony if peace was agreed to by July 2006,\textsuperscript{31} which deadline was later extended to 12 September.\textsuperscript{32} At the same time, Uganda’s then security minister, Amama Mbabazi, urged the ICC to drop the indictments issued in 2005 against leaders of the LRA to allow for peace negotiations. However, the LRA legal advisor, Krispus Ayena Odongo, rejected the offer, stating that accepting amnesty “presupposes surrender” and would mean the LRA was no longer available for discussions. In June 2006, the government of Southern Sudan formally invited Uganda to attend peace talks, an invitation Uganda honoured.\textsuperscript{33} On 14 July 2006 talks between delegations from the LRA and Uganda commenced in Juba, with the vice-president of Southern Sudan, Riek Machar, as chief mediator. At the meeting, the leader of the Ugandan delegation stressed that his priority was to achieve a quick ceasefire.\textsuperscript{34}

Although the broader context of the talks was largely unclear on 4 August 2006, Vincent Otti, the LRA second in command, declared a unilateral ceasefire and asked the Ugandan government to reciprocate. The government and LRA signed a truce on 26 August 2006. Under the terms of the agreement,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{29} Amnesty International, 1990; Amnesty International, 1992; See also Museveni’s address to Lango and Acholi councils and elders: “Sometimes our own un-disciplined soldiers took advantage of the breakdown of law and order caused by the rebellion and committed atrocities against the civilian population”, in \textit{New Vision}, 28 March 1994.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Uganda rebel leader breaks silence, BBC News, 28 June 2006, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newsnight/5124762.stm
\item \textsuperscript{31} Sam Farmar, Uganda LRA rebels reject amnesty, BBC Newsnight, 7 July 2006, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5157220.stm; ICC urged to drop LRA charges, BBC News, 12 July 2006.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Uganda resumes talks with rebels, BBC News, 18 August 2006, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5264742.stm
\item \textsuperscript{33} UGANDA: Gov’t to send team to Sudan over proposed LRA talks, IRIN News, 28 June 2006, at http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=59498
\item \textsuperscript{34} “Ceasefire First On Kony Agenda”, \textit{AllAfrica (The Monitor)}, 15 July 2006.
\end{itemize}
LRA forces were required to leave Uganda and gather in two assembly areas, which the Ugandan government promised they would not attack and whose safety the government of Southern Sudan guaranteed. Once this had been accomplished, talks on a comprehensive peace agreement would begin. Although a final agreement was not reached by the 12 September 2006 deadline, LRA rebels began gathering in the designated areas. With the signing of the cessation of hostilities in August 2006 and the start of peace talks with the GoU, the LRA rebels halted their brutal attacks in Northern Uganda.

But as predicted by many in the north, the peace talks that started in Juba in 2006 eventually collapsed. Blame for the failure of the talks should be squarely placed on the LRA leadership, which refused to sign the FPA. It is worth noting that there were a number of interests involved in the peace talks. While the conflict imposed enormous social, political and economic costs on the worst affected regions of the north, the government appears to have been half-hearted in its commitment to peace negotiations. As far back as 1993, when the first attempts at peace negotiations commenced, the government was lackadaisical in its approach. Museveni was reported to have claimed repeatedly that he had given time to the LRA to surrender but because of their intransigence the only way to deal with them was by military means. Museveni’s statements no doubt irked the LRA rebels and arguably prompted them to unleash more atrocities against the population. On one occasion, he announced a seven-day ultimatum for the LRA to surrender all arms, which was rebuffed by Kony and his rebels, resulting in another flare-up in conflict.

Given the experience with peace negotiations with the LRA rebels, it is apparent that the Juba talks had on one side of the negotiating table people who wanted peace and on the other side, those who wanted money. Whatever skills were employed in the negotiations to bring peace, whatever good intentions, were counterbalanced by the greed and opportunism of those determined to keep the conflict going so they could continue to exploit it for selfish ends. In this regard, branding the LRA as the scapegoat for all inhuman acts against civilians by the UPDF created further opportunities for top military officials to benefit massively from the continuation of the war.

Other factors contributing to the intractability of the war were Kony’s rather volatile nature, his motives and the challenge of communications between him and LRA rebels dispersed throughout the region. This situation was further compounded by the murder of Vincent Otti, Kony’s deputy – considered to have

been more pro-peace than Kony – and the firing of David Matsanga, chief LRA negotiator in the peace talks. These actions demonstrated that despite all efforts to negotiate with Kony, he really had no interest in peace. It was also possible that the ineffectiveness of international pressures to make Kony sign the FPA allowed him to continue his business “without any fear of repercussions.”

Although Kony’s intransigence was a critical factor, on the balance it can be argued that the continuing violence in Northern Uganda is largely due to lack of political will on the part of President Museveni and his government to bring an effective end to the war. Also relevant is the international community’s failure to pay real attention to the war and its inability to hold the Museveni government accountable for the atrocities committed by the UPDF in Northern Uganda. Some conspiracy theories circulating in Northern Uganda suggest that Museveni and Kony are somehow connected. According to one of these “The Museveni government does not want this war to end because if it ends, they cannot embezzle money as much as they do with the war.” However, there is no hard evidence to back the allegation that Museveni and Kony were working hand in glove. What is much closer to the truth is that both Museveni and Kony see the Acholi as a common enemy.

However, Kony’s false promises during the waning peace talks led Museveni to threaten a return to military action after refusing to extend the cessation of hostilities agreement, which expired on 15 April 2008. Museveni carried out this threat in December 2008 in a joint military mission against Kony in the Garamba forest of Democratic Republic of Congo with support from the US. While this was justified in terms of the war on terror, it was not clear if US intervention was really to arrest or kill Kony or was just a façade for pursuing its security and strategic interests in Central/Eastern Africa.


The months leading up to the end of 2008 and into early 2010 have witnessed a major re-escalation of LRA atrocities primarily in Eastern DRC, Central African Republic (CAR) and South Sudan. Also, the decision by the government to re-engage with the LRA militarily, through the joint Operation Lightning Thunder, was a contributory factor. Despite widespread anxiety and opposition to the military course of action by leaders and locals in Northern Uganda, Kony remains elusive and military operations have neither led to his capture nor the end of the LRA rebellion.

Northern Uganda after the failed Juba peace talks, 2008–10

The hopes for peace of the marginalised people of Northern Uganda have been repeatedly dashed by the failure of both warring parties to reach agreement and the government’s preference for retribution over reconciliation. Although the LRA rebels have moved into neighbouring countries (DRC and CAR), Northern Uganda still experiences the consequences of the violence and atrocities perpetrated over the past two decades. With the failure of the peace talks in 2008, life in Northern Uganda remained the same as it was during the peace talks: thousands of people living in IDP camps and others attempting to resettle in their former villages but living in fear of the LRA.

With the decades-long stay in IDP camps without farming, Acholi people have become deeply dependent on aid and are finding it difficult to return to agriculture. In an effort to restore normalcy to Acholiland, the government is forcing people back to their home villages. But without farming tools or skills and with concerns about their safety, some people are reluctant to leave the camps. Many of those returning to the villages from camps have found very little there that would enable them to support themselves.

There are concerns that the return of more people to their homes from IDP camps may heighten psychosocial trauma, psychological problems and suffering – home is where the hurt is. This is where the memories are of the woman who saw her children abducted and husband killed, of the children who saw their parents killed or were forced to kill them, where a man witnessed his wife and daughters being raped. Although some people seem able to gather the courage to forgive and let go of the emotional hurt brought about by atrocities and violence, the return home brings back memories of war and fear. Finnström observes that most people in the camps have survived, but more than the threat to their physical bodies, perhaps, life in terror and encampment threatens their humanity, and people fear the emotional dangers more than the physical ones.  

Although the peace talks to end the two decade-long war addressed some of the root causes as well as the adverse impacts of the long years of conflict, they

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have not led to sustainable peace. Rather, they have contributed to the signing of a five-point agreement including, cessation of hostilities; comprehensive solutions; accountability and reconciliation; permanent ceasefire; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, as well as implementation and monitoring mechanisms for the above.\(^{45}\) However, the FPA has not been signed. Even some of the five points agreed upon, such as the cessation of hostilities agreement, were honoured mostly in breach.\(^ {46}\) The peace process that would have brought closure to the Northern Uganda conflict has therefore failed.

In light of the foregoing, a genuine process of reconciliation and accountability for both the LRA and UPDF atrocities has not taken place. At the same time, as people return from the IDP camps there are no basic services, such as health clinics and education in return areas.\(^ {47}\) Furthermore, access to land by returning IDPs is uncertain for many, especially households headed by women or children.\(^ {48}\) The land problem is even more complex, because powerful interests are seeking to obtain land for large-scale commercial farming, such as the controversial Madhvani sugar project in the north.\(^ {49}\)

The situation is further complicated by the discovery of oil in the region. Many believe that oil and oil exploitation in the north is an incentive for the government to pacify the area.\(^ {50}\) This feeling exacerbates the concerns of the Acholi and other communities about continued economic alienation and disempowerment. It also increases their distrust of the government’s intentions. Such distrust presents a problem for the implementation of the government’s recovery plan.

Although Kony and the LRA nuisance have temporarily moved out of Northern Uganda to the neighbouring DRC and CAR, there are rumours that

\(^{45}\) The full text of these agreements is available at www.beyondjuba.org


\(^{50}\) Olivia Harris, “The Ugandan Bargain: oil for peace”, at www.thefirstpost.co.uk/2538; Angelo Izama, “Is Uganda’s Oil a Curse or God’s Blessing?”, Alexander Oil and Gas Connections, Vol.12, No.12, September 2007.
Kony is holed up in Darfur and his rebels are trekking to join him there.\textsuperscript{51} Such news increases the fear of an imminent return of the LRA to Northern Uganda to commit more atrocities as well as reverse the gains of the fragile peace that followed the Juba talks, especially since the signing of the cessation of hostilities agreement in August 2006.

**Legacies of the war in Northern Uganda**

Northern Uganda is still reeling from the effects of a conflict that saw the Acholi driven off their land. The long struggle has had an adverse impact on the region as a whole, in terms of gross human rights violations such as abductions, forced conscription, murder, mutilation, rape and other forms of sexual violence; economic losses; and population displacement. At the height of the insurgency (1996–2004) over two million people in Northern region were forced to live in deplorable IDP camp conditions.

The combination of insecurity and violence, population displacement, breakdown of social infrastructure, loss of assets and livelihoods contributed to high poverty levels in the Northern region, which range between 64 per cent and 70 per cent, more than double the national average of 31 per cent.\textsuperscript{52} Two decades of war have widened the poverty gap between the north and the rest of the country. Today, almost half (44.3 per cent) of the poorest 20 per cent in Uganda live in Northern Uganda,\textsuperscript{53} and while poverty levels decreased significantly in all other regions in Uganda between 1995 and 2006, poverty levels in Northern Uganda remained the same. The north also compares poorly with other regions on all major social indicators and scores significantly lower than the national average.\textsuperscript{54} Northern Uganda remains a marginalised region that has failed to enjoy the benefits of Uganda’s development.

Northern Uganda’s economy is dependent on agriculture, specifically the rearing of cattle and farming food crops. With massive displacement for over a decade, food production has been very low, and energetic and once hardworking people depend on food from humanitarian agencies, including the United Nations. A generation has grown up in camps without learning how to farm, raise cattle or support themselves. The food handouts that kept the people alive in the camps did not prepare them for self-sufficiency. Thus, a people that had previously been self-sufficient and provided the rest of Uganda with food became dependent on food aid, while other regions of Uganda have benefited by

\begin{itemize}
  \item Barbara Among and Agencies, “Kony hiding in Darfur, says army”, *The New Vision*, 14 October 2010.
  \item UBOS/Government of Uganda: 2005/06 National Household Survey.
  \item Ibid.
  \item Ibid.
\end{itemize}
filling the gap in supply. Acholi people once valued their cattle only slightly less than their children, but when the people were forced into camps during the war, the cattle were either killed or herded into trucks and driven to the west and markets in Kampala to be sold. All that is left for the people is land, and there is suspicion that the government can steal land from the Acholi and sell it to outsiders.

While some individuals profited during the LRA conflict, many local businesses lost property, goods and money. Businesses were regularly targeted by LRA rebels for supplies or money and vehicles were ambushed and destroyed. Insecurity further isolated the region from the rest of the country. High transport costs and corruption among civil servants, top government and UPDF officers also worsened the situation in the north. The conflict in the region also had an enormous impact on its demography. The 2002 national population census indicated that the population of Northern Uganda is youthful and becoming ever younger over time. Children (those under 18) constituted 55 per cent of the population, those under 15 years constituted 49 per cent, while the elderly (60+) made up 4 per cent.

