

26 September 2013

## LRA-related displacement in central Africa

# An end to the emergency, but not to IDPs' needs

Since the Lord's Resistance Army first emerged in the 1980s, the group's violence has displaced an estimated 2.5 million people within and across borders in central Africa. It originated in Uganda, where it took up arms in response to the central government's marginalisation of the Acholi people, and by 2005, around 1.8 million people had been internally displaced by the conflict. As early as 1993, the LRA began operating what is now South Sudan before moving into north-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and south-eastern Central African Republic (CAR). Its campaign of violence against civilians, often carried out in retaliation for military operations against

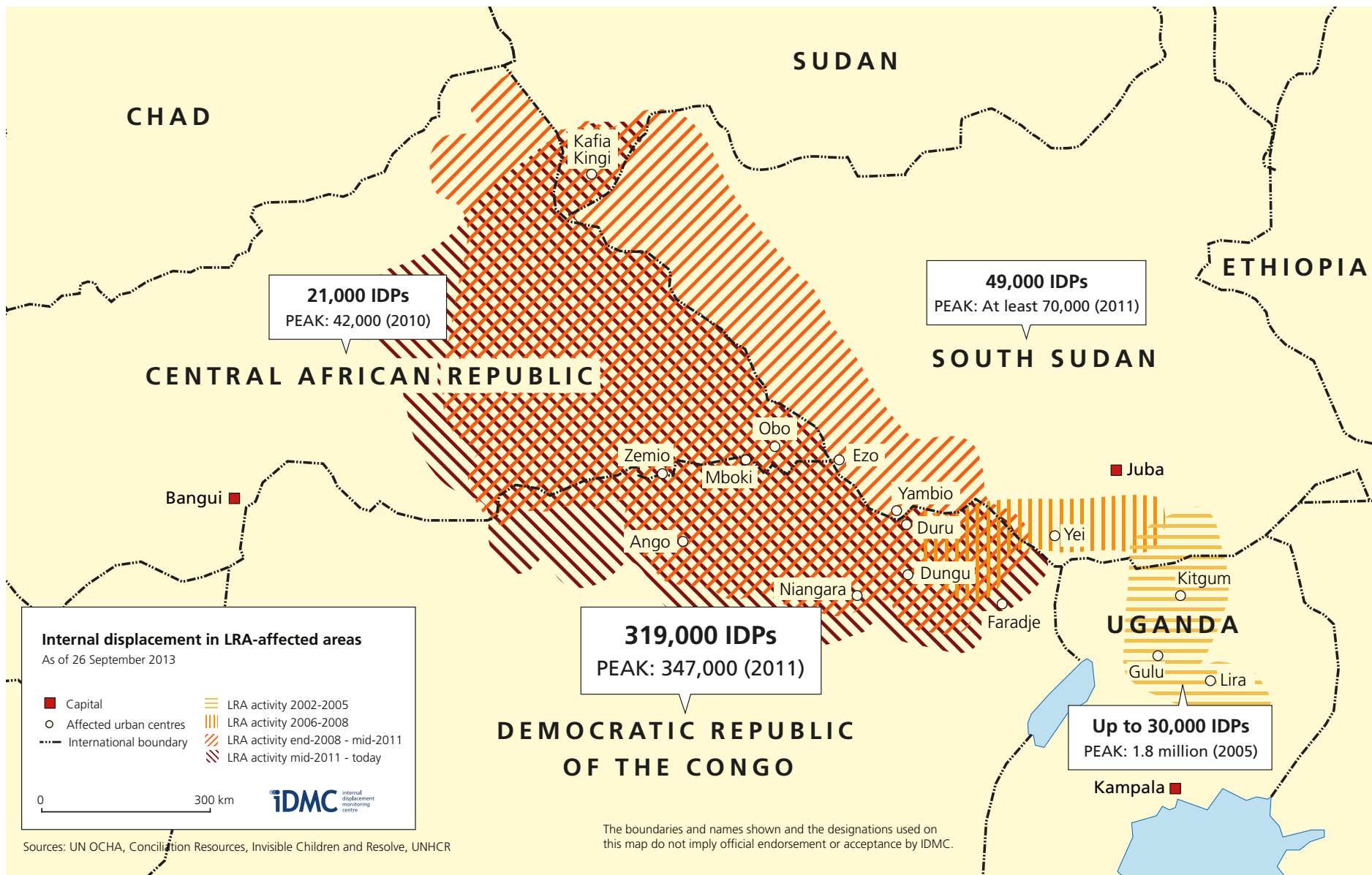


Internally displaced women in a spontaneous IDP site near Dungu, DRC. They fled LRA attacks between 2008 and 2010, leaving their homes in Kiliwa, Ngilima and Limai. (Photo: IDMC/M. Wissing, May 2013)

it, has caused significant internal displacement, especially in DRC where most LRA attacks have taken place in recent years. An estimated 420,000 people are currently living in internal displacement as a result of LRA violence in Uganda, South Sudan, DRC and CAR, representing 20 per cent of the population in the affected areas of the latter three countries.

