



# REFLECTING ON PEACE PRACTICE PROJECT

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## Case Study

### **An Overview of Initiatives for Peace in Acholi, Northern Uganda**

*This case study is one of 26 cases developed as part of the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project (RPP). The RPP cases were not written as evaluations; rather, they were written to allow for the identification of cross-cutting issues and themes across the range of cases. Each case represents the views and perspectives of a variety of people—the case writer, agencies, project participants, and observers—at the point it was written. RPP would like to acknowledge the generosity of the agencies involved in donating their time and experience for these case studies, as well as their willingness to share their experience with the worldwide community of peace practitioners.*

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## ACRONYMS

ACORD	Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development
ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
APG	Acholi Parliamentary Group
ARLPI	Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative
AVSI	Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale
CDO	Community Development Office
CJ&PC	Catholic Justice and Peace Committee
CPA	Concerned Parents' Association
CPAR	Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief
CVC	Community Volunteer Counsellors
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FEDEMU	Federal Democratic Movement
GoS	Government of Sudan
GoU	Government of Uganda
GUSCO	Gulu Support the Children Organisation
HSMF	Holy Spirit Movement Force
HURIFO	Human Rights Focus
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KICWA	Kitgum Concerned Women's Association
KM	Kacoke Madit
KM98	Kacoke Madit 1998 (conference)
KPI	Kitgum Peace Initiative
LC5	Local Council Level 5
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MCC	Mennonite Central Committee
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NRA	National Resistance Army
NRM	National Resistance Movement
MPs	Members of Parliament
PVP	People's Voice for Peace
RDC	Resident District Coordinator
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
SPLM/A	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNLA	Uganda National Liberation Army
UNRF II	Uganda National Rescue Front II
UPDA	Uganda People's Democratic Army
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force
UWONET	Uganda Women's Network
WNBF	West Nile Bank Front

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Acholi people of northern Uganda are currently enjoying a respite from war that has afflicted the districts of Gulu and Kitgum for thirteen years. Since February 1999, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) which has been fighting the Government of Uganda (GoU) since the late 1980s has halted military activity. Among the Acholi people of Gulu and Kitgum there is no desire to see the war continue and optimism that the war is drawing to an end. The optimism, however, is tempered by previous experiences of interludes in the war, and the current period of calm is euphemistically referred to as a 'lull,' rather than 'peace'. The challenge that people are grappling with is how to transform the 'lull' into a permanent cessation of violence and an end to the war

In Gulu and Kitgum districts local government and a proliferation of international and local aid organisations are pursuing a range of activities, referred to here as 'peace-building' and 'reconciliation.' These include human rights documentation and advocacy, community mobilisation and sensitisation, institutional strengthening, conflict resolution skills training, psycho-social support, rehabilitation, development, and research. These multiple peace-related activities may reflect a positive synergy of purpose directed towards common objectives of peace and reconciliation, but their impact is unclear. Some appear to be adaptations to a changed funding environment in which donors are keen to fund peace projects.

This paper was commissioned by the Collaborative for Development Action, Inc (CDA)., for the *Reflecting on Peace Practice Project*, a collaborative undertaking with the Life and Peace Institute. The paper is based on a visit to northern Uganda between 25<sup>th</sup> September and 8<sup>th</sup> October 1999. Between 27<sup>th</sup> September and 1<sup>st</sup> October the consultant was a guest of ACORD at the *Peace Research and the Reconciliation Agenda* conference in Gulu, organised with the Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative (ARLPI). At the request of Kacoke Madit (KM), the consultant spent a further week in Gulu, Kitgum and Kampala, meeting their partners, and other organisations and individuals involved in peace work in Acholi.

There was insufficient preparatory time and insufficient time in Uganda to attempt a case study of a specific organisation or activity. This would not have done justice to their work and the serious issues they are dealing with. Instead this paper provides a 'contextual description' of the activities of a range of agencies involved in peace-related work in Gulu and Kitgum Districts. It draws on, and attempts to reflect, some of the discussions and debates at the Peace Research conference and with organisations and individuals interviewed for KM. The interpretation of the information is the responsibility of the author. The first section of the report provides a brief description of the war in Acholi and its impact. Sections two to four describe some initiatives for peace at international, national and local levels. The final section seeks to raise some questions of relevance to this and other case studies.

The invitations from ACORD and KM to visit Gulu provided the opportunity for this study. The company and guidance of Ben Okweru from KM was invaluable during my visit. I am also grateful to Andrew Olweny of ACORD for his assistance in Kitgum.

## **2. THE WAR IN ACHOLI**

The Acholi people of Gulu and Kitgum Districts in northern Uganda have experienced war almost continuously since 1986. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), led by the spirit medium Joseph Kony, is the latest in a series of armed insurgencies that have emerged among the Acholi to take up arms against the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government of Yoweri Museveni. Ignored for many years in Uganda and internationally, the gross abuses of civilians, the large-scale abduction of children and the mass displacement of populations since the mid 1990s has forced Ugandan society and the international community to sit up and take note. The war has subsequently become the focus for a range of organisations documenting human rights, providing humanitarian assistance and supporting peace-building and reconciliation activities.

A long history of political violence under the regimes of Idi Amin, Milton Obote, and social, economic and ethnic divisions within Uganda stretching back to colonial times, provide a complex back ground to the war, which this paper cannot do justice to. At the risk of over-simplification, several characteristics of the war stand out:

The war combines elements of an intra-state civil war with an inter-state proxy war, involving a national army pitched against an ethnically-based insurgency supported by a neighbouring country.

The LRA has no clear political programme and combines features of a conventional military insurgency with a more grassroots millennial movement based on the mobilisation of spiritual forces.

While the war does have an economic dimension from which a few may benefit, the economic motivations behind the persistence of the war are less apparent than the more overt economically motivated 'warlord' phenomena seen elsewhere in Africa.

The war is fought primarily in rural locations. Large-scale abductions by the LRA and forced population movement by government forces indicate this is a war for the control of rural populations, rather than territory.

The manipulation and taxing of aid has not been an obvious strategy of the warring parties, at least until the movement of populations to protected villages.

Violence against civilians has been a strategy of the LRA and government forces, with mass abduction of children a trade mark of the LRA. Fought in a way that deliberately violates human rights, the war has been as much a human rights crisis as a food security crisis, at least until the forced movement of populations.

The overt starting point to the war in Acholi was August 1986. In January 1986, the National Resistance Army (NRA) had seized Kampala overthrowing the six month old military government of General Tito Okello-Lutwar and the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA). Former soldiers and politicians of the Okello regime retreated northwards and regrouped in Sudan as the Ugandan Peoples' Democratic Army (UPDA). In August they attacked NRA forces in Kitgum. The NRA forces in Kitgum included Baganda soldiers of the Federal Democratic Movement (FEDEMU), who held Acholi soldiers responsible for the UNLA atrocities in Luwero Triangle in the early 1980s, in which up to 300,000 mainly Baganda people are thought to have died. Their reprisals for the UPDA incursions increased

fear among the Acholi that the NRA was intent at their annihilation. Acholi resistance was greatly weakened from 1987 onwards when the government failed to prevent some 98% of their cattle from being stolen in raids by the Karamojong. By 1988 the UPDA rebellion had collapsed as some of its members accepted an amnesty from the government.

While the UPDA and the NRA were fighting, another force was being mobilised by Alice Auma, an Acholi spirit medium from Kitgum, possessed by a spirit Lakwena ('messenger'). Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Mobile Force (HSMF) as it was known, had the character of a millennial movement, combining Christian and Acholi beliefs, which aimed not only to bring down the government but also cleanse the Acholi of their sins. Lakwena's forces were defeated in October 1987, less than 100 miles from Kampala.

After Alice's defeat, her father, Severino Lukoya, briefly took up the fight before being captured by government forces in 1989. By this time Joseph Kony, a cousin of Alice and a spirit medium, emerged as the leader of the main Acholi force fighting the government. While Lakwena had recruited her forces from her home district of Kitgum, Kony recruited his from Gulu. They were strengthened after 1988 by members of the UPDA who refused to sign a peace agreement with the NRM. In 1992, his forces became known as the LRA.

Since the overthrow of Okello in 1986, civilians in the north, particularly in the rural areas, have faced violence from returned UNLA soldiers, government forces, and the various insurgencies. Violence has been a particular characteristic of the LRA. As early as 1988 there are reports of civilian massacres by Kony's forces. In 1991, the NRA mounted a major military operation in the north, called 'Operation North.' This included the creation of local self-defence units. The brutal reaction of the LRA to them lost the LRA much support, and by the end of 1991, the LRA had lost much local legitimacy.

The years 1992 and 1993 were relatively quiet, enough so that reconstruction work started. Messages from the LRA expressing a readiness to negotiate led to face-to-face talks between the Minister of the North, Betty Bigombe, and the LRA in early 1994. The process collapsed when the government gave the LRA an ultimatum to surrender in seven days.

Throughout 1994 and 1995 there was a resurgence in LRA military activity, armed by the Sudanese government. At the same time the LRA built up its forces through child abduction. In 1996, another initiative—this time by Acholi elders—to hold direct talks with the LRA ended in tragedy when two elders were killed by the LRA. This was the most violent year of the war (Mawson, 1999). In what became a struggle for the control of the civilian population, the government began to move the entire rural population into 'protected villages' in order to separate them from the LRA, which was dominant in the countryside. By February 1997, it is estimated that 80% of the population of Gulu district alone was living in protected villages, fleeing the LRA or forcibly moved by the army, now renamed the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF).

By 1998, the level of LRA violence against civilians had begun to decline in Gulu and Kitgum, although there were indications of increased incidents in neighbouring districts (*ibid.*). In addition to corralling the population in protected villages, the military had also sealed the Sudan border with mines and new roads to facilitate troop movement. Since February 1999, the LRA have remained in Sudan.

## 2.1 International Dimensions of the War

Since its beginning in 1986, the war in Acholi has been part of the dynamic of regional political relations. The wars in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) directly impact Uganda's internal security.

Sudan-Uganda relations have been a factor in Uganda's internal politics for decades. Sudanese have sought refuge in northern Uganda from the civil wars in Sudan, while Ugandans have sought refuge in Sudan from the Amin and Obote II regimes. The UPDA insurgency of Basilio Okello, the HSMF of Lakwena, and the LRA have all utilised Sudanese support. Military support from the GoS for the LRA increased following the failure of the Bigombe talks in 1994. In return for arms and training from the Sudanese military, the LRA helps to protect Juba and fight the SPLM/A inside Sudan (Human Rights Watch/Africa, 1998).

