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# **Northern Uganda: Local Actors Preparing for Peace**

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# Preface

This is a work-in-progress report from the research project “*The decentralisation dimension of conflict and peace: Northern Uganda in a comparative perspective*”. The project is sponsored by the Section for Peace and Reconciliation in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Einar Braathen, a political scientist and senior researcher at the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR), is project leader. Agnes Ojera, an Acholi-speaking postgraduate from Makerere University and with extensive work experience from Northern Uganda, is a research assistant in the project.

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A forthcoming main report from the project will examine the current peace agreements, post-conflict reconstruction plans and local governance system in more depth than what is done in this study. The aim of the working paper presented here is to know the viewpoints of local actors and the space for local institutions in Northern Uganda in the current peace process. It will hopefully pave the way, at the next stage, for an analysis of the dynamics of various post-war decentralization options, ranging from federalism and regional autonomy to deepened municipalism.

Oslo, December 2008

Marit Haug  
Research Director

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## Acronyms

ARLPI	Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative
CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSOPNU	Civil Society Organization for Peace in Northern Uganda
ICC	International Criminal Court
DPRT	District Reconciliation & Peace Team
GoU	Government of Uganda
DP	Democratic Party
FDC	Forum for Democratic Change
HUR�PEC	Human Rights and Peace Centre
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
LC	Local Council
LGA	Local Government Act
LGAs	Local Government Authorities
LRA/M	Lord's Resistance Army / Movement
NAADS	National Agricultural Advisory Services
NGO	Non Government Organization
NRA/M	National Resistance Army/ Movement
NUSAF	Northern Uganda Social Action Fund
PMC	PRDP Monitoring Committee
PRDP	Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) for Northern Uganda
RDC	Resident District Commissioner
SDU	Self-Defence Unit
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UPC	Uganda People's Congress
UPDF	Uganda People's Defense Forces
WB	World Bank

# Summary

*Einar Braathen and Agnes Ojera*

**Northern Uganda: Local actors preparing for peace**

NIBR Working Paper 2008:117

The paper provides a work-in-progress report from the research project “*The decentralisation dimension of conflict and peace: Northern Uganda in a comparative perspective*”. A twenty year old civil war was replaced by a more peaceful track when a cease fire agreement between the Lord’s Resistance Army and the Ugandan government was signed in August 2006. The paper suggests some key social and political factors producing this event. It then illuminates the role of local actors and institutions in the peace process in Northern Uganda. In particular it presents the viewpoints of key actors in the political life, public administration and civil society in the Acholi Region regarding the main challenges ahead: Reconciliation, resettlement and restructuring of political power.

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# 1 Introduction

On January 2, 1986, the National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A), headed by Yoweri Museveni, came to power by military means. Bringing peace, reconciliation and human rights to this civil war-stricken and violated country was the main promise, and the main source of legitimacy, of the NRM/A. However, its rule was contested from day one. Since 1986 the epicentre of contestation has been Northern Uganda, with Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) providing the most persistent armed opposition to President Museveni's territorial control of the country. The more than two decades of war and frustrated peace initiatives in Northern Uganda will be depicted in Section Two.

On August 26, 2006, a landmark cease fire agreement was signed between the Government and LRA. Two years on, a final peace agreement is yet to be signed. However, there has been an effective cessation of hostilities, and internationally mediated peace talks have been held in Juba in Southern Sudan, where a number of documents have been agreed upon.

Hence, Northern Uganda has been in the middle of a '*peacemaking*' process, defined as the immediate process from negotiations for ceasefire to the implementation of a peace agreement. At the same time, local actors have for a long time been active in '*peacebuilding*', understood as the long term process of institutionalizing conflict management and eliminating the causes of conflict. The role of local actors in this double-layered peace process is outlined in Section Three.

It is a common view that effective peacebuilding requires the mobilization and strengthening of local institutions. In Northern Uganda we see in particular three local institutional challenges: (i) Normative-emotional challenges of justice & reconciliation; (ii) gendered challenges of social resettlement & reconstruction; and (iii) political challenges of local & regional institution building. These topics are addressed in Section Four.

The paper concludes that the main challenges are political and linked to qualities of local government and to central-local relations. Hence, some key dimensions of decentralization under the Museveni regime are briefly introduced in the Section Two ('Background').

## Methodology

Although repeatedly using the notion Northern Uganda, the paper empirically mainly refers to the Acholi Region.

The Acholi Region is made up of four districts, Gulu, Kitgum, Pader and Amuru. The paper is based on field work in May 2008 in the Gulu District. This field site was selected due to the fact that Gulu is the centre of the Acholi Region, where the main war actions have taken place. However, the Gulu district has allegedly the best functioning government structure in the region. Additional field work in a more recently established district council like Amuru, may give a more nuanced and comprehensive picture of local actors and institutions.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of the field work was to get an overview, and to take down the viewpoints, of key local actors in the political life, public administration and civil society. That means that many of the claims of roles played, initiatives taken and results obtained are biased. Still, they depict well how they regard different situations and what they would like to see done.

The 'civil society' we found is mainly consisting of religious leaders, traditional leaders and NGO leaders. In-depth semi-structured interviews with a few persons rather than extensive and structured enquetes were carried out ( see Appendix 1). Unfortunately very few representatives of NGOs were interviewed, but Appendix 2 lists some 30 of the most active NGOs in the region at the present. Likewise, there were many significant religious, traditional and political leaders that have not been interviewed, and their views that could have contributed to more nuanced pictures of the situation are not reflected in this report.

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<sup>1</sup> Amuru District Council will be covered in a forthcoming report of the project.



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## 2 Background

The new NRM/A regime employed both the whip and the carrot to consolidate its territorial control of Uganda. The ‘whip’ was manifested by prolonged warfare against rebel groups, mainly based in Northern Uganda. The ‘carrot’ was the devolution of authority, power and resources to local elected leaders that recognized the legitimacy of the NRM regime. This way, the NRM produced an innovation in African statecraft. Radical decentralization became a trademark for Uganda under Museveni. In other words, with Museveni as president, Uganda has seen two aspects of regime security been unfolded – decentralization and war.

The following subsections depict these two aspects of regime security in Uganda – decentralization and war.

### 2.1 Decentralisation options

We here define decentralization as devolution – the transfer of authority, responsibilities and resources from the central government to subnational institutions. In current Uganda, three types of subnational institutions are eligible for devolution: Regional, traditional and municipal institutions.

The 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda spells out in article 178 that the country consists of regions and that all of them may obtain some extent of regional autonomy. Two of the regions cover Northern Uganda. However, so far no political or administrative measures have been undertaken to empower any of the regions. It remains to see whether the Peace Talks may lead to some kind of regionalism in the Ugandan state affairs.

Article 246 in the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda opens for ethnically-based traditional authorities, such as chiefdoms and kingdoms, to be revived as ‘cultural institutions’. Since its revival in 2000, the Ker Kwaro Acholi as a traditional institution has been working hard to revive the Acholi culture as one way to bring peace and promote harmonious relationships. This option, ‘traditionalism’, is present in the Peace Talks but not yet seen as a political alternative to regionalism and municipalism

The option which is best institutionalized is municipalism – local self-government by establishing municipalities:

The first step to revive local governments’ powers and functions was the enactment of the 1987 Resistance Council/ Committees (RCs) Statute No.9. It legalized the RCs and gave them powers in their areas of jurisdiction at the local level. The Presidential

Policy Statement of 1992 formalized and articulated the government's political commitment to decentralization. This commitment was strengthened and maintained through the provisions of the 1995 Constitution, which clearly spell out that the state "is to be guided by the principle of decentralization and devolution of governmental functions and powers".

The 1997 Local Governments Act (LGA) provides the more detailed legislative framework for decentralization in Uganda. In terms of structure the local government in Uganda is made up of Local Councils (LCs) at five different levels: Villages (LC1), Parishes (LC2), Sub-counties (LC3), Counties (LC4) and Districts (LC5). The LC5 – the district council - is the supreme political organ in the district, with the council chairperson as the political head of the district. The Chief Administration Officer (CAO) heads the civil service.

Previous research indicates that the decentralization reform has given ordinary people a voice and allowed them to manage their affairs in local governments. In particular, the LC1 structure has helped villagers in many regions to produce important collective goods such as security and conflict resolution. However, the democratically elected LC3 and LC5 structures suffer from insufficient financial resources, detailed administrative control of key sectors by the centre, and widespread corruption. Their performance leaves a lot to be desired (see Wunsch and Ottemoeller, 2004).

We return to the challenges facing the local councils in Northern Uganda in post-war reconstruction. At this stage two assumptions can be made:

- i) Local government, particularly the participatory, security providing and conflict resolving LC1 structures, did not function well in the Northern Uganda due to the war and the internal displacement of villagers; nevertheless,
- ii) due to the decentralized system, institutional space and legitimate power have been rendered to local actors in the peacemaking and peacebuilding processes in Northern Uganda, particularly at the LC5 level. .

## 2.2 The armed conflict in Northern Uganda

This is not the place for a full account of the armed conflict in Northern Uganda. However, we draw on some independent international reports (Human Rights Watch, 2005; HURIPPEC, 2003; Lomo and Hovi, 2004) and views of the interviewed local actors.

Uganda has experienced national and regional political conflict for most of its post-independence period. From the constitutional crisis of 1966 until the overthrow of the second regime of President Milton Obote in 1985, Northern dominated regimes were seen as taking retribution against the South of the country for the perceived imbalances of the colonial period. Every change of political regime in the post-colonial Uganda has been brought about through armed conflict, leaving deep scars of distrust and anger between different regional and ethnic groups particularly between Northern and Southern/Central parts of the country.

Since 1986 when the NRM/A took power, over 20 armed opposition groups, some from previous regimes have emerged. This has caused major insecurity in Northern Uganda especially in Acholi region where the remnants of the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) soldiers, who retreated from Kampala, continued north and finally crossed into Sudan where they got refuge and a base for re-organization. In August 1986, the Acholi exiled soldiers in Southern Sudan organized themselves and transformed into the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA) and launched an attack on the NRA. However, in 1988 the UPDA signed a peace accord with the Government upon their defeat.

Nonetheless, the conflict was prolonged by the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM), headed by an Acholi woman, Alice Lakwena,<sup>2</sup> who had seized the opportunity of the UPDA's demoralization. She recruited some of the UPDA Soldiers to fight in her ranks. The HSM philosophy was, among many other ingredients, based on belief in the power of spirits. The Lakwena movement promised political and moral restoration to the Acholi who felt they were being punished for atrocities committed by the Acholi soldiers fighting for the governments of Obote and General Tito Okello Lutwa against NRM/A. The HSM pushed the battle from the Acholi land through Lango, Teso and were eventually defeated in October 1987 by a revitalized NRA military force about 90kms east of Kampala.

After her defeat, her father Ladit Severino Lukoya launched yet another Holy Spirit Movement back in Acholiland. Lukoya emphasized a rather exclusive and localized spirituality that did not get the same broad inter-ethnic popularity of Alice Lakwena. He was unable to motivate the population and therefore turned to terror tactics, particularly against children, to sustain operations. Poor leadership and organization however led to a quick dissolution of the group.

By the time UPDA signed the peace accord, Joseph Kony had broken off and formed his own group first known as the Lord's Salvation Army, then the United People's Democratic Christians Army (UPDCA), and in 1992 renamed the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Initially Kony targeted mainly government fighters, but soon turned against the civilians, particularly after government-sponsored "Bow and Arrow" civil defense militias in Gulu and Kitgum were raised against him in 1991-1992. At the same time government launched the brutal "Operation North", which reportedly damaged LRA capacity considerably.

However, the LRA was able to sustain itself through Sudanese government support that reportedly started in 1994. At the same time the Ugandan government allegedly supported the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A).