In the past, the LRA carried out large-scale attacks against civilians, including massacres, mutilations, abductions, sexual violence and looting. In recent years, however, it has changed its tactics. Its violence is now on a smaller scale, and this is reflected in a drop in new large-scale displacements. The fear the LRA has instilled among internally displaced people (IDPs) remains pervasive though, and this has left many reluctant to return home. Instead they live in protracted displacement, despite the challenges they face in their places of refuge.

LRA presence and activity has also aggravated other causes of displacement in the region such as inter-communal tension. The scale and scope of this displacement is hard to gauge as it is often difficult to distinguish between the various perpetrators, including soldiers, armed bandits and pastoralists and the LRA itself. IDPs continue to face major challenges in terms of livelihood opportunities. A lack of access to land for farming has left many dependent on unsustainable day labour. The trauma of experiencing LRA violence and the disruption of traditional livelihoods have also altered community and family dynamics. Social and support networks have been severely disrupted and the burden of providing for the family falls increasingly on women.



Source: IDMC  
 More maps are available at [www.internal-displacement.org/maps](http://www.internal-displacement.org/maps)

Children are particularly vulnerable, with unaccompanied minors and orphans most at risk. Many children do not have enough to eat, and struggle to access adequate health services and education. The LRA has also targeted children, abducting them for use as porters, soldiers and sex slaves. Abductees experience particular difficulties when they eventually return to their communities.

National governments and the international community have responded to the crisis caused by the LRA both by trying to combat the group militarily and by providing protection and assistance to those affected by its violence. Competing priorities, poor infrastructure, a shortage of funding and difficulties in coordinating across borders have, however, hampered the humanitarian response, and as LRA violence has decreased, so have levels of assistance. That said, such assistance has helped both IDPs and local communities struggling to cope with existing vulnerabilities stemming from chronic poverty and gaps in service provision. If IDPs are to achieve durable solutions to their displacement, it is crucial that any reduction in humanitarian aid is countered with longer-term development support.

## Background

### *The history of the LRA in the region*

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) took up arms against the government of Uganda in the 1980s under the leadership of Joseph Kony. Despite offers of a national amnesty as early as 2003, efforts to negotiate a peace deal failed. Instead the LRA's operations spread progressively beyond Uganda's borders, and in 2005 it set up its headquarters in north-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Three years later, a joint military operation codenamed Lightning Thunder was led by the Ugandan army and supported by the armed forces of DRC and South Sudan<sup>1</sup> in an attempt to

eradicate the group. It only served, however, to push the LRA further into remote areas of DRC, Central African Republic (CAR) and South Sudan. Since 2006, the movement has not been active in Uganda, but has carried out attacks in CAR and DRC and has sometimes crossed into South Sudan ([The Resolve](#), July 2013; [Schomerus](#), September 2007; [DPA](#), Feb 2007). It operates in small, scattered groups that are difficult to track down ([CSIS](#), 18 October 2011). It was said initially to have taken up arms in response to the marginalisation of the Acholi people in northern Uganda, but it appears to have long since abandoned any political agenda ([The Resolve](#), July 2013; [CSIS](#), 18 October 2011).

For more than two decades, the LRA has terrorised local populations by attacking and looting villages, killing and mutilating civilians, and abducting adults and children. As many as 2.5 million people have been displaced, either internally or across borders ([UN SG](#), May 2013). In 2005, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for the top LRA commanders for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in northern Uganda.

### *The affected areas*

The relative absence of the state, ongoing internal conflicts and widespread poverty in areas where the LRA is present have enabled it to become well-established. The same factors are also key drivers of vulnerability among local populations, leaving communities more susceptible to attacks. Poverty and a lack of public services make dealing with the consequences of violence and displacement all the more difficult.

### *Absence of the state*

The border regions between CAR, DRC, South Sudan and Uganda are characterised by the absence of security forces to secure frontiers, enforce

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<sup>1</sup> South Sudan was not an independent country at the time

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of Operation Lightning Thunder, but the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) supported the operation.

the law and protect civilians ([UN SG](#), May 2012). The lack of adequate communications infrastructure has hampered both the reporting of security incidents and the transmission of early warnings about imminent threats ([Invisible Children](#), n/d; [COOPI](#), 2012). Uganda pursued strident and often military policies against the LRA and by extension in response to internal displacement, but the governments of CAR, DRC and South Sudan have shown only limited political will to address their shared problem ([World Bank](#), June 2011). Some reports suggest that this is, in part, because they do not see the affected areas as politically or strategically important. ([The Resolve](#), July 2013; [Enough Project](#), June 2010; [INTERSOS](#), April 2011). In the South Sudanese state of Western Equatoria, however, improved governance and response to security and humanitarian problems helped to reduce LRA activity in the area in 2011.

