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## Uganda:

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# Returns outpace recovery planning

*Since the signing of a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between the government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army in 2006, about two thirds of the 1.8 million IDPs who lived in camps at the height of the crisis have returned to their areas of origin.*

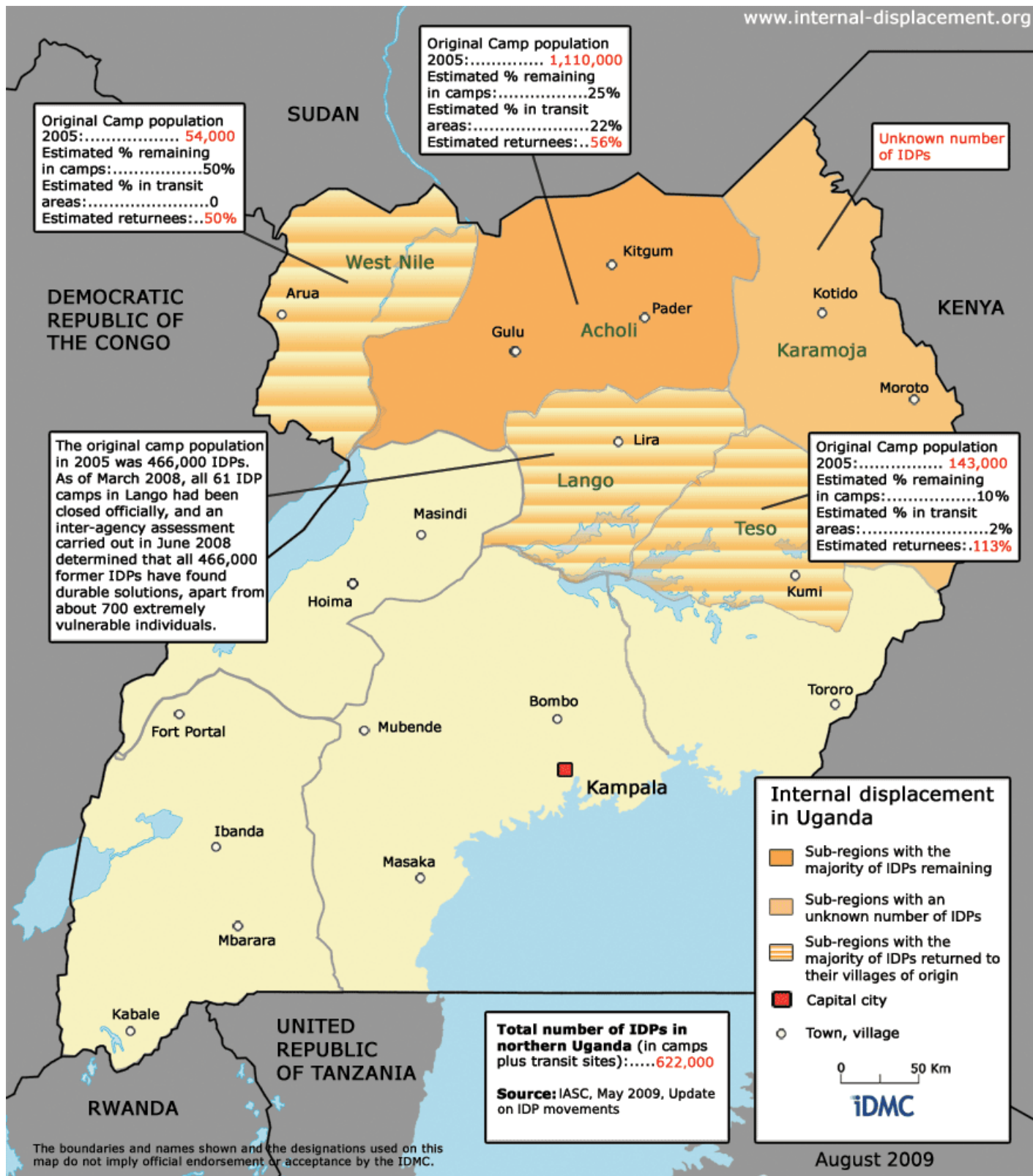
*However, much work remains to be done to ensure that these returns are sustainable. Basic infrastructure and services in the return areas are inadequate or non-existent. Lack of access to clean water poses a risk of epidemics, and clinics and schools struggle with a lack of facilities and qualified personnel. While returnees have begun to grow their own food, the food security situation of many is still fragile, particularly as low rainfall since April 2009 means that harvests are predicted to be more than 60 per cent lower than normal.*

