

The regional dimensions of the war in northern Uganda

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Introduction

This paper highlights the complexity of the conflict in northern Uganda¹. Attempts have been made to analyse the structures, actors and complex dynamics of the conflict using a multidisciplinary methodology. This has helped in identifying and mapping out not only the structural sources of the conflict but also the international/global, regional, national and local dimensions. The analytical process took into consideration the security or military, political, economic and social factors that are germane to the conflict helix. However, the discussions of the regional ramifications of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) war tended to elicit cautious responses from some government and military officials for fear of releasing information that, in their view, would appear sensitive and controversial in diplomatic circles.

Government officials were reluctant to make statements that would jeopardise the outcome of the Juba peace process.² All the more so because the study was conducted at a time when the government of Uganda and the LRA had just been in Sudan to conclude a negotiated compromise for a peaceful political end of the war pending the often aborted ceremonial signing of the final peace agreement (FPA) by the president of the Republic of Uganda and the LRA leader, Joseph Kony. However, the information presented here also contains perceptions of ordinary people of the war and its regional implications, and how these have impacted on their livelihood. It is hoped the discussions will contribute to a better understanding of the local perceptions of the geopolitical climate of the LRA war.

Background to the war in northern Uganda

Since Uganda gained political independence in 1962, the country has not enjoyed peace for any length of

time. Every change of the political regime in post-colonial Uganda has been accompanied by and accomplished through armed conflict, leaving deep scars of distrust and anger between the different regional and ethnic groups, particularly between the northern and southern/central parts of the country. Frequent regime changes through violent, extra-constitutional means were 'normal'. The country's chequered post-independence history therefore remains characterised by ubiquitous violence manifested in wars, armed conflicts, rebellions, insurgencies, civil strife, armed cattle rustling, raids, and many other attendant social vices. All of these are characterised by a notorious inability to manage or resolve these crises. Other manifestations include systematic trends of uncontrollable recidivism, hostilities, confrontations and conflagrations; diverse scenarios of political upheavals, turbulence, instability and social schisms. Suffice it to say that wars grow much worse when they turn into a battle of belief systems, which are usually much more visceral than the term implies.

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From the constitutional crisis of 1966 until the overthrow of the second Obote regime in July 1985, northern-dominated regimes were seen as taking retributive action against the south for the perceived structural imbalances, socio-economic and political exclusion, and marginalisation of the colonial period.

The northern part of the country plays a special role in today's Uganda. Since the time of independence, it has never been a region of development and prosperity. Instead, in the last more than two decades it has been heavily affected by a protracted internecine armed conflict. Since the assumption of state political power by the National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A) government in January 1986, Uganda has seen the emergence of a number of armed rebel groups in many parts of the country. This turbulent political history, as



well as the fractured nature of society, is brought into stark relief by the rebellion orchestrated by the LRA in northern Uganda. The rebel outfit developed from anti-government movements that formed in the north after President Yoweri Museveni took power in 1986 by overthrowing the Acholi-led military government. For more than two decades the country has been experiencing one of the longest internal armed conflicts in northern Uganda, with no peaceful end in sight. No such prolonged violent conflict has been known in the annals of Uganda's history.

The conflict pits the government's Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) against the dissident Lord's Resistance Army fronted by a self-proclaimed lieutenant general, Joseph Kony. The LRA's reason for engaging in the war since 1988 has been to replace President Yoweri Museveni's secular government with one based on the biblical Decalogue. There has been no clear political agenda (at least up to the time of the Juba peace talks). The war remained intriguing because the LRA never came out clearly with legitimate political demands in the form of an agenda. It is through recent developments in the Juba peace talks that issues pertaining to Kony's political agenda became known. Before that, Kony's political agenda (if any) remained an enigma to the general public.

The armed conflict has involved many actors, including members of different ethnic, religious or political groupings within the country. This conflict has sometimes spilled across the Uganda-Sudan border in the form of sporadic cross-national military incursions and clashes. Some of the groups are reportedly now holed up in the thick natural forests of Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The war has tended to develop its own dynamism, thus undergoing qualitative and quantitative transformation over the years, with diverse disastrous, dehumanising impacts on various people and the parties within and outside the arena of the conflict. Over time, the LRA has become notorious for its shockingly brutal tactics and the perpetration of mass civilian atrocities – more than for its political positions – in northern Uganda, southern Sudan and even some parts of eastern Congo where they are currently holed up.

The result of the rebellion has been killing and imposing physical violence on the population in northern Uganda. Besides women, children are hard hit. They are abducted: girls become sex slaves and boys are trained to kill even their kinsmen and -women and become carriers of looted war booty. The violence meted out by the LRA – to innocent

civilians in particular – is notorious for its ferocity, brutality and viciousness. The LRA use methods as cruel as they are effective. They have thrived on war and its cruel and diabolic dynamics, in addition to the instability this causes to the innocent population. In a futile feat of brutal force they have brought an unprecedented level of devastation to the Acholi region in particular. Some of the losses – especially of human lives – are hardly quantifiable and are beyond any level of social or legal atonement.

The war reconfigured Acholiland, its economy and its people. Its strong population of industrious and illustrious people has been subjected to systematic and aberrational human rights violations, marginalisation, and acute vulnerability, in spite of the vast agricultural potential of the land. The resultant abject poverty produced new forms of structural injustices. The war-infested zones continue being swamped by heart-wrenching scenes of killings, as well as maiming, abduction, rape, looting, depravity, deprivation and despondency.

In northern Uganda, the population is made up of numerous vulnerable groups, traumatised veterans, children and adults, and is being ravaged by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The situation has been described as the world's worst forgotten humanitarian disaster. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed and close to two million were uprooted from their ancestral homesteads and crammed into some 200 squalid internally displaced persons (IDP) camps scattered over the Acholi, Lango and Teso regions of greater northern Uganda.

Furthermore, the endemically depressed, disadvantaged and marginalised region of northern Uganda is treated differently by the central government in official and unofficial talks. There is a condescending attitude of 'Let them have it' reflected in actions and inactions, reverberations and counter-reverberations – perhaps as a consequence of the colonial south-north strategic division. Apart from the physical violence meted out to innocent civilians, the region continues to suffer from socio-economic and human developmental deficiencies and has endured a series of national regimes in various wars.

In the last two years the Juba peace process has progressed to the extent that although the final peace agreement has not yet been signed, insurgencies are not taking place any more (as at the time of writing) on Ugandan territory and the refugees have started returning in 2007. The good news is that for at least two years now, the spiral of violence epitomised by military hostilities has been cushioned by the cessation of hostilities agreement (CHA), a

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product of the Juba Peace Talks. One may say that the political dialogue embracing the peace efforts are gradually being anchored and concretised – continually evolving and vacillating between greater unity and diversity within the cardinal requirements of national reconciliation.

It cannot be said that the conflict in northern Uganda will never be resolved, but it is crucial to appreciate that in any conflict scenario the root causes of a conflict have a bearing on the understanding of its dynamics, variables and constants. These have to be seen as part of the process of resolving the conflict.

Statement of the research problem

There has been a gradual recognition that contemporary conflicts are complex and multi-faceted and that they are interconnected in a regionalised conflict system. There is no single conceptual framework for looking at such complexities. As such, there is a need for a holistic understanding of these conflict processes. We are therefore cognisant of the fact that there have been little rigorous academic analysis of the sub-regional implications of the conflict.