#### *Other conflicts*

DRC, CAR and South Sudan have all experienced or continue to experience internal armed conflicts that have weakened governance and compromised security. When the LRA arrived in what is now South Sudan in the 1990s, southern rebels were fighting the central government and Khartoum reportedly welcomed the movement as a proxy in its campaign against the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) ([Schomerus](#), September 2007). After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, Sudan's support for the LRA diminished. Recent reports, however, suggest that Kony and his troops have renewed relations with Khartoum and were able to seek safe haven as recently as this year in the Kafia Kingi enclave, a border area disputed by Sudan and South Sudan ([The Resolve](#), July 2013).

Both CAR and DRC are chronically unstable and have experienced decades of internal armed conflict and military coups. As a result, neither government was particularly focused on the peripheral border areas where the LRA established itself in the mid-2000s. All three countries suffered

a significant upsurge in armed violence and the creation of new armed groups in 2012, drawing attention, troops and often humanitarian and development aid further away from areas affected by the LRA ([Conciliation Resources](#), January 2013). In CAR, a new coalition of armed groups known as Séléka overthrew President François Bozizé's government in March 2013.

#### *Poverty and socio-economic context*

All of the areas affected by LRA violence are extremely poor. Northern Uganda is the poorest region of the country and has very low human development indicators ([World Bank](#), June 2013). In DRC's Orientale province, more than 75% of the population live in poverty, according to government figures from 2009. The UN's Human Development Report for 2013, stated that 87.7 per cent of DRC's population as a whole lives in poverty, suggesting that the rate in Orientale may be even higher today ([UNDP](#), March 2013). In South Sudan, the state of Western Equatoria has some of the worst social and humanitarian indicators in the country, with maternal and child mortality rates comparable with those in the northern areas suffering an acute refugee crisis ([DRC and DDG](#), April 2013). CAR ranked 180th out of 187 countries in the 2013 Human Development Report ([UNDP](#), March 2013).

## **Displacement figures and patterns**

Data tracking in the region for LRA violence and the displacement it has caused is not always consistent across organisations and locations, and access restrictions stemming from both insecurity and logistical problems make the task more difficult still.

Since the LRA first emerged in the 1980s, it is estimated to have forcibly displaced 2.5 million people ([UN SG](#), May 2013), of whom more than 440,000 were believed to be living in displacement in the central African region as of June 2013.

Of these around 420,000 are IDPs, and 26,000 are refugees (OCHA, June 2013). DRC hosts 319,000 IDPs, South Sudan 49,000 and CAR 21,000 (OCHA, June 2013)<sup>2</sup>. The areas affected by the LRA have a combined population of around two million, meaning that more than 20 per cent are living as IDPs or refugees (OCHA, June 2012). Such high proportions are rarely seen in national displacement crises, and are comparable to some of the world's worst.

At the country level, however, displacement caused by the LRA tends to represent a relatively small proportion of national totals. In DRC, for example, there are currently as many as 2.6 million IDPs in the east of the country, the majority in the provinces of North and South Kivu (OCHA, July 2013). South Sudan hosted as many as 193,000 new IDPs in the country as a whole in 2012, and since the current political crisis in CAR more than 200,000 people are believed to have fled their homes (IDMC, April 2013; OCHA, May 2013). Only in Uganda, where the number of IDPs peaked at an estimated 1.8 million, did the scale of displacement caused by the LRA constitute a national crisis. Today, after several years of a sustained focus by the Ugandan government, only around 30,000 people live in semi-dismantled camps and transit sites.

Displacement patterns have mirrored LRA movements and activity, and military campaigns against it across all four countries. The number of IDPs in Uganda increased sharply from 2002 as the army launched a series of counter-insurgency operations (IDMC, May 2012). Uganda's sustained military response pushed the group into southern Sudan, where the ongoing civil war made displacement difficult to measure accurately until after the signing of the CPA. The first subsequent

large waves of internal displacement caused by the LRA in South Sudan took place in 2008 and 2009, displacing about 80,000 people (IDMC, May 2009, OCHA, June 2012). This coincided with Operation Lightning Thunder and the onset of a vicious campaign of revenge meted out by the LRA on the civilian population in DRC's Orientale province, where tens of thousands of people were displaced (OCHA, June 2012; OHCHR, December 2009). In CAR, internal displacement increased dramatically between 2009 and 2010, when the LRA carried out attacks in retaliation for civilian resistance and Ugandan army offensives (World Bank, June 2013; Enough Project, June 2010).

Fear of the LRA runs extremely deep, and is the key factor behind the preventive displacement common in areas where it is present. Despite a decrease in its activity in DRC and South Sudan since 2011, the slightest sign of the group's presence or even just the rumour of it has proved enough to cause people to flee (OCHA, December 2012; DTJ, 2012; DDG, 2012).