Youth have been both the primary victims of and in some senses the primary actors during the LRA conflict. Yet, according to the findings of a recent study by the Survey of War Affected Youth (SWAY), very little information on the effects of this situation is available, including the different effects of conflict on young men and young women. This lack of information hampers programming efforts by government and development partners alike. The SWAY study points to the need for significant expansion of programmes targeted to youth, which in most cases are “grossly inadequate.” Levels of abduction of young people were high, with some youths forced into the LRA’s ranks and others enlisted as “support” fighters, including as sex slaves to commanders. The total number of youths abducted is placed at anywhere between 24,000 and 66,000.

The psychological impact of the experiences undergone by both abducted and non-abducted people is profound, with the population witnessing, experiencing and perpetrating acts of violence. It is almost impossible to understand the war and ensuing coping mechanisms in Northern Uganda without understanding the psychological trauma the population has suffered. Present-day

55. Civil Society Organisations for Peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU), Counting the cost: Twenty years of war in Northern Uganda, March 2006.
Northern Uganda is a community heavily fraught with trauma as a result of the severe violence perpetrated on the people on the one hand and the coercion of others to perpetrate violence against their own households. Too often, as Kleinman (1992) and Wilkinson (2005) note, trauma is “normalised” where there is perpetual violence. This normalisation results from what anthropologist Linda Green (2004) calls a culture of terror, or state-induced violence, from which two things result: intimidation and a culture of fear. In Northern Uganda, governmental terror perpetrated by the UPDF led to both: intimidation and terrorism by LRA rebels, which in turn engendered a culture of fear, whereby a supposed state of peace is actually a continued threat of violence and violence is not only normalised but has become a means of social control. These traumatic experiences are also correlated with high reported levels of family problems and emotional distress.

The impact of the violence is pronounced in the behaviour of the young children who were born and grew up in the war. While children in other parts of the country play “house,” Northern Ugandan children play “war” or “abductions” or act out scenes of domestic violence. Responses to the traumatic effects of political violence in the north have often transformed the local idioms of victims into a collective language of complaint and restitution, thereby remaking both representations and experiences of suffering. In Northern Uganda, the victim is usually seen as being responsible for his or her situation, as is evident in the fact that the Ugandan government blamed the Acholi for savageness, violence and rebelliousness. Since suffering seems to have become a normal part of life for the Acholi, many people in Northern Uganda also seem to believe that they are to blame for their post-conflict poverty and trauma.

Meanwhile, many young people in Northern Uganda have limited or no formal education or skills. Both formal and informal education were highly prized in Northern Uganda and the adverse impact of the war on the region’s educational system is obvious. Twenty-two years of war have undermined the educational potential of an entire generation of young people, destroying the region’s prospects for future development. UNICEF reported in June 2005 that 60 per cent of primary schools in Gulu, Kitgum, Pader, Lira and Apac districts were non-functional due to forced displacement. As a result, 25 per cent of all displaced children of primary school age are currently not in school and 250,000 children in total are not receiving any education in school whatsoever. This is in spite of the government’s policy of free universal primary education. The lack of access to secondary school education also poses serious problems. In

Kitgum district, only about 2,000 children enter secondary school annually.61 The limited access to higher education has been attributed to lack of income as a result of forced displacement, making school fees unaffordable for most parents/guardians. The lack of skills gives rise to a significant risk that local people will be unable to participate fully in economic recovery efforts, thereby reinforcing their economic marginalisation.

Given the psychological stress that the continued lack of resolution of the LRA conflict engenders among civilians living in Northern Uganda, policymakers face a serious problem. There have already been delays in effecting the shift from humanitarian relief to recovery and the pragmatic decision has been made by most agencies as well as government to throw their weight behind an anticipated peace. This approach facilitates planning processes and builds on the gains made during the lull in violence in the region. It also helps to consolidate the important groundwork in resettling returnees and turning to a new chapter of development assistance in the region. It does, however, require a “suspension of disbelief” to some extent, whereby the foundations of economic recovery are being laid in Northern Uganda without any certainty about the most fundamental precondition, namely sustainable peace. While some agencies are dealing with this by planning for different possible scenarios, it is important that all stakeholders not lose sight of this reality.

Bearing in mind the causes as well as legacies of the conflict and the wider context of a fragile and only partly successful peace process, this paper now turns to review the recovery plans and programmes for the north of the government, development agencies and the private sector. The focus is not so much on the technical aspects of these efforts, but to examine the extent to which they are sensitive to the ongoing conflict dynamics and seek to avoid “doing harm,” and the extent to which they open up and explore existing peacebuilding opportunities.

Enabling peace in Northern Uganda – international perspective

A UNDP report on post-conflict economic recovery delineates two objectives: first, “to re-establish the conditions for self-sustaining economic growth and human development,” and second, “to reduce the major risk factors of conflict recurrence such as low per capita incomes, poor employment opportunities, weak economic growth, and severe socio-economic horizontal inequalities.”62

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All of these risk factors apply in Northern Uganda and need to be addressed if a sustainable peace is to be achieved.

Early post-conflict recovery requires adherence to development principles of participation, sustainability, local ownership and capacities, but should also be integrated with humanitarian mechanisms. The action required by early recovery is “political, but requires a focus on social economies and programmes. It is developmental, but requires political/conflict sensitivity, flexibility and speed. It operates in the humanitarian sphere, but requires a focus on the state.” However, early recovery in Northern Uganda is so elusive because it encapsulates all the dilemmas and trade-offs that peacebuilding entails and requires rapid decisions and strategising to plant the seeds of future sustainable development. It also requires a coordinated approach, reliable funding and, most of all, a detailed assessment of local needs, capacities and drivers of conflict. Given these complexities, humanitarian actors should place emphasis on better responding to “early recovery” needs.

The donor and international communities have recognised their limitations in responding quickly and effectively in post-conflict contexts and many have recently adopted priority strategies for addressing some of the gaps in the international response at the highest level. Different parts of the UN system are also reviewing their responses to, and activities in, post-conflict contexts in the light of combined peacebuilding and early recovery needs, and a UN secretary general’s report on these issues was being finalised in May 2009.

A report commissioned by the UK’s department for international development on the challenges to early action finds that international actors rapidly and flexibly launch relief efforts and that international peacekeeping programmes are more effective as a result of the last decade of reforms. But their response to the challenges of economic recovery, livelihoods, services and state-building is undertaken in a more or less ad hoc manner by a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral actors who do not primarily operate in conflict zones, or are not mandated to tackle conflict in the first instance. As a result, projects are not always carried out in a conflict-sensitive manner and can serve to increase tensions on the ground. Often, strategic vision and coordination across the different initiatives is severely lacking or under-resourced. While the newly established UN

64. NYU Centre on International Cooperation (CIC), 2008.
65. See, UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown, speech delivered in New Delhi, India, 21 January 2008, referenced in NYU Centre (CIC), 2008, the UN Peacebuilding Support Office has been tasked to help prepare the forthcoming report, which is to make practical recommendations to enhance the UN system’s response in this area. See also www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding/
66. NYU Center on International Cooperation (CIC), 2008, p. 4.
Peacebuilding Commission works on some of these issues, it does so mainly in late recovery contexts.67

The report calls for a clarification of the core functions of IFIs and UN agencies for development in conflict contexts as a vital step in improving early recovery interventions.68 Based on a review of several recent cases, including Timor Leste, Sudan, Lebanon, Nepal and Afghanistan, it concludes that “there was no evidence of strategy that encompassed political, security, development and humanitarian tools across bilateral and multilateral actors; and no framework for prioritisation.”69

While there is clearly increasing international momentum towards addressing recovery challenges in post-conflict societies, in the absence of consensus on what is meant by early recovery, both in policy and programmatic terms, the concept continues to be open to different interpretations.70 The timing of early recovery is just as difficult to pin down. It can refer to the response to conflict; to phases that are prior to the cessation of hostilities; and often (loosely) for much later action.71 Early recovery by humanitarian actors seems to be linked to sectoral efforts to promote livelihood activities at community level. For development actors, it is linked to efforts to strengthen national recovery capacity, ensure ownership of the process and identify opportunities to initiate development activities at the earliest stage of a crisis. For some donors and post-conflict governments, early recovery is related to peacebuilding initiatives and efforts to restore security.72

According to the UN inter-agency standing committee’s cluster on early recovery, early recovery:

…is a multidimensional process of recovery that begins in a humanitarian setting. It is guided by development principles that seek to build on humanitarian programmes and catalyze sustainable development opportunities. It aims to generate self-sustaining, nationally owned, resilient processes for post-crisis recovery. It encompasses the restoration of basic services, livelihoods, shelter, governance, security and rule of law, environment and social dimension, including the reintegration of displaced populations.73

This is a tall order that clearly no single actor can fulfil. Prioritisation and effective coordination of these urgent tasks is just as challenging.

67. Ibid.
68. NYU CIC, 2008, p. 10.
69. Ibid.
71. NYU CIC, 2008.
72. Pavanello, “What does ‘early recovery’ mean?”
73. CWGER, April 2008, p. 1.
In light of these international observations, this paper discusses some of these challenges in the context of the Northern Uganda recovery plan. While early recovery is clearly a multidimensional task, the note focuses primarily on the potential of recovery efforts to enable a peace economy in the region.

**Peacebuilding and recovery in Northern Uganda – a two pronged approach**

The GoU has attempted to deal with the conflict in the north and get to the root of the problems by employing a two-pronged approach: a political/military approach and a social/economic approach.

The political approach involved the long military onslaught against the LRA rebels. This, instead of dealing with the conflict, exacerbated it, leading to the worst political violence ever witnessed in Uganda. The peace process in Juba, which started in 2006, quieted the violence in the north after a cessation of hostilities agreement was signed between the GoU and LRA rebels, but did not resolve the conflict because the FPA was not signed. In December 2008, the GoU launched Operation Lightning Thunder jointly with the governments of South Sudan and the DRC, with intelligence assistance from the US Africa Command. It was aimed at crushing the LRA once and for all. During this operation, it is estimated that over 1,000 civilians were killed by the LRA in Southern Sudan and the DRC. The joint military operation was undertaken without clear or adequate arrangements to protect civilians. During the operation, the UPDF’s focus was clearly on fighting and destroying the LRA, not civilian protection. Although reports suggest the initiative weakened and isolated LRA rebel leader Joseph Kony and disrupted “the enemy’s normal operations,” there is a fear that, having survived, he will come back stronger, especially if Khartoum re-engages him as a proxy force in the Sudanese conflict.

The peace talks in Juba appear to be over, despite the fact that a negotiated agreement lies unsigned on the table. The military operations have also failed to end the conflict or force the LRA to sign the FPA. It is unlikely that military force will result in any deal being signed and any trust that was built between

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the negotiating parties in Juba, however fragile, has vanished. This has caused local frustration with the military attempt to end the conflict, which makes reviving a political process and establishing channels of communication with the LRA more difficult. There is a need to recognise that the LRA conflict is part of a complex web of violent political conflicts and conflicts in the Uganda, Sudan and DRC border regions, as an essential step towards protecting the civilian populations of these areas.

The socioeconomic steps adopted by the GoU were mostly embodied in the Northern Uganda Reconstruction Programme (NURP-I), Northern Uganda Social Action Fund and the Peace Recovery and Development Plan initiatives for Northern Uganda. However, since the early 1990s the GoU has engaged in a number of recovery and reconstruction initiatives to bring peace and security to the north, including mine action programmes, human security initiatives and livelihood recovery programmes supported by UNDP and, later, in 2000, the enactment of an amnesty law.\footnote{UNDP, Evaluation of the Transition to Recovery Programme, December 2006.}

NURP-I and NUSAF had a limited impact on the people for which they were intended. For example, NURP-I, which ran from 1992 to 1997 with the intention of restoring basic social and economic infrastructure as well as reviving economic activities after the war, was implemented in top-down fashion by central government and did not link development with peacebuilding or psychosocial support for war-affected communities. In response to these shortcomings, NURP-I was relaunched as NURP-II in 1999 with the stated intention of incorporating a more bottom-up, demand-responsive approach. The most significant initiative under NURP-II was the World Bank-funded NUSAF, which provided grants directly to community groups that had submitted project ideas of their own design. NUSAF was adopted to empower communities in Northern Uganda by enhancing their capacity to identify, prioritise and plan for their needs within their own value systems. However, 18 months passed before NUSAF recruited technical staff, and the first project disbursements were not made until 2004. Reports of corruption call into question how much NUSAF funding actually reached intended project beneficiaries, with at least 20 people being charged with corruption while implementing NUSAF projects.