There have also been limited, if any, academic policy analyses in relation to the conflict. Solutions and mechanisms to the resolution of the northern Uganda conflict have not been easy to come by, as evidenced by the long period the war has lasted. This lack of concrete approaches have prevailed regardless of regional and international aspects such as the northern Uganda war; the involvement of the United Nations (UN), the United States of America (US), the International Criminal Court (ICC) with its head office in The Hague, in the Netherlands, the governments of Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, the DRC, and the Central African Republic (CAR); terrorist organisations around the world; LRA clashes with the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPL/A); and the involvement of humanitarian agencies with internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study is to provide a detailed analysis of the conflicts in the Acholi region in northern Uganda, as well as of the sub-regional implications of the northern Uganda conflicts; to propose viable solutions and mechanisms for their resolution through field and desk research; and to give a policy analysis in relation to the research findings.

Research rationale or justification

The study analyses the underlying social, political and economic causes of the LRA conflict and discusses the dynamics through which they interact and change. It is intended to show how the different actors in the

conflict – local and international – interact in this complex conflict environment.

When humans need help, it helps to be humane. Applying the principle to this action-oriented research shows a clear predilection for the promotion of a common search for regional and global peace and sustainable development in Africa.

In this context, this researcher tried to find out more about the conditions and the thinking or perceptions of the population of northern Uganda. The study findings, while complementing earlier studies, will demonstrate that conflict resolution and peacebuilding should be handled constructively in order to enhance good human relations. In doing so, it is important that the needs, aspirations and wishes of the war-affected population be taken into consideration. To address the problems caused by the war in northern Uganda in the context of Uganda as a whole will help overcome regional disparities, disadvantages and marginalisation and will help build a sustainable nation. With this in mind, it is envisaged that the research findings can contribute to the community transformation process in northern Uganda and to the development of a viable policy framework for conflict resolution in Africa and beyond.

The research findings are expected to benefit various institutions of academia, researchers, students, communities, etc, as they strive to transform conflicts in many parts of the world and create a legacy of peace. More significantly, the study can contribute towards the development of a cross-border framework for peacebuilding. There is a need for a comprehensive framework for security, development and compensation of conflict-affected communities in ways that advance development and improve relations. Civil society organisations and religious and cultural/traditional leaders can play key roles in identifying needs, opportunities and methods for designing and implementing such a comprehensive plan.

Scope of the study

The study is designed to cover the region affected by the war in northern Uganda – Uganda itself, as well as Kenya, Sudan, the DRC, and the CAR – for the period 1986-2008. It also covers the activities of such organisations as the UN agencies and the ICC, as well as the US and stakeholders involved in the various peace talks held in relation to the war.

Literature review

A flurry of multidisciplinary literature on the northern Uganda war has been published since the war started in 1986. The available data kept on vacillating, however, in accordance with the trends and patterns



the conflict would assume at various times. The topics also varied from one writer to the other.

This section presents selected literature that was reviewed for this paper. It attempts to cover both the historical underpinnings of the war and the contemporary developments related thereto.

According to Kasozi,³ the long history of political violence, conflict and insecurity under the regimes of Uganda's former presidents – Apollo Milton Obote, Field Marshall Idi Amin Dada, Professor Yusuf Kironde Lule, Godfrey Lukongwa Binaisa, General Tito Okello Lutwa, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and others – as well as the social, economic and ethnic divisions within Uganda can be traced back to pre-colonial and colonial times. Divisions among different ethnic groups are based on fear for their survival, victimisation, divisive political rhetoric, and myths of differences and boundaries among them. These have compromised the peaceful coexistence among different tribes – or rather ethnic communities – in Uganda since its independence.

Milton Obote, Uganda's former president who led the country to independence, was toppled twice in military coups: by Idi Amin in 1971 and by General Tito Okello in 1985. Kasozi⁴ is of the opinion that between 1964 and 1985 Ugandans were exposed to a level of violence that far exceeded that of any other people in the Eastern Africa region, with over one million of them killed through violence that was invoked for political purposes. He suggests that the violence in Uganda was caused by social inequality, the existence of sub-states and ethnic groups, flimsy mechanisms for conflict resolution, ethnic and religious fanaticisms; absence of an indigenous property-owning class; a decrease in national production; a parochial, weak and poorly educated leadership; and language problems, among many others. While the above assertions are debatable, by 1985 there were inter-tribal strife between the Acholi and the Lango of northern Uganda and fears of retribution from the southern Ugandan (Bantu) tribes.

General Tito Okello's 1985 coup caused a significant rift between his ethnic group (the Acholi) and Milton Obote's Lango tribe. When Yoweri Museveni toppled General Tito Okello Lutwa, another front of conflict was created, resulting in prolonged armed rebellions in the Acholi, Lango and Teso regions, and in the western parts of Uganda and beyond. Fearing the loss of their traditional dominance in the national military/army, the Acholi were deeply concerned that the National Resistance Army (NRA) led by Yoweri Museveni would seek retribution for the brutal actions

of the Acholi-dominated national army in the Luwero Triangle named after Luwero district. In support of this premise, Heike Behrend⁵ asserts that the post-colonial history is one of violence and counter-violence; that with the militarisation of politics which took place under Obote in 1960s and 1980s the state, which should have limited violence, increasingly became an instrument of violent retaliations instead. Whoever took over state power was not only able to gain wealth, but also take revenge against members of other ethnic groups or religions – as in the times before the existence of the state. The northern Ugandan war must also be seen in this context.

The first rebellion against the regime of Museveni was conceived by the exiled people of Acholi from Sudan. The group resolved to resist Museveni's rule by forming a rebel group called the Uganda People's Defence Army (UPDA) in August 1986. Initially, the rebellion against the NRA enjoyed massive support from the local population with some Acholi elders giving their support to the rebellion through performing war rituals and blessing the combatants using a ritual with tree leaves known in the Acholi language as *oboke olwedo*. After the UPDA signed a truce with the government at Pece Stadium in Gulu in March 1988, Acholi resistance became less universal and not well organised. Thereafter, Alice Auma alias Lakwena⁶ formed the Holy Spirit Mobile Force (HSMF) and took over the mantle to continue the rebellion. While expounding the theory of 'periods of singularity', Behrend⁷ suggests that during crises, single individuals are often able to gain a certain freedom, detachment or separation from hitherto dominant ideas and practices. At such times prophets become noticeable as a category and their registration becomes

a necessity. The prophets who appear at other times find no or limited recognition, and they usually remain silent. Alice Auma Lakwena was able to mobilise a military movement and series of combative engagements because she was seen as a prophetess during a period of crisis.