The same fear accounts for the significant levels of protracted displacement seen in all four countries. Since the LRA left Uganda in 2006 and South Sudan in 2011, very little new displacement has been recorded in the areas where it had been active, but returns did not start to gather pace in Uganda until 2008 and in South Sudan until 2012. Indeed, the majority of IDPs displaced by the LRA in South Sudan have chosen not to return for the time being. From a peak of 70,000 in displacement in 2011, there are still 50,000 people living in displacement, despite no recorded incidents of LRA violence in the country since mid-2011. In CAR and DRC, the LRA is still active but has changed tactics since 2011, carrying out mainly small-scale attacks, and incident records indicate a significant drop in their number. This is reflected in a reduction in new displacement, but the overall number of IDPs remains high.

Displacement from the remote rural areas where

<sup>2</sup> In CAR, humanitarian organisations have been unable to verify the number of IDPs in the south-eastern part of the country since Séléka took up arms in December 2012. The figure of 21,000 is from October 2012 and may have changed since.



the LRA operates to urban locations is common to all four countries, as IDPs seek security and protection in more populated places. In south-eastern CAR entire villages have been abandoned as communities fled to larger towns, especially those such as Obo where the Ugandan army maintains a presence ([Enough Project](#), June 2010). In DRC, the population of the town of Dungeni in Orientale province has increased by more than 50 per cent. For the most part, such influxes have been absorbed by host communities, with the majority of IDPs in CAR, DRC and South Sudan staying with host families or in makeshift settlements ([UN SG](#), November 2011). In Uganda, by contrast, most were housed in camps known as “protected villages” set up by the government ([Mercy Corps](#), 2012; [IDMC](#), May 2012).

## Causes of displacement

### *LRA violence*

The LRA is notorious for targeting civilians with brutal atrocities, and the movement remains the primary cause of internal displacement in the affected region. It has carried out massacres and mutilations, and has abducted more than 60,000 men, women and children whom it has used as porters, fighters or sex slaves. The affected areas of South Sudan, DRC and CAR are mainly inhabited by Zandé farmers, and they have been the main targets of the group's violence there. The bulk of its attacks outside Uganda, and by extension the majority of the displacement caused, have taken place in DRC, mainly in the Haut-Uélé and Bas-Uélé districts of Orientale province. In both DRC and CAR, it targeted civilians with waves of serious atrocities, especially between 2008 and 2010 in response to Operation Lightning Thunder and other military offensives. It carried out mass abductions and mass killings, including the infamous 2008 Christmas massacres in Orientale ([Human Rights Watch](#) (HRW), February 2009; [UN SG](#), November 2011; [World Bank](#), June 2013).

### *Other displacement drivers compounded by LRA presence*

The LRA has been the principal driver of internal displacement in the areas where it operates, but both the security forces and other armed groups, bandits and poachers have increasingly taken advantage of the “LRA myth” and the absence of rule of law to prey on the local population. Their violence is often difficult to distinguish from that of LRA, and incident reporting tends to refer almost exclusively to “presumed” LRA violence ([Titeca](#), May 2013; [Schomerus](#), September 2007).

### *National security forces*

In attempts to root out the movement and protect local populations, national security forces have at times deliberately displaced civilians, in some cases without ensuring that their basic needs were met. From 1996, the Ugandan government forced hundreds of thousands of civilians in the north of the country to relocate to the “protected villages” it had set up. These were effectively camps with no access to basic services ([The Resolve](#), July 2010; [IDMC](#), May 2012).

The presence of security forces in areas where the LRA operates has to a certain extent deterred attacks and as such has served a protection purpose, but individual soldiers have at times been a considerable source of insecurity and have even caused displacement. Congolese soldiers deployed to the north-east of the country to fight the LRA and protect civilians have perpetrated rape and other sexual violence, forced marriages, looting and harassment. Protection data shows that this small-scale violence has at times accounted for more security incidents than the LRA's more brutal activity and caused displacement (Oxfam Québec and UNHCR, 2010, on file with IDMC).

The Ugandan armed forces have also been accused of committing human rights violations against civilians ([HRW](#), September 2005; [Amnesty International](#), March 2012), including in CAR and

DRC. It is not known whether these violations have led to displacement.

#### *Intercommunal tensions*

Access to land, grazing and water sources has been a principal cause of inter-communal tension and conflict in the region, and this has been fuelled by LRA violence and the resulting displacement ([INTERSOS](#), April 2011). In DRC and South Sudan, and to a lesser extent in CAR, tensions between the local and displaced populations, farmers and Mbororo pastoralists have at times escalated into armed clashes ([Conciliation Resources](#), September 2012). Locals have accused the Mbororo of killings, pillage and of damaging farmland and crops with their livestock.

