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Uganda: Uncertain future for IDPs while peace remains elusive

With the peace process plagued by delays and confusion, and with conditions in return areas often worse than in the IDP camps, the future for IDPs in northern Uganda remains uncertain.

In August 2006 the government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) signed a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CHA), which led to significant improvements in the security situation in northern Uganda. After many delays, progress in the peace negotiations between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army in early 2008 gave rise to cautious optimism that an end to the conflict in northern Uganda might finally be on the horizon after 22 years of war. However, the process stalled again when on 10 April 2008 Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA, at the last moment failed to sign a Final Peace Agreement. The CHA has not been renewed and has now expired.

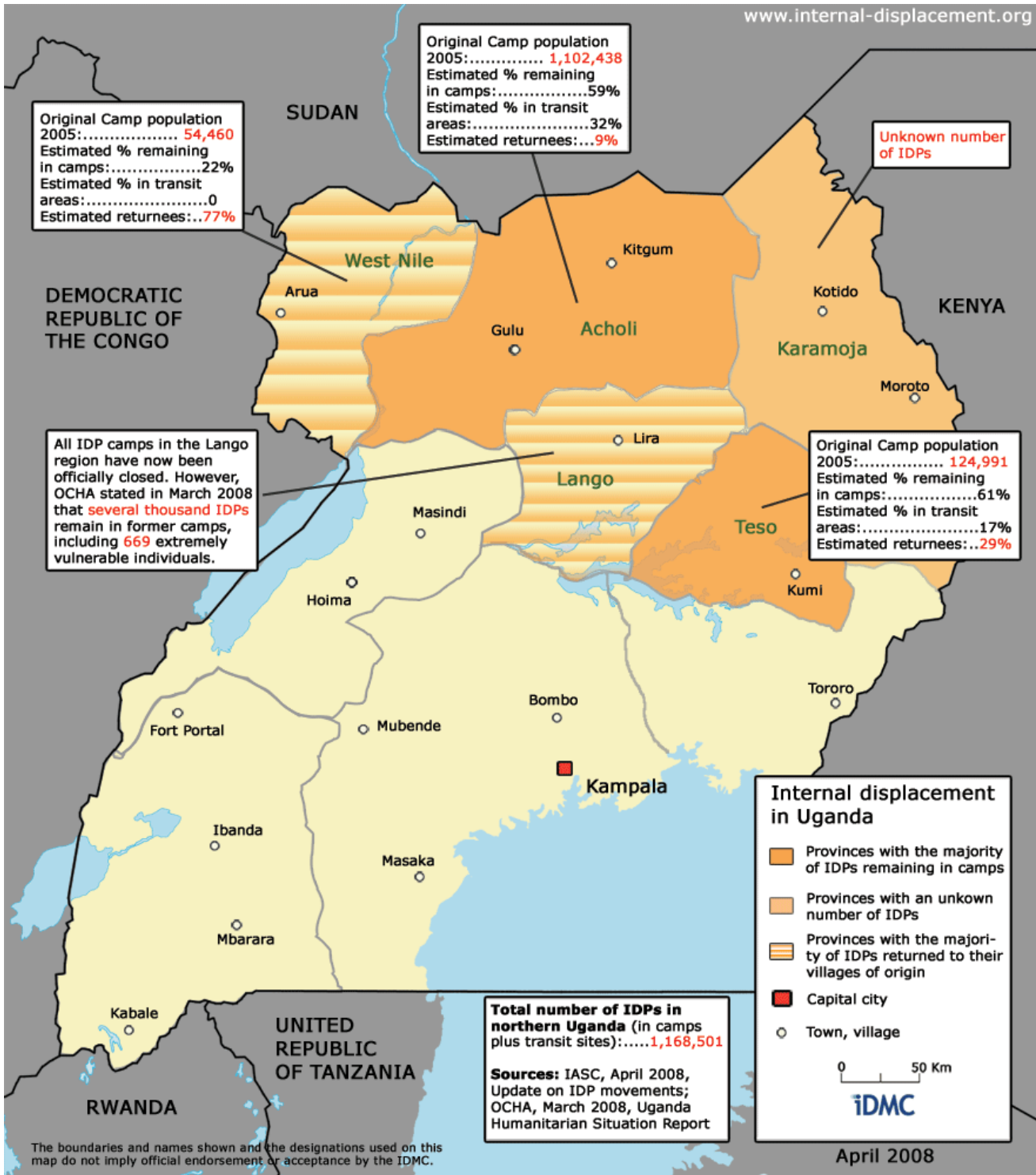
Since the signing of the CHA, about half of the more than 1.8 million people who had been internally displaced by the conflict have returned to their homes or have moved to transit sites nearer to their homes. However, many IDPs are reluctant to go home in the absence of a final peace agreement. Moreover, a significant number of IDPs who live in camps or transit sites close to their land might not intend to move back onto their land, preferring to live in communities near basic services such as schools and clinics.