One promising peace initiative was launched in November 1993 led by then Minister for Pacification of the North, Betty Bigombe. Despite achieving ceasefires and extensive face to face talks with Kony himself, the mission failed as a result of communication difficulties, alleged vested interests of certain high-ranking officers and politicians. In addition, President Museveni issued a seven-day ultimatum to the LRA to surrender or face the resumption of the military campaign. Hence, by 1994 the LRA had gone back to Sudan for rearmament.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Lakwena' was her nick name. In the Acholi language it means 'messenger'.

The war was dragged on for another ten years since the Bigombe negotiations without significant hope of resolution. In this period people were forced to move to IDP camps. They were often given 48 hours to evacuate or they were killed. This was a government measure to avoid LRA recruitments. The camps were created between 1996 and 2002. In 1996 there were 22 camps, in 2002 it had increased to 120 camps. The largest camps had 60 000 people. The life in the camps were hard for many reasons. First, people came from different cultural background; second, the sanitation was poor; third, HIV/AIDS proliferated, mainly because of the soldiers 'protecting' the camps and fourth, people could not go beyond a 1 km circle of the camp. If astray, one would be considered either 'rebel collaborator' or 'government spy', shot and killed. As a result, there was a meagre own agricultural production and people were undernourished. Still, the camps were a fertile ground for abductions. The UPDF soldiers could not provide security for the people in the camps. Many Acholi religious leaders perceived that the war, and in particular the IDP camps, had become a humanitarian and military-strategic disaster. In response to this situation the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) was formed 1997-98.<sup>3</sup>

In 1999-2000 there was the international efforts by the Carter Center between the Government of Sudan and Uganda. After considerable lobbying by ARLPI and other Acholi leaders, the government introduced the Amnesty Act in 2000, which gave amnesty to all LRA fighters who returned. This followed the Ugandan and Sudanese governments' agreement to stop supporting opposing rebel groups in either country, in 1999. However, these measures were not accompanied by peace initiatives towards LRA.

Instead, in March 2002, the Ugandan government launched "Operation Iron Fist" in Southern Sudan with the consent of the Sudanese government. The intention was to drive the LRA back into Northern Uganda. Hence, in mid 2002 the theatre of war was expanded towards the south and the southeast. It included areas less affected by conflict like Lira and Teso regions of Eastern Uganda. The LRA began more wide-scale abductions and killings and looting throughout the north and east, causing people to flee their homes. This led the UPDF to issue an order the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2002, giving people living in the "abandoned villages" of the Acholi districts 48 hours to move to government camps.

In early 2002, about 500,000 civilians were internally displaced in Northern Uganda. By the end of 2002, as a result of the LRA's return to Northern Uganda and the UPDF order, the number increased to about 800,000. Many northern people blamed Operation Iron Fist for stirring up the LRA violent actions. Despite the supposed security provided by these camps, the LRA regularly conducted devastating attacks on them.

In 2004, the UPDF embarked on "Operation Iron Fist II" with Sudanese government permission. The renewed government offensive seemed to have some success. The UPDF reportedly came close to capturing Joseph Kony in a raid on an LRA base at Nesitu in Southern Sudan in July 2004. Since mid-2004, however, some

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<sup>3</sup> Mr. James Nyeko program coordinator, "Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative" (ARPLI). Interview: May 8, 2008. Gulu.

measure of government-controlled peace returned to areas such as Lira district and Teso region of Eastern Uganda.

However, not only the observers but also the parties of the armed conflict realized that a military solution to the conflict in Northern Uganda remained elusive. Besides, its primary victims remain Acholis. This conflict has been devastating for them: at the peak of the conflict, in mid-2006, more than 1.9 million persons were internally displaced in Northern Uganda, of which 1.1 million lived in the four Acholi Region districts, and represented 90-95% of that region's population. It is estimated that more than 20,000 children have been abducted over the course of the conflict since 1986 to serve as child soldiers and sex slaves. Although most child and adult abductees have escaped, many remained for years with the LRA. They remain psychologically and often physically scarred by the treatment they got. In addition, thousands of children witnessed killings, rapes and other forms of violence although not abducted.

## 3 The peace process & the role of local actors

### 3.1 The break-through for a peace process.

In December 2004 it was reported that the LRA was ready to sign a ceasefire agreement. Talks between the Presidential Peace Team and LRA representatives started in July 14, 2006, and these negotiations became ground breaking.

A cessation of hostilities agreement was signed in August 26, 2006. Since then there has been a steady improvement in the security in Northern Uganda as evidenced by declining number of rebel attacks. The cease-fire was effective, and the subsequent peace negotiations have, in spite of interruptions, produced a flow of agreed documents on how to build peace.<sup>4</sup>

Prior to 2006, several attempts had been made to find a peaceful end to the war in Northern Uganda, as already depicted.<sup>5</sup> If the recent Juba talks become the definitive break-through for peace in Northern Uganda, why did they start in 2006 and not before?

A combination of the factors have contributed. The social situation has already been described - the life conditions were untenable for the population in the North. Perhaps even more important were the following two factors:

First, the international-diplomatic situation. The UN represented by the Assistant General Secretary Egeland had started to pay particular attention to the humanitarian situation in Northern Uganda. A peace agreement was made between the government in Khartoum and the SPLM/A in 2005. South Sudan wanted to get rid of LRA, and this was possible only with a deal. At the same time the UN was deploying peace keeping troops in DR Congo, and the international community realised that peace and stability in the Great Lakes Region was indivisible. For international actors interested in oil exploitation, the belt around Lake Albert and River Nile was becoming a big stake with expected discovery of petroleum reserves. As LRA had started a strategic retreat from South Sudan to Eastern Congo, USA (and Museveni) were afraid that LRA could again be a tool for Khartoum and a destabilising force in DR Congo.<sup>6</sup> Hence, the Museveni government was persuaded

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<sup>4</sup> These agreed protocols will be presented and analysed in the forthcoming report.

<sup>5</sup> Since 1988, it seems like peace agreements or peace talks have occurred around every 6th year.

<sup>6</sup> Mr. James Nyeko, Program coordinator, "Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative" (ARPLI). Interview: May 8, 2008. Gulu.

to end the conflict by an agreement, and the South Sudanese government had a direct interest in mediating for peace in Uganda on behalf of neighbours and international community.

Second, the domestic-political situation. In spite of the apparent success of Iron Fist II, the government and perhaps also the LRA discovered that while they might continue to win battles, they were losing the support of the people. The conflict in Northern Uganda was turning into a controversial national issue, which received increasing attention by Ugandan citizens across the country. The national and local elections took place on February 23, 2006. They revealed that the ruling party was highly unpopular in Northern Uganda. The opposition parties won an overwhelming majority in all the district councils and they conquered all the MP seats reserved for Northern constituencies.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, the elected opposition leaders were outspoken in their condemnation of the war – including of LRA and its abductions and killings of civilians. They demanded an immediate cease-fire and peace talks. To what extent were these new political leaders in the North a result of the mobilisation of the local society? What role had local leaders played in opening up the space for peace?

In the following sections we look at the following categories of local actors: religious leaders, political leaders, traditional (“cultural”) leaders, women and NGOs. We start out with the local religious leaders, since we think like most other observers (and representatives of the other actor groups interviewed for this project) that they have played the most important role. For each category we look at

- a) when, why and how bodies relevant for the peace process were organised.
- b) their top-level initiatives for peace
- c) their grass-roots mobilisation for peace

## 3.2 The local religious leaders

### **When, why and how bodies relevant for the peace process were organised**

“To the extent there is a civil society in the Northern Uganda, it consists mainly of the church”.<sup>8</sup> During the early years of the war in the Acholi Region, religious leaders in the region focused primarily on providing moral and practical support to their parishioners and Church institutions became centres of support for thousands seeking shelter from the violence. Over time a consensus emerged amongst church leaders in the North on the need to be proactive in ‘bearing-witness’ about the conflict and engage directly in peacebuilding. A driving force in the process has been the Catholic Church and its Justice and Peace Commission (JPC). This transformation resulted in a number of initiatives that have placed religious leaders at the heart of efforts to support a political resolution of the conflict and to address the

<sup>7</sup> At the national scale, President Museveni got 59% of the vote and his party (the National Resistance Movement) 142 of 215 constituency seats.

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Deborah Mulumba, Professor, Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University. Interview: May 5, 2008. Kampala.

consequences of the war. The most prominent body conducting these initiatives has been the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI).

The ARLPI began in 1997, after realising that the war and the suffering of the Acholi people was not being addressed by the international community and less was being done by the government. The Catholic, Anglican, Muslim and Orthodox religious leaders of Acholi formalized their co-operation which they had earlier embarked on to strengthen their efforts in peacemaking between the government and the rebels. They set up the Acholi Religious Peace initiative as an organization to continue with peace efforts at a time when there was a lull in contacts.

ARLPI has worked hard to engage interfaith communities to contribute proactively in bringing peace in the Acholi Region. It has acted as the main board for mediation and advocacy regarding the situation in Northern Uganda at both the national and international levels. ARLPI's governing body is the Core Team. It consists of 17 religious leaders, all based in the North. Then it has a Secretariat in Gulu with a coordinator, finance, research & documentation officer. In every District there is a Religious Leader Peace Team of 12 people. (From each of the four denominations there are three persons: a clergy, a woman, and a youth representative.) At the Sub-County level there are similar teams, of 12 religious leaders. The team members are trained in grassroot mobilisation work, conflict resolution management etc.

Over the years, ARLPI has pursued an inclusive approach where stakeholders are involved in peacebuilding activities such as dialogue, mediation, community sensitization, peace education, peace rallies, sharing experiences during exchange visits, lobbying and advocacy for dialogue to end the northern conflict.

### **Initiatives for peace**

Since 1997 they have embarked on series of advocacy campaigns. ARLPI consistently called for an end to violence, dismantling of the IDP camps, and use of negotiations to end the conflict. Their first success, in co-operation with the traditional leaders, was the Parliament adoption of the comprehensive Amnesty Law in 1999 (implemented from year 2000) intended to bring about reconciliation, forgiveness and healing in the communities. When making public statements, the religious leaders emphasized the complementarity of reconciliation system of *mato-opút* (see below) with the Biblical understanding of unconditional forgiveness.

In July 2003, the ARLPI, came out with the issue of the abducted children, they expressed their solidarity with the children dubbed “night time commuters” who walked long distances to find safety on the streets of Gulu town at night. By coming to pray and sleep in the streets with the children, the religious leaders highlighted the suffering of these children, a fact that drew the attention of the international community. (HURIPPEC, 2003: 117-118).

They too continued a campaign to involve the international community in the resolution of the Northern Uganda conflict.

Since its inception, ARLPI sought to draw the senior LRA leadership into peace talks. While meaningful high level meetings remained elusive, discreet contacts by some religious leaders and LRA commanders took place. The main focus has been around the implementation of the Amnesty Act which allows combatants to report



to religious leaders and the signing of the final peace agreement. Between 1999 and 2005, the Religious leaders took up the peace process after Betty Bigombe's dialogue failed. They took several initiatives towards the government and the rebels to start peace negotiations. In 2004 they managed to convince 76 rebels to come out of their rebel actions. It is then that the Government started using the religious leaders to mediate with the rebels.<sup>9</sup>

In December 30<sup>th</sup> 2004, the ARLPI managed to have Brig. Sam Kolo, the LRA Spokesman then, to talk with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uganda for the first time. A peace Agreement was arranged to be signed but the rebels refused and as a response to their refusal, the government bombed some of their camp-sites in January 2005, this again made the two parties lose trust in each other.