Likewise, the SPLM/A has received military support from the Ugandan government in the form of training bases, logistical support, military hardware and Ugandan combat troops (Human Rights Watch/Africa, 1998, August). In 1993 and 1994, when Bigombe talks were progressing, the SPLM/A was regaining military ascendancy in southern Sudan after years of damaging internecine warfare. The SPLM/A was bolstered by international, particularly US, political support for political reforms within the movement (Bradbury, 1999). In 1993 and 1994 the UN relief programme in southern Sudan — Operation Lifeline Sudan — underwent major expansion in SPLM/A-controlled areas. Equatoria province in southern Sudan bordering Uganda has been a focus for international aid, particularly from the US. Gulu and Kitgum are on the overland access route to Equatoria. In February 1994, the same month that the Bigombe talks collapsed and the LRA conflict resumed, the GoS blocked aid flights to SPLM/A-held locations in Equatoria along the Uganda-Sudan border. In 1995 the UPDF and SPLM/A conducted joint operations against LRA bases in Sudan (Human Rights Watch/Africa, 1998). Some of the \$20 million of 'non-lethal military' aid supplied to the 'frontline states' by the US in 1996 is thought to have filtered through to the SPLM/A. In 1997, UPDF combat troops are reported to have supported the SPLM/A offensive against the southern Sudanese town of Yei. That year Operation Lifeline Sudan ran a sub-office in Gulu.

Uganda's relations with Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) similarly have had a deep impact on Ugandan politics. Major-General Fred Rwigyema, for example, who led the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) incursion into Rwanda in 1990 was a former Chief of Staff of the Ugandan army. He fought against the HSMF and was once RDC of Gulu. Indeed, his Banyarwanda soldiers are partially blamed for the rustling of Acholi cattle in the late 1980s. The spiraling war in the DRC since 1997 has become part of the regional struggle between Sudan and Uganda. Not only do they support opposing forces, but the GoU, SPLM/A, GoS and the LRA are all reported to have fighters in DRC.

There appears to be some movement towards improving Uganda-Sudan relations. There are several reasons for this. With its own oil production coming on line, Sudan has embarked on a diplomatic charm offensive. In order to be able to sell oil they need to restore external relations, and the European Union is a target market. Britain and other European countries are also seeking to normalise relations reopening embassies in Khartoum. In this context, the issue of child abductees is an embarrassment to the GoS, although it has not been made conditional to the restoration of foreign bilateral aid.

At the same time, US relations with the Ugandan government and with the SPLM/A appear to be cooling. The US is unhappy about Uganda's involvement in the DRC, where their forces are currently opposed to those supported by the US's ally Rwanda. An indication of this displeasure is that US Secretary of State Madeline Albright will not be visiting Uganda on her up-coming visit to the region. With regards to the SPLM/A, there is fatigue in the US, and in the West in general, in the wake of the 1998 Sudanese famine with the human and financial costs of the war in Sudan. There is evidence that the SPLM/A was complicit in diverting humanitarian aid during the famine.

A further factor in changing Uganda-Sudan relations is the impact of the Ethiopia-Eritrea war. For several years US aid policy in the region has revolved around the Greater Horn of Africa Initiative, and on a political alliance of 'new' African leaders in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda, and later Rwanda. The outbreak of war between Ethiopia and Eritrea was a major blow to this policy. Pressure on Sudan from the former 'frontline states' was eased, and Sudan has sought to exploit the divisions among the former allies and reduce support for the SPLM/A by restoring diplomatic relations.

GoS support for the LRA is intrinsic to its ability to continue fighting and abducting children. In order to understand the relationship between the LRA and the GoS, it is important to understand the nature of the Sudanese war. The war in Sudan is not simply about a north-south, ethnic, political and religious divide. It is deeply embedded in the political economy of the country and the exploitation of the country's resources, both human and natural. Furthermore, the Sudanese regime is not monolithic, but represents an alliance of business, military and religious interests. For the Sudanese government in Khartoum the LRA may be a political card in international diplomacy. However, they are also important to the Sudanese military. The LRA are one among several militia groups used by the military to fight the SPLM/A. In particular they provide part of the government's defence of Juba. There is some evidence that LRA abductees are also used as labour by military officers (Human Rights Watch/Africa, 1998). As long as the LRA remain useful to the military, it seems unlikely they will be disbanded. The current 'lull' in LRA military activities suggests they may be under some restraint. This may be a military tactic while the activities of the ADF are boosted.

The continuation or resolution of the war in Acholi is, therefore, linked to Sudan-Uganda relations, and to the internal nature of the Sudanese war. The war in Sudan, however, impacts Uganda in many different ways; the arms trade in Karamoja, or the activities of the ADF, for example. The resolution of the war in Acholi, is therefore, only one element in a complex set of regional and international relationships.

## **2.2 The Humanitarian Impact of the Conflict**

The war in Acholi is the longest running war in Uganda, and it was preceded by fifteen years of civil war under the Amin, Obote and Okello regimes. The years of war have had immediate and long term impacts. The war has been characterised by mass killings, abductions and displacement, particularly after 1994. Blatant violations of international humanitarian and human rights norms by both government forces and LRA insurgents have been systematically documented by international human rights organisations (see for example, Human Rights Watch Africa, 1997; Amnesty International, 1997). Thousands of people have been killed, and many others left disabled, disfigured and traumatised by atrocities and landmines. Up to 10,000 children and many adults are believed to have been abducted by the LRA since 1994.

According to UNICEF over 2,500 children remain missing. Many children have also been orphaned by the war.

Insecurity has disrupted trade and market activity, leaving high employment and a depressed economy in Gulu and Kitgum Districts. The mass displacement of the rural population into over-crowded and under-resourced 'protected villages,' coupled with the loss to raiding of 98% of the Acholi cattle herd in the late 1980s, has had a significant impact on family livelihood security and coping mechanisms. In late 1996 severe malnutrition among encamped populations in Gulu District was as high as 70% before emergency food aid and seeds were distributed (UNOCHA, 1998:18), a situation compounded by drought the following year.

The destruction of rural schools, the abduction of children, and killing of teachers by the LRA has severely disrupted educational services. According to one estimate some 53% of school-age children have never attended school (Olaa, 1998), and the area is losing out on the benefits of the Universal Primary Education programme of the government. The number of Acholi attending secondary and university levels of education is reported to be low compared to other areas in Uganda, and a decline from an earlier period when the area had one of the highest levels of education in Uganda (Pain, 1997:36).

The violence of the war is reported to have had far-reaching social and psychological impacts on the population. Former abductees and their families are reported to suffer traumatic stress disorders (GoU/UNICEF, 1998). The war is said to have caused a breakdown in normal social support systems and traditional forms of conflict management. Life in displaced camps is reported to be 'socially and culturally destructive' (Oywa, 1999, September). Domestic violence, alcoholism, lawlessness and welfare dependency are all reported to be symptoms of this.

Research by ACORD indicates a differential impact of the war on populations in Gulu and Kitgum Districts. The rural food deficit is reported to have been worse in Kitgum, for example. Displacement has been experienced differently by people in different parts of Gulu district (Dolan, 1999, September). In some areas families were able to remain near their villages and only maintained a seasonal residence in the 'protected villages. Others were forced to move far from their homes. The ability of communities to resist the government's policy of encampment was in part dependent on the character of the Local Defence Force or 'Home Guard' commander, and the position taken by their representative Member of Parliament (MP).

Only a few aid agencies have had a long term presence in Gulu and Kitgum districts. Their presence increased in response to the mass movement of populations into 'protected villages,' which were unequipped to receive them. In mid-1998 it is estimated that up to 80% of the population of Gulu had been displaced (Mawson, 1999:11) and perhaps 50% of the population of both districts. According to UNOCHA, the war affected populations in Gulu and Kitgum in late 1998 comprised as follows (UNOCHA, 1999):

	Gulu	Kitgum
Displaced	237,710	93,000
Abducted children	2,717	1,863

Since these figures were compiled the situation has improved, although in Kitgum it is reported that the number of Acholi refugees arriving from Sudan has increased. The 1999 rains have been good, and food production is expected to be an improvement on previous years. The improvement in security has increased the possibilities of travel and trade. The lull in fighting has encouraged people, especially around Kitgum, to return to their villages to farm. In some places people go to their villages to cultivate during the day and sleep in the 'protected villages' overnight. One rough survey estimates that the protected village populations have declined by 15% (UNOCHA, 1999, September). However, government policy to maintain 'protected villages' and limited assistance with resettlement stops people from choosing to return home. There is evidence that in some areas people are not returning to their original villages, but are moving to land secured and cleared by the military for farming next to new military detachments near the Sudan border.

### **2.3 The 'Lull'**

After almost thirteen years, the Acholi people of Gulu and Kitgum districts are experiencing a respite from war. There is optimism that the lack of military activities by the LRA since February this year signals the end to the war. However, people have also not forgotten that there have been respites in the war before, notably in 1992/93, which lasted longer than the current period. Although the scale of LRA activity was reported to have been declining in 1998, violence continued right up to February 1999 when 70 children and young adults were abducted in Omiya-Anyima in Kitgum District (Mawson, 1999). Several reasons are advanced for the 'lull':

- a national and international campaign by concerned parents, human rights activists, and humanitarian organisations to highlight the abuses of the LRA, focussed around their abduction of children;

- international and national pressure on the GoU to increase accountability for human rights, and the actions of the UPDF;

- the Sudanese government's desire to reestablish international legitimacy, linked to its search for an export market for its oil;

- a reduction in pressure on the GoS from the so-called 'front-line' states following the outbreak of the Ethiopia-Eritrea war;

- a change in Sudanese military strategy towards Uganda, involving putting the LRA on hold while increasing pressure from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF);

- a reduction in the LRA's military capability after the deaths of several commanders;

- a change in military priorities for the GoU, with its involvement in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and a reduction in direct military intervention in Sudan in support of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A);

- an acceptance in the Ugandan military that the war with the LRA is unwinnable and an increasing preoccupation with other insurgencies: the ADF in western Uganda, the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF) and the Uganda National Rescue Front II (UNRF II)

in the northwest, incursions by the Interhamwe in the southwest, unrest in Karamoja in the northeast, and grenade and bomb attacks in Kampala;

for Uganda government and LRA soldiers, the economic incentives of involvement in the DRC may outweigh those accrued from war in Acholi;

US displeasure with the GoU over its involvement in DRC, where it is currently opposed to the Rwanda-supported rebel factions; US policy currently favours Rwanda;

the 'success' of the GoU's military strategy, combining mass displacement of the rural population into 'protected villages', and the sealing of the Sudan-Uganda border to prevent further LRA incursions, including with landmines;

an acceptance among many Acholi of the futility of continuing an armed struggle, and that the GoS will not support the overthrow of NRM, of the need to engage politically with the NRM government in order to benefit from development and rehabilitation;

the LRA's alienation of civilian support due to its terror tactics, and the united vocal public opposition to them from Acholi political and religious leaders and civil society organisations;

a decline in support amongst the Acholi diaspora for the LRA;

increasing national awareness of the war from 1996, and that Acholi do not support the war;

constitutional changes in Uganda since 1995, including the decentralisation of administrative powers to the District level, and recognition of traditional systems of governance;

the creation of conditions for the LRA to return, including a formal Amnesty.