Lack of access to basic services and security guarantees form a major obstacle to the return process. Concerns about an increase in crime, and the insufficient capacity of the police and the judicial system to respond, also impedes the return process, as do concerns about landmines and other unexploded ordnance. In areas neighbouring Karamoja, fears of attacks by Karamojong warriors further add to IDPs' considerations for staying in the camps.

Humanitarian conditions in the IDP camps remain very poor, while conditions in some transit sites are even worse, with very little access to clean water and sanitation. There is an urgent need for early recovery, development and institutional capacity-building to be scaled up in the north. The long-awaited launch of the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) in October 2007 represented a first step, but there are still significant uncertainties about its implementation which is planned to start on 1 July 2008.

Meanwhile, the crisis in the north-eastern Karamoja region continues unabated. Forced disarmament operations have led to intense clashes between Karamojong warriors and the Ugandan army, resulting in displacement in and near the region.

Internal Displacement in Uganda



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Background: war and displacement in northern Uganda

The current conflict in northern Uganda began in 1986 and ultimately caused the displacement of an estimated 1.8 million people. The history of antagonism and political distrust between the Acholi people of northern Uganda and southern-based elites contributed to the forming of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in 1987, after the January 1986 overthrow of President Tito Okello, an ethnic Acholi, by the National Resistance Army (NRA) led by current President Yoweri Museveni (LIU, 30 October 2003, p.33; RLP, February 2004, p.5; CSOPNU, 10 December 2004, p. 28). The LRA was initially a popular uprising known as the Holy Spirit Movement. Since 1988 it has been led by Joseph Kony, and has fought a low-level guerrilla war in an ostensible effort to overthrow Museveni's government, rebuild the Acholi nation and culture and purportedly ensure that Uganda is ruled in accordance with the biblical ten commandments (CSOPNU, 10 December 2004, p.28).

Over the course of the conflict, the LRA has carried out a multitude of atrocities against the civilian population, including abduction, rape, torture and forced conscription. LRA crimes have been classified as war crimes and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court. In July 2005 the court issued arrest warrants for five top LRA leaders (ICC, 14 October 2005), one of whom has since been killed by the army, while two others are reported to have been killed in LRA infighting (BBC, 21 December 2007; BBC, 23 January 2008; The Monitor, 14 April 2008).

Prior to 1996, some people in the Acholi region fled their villages as a direct result of LRA attacks, mainly in the districts of Kitgum and Pader (W. Weeks, March 2002, p.2). But the main cause of the large-scale displacement in northern Uganda was the government's decision in 1996 to force civilians into "protected villages" (RLP, February 2004, p.25; CSOPNU, 10 December 2004, p.6; CSOPNU, 31 December 2004, p.1; HRW, September 2005, p.10). As rebel activity increased, the Ugandan government sought to separate civilians from the rebels in order to reduce the LRA's ability to benefit from suspected civilian collaborators and to clear the territory for military operations (CSOPNU, 10 December 2004, p.6).

In October 2002 the displacement crisis worsened when the Ugandan 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 within 48 hours. With the consent of the Sudanese government, the Ugandan army targeted the LRA's rear bases in southern Sudan. The rebels responded by returning to northern Uganda where they carried out an increasing number of abductions, killings and lootings. The IDP population grew from 500,000 in early 2002 to almost 800,000 by the end of the year (HRW, September 2005, p.9). During this period, the area affected by displacement expanded as the LRA moved eastwards into the Lango and Teso regions of eastern Uganda. In March 2004, after the failure of Operation Iron Fist, the Ugandan army, with renewed support from the Sudanese government, launched "Operation Iron Fist II".

