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## Peace, Recovery and Development: Challenges in Northern Uganda

Stability in Northern Uganda has allowed about three quarters of the 1.8 million people who had been forced into camps to return to their homes and to start the process of rebuilding their lives.

The remaining camp population largely consists of four groups. Specific sets of obstacles, discussed in more detail below, have blocked the return of three of these four groups: firstly, so-called “extremely vulnerable individuals” 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. 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.

### **Obstacles to return**

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

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.

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,

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. Almost all the land in northern Uganda is held under customary law with no registration of land boundaries, 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. 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 (which represent almost a quarter of all households in northern Uganda) are at particular risk of being denied access to land by their relatives, as are orphans and other child-headed households. 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 particular 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.

## **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. Less than half of the available land in the Acholi districts is being cultivated, mainly due to the difficulties of clearing overgrown land, the uncertainties involved in planting on disputed land; 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 land use have not kept up with the needs in the return areas.

The 2010 Consolidated Appeal for Uganda notes that the current “funding gap between humanitarian and recovery/development responses [...] may lead to a serious breakdown of service provision to enhance food and nutritional security.”

### **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”. 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”. The 2010 Consolidated Appeal observed that to date there has still been little progress made in this regard: “For various communities, impediments to accessing functioning basic services, coupled with limited or unfavourable productive economic prospects in return areas, represent the biggest challenges to their achievement of sustainable return and reintegration.”

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. 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 humanitarian activities in the Acholi sub-region.

### **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.

In 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.

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. Nevertheless, 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. The ongoing process of subdividing existing districts has created further problems, with newly-created districts lacking the capacity to discharge their responsibilities.

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, but the government has stated that “this figure has since been overtaken by economic trends”. 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 11 March 2010, the Consolidated Appeal for Uganda for 2010 was 0 per cent funded. The 2009 Appeal was 77 per cent funded, with the education sector having received no funds at all, and the health, nutrition and HIV/AIDS having received only 12 per cent of the funds requested. Another sector that is crucial in terms of rebuilding services in the return areas, namely water, sanitation and hygiene, received only 27 per cent of the requested funds. The Consolidated Appeal for 2010 is expected to be the last in relation to the crisis in northern Uganda.

The phasing out of humanitarian activities has not been properly synchronised with the establishment of recovery and development activities. The 2010 Consolidated Appeal for Uganda notes that the “humanitarian gains made following the 2006 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement [...] are in danger of unravelling. This is due to diminishing humanitarian programming that is unmatched by a significant increase in recovery programmes.” 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.