There is a sense of cautious optimism that the war is drawing to a close. The fact that government and agencies are preparing contingency plans for the mass return of abducted children illustrates the air of expectation. However, the return of the children in itself would not necessarily signal the end of the conflict.

There are many obstacles to direct talks with the LRA. There is a view that as long as Uganda supports the SPLM/A then the abducted children will not be released. The LRA may have no room for independent decision-making from the GoS, in which case seeking direct dialogue with the LRA may be fruitless. It is also possible that Kony does not want dialogue. If the LRA fighters believe that they have God on their side and that Kony is his prophet, and if Kony derives his authority from being a holy rebel commander, then he may have nothing to gain from peace. Alternatively, those claiming to represent the political wing of the LRA may be seeking to benefit from negotiations.

Others may also benefit from a state of partial-peace. UPDF soldiers could take advantage of the 'lull'. There are some reports that military detachments which have moved to areas in

northern Gulu bordering Sudan are clearing land for rice farming and encouraging people from the protected villages to move next to the army camps.

The escalation of war in other areas of Uganda, or between Uganda and the DRC could divert government and international resources and attention away from the north. The UN, for example, are planning for the influx of large numbers of refugees from the DRC in 1999. If GoU authority is weakened elsewhere in Uganda this could lead to a renewal of LRA activities.

In October 1999 The *New Vision* newspaper summed up the situation in a long article entitled 'Peace Returns to Gulu but is it there to stay?'. The challenge that people are grappling with locally is how to transform this 'lull' into a permanent end to war.

### **3. MULTI-LEVEL INITIATIVES FOR ENDING VIOLENT CONFLICT IN ACHOLI**

There are currently over thirty-five international multi-lateral agencies, government agencies and international and local NGOs involved in supporting and delivering a range of humanitarian assistance, rehabilitation and peace-building and reconciliation programmes and projects in Gulu and Kitgum districts. This excludes international human rights agencies like Amnesty International In addition, the World Bank through the Northern Uganda Reconstruction Programme II (NURP II), and the Governments of Belgium, Britain, Denmark, Italy, and the US, are all making funds available for peace-building and reconciliation activities.

Reviewing this list of agencies and their activities, three issues stand out. First, there appears to be no clear distinction between the objectives of humanitarian, development, human rights and conflict resolution agencies. Thus one goal of the humanitarian system in Uganda is to: "Enhance conflict management and prevention at the local and national level" (UNOCHA, 1998, December: 14).

This is to be accomplished through the:

Promotion of human rights and humanitarian principles through education and advocacy, [and the ] Promotion of national and local reconciliation through support for traditional conflict management techniques and through coordination of the UN system efforts at conflict resolution. (ibid.).

The potential contradictions that might arise between humanitarian action, human rights advocacy and actions to promote peace are not recognised. This makes it difficult to understand what differences there may be between normal relief and development activities and peace-building activities. Is it the same thing by a different name?

Second, although collectively the organisations broadly work at three levels — international, national and local — the majority are focussed on local level peace-building and reconciliation. Third, very few of these organisations are involved in efforts to directly contact the LRA, or to mediate between the LRA and the GoU.

The following sections look at some of the current peace-building and reconciliation activities of international and local agencies in Gulu and Kitgum.

#### **4. INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION**

The international and regional dimensions of the war in northern Uganda are public knowledge. The issue of Sudan-Uganda relations was identified as an issue at the 1998 *Bedo Piny* conference of religious leaders (Kitgum District, 1998), and the conference of Kacoke Madit (KM) in 1998 (KM98). The seriousness that people attach to the issue was highlighted by the lengthy discussions on the topic during the ARLPI/ACORD Conference. With the exception of some multi-lateral agencies like UNICEF and pan-Acholi groups like ARLPI and the Acholi Parliamentary Group (APG), most peace activities are 'internally' focused—that is, towards reconciliation amongst the Acholi people. Options for local, national and international multi-lateral agencies and NGOs to influence these relations appears to be limited. Three strategies are examined here.

##### **4.1 Dialogue with the LRA**

During the course of the insurgency there have been a number of initiatives to engage in direct dialogue with the LRA.

In 1994, after a period of relative quiet and overtures from the LRA for talks, the Minister of State for the North, Betty Bigombe, embarked on a process that led to face-to-face talks with Joseph Kony in Uganda. Sufficient progress was made in the talks that some LRA fighters were able to come out of the bush and move freely in the towns. The talks faltered over LRA demands for a 3-6 month delay in the implementation of a peace plan. They collapsed when the GoU issued the LRA with a seven day ultimatum to surrender their weapons. It is speculated that the GoU was suspicious that the GoS was rearming the LRA, or that members of the military did not want the talks to succeed.

In early 1996 Acholi elders, lead by the paramount chief of the Payira clan, *Rwot Acana*, established contact with Kony and obtained permission from the GoU to hold direct talks. Again, progress was made. However, in May that year Museveni won the presidential elections, in which his rival received 96% of the vote in Acholi. Shortly after being reelected the President announced his aim to defeat the LRA by force. In this context the budget proposed by the elders for talks was leaked to the press, and the LRA accused the elders of seeking to profiteer from the initiative. The talks ended when two elders were murdered during a second meeting with the LRA.

In 1997, following the first Kacoke Madit in London (KM97), the Nairobi based political representative of the LRA/M contacted the government proposing talks. Through the offices of the St Egidio Community, he met the Ugandan Minister of Foreign Affairs in Rome. The GoU made a second round of talks conditional on there being a LRA field commander present. Disputes within the LRA over its political representation caused the talks to fail.

In June 1997, Sister Rachele Fassera, Deputy Head Mistress of the St Mary's School in Aboke, together with members of the Aboke Concerned Parents' Association (CPA), met with

LRA Commanders in Juba to seek the release of their abducted children. Although the LRA initially denied that they held the Aboke girls, during the meetings it was reported that they did offer to release them through ICRC in return for the GoU declaring a cease-fire (Fassera & Atyam, 1999). The GoU refused these conditions. The LRA subsequently blamed them for the breakdown in talks and for anything that might happen to the girls.

During 1999, there have been several efforts to open dialogue. A delegation of concerned parents visited Khartoum as part of confidence building measures. Members of local government in Gulu sought to contact the LRA political representatives in Nairobi, leading to accusations from government circles that they were ‘rebel collaborators.’ In September two Sudanese MPs visited Gulu and Kitgum to discuss the issue of abducted children.

Currently, there appear to be no local initiatives to establish direct peace talks with the LRA, although elders, religious leaders and Members of Parliament (MPs) all express a readiness to play a role in direct talks. However, it was apparent from discussions during the ARLPI/ACORD Peace Research conference that there is hesitation to take a first step without government approval. The government for its part appears to lack the willingness to open direct talks with the LRA. Questions about government support for such talks during the ARLPI/ACORD conference were deflected by the Prime Minister with discussions about budgets. Given the controversy surrounding the budget for the 1996 talks, this was a pointed reminder that any such delegations do need government blessing. The emphasis, therefore, appears to have moved away from direct talks with the LRA to bilateral talks between the governments of Uganda and Sudan. The visit of the Sudanese MPs seems to reflect this.

#### **4.2 Kacoke Madit**

One of the biggest obstacles to peace talks is identifying effective intermediaries between the GoU, LRA and the Acholi people. This is a role that Kacoke Madit is seeking to fulfill.

KM describes itself as a ‘forum’ of Acholi people working together for a peaceful resolution of the conflict in the northern Uganda districts of Gulu and Kitgum (Kacoke Madit, 1999, September). It was founded in 1996 by Acholi in the diaspora, following the failure of the elder’s peace talks with the LRA. In 1996 the Uganda North America Association refused to discuss the issue. Amid this apparent indifference by non-Acholi Ugandans in the diaspora, a meeting was organized in London in April 1997 where the largest Acholi diaspora lives. It aimed to raise international awareness of the conflict in northern Uganda, and generate a consensus for peace and reconciliation among the Acholi. Consensus is said to be ‘the essential basis of any authentic Acholi politics’ (Pain, 1997).

The meeting, called *Kacoke Madit* (‘big gathering’), brought together over 300 Acholi from Uganda and the diaspora, including government ministers, church leaders and LRA representatives. Kacoke Madit ‘97 (KM97) was totally funded by voluntary contributions. It was organised by a voluntary group — the London Organising Committee (LOC) — in collaboration with the APG, religious leaders and individuals in Uganda. The resolutions of (KM97) urged the LRA and the GoU to resolve the conflict by peaceful means, and to mobilise resources for rehabilitation. They identified the need for a task force to follow up resolutions, and to promote Acholi unity and strengthen cultural heritage, and for KM to continue as a ‘forum’.

Two further meetings have since been held in London, bringing together Acholi from Uganda and the diaspora. KM98 entitled 'Removing the Obstacles to Peace,' identified Uganda-Sudan relations as an issue and called on Sudan and Uganda to create an appropriate 'atmosphere' for a resolution of the conflict. KM99, entitled 'Building Partnerships for Peace,' sought to formulate joint plans with partner organisations in Uganda.

KM continues to define itself as a 'forum,' but over time it has begun to formalise its structure. It currently has a KM Secretariat based in London, with an international Coordinator, and Regional Coordinators based in other countries. It has adopted Partner Organisations in Uganda and is looking to establish a Conflict Resolution Advisory Group. In 1999, it received a grant from the British Government to take forward its work, primarily to support travel costs, meetings, communications, the production of a newsletter, and the part-time secretarial costs of one KM member. The grant was channeled through the London based NGO Conciliation Resources, which also provides work space, administrative support, and technical assistance to KM.

KM view peacemaking as a multi-level process, and since KM97, it has sought to develop links with the LRA, with government and with international organisations to find common ground and broaden its partnerships for peaceful reconciliation of the conflict. Among its achievements, KM lists the following:

- KM97 led to an exchange of letters between the GoU and the LRA, and the first face-to-face meeting between the parties since 1994. While the initiative failed to produce an agreement, it indicated a willingness among the parties to consider negotiations.
- KM97 led to the first face-to-face meeting between the LRA/M leaders and the Acholi people since 1996.
- It helped to strengthen the consensus for peace, and stimulated the formation of other peace initiatives in and outside Uganda
- It increased international awareness among the international community about the war and its humanitarian consequences.
- Helped attract support for peace, reconciliation and development from donor governments and NGOs
- Commissioned the publication of 'The Bending of the Spear,' which reflects strong grassroots support for reconciliation.
- It has also contributed to debates on the Amnesty Bill.