The policy of forced encampment dramatically increased people's vulnerability. The LRA succeeded repeatedly in attacking IDP camps despite the deployment of the army to protect them. The lack of protection and the almost total lack of government assistance to IDPs constituted a failure of the state to protect those living in the north from physical harm and human rights abuses (ODI, December 2006, p.5). The failure of the policy and the appalling humanitarian conditions in the camps also further entrenched the Acholi people's sense of political and social marginalisation (CSOPNU, 10 December 2004, p.2; RLP, February 2004, p.25).

Peace between the government and the LRA?

Peace talks between the government and the LRA began in the southern Sudanese town of Juba in July 2006, marking the third attempt to negotiate a peace agreement since 1994. In August 2006, the government of Uganda and the LRA signed a landmark Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CHA), which resulted in substantial improvements in the security conditions and in humanitarian access.

The signing of the CHA paved the way for continuing negotiations, and despite repeated walk-outs and delays, the parties signed agreements on comprehensive solutions to the conflict (2 May 2007), and on reconciliation and accountability (29 June 2007) (ICG, 14 September 2007, p.1). In February 2008, five further agreements were signed in rapid succession: an annexe on the implementation of the accountability and reconciliation agreement; an annexe on the implementation of comprehensive solutions; a per-

manent ceasefire; an agreement on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, and an agreement on implementation and monitoring mechanisms.

Kony had been expected to sign a final peace agreement on 10 April in Ri-Kwangba in Southern Sudan, with President Museveni signing the agreement in Juba on 15 April. However, Kony failed to appear, and was said to have asked for further clarifications about the provisions of the annexe on the implementation of the accountability and reconciliation agreement (BBC, 11 April 2008; Mail and Guardian, 12 April 2008, The Monitor, 14 April 2008). This annexe provides for the creation of a special branch of the High Court to try rebels for serious crimes, while lesser crimes will be dealt with by traditional justice mechanisms as part of a broader reconciliation process.

Kony's failure to sign the peace agreement created uncertainty about the state of the peace process. The CHA expired on 16 April: the government has not extended it and Museveni has hinted instead that his forces could resume operations against the LRA (Reuters, 19 April 2008). Even if Kony ultimately signs the peace agreement, disarmament and accountability are likely to remain challenges.

Indeed, in early 2008, many of Kony's men were reported by Sudanese officials to have moved to the Central African Republic (CAR), fuelling speculation that the LRA may have forged links with Sudan-backed rebels there (Reuters, 2 April 2008) and concerns that the Sudanese government might have an interest in ensuring that the LRA survives as a potential proxy militia in Southern Sudan

should the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the government of Sudan and the southern Sudanese collapse (ICG, 14 September 2007, p.6). In April 2008, LRA strength was reported to be 1,200 fighters, almost half of which were civilians from CAR, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo who had been newly abducted in the preceding three months (The Monitor, 14 April 2008; Reuters, 22 April 2008; The Monitor, 22 April; Voice of America, 23 April 2008).

Background: crisis and displacement in Karamoja

The north-eastern region of Karamoja continues to suffer from violence, mainly related to cattle-rustling by semi-nomadic pastoralist Karamojong warriors. Traditionally, clans fought each other with spears, sticks, bows and arrows, but in the post-colonial period these traditional weapons have been replaced with more lethal small arms. Inter-clan fighting is still rampant, but the violence has increasingly been directed at clans living across the border in Kenya, as well as against the Ugandan army, local defence units and civilians in the Teso region (GoU, 15 June 2005; UHRC, September 2004). The violence in Karamoja is rooted in a history of colonial and post-colonial neglect, shrinking access to pasture and grazing land for cattle, and successive years of drought. Commercialisation of cattle-rustling has further fuelled incentives to carry out raids. The result is a cycle of violence in which victims of the raids, particularly rival Karamojong clans, acquire weapons to protect themselves and retaliate against attacking clans.

In May 2006 President Museveni directed the Ugandan army to begin “cordon and search” disarmament operations, in which the army uses tanks and helicopter gunships, surrounds villages and searches for weapons (GoU, January 2007, p.12; OHCHR, 24 November 2006, p.3; IRIN, 13 November 2006). The operations are characterised by excessive use of force by the Ugandan army, and widespread human rights abuses including killings, torture and other forms of ill-treatment, and looting and destruction of property (OCHA, 7 November 2006; OHCHR, 24 November 2006; HRW, September 2007, pp.36-66; OCHA, 10 December 2007, p.2). Although noticeable improvements were made in the middle part of 2007, the situation has deteriorated again since then. In February 2008, the army carried out eight disarmament operations, in which five people were reported to have been killed (OHCHR, 3 September 2007; IDMC, 15 November 2007; OCHA, 29 February 2008).