LRA violence has undoubtedly made these tensions worse. Local communities often associate the Mbororo with the LRA, and they have reportedly become more suspicious of outsiders as a result of their constant fear of attack ([International Crisis Group](#) (ICG), November 2011). The nomadic Mbororo are relatively recent arrivals in DRC and South Sudan, and have a completely different lifestyle to the mainly Zandé farmers living in the area. There are claims that tracks left by the Mbororo and their livestock have been used by the LRA to find their way through the bush to inhabited areas ([ICG](#), November 2011). The displacement caused by LRA violence has increased population densities in areas of refuge, aggravating existing tensions over already scarce resources.

There have been occasional reports of conflicts between Mbororo and local people causing displacement as well. In the Bas-Uélé town of Poko, around 100 households were reported to have fled their village for several days in June 2012 after Mbororo herders allegedly killed 20 members of the community ([Radio Okapi](#), July 2012). There have also been incidents in which Mbororo themselves have been expelled by national security forces in DRC and South Sudan, ostensibly for security reasons ([Conciliation Resources](#), September

2012). They have also taken their own decisions to flee in response both to LRA attacks - fighters have abducted and killed pastoralists and stolen their livestock - and to human rights violations and harassment by security forces. ([INTERSOS](#), April 2011; [ICG](#), November 2011; [Conciliation Resources](#), September 2012). Assessing the scale and impact of such displacement is, however, extremely difficult.

## **Protection and assistance needs**

LRA violence is seen as distinct from the many other sources of violence elsewhere in the region primarily because of the ruthless and unpredictable way the group targets civilians. The pervasive sense of fear that LRA brutality has instilled in the populations affected, and the extent to which this is sustained despite a clear reduction in the number of attacks is also unique.

#### *IDPs' protection needs*

The LRA, other armed groups and security forces have all been the source of protection concerns for IDPs. The LRA has attacked camps for IDPs and refugees in all four countries, contributing to what are thought to be significant levels of repeated displacement (focus group discussions, IDP sites, Dungu, July 2013; [IRIN](#), February 2004; [Sudan Tribune](#), December 2009). This threat has diminished since the group changed its tactics to smaller-scale operations, but the LRA has in the past killed, injured and abducted IDPs and stolen their property.

Others, including soldiers, have also looted IDPs' belongings, committed sexual violence in camps and at other sites housing the displaced, and set up illegal roadblocks to tax both IDPs and local people. Congolese soldiers have been accused of abducting women from camps and forcing them into marriage (focus group discussions, IDP sites, Dungu, July 2013), and in Uganda the army has allegedly committed abuses against IDPs including

rape, other sexual violence and looting ([Uganda Human Rights Commission/OHCHR](#), 2011). IDPs have been particularly vulnerable at distribution points for humanitarian aid. LRA fighters, soldiers and local community members have carried out attacks and looted supplies including food, household articles and medicines ([UN SG](#), November 2011; [Enough Project](#), March 2010; focus group discussions, IDP sites, Dungu, July 2013). As a result, some humanitarian organisations in DRC suspended distribution in remote areas when they were unable to ensure IDPs' protection ([Enough Project](#), March 2010).

### *Children*

Among the displaced population, children are particularly vulnerable, with unaccompanied minors and orphans most at risk. The LRA has abducted and forcibly recruited children, who have been exposed to further trauma and abuse while in the group's ranks. It may have abducted between 60,000 and 100,000 over the last 25 years, contributing to its reputation as an army of children. In reality though it has abducted just as many if not more adults and most the abducted children who were forced to become fighters are now adults ([The Resolve](#), July 2013; [UN SG](#), May 2013; [USAID and UNICEF](#), August 2006).

Children who manage to escape or are released are often haunted by their ordeal and may suffer flashbacks and nightmares. They also struggle to reintegrate into their communities as their status as former abductees can lead to stigmatisation. They are often described by community members as aggressive and violent, and are subjected to insults and name-calling.

Access to education in LRA-affected areas is hampered both by displacement and reduced service provision as a result of the group's attacks on infrastructure. In DRC, attacks on schools appeared to have been a deliberate tactic in 2008, when 34 schools were destroyed ([UN SG](#), May 2012). In CAR, some schools had to close because their

teachers had been displaced and parents were no longer sending their children for fear of their being attacked or abducted ([UN SG](#), May 2012).

In other cases, children's education is disrupted as a direct result of displacement. Infrastructure tends to be overwhelmed in areas that experience large influxes of IDPs, and though makeshift facilities are sometimes set up to increase capacity, there are often not enough buildings, teachers or materials to educate both local and displaced children ([UN SG](#), May 2012; [JUPEDEC](#), 2012). Cost is also an issue. Many displaced parents are unable to afford the fees, contributions and materials to send their children to school (focus group discussions, IDP sites, Dungu, July 2013, [JUPEDEC](#), 2012).