The successes associated with NURP-I and NUSAF were minimal, and the PRDP is also widely considered to have been a failure thus far, especially in light of President Museveni’s announced suspension of the initiative in late December 2008,\footnote{Peter Otika, “Museveni suspends compensation and reconstruction of Northern Uganda”, \textit{The Monitor}, 8 January 2009; Annie Kelly and Liz Ford, “Ugandan government postpones Northern recovery plan,” \textit{The Guardian}, 9 January 2009.} purportedly to fix the budgetary workplan and improve implementation and monitoring of the initiative. This suspension, however necessary, led to an
up roar in the north and among those who doubt the government’s political will to meaningfully improve conditions there.\textsuperscript{79}

The Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Programme (NUREP) implemented between 2007 and 2009 aimed at strengthening the self-reliance and protection of local populations in Northern Uganda, rehabilitating social infrastructure and improving the capacity of Ugandan stakeholders to respond to conflicts and disasters, while promoting reconciliation and reduction of regional disparities through development.

Recovery and peacebuilding in Northern Uganda – the Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP)

After almost a decade of disparate, ad hoc and short-term projects and programmes, the GoU recognised the need to take forward the post-conflict recovery initiatives in a comprehensive and coordinated manner. This resulted in the PRDP for Northern Uganda for 2007–10.\textsuperscript{80} In October 2007, the GoU launched the PRDP to help Northern Uganda transit from war to peace.\textsuperscript{81}

The PRDP represents a commitment by the GoU to stabilise and provide post-conflict reconstruction across the northern region. It provides a single overriding framework, which all stakeholders will adopt in implementing their individual programmes. The overall goal of the PRDP is to consolidate peace and security and lay the foundations for recovery and development. The GoU aims to achieve recovery and development through four core strategic objectives, which should be mutually reinforcing.\textsuperscript{82}

\textbf{Strategic objective 1}: Focuses on the consolidation of state authority by ensuring the cessation of hostilities, re-stabilising the rule of law, enabling judicial and legal services to become functional, protecting human rights and strengthening local governance. The PRDP proposes investments to create an enabling environment for stabilising the political, economic and social conditions in Northern Uganda through six programme areas.\textsuperscript{83}

Facilitation of Peace Agreement Initiatives: This aims to finance costs involved in cross-border movements, thereby facilitating reunification of returning families, logistics as well as other support identified to ensure the consolidation of peace in the post-agreement phase.

Police-Enhancement Programme: This seeks to increase the police presence

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{80} PRDP Document, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{81} See Message from the Minister, at http://www.prdp.org.ug/
\textsuperscript{82} Peace Recovery and Development Plan, Office of the Prime Minister, Kampala, Uganda, 2008, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{83} PRDP Document, p. 37.
in Northern Uganda and to strengthen community policing by training and equipping additional police, among other initiatives.

*Judicial Services Enhancement Programme*: This sets out to re-establish a functional legal and judicial system in the north. It includes funding for prosecutorial staff, judges and courts, as well as mechanisms to solve land conflicts. In addition, existing legal services such as those provided by NGOs, the private sector and other legal service providers will be supported to increase the outreach of judicial services. The programme will include recruitment and deployment of principal and senior state attorneys, state attorneys and state prosecutors. Investments will be made for the construction of state attorney’s stations and equipping them with vehicles, furniture, computers, telephones and solar panels.

*Prisons Enhancement Programme*: The purpose of this programme is to increase the prison capacity by renovation and expansion of existing facilities.

*Rationalisation of Auxiliary Forces*: This involves replacing auxiliary forces with regular police.

*Local Government Enhancement Programme*: While the above interventions are under centralised GoU management, a separate programme is proposed under this strategic objective to strengthen local government administration to execute and coordinate PRDP-related activities. The PRDP document proposes additional resources from, for example, LGDP for the coordination and management of programmes; recruitment for key posts in a post-conflict situation; an operations manager to assist the chief administrative officer in implementing PRDP activities; systems for community monitoring of service delivery; and additional resources to strengthen local government coordination capacity through additional central government transfers, local government resources and other resources from other partners.

Consolidation of state authority is a pillar of the PRDP that works towards establishing and consolidating peace in Northern Uganda. While the exercise of state authority through civilian policing and judicial structures is a key policy objective, civilian policing, which is not addressed in the PRDP, should lead to the establishment of state legitimacy. It is the absence of state legitimacy in Northern Uganda that is the underlying structural problem. The GoU should realise that real legitimacy resides in mutual respect, not fear.

**Strategic objective 2**: The focus of this component is to strengthen communities in their ability to plan and control their livelihoods. It focuses on rebuilding and empowering communities by contributing to community recovery, promoting improvement in the conditions and quality of life of civilians, completing the return and reintegration of displaced populations, initiating rehabilitation and development activities among communities and ensuring the vulnerable are protected. It includes additional resources for basic services:
**Emergency Assistance to IDP Programme:** This targets those IDPs who have not returned to their place of origin with transitional humanitarian assistance. The programme includes opening up emergency access roads, procurement of resettlement packages/kits for returning IDPs, support to local governments to re-establish public administration at sub-county level and strengthening the coordination mechanisms for humanitarian action both at the national and district levels. It also includes a sub-programme for promoting income-generating activities among IDPs. This programme duplicates a number of issues covered under objectives 1 and 3, such as strengthening the police and the judiciary as well as livelihood programmes.

**IDP Return/Resettlement Programme,** to provide pre-departure and point of arrival support

**Community Development Programme:** Several sector initiatives are listed, including health, education, water and livelihood support. In the education sector are investments in classroom construction; teacher training; provision of school materials; and support to alternative education. The water sector includes investments in gravity-flow schemes, protected springs, boreholes and shallow wells and education on sanitation and hygiene. Health services will be strengthened by investments in more health facilities and by provisions to retain health persons in the region.

**Strategic objective 3:** This focuses on revitalisation of the economy through reactivating the productive sectors within the region, including production and marketing, services and industry. Major rehabilitation and infrastructure improvements and reinforcement of mechanisms for sound management of the environment and natural resources are also planned. The objective focuses on private sector development by means of investing in basic infrastructure to promote income-generating activities.

**Production and Marketing Enhancement Programme:** This programme covers investments in agriculture, livestock and fisheries, including investments in marketing and distribution systems as well as outreach and extension services.

**Infrastructure Rehabilitation and Urban Improvement Programme:** The programme includes investments in roads, bridges and power supply and distribution. It will focus on roads in high return areas and in areas where IDP camps are located, as well as national trunk road and feeder roads. As part of the strategy for rural electrification, district headquarters and areas with a potential for economic activity, especially agro-processing, will be targeted.

**Land, Environment and Natural Resource Management Programme:** This programme includes mobilisation of local government and communities to form environment management structures and committees to sensitise communities on sound environmental management and use of natural resources; to estab-
lish community nurseries and woodlots and encourage farmers to institute tree-
planting and agro-forestry; as well as promote the use of energy-saving devices.

The third pillar of the PRDP only partly addresses the major political prob-
lem of a north-south divide. It does so by emphasising how Northern Uganda
will catch up with other parts of Uganda in terms of basic services, rather than
revisioning what an integrated Ugandan economy could actually look like.

**Strategic objective 4:** Focuses on peace and reconciliation by ensuring the
prevalence of peace, increasing access to information by the population, enhanc-
ing counselling services, establishing mechanisms for inter/intra-communal and
national conflict resolution, strengthening local governance, strengthening in-
formal leadership structures and reinforcing socioeconomic reintegration of ex-
combatants. The overall objective of the programmes under this component is
to put in place mechanisms for rehabilitating the victims of war and facilitat-
ing their reintegration into their communities and strengthening local conflict-
resolution mechanisms and the relationship between civilians and government/
public administration.

*Information Education and Communication and Counselling Services pro-
gramme:* The programme will be implemented by disseminating information
activities on PRDP to beneficiaries and stakeholders.

*Amnesty, Demobilisation and Re-integration of ex-combatants programme:* AD-
RP will provide resettlement packages to ex-combatants, facilitate reunifi-
cation with their families and the community and provide access to existing
service-providers and to income-generating opportunities.

Objective 4, rather than dealing with the structural issues noted by the
IMTC, focuses on the micro-level of peacebuilding and reconciliation, particu-
larly at individual and clan levels, and has little to offer in terms of national
reconciliation.

The foregoing strategic objectives will be achieved through 14 priority pro-
grammes agreed upon by the districts as the most critical for stabilising the
North. These include: facilitation of peace agreement initiatives; police en-
hancement; prisons enhancement; rationalisation of auxiliary forces; judicial
services enhancement; local government enhancement; emergency assistance;
return and resettlement of IDPs; community empowerment and recovery; pro-
duction and marketing; infrastructure rehabilitation; environment and natural
resource management; public information, education and communication; sen-
sitisation; and counselling, amnesty, demobilisation and reintegration.

The PRDP is set within the framework of the Poverty Eradication Action

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84. PRDP Document, p. 8.
85. Ibid.
Plan (PEAP), which provides the general policy framework to guide public sector support to eradicate poverty. It is based on broad recognition of the four core challenges the GoU faces in improving welfare and promoting growth in all parts of the country by restoring security and dealing with the consequences of conflict and improving regional equity, with particular focus on Northern Uganda. These challenges include restoring sustainable growth of incomes; enhancing human development; using public resources transparently; and using public resources efficiently to eradicate poverty. PEAP responds to these needs with a reference to the goal of recovery and development of conflict-affected Northern Uganda. It also notes the various initiatives designed to address post-conflict needs and calls for the integration of these initiatives into a coherent plan and programme that addresses the needs of the conflict-affected areas.

The PRDP seeks to harmonise the vast number of initiatives currently undertaken by the international community through the four strategic objectives and the 14 priority programmes. It integrates other ongoing activities and seeks to build on existing structures and policy initiatives, such as the district disaster management committees and the Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Plan. At the end of the three years, the targets of the PRDP will be reviewed and brought in line with the national goals enshrined in the overall development framework – the PEAP.

The PRDP could potentially be both a peacebuilding plan for Northern Uganda and a roadmap for conflict-sensitive economic recovery and development. Peacebuilding is commonly understood as “a broad range of measures implemented in the context of emerging, current or post-conflict situations and which are explicitly guided and motivated by a primary commitment to the prevention of violent conflict and the promotion of lasting and sustainable peace.”

The four broad categories, socioeconomic development, good governance, reform of justice and security institutions and a culture of justice, truth and reconciliation are often used as examples of such measures.

International research and policy initiatives have led to an understanding of the economic aspects of violent conflict, as well as of the role of economic recovery in improving a conflict-affected country’s chances of peace. Northern Uganda’s current peace process and its prospects for consolidating peace in the future are mired in issues such as the misuse of public resources, elite control of
economic opportunities and horizontal inequalities in the country’s economic base, all of which have fuelled grievances and caused violent conflict to erupt.

Building an economy in which different groups have access to decent work opportunities and a share in economic growth is essential to consolidating and sustaining peace in the long term. Northern Uganda’s economy is closely entwined with its conflicts and the region cannot simply be subjected to “economic development as usual”: it is better to adopt alternative approaches that could enhance chances for lasting peace rather than focusing purely on economic growth as the end goal. Despite some efforts to the contrary, the PRDP interventions continue to follow existing aid, trade and investment paradigms, rather than being informed by an understanding of the political economy of each conflict context.

The PRDP is set against the context of historical conflict in Northern Uganda and attempts to address both the consequences of violent conflict and resolve the grievances and underdevelopment that drove past conflicts and may give rise to new ones. In this respect, the PRDP in its conception and objectives may be seen as thoroughly conflict-sensitive, with peacebuilding objectives at its heart. But the PRDP emerges from a historical background of GoU policies and programmes towards the north that have been highly conflict-insensitive. Against this background, the PRDP rests on insufficient and differentiated conflict analysis, mainly focusing on symptoms rather than the underlying causes and dynamics of the conflict. Furthermore, there has been inadequate analysis of potential “connectors and dividers” in peacebuilding in a national conflict setting, and on how to avoid the negative impacts of interventions and maximise the positive ones.

Confidence and peacebuilding strategies in the PRDP are underdeveloped, with issues of peace and conflict narrowly defined, being mainly confined to the fourth strategic objective of peacebuilding, recovery and reconciliation and insufficiently recognised under the other objectives. Furthermore, the fourth objective mainly focuses on the micro-level, particularly individual and clan levels, and has little to offer in terms of national reconciliation.