For some of its members, KM97 was considered 'the start of peace' (Okweru, September 28). Within government circles and among Acholi religious and political leaders, there is broad appreciation of KM's efforts in helping to turn the tide of opinion against war and in favour of a negotiated political settlement. Among Ugandans and international organisations interviewed in Uganda, the greatest contribution of KM to date has been to provide a forum for contacts between Acholi leaders and LRA representatives. They believe this has led to a change in views among Acholi in the diaspora who were directly or nominally supportive of the LRA. As a result of KM, some Acholi have visited Uganda to assess the situation for themselves. The participation of LRA sympathisers and representatives in KM97 appears also to have resulted in splits within the LRA. A decline in diaspora support for the LRA is thought to have contributed to the current cessation of hostilities.

KM's position in the diaspora is perceived to give it certain advantages in terms of mediation. At the same time, there is some concern about KM's links with the LRA and doubt about the legitimacy of those in the diaspora claiming political leadership of the LRA. There is suspicion that these are people who are seeking personal advantage from negotiations. As one religious leader argued, "We should not give recognition to people who claim to represent the LRA, as it just aggravates the problem."<sup>1</sup>

There is also doubt about the LRA's ability to act independently from the GoS. For this reason there is some uncertainty about KM's ability to 'bring in' the LRA. Because KM is perceived to have had influence on support for the LRA, several people interviewed, believed that KM should take a more public stand on human rights, and use all avenues available to it to secure the release of the children.

In this regard, there are two key dilemma for KM. First, how to balance its position against human rights abuses without compromising its links with the LRA or the government. Second, as an interlocutor, how to sustain interest and trust in their work which, for reasons of confidentiality, it cannot publicise. Previous talks have been criticised for being exclusive, and KM will need to find ways to maintain and improve the transparency of its work, ensuring that Acholi in Uganda, the government and the LRA are all consulted.

Some partners feel that KM has perhaps spent too much energy calling for dialogue between the GoU and the LRA. As the reconciliation process among the Acholi within Uganda moves ahead and the LRA threat is seen to be contained, there is concern that Acholi should not miss out from the developments in Uganda. For this reason some people argue that KM should focus more on rehabilitation and less on dialogue. To support this, it is proposed by some that KM2000 should take place in Uganda and focus on the positive activities that are taking place there. Leaving aside the issue of whether LRA representatives would be prepared to attend a meeting in Uganda, an issue for KM, and for all those working to end the war and address its causes, is defining the point at which a war — whose start was never declared — can be declared ended.

### **4.3 Human Rights Advocacy**

Since 1997, a concerted advocacy campaign by international and Ugandan organisation has drawn attention to the human rights abuses of the LRA, and to a lesser extent the UDFP in northern Uganda. LRA abuses of children have provided an emotive and powerful issue around which to mobilise. The campaign, although loosely structured, has brought together UNICEF, Human Rights Watch/Africa, Amnesty International, with humanitarian and development NGOs such as World Vision and Red Barnet, local human rights organisations such as Human Rights Focus (HURIFO) and People's Voice for Peace (PVP), relief NGOs such as GUSCO, church groups such as the ARLPI and the Catholic Justice and Peace Committee (CJ&PC), and community-based organisations such as the Aboke and the Omiya-Anyima Concerned Parents' Associations. The 1997 investigative report by Robert Gersony for USAID added weight to the reports of Human Rights Watch/Africa and Amnesty International.

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<sup>1</sup> Interviewed in Kampala, October 1999.

Although peace-building and reconciliation have not been overt objectives of the human rights campaign, the rationale has been to influence the behaviour of the LRA and UPDF, in order to reduce the level of violence against civilians. It is extremely difficult to single out the impact of such a campaign from other factors. However, in northern Uganda it is reasonable to assume that the campaign on abducted children has contributed in several ways. It has served to expose the situation in the international arena and force UN member states and UN institutions to take action. In April 1998, for example, the UN Commission for Human Rights condemned the LRA's treatment of children and called on member states and other international bodies and organisations to exert all possible pressure on the LRA to release the children immediately (Mawson, 1999: 44). The campaign has helped break the isolation of northern Uganda and demonstrate that the war is national issue, not just an Acholi problem. It has helped educate Acholi in the diaspora on the impact of the war. It has brought international pressure to bear on the Sudanese government and, as noted, has also led to direct contact between Ugandans and the LRA, as when the Aboke CPA met LRA commanders in Juba. Importantly, there is some evidence that it may have led to a reduction in violence against civilians, although this may have been at the expense of increased violence in non-Acholi districts. (Mawson, 1999).

The campaign for the release of children has been criticised for focussing too much on children. Children are an easy, non-political, entry point for international action. However, many adults have also been killed in the war and abducted by the LRA. While concern is expressed for the rehabilitation of children, little thought appears to be given to how adults may be demobilised or reintegrated. Furthermore, the GoU is accused of taking notice only after the abduction in 1996 of over 100 girls from St Mary's school in Aboke, Apac District, because it signaled a widening of the conflict and affected middle-class families. The Aboke CPA, however, are keen to stress that their campaign is for the release of all the abducted children (Fassera and Atyam, 1999, October).

In terms of international relations, one outcome of the campaign has been the visit of two Sudanese MPs to Gulu and Kitgum districts in northern Uganda in September 1999. Their visit, facilitated by UNICEF, followed meetings between UNICEF, the Sudanese Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Internal Affairs and the military which resolved that the case of the abducted children should be treated as a 'humanitarian' issue (Wright, 1999, October). In Uganda the MPs (the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Committee of Human Rights and Public Duties) met with government officials, former abductees, NGOs and UNICEF. It is reported that they initially came with the view that conditionalities should be placed on any deal over the children, such as Uganda's support for the SPLM/A. They concluded, however, that humanitarian and political issues should be separated, and that the children should be released unconditionally.

The MPs accepted that the APG should meet with the LRA and the GoS. UNICEF, while reluctant to become too deeply involved at a political level, have offered to fund such a visit. The visit of the MPs was a significant event. Coupled with the first reading of the Amnesty Bill, expectations were high that it would pave the way for the return of the abductees. In September there was an emergency meeting of government aid agencies in Gulu to draw up contingency plans for the sudden return of over 2,000 abductees and the demobilisation and reintegration of rebel fighters.

The abduction of children is a fundamental obstacle to reconciliation and any peace settlement. The parents and Acholi people in general will not accept that the war is over until the children

have returned. Concern is expressed by the parents and NGOs working with former abductees, that those who claim to represent the LRA politically continue to deny LRA responsibility for human rights abuse and abductions. While there has been an international human rights campaign on the issue of child abductees, no-one sought to engage directly with the LRA on human rights.

## **5. STRATEGIES FOR NATIONAL PEACE-BUILDING AND RECONCILIATION**

The work of several organisations bridge the national and local levels of the conflict. UNICEF, the ARLPI and APG can again be included, as well as those agencies involved in human rights advocacy, and those parents' associations campaigning for the return of abducted children. Here two initiatives that explicitly work within a national governmental framework are examined, the role of the Acholi Parliamentary Group and the lobby for an Amnesty.

### **5.1 Political Vulnerability and the Role the Acholi Parliamentary Group**

1996 was one of the most violent years of the war. In 1996 talks between Acholi elders and the LRA failed. In Presidential elections, Museveni's main political rival, Ssemogerere, secured the support of 90% of Acholi voters who endorsed his proposal for a negotiated settlement to the war. Museveni, however, was elected President with over 70% of the national vote. He publicly declared the LRA would be defeated by military means, and in 1996 the corralling of the rural populations into 'protected villages' started. As the LRA and UPDF fought for control of the population, the Acholi were politically vulnerable. However, in 1996, eleven Acholi politicians were also elected to parliament. Elected, it is claimed, on an agenda for peace and development (Mao, 1999 September 25), they constituted a caucus in parliament — the Acholi Parliamentary Group.

Civil society has largely been credited for creating the space for the voiceless Acholi to speak on national issues. While the work of the religious leaders and KM, for example, has been important, the role played by Acholi MPs in defending the north and representing Acholi interests nationally has also been critical. This only became feasible, however, with changes to the national constitution in 1995 and the decentralisation of administrative authority to the districts.

Although the APG are criticised from some quarters for the limited time they spend in their constituencies, they have been vocal at a national level. Their first task was to call for an investigation of the situation in the north, thus stimulating a national debate on Acholi. Until 1997, their strategy was to put pressure on the government. After 1997, through KM the APG established links with the diaspora whom they criticised for supporting the LRA (Mao, 1999 September 25). The APG have defended Acholi land from the encroachment of southern businessmen seeking to open up farming land during the war. They have also been influential in persuading government to accept the renewal of the chieftaincy system. Significantly, there is also evidence that in those parishes where MPs were active the local population was less vulnerable to forced displacement to protected villages (Owya, 1999, October). The APG believe they have built confidence in the Acholi that it is feasible now to pursue the needs of the north through constitutional politics rather than through war.

## 5.2 The Amnesty Bill

An essential element in the current approach to peace-building and reconciliation has been a lobby for unconditional amnesty for the LRA fighters. In the past the government has used presidential amnesties to persuade UPDA rebels to surrender, but has rejected a blanket amnesty for the LRA on the grounds that it would provide impunity to ‘criminals.’ In 1998, this changed when the President announced that he was prepared to offer such an amnesty if people desired it.

Reasons for the change of position are unclear, but appeals from the Aboke parents are said to have been important. Government consultations in 1998 with district leaders, churches and NGOs revealed popular support for the idea. The unanimous support for the Amnesty among the Acholi is linked to traditional values of reconciliation, which do not sanction the death penalty or ostracism. It is believed that people who have done wrong can still be productive members of society. The strengthening of traditional social institutions for reconciliation is seen by some as a necessary pre-requisite for the Bill’s implementation.

Acholi political leaders, church leaders and NGOs, including KM, have all submitted proposals for inclusion in the Amnesty. The Bill was given its first reading in September 1999 and is expected to be passed on a second reading before the end of 1999. Locally, the Amnesty Bill is seen as a positive response to local demand and there is no desire to delay its passage by advocating too many changes, as this would be seen as harmful to the momentum building for peace. There is a view that securing a peace settlement must take precedent over human rights issues. The apparent unanimous support, however, disguises several problems with the Bill as it stands.

It is not clear that ordinary people who have suffered the brunt of the violence are all supportive of a blanket amnesty. Issues such as the composition of the Commission, the six month time frame for the Amnesty, whether it covers the UPDF, how it will be communicated to the local population and to the LRA have still to be thought through, along with details of resettlement packages and security guarantees for the LRA. While the Amnesty deals with offenses against the State, it does not deal with offenses against the individual, leaving open the possibility for people to take out civil cases against LRA fighters. The Amnesty, unlike the traditional reconciliation ceremonies *mato oput* (see below), does not allow for acknowledgement of offenses committed. It also does not deal with the issue of encampment in ‘protected villages,’ which for some is a human rights issue. While there is no desire to see the Bill delayed, there is some concern that if these issues are not addressed the Bill, an important element in a peace process, will fail.