Some children drop out of school and in to child labour, usually to help struggling parents supplement their household income. Others do day-labour work to pay their own school fees.

Food insecurity and malnutrition are also a problem, with some parents resorting to eating less themselves in order to feed their children. Malnourished children are more vulnerable to diseases, and given that a) many health facilities have been damaged or destroyed, and b) many IDPs are unable to afford the cost of medical care, this is a serious concern.

*Socio-economic impacts and community dynamics*  
The extreme and seemingly random nature of LRA violence leaves IDPs feeling particularly vulnerable. As the group would appear to have no political or economic agenda, they have no idea why they were targeted and many are left with deep psychological scars ([DTJ](#), 2012; [DTJ and HHI](#), 2012). As a result, people have changed their behaviour. Some choose to sleep fully clothed and others to brave the elements and spend the night outdoors so as to be able to flee at a moment's notice ([DTJ and HHI](#), 2012). Most IDPs fear to travel long distances, even to fetch water, and they prefer to stay in groups rather than going out alone. Others are



afraid to leave their displacement sites or urban centres at all, which prevents them from accessing land and other livelihood opportunities. For many such access is their greatest challenge during their displacement.

The majority of IDPs are from rural areas, where they subsisted on small-scale farming, hunting and fishing before their displacement ([The Resolve](#), July 2013; [Enough Project](#), June 2010). When they flee, often to urban or semi-urban centres, they struggle to find land on which to practice their traditional livelihoods. Population density in areas of refuge in north-eastern DRC, south-western South Sudan and northern Uganda means that competition for land is intense and access for new arrivals is difficult. In south-eastern CAR, land is more readily available, but many IDPs were unable to plant or harvest in 2009 and 2010, either because of renewed displacement or because their crops were looted ([The Resolve](#), 2013; [INTEROS](#), April 2011; [Première Urgence-Aide Médicale Internationale](#), 2012).

Access to land is made more difficult still by IDPs' fear of attacks. Near Dungu in DRC, for example, some IDPs who were initially prepared to travel 20 kilometres or more to cultivate stopped doing so because the journey into more remote areas made them more vulnerable to LRA violence. The scarcity of land closer to urban centres has, in many places, led to heightened tensions with host communities who are themselves often impoverished. In all four of the countries affected, IDPs have in some cases been chased off land they had previously been allowed to cultivate, targeted with threats and curses, and reportedly even been killed. The situation appears less acute in CAR than elsewhere ([DTJ and HHI](#), 2012).

Many IDPs unable to access land have been forced to adopt other coping mechanisms to provide for their families. As is the case in other contexts where land forms a crucial part of people's livelihoods, the loss of access as a result of displace-

ment also has a significant impact on IDPs' culture, identity and dignity. In CAR and DRC, some IDPs resort to day-labour, working others' land, pressing bricks, doing laundry or collecting firewood ([Mercy Corps](#), 2012; focus group discussions, IDP sites, Dungu, July 2013). Such work is generally very poorly paid, often at lower rates than for members of the host community, and is not enough to make ends meet.

This disruption of traditional livelihoods has in many cases changed household dynamics, with the burden of providing for the family falling increasingly on women. Many have had to take on day-labour in addition to taking care of their household and children. This is of course particularly the case for families who have lost fathers and husbands to LRA killings or abductions ([DTJ and HHI](#), 2012), while other men no longer able to provide for their family often feel disempowered ([DTJ and HHI](#), 2012). Such impacts have reportedly led to the disintegration of some family units, as divorce and domestic violence rates rise (focus group discussions, IDP sites Dungu, July 2013; [Mercy Corps](#), 2012).

Traditional community support networks are also often disrupted. Many communities are broken up when they flee and are not always able to regroup, and in some cases the LRA has killed or abducted community leaders. This can leave the most vulnerable IDPs, such as widows, widowers and orphans, with little or no support. In some cases, even disabled IDPs have had to accept poorly paid work in an effort to meet their most basic needs.

## National and international response

CAR has taken some steps towards the development of a national policy on internal displacement, but to date only Uganda has enacted such legislation. The policy, which was adopted in

2004, was in large part developed in response to the displacement crisis caused by the LRA, and it was significant in promoting subsequent steps towards regional legislation, as reflected in the 2012 Kampala Convention and the two displacement-related protocols to the 2006 Great Lakes Pact. As signatories to the Great Lakes Pact, all four affected countries have strong applicable legal frameworks as a basis for their response to internal displacement. With the exception of Uganda, however, responses to LRA violence and the displacement it has caused have generally been inadequate and very military in their approach. Humanitarian aid has been provided for the most part through local civil society networks, particularly churches and international organisations, at national levels.

#### *Military response*

The Ugandan army carried out a regional military offensive against the LRA over a number of years. At times, such as in Operation Lightning Thunder, it was supported by forces from other affected countries, but competing priorities, a lack of resources and poorly trained personnel meant such collaboration was only partially successful.