Karamoja has the worst humanitarian and development indicators in the country, including the lowest primary school enrolment, highest maternal and infant mortality and the lowest life expectancy in all of Uganda. The continuing inadequacy of government services, such as social, medical and judicial institutions, has contributed to an overall breakdown in the rule of law and the flight of women and children in search of food and employment. Such movements have increased vulnerabilities and contributed to a protection crisis (OHCHR, 24 November 2006; OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.1, and 10 December 2007, p.2, and 31 March 2008, p.5; OCHA and OPM, 18 April 2008).

While the disarmament campaign has disrupted traditional movement patterns and has caused displacement within Karamoja, there are no accurate estimates of the number of people displaced, and it is exceedingly difficult to distinguish the forced displacement from the ordinary movement patterns of the semi-nomadic Karamojong. Nevertheless, a representative of the international humanitarian community in Uganda has estimated that about 30 per cent of all displacement in Karamoja is related to the ongoing disarmament campaign (IDMC, 12 November 2007).

Observers do not believe that the army's disarmament operations, and the extensive presence of the army in Karamoja, can ultimately succeed in restoring law and order in the region, or in reducing the demand for weapons. Instead, security can only be restored by means of an integrated development plan to bring Karamoja up to the same economic and development levels as the rest of the country (IDMC, 12 November 2007; OCHA and OPM, 18 April 2008). The Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Programme (KIDDP) has now been absorbed into the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP) (Government of Uganda, September 2007). However, while there is substantial donor support for the PRDP in general, donors are reluctant to contribute to the KIDDP, because it conditions development on the continuation of disarmament operations which have regularly led to human rights abuses (IDMC, 12 November 2007).

Background and causes of displacement in the Teso region

As noted above, following Operation Iron Fist in 2002, LRA-induced displacement spread to the Teso region of eastern Uganda. By 2008 this had largely come to an end, but there was still large-scale displacement in the region as a result of high levels of insecurity caused by Karamojong raids, particularly in the Teso districts of Amuria and Katakwi which border Karamoja. Over 110,000 IDPs remained in camps in Katakwi and Amuria districts at the end of 2007; fewer than half of them are expected to return to their places of origin in 2008 (OCHA, 10 December 2007, p.1).

Physical security of IDPs in northern Uganda

The general security situation in northern Uganda has much improved since the start of the Juba peace talks, although there are still occasional reports of confrontation between the army and remnants of the LRA (OCHA, 29 February 2008, p.1). Some parts of the Acholi and Teso regions continue to be affected by Karamojong incursions, in particular cattle raids in eastern Kitgum and Pader (Acholiland) (UNDP, December 2007, p.6; OCHA, 29 February 2008, p.1, and 31 March 2008, p.1), and parts of Katakwi district in Teso (OCHA, 30 November 2007, p.1). Nonetheless the changing environment in northern Uganda calls for a further scaling down of the military presence and an increase in police deployment.

Crime now poses the gravest threat to security in northern Uganda (OCHA, 30 Nov 2007, p.1, and 31 March 2008, p.1;

Daily Monitor, 11 December 2007). There is a shortage of properly trained and qualified police officers. In late 2006, 600 Special Police Constables (SPCs) were recruited in Gulu and Amuru district in an effort to improve enforcement of the rule of law (OCHA, 7 January 2007, p.9; OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.6). Although they were not properly vetted and did not receive the same training as ordinary police officers, they have the same powers to investigate, arrest and interrogate suspects. As a consequence, in some cases the SPCs have themselves become part of the problem, instead of contributing to the restoration of the rule of law in northern Uganda. SPCs require further training on the Code of Conduct and the protection of civilians. The effectiveness of the SPCs is further undermined by delays in payment of their wages (OCHA, 29 February 2008, p.5). There are similar problems with the Anti-Theft Stock Units (ATSUs) deployed to guard against Karamojong raids (OCHA, 30 November 2007, p.5; IDMC, 13 November 2007; OCHA, 29 February 2008, p.5).