## 6. ‘PUTTING THE HOUSE IN ORDER’ : STRATEGIES FOR LOCAL PEACE-BUILDING AND RECONCILIATION

Only a few of the thirty-five international and local organisations working in Gulu and Kitgum are involved in peace activities directed at addressing what might be called the ‘external’ international and national dimensions of the war. The majority are concerned with addressing local or ‘internal’ aspects, whether related to ameliorating the humanitarian impact of the war, or strategies to end the violence. As one commentator notes, “The bulk of work by human

rights and humanitarian actors is directed towards creating an internal environment in which LRA leaders can lay down their arms” (Mawson, 1999: 34).

In part the focus on the ‘internal’ aspects of the war is a reaction to what some Acholi believe has been an attempt by the government to destroy Acholi by setting them against each other. Despite redefining the war as a national and regional ‘political’ issue, there is also a recognition of ‘social’ conflicts and tensions within Acholi society, and of the need for intra-Acholi reconciliation. The UPDA, HSMF and LRA insurgencies have all fought each other and committed violence against Acholi civilians (Behrend, 1998).

During the ARLPI/ACORD conference there was talk among Acholi leaders of ‘setting the house in order.’ Support for an amnesty, the strengthening of social institutions and mechanisms for conflict resolution are strategies employed towards this end. At the local level there is a particular focus on what might be called ‘social reconstruction,’ through institutional strengthening and capacity building, and activities to affect behavioural change. The latter includes psycho-social programmes for abductees, relatives of abductees and communities, the training of community leaders in conflict resolution techniques and life skills, and community sensitisation and mobilisation.

### **6.1 Strengthening Indigenous Institutions for Conflict Management**

In 1997, following KM97, Kacoke Madit and International Alert commissioned research to elicit the views of Acholi ‘opinion leaders’ in Uganda on what would constitute a substantive ‘talks agenda’ and a process for reconciliation. The subsequent report, *The Bending of Spears*, seeks to provide a outlet for Acholi views (Pain, 1997). In particular it confirmed a view that the war was eroding Acholi culture. It also confirmed a consensus that a peaceful end to the war should be pursued, and articulated a community-based approach to reconciliation, drawing on Acholi culture, values and institutions. The report highlights a traditional reconciliation process known as *mato oput*. Mediated by elders, this involves acknowledgement of responsibility for wrongdoing, repentance and the payment of compensation. The process ends with the symbolic shared ‘drinking of a bitter juice’ (*mato oput*), and the bending of spears. The report argues that this traditional process offers a means for the restoration of relationships which legalistic approaches do not. Importantly, the report emphasises the need for all Acholi to go through *mato oput*.

*The Bending of the Spears* has been very influential among the Acholi and some NGOs and donors, who have tried to formulate strategies to take its recommendations forward. The interest in indigenous or traditional approaches to conflict resolution raises many issues, which this report has neither the time nor the data to do justice to. In terms of ‘setting the house in order,’ the interest in traditional institutions and processes for conflict resolution appears to revolve around three aspects of the conflict — social, political and human rights.

One consequence of the thirteen years of war is said to be the erosion of Acholi values, social institutions, community support mechanisms, and traditions of conflict management. Traditionally the Acholi elders have a central role in *mato oput*. These institutions, however, are considered to have been weakened by the formation of the Ugandan state, as well as the war.

The loss of livestock in the late 1980s had both an economic and cultural impact on the chieftaincy system and payment of cattle. The insurgency tactics of the LRA appear to target

the social fabric of Acholi society, by attacking spiritual beliefs, overturning cultural norms, attacking authority structures and mistreating children. During the course of the war Acholi culture has been maligned by the government and LRA atrocities presented as characteristic of Acholi society. Elders, who are supposed to be the guardians of Acholi culture, are criticised by Acholi for being weak and for their inappropriate behaviour in drinking and attending discos.

KM97 identified the need to reassert and strengthen Acholi cultural heritage. A precedent for this was the 1994 Act of Parliament which allowed for the restitution of the Buganda kingdom. Article 46 of Uganda's 1995 Constitution restores legitimacy to traditional leadership structures, which had been banned by the 1967 Constitution after the Buganda Kabaka was exiled. For many, cultural revival is about 'social reconstruction,' but also a means to reestablish a distinctive Acholi political voice and identity.

In terms of human rights, it is argued that the revitalisation of traditional institutions and mechanism for reconciliation is a necessary precondition for the implementation of the Amnesty Bill. One conclusion of *The Bending of the Spears* was that an Amnesty for the LRA is insufficient, as it would effectively provide impunity for crimes. Parallels are drawn with the Truth Commission in South Africa which documented what happened and made people confront the truth, but was not followed by a formal process of reconciliation and restitution. In contrast the Acholi process of *mato oput* requires an acknowledgement of wrongdoing and a healing process and restitution through compensation; inter-group relations can only be reestablished once compensation is paid. Therefore, while there was widespread demand for an Amnesty to enable the rebels to return and to end the war, it was also recognised that this needed to be complemented by a reconciliation process. Without the support of the Acholi chiefs, it is argued, the Amnesty will fail. A constraint to *mato oput* is the cost of paying compensation, due to loss of cattle. One conclusion of *The Bending of the Spears* was that the international community should support *mao oput* with funds for compensation.

In January 1999, the Belgium government offered resources to the government to do research on the chieftaincy system. ACORD was nominated to be the conduit for funds and to manage the research. Building on Pain's research, ACORD's aim has firstly been to understand how the chieftaincy system has been affected by the war and whether traditional healing and community reconciliation processes are continuing. ACORD, together with local government and religious leaders have, therefore, been travelling throughout the districts, holding consultations with local leaders to identify who the *rwot* are, and to discuss what the role of elders could and should be. This will be the first time for all the *rwot* to be identified and documented. The report will therefore be a historic document. The process has also involved consulting with neighbouring groups, such as the Banyaro, who have a traditional role among the Acholi.

The identification process is intended to be completed by the end of November, at which point a meeting will be held to determine, among other things, what traditional mechanisms are still used for reconciliation and whether it is feasible to marry traditional process of reconciliation with modern legalistic processes. The initial research suggests that elders have always played a role. In 1987-89 for example, some elders ran reception centres for those UPDA fighters who accepted an amnesty. Initial research also suggests that traditional leaders are divided in their ideas about their roles, and their constituency has been disrupted by displacement. Healing and cleansing rituals are continuing but reconciliation rituals are much weaker. The youth are less

de-socialised than some people report, but they no longer automatically respect the elders (Oywa, 1999, October).

Expectations about the outcome of the process are somewhat different among those involved in the research. Among some there is an expectation that it will lead to a major pan-Acholi reconciliation conference, where all the Acholi *rwoti* meet, as proposed in *The Bending of the Spears*. This, it is suggested, should take place at the Achwa river marking the border between Kitgum and Gulu Districts. ACORD is more cautious, preferring to analyse the findings first before determining the outcome (Oywa, 1999, October.) Some believed that the traditional governance should be strengthened, and that traditional courts can be more effective in resolving local disputes than the local courts introduced by government. It is reported that the process has created tensions amongst some elders, as there are expectations about financial benefits. Some suggest that the aim of government is to streamline or rationalise the traditional administration, and thus bring it under government control. Currently, the government is investing financial and political capital in the restoration of the Buganda Kingdom. Some Acholi are concerned that the Acholi should not miss out on similar investment. Others have criticised the emphasis being given to the role of the elders as an excuse for the government not to do more in education and economic development. As one participant at the ARLPI/ACORD conference asked, “Is ritual cleansing all that a society can give back to the victims of the war?”

### 6.1.1 Observations

An interest in indigenous and traditional approaches to conflict resolution is apparent in a number of war settings. The role of Somali elders in Somaliland has been written about. In Sierra Leone the British government are considering proposals to reinvest in the Chieftaincy system. In Sudan traditional reconciliation ceremonies between Dinka and Nuer have been encouraged. There is also an interest in traditional codes of warfare, and linking them to the international ‘laws of war’. In Somalia ICRC has done research into Somali codes of warfare, and in Sudan UNICEF use discussions on traditional codes of war to disseminate humanitarian principles and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In Acholi the idea of reviving and strengthening traditional processes raises a number of interesting and contentious issues. Some of the ideas contained in *The Bending of the Spears* have been criticised. For example, because the report represents the views of ‘acknowledged “opinion leaders,”’ it is criticised for not taking into account the views of ordinary people, and therefore suggesting a consensus which may not be there. The report assumes that LRA fighters will not easily be accepted back, but there are very few reports where former abductees have been rejected (Dolan, 1999, September).

The notion of a single pan-Acholi ritual reconciliation act seems to go against established practice. Reconciliation takes place over a long period of time, with *mato oput* occurring at an appropriate time when agreement has been reached by all parties on compensation and the restoration of relations. Compensation is not the sole responsibility of the ‘guilty’ individual, but of the clan. If the international community pays compensation, as proposed, this would absolve clan members from their shared responsibility and the joint commitment it symbolises.

The emphasis of *mato oput* seems to be on the therapeutic. It is unclear, however, whether the acknowledgment of ‘crimes’ would be sufficient to reveal the ‘truth’ and to account for what

happened during the war which is consistently highlighted as a critical element in a reconciliation process. As not all LRA rebels are believed to be Acholi, it is unclear how *mato oput* will address their cases. It is also unclear how it would address abuses by the UPDF. It may, therefore, not enable people to express their grievances against the government. Furthermore, a reliance on traditional processes may relieve the government of responsibility to genuinely implement the Amnesty.

High expectations are being placed on what are widely considered weakened traditional institutions to resolve what is a protracted conflict. The war has generated new problems, such as violence by and against children, for which there is no precedent, and which may take society some time to come to terms with.

Importantly, this approach of local-level reconciliation fails to address the international dimension of the war, or those who may be benefiting from the war. As one participant in the ARLPI/ACORD conference commented, "Getting to the truth is not possible if it is locked away in Sudan."

Celebrating Acholi culture and identity expresses Acholi separateness or difference from the rest of Uganda, and holds the danger of reformulating the war as a 'internal' intra-Acholi conflict. However, an interesting aspect of the emphasis on Acholi traditional practices is the way it resembles the efforts of Lakwena and Kony to 'cleanse' Acholi society of evil spirits and witches. The traditional ritual practices of elders seem to be being pitched against the rituals of Kony. Perhaps the battle is not just for the 'hearts and minds' of the Acholi, but also for the soul.

## **6.2 Community-Based Peace-Building and Reconciliation**

The interest in traditional institutions and mechanisms for reconciliation is accompanied by 'non-traditional' peace-building and reconciliation activities focussed on intra-Acholi reconciliation. This includes training in conflict resolution and conflict management techniques, community sensitisation for peace, and individual and community focussed psycho-social programming. Four types of organisation are involved in these activities: religious, government, and international and local NGOs. As the activities are often combined with community-based development activities, they are referred to here as community-based peace-building and reconciliation.