Any development project set in a conflict-prone region like Northern Uganda inevitably has an impact on the peace and conflict environment, positive or negative, direct or indirect, intentional or unintentional. The understanding that humanitarian and development interventions and projects can contribute

91. P. Collier et al., 2003, Breaking the conflict trap: Civil war and development policy. Oxford, UK: OUP. The concept of decent work is central to the work of the ILO, including in countries emerging from conflict. See www.ilo.org/global/About_the_ILO/Media_and_public_information/Feature_stories/lang--en/WCMS071241/index.htm
to and exacerbate conflict and even feed violence\textsuperscript{93} should lead to the development of “conflict-sensitive” tools and approaches to help governments and other actors better understand the relationship between economic development and conflict; and to adapt and plan interventions that reduce the potential for violent conflict and abuse and increase the potential for positive outcomes. Such “conflict-sensitive approaches” should assess the impact an intervention will have on factors that can support peaceful coexistence and decrease the likelihood of the outbreak, recurrence or continuation of violent conflict, or on structures and processes that increase the likelihood conflict will be dealt with through violent means.\textsuperscript{94}

There has been very little effort by the GoU to draft a conflict-sensitive intervention document. Much of the work on mainstream conflict-sensitive approaches has focused on specific project-level interventions undertaken by humanitarian and social sector development agencies.\textsuperscript{95} This has meant that the evaluation of the impact of interventions aimed at peacebuilding and implemented in Northern Uganda lacks rigour and depth. The focus on individual projects has inhibited appraisal of the overall impact of a particular agency’s effect on conflict in the region. Even when a donor seeks to minimise the local conflict impacts of particular projects it is funding, the same donor’s geopolitical interests, championed by its foreign affairs department, lead it to support military expansionism that is at odds with overall peace and security in the very country where it is promoting conflict-sensitive projects.\textsuperscript{96} The tendency for development assistance to pride itself on technocratic content, while remaining silent on geo-political dynamics, is a major problem in international relations today, and highlights the need for agencies genuinely committed to peace and conflict-sensitivity to take a much more strategic overview of their own work, even if this means grappling with difficult political issues.

The conflict-sensitivity discourse is slow to permeate economic areas of intervention such as trade assistance or support to private enterprise and specific economic sectors. In part this may be symptomatic of a broader tendency among economists to believe that the laws of economics are politically neutral.\textsuperscript{97} The re-

\textsuperscript{93} Saferworld, Fewer et al., 2004, Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding. London, UK.

\textsuperscript{94} K. Bush, 1998, op. cit.


sult of this has been that many development partners’ economic interventions at each of micro and macro levels have remained ‘conflict-blind’ in their approach. In fact, how such interventions are designed and implemented are the key variables related to their ability to support peacebuilding processes. To ensure that such interventions achieve their objective and do not inadvertently fuel tensions in a society, and contribute to peace, a much greater appreciation of the prevailing conditions in northern Uganda’s political economy is required.

PRDP Planning process – the Link between Economic Development and Peacebuilding

In 2005, President Museveni launched his 14 point plan for recovery in Northern Uganda, and gave the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) the responsibility to coordinate the formulation of a program taking these points into account. Between June and August 2005, an Inter-Ministerial Technical Committee (IMTC), tasked with analyzing the situation in the North and developing the PRDP was established. The IMTC collected baseline data and reviewed various studies on the North such as the Northern Uganda Survey commissioned by OPM, conducted by Uganda Bureau of Statistics in 2005. It also drew upon lessons learnt from previous interventions, in particular the Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Project (NURP I) (1992–1997) and Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (2003–2007), both funded by the World Bank. This informed the process of designing the new Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Programme (NUREP) funded by the European Commission scheduled for implementation between December 2006–December 2010, ministerial policy statements and reports and plans from developing partners and NGOs.

From August to December 2005, three sub-regional meetings were held with local governments to prepare district recovery plans, which IMTC reviewed. Consultations were held with sector working groups as well as developing partners between November and December. In July and August 2006, further consultations took place with all stakeholders for the finalisation of the first draft and the GoU launched the Emergency Action Plan for Northern Uganda and the joint monitoring committee to oversee this plan in July 2006. This later inspired the establishment of the PRDP monitoring committee.

The joint monitoring committee was welcomed by development partners and NGOs as a forum for high level dialogue with GoU on the situation in the north. However, external actors pressed hard for the GoU to include district representatives in the joint monitoring committee to encourage more involvement by PRDP districts in PRDP planning. When a first draft PRDP was sent

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98. Fourteen points listed in PRDP document Ch. 1.2, p. 18–19, but the following text refers to twelve points, date not specified.
to stakeholders (government ministries, development partners and NGOs) for comment in September/October 2006, the Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Programme was revised to adapt it to changing events on the ground and elaborate the Karamoja component of PRDP.

In March 2007, a second draft PRDP was circulated for consultation and additional comment. Further consultations were held with local governments over the following two months to establish whether their priorities were reflected and to ensure collective ownership of the PRDP. In August 2007, the PRDP document was approved by cabinet. However, more districts not traditionally considered part of the north and not affected by the LRA war were added, such as Masindi, Tororo and Mbale.99

President Museveni officially launched the PRDP document in October 2007 and discussions on the PRDP financing strategy were held at the national budget workshop in December 2007. The PRDP districts were also asked to submit additional needs assessments – referred to as a “costing exercise” – in January 2008. The funding strategy and PRDP budget were presented in the national budget framework paper in June 2008 after a planning and stakeholders’ consultative workshop had been held in February 2008.

Following the trend of events in the PRDP planning process, it is clear that the planning process was driven by the OPM. Although local government officials in the Acholi region speak approvingly of PRDP consultations held there in 2006,100 there is no evidence to suggest that GoU/OPM initiated or encouraged consultation with the population in the north, including IDPs in the camps or in transition. Such consultation would have been particularly valuable in areas with minimal state and local level government functions, such as the Acholi region. Sub-county and village representatives also seem not to have been engaged widely.101

OPM interacted directly with district authorities in the planning process, thus undermining the regular sector-wide approach (SWaP) widely recognised as being at the core of the Ugandan government’s development efforts. In spite of the establishment of the IMTC, it is likely that key ministries such as the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, Ministry of Local Government and major sector ministries such as Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Sports and Ministry of Water and Transportation were not adequately engaged at the institutional level.

The PRDP strategic objectives based on 14 key intervention programmes

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have been identified with more large- and small-scale investments in addition to funding of regular positions within central and local government administration and service delivery units. This indicates that all the activities included in PRDP are based on inputs from central and local government institutions and screened by the OPM-PRDP design team, applying targets which are assumed realistic within a three-year timeframe. These targets are well below the objective of the PRDP to achieve national average standards in Northern Uganda.

The PRDP document argues that earlier interventions in conflict-affected areas assumed that state authority was functioning normally and were therefore based on a regular poverty-reduction strategy. An overall strategic framework appropriate to a conflict setting was lacking. It refers to wide agreement among stakeholders in 2005 that (i) the PRDP process would acknowledge the overall resource envelope determined by Medium Term Expenditure Framework ceilings, but with the possibility of additional external resource mobilisation; (ii) that a sector-wide approach was not sufficient; (iii) that the process was as important as the product; and (iv) that needs rather than resources were the primary determinant for setting objectives and targets.

Such statements open up a plethora of options, including delinking from the regular planning and budgeting processes, which had been identified as a major weakness in previous interventions. It appears that various stakeholders had different ideas about what the PRDP should be, from simply more project funding for the north to a broad master plan or overall strategic framework throughout the planning period. The apparent lack of strong vision and coherent leadership throughout the process, together with the executive’s repeated statements that the LRA conflict could be solved militarily, seem to have led to unclear messages as well as doubts about high-level GoU ownership of the PRDP.

High ambitions by some stakeholders to present a complete solution to the problems in the north, as well as conceptual confusion about PRDP and lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities, most likely contributed to delay in the planning process and consequently the implementation of PRDP. Even after the plan was launched, OPM engaged districts in a new, comprehensive top-down costing exercise to identify the financial gaps to be filled in order to bring development in the north up to the national level. The idea was to link these to the district development plans and the normal budget process.

Delays and the continuous suspension of the implementation of the PRDP

102. This is based on the detailed programme costing spreadsheets that have been the basis for the summary budget presented in the PRDP document, PRDP Document, p. 11.
103. MPs, premier in PRDP row, Daily Monitor at http://www.monitor.co.ug/artman/publish/regional-special/MPs_premier_in_PRDP_row_81663.shtml
104. See PRDP Coordination, at http://www.prdp.org.ug/content.php?Submenu_id=58
clearly show that there is still no uniform conceptual understanding of what PRDP is. Assessment of needs and priorities for the PRDP was based on a wide range of available documentation and a limited participatory process. However, the approach to designing the “master plan” across sectors and local governments and conflicts with the regular planning and budget process led to lack of clarity about roles, responsibilities and financing modalities in the implementation phase.

While some would claim it is a master plan\textsuperscript{105} formulated to establish peace, enhance security, facilitate return, accelerate development and bring Northern Uganda up to par with the rest of the country, it is important to note that PRDP is a policy framework to guide regular planning to give priority to its objectives. The PRDP is more of a mechanism to ensure additional resources (either through regular grants or a special PRDP grant) to fund the PRDP priority projects that the PRDP districts have been requested to present.\textsuperscript{106}

The planning of PRDP-related activities in the north remains separate from existing national and district planning cycles and, therefore, the recovery component of existing district development plans needs to be strengthened. The ongoing process of creating new districts creates further problems, with newly created districts lacking the capacity to discharge their responsibilities.

The PRDP document is not clear about whether it includes all public sector interventions within the strategic objectives or only additional required interventions. What the PRDP districts presented to OPM was only additional priority projects over and above what was contained in their district development plans. It appears that the programmes under the four strategic objectives of the PRDP were designed with a mix of ongoing regular budget funding activities and new activities in mind, without clearly identifying which are ongoing and which are additional. Furthermore, some activities are repeated under different strategic objectives, are costed separately and given separate budget lines leading to double counting, such as “Rebuilding and Empowering of Communities” and “Revitalisation of the Economy,” which both contain the same interventions for support to livelihood programmes and promoting income-generating activities for IDPs. Similarly, both the “Consolidation of State Authority” and “Rebuilding and Empowering of Communities” programmes contain similar interventions for strengthening the judicial and justice system and increasing police presence in the region through recruitment, deployment and opening new posts.

\textsuperscript{105} MPs, premier in PRDP row, Daily Monitor at http://www.monitor.co.ug/artman/publish/regional-special/MPs_premier_in_PRDP_row_81663.shtml, also, Centre For Women in Governance, Monitoring Implementation of the UNSCR 1325 in Uganda- Stakeholder Workshop Report, May 2010.

\textsuperscript{106} See PRDP Coordination, op.cit.
The dilemmas of building sustainable peace through the PRDP

Although the PRDP’s full implementation would significantly counter the real and perceived neglect and marginalisation at the root of the conflict, the impact of the interventions in the Acholi districts is insufficiently visible. The phasing out of humanitarian activities in the region has also not been properly synchronised with the establishment of recovery and development activities. The 2010 Consolidated Appeal for Uganda notes that the “humanitarian gains made following the 2006 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement … are in danger of unravelling. This is due to diminishing humanitarian programming that is unmatched by a significant increase in recovery programmes.”¹⁰⁷ This may mean that in the short and medium terms, there is a risk that people returning to satellite camps and villages will end up worse off than they were in the camps, with obvious implications for peace and stability in the region. Although there is improvement in the security situation and greater freedom of movement for civilians in Northern Uganda, there are still a number of challenges and risks that PRDP faces from a peace and security perspective.

Additionally, policies, plans and programmes that have been implemented in Northern Uganda have to a very limited extent been adjusted by central and local governments in light of the conflict and post-conflict situation¹⁰⁸ – this is still the case with the PRDP. In this instance, the GoU and its partners assume that peace will automatically follow from implementation of the development and other aspects of the PRDP. This will probably not be the case, since implementation has been slower than planned, coupled with the fact that there is very little awareness of and capacity for conflict-sensitive implementation of the PRDP at both national and local government levels.¹⁰⁹ A conflict-insensitive PRDP may result in the allocation of PRDP funds in ways that strengthen existing divisions, for example, by being perceived to favour certain communities or elite networks over others. Not managing the high expectations across the PRDP districts when some areas will probably be prioritised at the expense of others may reinforce perceptions of marginalisation, insecurity and underdevelopment among communities who feel their areas are being neglected. This may also fuel existing conflicts or create new ones. Poor public knowledge and understanding of the PRDP, particularly in the PRDP districts, is likely to contribute to further misunderstanding or unrealistic expectations. There is a need for active political leadership and engagement in this area, including further development of partnerships with local people and representatives in each PRDP district.

Dealing with the hearts and minds of the northern communities should have

¹⁰⁸. This is true in the planning and implementation of the NURP-I and NUSAF projects.
¹⁰⁹. Refugee Law Project Survey – Is PRDP politics as usual?
been a major part of the government’s efforts to build peace and the economy in the north. It is crucial that northerners perceive the government as catering to their interests. The government should develop a strategy that makes the Acholi people a more essential part of the governance structure of Uganda, increase public services and assistance to the returning IDP population and take on an inclusive process of planning for normalisation of life in the region. It is interesting to note that after the wars of 1971–86, the NRM government took a positive and non-detrimental step towards reconstruction. But in Northern Uganda, the traditional reconciliation rituals to heal the deep emotional wounds, such as burial ceremonies like mato oput, are intended to integrate Acholi culture and rehabilitation for the people who want to return to their home villages and also serve to reconcile survivors with the past and lay the spirits of the dead to rest. In the aftermath of wars in Uganda, the government constructed memorials in other parts of the country, but in Northern Uganda these ceremonies are being conducted independently of government input as they are considered “cultural affairs.” The lack of documentation of the deaths means the full effect of the war on the lives of people in the north will be excluded from the war history of Uganda, and this deepens the existing distrust of the NRM government among the Acholi.