Behrend and Luig⁸ state that in a related development, the HSMF combined Christian and Acholi beliefs, mystical rituals and metaphysical warfare tactics as designs and strategies for mobilising and motivating the insurgents against the National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A) government. Alice, who claimed 'holy' spirits possessed her, performed many traditional rituals that played a role in sustaining the HSMF war against the NRA for over a year. The HSMF used 'holy' water for cleansing military recruits, healing, and blessings, and for 'cooling' the power of the enemy's arms. They also used shea butter (or oil) from shea tree seeds to smear on the chests

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or foreheads of the HSMF soldiers for cleansing, treatment, and providing 'physical protection' against enemies during combat. A third ritual consisted of magic stones that were used as magic 'bombs' and magic 'mountains' that barred the enemies from seeing the HSMF forces during combat. The 'bombs' and 'mountains' were thrown before the HSMF forces during combative engagements. A fourth ritual was a song that would be sung by the HSMF during combat and was meant to invoke protection from the 'holy' spirits during wars. The song was adopted from the Roman Catholic version, which was sung during the Easter Season. The ritual battle songs, recited in the Luo or Acholi language, had the import that the insurgents believed that Jesus died, rose and will come back. A HSMF-'anointed' soldier called a 'controller' would perform some of the above rituals from a sacred place called a 'yard'. The ritual-centred war ended in late 1987 when Alice was defeated and fled to exile in Kenya where she died in February 2007 while in the care of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Alice Auma's father, Severino Lukoya, took over the mantle of the rebellion from his daughter and in 1987/88 formed yet another rebel movement, whose work was similarly ritualistic. Lukoya referred to himself as *Rubanga Won* – literally, 'God' the Father. Around that time, in May 1988, the NRA government signed a peace agreement with some sections of the UPDA while the remainder joined Joseph Kony.⁹ The NRA captured Severino Lukoya in 1989, and that marked the end of his rebellion. However, the rebellion was far from being over.

Most of the commonly available literature reveals that Joseph Kony, a former Roman Catholic altar boy and 'catechist', emerged in 1988/89 and founded the Uganda Christian Democratic Army (UCDA), later to be renamed the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), from the remnant forces of the UPDA, Alice Auma's HSMF and Severino Lukoya's spiritual movement.¹⁰ The LRA has been fighting the Uganda government forces, the UPDF, for more than twenty years. Like Alice, the LRA combines Christian and traditional beliefs and rituals in their military mobilisations, adventures and campaigns, in addition to modern military guerrilla warfare tactics. They claim to take over Uganda and govern it in accordance with the biblical Ten Commandments. The group is known for its brutality and many of its members have been recruited forcefully through systematic abductions. A significant proportion of the abductees are children who are often forced to attack their own relatives and villages to ensure that they remain submissive and alienated from their own people.

The LRA insurgency in northern Uganda started as an internal conflict in August 1986. It was initially perceived nationally as a local act of banditry of the people of Acholi. This perception was to be proved unfortunate by the subsequent unfolding of events that would see various nationalities in the country becoming either directly or indirectly sucked into the rebellion or getting indiscriminately affected by the viciousness of the hitherto low-intensity conflict. What was then seen as a localised insurgency gradually became regionalised, and to some extent internationalised, in 1994. This was the time when the insurgents sought and secured tactical bases in southern Sudan, allegedly with logistical and military support from the Khartoum government, in retaliation for Uganda's support for the SPLM/A. The conflict extended northward and destabilised neighbouring parts of southern Sudan, which is rich in oil, and north-eastern parts of the DRC, which have large mineral wealth, vegetation and wildlife.

This conflict trend follows the collapse of the Betty Bigombe-initiated 'near success' peace talk between the LRA and the NRM/A government at Pagik in Palaro sub-county, Aswa county, in Gulu district, in 1994.¹¹ The ultimatum issued by President Yoweri Museveni for the LRA to surrender within seven days seemed to have prompted the LRA to enter the territory of another sovereign state. Oral literature points to the fact that some connections were established with the help of soldiers who were acquainted with the ruling government of the Republic of Sudan. Among these was Brigadier Kenneth Banya, who had completed his training at the Sudan School of Infantry in 1984/85. Through such linkages, the LRA found their way to southern Sudan and became an affiliate of the Khartoum-

based government forces operating in southern Sudan and northern Uganda. This introduced a new aspect and era in the northern Uganda insurgency as the regionalisation of the war at this stage enabled the LRA to establish bases in southern Sudan. According to Arop Madut-Arop,¹² they were trained and supported clandestinely by the Khartoum government as a trade-off for similar actions by the Uganda government to the SPLA/M, an insurgent group led by General John Garang de Mabior, who was fighting the government of Khartoum. With the support of the Khartoum government, the LRA became a force to be reckoned with. This did not only increase the regional dimension of the northern Ugandan war; it also internationalised the erstwhile internal insurgency or armed rebellion that was localised in northern Uganda.

Other than the Sudanese government, the LRA conflict has drawn the attention of other international

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actors. Based on the concept of 'Khartoum-sponsored terrorism', a few months after the terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September 2001, the US Secretary of State designated the LRA terrorist organisation and placed it on the Terrorism Exclusion List of the US Patriot Act of 2001.¹³ President Museveni had earlier referred to the LRA as a terrorist group when he said, 'We in Uganda know very well the grievous harm that can be caused to society by terrorists, having suffered for many years at the hands of Kony.'¹⁴ Indeed, a study of geopolitics reveals that through the US, Uganda is known to have been involved in dealing with terrorism. With an ardent belief that the LRA was under the auspices of Khartoum-sponsored terrorism, the US, in its international anti-terror crackdown, subjected the LRA to Islamophobia and terror profiling and blacklisted them as an international terror group. The Muslim communities have always criticised this orchestrated frenzy of unfounded, stereotyped hatred of Muslims.

In 2003 the unilateral declaration of the LRA by the US, followed by the UN, as a terrorist organisation (akin to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda and other, similar organisations) was legalised by the US through the Northern Uganda Crisis Response Act (Public Law 108–283 of 2 August 2004). Section 3(7) of the Act stipulates that: 'Government of Uganda military efforts to solve the conflict, including the arming and training of local militia forces, have not ensured the security of civilian populations in the region to date.'¹⁵ The Act obliges the US to steer clear of any involvement that may be construed as assistance to the indicted LRA leaders, for example 'work with the Government of Uganda, other countries, and international organizations to ensure that sufficient resources and technical support are devoted to the demobilization and reintegration of rebel combatants and abductees forced by their combatants to serve in non-combatant support roles'.¹⁶ Indeed, the USAID-funded Northern Uganda Peace Initiative (NUPI), a government of Uganda-assisted programme in line with the Northern Uganda Crisis Response Act, worked to promote national reconciliation and reintegration of ex-LRA combatants.

The war resulted in terrible losses and destruction of property and cultural/traditional structures and caused massive internal displacement of people from their homes. Abduction and loss of life were commonplace, while gross human rights abuses were committed by the warring parties. The war weakened the Acholi cultural and traditional cohesiveness of families, clans and the tribe. According to a recently released world development report¹⁷ at least 66 000 youth are thought to have been forcibly recruited

into the ranks of the LRA over the last twenty years of the insurgency. The report adds that 'two-thirds of them are severely beaten, one-fifths are forced to kill and nearly 10 per cent are forced to murder a family member or friend to bind them to the group'.¹⁸ The UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Jan Egeland, describes the war as one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters, and the least known.¹⁹ Up to 40 000 children in Acholi were commuting nightly from villages to sleep in town centres to avoid abduction by the LRA.