In 2010, the US president, Barack Obama, signed into law the LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act. Washington also developed a strategy to counter LRA which committed it to the deployment of around 100 military advisors to central Africa to assist local forces in intelligence gathering and with military advice ([UN SG](#), November 2011; [Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect](#), March 2013).

In 2011, the African Union (AU) developed a co-operation initiative, which provided for a regional task force to fight the LRA. The task force became operational in March 2012 and was meant to include troops from the four affected countries, but it took until February 2013 for DRC to send its contingent of 500 soldiers ([Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect](#), March 2013; [Conciliation](#)

[Resources](#), April 2013). Despite challenges in terms of logistics, funding and support mechanisms, recent reports indicate that the task force, in collaboration with the UN, has made progress ([Conciliation Resources](#), April 2013; [The Resolve](#), July 2013). Since the change of regime in CAR in March 2012, however, it has suspended its operations there, raising significant concern that the lull may allow the LRA to regroup.

In June 2012, the UN Security Council adopted a regional strategy to counter the LRA and the effects of its violence. The strategy aims to support the AU's cooperation initiative and its task force; to enhance the protection of civilians; to extend disarmament, demobilisation, repatriation, reintegration and resettlement activities; to improve the coordination of humanitarian and child protection responses; and generally to support peace-building, human rights and the rule of law ([UN SC](#), June 2012). The strategy was welcomed by national and international organisations but implementation has been slow, in part because competing priorities in the region have meant that resources have been limited ([Enough Project/The Resolve et al.](#), December 2012; [UN News Centre](#), December 2012).

The military responses to the LRA have had only a limited focus on civilian protection, which under the AU's cooperation initiative should be "integrated in all military and security initiatives to address the LRA problem". Following the adoption of the UN's regional strategy, some training to promote respect for international humanitarian and human rights law has taken place, but there is little analysis to date by which to gauge the task force's effectiveness in protecting civilians. Concerns about abuses committed by some of the troops involved also remain. That said, military forces, both national and UN, have improved the protection of civilians in larger towns, where they have been few if any LRA attacks in the last two years.. One report states that "since October 2011, patrols around Obo by the CAR and Ugandan armed

forces supported by the US military advisors have allowed local authorities to secure a larger radius around the city, enabling residents to tend their farms" ([Enough Project](#)).

#### *Community-based protection response*

In the absence of any real state protection from the threat of LRA violence, local self-defence groups have been established in some areas. In South Sudan, the so-called Home Guard, also known as the Arrow Boys, emerged in the mid-2000s ([UN SG](#), November 2011). They operate mainly in Zandé communities and have thrived under traditional Zandé systems of governance ([ICG](#), November 2011). Their patrols have helped boost IDPs' confidence in returning, they are seen as the major providers of security, and are generally well perceived by local populations ([JIPS](#), 2012; [ICG](#), November 2011). In DRC, local self-defence groups began to emerge following the first LRA attacks there in 2008 ([DTJ and HHI](#), 2012), but despite popular support the Congolese army disbanded them a year later for fear they might pose a threat to the government and wider stability ([DTJ and HHI](#), 2012; [ICG](#), November 2011). Some local self-defence groups were reported to have recruited children to their ranks ([UN SG](#); May 2012).

#### *Humanitarian and development response*

Most of the humanitarian response is currently organised at the country level, but efforts to improve regional coordination are increasing ([OCHA](#), June 2012). Humanitarian organisations are providing aid to IDPs through country-specific humanitarian clusters in CAR, DRC and South Sudan but their presence is limited, especially in CAR where most NGOs and UN agencies pulled out in March 2013 because of insecurity following the coup. They have only recently started to return to peripheral areas outside the capital ([Conciliation Resources](#), April 2013).

Humanitarians face a range of challenges in their work, including insecurity caused by both the LRA

and other armed groups and bandits, logistical problems, poor transport infrastructure, understaffing and a lack of financial resources. These hamper humanitarian access and create difficulties in tracking population movements, information sharing and coordination across borders. This has meant that humanitarian aid and protection has regularly failed to reach some IDPs in rural areas, and in some cases that displacement went unreported for weeks ([UN SG](#), May 2012; [INTEROS](#), April 2011; [OCHA](#), July 2013; [OCHA](#), June 2012). In CAR, the consolidated humanitarian appeal for 2013 includes nine projects from various sectors which specifically mention the LRA in their title. All of these projects, however, remained unfunded as of August 2013 and the overall appeal is funded at only 34% ([Financial Tracking Service](#), August 2013).

As the levels of LRA violence and subsequent displacement have dropped, humanitarian organisations have assumed that the emergency situation is over and begun to pull out. At the same time, IDPs' needs, have changed rather than ceased, and a focus on mid to long-term development assistance instead of short-term humanitarian aid is required. IDPs themselves have asked for support that helps them to become more self-reliant ([OCHA](#), June 2012).