At another level, the PRDP is void of empowerment strategies for the Acholi people who feel that the war was intended to steal their wealth and weaken their economy and that the forced displacement was designed to destroy their livelihoods. The combination of psychosocial trauma, economic depression and dependency has led many people in Northern Uganda to believe what Western media and actions entrench their state of helplessness. They have lived in camps and were doomed to the life it entails: no education, no career and no prospects for change. The government has become complacent about the heavy local and foreign aid presence in the region. What NGOs are doing is what the government is supposed to do for its people. The excuse has always been conditions created by the war, but this is hardly tenable since the government is implementing a recovery plan for Northern Uganda.

However, the people of Northern Uganda should also start to demonstrate what they are doing to help their own situation and how they are making the most of their resources, despite decades of poverty, neglect and war. It is necessary to change their current attitude and stop dwelling on the past. This attitudinal change is important if they are to recognise their own capabilities and stop viewing foreign assistance as the main source of sustenance. Helping people to regain control over their everyday life should be the top priority in the govern-

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ment’s intervention in Northern Uganda. The GoU and its partners need to wean the region off dependence on foreign aid and Northern Ugandans must be prepared for this paradigm shift. This change can only be initiated through targeted programmes, in which the empowerment of the people will be inevitable.

A key issue relating to the conflict-insensitivity of the PRDP is the political aspect of peacebuilding and national reconciliation, which has given rise to doubts about the true commitment of the GoU. The breach of the cessation of hostilities agreement through renewed military operations against LRA rebels has fuelled distrust about government’s intention to end the devastating conflict that has afflicted Northern communities. The deterioration in security in LRA-affected areas since the December 2008 military attack on the LRA has had a particularly devastating effect. Although the LRA currently poses little military threat to the north, the potential for further LRA activity creates enormous fear within the population and cannot be completely ruled out. A single LRA attack can destabilise the entire north and lead to renewed displacement, encampment of civilians and UPDF actions that are insensitive to the concerns of the local populace. This fear, coupled with a failure to implement the PRDP, is leading to growing concerns among the people that the GoU is not really interested in addressing the political, social and economic disparities and divisions among the regions of Uganda that have fuelled cyclical conflicts in the country since independence.

The unsigned FPA presents a serious dilemma for policy-makers and actors involved in recovery and peacebuilding in the north. In Northern Uganda only peace can restore hope and build trust in the central government. Until Kony comes out and signs the FPA, the conflict in Northern Uganda will not have ended, despite the fact that there is relative peace now that has enabled IDPs to return to their villages. Therefore, fundamental to the achievement of the PRDP objectives for post-conflict recovery and reconstruction is the need for peace to be secured. This will create an environment that can to some extent dispel the “suspended disbelief” arising from the laying of the foundations for economic recovery in Northern Uganda without any certainty about the primary enabling factor, peace.

The geopolitical environment, not least the Sudan factor, in which the search for peace in Northern Uganda is taking place remains challenging. Perhaps of greatest concern is the role of the Khartoum government and the increasingly fragile Comprehensive Peace Accord in Sudan. As fighting continues in Abyei province and disagreements grow within the SPLM government, the opportu-


nity for Khartoum to return to supporting the LRA as a spoiling tactic against SPLM cannot be entirely foreclosed. Sudan bears some responsibility for the prolongation of the conflict in Northern Uganda. It can be argued that Khartoum would rather keep its old ally, the LRA, should the shaky CPA falter.\textsuperscript{113}

Reconciling peace and justice, which may require hard compromises, also presents a challenge. The traditional informal justice system may not be sufficient to bring justice for all the atrocities committed in the north. A genuine process of reconciliation based on accountability for all crimes committed in the north, including those committed by the UPDF, is necessary to restore the civil-military relations. The Acholi are concerned about abuses perpetrated by the UPDF throughout the north and the lack of redress or consistent punishment.\textsuperscript{114} Several reports provide evidence of the UPDF having killed civilians out gathering wild fruit and hunting animals around the IDP camps.\textsuperscript{115} The army, in defence of its actions, accused the civilian population of collaborating with the rebels and refusing to abide by restrictions on movements outside those camps. UPDF’s abuses played into the hands of the LRA, feeding the vicious cycle of violence against the Acholi.

Acts of brutality and torture perpetrated at the level of government have always been followed by government-imposed secrecy and impunity for those involved. This is aggravated by the fact that the PRDP does not recognise the role of the government and army in the atrocities committed in the north. President Museveni has noted that the UPDF played no part in the 22-year-long devastation in the north.\textsuperscript{116} Exploring the issue of how to eliminate torture as well as how to improve the healing process requires the GoU to reduce or end secrecy and stop defending acts committed by its forces. It is also important for the international community to cease overlooking atrocities committed with the backing of the government. This is a rather sensitive issue, given that the ICC cannot hold Museveni accountable for the atrocities the NRA committed in the

\textsuperscript{113} See Barbara Among and Agencies, “Kony hiding in Darfur, says army”, \textit{The New Vision}, 14th October, 2010.


\textsuperscript{116} Museveni’s foreword to the PRDP, 2007; see also Dolan, Chris. “Is the PRDP a Three-Legged Table? Challenges for NGOs in Moving from Humanitarian and Short Term Interventions to Longer Term Approaches in Light of the PRDP and the Conflict Setting.” Keynote Speech at NGO seminar for Scandinavian based International NGOs working in Northern Uganda. Refugee Law Project. Kampala, Uganda. 10 April 2008.
The situation is further complicated by the reality that Museveni is recognised by the West as a hero for his education and economic policies that benefit only a fraction of the Ugandan population; and Uganda is recognised as a stable country with impressive economic development indicators. Museveni has garnered further support from the West as an ally in the US-led global war on terror in the Horn and eastern part of Africa. Museveni has cashed in on such support by labelling the fight against the LRA as a fight against “home-grown” terrorism. What the West fails or refuses to accept, however, is the high levels of state terror in Uganda.

Fear and suspicion undermine efforts to end the war in the north and to promote reconciliation and bring peace, all of which are important to economic recovery. The government and its plans for recovery would have more credibility with northerners if its justice processes were strengthened and firm action was taken against soldiers that commit human rights violations. The government and army should make it a priority in the north to improve their treatment of civilians in order to regain their trust and to enhance their image in the region. Unless Museveni and his accomplices are also held accountable by the international community or a justice mechanism of choice, the root of the problem will continue to be ignored and true change will never happen.

The integration of peace, forgiveness and reconciliation is narrowly defined and minimally dealt with in the PRDP document. While objective 4 of the PRDP highlights reconciliation between families, clans and communities, especially for returnees, it favours formal justice processes over traditional ones. Reconciliation is needed at a number of levels in Uganda: however, the Acholi communities are not prepared for and supported in accepting returning LRA ex-fighters. Intercommunal reconciliation efforts are not being assisted within the Acholi region and between Acholi and their neighbouring communities. The north-south divide that has burdened Ugandans and their politics is not addressed. Peacebuilding is happening only at the elite level and does not filter down to the grassroots. Most disturbingly, there is no organised effort to reduce the stigmatisation and other difficulties former LRA members experience when they attempt to return to their communities. Healing the deep emotional wounds of war is largely complicated by the fact that many atrocities happened in the bush, away from home. People were abducted and killed by faceless soldiers who could have been associated with either the government army or the rebel army. Who do you blame? Who do you forgive? There is no closure regarding the war and violence for families who cannot find the body of the loved one

117. The International Criminal Court established by the Rome Statute came into force in 2002 and its time jurisdiction covers international crimes committed from July 2002 onwards and not those committed prior to its coming into force.

118. PRDP Document, p. 74.
they lost. Honouring and remembering these deceased people proves difficult, if not impossible.

The DDR strategy for Northern Uganda is inadequate and not clearly articulated either in the agreements on comprehensive solutions and DDR signed during the peace negotiations, or in the PRDP. Most returning LRA ex-fighters are destitute and get relatively little from the government or donors. This has created a disincentive to defection and voluntary return and works against building lasting peace and stability in the north. Most LRA fighters were abducted as children and upon return there is no prospect for them to return to school, no jobs or way of making a decent livelihood. Most of these ex-fighters cannot live in the IDP camps for fear of re-abduction or retribution from the community. Psychological and social counselling services envisaged in the reintegration strategy are underfunded and completely unrecognised in the PRDP, which leaves NGOs to fill the gap.

Related to the foregoing is the issue of stigma and isolation of victims from their family or community. Returning abductees have lost their identity in the community and acquired what is commonly referred to as a “spoiled identity” – a deeply embedded identity it is not easy to grow out of. Stigma reinforces this identity and causes the stigmatised persons to believe in and accept the stigma, thus adding more division to Acholiland. Such stigma leads to shame, arising from the individual’s perception of one of his/her own attributes as being defiling, and becomes a problem in reintegration and reconciliation. It is not just the community that shames and isolates the individual, the individual, recognising s/he is unwanted in the community, can also isolate him/herself. This has caused Acholi to lose their identity as part of the Ugandan nation, as some of their compatriots have been known to refer to them as “Kony” or “the people up there.” Psychological pain is exacerbated through the lack of reconciliation in the community and is intensified by the lack of solidarity with the rest of the country.

Land disputes pose a serious challenge to building peace in Northern Uganda. As IDPs return, the number of land disputes has risen. Almost all the land in Northern Uganda is held under a customary system, with no registration of land boundaries. The customary ownership system has not prevented some people in Northern Uganda from becoming landless. Many returnees have been unable to recall or agree on the exact boundaries of their land. Households headed by women (almost a quarter of all households in Northern Uganda) are at particular risk of being denied access to land by their relatives, as are orphans and other child-headed households. Some early returnees took advantage of former neighbours who have not yet returned by moving the boundaries of their land. The means to resolve these disputes are limited, as land administration and adjudication mechanisms are not functional in Northern Uganda, especially the land committees and land tribunals.
In many instances, disputes have been referred to elders believed to know the original boundaries. However, in many cases, the surviving elders are afraid of conflict over land, which has sometimes resulted in murder and assault. Traditional institutions involved in mediating land disputes have also not in all cases paid due regard to human rights norms, particularly with respect to age and gender equality. Yet IDPs who have remained in the camps are facing increasing pressure to leave from the owners of the land on which the camps have been situated as well as from government in fulfilment of the camp phase-out policy. The majority of those whose land has been taken over by others lack the resources to buy or rent land.

The PRDP lacks specifics and lays out a vague blueprint for reconstruction in the north, only explaining why such programmes are necessary, without touching on the “whom,” “what” and “how.” Some PRDP strategies are institutional, in terms of the central government’s capacity to coordinate and oversee implementation of the plan. While the objectives provide a broad framework for intervention, the PRDP does not elaborate how implementation should proceed with regard to coordination, appropriate leads in line ministries and how these would work with the OPM. Nor are the actual activities under the priority programming headings identified. Local government capacity to play its role by monitoring and planning for PRDP spending at district level is also wanting. The local administration staffing gap in the Acholi sub-region is 63.2 per cent, while the figures for Lango are 51.1 per cent.119 The PRDP in objective 1 includes a programme for local government enhancement, which, if successful, could go some way to closing this gap. Until objective 1’s effects are realised, local governments are simply not equipped to play their full part in the processes envisaged.

Also the government plan breeds more confusion than hope. Many have questioned whether it is a project, programme or a slogan, a pot of money, or a funding mechanism. It provides a shallow and generalised assessment of problems and the framework for how to move forward and fails to include costs, technical people or tangible projects that would be helpful in alleviating these problems. In short, it repeats the mistakes of previous programmes for the north. Confusion about the PRDP is even more apparent at sub-county and parish levels, where even the leaders of local civil society groups responsible for presenting community concerns to the district government have never heard of the PRDP.120 Coupled with this, no meaningful consultations were conducted prior to the drafting of the PRDP, including sensitive industrialisation and hydroelectric power programmes. Local communities express fear that the PRDP

119. PRDP Document 2007, p. 35.
may be used by government to grab land and co-opt what are interpreted as community assets.\textsuperscript{121}

People in Northern Uganda had expectations and hopes of the PRDP, but no one has seen its fruits in the four years since 2007. As it is now, Northern Ugandans are still wary about the merits of the PRDP and the sincerity of Museveni’s motives. As a result of local confusion, existing mistrust in the GoU in the north is beginning to increase. Whether valid or not, this distrust limits the PRDP’s ability to contribute to peace and development in the Northern region.