Attempts have been made to end the LRA war – for example the peace talks that were initiated by Betty Bigombe in 1994 and the recent peace talks in Juba, southern Sudan. However, a lasting solution still has to be found.

Under the Uganda Government Amnesty Act, 2000, several LRA fighters and commanders – including many who were responsible for grave human rights abuses – are among the people who have received amnesty. The Act provides amnesty for all involved in rebellion against the government of Uganda. This piece of legislation was a community-driven enactment meant to encourage rebels to lay down their arms, surrender and unconditionally renounce rebellion. Through this legislation the Ugandan government has been providing former LRA fighters with 'amnesty packages' of cash and supplies to help them resettle. This gesture has helped demobilise the LRA soldiers, but at the same time it has created mixed feelings and resentment among the impoverished civilian population in the north who suffered at the hands of these soldiers.

One issue that has been eluding discussions to end the LRA war, whether through the Amnesty Law or pacific settlement, is the question of accountability and reconciliation. Whereas the Act provides for blanket amnesty, President Museveni has often been adamant that amnesty would not apply to the LRA commanders. Of course, Operation Iron Fist sent a different message to most in the LRA over any hopes for amnesty and was used by Kony to discourage his fighters from applying for it.²⁰ Nonetheless, a significant number of LRA fighters and mid-level commanders who came out of the bush have benefited from the amnesty process.

In 2003, the Uganda government requested that the ICC investigate serious crimes committed during the LRA conflict. The announcement in January 2004 that the ICC would initiate formal investigations into alleged crimes against humanity committed by the

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LRA introduced yet another new dimension into the internationalisation of the LRA conflict.²¹ In 2005, the ICC announced indictments against five top LRA commanders, namely Joseph Kony, Vincent Otti, Okot Odhiambo, Raska Lukwiya and Dominic Ongwen. Of these, Lukwiya and Otti have since reportedly died under obscure circumstances. The ICC indictments have raised controversy between those who see it as having put pressure on the LRA leaders by making them international outlaws and making it increasingly difficult for them to receive continued support from the government of Sudan, on the one hand, and those trying to seek an end to the conflict through peaceful means, who see the indictments as a major obstacle, on the other.²²

Government sources argue that Uganda can only approach the ICC to suspend the arrest warrants of the LRA leaders after the government of Uganda and the LRA have signed a comprehensive peace agreement – which is also the position of President Museveni. This, according to them, will place the government in a position of strength when it approaches the ICC, proving that the process does not encourage impunity. Justification will have to be sought from the efficacies of an appropriate type of justice within an alternative justice system, including the traditional cleansing and reconciliation mechanism known as *mato oput* – an Acholi traditional practice of restoring broken relations.

Judicial intervention by the ICC pushed the regional aspects of the war to a global dimension. When the chief prosecutor at the ICC announced in 2003 the intention of the organisation to investigate the LRA leadership for crimes against humanity, many local leaders in northern Uganda were opposed to the initiative. Traditional, religious and civil society leaders argued that by charging the LRA's top leadership with war crimes, crimes against humanity and gross human rights violations, the ICC would place their children at greater risk and threaten to damage their cultural identity and beliefs even further. They have advocated for Acholi traditional mechanisms of reconciliation and/or justice, predicated upon restorative principles, as opposed to the ICC's Western retributive system. The leaders wanted the ICC to suspend its investigations until local approaches were given an opportunity to work, or until peace would be realised in the Acholi region.

Our discussions with the different categories of the local community (including the elders, women, and youth) on the much-acclaimed *mato oput* as the best option of fostering reconciliation generated mixed feelings. Whereas some of the elders had

an idea of what *mato oput* is and of its role in fostering reconciliation in Acholi society, the younger generation argued that it is a defunct practice that has little relevance for most of the Acholi today. The elders argued in favour of the practice as the basis of Acholi tradition of peaceful coexistence where conflict is not tolerated, as opposed to the notion of the Acholi being a violent, atavistic people. They blamed the waning of such practices on modernisation and westernisation, which vilify Acholi traditions, and questioned why the world was returning to *mato oput* if it was seen as bad. The elders also pledged that they would sensitise and educate the younger generation on the significance of Acholi traditions and the practices of reconciliation and peacebuilding.

However, the LRA war has been ongoing for more than two decades and in this period, there have been numerous returnees. The question then is, why has this ceremony not been used on these ex-combatants? Even if the practice had been forgotten, there has been time to popularise it – particularly since it has been backed by government. It has been argued that one of

the reasons why government officials are shy to talk about *mato oput* is that most of them do not know what it entails. Apparently *mato oput* has been reserved for the post-Juba process. If it is to work for a broader national reconciliation strategy, perhaps there is need to start the process now to popularise it among the local community and also in the rest of the country. Unfortunately, the jurisdictional competence of *mato oput* in handling mass atrocities is yet to be tested. It is known from the past as a reconciliatory process rather than an instrument of justice.

The option of reconciliation seems to emanate from the feeling that most of the individuals seen as perpetrators are themselves victims of the conflict. There is also some concern that most of these 'victim-perpetrators' did not join the LRA voluntarily but were forcibly abducted and recruited into the rebel ranks. The available literature abounds with graphic accounts of how ex-combatants were abducted, trained and forced to kill as part of induction rituals and indoctrination, or girls and women turned into sex slaves.²³ This category of LRA fighters seems to invoke the commiseration from the local people, hence the choice of reconciliation as peacebuilding strategy. Empathy with this group of combatants makes the community wary of the jurisdiction of the formal justice system in providing the desired traditional and cultural reconciliation. They are yearning for a communalistic justice dispensation system whereby ex-combatants will be reintegrated and live with the rest of the community rather than be tried and convicted for their crimes.

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Another crucial factor is that the LRA war has affected communities outside the Acholi region, namely the neighbouring regions of Madi (especially Adjumani district), Lango, Teso, southern Sudan, etc. Some foreign tourists were killed by the LRA in Paraa (Murchison Falls) National Park, and many travellers met a gruesome fate during road carnages orchestrated by the LRA. These communities become major stakeholders in attempts at attaining a lasting reconciliation or meting out justice and should therefore be part of the peacebuilding process.

At the time of writing, the LRA reportedly had bases in the DRC and splinter groups in the CAR. This means that the northern Uganda war had a geographical constituency covering Uganda, Kenya, Sudan, the DRC and the CAR. The war has raised the concern and involvement of UN agencies and various other international and local humanitarian organisations. The planning and execution of individual episodes or incidences of war have drawn parallels between the northern Ugandan insurgents and terrorists operating elsewhere in the world. Consequently, anti-terrorist combatants such as the US government and its allies have continued to regard northern Ugandan insurgents – the LRA in particular – as terrorists. Human rights abuses in the war have led to the intervention of inter-state organisations such as the ICC and the African Union.

As can be seen in the above review of the available literature and interviews, the conflict and insecurity in northern Uganda have some historical foundations. These historical perspectives (which will be discussed below) indicate that at the core of Uganda's conflicts lie deeply rooted social, economic and ethnic issues that are largely informed by the country's past. Past policies undermined the emergence of Ugandan nationalism and instead produced ethnic divisions that fuelled instability and violence. Whereas the causes of individual conflicts in Uganda may vary by region, they were informed by historical factors that are largely a reflection of the transformation of the Ugandan state – right from the colonial expansionist policy, manipulation of pre-existing differences, administrative policies of divide-and-rule, and economic policies that fractured the colonial entity, to post-independence governments that did not make adequate efforts to address these shortcomings. External factors such as conflicts in neighbouring countries tended to exacerbate these conflicts.