Despite this, the Religious leaders continued with their efforts of convincing the two parties to have a peaceful resolution to their conflict. At this point to the start of the ongoing Juba peace talks, the government had left the religious leaders out of the process of mediating with the LRA. According to the ARPLI coordinator, one of the reasons was that the religious leaders demanded from the government to account for the atrocities it had also caused in Northern Uganda rather than blaming all evils on the LRA. The government was not ready for a 'truth & reconciliation' process of this kind.<sup>10</sup>

However at the start of the Juba Peace talks, the Mediator, the Vice President of South Sudan, Riek Machar, insisted on the presence of the religious leaders. Thus they reappeared in the peace process. Now in the on-going peace-talks the religious leaders

- act as observers to the peace process;
- are confidence builders of both the government and the LRA;
- calm situations in times of pressure;
- provide advise if asked or when necessary;
- work with the traditional leaders .

The Acholi religious leaders together with the traditional leaders opened way to peace talks and they gave challenge to the other Religious leaders especially those at the Center in advocating and finding peaceful means to ending the war in Northern Uganda.

### **Grassroots mobilisation for peace**

ARLPI is involved in the organization and recitation of peace prayers/rallies in commemoration of those lost during massacres, as well as sub-county peace prayers/rallies. The main objectives of the community peace prayers/rallies are mobilization for reconciliation and advocacy for peaceful coexistence and an end to the northern conflict. ARLPI envisages these rallies as a way of raising solidarity for peace and reinforcing the sense of hope among Ugandans. At the sub-county level, the peace committees have been very instrumental in organizing and mobilizing communities to participate in the rallies.

<sup>9</sup> Mr. James Nyeko, *ibid*.

<sup>10</sup> Mr. James Nyeko, *ibid*.

The annual peace prayers at the district and sub-county levels are organized by ARLPI with multiple purposes: instil hope for peace in the community members, help restore and heal communities, and to offer an inter-religious approach, help to foster unity among the people of Northern Uganda.

ARLPI is carrying out community awareness meetings to sensitize and educate the communities on reconciliation (e.g. preparations for the traditional community reconciliation ceremony), forgiveness and peaceful coexistence. Discussions are centred on support for and ways to ease reintegration of returnees. The meetings also sensitize on human rights, land rights and domestic violence, issues where gender is a key issue. (See below on their women's empowerment initiative). The meetings are organized through networking with other organizations, cultural institutions, district stakeholders and community leaders.

ARLPI uses information gathered from the awareness meetings to call other actors and organize dialogues about concrete conflict issues, such as conflicts between ex-combatants and the community, tensions between political parties and leaders, mistrust between the civilians and the military, conflict between different ethnic groups such as the Karamojong and Langi, as well as among Acholi clans. The meetings help strengthen the communities' capacities to resolve conflicts locally, reconcile and increase their commitment to peace.

ARLPI has also worked to strengthen women's capacity in peace work. Women have been trained in psychosocial support, peacebuilding and conflict management, and this is now being taught to the community through awareness meetings and sensitizations on nonviolence and harmonious coexistence. Currently ARLPI is a partner in a pilot scheme to implement the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 of empowering women in peace and security, funded by the Norwegian Foreign Ministry through CARE International. ARPLI also gets funding from DFID, Christian Aid and other international agencies.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.3 The local political leaders

#### **When, why and how bodies relevant for the peace process were organised.**

In Gulu, the District Reconciliation & Peace Team (DRPT) was established in year 2000. It is an umbrella organisation, funded by SIDA, EU and others. Similar teams from Kitgum, Pader, Amuru and Gulu form the Northern Uganda Peace Forum.

In Gulu District Council (LC5), the local elections in 2006 gave the opposition 26 seats, the ruling NRM only 4 seats.<sup>12</sup> The council elected a former MP and experienced national politician, Hon. Mr. Norbert Mao from DP, as its chairman. He is instrumental in having created good working relationships between elected councillors and the administration, mainly because he is respected by his councillors – "he is in command".<sup>13</sup> The same council elected a young educated person and

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<sup>11</sup> Mr. James Nyeko, *ibid*

<sup>12</sup> Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) got 20 seats, and 2 came from the Democratic Party (DP).

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Mr. Stephen Oloya, deputy CAO (chief administration officer), Gulu District Council. May 8, 2008. Gulu

newcomer to politics, Hon. Mr. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi (born in 1979; member of FDC) as its Speaker. Mr. Mao in company with Mr. Ojera have led the District Reconciliation & Peace Team and been very visible in the peace talks.

### **(Top-level) initiatives for peace**

In the Juba Peace Talks, the Gulu District has been represented by its elected LC5 Chairman and the president-appointed Resident District Commissioner. The LC5 chairman has been more than an observer; he has taken active mediation initiatives. The DRPT headed by LC5 chairman and speaker have visited Kony in his Garamba camp twice, to discuss with him face-to-face. First time was 28 July to 4 August 2006, before the signing of the cease-fire agreement. “We could tell him we were there on behalf of the suffering communities, not the government or LRA. We were the voice of the communities. We could witness people’s awareness. We could offer confidence building.”<sup>14</sup>

Recently, the Northern Uganda Peace Forum has established contact with 18 more districts and taken initiatives to ease anti-Acholi sentiments in other regions of Uganda (see below).<sup>15</sup>

### **(Grass-roots) mobilisation for peace**

“People are tired of this life”.<sup>16</sup> “The communities are in a desperate situation, need peace more than ever. They are ready to forgive, and let a new life begin.”<sup>17</sup>

DRPT was established just after the Amnesty Law was enacted in 2000, and DRPT has since been active in receiving the returned soldiers at reception centres, with GUSCO and World Vision.<sup>18</sup> However, the main emphasis has been mobilisation of communities – hearing their views, informing them, build confidence in the future. “The team members visit all the camps, spending evening there around fire places” (in ‘wang oo’<sup>19</sup>). The DRPT works closely with the religious leaders, the Acholi cultural leaders, and NGOs. DRPT does not get money from the District Council, its finances come from NGOs like World Vision, Save the Children, the NGO Forum. The DRPT got 200 000 € from EU. It had its own Secretariat for 18 months.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Hon. Mr. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, Speaker in Gulu District Council (LC5). Interview: May 9, 2008. Gulu

<sup>15</sup> Hon. Mr. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Hon. Mr. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, Speaker in Gulu District Council (LC5). Interview: May 9, 2008. Gulu.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Mr. Stephen Oloya, deputy CAO (chief administration officer), Gulu District Council. May 8, 2008. Gulu

<sup>18</sup> Hon. Mr. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, Speaker in Gulu District Council (LC5). Interview: May 9, 2008. Gulu.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Wang oo’ means traditional fire places where people sit in the evenings to discuss several issues.

<sup>20</sup> Hon. Mr. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, *ibid.*

### 3.4 The Acholi cultural leaders

#### **When, why and how bodies relevant for the peace process were organised**

Article 246 in the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda opens for ethnically-based traditional authorities, such as chiefdoms and kingdoms, to be revived as ‘cultural institutions’.

Since its revival in 2000, the Ker Kwaro Acholi as a traditional institution has been working hard to revive the Acholi culture as one of the ways to bring peace and promote harmonious relationship. The Ker Kwaro Acholi as cultural institution covers the original Acholi districts, which include, Gulu, Kitgum, Pader and Amuru. It is commonly referred to as the Acholi Region extending from Karuma in the South to Sudan border in the North, and bordering Lango and Karamoja in the East and West Nile to the West.

The Ker Kwaro Acholi comprises of 50 traditional leaders of the Acholi people, with 50 well- established, semi-autonomous chiefdoms headed by 50 chiefs (Rwodi) for each respective chiefdom with an overall Paramount Chief known as the Rwot, and currently being Rwot David Onen Acana 11.

Since their reinstallation in 2000, 50 traditional leaders together with their elders, women and youth leaders have set up ‘Acholi Traditional Leaders Council’ which is now functional. The role of Ker Kwaro Acholi include:- being a community focal point in conflict resolution at the family, clan, inter-clan, inter-ethnic levels and responsible for traditional conflict management and cleansing ceremonies.

#### **(Top-level) initiatives for peace**

The Acholi Traditional leaders have been active in the peace process. To begin with even the first peace accord between UPDA and the government in 1988 was a result of the intervention of traditional leaders who went to Sudan to convince the UPDA leadership to negotiate. They were also involved in the Bigombe peace contacts, but these efforts were frustrated by hard-line responses from the government.

Despite those failures, the traditional leaders continued underground contacts and linkages between the government and the rebels. They were open to attack from both sides, being likely taken as government agents or rebel collaborators. The peace contacts and initiatives by Acholi elders are/were crucial to the reconciliation process. The Ker Kwor Acholi suggests that the ‘Acholi Traditional Justice’ should be used, suggests that the Luo cultural mechanism of ‘Mato-opút’ promotes a model of healing through the culture of non-violence, forgiveness and peace. (See below in ch.4 on this). Their ideological and political arguments for reconciliation convinced the government to embrace the idea of forgiveness under the Amnesty Act in 2000. The preamble of the Amnesty Act of 2000 reiterates the “desire of the people of Uganda to end armed hostilities, reconcile with those who have caused suffering and rebuild their communities.” It also reiterates “the determination of the government to genuinely implement its policy of reconciliation in order to establish peace, security throughout the whole country.” All this is to be achieved with the involvement of the traditional leaders acting closely with the religious leaders.

After August 2006 the traditional leaders have been actively involved in the peace talks in Juba. The Rwot has direct contacts with the LRA leader, Joseph Kony and it's through the Rwot that the government and most of the members in the peace team communicate to Kony.<sup>21</sup>

The Traditional elders try to act as confidence builders among the Acholi people. For example, on April 10 2008, after failure of the signing of final peace process, the Rwot sent a message through the local radio stations to the people of Acholi land to stay firm and have hope in peace revival.

### **(Grass-roots) mobilisation for peace**

According to its “Strategic Plan 2005-2007”, the Ker Kwaro Acholi aims at implementing the following activities as a way to peacebuilding in the life of the war ravaged community of Acholi:

First, consolidating peace and reconciliation. They organize peacebuilding and reconciliation meetings (exchange visits) with Langi, Alur, Madi, Teso, Karmojong, Arua people, to create a peaceful neighbourhood for the Acholi people both in and outside the Acholi Region. They organize solidarity and mobilizing visits to Acholi people in the Diaspora. They perform traditional cleansing of the former rebels - the traditional ritual is a way of receiving and re-accepting one who has committed an offence back to the community. Hence, they disseminate information on Acholi traditions, cultural practices and by laws. They also sensitize the clan leaders on peacebuilding and reconciliation process. Clan leaders are basically “grass root” leaders, they deal with the people directly at the grass roots. They also sensitize youth and the Acholi elders on peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

Second, mobilizing the community on the value of land, education, and agricultural production and increasing household incomes. People had been depending largely on food hand-outs in the IDP Camps. For the last year(s), no more food is being distributed as one of the ways to force them to leave the camps. Therefore, the traditional leaders are mobilizing them to farm work. They organize sensitization meeting on land matters. With the 21 years of insurgency in the Acholi Region and forced migration to the IDP camps, many people are now returning to their once ancestry homes. However, the issue of land conflicts are on the rise.

Cultural/traditional leaders are addressing this issue by organizing clan meetings since the cultural leaders “know the old land boundaries” of each family. They prepare guidelines on land issues that all Acholi people should follow to avoid land conflicts in their resettlement. They also mobilize farm groups to access agricultural technologies through demonstrations – green and dry shows.

Third, gender mainstreaming of cultural activities. Meetings are being held for the gender working groups to monitor progress and share experiences on gender mainstreaming and strengthening gender analysis skills through training workshops.

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<sup>21</sup> Ms. Sophie Agwokao, project officer, the Traditional Acholi Authority (Ker Kwaro Acholi). Interview: May 9, 2008. Gulu.