However, open multi-stakeholder dialogue at local level on investment/land issues to build consensus on the appropriate path for economic recovery in each district will help sustain PRDP implementation, economic recovery and peace. It is unfortunate that the discussions of PRDP implementation have been at the Kampala level and that district stakeholders only receive “implementation orders.” The process of identifying recurrent and investment needs for public sector service delivery during the planning for PRDP was in many districts not linked to sector- or local government-level targets. Rather, it was an exercise to identify what these levels require to implement their sector or district development plans. For some districts, it was understood as a process to identify what would be required to fill vacant positions, upgrade infrastructure and/or meet local priority needs related to investments decided upon by local governments.

The prioritisation of activities under the PRDP has been undertaken by OPM and its design team, so it does not necessarily reflect the priorities of sector ministries and districts. The PRDP thus reflects a centralised process of development which departs from the current system of planning and management whereby ministries and local governments plan and execute programmes within their own sphere of authority within an overall policy framework, and are not simply reduced to service delivery units. PRDP, while it is called a plan, contains few if any of the targets that would make it an operational plan or framework for implementation.

Channelling funds for the projects has been inadequate, leading to suspension of the plan. It is critical that funds start to be visibly channelled to the north and their impact felt as part of a “peace dividend” and evidence of government commitment to the region. In particular, perceptions that government has failed to spread the benefits of development across the whole country must be reversed. The GoU’s funding commitment to PRDP is below what was initially promised. At the time of its launch, the PRDP budget called for USh 337,476,023,360 to be spent in the fiscal year 2008/09, USh 327,520,420,251 in FY 2009/10 and

\textsuperscript{121} For example, residents in Amuru are protesting the proposed plan to build a Madhvani sugar plantation there (see \textit{Daily Monitor} article “Madhvani’s sugar project in balance” 18 July 2008).
It is clear that the GoU’s commitment has fallen significantly below initial projections. In his budget speech to parliament in June 2008, then Finance Minister Ezra Suruma indicated that government would commit USh 51.68 billion (approximately US$ 32.3 million) for PRDP programmes in 2008/09. The GoU’s reluctance to follow through on its promise to meet its PRDP funding commitments has devastating consequences for perceptions of the motives of the government in coming up with the plan in the first place.

The main strategies for rebuilding communities as laid out in the PRDP are lopsided. PRDP mostly focuses on the technical aspects of rebuilding central and local government institutions, improving service delivery and revitalising the economy. It does not offer comprehensive political solutions to peacebuilding and national reconciliation. These aspects are probably best pursued through implementation of the agreement on comprehensive solutions (Agenda Item 2) drawn up in the Juba talks between GoU and LRA.

The satellite camps and returnee areas pose more and perhaps worse problems for the people who are returning and residing there. Formal IDP camps have been in place for years, so an internal structure has also developed, including security, IDP schools, health clinics and camp governance and leadership, not to mention food aid. Satellite camps, however, have worse conditions, since access to the above facilities and services is limited and sometimes nonexistent. Additionally, objective 2 focuses almost exclusively on material needs such as water, sanitation, agricultural tools and food aid. The sub-section explaining health measures only includes HIV/AIDS services, improving maternal and infant mortality rates, nutrition and sanitation. Indeed, overcrowded living conditions lead to diseases and poor health and in order to address the poverty of a region, health must be improved. As a document that assesses all the needs for recovery in Northern Uganda, however, the PRDP leaves out mental health needs entirely from this section. To empower communities, according to the PRDP, and in order for healing to occur, life must return to normal for people in the region so they can progress economically.

PRDP’s fourth objective talks of the importance of peacebuilding and reconciliation, particularly for development. It also pays attention to psychosocial needs, emphasising trauma and counselling services, but is devoid of specifics. While the PRDP emphasises the value of psychosocial assistance in the recovery processes, it seems to rely on, or recognise the “comparative advantage” of outsiders in civil society organisations and NGOs in providing psychosocial services.124

122. PRDP 2007, p. 9.
124. PRDP 2007, p. 74.
The counselling services offered by a range of NGOs doing psychosocial work in the north impressively focus on the needs of children, but very few programmes address the trauma of adults and women who interact with the children. Adults and the elderly are somewhat neglected by NGOs. This leads to the problem that teachers as counsellors in schools, parents, guardians and the community as a whole may not be able to assist children in dealing with their trauma when very little, if anything, has been done to allow them to heal their own traumas. There is also a need for a gendered perspective on psychosocial counselling, particularly as women suffered immensely during and after the war and in some cases have been ostracised after returning to their villages from the “bush” with the offspring of often forced sexual liaisons with LRA rebels. The government must allocate money for special counsellors through government policies, as addressed in the GoU’s recovery plan for Northern Uganda, rather than rely on NGOs.

It is true that the majority of people in Northern Uganda live in absolute poverty, so when counsellors come to their homes, they expect material support, not just counselling services. This brings into focus the dilemma of material needs versus emotional needs – which should be met first? In Northern Uganda, the process of healing is advanced in the absence of the looming burden of poverty, so one would assume that material needs must be met first. However, for Northern Uganda to attain the level of economic development of the rest of the country, deeper healing should take place to deal with the deep-seated feeling of victimisation, marginalisation and isolation deriving from the actions of government and the effects of war. Unless trauma and the emotional wounds of war are addressed, empowering communities and achieving psychological and economic recovery will be difficult. Although psychosocial help may not bring an immediate end of the war or achieve immediate economic recovery in the region, it will work on the roots of violence and aggression and, therefore, contribute to building peace.

Stereotyping the Northern population as victims and blaming them for the war and their suffering aggravates the already existing sense of exclusion. One of the most frustrating barriers to peace, healing and recovery in Northern Uganda is the lack of responsibility at the governmental level. Much time and effort is spent on analysing victims in various situations, and rightly so if the efforts genuinely seek to facilitate healing. Very little attention, however, is paid to the perpetrators. To understand the perpetrator is to understand the violation, which would in turn address the core problem by allowing for two things: preventive measures against future violations and developing approaches to facilitate deeper healing by targeting the causes, not just the effects, of social suffering.

Real and perceived feelings in the north that the PRDP is aimed at exploiting the people’s resources and not at recovery and peace can become a major
problem if they are not carefully addressed. As the population moves from dependency on relief and aid towards independent living, it will have to contend with continued low levels of production directly linked to land conflict and the lack of farming equipment and infrastructure to support production and marketing. At the same time, the loss of livestock has the potential to fuel further conflict as a result of shrinking household income options.

Linked to the resource issues are those related to large-scale investment in Northern Uganda. These have generated some controversy, particularly the Madhvani Group’s proposed sugar production factory in Amuru.\(^{125}\) Anecdotal evidence suggests further investment plans, such as a Danish meat-processing firm interested in investing in Gulu once peace is secure; a Kenyan firm interested in investing in maize growing in Apac; and a South African delegation of investors interested in goat-rearing and citrus production in Lira. There is also the potential for new investors from India, China, Arab states and elsewhere in Africa coming in search of opportunities in the region.\(^{126}\) In its quest to attract investment and capital to the region, the capacity of government to ensure that proposals meet the demands of peaceful recovery becomes urgent. There is also a pressing need to strengthen the platform for dialogue on investment and economic recovery in order to build the necessary consensus and address existing concerns. Investors need to be aware of the issues to ensure that their businesses in Northern Uganda are mutually beneficial and do not unwittingly exacerbate tensions.

In addition, investors need to maximise their contributions to peace, open up opportunities for domestic business that is local to the north – through contracts for reconstruction projects as part of the PRDP effort. There is an evident lack of capital for investment among those who have lived through the conflict in the north, which gives external investors the advantage. Depending on whom the investors are, resentment and tensions may flare up. Deliberately partnering with Northern businesses as part of economic recovery will have economic spin-off benefits and help narrow the north-south economic divide.

There are rumours in Uganda that Museveni is considering making a northerner his vice president.\(^{127}\) Such a move may be intended to bolster Museveni’s

\(^{125}\) See “Kakira Sugar to set up factory in Amuru”, New Vision, 18 July 2007. The equity is planned to be $30 million and the loan component to be sought from financial institutions $50 million. Of the equity, 60 per cent ($18 million) will be held by the Madhvani Group, while the balance ($12 million) will be held by the government. See revised Madhvani proposal as presented to the Ker Kwaro Acholi Committee; Healing Wounds of War: Proposed Amuru Sugar Complex. A film from The Madhvani Group, 2007; “Amuru residents reject Madhvani Sugar project”, Daily Monitor, 21 July 2008; “Museveni to meet Acholi leaders over Amuru land”, Daily Monitor, 9 July 2008.


image and improve his chances of winning the support of the Northern region through policies that promote investments there. Northern Uganda, with its oilfields, untouched fertile farmland and proximity to South Sudan, Uganda’s leading trading partner, offers significant potential returns on investments in a post-conflict phase. It is also difficult to predict whether investments will benefit the people or merely result in the exploitation of their resources. However, it should be noted that they would mark a change in Museveni’s policies for Northern Uganda and contribute to strengthening the PRDP.

The combination of past experience and present reality in Northern Uganda has produced a people who have little trust and even less faith in its government. This is particularly true in the part of Northern Uganda the PRDP refers to as “north central”128 where, in the name of “protection,” government systematically violated, debilitated and humiliated its own citizens over the last two decades by collecting them in IDP camps. It could also be argued that without accelerated development in the north and efforts to narrow the gap between northern and southern districts, Uganda will not be in a position to reach its overall PEAP target of becoming a Lower Middle Income Country by 2017.

Rebuilding a post-conflict Northern Uganda requires approaches that are both strategic and cognisant of political realities on the ground. As noted earlier, these realities are perhaps deliberately not being recognised in the planning and drafting of the PRDP document. As stated above, the PRDP was born out of one of the four core challenges facing Uganda in becoming a middle-income country by 2017 and lacks the specifics that would make it more conflict-sensitive in approach. The plan to rebuild the north focuses mostly on “hardware”129 and on bridging the longstanding north-south divide130 at the expense of developing human capacity in the education, healthcare, local government and security and justice sectors. Given these deficiencies, PRDP, while conceived as a “master plan” for recovery, development and peacebuilding in Northern Uganda, may not be able to serve as a comprehensive plan for implementing recovery and development and building sustainable peace in Northern Uganda. Given this, the PRDP should be considered as a policy framework to guide the regular planning and annual budgeting process and not be applied uncritically as a “master plan” for the development of Northern Uganda. As a policy framework to promote PRDP objectives with additional resources for Northern Uganda it qualifies for support, provided that clear political leadership is shown, especially based on a final agreement between MoFPED and OPM on what PRDP is and how PRDP priorities are to be implemented through the regular planning and budg-

130. See Museveni’s foreword to the PRDP Document.
Recovery and Development Politics

The government also failed to recognise shortcomings in previous efforts to ensure they were not repeated in the PRDP. As a result, the PRDP may be a continuation of “politics as usual” rather than a positive action for Northern Uganda. Without a significant shift in commitment and attitudes among all actors, the PRDP will likely follow the path of previous recovery efforts like NURP-I and NUSAF. Failure to restructure and implement the PRDP as the military option is being pursued against the LRA leaves Northern Ugandans vulnerable to renewed political violence and suggests that the GoU may not be sincerely addressing the political, social and economic divisions in Uganda.

Reconstruction, recovery and peacebuilding in Northern Uganda – some suggestions

The recent transition to peace in Northern Uganda has been accompanied by an augmentation of peacebuilding and recovery efforts conducted by a variety of state and non-state actors. The actors should bear in mind that what happened in Northern Uganda had a psychological element to it. The crisis or trauma associated with intense relative deprivation was tantamount to severe repression, which escalated into rebellion against government authority. The consequence of the rebellion was blatant disregard for communal values such that actors – LRA rebels and UPDF soldiers – took violent action against a people they believed to be “enemies.”

As noted earlier, the psychological and material stress that the continued lack of resolution of the conflict imposes on northern Ugandans leaves policy-makers with a serious dilemma. There are already delays in administering the shift from humanitarian relief to recovery, although government and its partners have thrown their weight behind the anticipated peace. Planning processes have been laid to build on the gains made during the lull in violence and important groundwork is being done in resettling returnees and turning to a new chapter

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133. See Ibid.
of development assistance. The planning processes do, however, require a “suspension of disbelief”, in that the foundations for economic recovery are being laid in the absence of certainty about the onset of peace. While some agencies are dealing with this by planning for different possible scenarios, all stakeholders should not take account of this reality. The task of peacebuilding and recovery should be to eliminate the mindset that compelled people to distrust and question their sociopolitical and psychological environment. Consequently, emphasis should be on combating structural sources of insecurity – harmful actions linked to the cognition of the society at large, which may mean engaging in resocialisation to strengthen commonly held ideas and understandings of political and social life.