### **6.2.1 The Religious Leaders**

Most prominent among the religious institutions are the ARLPI and the Catholic Justice and Peace Committee (CJ&PC). The ARLPI was initiated as an ecumenical programme by the Anglican Bishop of Kitgum, following the creation of the Anglican diocese of Kitgum in 1995, and the Catholic Comboni Father of Kitgum. Two massacres that year in Kitgum brought the religious leaders together to work for peace, and 'to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves' (Ochola, 1999, October). The initiative at first lacked support from the former Archbishop of Uganda and only received national and international prominence after 1997, when the Right Reverend Nelson Onono Onweng was appointed Bishop of Gulu and broadened the body to include Gulu and Kitgum.

In 1998, ARLPI obtained funding from UNDP for a conference — *Bedo Piny* ('sitting down') — to discuss the conflict. Entitled 'Active Community Participation in Healing, Restoration and Development,' the conference brought together over 150 Acholi. The conference sought to identify the causes of the insurgency, its impact on Acholi, the reasons for its persistence, and what can be done to end it. The causes of the war were identified as the historic marginalisation of the Acholi and the revenge against them by the NRA government, coupled with the manipulation of the population by Acholi military leaders. A lack of political will on behalf of the government and regional and international politics were identified as the reasons for its continuation. It was concluded that the 'the insurgency cannot be won by the gun', and that the solution was to end the armed struggle (Kitgum District, 1998). The conference called for dialogue between the GoU and the LRA, an Amnesty, and efforts at *mato oput*. It was also resolved that the Acholi religious leaders would work together with other Acholi opinion leaders and the diaspora under the auspices of KM.

The 1998 *Bedo Piny* conference was important for publicly signaling the position taken by the Acholi religious leaders against the war. As with other Acholi leaders their position previously was ambiguous. Now the LRA are seen as a threat to Acholi survival, and the talk is about 'setting the house in order.' The unity of the Anglican and Catholic churches in itself is a potent symbol of reconciliation, given the history of political division within them.

Since 1998, the ARLPI has established itself as an important actor in peace-building and reconciliation. It has positioned itself as being opposed to the tactics of the LRA, calling for the release of the abductees, while preparing the ground for their return through grassroots peace education, and advocating for an amnesty. It is one of the few local institutions that has been able to work at several levels: disseminating peace education at a grassroots level; at a national level, helping to shape the Amnesty Bill, offering advice to the government through pastoral letters, and appealing to the diaspora; and at an international level lobbying governments and international bodies, such as the Lambeth Conference. The ARLPI have travelled to UK, South Africa, the US and Canada to take their message. Following the *Bedo Piny*, a delegation took their resolutions to the Acholi diaspora at KM98. Following KM98, they held another meeting in Uganda with local government and the APG to define a strategy and coordination. In addition to UNDP, ARLPI has attracted support from other sources, including the Mennonites Central Committee (MCC), who fund a secretary, and Christian Aid who sponsored their participation in the ARLPI/ACORD conference in Gulu.

In Gulu, the ARLPI is involved in community sensitisation training priests, teachers and LC3 chairmen at a sub-county level as peace animators. This combines training in conflict transformation, conflict analysis, mediation, trauma, leadership skills and group facilitation. The main message is one of 'forgiveness'. According to the leaders, 'the outcome will be a conscious process of preparing the community for peace and reconciliation.' (Cosmos, 1999 October). The ARLPI are also participating with ACORD and the government in the research on traditional elders. While accepting that the traditional elders have a role in reconciliation, the religious leaders are against the mixing of Christian and traditional practices apparent in the LRA, arguing: 'there are lots of pots and people can chose which to use to wash their face' (Onono, 1999, October).

There is also an expectation that the religious leaders may become involved in running reception centres for returnees as, under the Amnesty Bill, LRA fighters are able to surrender to religious leaders. There is an expectation that UNDP will provide further funding for this.

The CJ&PC in Kitgum undertakes peace education and documentation of human rights abuses by both sides during the war. The Catholic priest has been trained in conflict management in South Africa with the British organisation Responding to Conflict. Their training includes conflict management, mediation, human rights and traditional conflict management. The CJ&PC work closely with ARLPI due to the relationship established in Kitgum. The main difference is that the CJ&PC focus on out-of-school youth and teachers, while ARLPI have a broader national remit.

### **6.2.2 International NGOs**

Several international agencies support community-based reconciliation. One example is CPAR (Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief), a Canadian funded organisation working in Gulu, which combines relief, reintegration, conflict resolution and disaster response in its portfolio of activities. Active in Uganda since 1992, it currently works in three districts of northern Uganda, including four sub-counties in Gulu and in Apac district. One of the areas it works in borders a forest reserve where the LRA had a base and has therefore suffered many abductions. Part of its work involves supporting communities where abductees return without going through counseling centres.

CPAR's objectives illustrate their integrated approach, combining traditional and western approaches to conflict resolution:

To strengthen the capacity of traditional institutions and community based organisations for peace building and conflict resolution activities in selected sub-counties. This includes reactivating and supporting traditional conflict resolution and reconciliation processes in communities caught up in the conflict.

To reduce the burden of mental and physical trauma suffered by victims as a result of their abduction from their communities in the elected sub-counties by providing community based mental health counseling and health care in a safe, structured environment.

To facilitate the social and economic re-integration of returnees into their communities in the selected sub-counties and to facilitate the creation of community-based economic development opportunities to re-build and strengthen the self reliance and capabilities of local communities affected by the conflict.

### **6.2.3 Local NGOs**

This approach of community-based reconciliation has been adopted by local organisations. In March 1998, for example, the Kitgum Peace Initiative (KPI) was formed by the District Disaster Development Committee to undertake 'peace advocacy.' With Oxfam sponsorship, it held a meeting in April 1998 of local government, community elders, teachers, women leaders and NGOs. The aim was to identify solutions to the war. The meeting selected an 11 member committee to travel throughout 26 districts consulting people on their views of the war. The meetings were taped and were used to inform religious leaders at the *Bedo Piny* conference and the diaspora at KM98 of local opinion.

The initiative collapsed when Oxfam discontinued funding, although there is an attempt to re-energise the initiative by formally registering it as an NGO. However, a key individual in KPI

has since become fully occupied with the work of the Community Development Office (CDO) in Kitgum. When Oxfam funding stopped it was decided to link KPI's activities to a district Psycho-social Support Programme (PSSP) funded by AVSI (Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale) through the CDO. One idea is that the structure of Community Volunteer Counsellors (CVCs) that AVSI are supporting could be used by KPI for peace advocacy. There is also an idea to support a human rights education programme, which the Danish government have expressed an interest in funding.

#### **6.2.4 Psycho-Social Support**

A further aspect of this emphasis on the 'internal environment' is a number of programmes focussing on psycho-social support, at an individual and community-based level. The major focus of such work is the rehabilitation and reintegration of former abductees, particularly children. This includes the work of the local NGOs GUSCO, and KICWA, and the international agencies World Vision, Red Barnet, IRC and UNICEF. Included also can be the work of PVP supporting women rape victims and amputees.

GUSCO and World Vision in Gulu and more recently KICWA in Kitgum all provide medical and psycho-social rehabilitative care for children abductees. Since it was founded in 1994 GUSCO, has assisted over 5,000 children. World Vision which started in 1995 has supported a similar number. The organisations have slightly different remits, with World Vision handling children from both Kitgum and Gulu, and adults. As well as providing residential care, these organisations also support communities with the reintegration process.

The work of these organisations are not without criticism. The type of counseling offered to children has been criticised, as has the length of time children spend in care, the slowness in tracing and contacting parents, along with the religious orientation of the organisations. There is even suspicion about the emotive issue of children being good for funding raising. The lack of critical public monitoring of this type of work was criticised during the ARLPI/ACORD conference.

Although, the work of these agencies does not include peace-building or reconciliation as objectives, explicit links are made. In particular it is asserted that the psychological trauma experienced by abducted children, unless dealt with, may lead to violent behaviour. That children no longer accept and respect authority is seen to be problematic for the future stability.

Increasingly, stress is placed on the importance of community-based rather than institutionalised psycho-social support for the reintegration of the abducted children. World Vision, for example, support 426 community-based 'care givers' in Gulu District alone. The community work of CPAR in Gulu, or IRC with child headed households in Kitgum are also examples of this type of work. The most developed community-based psycho-social support programme, however, is supported by AVSI in Kitgum district.

In 1998 UNICEF in collaboration with the GoU and several NGOs undertook an assessment of psycho-social needs in all 14 districts of northern Uganda — the Northern Uganda Psycho-Social Needs Assessment (NUPSNA) (GoU/UNICEF, 1998). There were several rationales for this:

that the conflict had ‘broken down the very fabric of civil society,’ that ‘traditional customs which brought community people together to discuss problems and implement solutions jointly are no longer followed,’ that people, especially children, have witnessed or participated in ‘psychologically wounding events,’ and that Uganda has a limited capacity to meet the psycho-social needs of vulnerable people in areas of armed conflict (ibid.: i).

The report provided the rationale for community-based psycho-social programmes, including that supported by AVSI in Kitgum.

AVSI has worked in Uganda since 1984. In Gulu it works in health and supports an orthopaedic hospital. Its psycho-social support programme (PSSP) for Kitgum District is interesting because its policy is to work through district authorities, providing technical support through the Community Development Office (CDO). It explicitly links psycho-social support with peace-building and community development. The Kitgum District PSSP proposal for 1998-2000, for example, states that its central objective is ‘to focus on the weakening networks that are responsible in keeping society together so that adverse effects of the conflict are contained’ (Olaa, 1998).

The impact of the war, it suggests, is not only material but social and psychological. Indicators for this are said to be alcoholism, depression, helplessness, and a decrease in family guidance of children. They estimate that 70% of family income in Kitgum is spent on alcohol. AVSI’s focus is on capacity building to strengthen community structures, rather than the provision of material resources (Khawaja, 1999). It argues that helping communities cope with reintegration by only providing material support to returnees can cause tensions within communities, as some families are seen to benefit from abductions, and they are not always the most needy. Its approach is to establish and train a structure of Community Volunteer Counsellors (CVC), and institutionalise psycho-social support at a community level. Since 1997 it has trained CVCs in displaced camps, primary schools and 13 sub-counties, with future plans to cover all 26 in Kitgum District. CVCs are trained in problem recognition, cultural mediation, coping mechanisms, self-help management, life skills, trauma counseling, rebuilding confidence. Strong emphasis is placed on ‘well-being’ of the person, ‘listening skills,’ and supporting people’s own ‘coping mechanisms.’ It also plans to provide counseling services at a district level. In the future they plan to expand the programme to include a peace-building element funded by USAID.

### **6.2.5 Rehabilitation and Development**

A further element in this focus on the internal environment is apparent in developmental approaches. With the ‘lull’ in fighting there are increasing calls for rehabilitation and development investment to restart. Some 13 years of war have impoverished Acholi. Lack of infrastructure, financial and human resources means that the northern districts are amongst the poorest areas of the country. Administrative decentralisation has moved responsibility for development to district level authorities. However, long term insecurity means that it is difficult to attract qualified staff, and insecurity restricts revenue collection.