The traditional institution is also networking with other organizations/ institutions with competencies in gender mainstreaming of development.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.5 The role of NGOs /CSOs present in Northern Uganda

After years of war, no civil servants wanted to work in the war-affected communities. The NGOs filled the vacuum left behind by the civil service. National religious NGOs - like the Comboni fathers and other Catholics – were important because they attracted international NGOs such as Caritas, MSF, Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children Uganda, International Rescue Committee, UNICEF, World Food Programme and UNHCR etc.<sup>23</sup>

#### **When, why and how bodies relevant for the peace process were organised.**

There have been several efforts by NGOs and civil groups to participate in the peace process. Most of the NGOs, especially international NGOs, joined the peace process after the efforts by the local religious and cultural leaders to facilitate the peace talks between the LRA and the GoU.

One of the significant efforts by local civil society organisations was the creation of a loose coalition of about 40 CSOs into the Civil Society Organization for Peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU) in 2000.<sup>24</sup> According to the coalition, the CSOPNU was “born out of a sense of frustration among CSOs”, which were operating within the Northern Uganda region trying to mitigate the effects of the conflict. These activities include providing psychological support as well as efforts aimed at trying to alleviate poverty and revive peace in the region. Because the groups felt their role was no more than that of “sticking a band-aid on the wound, which was never actually going to heal,” they decided to come together in order to “go beyond their individual organizational objectives” and “to practically engage in advocacy and the fostering of reconciliation at all levels” (HURUPEC, 2003:119).

#### **National initiatives for peace**

The key areas of advocacy identified by the coalition were:

- Promoting national reconciliation, using the situation in the north as an example and opportunity;
- General advocacy for a stronger political willingness to support a peaceful resolution, e.g. to argue against “Operation Iron Fist” as the best way forward;
- Calling for more political and practical support for the amnesty;
- Calling for the critical review of the various peace initiatives ,with a view to consolidating them within one coherent approach;
- Helping community leaders lobby for a rational approach to the return of IDPs, based on a full knowledge of their rights;

<sup>22</sup> Ms. Sophie Agwokao , *ibid.* See below in ch.4 on its emphasis on gender issues for the reconstruction work.

<sup>23</sup> Dr. Deborah Mulumba, professor, Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University. Interview: May 5, 2008. Kampala.

<sup>24</sup> A list and presentation of some of these 40 NGOs/CSOs are presented in the Appendix 2

- Working with donors to help them understand their complacency in papering over the cracks, and suggest ways they could more effectively support reconciliation.

The CSOPNU has since its formation engaged in a number of activities to promote the above advocacy objectives. They have contributed to knowledge about the root causes of the conflict, reviewed the peace process (incl. the amnesty process as a basis for promoting national reconciliation), and engaged members of the donor and international community to urge the government to resolve the conflict through peaceful means.

The coalition has also investigated the lessons that had been learnt from the previous peace experiences, and they came up with the following conclusions: 1) Any peace initiative must be informed by deep analysis and based on patient dialogue and the search for consensus on underlying issues and not fixed positions; 2) The peace team should include civil society, religious and other community leaders, traditional elders, women and young people, care being taken to include all relevant organs of government; 3) Any peace initiative must consider the position of the government of Sudan, given the cross-border implications of conflict, and because of the past support given by them to LRA; 4) The peace team must have consistent and patient support from the government, and adequate resources provided in advance; 5) The peace team should have a realistic time frame which is decided in consultation with all parties, not by arbitrary deadlines; 6) If such a peace process is to succeed, external mediation would be highly recommended, given the depth of feelings involved and the long history of the conflict (HURIPEC, 2003).

With regard to the issue of national reconciliation, the Coalition observed that due to the “cycles of revenge” in Uganda’s history, where the “cycles” continue to be played out today, the nation remains highly vulnerable to destabilizing influences. However, the problem will only be resolved if the Ugandan leaders take explicit steps aimed at national reconciliation by;

- Recognizing the northern conflict as a national problem;
- Promoting public debate that recognizes the underlying causes of the conflict;
- Promoting a culture of co-existence and national unity through reconciliation processes fostered by government and civil society.

These positions of the CSOPNU point to the consensus, which was slowly emerging in the country: the problem in Northern Uganda was a national problem. There was a need for national reconciliation based on a culture of co-existence.

### **International NGO mobilisation for peace in Northern Uganda**

The conflict and humanitarian crisis in Northern Uganda, long obscure and neglected, has recently received increasing international attention. NGOs from around the world have united to support the local efforts to salvage the peace process to end Northern Uganda’s 22-year war.

In Northern Uganda, there are several local and international NGOs and international bodies, who are working towards the achievement of peace in the region, they have alike helped to raise the awareness among the general public and

government leaders around the world. Films like “Invisible Children”<sup>25</sup>, annual public events like GuluWalk,<sup>26</sup> and recent policy initiatives like a hearing in the European Parliament and Northern Uganda Lobby Day in Washington DC, have all played their part in the peace process. The net result has been to create a window of opportunity to influence international policy in the crisis in Northern Uganda. Most significantly, all of this is taking place at a potentially pivotal stage in the conflict.

NGOs strongly support the Juba peace talks between the Government of Uganda and the LRA, they have put pressure on both sides to be serious and to put forward reasonable proposals.

A statement signed by ‘Concerned Organizations’<sup>27</sup> in May 2008 warns that a failure to secure the peace and resort to a “military solution” would trigger renewed fears of insecurity and threaten the considerable progress made on the ground in the Northern Uganda. Additionally, it would impede efforts to implement important aspects of agreements already approved by the Government of Uganda and the LRA that are not contingent upon the signing of the Final Peace Agreement.

As a means to support the peace process, several of these NGOs are securing the Ugandan Government’s firm commitment to the Juba talks. The international NGOs especially those from Norway, Denmark, Canada, the UK, other EU-countries and US, continue to encourage Ugandan President, Yoweri Museveni and his government to invest in peace talks (Grzelkowski, 2006) .

According to the report “Prescriptions for Peace in Northern Uganda”, both the quality and quantity of international assistance to Uganda have been insufficient to address the full magnitude of the crisis. A shortage of resources, tenuous security situation and lack of coordination among UN, donor and NGO activities all help explain some of the previous failings of international assistance, however they are now careful to avoid a potential “funding gap” as NGOs switch their focus from humanitarian to developmental assistance (Grzelkowski, 2006).

One initiative from NGOs funded by a foreign donor has raised particular attention in the peace process: CARE International Uganda’s initiative to mobilize women in the implementation of the UN Security Resolution 1325.

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<sup>25</sup> See: [www.invisiblechildren.com](http://www.invisiblechildren.com)

<sup>26</sup> GuluWalk is focused on supporting the abandoned children of Northern Uganda. The original GuluWalk started with just two people in July of 2005 and has now grown into a worldwide movement for peace. GuluWalk was inspired by the gripping tale of the ‘night commuters’ (children who had to walk from their home to town or to IDP camps for security at night). See: [www.guluwalk.com](http://www.guluwalk.com).

<sup>27</sup> Include: Oxfam, Norwegian Refugee Council, NGO forum, Refugee Law Project, Unicef, Save the Children, World Vision, Pax Christi International, Mennonite Central Committee, Quaker United Nations Office.



### 3.6 Gender issues & the role of women

#### **Women under-represented in the official peace process**

The peace process in Northern Uganda has reached a stage where the participation of women is critical if durable peace is to be achieved. For the last two decades, women in Northern Uganda have played a key role in promoting peace right from the grassroots and they are the primary victims of the excessive use of violence by the fighting forces. Women have initiated many local organizations such as Grassroots Women Association for Development (GWAD), People's Voice for Peace, Concerned Parents, and Gulu Support Children Organisation (GUSCO).

Yet they have been largely under represented in the official peace process, and representatives of women believe their efforts have been undermined. To redress the gender imbalance, UNIFEM has organised women's observation teams with financial support from the Norwegian Embassy and other donors.<sup>28</sup>

According to a women observer of the Juba peace talks, there was a lack of visibility of women in the negotiation teams.<sup>29</sup> The LRA team had one woman representative at the beginning of the Peace talks and the Government side had none, though a woman was included later. However, an informal coalition of women for peace involving the women in the negotiation teams as well as the female observers was eventually formed. The coalition prioritized two items of the official agenda: item 3, Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation, and item 4, Agreement on a Permanent Ceasefire. They sent a team to Garamba in DR Congo, where Kony and his people were hiding, and they saw many women and children in captivity, who begged the team for a success in the talks so the women could return home with their children. Although the number of women was limited, they contributed in the continuous running of the peace talks and they were strongly involved. However during the peace talks, the female observers faced lack of funds. Hence they could not fully participate in the talks. There were also petty conflicts among the women, and the two negotiating groups took different considerations for women.<sup>30</sup>

#### **The CARE initiative**

CARE International in Uganda in partnership with CARE Norway gained support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a project to follow up UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

Resolution 1325 was adopted on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 2000 by the UN Security Council. It is driven by the belief that women's involvement in conflict prevention, management and post-conflict activities plays a big role in creating lasting peace. It calls for the representation of women in formal and informal peacebuilding efforts. It supports the inclusion of women's needs and aspirations in peacebuilding decision-making processes, that is, repatriation, resettlement, rehabilitation and post conflict

<sup>28</sup> Ms. Vibeke Sørum, first secretary, the Norwegian Embassy. Interview: May 7, 2008. Kampala

<sup>29</sup> Hon. Ms. Aol Ochan Betty, Woman Representative Gulu District. Oral presentation: "*Women and the Juba Peace Process Presentation*" at Women Parliamentarians Workshop ("Putting UN Resolution 1325 into Practice") organized by CARE International in Lira 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> June, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Hon. Ms. Aol Ochan Betty, *ibid*.

reconstruction. It calls upon all parties to armed conflict to respect international law applicable to the rights and protection of women and girls.

CARE International Uganda is working in partnership with Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative (ARLPI) and Grassroots Women Association for Development (GWAD) in the implementation of UNSCR 1325. In addition to basic information work in the society and civic education among women, the project

- provides support to the grass roots women's initiatives to strengthen their capacity for the implementation of UNSCR 1325,
- challenges cultural institutions that impose barriers to women's participation,
- tries to organize the grassroots women in a national advocacy forum,
- advocates for increased women's representation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes.

CARE International organized a 'Women Parliamentarians Workshop' in Lira from the June 6-8, 2008. The workshop theme was "Putting UN Resolution 1325 into Practice". It involved different stakeholders ranging from women grass-roots organizers to representatives of district councils and churches.

Although it is difficult to assess the effects of the CARE initiative, it should be paid attention to because it has coalesced a donor country, an international NGO, and a key local CSO around a key issue: the mobilization of women for peace.

## 4 Peacebuilding & local institutional challenges

The war has increased the vulnerability of the majority of the Northern Ugandan population. It has created an atmosphere of despair and hopelessness. Trauma caused by killings and abductions, increase in gender based violence and ongoing conflict over land and cattle rustling create enormous stress. This is compounded by a breakdown in traditional family and clan conflict resolution structures and an overwhelming degree of community distrust vis-à-vis the government officers who are supposed to protect them, such as in the camp settings. In this context, how can peace be built, and which institutions can help build it? Which challenges do these institutions meet?

### 4.1 Normative-emotional challenges of justice & reconciliation.

#### **The amnesty arrangement**

After considerable lobbying by the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) and other Northern Ugandan leaders, the government introduced an amnesty bill and it was enacted by the Parliament in year 2000. The Amnesty Act has been prolonged every year. The Amnesty Commission is responsible for its implementation, and it has six regional offices, two in the Acholi Region: Gulu and Kitgum. It gets its funding from the government and from external stakeholders: African Union, the World Bank, the UK NGO 'Window Trust', Save the Children, UNICEF etc.