Further literature reflections on the political history of the war

Whereas the long history of socio-political violence in Uganda under various regimes contextualises the LRA war, it is important to emphasise that the conflict in northern Uganda is a product of various factors (social, economic, political) – the most salient of

which are presented below – that provided fertile ground for the conflict to erupt.²⁴

Attempts at identifying the 'root causes' of a conflict like the LRA conflict are often faced with the challenge of dealing with overlaps between what can be categorised as the structural, systemic, political, economic and social factors of the conflict and intervening factors that have acted as accelerators that have fuelled and perpetuated the conflict. Yet there is a need for consensus on the side of parties to the conflict on what these root causes are in order for there to be a sustainable resolution of the conflict. If the underlying causes of a conflict are not addressed, they undermine the possibility of durable conflict resolution since they will enable the sprouting of other conflicts. The political, social and economic history of the country below is based on a review of secondary literature sources as well as interviews and we hope that it will show what we consider the structural causes of the LRA conflict.

As stated in the introduction, since gaining independence from colonial rule in 1962, successive waves of political turmoil have undermined Uganda's social fabric and economic infrastructure. As the legitimacy of the state was compromised in the past, the state relied on coercive instruments, especially military might, to impose stability and 'loyalty'. This contributed to the undermining of allegiance to the state and could have created group animosity over governments, as shown below.

The 1962 Independence Constitution of Uganda provided for areas that had kingdoms to be administered differently from those that did not. Buganda was to be administered under a federal system, while kingdoms such as Buyers, Ankole and Toro were to be administered under a semi-federal arrangement. The rest of the country was to be fall directly under the central government.

Such was the nature of independent Uganda, then, neither federal nor unitary. There was disagreement in 1966 between Prime Minister Apolo Milton Obote (who had executive powers) and the ceremonial president of Uganda (the *Kabaka*, or king, of Buganda) over the constitutional status of the Buganda kingdom. This resulted in Buganda ordering the central government out of Kampala City – which is located in Buganda kingdom. The response was a military attack on the palace deposing the king, who eventually went into exile and died in London. The military were used in the attack on the *Kabaka* without hesitation because it was dominated by people from northern Uganda who had no reverence, loyalty or respect for the *Kabaka* since they did not owe allegiance to the kingdom.

The Independence Constitution was abrogated and replaced by the 1966 Interim Constitution and later



by the Republican Constitution of 1967, whereby the monarchy and many other traditional or cultural institutions were abolished. It is argued in some circles that this was the climax of the so-called north–south divide of Uganda which led to the balkanisation of the country along political, ethnic and regional lines.

The following period saw President Milton Apollo Obote becoming increasingly dependent on the army as a result of the fluid political situation. This later proved to be his undoing because in 1971, he was ousted by Idi Amin in a bloody military coup.²⁵ The coup was received with excitement by the people of Buganda. Amin took advantage of this to rally support from the south – at least in the initial stages of his regime.²⁶ Amin’s strategy for holding on to power was to purge personnel from the Luo ethnic groups (mainly the Acholi and the Lango) from the armed forces and gradually even those holding prominent positions in public office. The soldiers, most of whom had fled their barracks after the coup, were lured back and massacred. This forced thousands of Acholi and Lango soldiers and other professionals to flee the country for fear of losing their lives. Individuals from other ethnic groups also fled the country because of Amin’s brutal rule.²⁷ Amin preferred to recruit people from the West Nile region (where he hailed from) to the armed forces and secret service, the State Research Bureau.

After eight years, Idi Amin was ousted in 1979 by a combined force of Uganda exiles with the help of the Tanzanian government’s Tanzanian People’s Defence Forces. After the overthrow of Amin’s regime, the remnants of his army fled the country and sought refuge in neighbouring Sudan and the then Zaire (now the DRC). The immediate period following the overthrow of Amin was characterised by the formalisation of the guerrilla force that ousted Amin into the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA), but also intermittent governments, internal bickering and fighting, and state-inspired violence in the West Nile region as the UNLA sought revenge against the people from West Nile.

The elections of 1980 brought back Obote as president of the Republic of Uganda for the second time with his party, the Uganda People’s Congress (UPC). However, these elections were widely believed to have been rigged and Yoweri Museveni, then president of the Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM), a political party that had participated in the elections, immediately started to wage war against Obote and his UPC government. Museveni formed the Popular Resistance Army – eventually merging with Lule’s Uganda Freedom Forces to form the National Resistance Movement (NRM) with its military wing,

the National Resistance Army (NRA). At the same time, the remnants of the Amin regime formed a fighting force, the Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF), against the Obote regime.

The war to remove Obote from power was characterised by violence against the people in the areas where the rebel NRA forces were based, an area that came to be known as the ‘Luwero triangle’ – named after Luwero district. In 1985 Obote was overthrown in a military coup led by Generals Tito Okello Lutwa and Bazilio Olara Okello. The new military government encouraged all fighting groups to join the new government in the interest of national reconciliation. A specific invitation was extended to Museveni and his NRM/A. In a bid to concretise this peace gesture, a peace process was initiated and took place in Nairobi, Kenya, with the then president, Daniel Arap Moi, presiding. The talks culminated in the signing of a peace agreement on 17 December 1985.²⁸ However, the ceasefire was short-lived and on 25 January 1986 the NRM/A took power by overthrowing the Okellos. The collapse of the Nairobi agreement has served as proof to most elements in the LRA that Museveni is not to be trusted and to doubt whether the Juba peace process would ever bear fruit.

The conflict is partly rooted in the colonial creation of boundary between Sudan and Uganda as it is today

In his discussion of the history of the LRA conflict, Allen²⁹ brings in yet another dimension relating to colonial boundaries. He argues that the conflict is partly rooted in the colonial creation of the boundary between Sudan and Uganda as it is today.³⁰ According to him, the groups now known as the Acholi, who live today in what has become the Uganda–Sudan border area, were in the 1850s devastated by armed traders who were looking for ivory to sell to the industrialising countries. In response, warlords who acted as agents for the invaders provided sanctuary to the people. With the coming of the British to what is now Uganda and Sudan, there were initiatives to bring peace to the region. After Uganda was declared a British protectorate in 1894, the region remained volatile until just before World War I when the Acholi communities rallied around their chiefs who were former allies in the ivory trade. This made it possible for the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium of the Sudan and the Protectorate of Uganda to engage these chiefs as agents as they sought to impose their administration. Alan further argues that the Uganda–Sudan boundary was deliberately demarcated to include some of the Acholi in Sudan because the British officer in the Sudan administration who participated in the demarcation thought the Acholi chiefs were quite progressive and therefore wanted to have some of them in his territory.³¹ This may partly explain why insurgents from the Acholi



region of Uganda found refuge with their kith and kin across the border in Sudan when the Okello military regime was overthrown in 1986. It may also explain the support the LRA received in the Acholi sub-region of southern Sudan.