A further threat to physical security is posed by unexploded ordnance (OCHA, 10 December 2007, p.13; OCHA, 29 February 2008, p.1). The demining team deployed by the government is too small to respond to all reports of unexploded ordnance. The risk is greater in the dry season, when people move greater distances. There is a need for levels of awareness to be raised, because not everyone is able to identify and recognise unexploded ordnance (IDMC, 12 November 2007). For IDP women, who spend a significant proportion of their time collecting firewood, landmines and other unexploded ordnance constitute a

particular risk (UNDP, December 2007, p.24)

The overall impact of the conflict on children in northern Uganda has been especially acute. The LRA largely consists of abducted children who have been forced to become child soldiers or sex slaves to commanding officers. Since the beginning of the conflict in 1986, an estimated 25,000 children have been abducted; 7,500 are girls with 1,000 having conceived children during captivity (UNICEF, January 2007). The LRA has thus far resisted international calls to release all the women and children it currently holds (ICG, 14 September 2007, p.6; UNICEF, 16 April 2008, p.2).

Humanitarian situation of IDPs

All IDP camps in northern and eastern Uganda are accessible without military escort; only the World Food Programme (WFP) continues to use light military escorts for its food convoys (OCHA, 29 February 2008, p.1). The civilian population is moving about freely, apart from some areas of Lamwo county in Kitgum, where officials are refusing to allow movement for security reasons (IDMC, 14 March 2008).

The humanitarian conditions in IDPs camps continue to be poor, with a lack of adequate access to health care, shelter, water, and sanitation facilities. Nevertheless, the conditions in the IDP camps compare favourably with conditions in the transit sites, which are generally worse. For example, by November 2007 access to drinking water was below the SPHERE Project's recommended standard of 15 litres per person per day in transit sites in Kitgum, Lira, Oyam, and

Pader districts, although ongoing work in the transit areas was beginning to produce improvements. Sanitation in the transit sites is cause for even greater concern, with ratios of between 50 and 70 persons per latrine stance in transit areas in Gulu, Amuru, Lira, and Oyam, as compared to the SPHERE standard of no more than 20 persons per latrine stance (OCHA, 30 November 2007, p.6).

Although access to land and production is gradually increasing as a result of the improved security situation, most IDPs are still far from their full potential in terms of the production of sufficient amounts of food for their own consumption (FEWS Net, February 2008, p.2). Many IDPs continue to be dependent on WFP for the bulk of their food needs. As of March 2008, 13 per cent of WFP's caseload were considered to be extremely vulnerable individuals (EVIs), for whom food rations were set at 98 per cent of the recommended daily allowance (RDA). Of the remaining caseload, ten per cent received 60 per cent of their RDA, 50 per cent received half their RDA and the remaining 27 per cent 40 per cent of the daily allowance (email communication from WFP to IDMC, 20 March 2008).

There has been a significant reduction in the global acute malnutrition rates in northern Uganda; they are currently below five per cent in all Acholi districts except Kitgum. However, a reversal in the trend is being observed in Lira (and to some extent in Pader), which may be because in the return process spearheaded there, returnees' needs were not sufficiently anticipated. This should be seen as a warning sign and appropriate action must be taken to assist returnees in their places of return (Uganda Health, Nutri-

tion, and HIV/AIDS Cluster, December 2007, p.4; WFP, 25 January 2008, p.7).

Meanwhile, the malnutrition rate in Karamoja has doubled between 2005 and 2007 from 5-10 per cent to more than 15 per cent, above the emergency threshold (Uganda Health, Nutrition and HIV/AIDS Cluster, December 2007, p.5). Only eight per cent of the population in Karamoja is deemed to be food secure, 14 per cent is chronically food insecure, 55 per cent is facing an acute food and livelihood crisis, and 22 per cent faces a humanitarian emergency (OCHA, 29 February 2008, p.3). In the three northern districts of Karamoja (Kaabong, Kotido and Abim), less than three per cent of the population has access to sanitation facilities, while across all of Karamoja less than 50 per cent of the population has access to safe drinking water (OCHA and OPM, 18 April 2008).

Obstacles to return

The start of the Juba peace talks and the signing of a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in August 2006 led to a noticeable improvement in the security situation in northern Uganda. Nevertheless, the uncertain outcome of the peace talks continued to cause widespread concern amongst the displaced population, and few displaced people in Acholiland were willing to return to their villages of origin until there was a signed peace agreement. Indeed, many IDPs are planning to wait for some time after the signing to see if the peace holds before returning home (UNDP, December 2007, p.38).