*Significant numbers of those who remain in the camps are there not out of choice but because they are unable to return to their home areas. Some IDPs cannot return because land disputes prevent them from accessing land, while IDPs with special needs and vulnerabilities are unable to support themselves in the return areas. Returnee communities need assistance to reintegrate these vulnerable IDPs.*

*The government and its international partners in northern Uganda have struggled to manage the transition from humanitarian emergency assistance to recovery and development. The government is in the process of reasserting its authority in the north, and is formally in charge of coordination and the provision of planning frameworks. However, a lack of capacity at the local level means that government authorities frequently struggle to discharge their operational responsibilities.*

# Map of Uganda

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## **Background: war and displacement in northern Uganda**

The conflict in northern Uganda began in 1986. A history of antagonism and distrust between the Acholi people of northern Uganda and southern-based tribes dominating the government contributed to the formation of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in 1987, led by Joseph Kony. The LRA purportedly aimed to overthrow the government led by current president Yoweri Museveni, rebuild the Acholi nation and culture and rule Uganda in accordance with the biblical ten commandments (LIU, 30 October 2003, p.33; RLP, February 2004, p.5; CSOPNU, 10 December 2004, p.28). It has since been accused of widespread human rights violations including massacres and the systematic abduction of children to take part in hostilities.

In the period up to 1996, some people in the Acholi sub-region fled their villages as a direct result of LRA attacks, but the main cause of the subsequent large-scale displacement was the government's decision in 1996 to force civilians into IDP camps which it described as "protected villages". The displacement crisis worsened in October 2002, when the army, in the course of a large-scale offensive entitled "Operation Iron Fist", ordered all civilians remaining in "abandoned villages" to move to government camps. Around the same time, the area affected by displacement expanded as the LRA moved eastwards into the Lango and Teso sub-regions. Operation Iron Fist failed to defeat the LRA, and in March 2004 the army launched "Operation Iron Fist II", causing further massive displacement. By the end of 2005, a total of about 1.8 million people were living in

IDP camps (Weeks, March 2002, p.2; RLP, February 2004, p.25; CSOPNU, 10 December 2004, p.6 *and* 31 December 2004, p.1; HRW, September 2005, p.10; Reuters, 21 February 2008).

The LRA repeatedly attacked IDP camps, although the army was deployed to protect them. The army's failure to ensure security and the appalling humanitarian conditions in the camps further entrenched the Acholi people's sense of political and social marginalisation (CSOPNU, 10 December 2004, p.2; RLP, February 2004, p.25; The Monitor, 26 August 2008).

An unknown number of people moved to towns and trading centres across northern Uganda instead of camps, while others moved further away to towns and cities such as Masindi, Jinja and Kampala. No comprehensive data has ever been collected on urban IDPs in Uganda; estimates of their number range from 300,000 to 600,000 (RLP, 17 December 2007; Protection Cluster, 16 July 2009).

## **Peace negotiations stall at final hurdle**

A third attempt at peace talks began in July 2006, and the next month the government and the LRA signed the landmark Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CHA), which resulted in substantial improvements in security conditions and in humanitarian access to affected populations. The signing of the CHA paved the way for further negotiations, and between May 2007 and February 2008 the parties signed a total of seven agreements (ICG, 14 September 2007).

However, Kony failed to show up to sign a final peace agreement in April 2008, and successive attempts to obtain Kony's signature have all since failed (Chief Mediator Riek Machar, 11 September 2008). The LRA has maintained that it is committed to the peace process, but views the July 2005 International Criminal Court indictments of Kony and four other LRA commanders as the major obstacle to signing the final peace agreement (Sudan Tribune, 17 September 2008; OCHA, 16 July 2008, p.6; ICC, 14 October 2005). Given the improbability of further progress at this time, the UN Secretary-General suspended the mandate of his Special Envoy for the LRA-affected areas in June 2009 (Security Council Report, 22 June 2009).

While the security situation in northern Uganda has improved significantly since the signing of the CHA in 2006, the LRA has increasingly presented a regional security threat. Since September 2008 the LRA has attacked villages in the Central African Republic (CAR), Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), killing more than 1,000 civilians, abducting close to 2,000, and forcing more than 300,000 people to flee their homes. A regional military offensive launched in December 2008, "Operation Lightning Thunder", failed to end atrocities by the LRA, which carried out further attacks against local communities (Resolve Uganda, July 2009; OCHA, 21 July 2009, p.7; UNHCR, 7 August 2009). There is no consensus about a viable strategy to protect civilians in the region from further LRA violence.