Amnesty is offered to all anti-government combatants since January 2, 1986. Hence it includes also members of Holy Spirit Movement and other rebel groups. The main target group is, however, members of the Lords Resistance Army. It is estimated that LRA has abducted about 20 000 children to become soldiers or sex slaves. The majority of them have managed to escape from LRA. By May 2008, amnesty had been granted to 22 000 individuals nationwide, around 12 000 (55 %) of them come from LRA. Approximately 70 % of them were between 12 and 24 years old.

The individual amnesty process starts with the ex-soldier reporting to proper reception centres ran by NGOs like World Vision and Gusco. Here the 'reporter', as he/she is officially titled, is demobilised, disarmed and given medical treatment and counselling, and he/she applies for amnesty. On being granted amnesty, the most traumatized reporters stay on in the reception centres for treatment.

However, the final step of the amnesty process is resettlement (reinsertion and integration) in the communities where he/she was born. Here there is a backlog of 3 400, since 18 600 persons have been resettled so far. The ‘reinsertion’ element is transport to home with a mattress, a kit for cooking and other basic requisites. The ‘integration’ consists of the re-enrolment to school for those returnees who are children. In every community there is a Focal Point Person (FPP). The Amnesty Commission invites the LC3 chairmen to nominate this person. He/she is a volunteer who gets a bicycle and some stationary, plus some subsistence from the LC3 sub-county. They send the Amnesty Commission regular reports about the returnees, and the commission is to help when the returnees need to see a doctor. Some cases are difficult to handle, and it may be difficult to get local people to support the integration process.

At the moment, LRA has endorsed the Amnesty Act in the Juba peace talks. There is an uncertainty about how many people are under the command of LRA at the moment and thus eligible for amnesty. The estimate is between 1000 and 2000 persons. However, the reception centres can expect to draw on the resources of flexible international NGOs to meet any future demand. The challenge ahead is not the reception centres but the resettlement in the communities. There is a need for a baseline study to know if meaningful integration makes progress. The returnees are probably not given good enough tools to start a new and better life.<sup>31</sup> Three more issues may arise: First and foremost, the cooperation between CBOs headed by religious, traditional and other community leaders on the one hand and the local councils (mainly LC3), the FPPs, the Amnesty Commission and the NGOs, on the other. This is an issue of local governance. A second issue is the lack of a proper association of (or for) the returnees to defend their rights and interests in the resettlement process. A third issue is the application of *Mato-opút*.

### **Acholi traditional justice: Mato-opút**

The Ker kwor Acholi suggests that ‘Acholi traditional justice’ should be employed, based on the Luo cultural mechanism of “Mato-opút”. It promotes healing through the culture of non-violence, forgiveness and peace. In the Luo culture, justice can not be reached without mercy or forgiveness. When a crime is committed, the accused person (the perpetrator) must be the first witness against him/her self. If he/she takes the responsibility for a crime, there is no way the Luo community can deny forgiveness to those who long for it.

According to the Ker kwor Acholi representatives, drinking the bitter root *Mato-opút* is not simply a tradition of some glorious past. In the midst of war, this reconciliation ritual has been conducted in Acholi land and clan feuds have been settled. Anyone who wants it could drink the “bitter root” and reconcile. The rebels can thus be forgiven for any violent deed they are responsible for in Acholi land and the government ought to admit killings, atrocities, looting, havoc and destruction committed by the Ugandan Army in Northern Uganda ever since 1986, if any path towards a peaceful settlement of conflict is to be ach (HURIPPEC, 2003).

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<sup>31</sup> Mr. Stephen Oloya, deputy CAO (chief administration officer), Gulu District Council. Interview: May 8, 2008. Gulu

Since 2000, the elders have been the fore actors in welcoming the rebels who have returned “home” under the Amnesty Act. They carry out the cleansing ritual, and it is claimed that about 10,000 returnees have gone through this ritual.<sup>32</sup> This claim is disputed by other informants who question the capacity and actual legitimate authority of the traditional leaders. The war has broken down traditional family and clan conflict resolution structures.<sup>33</sup> The main issue arising is, however, if the *Mato Opút* can meet the demands for justice against the commanders responsible for war crimes.

### **The International Criminal Court ( ICC)**

The ICC indictment against Kony and four more LRA leaders<sup>34</sup> is commonly seen as the main reason why the Final Peace Agreement was not signed as scheduled on March 26, 2008. Kony did not show up in Juba because he had seen what happened with President Taylor of Liberia. Kony is seen as highly unreliable, “afraid even of his own shadow”, but people who have met him maintain that he can make rational deliberations. The peace facilitators from Northern Uganda want the concerns raised by Kony to be seriously addressed. Kony should be given time, but he should also be pressured. He has agreed to being brought to justice in some way or another. The question then is: Will he surrender to a national or an international court?

According to the LC5 speaker, Kony will stand a better chance in the ICC. He will have good lawyers, excellent opportunities to speak for himself, and very detailed, fair and transparent proceedings. Not so in Uganda, a limping democracy: “Here he will be sentenced to death. He will jump from the frying pan to the fire. We know how our justice system works. After two weeks, the prosecuted is hung.”

Nevertheless, most people in Northern Uganda with an opinion on the issue think the ICC indictment should be dropped. If not, the war will continue. The LRA is capable to escalate their abductions and keep on with the war as long as they want. “Peace must come first, justice come after”. The ICC might as well bring more pain to the victims as they have to present statements and revive their memories. “The best alternative for the Northern Ugandan population is to apply the Amnesty Act in combination with the traditional court system (e.g. the Mato-opút). That has been done already with Sam Kolo and Kenneth Banyar, two LRA commanders, who are now back in society.”<sup>35</sup> The challenge is to resolve the doubts and eventual

<sup>32</sup> Ms. Sophie Agwokao, project officer, the Traditional Acholi Authority (Ker Kwaro Acholi). Interview: May 9, 2008. Gulu.

<sup>33</sup> Mr. Stephen Oloya, deputy CAO, op.cit.: “The traditional justice system is not that easy to revamp. It is not like the Buganda here. The Buganda had one unifying king, well-established, used by the colonial master. Here in the north there has been a very low level of social development. The ‘king’ here was not used to have one single paid staff. There was a structure of clan leaders, but much has eroded through the last 20 years of war.”

<sup>34</sup> Two of these LRA commanders have died after the indictment was announced –allegedly killed by Kony.

<sup>35</sup> “People have received them and forgiven them, and they now live as humble compatriots. ICC will not solve the problem, and that is why we should drop it.” Hon. Mr. Ojara Martin Mapenzi, Speaker in Gulu District Council (LC5). Interview: May 9, 2008. Gulu.

disagreements under agenda 3, Accountability and Reconciliation, of the peace agreement.<sup>36</sup>

### **The role of UPDF & needs for demilitarisation.**

Violations of human rights in Northern Uganda have been committed not only by the LRA but also by government military forces. While the LRA is known for abductions and killings, the Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF) and paramilitary 'self-defence units' (SDU) under its command are known for constantly violating the rights of non-combatants. The relationships between civilians and the military in Northern Uganda have deteriorated. Reports from NGOs, the United Nations (UN), and human rights organizations show a pattern of human rights abuses and the continued intimidation of civilians by the armed forces, leading to an overwhelming degree of community distrust vis-à-vis the Government officers. There are witnesses to UPDF soldiers having buried people alive. They have pulled people out of prisons and killed them. They have raped and killed women. That is why also UPDF commanders should be subject to justice. At least the government ought to admit killings, atrocities, looting, havoc and destruction committed by the Ugandan Army in Northern Uganda ever since 1986, if any path towards a peaceful settlement of conflict is to be achieved.<sup>37</sup>

Another challenge is posed by the soldiers still in Gulu district. No one knows exactly how many soldiers there are in the district. There has been one platoon at every IDP camp (about 22 soldiers). There is a brigade of 1000 at Palaro. Then come all the SDUs under command of UPDF. The military must go back to their barracks, the SDUs must be dissolved, and the police must take over the responsibility for law enforcement and public order.<sup>38</sup>

However, demilitarisation will also challenge the self-perceptions and military identifications of people in Northern Uganda. "Our people has been militarised since the colonial times." The British considered the Northerners as strong and fast running, and thus fit for the military. 70 % of the Ugandan soldiers Britain sent to the 2<sup>nd</sup> WW came from Northern Uganda, and the Northerners continued to dominate the government army until Museveni took over.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Observers perceive that also Agenda Item 2 on demobilization and integration is a key to a lasting peace. The LRA soldiers can come out of the bush if offered good integration support. LRA, or LRM which is negotiators prefer to give it a more political profile, has demanded that they (or 'people from the North') get 35 % of the jobs in the government. That was rejected by the government, due to the constitution. But their integration into the UPDF military is an issue. (Ms. Vibeke Sørum, first secretary, the Norwegian Embassy. Interview: May 7, 2008. Kampala).

<sup>37</sup> The annual reports of the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) from 2002 to 2006 – see <http://www.uhrc.ug/> - provide documentation of human rights violations committed also by the the UPDF

<sup>38</sup> To some extent, this has taken place during the last two years – especially since July 2008, with a demobilization program (MDRP) funded by the World Bank.

<sup>39</sup> Hon. Mr. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, Speaker in Gulu District Council (LC5). Interview: May 9, 2008. Gulu.

### Inter-ethnic confidence building

Beyond the LRA conflict, there are long-standing and pervasive ethnic and regional divides. The so-called “North-South divide” is attributed to the colonial system.<sup>40</sup> Southerners were used for administration, Northerners for security.<sup>41</sup> After independence, all the governments (not only Idi Amin’s) have used excessive violence along ethnic lines against citizens. The governments have contributed to the situation where almost every Ugandans’ primary identity lies with his ethnic group and not with the nation as a whole. Pronounced grievances and mistrust along ethnic and regional lines exist among various groups in Uganda. These inter-ethnic and regional grievances are pervasive within and between the north and the rest of the country.

There is also widespread blame and retribution between groups for specific actions such as complicity in the overthrow of previous governments. General Tito Okello, an Acholi, planned the coup against president Obote, a Lango, in 1985. During the civil war in the 1980s, there are accusations that also NRM massacred and put the blame on Okello’s UNLA, like in the Luwero Triangle. NRM laid out many land mines in the North where the UNLA took refuge; however, the main victims of the land mines were civilians.<sup>42</sup>

The Acholi people have likewise been accused of support to the LRA. At least, Museveni saw the Acholi Region as a stronghold for the opposition parties: the Democratic Party (DP), the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) and the Uganda People’s Congress (UPC). He put Buganda and Lango people against Acholis, and the UPDF set up a breach that split acholi people: the Self-Defence Units (SDU).<sup>43</sup> “Museveni has never addressed the North-South divide of the country. In the election campaigns in 2001 and 2006 he went to Luwero to see the skulls, and asked people: ‘Do you want this back?’ His divide-and-rule policy must be rejected. The national president and his government must take a more active role in this national reconciliation process.”<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, the war was for a long time looked at as an “Acholi war”. The neighbouring ethnic groups were not bothered about the situation going on in Acholi land, not until LRA embarked on attacking the other neighbouring districts, like in Massac in Lira District in 2004. This created an image of Acholis being the enemy. Lango and Teso people took revenge against Acholi people because of LRA attacks, although LRA had for long time only attacked and abducted Acholis.