As of February 2008 only 102,000 displaced people in Acholiland (nine per

cent) had returned home, while 649,000 people (59 per cent) remained in IDP camps and 352,000 people (32 per cent) had moved to so-called transit sites closer to their land (IASC, April 2008). Some people who stay in transit sites access their land during the day for cultivation, but return to the transit sites at night.

The situation in Teso is comparable to the Acholi region, with 36,000 people (29 per cent) back in their home villages, 76,000 people (61 per cent) still in camps, and 21,000 (17 per cent) in transit sites. In Lango, on the other hand, the last remaining IDP camp has been de-gazetted, and officially there are no more IDPs. However, thousands of people remain in former IDP camps, including 669 people who are considered extremely vulnerable (IASC, April 2008; OCHA, 31 March 2008, p.2).

IDPs have to take account of many factors besides the security situation in deciding whether to leave the camps. Landmines and unexploded ordnance present an obstacle to the returns process, as does the lack of thatching grass without which people cannot complete their homes in the return areas (OCHA, 29 February 2008, pp.1-2).

Services in return areas are very limited, and most returnees have to travel considerable distances to access health care, education and water. In Lira, where almost all displaced people have now returned home, a survey conducted by Action Against Hunger (ACF) suggested that the mortality rate in the return areas there is in fact higher than in the Acholi districts, where most people are still in camps. This represents a grave warning about the impact of the desperate lack of

basic social services in return areas (OCHA, 17 July 2007, p.1; UNHCR, August 2007, p.7; Monitor, 8 March 2008).

Asked what needs to be in place before they can return to their homes, displaced people in northern Uganda cite basic social services such as health centres, boreholes, and primary schools as most important, but also frequently cite the need for roads (UNDP, December 2007, p.36).

Schools in the return areas struggle with a lack of facilities, including housing for teachers, classroom facilities, latrines, and water points. A lack of qualified teachers and absenteeism among teachers further adds to the reluctance of students to return to pre-displacement locations (OCHA, 29 February 2008, pp.2-3). In Lira and Oyam districts in Lango, the school feeding programme currently benefiting 114 schools is likely to end in 2008, raising fears about a possible increase in drop-out rates (OCHA, 29 February 2008, p.3).

Durable solutions

After having lived in the camps for many years, returnees return with almost nothing. They have to rebuild their homes and clear their land for planting, and few have alternative livelihood strategies. They will thus continue to depend on humanitarian assistance for the foreseeable future. IDPs have expressed concern that food aid in the camps will be halted after the signing of a peace agreement between the LRA and the government. This would leave them with the choice of staying in the camps and risking starvation, or returning to insecure homes (UNDP, De-

ember 2007, pp.2, 23, 38). The WFP announced in March that it would stop providing food to 600,000 former IDPs in Lango and Teso (New Vision, 16 March 2008).

The decision to leave the camps is not always made from a position of strength; some early returnees are people with the most desperate living conditions in the camps, who have stronger “push” factors driving them out (UNDP, December 2007, pp.13, 21, 23, 39). The evidence is that households with more resources are less likely to leave the camps and more likely to be able to rent land near the camps, and provide for their own needs while remaining in the camps until they have sufficient confidence to return to their original homes. Close attention must thus be paid to the humanitarian assistance needs of those who have moved out of the camps (UNHCR, August 2007, p.7; UNDP, December 2007, p.52).

With the increasing number of IDPs who are returning to their land, or who are accessing it from transit sites, the number of land disputes is on the rise (UNDP, December 2007, pp.31, 43-44; World Bank, February 2008, p.ii). Because of the length of displacement in northern Uganda, not all returnees are able to recall the exact boundaries of their land. Some returnees, including orphans who grew up in the camps, do not know at all where their family’s land is. Some early returnees take advantage of the fact that their former neighbours have not yet returned by moving the boundaries. This is a threat to female-headed households in Acholiland, since they are less likely than other households to be among the early returnees. In northern Uganda, 23 per

cent of household heads are women (UNDP, December 2007, pp.12, 50).

Some widowed women are faced with attempts by their in-laws to deny them access to their deceased husbands’ land; this is a particular concern in light of the fact that 18 per cent of women in the north between the ages of 30 and 49 are widows, twice as many as in the rest of Uganda (UNDP, December 2007, p.12). At the same time, care must be taken not to generalise and treat all widows and all orphans as vulnerable individuals: vulnerability in these cases is determined above all by whether these individuals have good relationships with their relatives and their clans (HURIFO, September 2007, pp.34-38).