During the pre-colonial period, some parts of what later became Uganda experienced turmoil and insecurity as kingdoms rose and fell through violent struggles. For instance, there were wars between the various communities/kingdoms such as Buganda and Bunyoro; Bunyoro and Toro; Bunyoro and Ankole; and Buganda and Busoga. The colonial state was largely established through violence as the colonialists took advantage of existing conflicts between the different nationalities and ethnic groups in Uganda – pitting one nationality against the other in pursuit of military adventurism and an expansionist policy. This exacerbated the conflicts and divisions between the different communities. The Buganda Kingdom was the most prominent at the time and the colonialists used the Buganda to conquer and incorporate the others.

As opposed to the more centralised form of administration of the kingdoms in the southern part of Uganda, the Acholi system of administration was organised around small, acephalous segmentary clans.³² According to Atkinson, the introduction of the centralised system of administration into the region was characterised by the use of force – just like in the northern and eastern parts of the country.³³ Buganda consequently assumed a dominant position in the wider Ugandan society as the colonial administration sought to replicate Buganda's centralised system of administration. By using mercenaries from the Buganda kingdom, the colonial government inadvertently planted the seeds of antagonism between the Baganda and other ethnic groups.³⁴

The colonial government also split Uganda into what is commonly termed 'economic zones'. Much of the territory south of Lake Kyoga was designated as cash crop growing (coffee and tea) and industrial zones, largely because of the favourable climate. However, the northern region, whose climate only supported the growing of cotton as a cash crop, was regarded more as a labour reserve for the plantations in the southern part of the country. This resulted in economic disparities between the southern and northern regions. This fragmentation of society was compounded by policies that left the civil service dominated by the southern and the military largely in the hands of northern ethnic groups. Such policies further widened the gulf between the socio-political south and north. Ergo, socio-economic factors such as underdevelopment, poverty, structural injustices and marginalisation have played a major role in fuelling the LRA conflict.

Since the northern region proved a fertile recruitment ground for the forces (army, police, and prisons), a

relatively high number of people from the northern ethnic groups were recruited into the forces. In this regard, Kayunga³⁵ argues that after World War II the colonial government adopted a policy of recruitment into the military where preference was given to those from Acholi and the West Nile regions. He believes this was because most ex-servicemen were from the south of the country, a region where the educational and economic elite was concentrated. Since the ex-servicemen were at the vanguard of the anti-colonial struggle in the other colonies, this situation would boost the anti-colonial movement. According to him this created a balance of power between an elite largely constructed from the south and an army largely drawn from the north.

While other authors have also argued that the dominance of the northern groups in the military was a deliberate strategy by the colonial government,³⁶ some sources are of the opinion that the predominance of northern ethnic groups in the forces rather implies that the northerners were seen a source of employment in an area less endowed with economic opportunities.

The above literature review notwithstanding, views seem varied on the historical factors that are linked to the LRA conflict. Some of the elites interviewed argued that the conflict in northern Uganda is only a symptom of the socio-economic disparity between the northern and the southern parts of the country and that a lasting resolution of the LRA conflict requires a deliberate and conscious effort by government to address the issue. It is their submission that the defeat of the LRA by either military means or negotiation, without addressing these core issues, will only postpone the problem: it will not lead to sustainable peace in the north or in the country as a whole. Some factors that are fuelling the conflict – for example the grievances of the Acholi with the present government over allegations of victimisation because of the LRA conflict – necessitate that reconciliation efforts be undertaken at national level through a comprehensive community-owned consensus-building process. Such reconciliation strategies can go a long way in addressing perceptions and restoring damaged relations in the country. It can also provide models to learn from in other regional conflicts.

Conceptual framework

Methodological framework

As seen from the above literature review, there has been prolific writing on the conflict in northern Uganda. This tended to influence our methodology, skewing it towards a desktop approach informed by on-the-ground research. Because of the close linkage between the conflict and the actors, our discussion focused on the dynamics of the trends and patterns of the conflict. Accordingly, a qualitative



approach became more relevant in gaining a better understanding of the circumstances of communal life in northern Uganda.

A participatory approach enabled the population to take part in the research process since they are directly influencing future policy options and the future direction of community development. It was also realised that when people are asked about their past, their present situation and assumptions on the future would contribute towards developing policy options that would help address their needs and create a better life, for future generations in particular.

Interviews based on oral history were used to obtain data covering key areas of social and political life. A series of open-ended questions helped to generate new insights and perceptions, in contrast to the use of questionnaires whose administration became problematic as a result of respondents being research-weary or fatigued. Interviewees from different spheres of life were identified through simple random sampling. Stakeholders such as local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local council officials, (now defunct) camp leaders, politicians, academics, the elderly, and people in public life were invaluable sources of information.

Although the greatest part of the war took place in the Acholi region, people from this region were often hesitant to give an account of how they have suffered and to discuss their understanding of the geopolitics of the war. Worse still, people from the IDP camps could hardly engage with the interviewers on the regional dimensions of the war. It became necessary to broaden the picture by extending the interview parameters to areas outside the Acholi region.

The fieldwork component required visiting IDP camps, where respondents were found to be cautious with the kind of information they volunteered. The reason is that these respondents or the people of Acholi have often been visited and interviewed by people looking for all kinds of information. Therefore the interviewees all demonstrated signs of interview fatigue with most of the respondents trying their best to determine why the interviewers would be interested in the information sought.

Theoretical underpinning/expositions

Within the framework of nation-building, it is necessary to identify key issues that are important to promote the prosperity and well-being of this conflict-ridden

and disadvantaged part of the country. In this context, three key elements are necessary to define a nation-building process: a shared ideology, an integrative and reconciled society, and functioning governmental structures. To constitute a sustainably peaceful nation-state, there needs to be a sense of togetherness. The integration of society becomes possible if it is directed by a non-antagonistic, effective communication flow between different groups. Functioning structures of the state are important not only to make programmes and policies work, but also to avoid creating avenues for structural injustices as sources of conflict. To adopt appropriate policy options to develop war-ravaged northern Uganda one needs to assess the appropriate measures that can enhance development in the region. To this end there is a need to analyse the origin of the armed conflict.

Everyone desires to bring conflicts to an end, but whatever approach may be adopted, it is important to determine what caused the conflict in the first place. Explaining the origin of a conflict requires a thorough comprehension of the structural triggers of the conflict and also what caused it to escalate.³⁷ This is often a daunting task, because one must relate the nature, character and magnitude of the conflict to its causes. In addition, it is important to note that the course of the conflict tends to be interrupted by intervening factors that tend to blur the primary causes – yet they have to be recognised and addressed if the conflict is to be resolved. Long-term strategies and the support of all actors are required. The assumption is that in conflict resolution, there is a cardinal belief that for every problem there is a solution if the problems at hand are properly understood.

Identification of the root causes of any conflict falls in the realm of conflict analysis. While these causative factors are often attributed to miscommunication and misperception of the other party's goals and intentions and also to inherent incompatibilities between the parties, many socio-political and communal conflicts are rooted in value differences and the repression of the need for autonomy, self-determination and/or identity. The pursuit of incompatible goals can intensify the struggle between opposites, especially in the absence of collaborative problem-solving mechanisms. When associated with antagonistic feelings and frustrations, it can strengthen the image of the enemy as an adversary and make a negotiated solution to a problem more difficult, thus perpetuating the conflict.