#### *Durable solutions and protracted displacement*

IDPs can be said to have achieved a durable solution when they no longer have protection or assistance needs that result from their displacement, and when they can exercise their human rights without discrimination based on it.

Durable solutions can be facilitated by IDPs' return and reintegration in their place of origin, their local integration in their area of refuge or their relocation and integration elsewhere in the country. IDPs have the right to choose their settlement option freely and voluntarily.

In Uganda, most IDPs have returned, but a du-

rable solutions assessment carried out in 2011 indicated that 43% per cent felt that their decision was not free and voluntary ([JIPS](#), 2012). In South Sudan, IDPs have started to return to their areas of origin as security has improved. A small number have also chosen to settle elsewhere, but from a peak of around 70,000 people, 50,000 remain in displacement.

Some IDPs in CAR and DRC would like to return, mainly as a result of their extremely difficult living conditions in displacement. They are, however, reluctant to do so because the LRA's continued presence and memories of the violence they suffered has made them afraid of being attacked and displaced again ([Mercy Corps](#), 2012; focus group discussions, IDP sites, Dungu, July 2013). Such fears are prevalent in areas affected by the LRA, including in Uganda and South Sudan ([Mercy Corps](#), 2012; [JIPS](#), 2012).

A major factor in preparing for durable solutions is to ensure that IDPs' prospects in terms of living conditions in both their home and displacement areas match. IDPs who feel their life would be easier if they return because they would have better access to livelihood opportunities may go home even if security conditions are poor. Many feel trapped between physical insecurity and food insecurity, and access to services tends to be difficult whether they choose to integrate locally or return ([Mercy Corps](#), 2012). In Uganda, access to health services, drinking water and education are still significant challenges for both returnees and remaining IDPs ([JIPS](#), 2012).

Access to land is a problem for many IDPs and returnees in all four countries. A profiling study in Uganda found that lack of access to agricultural land was the "single largest obstacle to achieving durable solutions" ([JIPS](#), 2012). In DRC, South Sudan and CAR, pendular movements between IDPs' places of refuge and origin are common, either on a daily basis or over longer periods. These tend to be driven by a combination of economic

and security factors. IDPs want to access land to cultivate food, which they can only do in their places of origin, but they are too afraid of potential attacks to return permanently, especially to more remote areas ([COOPI](#), 2012).

Progress towards durable solutions is also hampered by IDPs' loss of social networks and weakened social cohesion, both at family and community levels. Those in sites near Dungu in DRC said that as many neighbours or family members had been killed or abducted, there was no community, no home they could return to. Financial resources are also an issue. Some IDPs in CAR and Uganda who would like to return can simply not afford to do so ([Mercy Corps](#), 2012; [JIPS](#), 2012).

In all four countries affected by LRA violence, the emergency situation related to the LRA ended between almost three and seven years ago. Given the protracted nature of much of the displacement, however, especially in South Sudan, DRC and CAR, the end of the emergency does not mean the end of IDPs' needs. In fact the reverse is often true, and IDPs find themselves more vulnerable once humanitarian assistance is wound down. The longer their displacement goes on, the worse their poverty and vulnerability becomes, and this in turn hampers progress towards durable solutions even further.

It is therefore crucial that the development sector engage early to address both structural poverty and the impacts of displacement on IDPs and their host communities, including in areas where low-level violence and displacement continue. Not to engage in such a response, or not to include areas affected by LRA violence when planning national development initiatives, risks perpetuating vulnerabilities and making the situation of IDPs and their host communities worse still.

## About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) is a world leader in the monitoring and analysis of the causes, effects and responses to internal displacement. IDMC advocates for better responses to the needs of the millions of people worldwide who are displaced within their own countries as a consequence of conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations, and natural or man-made disasters. It is also at the forefront of efforts to promote greater respect for the basic rights of internally displaced people (IDPs). IDMC is part of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

### *What we do:*

- Promote appropriate responses to internal displacement through targeted advocacy
- Provide timely, accessible and relevant information on internal displacement worldwide
- Develop research and analysis to help shape policies and practices that have positive outcomes for IDPs
- Provide training and support to country-based policy-makers and practitioners with a responsibility to protect IDPs

### *Who do we target?*

IDMC is best placed to effect positive change for IDPs through advocacy to influence the decisions and practices of duty bearers and all those with a responsibility or capacity to promote or fulfil the rights of IDPs.

### *How do we operate?*

As information on internal displacement is often controversial and politically sensitive, IDMC must continue to operate and be seen to operate as an independent and effective global monitor of this widespread phenomenon.

IDMC has become an indispensable resource for anyone seeking impartial data and analysis on internal displacement, independent of political or operational considerations. [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)

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