The returns process is generating new protection concerns, in particular in relation to children. Scarcity of services in return areas has led to voluntary family separation, leaving thousands of children in camps without care-givers and at heightened risk of neglect, abuse and exploitation, including sexual violence and dropping out of school (OCHA, 10 December 2007, p.34).

There are concerns that the voluntary nature of the returns process may be compromised in some cases. Some owners of land on which the camps are situated put pressure on IDPs to leave the camps, and forced evictions have been reported, for example in Koro (Gulu district). In Atiak (Amuru district) the local authorities initiated evictions of IDPs on the grounds that land was needed for staff houses (OCHA, 29 February 2008, p.5). In Kitgum district local leaders are reported to have used radio programmes to instruct people to return homes by specific dates,

and they have claimed that children can only be registered for school in their places of origin (IDMC, 14 March 2008).

There is, at the moment, some degree of uncertainty about the final return patterns. Uganda's National Policy for Internally Displaced Persons gives IDPs the right not to be forcibly returned, and to choose freely whether to return or to settle in another part of the country (Office of the Prime Minister, August 2004, section 3.4). It is possible that significant numbers of displaced people will prefer not to move all the way back to their own land, but to live in communities near services such as health clinics and schools, as long as they are close enough to their land to access it on a daily basis. Given that 46 per cent of the displaced people in northern Uganda currently reside in camps that are less than three kilometres from their land, a significant proportion may have no desire to leave them (OCHA, 31 August 2007, p.5). This points to the need for at least some camps and transit sites to be turned into viable communities. Guidelines are currently being prepared for the camp phase-out process, setting out conditions under which IDP camps can be closed down (OCHA, 31 March 2008, p.2).

The population of northern Uganda is young, with a median age of 14 years old for women and 13 years for men. Many of them have no memories or experience of rural life, and have grown used to living in population centres with relatively easy access to services. If no adequate provision is made for these young people, groups of them may drift back to those camps that will continue to exist as trading centres, or to towns such as Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader. One consequence

could be rapidly increasing levels of crime and a new and deteriorating security situation, as returnees become the victims of alienated youth gangs (UNDP, December 2007, pp.6, 47-48).

Extremely vulnerable individuals, such as the elderly and disabled people, might not be able to return to their home areas, for example because they would not be able to rebuild their original homes or provide for themselves in their home areas. A study by the Ministry of Health showed that a disproportionate number of elderly and disabled people were stuck in the camps (The New Vision, 15 April 2008). UN agencies and NGOs are implementing programmes to assist people in this situation.

National response

On 15 October 2007 the government launched the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) for Northern Uganda, including Acholi, Lango, Teso, West Nile, Karamoja, and Elgon. The PRDP is a comprehensive development framework aimed at improving socio-economic indicators in those areas affected by conflict and a serious breakdown in law and order and bringing them into line with national standards. The PRDP replaces the Emergency Humanitarian Action Plan (EHAP) and its Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC). The targets and objectives in the PRDP are to contribute to the national goals of Uganda's Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) of 2004. The PRDP has four strategic objectives: consolidation of state authority, rebuilding and empowering communities, revitalisation of the economy, and peace building and reconciliation. The total estimated cost of the

PRDP is \$606 million over a three-year period (Government of Uganda, September 2007, pp.vi-ix).

When implemented, the PRDP will be an important step on the path to addressing the perceived neglect and marginalisation that lie at the root of the conflict in northern Uganda. However, its implementation will be a significant challenge. The PRDP does not specify how its objectives are to be realised. Proper benchmarks to measure progress in implementing it will be crucial, as will further elucidation of the relation between the PRDP and the Consolidated Appeals Process (IDMC, 15 November 2007).

Finally, the Refugee Law Project in Kampala has raised concerns that while provisions are made for assistance for the returns process for IDPs who have been living in camps for the duration of the conflict in northern Uganda, no such provision has been made for the estimated 300,000 to 600,000 urban IDPs in the country (RLP, December 2007 and March 2008; *The Monitor*, 12 December 2007 and 17 December 2007).