Various donors are preparing to respond to the needs of a ‘post-conflict’ environment. The major focus of this is the Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Programme II (NURP II). NURP I,

which ran from 1992 to 1996 and provided emergency assistance for the reconstruction of essential infrastructure, is reported to have had only a limited impact and was criticised for being 'top down.' The NURP II is designed within the framework of the Nation Poverty Eradication Action Plan and, it is claimed, on the basis of a district level, 'bottom up' planning process. NURP II will focus on income generation, and the expanded role of the private sector; the provision of social services, good governance and support to institutions; and peace and reconciliation.

The NURP II inception study included a specific consultancy on Post Conflict Analysis to ensure that conflict and post conflict issues are addressed (NURP II, 1998, November). Specifically the consultant was tasked to: identify and analyse the types and causes of conflict in the Project Area as a whole; study the traditional methods of conflict prevention and resolution among the people in the project area; propose interventions to facilitate the transition from war to peace. It was not possible to get hold of the NURP II plans during the visit, and there was insufficient time to look in detail at how rehabilitation and development strategies are addressing post conflict issues. From discussions and interviews, however, it seems several approaches are being advocated.

One approach, broadly articulated by parliamentary leaders, the diaspora, the Acholi religious, UNDP who fund the religious leader, and the LRA locates the causes of war in poverty and marginalisation. The Acholi, it is argued, are impoverished, politically and economically marginalised, and missing out from the benefits of development in Uganda. The disparity between Acholi and the rest of Uganda, between Gulu and Kitgum, and between rural and urban areas could, it is argued, be a future source of conflict. The international community is criticised for focussing too much on humanitarian assistance without addressing long term development needs, such as education. Thus development is conceived as a conflict prevention measure. External aid, it is thought, can promote a return to stability, and is therefore a critical element in the peace process. The 1986 insurgency, however, was not a product of poverty, but a response to the NRA's take over. It has also been pointed out that in 1986 Gulu was not acutely impoverished nor politically marginalised (Gersony, 1997).

The impact of the UNLA's defeat, and the long running war have clearly had an impact on Acholi. But if underdevelopment was not the cause of war, then development may not necessarily address the causes of the war, nor prevent its resumption. The defeat and demobilisation of the WBNF in 1997 led to a temporary improvement in security in Arua and Nebbi Districts. However, assistance to support the reintegration of former WBNF rebels has not prevented some from taking up arms again. Advocating development as a solution may mean that people are asked to ignore what has happened during the war.

An alternative view articulated by those concerned with the social and psychological impact of the war points to a danger in the 'peace through development' approach. As one person suggested, "Putting in money to Acholiland could be problematic because the social fabric of society has frayed."<sup>2</sup>

Here it is argued, development has to start with reconciliation and healing, and aid projects should be oriented towards engineering integration and harmony.

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<sup>2</sup> Interviewed in Kampala, October 1999.

Concern was expressed by several people about the potential negative impact that a large influx of investment in the districts could have. Government, institutions and communities are not ready for this, it is argued, and this may lead to increased tensions. This is a legitimate concern, in that external aid could become part of the crisis. However, it is based on an assumption about the value of external aid. According to the Kitgum development plan, donor and NGO revenue was equivalent to only 10% of revenue in 1999/2000, the largest portion of which was transfers from central government (Kitgum District, 1999). While it can be assumed that total investment by donors and NGOs probably exceeds 10%, it still probably represents a small part of the district's revenue. One conclusion that could be drawn from this is that aid *per se* is not the main cause of conflict, but instead the undemocratic, untransparent and unaccountable use of aid.

The example of cattle restocking may be instructive in this case. In the 1980s the Acholi lost 98% of their cattle to raiding, allegedly by the Karamojong. The government has offered US\$ 18 million for restocking. There is much concern over how to implement restocking without causing further conflict, specifically with the well armed Karamojong. However, it is asserted by some that the looting of Acholi cattle was done as much by the UPDF as by the Karamojong. If this is true, it may not be Acholi-Karamojong relations that need to be improved upon.

Another and related view articulated by some donors is that development assistance should be premised on a political solution to the conflict. Until that occurs, development assistance may be wasted if the war continues.<sup>3</sup>

In all of these approaches there is little detailed discussion on what form rehabilitation and development should take. It is implicit perhaps that it will follow the rest of Uganda, which is lauded as a success in sub-Saharan Africa for economic growth and development. This has been at a price, however. According to some, the adoption of liberal economic policies, for example, has served to increase unemployment, and a huge part of the national budget is spent on military adventures, rather than productive activity.

### **6.2.6 The Internalisation of War**

The emphasis on the 'internal environment,' apparent in community-based peace-building and reconciliation strategies, is interesting for several reasons.

First it is, in part, a reflection of the limited reach and impact of aid agencies. The ability of NGOs to contact Kony, or to influence international politics and policy is highly circumscribed. Many NGOs would not even want to have anything to do with the LRA. There would, therefore, appear to be a role for organisations like KM, located outside Uganda, to pursue an approach that fills that gap.

Secondly, the influence of western models of conflict resolution are very striking in the language and approaches of various organisations supporting community-based peace-building and psycho-social programmes. For example, the skills training of Responding to Conflict, the

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<sup>3</sup> Interviewed in Gulu, September 1999.

Mennonites, and the Nairobi Peace Initiative are apparent in the language and approaches of development NGOs and religious leaders. These approaches have been imported in the past ten years, and their impact merits further investigation. One of their features is that they tend to locate both the causes of and solutions to the conflict internally. In the reconciliation message of the religious leaders there is a strong advocacy for ‘forgiveness’ and to be ‘at peace with oneself, at peace with one’s neighbour and the community’ (Onono, September, 27). According to the RDC of Gulu, “It is up to us to forgive our people in order for reconciliation to work” (Odeck, September 27).

Here the victims of the conflict are being asked to do the forgiving. The emphasis on community-based reconciliation, on forgiveness and on self-help has a tendency to lay both the causes and solutions at the feet of the victims of conflict — the rural populations and abducted children. It is interesting that in the ARLPI/ACORD conference, and seemingly in the *Bedo Piny* and KM conference, there has been little, if any, representation from rural communities.

The emphasis on children reinforces this tendency towards internalisation. As noted, the emotive issue of children has provided a strong human rights platform around which to mobilise opinion against the war. However, community-based peace-building and psycho-social support seeks not only to help communities in handling traumatised individuals, but also serves to identify the failure of Acholi parents and Acholi society in general to protect its children. Thus, according to one organisation supporting children: “The beginning of reconciliation is to ask for forgiveness from the children” (George Omono).

In other words, the causes of the conflict are located in the ‘weakness’ of Acholi social institutions, rather than in national or regional politics. The psycho-social approach seems to take this further laying the causes of war in the pathology of Acholi society. Rehabilitation and development, it argues, should not proceed until communities are psychologically ready.

There is an alternative interpretation. The NRM has consolidated its power and cannot be overthrown by force of arms. Economically Acholi elite are missing out on the economic growth that is taking place in Uganda. Unemployment in Acholi is very high. Politically Acholi could miss out if the upcoming referendum leads to multi-partyism. International agencies appear to have bought into this ‘mood swing’ for reconciliation through peace-building and psycho-social counseling programmes. However, instead of recognising the politics of the situation, they instead see the war and development as a problem of the psychological behaviour of the Acholi.

Thirdly, the psychological and religious emphasis in peace-building and reconciliation strategies is interesting for the way that it parallels what Alice Lakwena considered was necessary to bring peace to Acholi. That is, the ritual cleansing of Acholi society. During the war in the late 1980s, there were recriminations and acts of revenge amongst the Acholi, and the war against the ‘exterior’ enemy, the NRA, was turned ‘inwards’ (Behrend, 1998: 108). The HSMF in seeking to reconstitute the moral order — a new heaven and new earth — initiated a process of ‘culpabilization,’ whereby the guilt no longer lies with another, but instead is taken ‘upon oneself’ (ibid.: 110). Clearly, the psychological and religious dynamics of the war are very important. According to one politician, “We need to fight the evil in our society....Conflict is in the mind...We need to resolve the contradictions in our society” (Owiny Dollo, 1999 September 28).

Whether western psychology can do this better than Acholi spirit mediums cleansing Acholi society and bringing peace remains to be seen.

### **6.3 Research and Documentation**

A further important area of activity is research and documentation, which potentially bridges all 'levels' of the conflict. Information is often a casualty of war. Communication is disrupted, information can be subject to manipulation, and knowledge can be a dangerous asset. Aid organisations are often criticised for being uninformed and basing their responses on untested assumptions.

The war in northern Uganda, for many years was largely under-reported. The early history of the LRA, for example, is poorly documented (Behrend, 1998). Since 1997, however, aspects of the war have been well documented. Robert Gersony for USAID, Human Rights Watch/Africa, Amnesty International, and KM with International Alert have all produced influential reports that trace the origins of the war, its human rights impact and propose measures to end it (e.g. Gersony, 1997; Human Rights Watch/Africa, 1997; Amnesty International, 1997; Pain, 1997). There has also been academic research on the phenomenon of the LRA and the HSMF before it (see Allen, 1991; Behrend, 1998; Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999). UNICEF, World Vision and GUSCO have both documented testimonies of children abducted by the LRA, which have been widely distributed. Ugandan organisations and academics have also sought to document the war and its impact, including the CJ&PC in Kitgum, HURIFO and PVP in Gulu, and Isis-WICCE and the Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) in Kampala. An interesting and innovative addition to the documentation and research has been the work of the British NGO ACORD.

ACORD has worked in Gulu District for 20 years, during this time supporting a range of development and relief interventions. Since 1993, they have also supported a number of peace-building activities. In 1993, a member of staff attended a training course in conflict handling skills at Responding to Conflict in UK. At the time ACORD was collaborating with the British-based PANOS Institute on collecting testimonies of women victims of violence. These were published as part of a book on women's experiences of war, and were serialised in the Ugandan daily newspaper *The Monitor*. Several of the women who collected the testimonies went on to form a local NGO, PVP. Supported by ACORD, as part of a capacity building programme for local organisations, PVP has continued documenting the impact of the war by collecting testimonies of men and providing medical and counseling services to women rape victims and amputee victims from landmines and rebel atrocities. In 1997, ACORD supported a conference in Kampala on peace and reconciliation, as part of a community peace-building programme.

In 1996, ACORD joined a consortium for a three year research programme on complex political emergencies, funded by the British Government. The Consortium on Complex Political Emergencies (COPE), which includes the Universities of Leeds, Bradford, Sussex and ACORD, is undertaking research in Uganda, Somaliland, Eritrea, and Sri Lanka on the impact of conflict and responses to it. In September this year, as part of their commitment to disseminate research findings, ACORD organised a conference in Gulu entitled 'Peace Research and the Reconciliation Agenda.' The conference hosted with the ARLPI, was sponsored by the Belgium Government, Christian Aid and UNDP.