Hence, recently, the Northern Uganda Peace Forum, backed by Gulu District Council and the District Peace and Reconciliation Teams, has established contact with 18 more districts. “We need to change the attitude of the country that LRA is an Acholi thing against the other ethnic groups. It is exactly the Acholis who experience

<sup>40</sup> The views presented in this sub-section are of course ‘subjective’ social constructions and representations made by quoted persons. y

<sup>41</sup> Mr. James Nyeko program coordinator, “Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative” (ARPLI). Interview: May 8, 2008. Gulu.

<sup>42</sup> Mr. James Nyeko, *ibid*.

<sup>43</sup> Mr. James Nyeko, *ibid*. There is an allegation that Museveni has once pronounced: “The Acholis are grasshoppers”.

<sup>44</sup> Hon. Mr. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, *ibid*.

most of LRAs atrocities. Our work has made results: In Eastern Uganda people now talk differently about ‘the Northerners’<sup>45</sup>. The Ker Kwaro Acholi makes similar efforts by organizing exchange visits to cultural leaders in other regions. The religious leaders (ARLPI) are engaged in inter-ethnic and inter-religious disputes between Acholi and Lango, and in South Sudan.

However, the challenge is to see an active collaboration from the government, ruling party (NRM) and Buganda-based structures in the work for inter-ethnic reconciliation.

## 4.2 Gendered challenges of social resettlement & reconstruction.

### Gender perspective on the social challenges

The war has had great negative impacts on women in Northern Uganda. Women’s displacement from family land due to the war has created extreme poverty. An estimated 40 percent of the women in Gulu District live below the poverty line, yet the families greatly rely on them. There is a high percentage of women-headed families. Women are living in poor health conditions especially in the IDP Camps. In the ICT camps there has been a high rate of domestic violence, which has led to high divorce rates. There is frequent gang-raping of both women and girls due to loss of cultural values and the fact that people are traumatized. The HIV rates are extremely high.<sup>46</sup>

The war effects come on top of local traditions that are not conducive to women’s equal rights and well-being. The Acholi people have a strongly patriarchal culture, like the rest of Uganda.<sup>47</sup> Women in general do not inherit land or property. Widows are not allowed to own the land/ property their husbands left. Besides, returned women are looked at as mentally unstable and are discriminated against. Single women, whether divorced or widowed, are henceforth usually not welcome to resettle in their villages.<sup>48</sup>

In Gulu there has always been low education levels of the girl child – there are low enrolment and high drop-out rates among girls. Other examples of patriarchal repression is that husbands deny their wives access to facilities like mother-child health centres, leading to high death rates of women. Most of the men do not want to go for HIV/AIDS testing and treatment, they normally wait for their women’s results and medication.<sup>49</sup> In general there are negative attitudes towards women by

<sup>45</sup> Hon. Mr. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, *ibid*

<sup>46</sup> Hon. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, Gulu District (LC5) Speaker. Oral presentation: ‘*The Perspective from the Districts on UNSCR 1325*’ at Women Parliamentarians Workshop (“Putting UN Resolution 1325 into Practice”) organized by CARE International in Lira 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> June, 2008.

<sup>47</sup> Dr. Deborah Mulumba, professor, Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University. Interview: May 5, 2008. Kampala.

<sup>48</sup> Hon. Santa Oketta, Secretary of Community Services in Gulu District. Oral presentation: ‘*Memorandum from the grassroots and district women*’. at Women Parliamentarians Workshop (“Putting UN Resolution 1325 into Practice”) organized by CARE International in Lira 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> June, 2008.

<sup>49</sup> Hon. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, *op.cit*.



men stopping them from accessing public information and joining women groups. Women are not involved in community decision making.<sup>50</sup>

Yet the women contribute most to the economic development of the communities and their families through petty trade, agriculture. Many women have gotten involved in the money lending institutions to help maintain their families (while the men wait and most instead steal from their women instead of giving support). Women play the main role in the feeding of their families and in bringing up the children.<sup>51</sup>

Hence, the view of many actors – men and women alike – is that central and local government must prioritise support to women: women should be encouraged to take part in decision making at all levels. Members of Parliament should lobby for financial support for women groups at the grassroots. Special programmes should be designed to target women in development and include them in the implementation of the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP), e.g. emphasise the girl child education. Special by-laws could be made by the local councils, e.g. against heavy drinking by men (no one should take alcohol before 6pm). By-laws could impose on every husband to go with her wife for HIV/AIDS test. However, implementation can be effective only if the community is fully involved.<sup>52</sup>

### **Women support from the religious and traditional leaders**

The ARLPI has a program for women's empowerment.<sup>53</sup> Through pastoral work and scriptural teachings, for example, they hold that women and men are created by God and thus women are partners with men. They also explore and nurture the great potential women have as peace builders to inculcate a culture of peace through their interactions and rearing of children. Hence, they promote the scaling up of participation/representation of women at all decision making levels in conflict prevention, management, resolution and peacebuilding .

For the reconciliation process they encourage women to report human rights abuses; specifically towards women. They want to ensure no impunity for war crimes against women including gender based violence. They also encourage women who have overcome obstacles to tell their stories and experiences to inspire others.

In the reconstruction and development work, they mentor and provide support and direction to other vulnerable groups within society, through women groups, micro-finance and loans. They provide training and funding to strengthen women groups and income generating projects. They promote and provide opportunities for the formal education of the girl child. Formal education was the best way forward to solve problems women are facing.

The Ker Kwaro Acholi address several gender issues as means to peacebuilding.

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<sup>50</sup> Hon. Santa Oketta, op.cit

<sup>51</sup> Hon. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, and Hon. Santa Oketta, *ibid.*.

<sup>52</sup> Hon. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, and Hon. Santa Oketta, *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Rt Rev. Bishop Onono Onweng, the leader of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI). Oral presentation: *'The roles of ARLPI in women's involvement in Peace building as to the conditions of the UNSCR 1325'* at Women Parliamentarians Workshop ("Putting UN Resolution 1325 into Practice") organized by CARE International in Lira 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> June, 2008.

There has been a realization that women should have rights like any other man to property, education, health; the traditional leaders therefore are advocating for women's rights and trying to abolish the old cultural practices against women as people are returning to their ancestral homes. Clan leaders are being trained in gender issues so as to consider women's rights especially on land issues. By-laws protecting women have been introduced. However, a woman cannot to date be chief. One of the reasons is the belief that they will always be married else where, thus they are unable to rule. Still, they can be present in the Executive Board of the Ker Kwaro Acholi.<sup>54</sup>

### **Does the PRDP have any gender perspective?**

The Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP) provides a framework aimed at addressing the causes of conflict and instability in the North. It is a strategy to eradicate poverty and improve the welfare of the populace in Northern Uganda, setting out a recovery and development strategy.

However, the PRDP does not expressly recognize the important role of women in creating durable peace. It proposes no concrete measures to mobilize, empower or target women. PRDP's section on peacebuilding and reconciliation offers no new resources to be allocated. Peacebuilding is thus left to individual districts and sub county local governments to prioritize. Close examination of the District Results Frameworks and sub-county development plans reveals that peacebuilding, let alone involvement of women in peacebuilding processes, is not integrated. This means the whole idea of women involvement in peacebuilding will not be captured in the implementation of PRDP. Thus the PRDP is largely not in compliance with the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, a representative of the political opposition in Uganda claims.<sup>55</sup>

### **IDP camps or resettlement for the most vulnerable groups?**

Of Gulu's population of 540 000, 90 per cent in the rural areas and 70 per cent in the town lived in IDP camps. In May 2008, more than 100 000 still live in camps.<sup>56</sup>

The authors of this study visited one of them, the Uyanma IDP Camp a few kilometres north of Gulu town. The camp was constructed in 1988, on the premises of a national teacher's college. For almost 20 years, 25 000 people had been crammed together in the camp. They all came from this area. Now almost half had gone home. Those who remained in the camp are the old, people with AIDS, divorced and single mothers, and their children remain. The LC1 chairman thought 50 % of the camp residents had been infected by HIV, and it was mainly because the soldiers, who were supposed to protect the camp, infected the girls. The LC1 chairman himself moved back home 5 months ago. People have got reduced food packages for the last 3 years, except old ones and people with AIDS. People have been sent home without

<sup>54</sup> Ms. Sophie Agwokao (Ker Kwaro Acholi), op. cit.

<sup>55</sup> Mr. Robert Opio, Head of 'A Stake in Our Future' (ASIOF.) Oral presentation: "Implications of policies/ Programmes for peace and development in Uganda and the present situation for women in Northern Uganda; The case for the PRDP" at Women Parliamentarians Workshop ("Putting UN Resolution 1325 into Practice") organized by CARE International in Lira 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> June, 2008.

<sup>56</sup> Mr. Stephen Oloya, deputy CAO (chief administration officer), Gulu District Council. Interview: May 8, 2008. Gulu

any seeds or kits, and there are a lot of land disputes hindering many people from cultivating the land.<sup>57</sup>

This picture is confirmed by officers in the District Council. The IDP camps are now habituated by the following groups:

1. the elderly, the disabled and those with HIV/AIDS. “The IDP camps offer no good environment for them. They need home-based care. The District Council does not have money, but NGOs and donors help reconstruct facilities”.
2. divorced women & widows (see below). “The women need the right to land and to their children. We need a new ‘domestic law’, but the MPs drag their feet. We do advocacy work with and among the traditional leaders”.
3. young people, orphans. “They are difficult to persuade. We help them to resettle where their parents lived.”<sup>58</sup>

“Many want to remain, they have changed their life orientations. Particularly the youth. They are born in the camps, used to urban way of life, football, disco. Some have good businesses. Some are involved in petty crime There is a generation gap”. Thus, the district council now tries to upgrade the camps to urban standards: piped water and permanent school structures. Those who remain must pay their houses, and pay for water and other services. “Those who cannot mend for themselves must go back to the village”.<sup>59</sup> This message is emphasised by the gradual cessation of food distribution in the IDP camps. The residents do not anymore receive hand-outs of free food packages. The LC5 Speaker emphasised economic arguments more than the deputy CAO. He thinks services should not be developed in the camps; services should follow the people. “We insist people must move back”. The argument is that the district has a very low revenue base because people live in camps, where they have not been productive. Resettlement is part of a short term strategy by 2010 to improve the revenue base of the district.<sup>60</sup>

Notwithstanding the moral issue of using force (e.g. against the youth) the question is: how can urbanised youth, marginalised women, the sick and elderly people survive in the villages?<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Mr. Thomas Akera, chairman Uyanma Local Council (LC1), Gulu. Interview: May 8, 2008. Gulu.

<sup>58</sup> Ms. Santa Oketta, community services secretary, Gulu District Council. Interview: May 9, 2008. Gulu.

<sup>59</sup> Mr. Stephen Oloya, deputy CAO (chief administration officer), Gulu District Council. Interview: May 8, 2008. Gulu

<sup>60</sup> Hon. Mr. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, op.cit.: “By end of 2008: everyone is to leave the camps. Now when people move back, by 2 years from now our revenue base will have improved!”

<sup>61</sup> Ms. Santa Oketta, community services secretary, Gulu District Council. Interview: May 9, 2008. Gulu.

### 4.3 Political challenges of local & regional institution building.

#### **The local (district) level**

We here address three issues linked to the local council system: The administrative and financial capacity of the district council, the central-local relations (in the case of planning and financing of the PRDP), and the relations between local government and CSOs/NGOs operating in the district.