International humanitarian response

After the then UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Jan Egeland, in November 2003 described the humanitarian crisis in northern Uganda as the “biggest forgotten, neglected humanitarian emergency in the world today”, the international humanitarian response improved significantly. The 2007 Consolidated Appeal for Uganda was 71 per cent funded. Nevertheless, according to a UNHCR report, “It is evident that the humanitarian effort continues to fall well short of what is re-

quired for minimum standards to be met. Moreover, the provision of essential goods and services to different IDP populations appears to be somewhat arbitrary in nature” (UNHCR, August 2007, p.10).

Moreover, there are serious concerns about funding for the Consolidated Appeal for 2008. The appeal totals \$374 million, compared to the revised total of \$346 million for 2007 (OCHA, 10 December 2007, pp.108-110). On 29 January 2008 UNHCR launched a Supplementary Appeal for \$15.4 million for protection and assistance to IDPs in northern Uganda (UNHCR, 24 January 2008). By the end of March 2008, only 17 per cent of the Consolidated Appeal had been funded, leading to warnings that programmes supporting the transition from humanitarian to recovery operations were at risk, as well as ongoing emergency projects aimed at addressing humanitarian needs (OCHA, 29 February 2008, p.6, and 31 March 2008, p.6).

The situation in northern Uganda presents a triple challenge, with humanitarian needs co-existing with urgent requirements in terms of early recovery and development. According to UNHCR, the uncertainties surrounding the peace process, combined with the almost total lack of infrastructure and services in the return sites, means that it is “incumbent upon the humanitarian community to acknowledge the profound problems that continue to affect northern Uganda, to be wary of overemphasizing the progress and impact of the peace process, and to recognize that a strategy based on the assumption of full and speedy return to home sites will be neither appropriate nor effective” (UNHCR, August 2007, p.8).

Uganda was one of the pilot countries for the implementation of the “cluster approach”. The cluster approach, which is part of the broader humanitarian reform process, aims to increase the accountability and predictability of the overall humanitarian response through assigning UN agencies responsibilities for certain sectors, or clusters. The cluster approach has indeed resulted in a more coherent and consistent policy response from the UN and humanitarian community in Uganda, and in improved coordination, service delivery, and protection of IDPs and returnees. However, there is still insufficient recognition of the fact that if it is to be successful, the clusters must adopt a participatory approach, and must 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).

With the ongoing peace talks and the resulting improvement in the security situation in northern Uganda, early recovery programming has assumed a vital importance. However, coordination and leadership on early recovery issues are currently lagging behind developments on the ground. Thus according to UNHCR, “while the Cluster Approach was intended to reinforce the accountability and predictability of the humanitarian system, the low level of activity demonstrated by the Early Recovery Cluster ... suggest[s] that these objectives have not been met” (UNHCR, August 2007, p.11).

Under the humanitarian reform programme, responsibility for the Early Recovery Cluster lies with UNDP. However, a decision has now been taken in Uganda that early recovery activities in the fields of water and sanitation, education, and

food security should remain within the purview of the relevant clusters, and the Early Recovery Cluster has been replaced with a Governance, Infrastructure, and Livelihoods (GIL) cluster. There remains nevertheless an urgent need for analysis and coordination of early recovery needs and activities across all clusters, a need which is not currently being addressed (IDMC, 14 March 2008).

Local authorities and the international community in Uganda are taking steps to implement the so-called “parish approach” in northern Uganda, which aims to facilitate the transition from the humanitarian to the recovery phase by rehabilitating priority basic service infrastructure at locations identified by district authorities in consultation with humanitarian actors and which are accessible to both IDPs in transit sites and returnees in villages of origin (OCHA, 31 March 2008, p.2).

In Karamoja, the international community is struggling to provide adequate assistance to IDPs, in part because of the difficult security situation and in part because the semi-nomadic population requires a non-conventional approach to service provision. Nevertheless, more UN agencies and international NGOs have now begun to expand their operations into Karamoja and are focusing mainly on longer-term development (IDMC, 15 November 2007).

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

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About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

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

Media contact:

Frederik Kok

Acting Head of Monitoring & Advocacy Department

Tel.: +41 22 799 07 12

Email: frederik.kok@nrc.ch

IDMC

Norwegian Refugee Council

Chemin de Balexert 7-9

1219 Geneva, Switzerland

www.internal-displacement.org

Tel: +41 22 799 0700

Fax: +41 22 799 0701