Wars and conflicts have bedevilled relations between many countries. Many conflict groups keep on

Although the greatest part of the war took place in the Acholi region, people from this region were often hesitant to give an account of how they suffered and to discuss their understanding of the geopolitics of the war



prosecuting different propensities to internal conflicts based on diverse political and socio-economic determinants. In this context, attempting to develop theoretical explanations for the causes of armed conflict as a general phenomenon involves the analysis of multiple, interactive variables. Within the human relations approach, conflict by its very nature is manifested in hydra-headed complexities. It is an intrinsic dynamic and has both positive and negative aspects. It is also an inevitable aspect of personal and social life, yet it is often a catalyst for beneficial change. One thing is clear, though: wars are consciously decided affairs. The decision to take up arms is a complex process involving many actors and concrete reasons in a wide range of conditions and circumstances. This means that a conflict arises from the dynamics of human relationships, cultural transformation and the divergence of interests and incompatibility of goals. It is a psychological development in the mindset. It is manufactured and bred in the mind of a person or persons where it incubates until it surfaces through dramatisation and externalisation in the form of non-violent articulation or covert physical violence. In this context, the productive aspects of a conflict are informed by the various causative factors relating to symbolic interactionism and structural functionalism. These theories converge in a multitude of social relations that can generate adversarial relations.

The task of developing theoretical explanations for the causes of armed conflict is usually complicated because, as David Welch points out,³⁸ only a few conditions may apply in any single conflict. According to him, war becomes possible as soon as the requisite or enabling tools such as weapons and human resources become available and a dispute develops between two parties. What makes war probable, however, is far more complicated. Thus, the history or genesis of the outbreak of war is usually complex and one must make carefully nuanced choices as to which factors to stress and what evidence to trust. Yet empirical knowledge of the underlying causes of a conflict is fundamental to research on peace and conflict resolution. It thus suffices to state that any attempt at conflict analysis, its transformation and peacebuilding processes should take into account that conflicts are caused by a myriad of political, socio-economic and cultural factors.

Data analysis

There is interconnection between the results of this data analysis and the data obtained from the literature review. In a bit of synergy, the data analysis attempts an in-depth investigation of issues such as the NRM/A era, the emergence of the LRA, the impact of the

war, regional and/or international dimensions of the conflict, the peace overtures, or initiatives so far attempted with emphasis on the perceptions of the people on the Juba peace talks.

The era of the National Resistance Movement

It is claimed that the National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A) took over state power in 1986 against the backdrop of Uganda's history of continuous violent state transformation. Just a few months after they had captured power, insurgency broke out in the Acholi sub-region. Some of the retreating soldiers of the defunct Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) who had tried unsuccessfully to blend into the local community crossed into southern Sudan where they regrouped in a bid to fight back the NRA. As stated earlier, in Allen's view, they were welcomed by the Acholi population in southern Sudan. Allen also argues that the Sudanese Acholi did not support the SPLM/A – they perceived it to be dominated by the Dinka and other northern groups – and so preferred to join the Equatoria Defence Force (EDF), a militia group supported by the Sudanese government. They found the defeated UNLA soldiers to be a useful reinforcement.³⁹

The defeated UNLA soldiers launched attacks on Uganda with moral, logistical and material support from their bases inside Sudan

Here we see the Acholi people in Uganda and those in southern Sudan (in Magwi County, comprising the Acholi ethnic communities of Panykwar, Magwi, Obbo, Palotaka, Parajok, etc) forming ethnic cross-border relations. The retreating UNLA soldiers capitalised on this and marshalled ethnic support to gain refuge in foreign territory. This factor undoubtedly introduced a regional dimension to what was seen as a local-level insurgency or an intra-state conflict and turned it into what was to become a

debilitating protracted insurgency against the NRM/A government. Having been organised into the Uganda People's Democratic Movement/Army (UPDM/A) from inside Sudan, the defeated UNLA soldiers launched attacks on Uganda with moral, logistical and material support from their bases inside Sudan. Thus a new regional or even international actor was drawn in the conflict in the form of the government of the Republic of Sudan, who oscillated between elements of the Acholi ethnic group and the NRM/A government.

During this time, the NRM/A was trying very hard to consolidate its grip on the northern parts of the country. Facts on the ground reveal that although the NRA had claimed to be a disciplined force, the experience of the people in the Acholi region was quite different – the NRA soldiers were accused of killing civilians and torturing and killing suspected former UNLA soldiers. As a result, the call by the new government on all former soldiers to report to army headquarters



in Kampala only served to remind the people in the north of what happened the last time such an order was made – during the time of Idi Amin – and they concluded that Museveni had a similar ploy. On the other hand, the UNLA soldiers feared victimisation by the NRA over atrocities that were allegedly committed by government forces in the Luwero Triangle during the rebel campaign by the NRA against the Obote regime. In one of her series of writings on peace and conflict issues,⁴⁰ Lamwaka attests to this by stating that some NRA soldiers looted property of the people claiming that they were only returning what was looted by the UNLA from Luwero. Such acts provided the impetus for many from the Acholi region to either physically join the UPDA or provide support to them in order to fight the NRA. There was fertile ground for the rebel movement to recruit from. The UPDA was the first group to launch attacks against the NRM government from the northern region.

The LRA conflict

Initially the UPDA reportedly enjoyed some local support⁴¹ largely deriving from the negative attitudes that the local population had about the NRA in the wake of the killings and torture they had experienced. However, according to Kayunga,⁴² the main weakness of the UPDA was their lack of political and economic programmes and its narrow support base, which was confined to Acholiland. Since Acholi generals spearheaded the overthrow of Obote, who hailed from the neighbouring Lango community, and the UNLA had been blamed for committing atrocities in the West Nile region, the UPDA could not successfully rally support from any of their West Nile and Lango neighbours. Consequently the NRA mounted military pressure on the UPDA that forced the latter to seek a negotiated settlement with the NRA. Thus in March 1988 the UPDA signed a peace deal with the NRM/A government – eventually concluding the peace agreement in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 1990. As a result, most of the UPDA ex-combatants were integrated into the NRA.

We need to emphasise here that Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Mobile Force (HSMF) had emerged in the same region at the end of 1986 as a campaign aimed at purifying former Acholi soldiers from the curses they received as a result of the war in Luwero.⁴³ The HSMF also recruited largely from northern Uganda and absorbed some of the demoralised elements of the UPDA after the leadership of the latter signed a peace deal with the NRM/A government. The HSMF launched attacks in Acholiland and beyond, sporadically attacking towns in the northern and

eastern parts of the country as they attempted to march to the capital, Kampala. They were ignominiously flushed out in 1987 in a battle with the NRA in eastern Uganda, just outside the town of Jinja. Alice Lakwena fled the country and sought refuge in Kenya, where she lived in a refugee camp until her death in early 2007.

There is no clear and consistent information on how and where Joseph Kony emerged from, but it seems that he was apparently first involved with the HSMF – although some respondents said he was with the UPDA before joining the HSMF. This assertion has however been refuted by former fighters from the UPDA, who claimed that Kony fought them, adding that it was after the defeat of the HSMF that Kony and his LRA became a major player in the rebellion against the NRM/A government – albeit amidst arguments that it does not have a clear political agenda.