#### **“The administrative and financial capacity of the district council is very poor”**

While there are good working relationships between councillors - staff,<sup>62</sup> the understaffing hampers implementation of decisions and service delivery. Around 40 percent of the 4000 positions are vacated. In key departments such as education (teachers) and health the vacancies are 50 and 70 percent, respectively. The financial situation is “very very bad”.<sup>63</sup> The abolition of the ‘graduated tax’, or poll tax paid by every head of family, reduced the local revenues by 80 percent. What remains as own revenues are flat income tax paid by every civil servant and property tax. The latter gives very limited revenues. Local revenues now cover only 3-4 percent of the district council budget (which totals 15 billion UGX budget).<sup>64</sup> The LC5 leadership hopes that resettlement will improve its revenue base, so that by 2010 much more market place tax, service sales tax etc will be collected.<sup>65</sup>

Following resettlement, a challenge is to vitalise the participatory sub-district structures. The LC1 and LC2 structures are important for basic citizen mobilisation, security and district policy implementation. However, they have been part of the Movement (NRM) system so far, and people need a thorough civic education about the change in the constitution towards multipartyism.<sup>66</sup> Some observers go further and claim that the local self-government structures (the LC1 to LC5) need to be cleaned up. There is too much corruption, misappropriation of funds, nepotism, politicking. The calibre of most of the councillors is very poor, and the monitoring mechanisms are too weak.<sup>67</sup>

#### **“The central-local relations seen from Gulu are not good”, for three reasons:**

First, the financial transfers from the central government are highly insufficient. After President Museveni scrapped the local taxes before the 2006 elections, the revenue system for local government got problems. The abolition of poll tax was to

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<sup>62</sup> There are council meetings every two months. There are five standing committees, and each meets once before the council meeting: 1. Finance, planning, general purposes committee. 2. Community Development Committee. 3. Production & Marketing. 4. Public works. 5. Social services (health & education). The councillors and the staff know their roles. “It’s not as bad as in other districts, where there are many local conflicts. When the chairman is not in command, the councillors take advantage”. Mr. Stephen Oloya, deputy CAO, op.cit.

<sup>63</sup> Mr. Stephen Oloya, deputy CAO, ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Mr. Stephen Oloya, deputy CAO, ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Hon. Mr. Ojara Martin Mpenduzi, op.cit.

<sup>66</sup> Hon. Mr. Ojara Martin Mpenduzi, ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Mr. James Nyeko program coordinator, “Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative” (ARPLI). Interview: May 8, 2008. Gulu.

be compensated by increase in the non-conditional grant to the LGAs, but that has not yet been done.<sup>68</sup> Consequently, the non-conditional grant to Gulu LC5 is 1.4 bn a year, less than 10 percent of the budget, and 80-90 percent of this grant has to be spent on arrays in salaries and pensions. “We cannot do any activities or investments ourselves”<sup>69</sup>

Second, very little support from the international NGO & donor community is channelled directly to the district councils, and PRDP will not make any difference in the financial situation of the local councils. There is a myriad of coordinating groups among the international donor agencies in Uganda, and those related to Northern Uganda are: 1) Northern Uganda Recovery Group (NURD), chaired by USAID. It discusses the PRDP with the government and is linked to ‘Local Development Partners Group’, chaired by the WB. 2) Peace & Conflict Working Group. It is linked to ‘Partnership for Governance & Democracy Group of ambassadors. 3) Humanitarian Technical Donor Group. 4) Certain sector working groups, such as the JLOS – Justice, Law & Order Sector. Humanitarian aid is typically ‘off budget’, it is off both central and local government budgets, and is likely to remain so. The main ‘on budget’ is direct budget support to the central government. The PRDP does not seem to change this. The scheduled start-up of PRDP was July 1, 2008, but the funding mechanisms were not yet in place.<sup>70</sup> The deputy CAO in Gulu District stated: “Additional funding is what we expect from PRDP, funding for proper staffing”<sup>71</sup>, and it is likely that he will be strongly disappointed. The PRDP funds will not go through the existing LGA grant system. And only Norway and Sweden have promised ‘on budget’ PRDP funding. The other donors rely on the budget support, try to get earmarked for the North through the regular budget channels.<sup>72</sup> The PRDP will lead to the phasing out of ‘cluster’ projects above the district level (e.g. for water, sanitation). It will also phase out the “District Disaster Groups”.<sup>73</sup> In Gulu, they have been very unhappy with the role of the Prime Minister’s Office in organising these groups, with a widely perceived corrupt State Minister for Disaster Preparedness.<sup>74</sup> These organising structures will be replaced by a centralised “PRDP Monitoring Committee – PMC”, to be convened every 3 months. Outside PRDP, there is the Local Government Development Program funded by the World Bank and with plans to escalate program activities in the North.<sup>75</sup>

Third, the planning of PRDP shows that the central government and its partners practice a heavy handed top-down approach, and there is little trust between the central and local levels. “Before the first PRDP draft, of 02 August 2006, there was no consultation. We asked some parts to be improved, we were heard on some points. But anyway, the Prime Minister’s Office is not a good place to handle it. It

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<sup>68</sup> Mr. Gjermund Sæther, councillor, the Norwegian Embassy Kampala. Interview: May 7, 2008. Kampala

<sup>69</sup> Mr. Stephen Oloya, deputy CAO, *ibid*

<sup>70</sup> Ms. Vibeke Sørum, first secretary, the Norwegian Embassy. Interview: May 7, 2008. Kampala

<sup>71</sup> Mr. Stephen Oloya, deputy CAO, *op.cit*

<sup>72</sup> Mr. Gjermund Sæther, councillor, the Norwegian Embassy Kampala. Interview: May 7, 2008. Kampala

<sup>73</sup> Ms. Vibeke Sørum,

<sup>74</sup> Ms. Santa Oketta, *op.cit*

<sup>75</sup> Ms. Vibeke Sørum,

should have been drafted here”.<sup>76</sup> “The PRDP planning approach has not been effective. Why not plan from Gulu, Lira – decentralise the planning, carry out needs assessments from here? The design has been very top-down. After we complained, a Resettlement Assessment Team was sent up from Kampala. But they did not even know the local language... The PRDP started in a way not proper. We went to the Prime Minister’s Office. We saw from the NAADS and NUSAF that the money did not reach the beneficiaries. The NAADS mainly reached the South. We saw some poultry projects up here, but mainly there were ghost projects. PRDP was first designed for 20 districts, now it will involve 40 districts! It will not be successful. And its implementation has been delayed so many times”.<sup>77</sup> A donor representative agrees that the PRDP planning has seen little local level consultation. However, not even internally in the government departments has there been proper consultation. There is much politicking involved, within the government and between government and opposition.<sup>78</sup>

**“The relations between local government and CSOs/NGOs operating in the district can be much better”<sup>79</sup>**

As noted above, there are 40 NGOs registered in Gulu. In one sector, community services, the following international organisations are active: UNICEF, Save the Children, Norwegian Refugee Council (in resettlement), CEPAR (Canadian), the NGO Forum, Caritas, Catholic Relief Service. In demining, the Italian company AFSI is involved.<sup>80</sup> However, in this and other sectors many NGOs are difficult to monitor. They are not accountable to the local council. Their main partner is the Central Government, or the UN Coordinator in Kampala. There are weak links between the national NGO coordinating system and the district planning system.<sup>81</sup>

At the beginning there was no compulsory exchange of information between NGOs and the local council system. Then the Gulu LC5 ordered the NGOs to bring their plans and budgets to the RDC to register, at least for security reasons.<sup>82</sup> A framework for cooperation, with sector working groups, has later on been established and overseen by the RDC. It provides some overview to the deputy CAO and the rest of the council staff, but not much action coordination. There are examples of replications in service delivery. The NGOs who stand out as good partners are the national ones, particularly the faith-based. They operate in the health sector, with state subsidies. Among the international organisations, UNICEF is much appreciated because it gives direct budget support to the district.<sup>83</sup>

The NGOs look at themselves as more efficient.<sup>84</sup> There is little mutual trust. They claim the local councils are not ‘transparent’, and the local councils think they do not

<sup>76</sup> Ms. Santa Oketta, op.cit . She claims that 18 billion UGX for emergency relief in the North was spent before an appraisal was done, and that the State Minister for Disaster Preparedness in the Prime Minister’s Office had stolen the money. The President was asked to indict him.

<sup>77</sup> Hon. Mr. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, op.cit.

<sup>78</sup> Mr. Gjermund Sæther, op.cit.

<sup>79</sup> Mr. Stephen Oloya, deputy CAO, ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ms. Santa Oketta, op.cit

<sup>81</sup> Mr. Stephen Oloya, deputy CAO, ibid

<sup>82</sup> Ms. Santa Oketta, op.cit

<sup>83</sup> Mr. Stephen Oloya, deputy CAO, ibid..

<sup>84</sup> The informants tend to define even UNICEF as a ‘NGO’

build local capacities. When they leave, they hand their facilities over to the district councils, and that increases their financial burdens. Therefore the councils prefer a smooth, long-term and planned hand-over.<sup>85</sup> Many NGOs probably have problems to adapt to this demand because their trade mark is ‘flexible operations’ – moving quickly in and out of emergency areas.

### **The regional levels**

Between the district LC5 and the central government there is no administrative level. Article 178 in the Constitution of Uganda states that regional governments can be formed, and it refers specifically to five regions including the Acholi and Lango regions. However, no such regional governments have been established. Thus, the PRDP Monitoring Committee (PMC) will be important for direct talks between government and LC5 chairmen. The problem is that PRDP covers almost half of the country, after pressures from ministries/MPs with their own constituencies.<sup>86</sup>

However, there are many initiatives to coordinate ‘from below’ within the Acholi Region. The Local Government Act allows the districts to come together. Hence, the four LC5 districts in the Acholi Region have organised three joint meetings for three days. “For three days we discuss policies and real issues: land disputes, poverty.” In their last meeting they produced some statements: they encouraged the IDP people to return to their villages; they urged the sub-counties to make by-laws to protect the cheer nut tree, an endangered specie; they urged the districts to plan local market places, and they urged Gulu to become a city in 2010, its 100 years anniversary, and become a well organised city “unlike Kampala”. The meetings gather 190 people, incl the RDC, the cultural leaders (chiefs). However, the funding and hence the institutionalisation of this regional structure is not secure.<sup>87</sup>

The Ker Kwaro Acholi builds a potentially powerful organisation for the Acholi people, beyond the precincts of a cultural institution. It has a Cabinet with a Prime Minister and 10 ministries. There is also a Speaker. They all work part time. The ministries are: education, finance/planning, land/physical planning/natural resources, agriculture/marketing, communication/rehabilitation, social development, culture/antiquity, tourism, external affairs, justice & attorney general, gender/youth/special groups. However, the only full time people work in the Secretariat under the Prime Minister. Three technical advisers, plus the project officer, accountant assistant and two drivers.<sup>88</sup> However, the Ker Kwaro Acholi is advised not to interfere into politics. It should safeguard its independence, otherwise people loose trust.<sup>89</sup> The Acholi Land Community Trust is another body– it works for fair solutions to land disputes.<sup>90</sup> The Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative is

<sup>85</sup> Mr. Stephen Oloya, deputy CAO, op.cit.

<sup>86</sup> Mr. Gjermund Sæther, op.cit

<sup>87</sup> Hon. Mr. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, op.cit.

<sup>88</sup> Ms. Sophie Agwokao, project officer, the Traditional Acholi Authority (Ker Kwaro Acholi). Interview: May 9, 2008. Gulu.

<sup>89</sup> Mr. James Nyeko program coordinator, “Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative” (ARPLI). Interview: May 8, 2008. Gulu.

<sup>90</sup> Hon. Mr. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, op.cit.

another regional body described in details above. Thus we may see tendencies of both a sub-national regional state and a civil society in the Acholi land.