ACORD's research on the impact of the war has been innovative and eclectic, involving the collection of monthly reports from 'protected villages' on all aspects of life, the use of photographs, videos, newspapers, and oral testimonies. It has also undertaken research on human rights and on HIV/AIDS with the UPDF. Some of the work has been used to inform programme activities, such as on livelihood security, work with traditional chieftaincy structures, and HIV/AIDS work with the military. Undertaken in a war zone in an oppressive environment, ACORD argue that the research has served to 'open spaces' for people to talk about things that were not previously discussed (Dolan, 1999). For ACORD one purpose of the Peace Research conference was to illustrate how research can inform reconciliation by identifying those issues that need to be addressed in any peace settlement. Having it in Gulu indicated a commitment by Ugandans and international guests attending the conference to seek a resolution to the conflict.

The issues identified at the Gulu conference for inclusion in a reconciliation agenda are listed in the box below. The list complements issues identified at the *Bedo Piny* meeting in 1998 and for the 'talks agenda' in *The Bending of the Spears*. While not exhaustive, and untested with the general public, it does provide a useful set of issues around which to forge a consensus and action. Peace processes are often criticised for being concerned with the negotiations over the distribution of power and restructuring institutions of governance. Somali peace conferences, for example, have focussed on how to structure state institutions and apportion power. What is interesting, and perhaps different, about the approach of ACORD is to identify other issues that are neglected at the negotiating table.

#### **Critical Issues for the Reconciliation Agenda**

Successful adoption and implementation of the Amnesty Bill  
 Promotion of Human Rights and the Rule of Law  
 Successful return and resettlement  
 Rehabilitation and reconstruction  
 Promotion of industrialisation and commercial agriculture in northern Uganda  
 Infrastructural development  
 Community economic empowerment  
 Normalisation of Uganda-Sudan relations  
 Active engagement in dialogue with all participants  
 Encouraging constructive international pressure  
 Secondary and higher education  
 Marginalisation of youth  
 Measures to address sexual abuse  
 Relations between government and local people  
 Relations between the UPDF and Local People  
 Improving relationship with the Karamojong  
 Relationship between home and the diaspora  
 Networking and collaboration  
 Role of the media  
 Information and research

## **7. SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE STUDY**

### **7.1 Doing Case Studies**

The time available to prepare for and undertake this study was insufficient to do justice to the range of issues raised by the conflict in northern Uganda and to the work of individuals and organisations involved in peace-building and reconciliation work there. Preparatory work is essential for such studies, in order to seek the collaboration of agencies, and assistance in accessing people and information. The opportunistic nature of this study did not allow for this. Nor was it appreciated locally. It is important that information gathered in such studies is fed back to people and organisations involved, and their comments sought, before further use is made of this paper.

## **7.2 Further Case Studies**

There is a lot of peace-oriented work being done in northern Uganda, which would merit a proper study. The type of work described in this case study is likely to increase as NURP II is implemented. It is recommended that CDA contact ACORD, KM and Conciliation Resources, the ARLPI and UNDP, AVSI, or others with a view to doing a further study over a longer period of time. The organisations mentioned would provide a representative cross-section of local and international agencies working across Gulu and Kitgum districts. They have different mandates, work at different levels, on different types of interventions, and with different sources of funding. A further study should look in more detail at individual agencies and their activities and the assumptions on which their actions are based, as well as make a more detailed examination of the immediate environment or set of issues they are seeking to have an impact on.

## **7.3 What is ‘Peace Practice’?**

The value in doing this contextual study, rather than a single organisational case study, is that it has been possible to describe, in brief, a range of organisations involved in activities that aim to influence the direction of the conflict and its underlying causes. Some justify their involvement on the basis of international legal norms, others on humanitarian claims to meet local needs, and most on the basis of self-ascribed mandates. Some seek to work at a local level, others at multiple levels.

The synergy of collective efforts of organisations and individuals with different knowledge, skills and resources, is generally asserted to be a pre-requisite for peace-building. Among some agencies, however, it is difficult to distinguish between activities defined as ‘development’ work, and activities defined as ‘peace-building.’ In a climate where funding is provided under a budget line of ‘peace,’ it would seem that some relief and development activities are being redefined as peace-building. Funding rather than need determines action. This is important. First because it raises questions about the independence of civil society organisations, and second because a change in funding priorities may distort good work. For example, one local human rights organisation in Gulu is seeking to expand its range of activities to include conflict resolution training. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this, but it does shift the focus of the organisation away from its important work of providing legal aid.

In undertaking further case studies, there would be merit to looking in more detail at what distinguishes peace work from other forms of intervention. It would be useful to assess changes in policy and funding and their impact.

## **7.4 'Levels'**

This paper has described different 'levels' at which organisations are active. While useful for ordering the information in this paper, as a tool for analysis it has limitations. Several organisations work at more than one level, and organisations and individuals are part of 'systems' and 'structures' that cut across levels. The word level introduces the notion of 'hierarchy,' as though one level may be more significant than another.

## **7.5 Strategic Alliances**

There is some evidence that collaboration around issues such as child abductions may have had some influence on the behaviour of the LRA. Proving this is difficult. However, it does suggest that collective action may have an impact. It also suggests that the creation of strategic alliances amongst organisations with difference competence may be a useful strategy. This can overcome potentially conflicting objectives within one organisation. The inflexibility in funding, such that all activities must be defined within a project framework, and market competition can work against alliances.

## **7.6 Assessing 'Effectiveness' and 'Success'**

Given the superficial nature of this study, it is impossible and unfair to make judgements on the 'effectiveness' or 'success' of one project, programme or organisation or its impact on the state of the war, the actions of the warring parties, or the victims of the war. Empirical data on which to judge the impact of peace-building and reconciliation initiatives on social and political change is not readily available, nor it seems is it collected by the organisations involved. It is therefore difficult to elicit 'best practice.' What would constitute effective evaluation criteria of peace-building and reconciliation initiatives resolution is a question this project needs to explore further. An interview-based approach to gathering case study material has its limitations. The history of events and actions are very often contested.

With time and a more focussed study, it may have been possible to comment on the technical competence of an organisation or appropriateness of an activity. However, as others have pointed out, the link between technical interventions and processes of social change is not straight forward (Duffield, 1997). As the brief overview of the war in this study indicates, the nature of the Ugandan state, the aims of the warring parties, their strategies, resource base, political support and relationship with local population are some of the key variables which impact on the nature and 'stage' of the conflict.

The term 'synergy' is often used to describe collective actions or events and their impact on a process. This overcomes the difficulty of apportioning responsibility. This is not a very useful concept. Even if the impact of single events or actions cannot be identified, there is some use in 'unpacking' a process.

In international human rights and humanitarian law it is the warring parties that are responsible for upholding the rights of populations under their control. In northern Uganda this is the GoU and the LRA. It is exactly these parties that NGOs have limited access to and contact with, defining their constituency as 'civilians,' 'children,' the 'voiceless,' the 'grassroots.' Many organisations, for example, are reticent to engage too closely with the government. As it is

one of the warring parties, this is not surprising. However, it may be that constitutional changes have done as much to create a climate for peace as has any civil society or NGO activity.

While there is apparent understanding of 'livelihoods,' 'coping strategies,' 'social breakdown,' and 'trauma,' little is known about government military strategies or the make up of the LRA and its relations with the local populations. Given their impact on the lives of thousands of people, this would seem to be an important omission. The simplicity of much analysis, neglects the wider forces at play. To assess the effectiveness of peace-building activities would require at least some information on regional politics, the political economy of war, and the incentives and disincentives for its continuation or resolution.

Despite the acknowledged importance of regional politics, there is apparently little local knowledge about Sudan and the Sudanese war. Among Acholi there appears to be little contact and knowledge of Acholi in southern Sudan. Although some aid organisations work on both sides of the border, there appears to be little attempt to forge cross-border linkages among civil society groups. Despite the interest in 'tradition' and 'social institutions,' anthropological understanding of social institutions appears limited. Psycho-social programmes, in particular, appear to be based on very slim anthropological knowledge. This does point to the importance of research and analysis. Donors, however, do not demand such analysis from their agencies for relief, development, or peace projects. Nor can such information be easily 'projectised'.

## APPENDIX: MEETINGS

Discussions were held with the following people.

Hon Nobert Mao MP, Kampala. 25/9/99  
Hon J Okello Okello Livingston. MP. 26/9/99  
Andrew Mawson, Save the Children. 26/9/99  
Graham Carrington, DFID East Africa Field Manager. 29/9/99  
Jeremy Armon. DFID Uganda Governance Programme. 29/9/99  
Chris Dolan, Research Officer. ACORD. Gulu. 29/9/99  
Simon Levine, Christian Aid. 30/9/99  
Okello John Samual, ADC of Rwot Acana II.  
Peter Obal, Chief Secretary, Rwot Acana II.  
Sylvester Otira, Deputy RDC, Kitgum. 2/10/99  
John Bosco Oryem, RDC Kitgum. 2/10/99  
Andrew Olweny, ACORD Kitgum. 3/10/99  
Ambrose Olaa, Kitgum Community Development Office. 3/10/99  
Farida Khawaja. AVSI (Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale). Kitgum. 3/10/99  
Fr Carlos Rodriguez, Catholic Justice and Peace Committee. Kitgum. 4/10/99  
John Muto Ono, journalist *The Monitor* and N.Uganda Media Club. Gulu. 4/10/99  
Rt Reverend Nelson Onono Onweng, Bishop of Gulu. Gulu. 5/10/99  
Mark Avola. World Vision. Gulu. 5/10/99  
Angelina Atyam, Dr. Olyek Ago. Aboke Concerned Parents' Association. Gulu. 5/10/99  
Sister Rachele Fassera, Deputy Head Mistress, St. Mary's School, Aboke. Gulu. 5/10/99  
James Otto, Secretary General Human Rights Focus. Gulu. 5/10/99  
Paulinus Nyeko. Chairman. Human Rights Focus. Gulu. 5/10/99  
James Oweka, New Vision. Gulu. 5/10/99  
Gloria Laker. New Vision. Gulu. 5/10/99  
Lam Oyem Cosmos. Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative. Gulu. 6/10/99.  
Rosalba Oywa, ACORD, and People's Voice for Peace. Gulu. 6/10/99.  
Geoffrey Oyat, Tom Komach. Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief. Gulu. 6/10/99.  
Keith Wright. UNICEF. Kampala. 7/10/99  
Hon Omwony Ojok, Minister for Northern Uganda, Kampala. 8/10/99  
Right Reverend Macleod Baker Ochola II, Bishop of Kitgum. Kampala. 8/10/99  
Archbishop Odama, Kampala. 8/10/99

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