## Patterns of return

As of May 2009, 378,000 IDPs remained in camps (about 20 per cent of the peak IDP population of 1.8 million); a further 244,000 had moved from camps to "transit sites" closer to their land, while the remainder had returned to their home villages. However, there were substantial regional variations: in Amuru district only 23 per cent of the original camp population had returned to their home villages, while for Gulu and Pader districts it was 68 and 70 per cent respectively (IASC, May 2009).

In May 2008 the government issued *Camp Phase-Out Guidelines* (OPM, May 2008), which were followed in June 2008 by *Guidelines for the Demolition of Abandoned Structures* (Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster, June 2008). In the Lango sub-region all of the 61 IDP camps had officially been "phased out" by the end of March 2008, although OCHA noted at the time that "several thousand" IDPs remained in the former camps, including about 700 people with specific needs who remained there without family or community support (OHCHR et al., 24 June 2008; OCHA, 31 March 2008 and 16 July 2008, p.10).

In the Acholi sub-region, 60 out of a total of 121 camps had been assessed for phase-out by July 2009, but none had been closed officially (Protection Cluster, 16 July 2009). However, in practice, support was being progressively withdrawn in many camps, and more than 15,000 abandoned huts had already been demolished (OCHA, 21 July 2009, p.14). The remaining camp population largely consists of four groups. Specifics sets of

obstacles, discussed in more detail below, have blocked the return of three of these four groups: firstly, so-called “extremely vulnerable individuals” (EVIs) and other people with special needs (sometimes referred to as EVIs and PSNs respectively); secondly, people who cannot go back to their areas of origin because of land disputes; and thirdly, young people who have been left behind by their family so they can access services in the camps, primarily education but also health care.

The fourth group of people in the camps are those who do not intend to return, because of the economic opportunities (typically petty trade) in and near the camps. The government has not responded to the needs of this group, instead focusing almost exclusively on returns, despite the fact that Uganda’s National IDP Policy and the *Camp Phase-Out Guidelines* emphasise IDPs’ right to make a free and informed choice between return, local integration and settlement elsewhere in the country (Government of Uganda, 22 July 2009; see also Oxfam, September 2008, pp.13-17; The New Vision, 13 August 2008). The mid-year review of the 2009 Consolidated Appeal for Uganda noted that “the third ‘durable solution’ – those who wish to remain where they are – continues to be an under-attended area of policy” (OCHA, 21 July 2009, p.7). The government’s plans to promote durable solutions other than return have not been sufficiently developed to address land disputes in the camps and in the return areas (see the discussion below), help IDPs obtain land in the former camp areas, or support the transformation of some camps and transit sites into towns and trading centres.

The government and international agencies have made initial preparations to assess the needs of Uganda’s urban IDP population and to plan for durable solutions, including support for return and reintegration, but as of August 2009 no such assessments have been carried out (Protection Cluster, 16 July 2009; RLP, October 2008, July 2008, March 2008 and December 2007; The Monitor, 12 and 17 December 2007).

### **Obstacles to return**

#### ***IDPs with particular vulnerabilities***

The most vulnerable IDPs (EVIs and PSNs) include people with disabilities, severely traumatised people, female-headed households, orphans and child-headed households, and elderly people without family support. Some of them are presently struggling to survive, especially in those camps where the World Food Programme (WFP) has stopped food distributions, due to a lack of funding (Geneva briefing by the UN RSG on the human rights of IDPs, 29 July 2009).

For the majority of these people local integration is not likely to provide a durable solution: they would remain dependent on humanitarian assistance indefinitely. While many of them, and the elderly people among them in particular, would prefer to return to their places of origin (UNHCR and HelpAge, June 2008), communities there are unlikely to be able to take sole responsibility for them in light of the difficult conditions they face. Viable strategies are needed for the reintegration of EVIs and PSNs, the development of which will require dialogue with receiving communities. One possibility, suggested by the Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the

human rights of IDPs, would be to provide EVIs and PSNs with agricultural tools or oxen, which they could then lend to the community in return for food and other forms of assistance.