Bearing in mind the causes as well as legacies of the conflict outlined above and the wider context of a fragile, possibly failing peace process, the peacebuilding efforts and recovery plans for Northern Uganda of GoU and its partners should display greater sensitivity to ongoing conflict dynamics and seek to avoid “doing harm.” An important concern in the region is the possibility of reversion to crisis, simply because it makes economic sense. As the region moves towards peace, its economy requires reconstruction. The recovery plan for Northern Uganda certainly needs to be designed to prevent recurrence of war. The process of transition to a commonly accepted “peace” is as important as the end of hostilities. Reconstruction planned for the north should aim for more than a return to pre-conflict economic, political and social life.

Conflict-sensitivity requires that government and its partners to:

• Understand the context in which it operates – especially conflict dynamics
• Understand the interaction between an intervention and the context, and
• Act on the understanding of this interaction to avoid negative and maximise positive impacts.

134. See Oxfam Briefing Paper, op.cit. 129. Also National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons, August, 2004 – designed primarily to address the needs of those displaced by the conflict. The policy’s objectives are to minimise internal displacement and its effects by providing an enabling environment for upholding rights and entitlements of the internally displaced; to promote integrated and coordinated response mechanisms to address the causes and effects of internal displacement; to assist in the safe and voluntary return of the internally displaced; and to guide the development of sectoral programmes for recovery through rehabilitation and reconstruction of social and economic infrastructure in support of the return and resettlement of IDPs (p.1); Emergency Plan for Humanitarian Interventions for the North, May 2006 – with the purpose to enhance protection of the civilian population, increase humanitarian assistance to the internally displaced and promote peacebuilding and reconciliation.

135. Oxfam Briefing Paper, op.cit. 129.


At a minimum, conflict-sensitivity seeks to reduce harm. At a maximum, it actively seeks to address the causes and drivers of violence while identifying and supporting opportunities for peace.\textsuperscript{138}

The current peacebuilding and recovery efforts for Northern Uganda are largely characterised by a language of power, exclusion or defence of an international order that does not adequately address issues of emancipation and inappropriate impositions. In this case of reconstruction, it is the integrity of the state that is given security. Insecurity in the north therefore becomes synonymous with an attack on the integrity of the state. As a result of this one-dimensional, state-centric view of security, Uganda may not be able to fully resolve the civil strife it has been confronted with for years as well as unable to resolve its own difficulties. Besides, the peacebuilding efforts in the north so far undermine the emphasis on human security because the people are viewed as the “means” to political stability as opposed to being the “end”\textsuperscript{139} of all peacebuilding efforts and hence as the means to a stable state.

Harris (1999) presents a useful summary of the four phases of recovery and reconstruction. The first is ending the fighting, which may seem straightforward, but is not necessarily so. Fighting continued even as a peace agreement was being drawn up, so it takes time to end fighting and to put the agreement into practice. The second is rehabilitation and restoration, which includes the removal of limitations on civil activity, re-establishing civil law and civil institutions, disarming ex-combatants, de-mining roads and returning displaced persons. Then reconstruction follows, which involves gaining financial resources for reconstruction, replacing and repairing capital and infrastructure, demobilisation and resettlement, rehabilitating victims of war, introducing or reintroducing democracy, developing and restructuring civil institutions consistent with the post-conflict environment and beginning reconciliation. The final phase is development and transformation, which will involve adopting and implementing a new vision for society, undertaking structural changes, establishing new institutions and continuing reconciliation.\textsuperscript{140} Each stage presents different challenges and has different implications for the actors that move in to support reconstruction in the region emerging from conflict.

Building sustainable peace occurs when the true nature of things such as class, cultures, identity, gender and ethnic equality are well understood. A great deal of peacebuilding effort in Uganda deals with issues of peace and security within a positivist-rational epistemology. Culture and identity, ideas, knowledge

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} Earl Conteh-Morgan, op. cit. 133, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{140} Harris Geoff (ed.), \textit{Recovery from armed conflict in developing countries: An economic and political analysis}. Routledge 1999.
and structures within an interpretive “bottom-up” approach to peacebuilding are crucial for understanding the perception of peace and security of marginalised individuals, groups and communities.

There is no doubt that understanding the conflict in Northern Uganda requires an appreciation of its social environment – an environment branded by injustice, inequality and oppression. According to Finnemore and Sikkink, understanding implies a profound and complex appreciation of the phenomenon. In order to understand group rebellion, one must get a sense of the rebels’ worldview, their motivation within a normative-material social structure. Similarly, in order to achieve sustained peace, human security and recovery in Northern Uganda following a brutal civil war, the GoU and its partners must delve into the normative, ideational and intersubjective beliefs that shaped the interests and actions of the actors during the civil war. In the arena of peacebuilding and recovery in Northern Uganda, analysis has to determine whether these efforts related to strengthening state authority, demobilisation, reintegration, reconciliation and overall postwar construction will perpetuate or change these ideational structures of domination to the point of ensuring individual, group and societal security.

To ensure that peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts involve understanding of and elimination of human insecurity located at the structural, institutional and personal levels of Ugandan society, there must be an attempt to understand violence and insecurity in terms of those who experience them. The GoU should take time to appreciate what motivates the dissatisfied to agitate, and seriously take into account their beliefs as marginalised people, instead of merely imposing a plan on them. Peacebuilding and reconstruction plans in Northern Uganda aiming to alleviate human insecurity should involve transforming the social and political environment in Uganda that fosters intolerable inequality and engenders historical grievances. This possibly means the development of social, political and economic infrastructures that produce tolerable equality and prevent future violence. The GoU should focus on dismantling structures that contribute to conflict, and move beyond the short-term tasks of maintaining a ceasefire, achieving demobilisation and disarmament and implementing shambolic projects.

Economic reconstruction in Northern Uganda is vital and has been started

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before the conflict has fully ended.\textsuperscript{143} An improving economy may make it easier to move through all the stages of peacebuilding laid out by Harris. An important issue all actors should address is balancing demands for greater economic growth with those for greater social justice and human welfare. More often than not, policies to reconstruct a region emerging from conflict are externally imposed by the World Bank and the IMF, which are the biggest financiers of such projects.\textsuperscript{144} Although their attitudes and policies have changed in recent years,\textsuperscript{145} these institutions tend to target economic growth and oppose policies concerned with social justice and redistribution. This problem is partly reflected in past failures of projects like NURP-I and NUSAF in Northern Uganda, since the policies leading up to these projects were the result of rigid adherence to structural adjustment.\textsuperscript{146} The fact that conflict has occurred means that a series of changes are needed to deal with grievances and to underpin sustainable peace. To ignore these and to impose generic policies for economic growth that may entail high short-term costs may simply reignite hostilities. Often, externally imposed policies have tried to develop the formal sector at the cost of the informal, which can cause considerable problems. Duffield argues that there is often a failure to recognise the importance of the informal sector, both during and after conflict,\textsuperscript{147} as is the case in Northern Uganda.

Colleta, Cullen and Forman concluded that the international system has consistently failed to reconstruct the “social fabric” of war-torn societies.\textsuperscript{148} In the case of Uganda, strictly following policies imposed by the World Bank has led to mistakes and the neglect of cultural integrity and identity, interethnic dialogue, social empowerment and collective reconciliatory mechanisms and intentionality as necessary conditions for attaining sustainable peace and security. This neglect arises from the assumption that politico-economic reconstruction that strengthens the state and introduces market economies automatically fosters long-term sustainable peace.

To a large extent, people’s perceptions have a great influence on their behaviour.\textsuperscript{149} In Northern Uganda, efforts towards political reintegration and social

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{143} NURP I and NUSAF projects implemented between 1992 to 2007.
  \item \textsuperscript{144} In Uganda, the NURP-I and NUSAF projects in Northern Uganda were financed by the World Bank.
  \item \textsuperscript{147} Mark Duffield, \textit{Global governance and the new wars}. Zed Books, 2001.
  \item \textsuperscript{149} See William Eckhardt, “Making and Breaking Negative Images”, \textit{Bulletin of Peace Proposals}, No 1, 1999, pp. 87–95.
\end{itemize}
rehabilitation could be hampered by strong feelings of hatred, distrust and fear among the people. For instance, it is easy to see in Northern Uganda today the high level of contempt for people in uniform, especially soldiers, because of their failure to protect civilians during the war and perceived participation in atrocities against civilians. There is still great distrust among ordinary people of police, soldiers, ex-civil defence force members (local defence units) and government officials. Because of the high levels of social distance in this society, a key objective for GoU in peacebuilding and recovery is fostering a dimension of peace and security that nurtures a culture based on tolerance, cooperation and empathy. There should be a deliberate effort to deconstruct the negative images of the “other” that prevailed during the years of conflict.

It is also noteworthy that the Acholi community by their very nature tend to be communal, collective and more likely to foster peaceful coexistence. Therefore, the application of their traditional customs and values in reconciliation efforts may result in greater communal grassroots involvement and contribute substantially to the eradication of the root causes of the conflict and to holistic reconciliation. In this context, Acholi culture should not be disregarded by government and its partners in favour of formal justice systems. It should rather be viewed as the primary agent of change, in that it is by nature inter-subjective and has real constitutive force. Josiah Osamba in his analysis of violence, warfare, insecurity and reconciliation among pastoral groups in Eastern Africa underscored the effectiveness of indigenous communal methods of peacebuilding. He maintains that the use of security forces and other extra-judicial methods of maintaining peace have failed. What is more likely to be effective is the adoption of norms and values based on indigenous cultures. According to Osamba, the current climate of repeated violence in the borderlands of Eastern Africa is due to “the marginalization of the African indigenous practices of conflict principles and norms.”

Among the Acholi in particular, culture is hegemonic and constitutes the foundation of reconciliation efforts following violence and warfare. Cultural values are of primary importance to most members of the community and they are more inclined to use rituals that foster collective “healing” than the methods that emphasise confrontation and power bargaining which have dominated peacebuilding activities in Uganda. In Acholi culture, conflicts are viewed as a communal concern/responsibility. Their peacebuilding approach is based on the view that since war involves most of the grassroots people as either active participants or victims, it only makes sense to involve this large segment of society in the process of peacebuilding. A communal approach to peacebuilding,

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therefore, translates into building peace from below and symbols and rituals are key in an effective and permanent peace and reconciliation process.

Fortes and Evans-Pritchard argue that a communal approach to peacebuilding is based on the premise that sustained peace and order in society results from the moral authority exerted by the communal group over its members. Communal peacebuilding takes the form of elders playing an important part in defusing tensions and conflicts. The wisdom and experience of the elders is manifested in clear and well-articulated procedures for conflict resolution in which all the parties are given the chance to express their views. The elders are vested with cultural authority to act as arbiters and even give judgement on the rights and wrongs and then suggest a settlement, although they may have no power of physical coercion or enforcement, but often the pressures of culture guarantee obedience.

The reconciliation process in a traditional post-conflict setting should be viewed as an opportunity to reaffirm and re-establish relationships not just between former protagonists but between all the people. Consensus is a key objective in negotiations and reconciliation becomes the major preoccupation for restoring broken relationships and strengthening the social healing. William Ury (1999) underscored this process when he wrote: “Emotional wounds and injured relationships are healed within the context of the emotional unity of the community. Opposed interests are resolved within the context of the community interest in peace. Quarrels over rights are sorted out within the context of overall community power.”

This does not mean that traditional methods of peacebuilding are without challenges. The rapid pace of globalisation and Westernisation is seriously eroding the respect of the youth for the elders and the traditional hierarchy of authority necessary for maintaining the hegemony of indigenous approaches to peacebuilding. Additionally, Acholi communities are in a state of transition as a result of the war. The consequences are that the communities are experiencing a serious challenge in their societal structure, security, survival as well as traditional moral foundations, which latter disintegrated in the course of a bloody warfare that evidenced little or no regard for women, children, or the elderly, so that most elders also perished in the war.

In sum, a quick solution regarding rehabilitation, reintegration, reconciliation and democracy enhancement is for policy-makers to turn to indigenous sources for sanctioning authority, power and legitimacy. Another alternative could be for the Acholi communities to find an appropriate and effective blend

of traditional institutional norms and external institutions that would guarantee stable and effective leadership while at the same time enhancing democratic norms within the context of the variable economy. Policy-makers could fail because of a discrepancy between the policies of the government and the values adhered to by the society in the north. Moreover, the diffusionist effects of external cultural and other influences tend to encourage the growth of formal practices and the gradual shift towards participatory democracy. The result is the exposure of the government to new forms of competition for which it is not prepared. Groups that are on the political periphery may begin clamouring for more prominence in the struggle for political control. The usual intransigence of the political establishment, coupled with the underdeveloped post-conflict political institutions, could result in a new political conflict.