Can this regional polity building lead to some regional or confederal structures? And may these structures pose a 'federalist' or even 'secessionist' threat to the current organisation of the Ugandan state? First, the inter-ethnic alliance for regionalism and confederalism is still very weak. Although the DRPT organises the Northern Uganda Peace Forum, and the Ker Kwaro Acholi organises exchange visits to other cultural institutions, Northern Uganda is far from being politically united. There is a lot of mistrust between the Lango and Teso peoples on the one hand and the Acholis on the other. The ethnical 'threat' to the Ugandan unity remains potentially an Acholi threat. Second, all the Acholi informants consulted in this study are clearly in favour of staying within a Ugandan state formation. However, there are different viewpoints of how this state formation should be reformed. There is disagreement of the suitability of (con)federalism: The proponents are in favour of some type of regional autonomy in the North, pointing at the semi-federal state of Germany and South Africa as role models.<sup>91</sup> The opponents maintain that this type of confederalism will not work in Uganda today. It may work only when politics and elections are fairly organised, when there is rule of law, and when proper monitoring and accountability mechanisms are in place.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Hon. Mr. Ojara Martin Mpenduzi (op.cit.)

<sup>92</sup> Mr. James Nyeko, op.cit.



## 5 Concluding remarks

Most of the local actors based in Gulu in the Acholi Region interviewed for this study are disappointed with the way Yoweri Museveni's regime after January 2, 1986, handled the conflict in Northern Uganda. Only a few attempts of national reconciliation with the overwhelming majority in the Northern Uganda, who embraced peace and repudiated LRA, have taken place. By forcing the population into IDP camps, the government has added to the people's sufferings caused by LRA's killings and abductions. The many failed peace talks with the LRA showed that the government preferred a military rather than a political-diplomatic solution.

However, by 2006, mobilisation and peace initiatives from northern (local), national and international CSOs were helped by certain political events at the national as well as international levels. The peace agreement in 2005 between Khartoum and South Sudan made the pacification of LRA (with bases in South Sudan) an urgent task for the international community. The national elections in Uganda in February 2006 revealed that the political opposition in all corners of the country wanted an immediate halt to the war, and that the Museveni government was highly unpopular in Northern Uganda.

The landmark cease fire agreement on August 26, 2006, started a new era for Northern Uganda in general and for the Acholi Region in particular. Although Joseph Kony has avoided to sign the final peace accord, the absence of war for more than two years has spurred a social resettlement process where people leave the IDP camps and return to their ancestral villages. In this context, the local political, religious and traditional leaders seem to work well together to open new spaces for popular mobilisation and participation. The role and rights of women are addressed both in the peace negotiations in Juba and in the resettlement in the villages.

The democratic decentralisation reforms of the Museveni governments have helped to build local political leadership and governance structures that show usefulness in the making and building of peace. However, the lack of financial resources and administrative capacities at the local level, as well as lack of transparency and real bottom-up inputs in the central-local relations, may reduce the effectiveness of the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) for Northern Uganda. Future research needs to address how and to what extent decentralisation, including in a country like Uganda with pre-existing decentralised government structures, may contribute to the making and building of peace.

Uganda faces vast and difficult issues, including the normative–emotional challenges of bringing war criminals to justice and enhancing post-war reconciliation both at the local community and national levels. Moreover, there are challenges linked to the

social inclusion and empowerment of women, in particular women who are divorced, widowed, disabled, old and/or infected by HIV, most of them still in the IDP camps.

Last but not least there are the challenges linked to re-structuring political power and institutions in Northern Uganda. On the one hand, there are potentially competing local elites with different institutional-social bases and interests. Elected leaders in the local municipal system, traditional leaders in the social clan system, and would be-members of a regional government may pursue different solutions to the needs for coordinating and conflict-solving devices within and between the communities in Northern Uganda. On the other hand, effective peace building in Northern Uganda requires that the central government in Kampala redefines its decentralization policy, e.g. its strategy for the restructuring of central-local relations. In that policy process federalism, regionalism, traditionalism and municipalism pose present political options and future controversies.

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# Appendix 1

## List of interviews

DATE	PLACE	NAME	POSITION	INSTITUTION
07/05/2008	Kampala	Dr. Deborah Mulumba	Professor	Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University
07/05/2008	Kampala	Ms. Vibeke Sørum	First secretary	The Norwegian Embassy
07/05/2008	Kampala	Mr. Gjermund Sæther	Councillor	The Norwegian Embassy
08/05/2008	Gulu	Mr. Bosco Otulo	Information manager	The Amnesty Commission's Gulu office
08/05/2008	Gulu	Mr. Stephen Oloya	Deputy CAO	Gulu District Council
08/05/2008	Gulu	Mr. James Nyeko	Program coordinator	Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARPLI).
08/05/2008	Gulu	Mr. Thomas Akera	LC 1 Chairman	Uyanma Local Council (LC1), Gulu
09/05/2008	Gulu	Ms. Santa Oketta	Community services secretary	Gulu District Council
09/05/2008	Gulu	Hon. Mr. Martin Mpenduzi Ojara	LC5 Speaker	Gulu District Council
09/05/2008	Gulu	Ms. Sophie Agwokao	Project officer	The Traditional Acholi Authority (Ker Kwaro Acholi)
28/05/2008	Gulu	Ms. Lina Zedige Waru	Project Manager UNSCR 1325	CARE International
29/05/2008	Gulu	Jessica Hube	Protection & Advocacy Adviser	Norwegian Refugee Council
30/05/2008	Gulu	Boniface Ojok	Project Coordinator	Justice & Reconciliation, NGO Forum
03/06/2008	Kampala	Moses Nsubuga	Resource Centre Coordinator	Refugee Law Project

## Appendix 2:

### NGOs present in Gulu

There are about 40 different NGOs both local and international in Gulu involved in the peacebuilding process.<sup>93</sup> Each has got different activities its carrying out to improve the lives of the people in Northern Uganda. The Government of Uganda is greatly relying on these NGOs on the rehabilitation and reintegration of the people of Northern Uganda. They include (in alphabetical order):

*Acholi Education Initiative (AEI)* is engaged in education and training, human rights, advocacy and good governance.

*Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI)* is engaged in organizing community prayers, training and capacity building, peace education, psychosocial support to war affected individuals to enhance their reintegration in the community, lobbying and advocacy, research, documentation and dissemination of information, networking and collaborating through exchange visits.

*Acholi Youth Peace and Reconciliation Initiative (AYPARI)*, does advocacy and lobbying for appropriate peace initiative and non-violent conflict resolution, HIV/AIDS awareness, advocate for children's rights, peace and reconciliation, training and sensitization at the youth level on peacebuilding and conflict management, youth counselling, formation of youth clubs at sub county levels.

*Action for Children in Conflict* does psychosocial, emotional and educational support to the child survivors of conflict, capacity building of local CBO that work with children and the community. Support and protection to the children, enhance local traditions value and cultures to night commuter children and community they come from.

*Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD)* activities include human rights and advocacy and good governance, HIV/AIDS, conflict resolution and peacebuilding , energy, environment and gender youth empowerment.

*Caritas Gulu (Social Services and Development) Gulu Archdiocese*, carries out agricultural production, health services and infrastructure development, psychosocial support and relief distribution.

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<sup>93</sup> Based on the list provided by the Programme Coordinator, Justice and Reconciliation – NGO Forum, Gulu, Ojok Boniface,

*CARE International* carries out activities which include provision of health services and relief distribution, agricultural production and water and sanitation, psychological support, infrastructure development in emergency health units and motorized water systems, human rights advocacy and good governance, women rights as a district theme.

*Catholic Relief services (CRS)* provides health services psychological support, peacebuilding and education, agricultural production.

*Charity for Peace Foundation*, engaged in humanitarian and material support to the war affected children, health care to the children and advocate for Child rights (Crime prevention), promote youth development, enhance the girl-child education, promote parent-child/ child-parent relationship.

*Christian Outreach Ministry and Education (COME)* carries out health services and relief distribution, agricultural production and water and sanitation, human rights and advocacy and good governance.

*Coalition for Peace in Africa (COPA)* activities include human rights and advocacy and good governance, capacity building in conflict transformation skills, documentation and disseminating, information of peacebuilding , support initiatives that enhance development, advocacy and lobbying.

*Community Welfare Initiative (COWI)* improves goat multiplication, tree planting, demonstration on crop production, group capacity building, conflict transformation to the community.

*Concerned Parents Association (CPA)*, is engaged in advocacy, mobilization, sensitization and networking, education and micro finance training to member groups.

*CPAR - Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief Programme* is involved in Human rights, Advocacy and good governance, infrastructure development, psychosocial support, relief distribution and water and sanitation.

*Education for Peace and Prevention of Violence and HIV/AIDS (EPPOVHA)*, is engaged in peace education to primary schools, peace debates and essays for secondary schools students, sensitization for District and sub county leaders, orientation workshops for EPPOVHA members, HIV/AIDS awareness creation.

*Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO)*, rehabilitates and reintegrates the formerly abducted children, provides skill raining to the formerly abducted children, education support to he formerly abducted who have the interest and ability to go back to school.

*Gulu Women Empowerment Network (GWENET)* is engaged in agriculture production, micro finance, sensitization, counseling and training, recreation activities and catering, training on micro finance, banking, saving and credit management, skills training in metal fabrication, fabric design, tie and dye.

*Human Rights Focus (HURIFO)*, monitors human rights situation in IDP camps, information and counseling in selected IDP camps, paralegal and journalists training, education bursary schemes for orphans.

*International Committee of the Red Cross* provides support to hospital and health structures, on food items seeds and tools, water and sanitation in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader, protection of victims of conflict is the specific mandate of ICRC.

*International Organization for Volunteers Association (AVSI)* carries out health services, distribution of non food items to camps in Gulu, psychosocial support, construction and renovation works works in hospitals and health centers, education on landmine awareness to the populace.

*Laroo Child and Family Programme (Laroo CFP)*, is engaged in HIV/AIDS Campaign, nutrition, relief distribution of food and non food items, pit latrine, shallow well and protect able springs, sensitisation on Amnesty, income generation activities

*Noah's Ark Children's Ministry* carries out psychosocial support to war displaced children, provides basic necessities to the war displaced children, provides temporary shelter to the war displaced children, HIV/AIDS awareness campaign, educating communities on peacebuilding , promoting f games and sports among children, bible studies.

*Northern Uganda Peace Initiative (NUPI)* carries out reconciliation and sustainable peace, promoting cultural and traditional institutions, helping local communities better reintegrate and reconcile with ex-combatants, offer technical assistance to the Government of Uganda in preparing for potential dialogue process by providing strategy papers on lessons learnt from past peace and reconciliation process.

*Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)* activities include relief distribution, human rights and advocacy and good governance, education, shelter construction for schools.

*People's Voices for Peace (PVP)*, is involved in providing psychosocial support to the vulnerable to war victims.

*Quaker Peace and Social Witness-Uganda (QPSW)* is involved in capacity building for peace and development in Northern Uganda

*Refugee Law Project (RLP)* is dedicated to research, public information and advocacy work regarding the humanitarian, legal and political aspects of the conflict in Northern Uganda.

*Save the Children in Uganda (SCiU)*, carries out psychosocial support to the children, provision of health services to the children and sensitization on HIV/AIDS. Protection of children's rights, payment of school fees to vulnerable children.

*SOS Children's Villages in Uganda Gulu ERP* provides health services to the village and community, psychosocial support at the village, long term care of vulnerable children, basic needs support to the vulnerable people, recreation and skills development for the youth at the social centre, long term family care.

*Waloko-kwo Support Organization (WASO)*, carries out HIV/AIDS sensitization, reproduction health services of young people, voluntary counselling, home based care, health education in schools, condoms distribution, drama/role plays, referral services, advocacy for the rights of orphans, training.

*World Vision Uganda-Gulu Programme* is engaged in the health sector provide care and support to registered HIV/AIDS patients, provision of non food items and shelter, food security and nutrition, water and sanitation in camps, child soldier rehabilitation and resettlement, fees payments to the orphans and vulnerable children and school construction.