### ***Land disputes***

As IDPs have returned, the number of land disputes in return areas has risen (OCHA, 21 July 2009, p.7; IRIN, 1 October 2008; Oxfam, September 2008, p.12; World Bank, February 2008, p.ii). 93 per cent of land in northern Uganda is held under customary law with no registration of land boundaries (OHCHR, 8 July 2009), and many returnees have been unable to recall or agree on the exact boundaries of their land. The means to resolve these disputes are limited, as land administration and adjudication mechanisms are not functional in northern Uganda, especially the Land Committees and Land Tribunals (OHCHR, 8 July 2009). Some early returnees have taken advantage of the fact that former neighbours have not yet returned by moving the boundaries of their land, something which is likely to further disadvantage vulnerable IDPs who have not yet returned.

The customary ownership system has not stopped some people in northern Uganda becoming landless. Households headed by women (23 per cent of all households in 2007 according to UNDP, December 2007, p.12) are at particular risk of being denied access to land by their relatives, as are orphans and other child-headed households (Protection Cluster, 16 July 2009; The Monitor, 18 September 2008). Traditional institutions involved in the mediation of land disputes have not in all cases paid due regard to national and international human rights norms, in par-

ticular with respect to age and gender equality.

IDPs who have remained in the camps are facing increasing pressure to leave from the owners of the land the camps have been situated on. The majority lack the resources to buy or rent land, and reports of forcible evictions have become more frequent (Daily Monitor, 24 July 2009). The problem is likely to become even more acute as camp closures get under way in the Acholi districts.

### **Challenges in return areas**

#### ***Food security***

While returnees have begun to grow their own food, many are at risk of becoming food-insecure again in future. Currently only 34 per cent of available land in the Acholi districts is being cultivated, mainly due to the difficulties of clearing overgrown land (including fears about remaining land mines); the uncertainties involved in planting on disputed land or even arising from fears about the possible return of the LRA to northern Uganda; and inadequate access to agricultural tools, seed and fertiliser. Although returnees need continued support to overcome these constraints and achieve sustainable food security, interventions aimed at expanding land access and use have so far failed to meet needs in the return areas (OCHA, 21 July 2009, pp.1,7).

The lack of contingency planning by the government and reductions in food distribution by WFP have combined with changing rainfall patterns in northern Uganda to further undermine the fragile food security of IDPs and recent returnees. Prospects for the 2009 harvest are

poor due to the late onset of the first season rains and the low overall rainfall since April: current predictions are that harvests will probably be under 40 per cent of normal yields. This outcome is likely to lead to an increase in food prices, which are already very high, presenting a further obstacle to food security for returnee households who are unable to grow all their own food (FEWSNET, June 2009, p.2).

In March 2009, WFP planned to distribute food to 750,000 IDPs and returnees. However, by May 2009 a lack of funding had forced WFP to stop distributing to most IDPs, with only about 99,000 EVIs continuing to receive food. Since then, WFP has had to stop distributing food to some camps, even for remaining EVIs (OCHA, 21 July 2009, pp.7, 12; FEWSNET, June 2009, pp.2-3).

### ***Lack of services***

The government has thus far failed to plan effectively for the restoration of services in return areas. The mid-year review of the 2008 Consolidated Appeal for Uganda noted “an appalling lack of basic services in transit sites and return areas” (OCHA, 16 July 2008, p.7). A year later, the mid-year review of the 2009 Appeal observed that “inadequate or non-existent basic infrastructure and services in return areas remains of serious concern and is believed to partially account for the reduced pace of return” (OCHA, 21 July 2009, p.7).

Schools in the return areas lack facilities such as housing for teachers, classroom facilities, latrines and water points. The shortage of qualified teachers is compounded by high levels of absenteeism among teachers. As a result of the poor

quality of education on offer, absenteeism among pupils and drop-out levels are high (OCHA, 21 July 2009, p.11). Over 40 per cent of returning households have left children behind in the camps because of better access to education or health care there (Protection Cluster, 16 July 2009).

Fewer than 30 per cent of returnees have access to clean drinking water. In some transit sites and return villages, people have access to at least 15 litres of water per day in line with the SPHERE standards, but the distribution of water access points is uneven and some return villages lack access to safe water within a distance of 1.5 kilometres (OCHA, 21 July 2009, p.16).

Overstretched services are failing to meet the demands of returning populations. There are shortages of clinics, qualified personnel, and medication. Absenteeism amongst health workers poses a further problem. Health authorities are still struggling to control an outbreak of Hepatitis E, 18 months after the first cases were reported. Access to reproductive health services is inadequate.

The lack of services including health care, justice, security and social support has created particular problems for victims of gender-based violence (GBV). GBV, including domestic violence, rape, and early and forced marriage, is still widespread in northern Uganda, (Protection Cluster, 16 July 2009). Food insecurity has heightened women’s vulnerability to GBV, but the percentage of female-headed households benefiting from livelihoods support has decreased due to the closure or reduction of hu-

manitarian activities in the Acholi sub-region (OCHA, 21 July 2009, p.15).