A context-sensitive perspective on recovery and sustainable peace should be based on the lived experiences, activities and perspectives of the northern Ugandans and of specific groups, such as the marginalised, women, unemployed youth or ordinary folk. Their views and opinions should be central to the agenda of reintegration, rehabilitation, democracy-building and inter-ethnic reconciliation. A post-conflict reconstruction effort that emphasises peace and security at the sub-national level and deliberately cultivates mutuality, caring, empathy and compassion among intersecting identities is more desirable than the mere attainment of a “strong” national security state. In her critique of the role of women in conflict resolution, Louise Vincent notes that: “So rather than the goal of a good politics being the creation of a neutral state which presides over perpetual conflict, the aim is unashamedly to give a particular content and meaning to the good life that is being proposed, unashamedly to avow a politics of mutual compassion rather than narrow self-interest.”

Peace-building will benefit from a conflict-sensitive focus that is predicated on the argument that in order for recovery and development plans to enhance sustainable peace and security they need to make the views, activities and experiences of “real people” a bedrock of deliberations and overall efforts. Along these lines, it is noted that the dominant discourse in the move towards sustainable peace in Northern Uganda has consistently downplayed or ignored the experiences of the local population. Yet building sustainable peace is dependent on the conceptions local people and the powerful bring to the public experience. All of them together construct the collective meaning of the recovery efforts they are confident will enhance peace and security at the personal, group, communal or national levels.

Effective international assistance from the UN or other external actors in

providing appropriate recovery activities should involve understanding the cognitive structures of those who have experienced war-related violence and trauma. Reality cannot be imposed from outside or by the powerful and it does not exist prior to its social (collective) invention. Communication and interaction can result in socially agreed governance related to economic, political, cultural, educational, or military matters, among others.

In principle, economic recovery efforts should lead to a “Peace Dividend.” Certainly, the end of the war should provide opportunities for the government to reallocate spending from the military to civil areas, although this may be gradual because the conflict in the north has not fully ended and continued military action may be required to defend the peace. Moreover, demobilising ex-combatants can be problematic and take time and money.

Judging from the challenges peacebuilding and recovery efforts face in post-conflict societies in other parts of the world, the traditional conceptions of peacebuilding and recovery that have dominated the plan for Northern Uganda need to be reconsidered and complemented if a self-sustaining peace is to become a reality. There is a need for new concepts and practices that advance the ideals of a positive peace. Sustainable peace means not just the cessation of hostilities, but the strengthening and reassertion of normative structures that enable individuals in the postwar region to share common identities, understandings and expectations with other Ugandans, thereby enhancing a social order that eliminates feelings of marginalisation, exploitation and existential insecurity. The GoU needs to move beyond traditional conceptions of peacebuilding and recovery that merely promote negative peace by emphasising state security and state-building mechanisms.

Lessons from the recovery plans in Northern Uganda

Although the GoU adopted two approaches to ending the long conflict in Northern Uganda, both seem to be failing and both need considerable improvement if sustainable peace is to be achieved. Absent these improvements, the approach risks making matters worse. It is urgent that the improvements be made as soon as possible, before exogenous factors such as Sudan’s referendum and the election cycle in Uganda, both scheduled for 2011, ratchet up pressures, making the endemic issues in the north much more difficult to manage.

In the event of any future military action, the government needs to do a better job of protecting civilians and providing for displaced people. The failure

of the military to anticipate and manage the effects of the war and violence has reduced trust in the military approach and it will be more difficult to get the support of the population should additional action be necessary.

Additionally, the government needs to do a much better job of consulting with conflict-affected communities on its plans to improve development in the North. This will ease implementation and reduce the prevailing belief among the population that slow implementation indicates a lack of political will within government to make meaningful progress towards peace in the region and facilitate positive advancement in education, public health and general livelihoods.

A political economy perspective on conflict in Northern Uganda highlights the intricate links between the region’s economy, its conflict and the prospects for peace. Such focus provides a clear rationale for policy-makers and implementers within government and its development partners to adopt more conflict-sensitive approaches to early economic recovery in the region. Careful planning for and implementation of early recovery, grounded in an appreciation of macro- and micro-level conflict dynamics, can enable the emergence of sustainable peace in this region after years of war.

Several priorities for laying the foundations of peace in the region have been identified: facilitating peaceful return of IDPs and mitigating land conflicts; providing livelihood support; strengthening financial services; offering opportunities for youth; rebuilding infrastructure; enhancing agricultural productivity; promoting conflict-sensitive investments; and strengthening Northern Uganda as a regional trading hub. There is also a need to address the significant institutional and political obstacles to effective implementation of government and donor initiatives. While these are good, much more needs to be done to prioritise, scale-up and improve coordination of interventions across the peace framework.

At the same time, conflict risks are present in each area and throughout the entire recovery venture. These risks include the perpetuation of patterns of exclusion if southern or politically connected individuals in the north maintain a monopoly on opportunities, for example in agri-business growth and in contracts for rebuilding infrastructure. Suspicion and mistrust of the government will be compounded if a peace dividend is not delivered to the northern population. The same could occur at the micro-level if beneficiary selection for various interventions continues to be conflict-blind and feeds the local tensions that are the inevitable result of years of displacement and rupture. The following could guide the making of policy for a conflict-sensitive recovery plan and build sustainable peace in Northern Uganda:

155. See the Strategic objectives of the PRDP, PRDP Document, pp. 32–34.
Gaining and maintaining peace needs to be at the heart of all recovery efforts. Sustainable peacebuilding needs to be integral to the multiple components of recovery and be well-resourced. Failure to mainstream a peacebuilding approach could lead to programming in other areas that exacerbates political divisions and conflict dynamics. This is even more important in the case of Northern Uganda, where an actual peace agreement has not been signed.

Context-specific analysis of development and recovery gaps is required. Several of the gaps identified in the PRDP, such as the delay in funding between short and longer-term development efforts, the lack of clarity as to which agency should lead coordination efforts for early recovery, and capital-centric planning that does not adequately include or reflect the concerns of precisely those populations and regions affected by conflict, pose a threat to peace if not reviewed.

The GoU and its partners should realise that conflict-sensitivity is not a nominal tick-box exercise, but should pervade all levels of planning and implementation. The current situation in Northern Uganda illustrates how persistent and dynamic conflict factors are, both at community and national levels. In particular, the economic legacies of the war are a test of strength for the government and its partners and highlight the centrality of understanding economic programmes and interventions through a conflict-sensitivity lens.

More funding may be needed to implement the PRDP, but such increased funding needs to be spent in a way that does not fuel conflict. Efforts to persuade international donors to release more funding more quickly and more flexibly are welcome. However, in the Ugandan context creating a “honey-pot effect,” with increased recovery funding becoming available to elites, will likely further marginalise and exclude Northern Ugandans from the future benefits of peace.

International good practices on recovery and peacebuilding are urgently needed on the ground to guide the GoU and its partners. The current push to consolidate and systematise international knowledge and practice on early recovery is important. It is also important to ensure that these debates and analyses are not limited to development agencies and governmental institutions, but trickle down to local communities and are informed by dilemmas and challenges confronted on the ground.

Conclusion: What Works in Northern Uganda?
The question of what works in recovery and sustainable peace in Northern Uganda is not easy to answer. Rather, it opens the door to another set of questions. Fundamental to these is an even deeper question: who decides what works? Is it the people, the government, NGOs and the international community?
In the north, programmes implemented to address peace, economic issues, trauma and social suffering must be internalised first. Whether they are based on Acholi custom or Western norms, they must be adopted within the community, not imposed from outside. Restoring humanity in Acholiland by erasing ethnic stereotypes, encouraging localised development and creating change, beginning at the structural level of government, will mark the beginning of the healing and recovery process.

Fixing the problems associated with the legacy of violence, poverty and inequality at the structural level must be the top priority, rather than trying to alleviate the side-effects of such, whether these are emotional or physical. In the meantime, an approach to healing that simultaneously addresses material and emotional needs must be in place. The strategy that will underpin structural transformation deserves further research.

The government needs to correctly interpret the needs of the people whom they claim to represent to avoid dehumanising them or making matters worse. The government and its partners need to recognise that the reduction of poverty and human suffering are not just a technical project, but encompass a holistic socioeconomic, political and cultural process of transformation. They need to understand how and why people suffer as a result of institutional neglect, war, marginalisation and isolation. As articulated in the PRDP, the government’s understanding of suffering in the northern region is largely defined in terms of cold statistics and what is materially lacking. Little attention is paid to the personal accounts, observations, stories and emotions of the people of Northern Uganda that underpin the suffering in the region. The government needs to address these challenges in a holistic and equitable manner. There is a need to integrate experiences in Northern Uganda into the wider discussion of social suffering by analysing marginalisation and the disruption of culture due to war, coupled with the rehabilitation and post-conflict reconstruction programmes implemented to alleviate these problems. Psychological healing for many people in Northern Uganda needs to be a peace dividend and is absent from the PRDP.

Given the political economy of conflict in Northern Uganda and the current economic situation, all stakeholders recognise that economic recovery is of paramount importance in moving the region away from conflict and must be at the centre of peacebuilding efforts. Indeed, the text of the agreement on comprehensive solutions signed as part of the Juba process hints at a framework through which to address some of the structural causes of the conflict, including imbalances in the overall socioeconomic and infrastructural development of Uganda. Rebuilding the Northern Uganda economy requires strategic programmatic interventions, taking into account both the political economy of the conflict and the failure of previous processes to deliver “peace dividends” that address structural political and economic imbalances and contribute meaningfully to peace.
The war in Northern Uganda began as something surreal and now is something written about or made into movies – the war started like a dream and is ending like a story. For Northern Uganda, the war was and is something real. Whether there is a happy ending to this story is still to be determined. Over 20 years of war has hurt Northern Uganda politically, economically, physically and emotionally. Healing the deep wounds will take just as long, if not, longer. “Hope” is a term frequently used in the north. Whether meant in spiritual terms or not, hope is embedded in northerners’ anguish. Building a peace economy in Northern Uganda is an uncertain proposition that can only be sustained by hope and commitment to change.

Recommendations

To the Government of Uganda

The GoU should be commended for its attempts to address the underlying conditions of conflict in the northern part of the country. However, in addition to what is discussed above, the government needs to do more.

• With respect to the PRDP, if a suspension and re-evaluation is necessary to make it more successful, the government needs to communicate effectively at the grassroots level. The most important step that government can take at this time in its re-evaluation is direct engagement with the affected communities so that their input is sought and applied in the revision of the programmes.

• The GoU must pay attention to the weaknesses of the PRDP from a peace and conflict perspective during the re-evaluation. The PRDP needs to be promoted more widely as a policy framework among all stakeholders and with a stronger focus on conflict sensitivity. Key immediate actions by GoU in this regard are promoting transparency and compliance with regulations; developing comprehensive communication strategies to enhance the understanding of the PRDP; clearly communicating on what basis resource allocations are made; ensuring revision of sector plans to improve service delivery on the ground; as well as implementing the provisions in the Juba agreements relating to national reconciliation.

• With respect to the threat of LRA rebels returning to the north, government needs to secure the borders and improve the quality and level of policing across the north so that rebel bands, whether LRA or bandits loosely affiliated with the LRA, cannot terrorise Northern Ugandan communities. Government should re-engage diplomatically with Khartoum so that it does not re-ally with LRA for its own purposes. It is imperative that government does its utmost to stop the cycle of fear and violence.
• The endemic mistrust and feelings of marginalisation in the north need to be addressed in a way that is perceived to be in good faith by the government, so as to improve legitimacy and reduce factionalisation and grievances. If the GoU does not improve its approaches/policies in this respect, it runs the risk of inadvertently making matters worse. Civilian protection should be a priority over the annihilation of the LRA. So also is the need to shift focus from military confrontation to building a secure environment in which the human rights of civilians are respected. The GoU needs to work with the governments of the affected areas to ensure that they enhance community security.

• The signed agreements from the Juba process need to be honoured by the GoU through implementation of the negotiated comprehensive solution. An assessment of achievements and failures of the Juba process will help in advancing the peace process.

• In terms of reconciliation and reintegration, government needs to establish within the northern communities mechanisms to receive those who have been with the LRA and reunite them with their families. This includes safe accommodation for returnees, preparing families before reintegration and reliable follow-up procedures that go beyond leaving this vital aspect of peacebuilding and recovery to NGOs.

To the Regional Organisations and the UN
• The UN, African Union, Inter-governmental Authority on Development and the East Africa Community should urge the GoU to fulfil its responsibility to protect all its civilians by adopting a more appropriate security strategy, focusing on protection rather than confrontation. They should express the firm conviction that failure by GoU to provide adequate protection for civilians will invite further decisive action by the international community.

To the International community and development partners
• Development partners and the international community should continue to promote tools for conflict analysis, conflict-sensitive programming, human rights, gender and participatory approaches among all government sectors. A new approach to conflict-resolution is urgently needed to avoid a prolonged low-level military campaign that causes extreme insecurity for civilians and fails to end the LRA terror.
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