### **National response**

In 2004, Uganda adopted the National Policy for Internally Displaced Persons, making it one of the first countries in the world to have an IDP policy. The Policy guarantees IDPs' right to make a free and informed choice between return, local integration or settlement elsewhere in the country (Office of the Prime Minister, August 2004, section 3.4).

On 15 October 2007, after repeated delays, the government launched the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) for Northern Uganda, including Acholi, Lango, Teso, West Nile, Karamoja, and Elgon sub-regions. The PRDP provides a development framework aimed at bringing socio-economic indicators in areas affected by conflict and breakdown in law and order into line with national standards. It has four strategic objectives: consolidation of state authority, rebuilding and empowering communities, revitalisation of the economy, and peace building and reconciliation.

Although the PRDP focuses mostly on "hardware" (buildings, infrastructure) at the expense of developing the human capacity of the education, health care, local government, security and justice sectors, its full implementation would significantly help to counter the real and perceived neglect and marginalisation at the root of the conflict. However, the planning of PRDP-related activities in the northern districts has remained separate from existing national and district planning cycles, and the recovery component of the existing district development plans

needs to be strengthened (Geneva briefing by the UN RSG on the human rights of IDPs, 29 July 2009; see also UN RSG, 17 July 2009). The ongoing process of subdividing existing districts has created further problems, with newly-created districts lacking the capacity to discharge their responsibilities (Beyond Juba, June 2009).

Moreover, a lack of clarity about funding and oversight mechanisms has meant that the implementation of the PRDP only began with the start of the 2009-2010 financial year on 1 July 2009. The estimated three-year budget of the PRDP was \$606 million (Government of Uganda, September 2007, pp.vi-ix), but the government recently stated that "this figure has since been overtaken by economic trends" (Government of Uganda, 22 July 2009). The government has committed to fund 30 per cent of the PRDP's overall cost, and has requested the international community to fund the remaining 70 per cent.

### **International response**

As of 28 July 2009, the Consolidated Appeal for Uganda for 2009 was 45 per cent funded, with three sectors having received no funds at all (education, mine action, and shelter and non-food items), and the health sector having received only 11 per cent of the funds requested (OCHA, 28 July 2009). The Consolidated Appeal for 2010 is expected to be the last in relation to the crisis in northern Uganda.

In June 2009, the UN launched its three-year Peace Building and Recovery Assistance Programme for Northern Uganda (UNPRAP) (UN, 22 June 2009), which

sets out a strategy for “aligning UN interventions with the PRDP and other government frameworks for northern Uganda” (UNPRAP, p.4).

The phasing out of humanitarian activities has not been properly synchronised with the establishment of recovery and development activities. Following the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in 2006, the transition from humanitarian relief to development support has been characterised by “institutional confusion and weak leadership” (Oxfam, September 2008, p.17; see also Resolve Uganda, September 2008). To date, the impact of development interventions in the Acholi districts has been insufficiently visible, because of the long time frames of most development planning. In the short and medium terms, there is a risk that people in return areas may end up worse off than they were in the camps, with obvious implications for peace and stability in the region.

Moreover, there are concerns that humanitarian actors are closing down operations in the Acholi districts too early, in order to start programmes in neighbouring Karamoja. While the humanitarian needs in Karamoja (arising mostly from prolonged drought and ongoing communal violence) indeed require urgent attention, donors and humanitarian actors should be encouraged to integrate their responses in the Acholi and Karamoja sub-regions (Geneva briefing by the UN RSG on the human rights of IDPs, 29 July 2009).

Uganda was one of the pilot countries for the implementation of the cluster approach under the humanitarian reform process. While the introduction of the

cluster approach in Uganda led to some improvements in coordination, initially there was insufficient recognition of the need for the clusters to adopt a participatory approach, and respect and reflect the priorities set by communities as well as by local and national government bodies (UNHCR, August 2007, p.4; NRC, December 2007). The second phase of the global cluster evaluation in Uganda and other countries is now under way.

In late 2008, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in Uganda approved the “Adaptation of Clusters” policy, instructing the clusters to merge with national sectoral coordination mechanisms by September 2009. More progress has been made in this regard at the district level than the national level (OCHA, 21 July 2009, p.10).

*Note: This is a summary of the IDMC’s Internal Displacement profile. The full profile is available online [here](#).*

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Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org).

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