In apparent acknowledgement of this history of violence, the NRM government established the Commission of Enquiry into Violations of Human Rights soon after taking power in 1986. However, little in the form of truth-telling and reconciliation was realised, and the LRA conflict bears the scars of some of these unaddressed bruises of past conflicts. As reflected later in this paper, our argument is that sustainable peace in Uganda can only be achieved when national reconciliation as a paradigm in sustainable peace-building is adopted at all levels in the country. The perceptions and experiences of the people on the violent past should also be taken into account.

The Lord's Resistance Army enjoyed the support of the local community at the start of their campaign against the NRM/A government

As noted above, the Lord's Resistance Army enjoyed the support of the local community at the start of their campaign against the NRM/A government. This support seems to have emanated from the perception of the local people that the NRA did not mean well and needed to be defeated.⁴⁴ In the meantime, the government machinery was working to discredit the LRA in the eyes of the Acholi people. A local militia dubbed the 'Arrow Brigade' was soon mobilised as a defence unit. Able-bodied people were encouraged to join the brigade to 'fight' the rebels with whatever means at their disposal – including spears, machetes, and bows and arrows. The brigade received popular support as local support for the LRA waned when the people gradually became convinced that the LRA did not have anything good to offer to them. The LRA viewed this shift of loyalty by their Acholi kin as 'betrayal' and the Acholi were consequently perceived as part of the enemy of the LRA. The Acholi therefore became legitimate targets.

During this period, in 1994, another international dimension was injected into the warfare tactics –



namely Arabised warfare, characterised by sheer brutality. The LRA launched attacks directed at the civilian population, torturing, maiming and killing them using dastardly methods such as hacking, decapitating, and chopping off limbs, lips and noses. Abductions replaced voluntarism as a mode of recruitment and looting of food and other supplies replaced the contributions that the people previously volunteered. As a result, the LRA lost its local support.

The government military forces were massively deployed in the region to counter renewed attacks by the rebels. Because of the new tactics by the LRA through which civilians were targeted, government forcibly moved thousands of families to camps in July 1996 in a bid to protect them and deprive the enemy of any supplies necessary for survival, and to make it easy for the military to pursue the LRA with minimum civilian casualties. According to some local politicians, the establishment of IDP camps was meant to be a temporary measure, but because of the protracted nature of the conflict, most of the camps assumed a more permanent status and have become social and commercial centres. It was further observed that whereas some people initially rejected being moved into camps, attacks on local people by the LRA terrified the community and forced the locals to rush to the camps, where they would be protected by the military. The movement of the people was controlled by the army who did not allow them beyond certain limits and only at certain times of the day because of the fear that they would be abducted by the rebels or be regarded as rebel collaborators by the army if they were found beyond the specified limits.

Impact of the war

Some of the consequences of the war were highlighted in the introduction. The emphasis here will be on the experience of internally displaced persons in the camps. The IDPs had to live and survive in difficult, hard, dangerous and squalid conditions. However, there is currently some lull in the conflict as a result of the CHA framework cited above that enabled a ceasefire between the government forces and the LRA. Hostilities have ceased, so there is a negative peace. There is a relatively relaxed atmosphere in the camps, while many sites are being demolished as most IDPs are moving back to their original homesteads. There is no obvious fear of abduction and some people have moved to 'transitional camps' somewhere closer or have gone back to their homes. 'Life is becoming easier,' was an expression often heard. To the outsider, however, life in the camps is still pathetic even though the security situation is improving.

Generally, life in the camps has been a day-to-day struggle. The most important concern of the people was to survive through the day. With no food of their own, they have been reliant on food aid for over a decade – in a predominantly agricultural region that had been self-sufficient before the war. Food rations provided by the World Food Programme (WFP) and other humanitarian agencies became the lifeline of people to the extent that a dependency syndrome developed. It is difficult to convince a young child who has been growing up in such a situation that food comes from the soil and not from WFP trucks!

WFP food rations were supposed to make out 60 per cent of the food requirements and the people were expected to cater for the remaining 40 per cent themselves. As a result, most people lived in a state of constant need as there were virtually no alternative food sources available to supplement WFP rations. Because of the socio-economic situation in the IDP camps, women became the breadwinners in most of the households. They would venture into the bushes to collect herbs to cook and firewood to sell in order to earn money for food. Others brewed and sold the potent local alcohol mix to survive. Coping mechanisms included petty trade such as *awaro* – a relationship between a wholesaler and a retailer with the latter selling goods at a minimal profit. In addition, the camps never provided guaranteed, water-tight security. Often IDPs would be abducted from camps, while camps would also be burned down by the LRA.

Information from district officials in Gulu reveals a decline in infrastructure and a lack of social services attributable to insecurity. The district has been unable to implement planned investments. The displacement of people also increased the levels of poverty, disease and ignorance. Poverty is singled out as the greatest challenge facing the district, with 59 per cent of people living below the national poverty line and surviving on less than a dollar a day – compared to the national average of 31 per cent. Limited access to arable land because of insecurity made large populations food insufficient and compelled them to depend on food rations from the WFP.⁴⁵ However, in spite of displacements and the constraints on cultivation posed by insecurity, agriculture remains the main economic activity – employing some 71 per cent of the population of Gulu.⁴⁶ The average area under cultivation has also increased from 0,5 hectare to 2 hectares as a result of the return of relative peace.

The demographics of Gulu district show that 55 per cent of the population is below 18 years of age. In an area where unemployment is rife, the high dependency ratio poses a threat to social and economic development.

With no food of their own they have been reliant on food aid for over a decade – in a predominantly agricultural region that has been self-sufficient before the war



Concern was raised about the poor education and health facilities, which would have ensured a future workforce had they been adequate and operational. Only 52 per cent of the primary schools are reportedly still on site while with 48 per cent displaced. Displaced schools are those that could not operate from their original places where they built due to insecurity. Staff and students were shifted to secure urban centres. Schools on site are those that were never shifted from their original sites. Attendance was reported to be low, with high failure and drop-out rates. The increasing number of families returning to their villages or to satellite camps meant that class attendance and drop-out rates fluctuated as some of the families shuttled between the camps and their villages or satellite camps as they are monitoring the Juba peace process.

The settlement pattern in the district has changed, too, from one informed by natural resources and socio-economic activities to one determined by security concerns. This has had a negative impact on people's ability to earn a livelihood. Large parts of the population are unable to provide food for themselves because they cannot access arable land.⁴⁷ Such conditions pose a major challenge to the much-acclaimed Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP), a national institutional and policy framework that is intended to provide an enabling environment for the rehabilitation and development of districts affected by the LRA conflict.

The impact of the war on people in the affected regions has been of concern to many a humanitarian worker and has elicited the interest of most commentators – often at the expense of determining how those who are living with the conflict perceive and understand it. Allen⁴⁸ describes the experience of life in the IDP camps and also shares various experiences of former abductees – and so do unpublished reports by civil society organisations operating in the area. A report by MSF Holland⁴⁹ describes the appalling health condition of residents of IDP camps in Lira and Pader districts.

The gravity of the situation in IDP camps in northern Uganda has been highlighted by individuals and bodies operating in the region. There was concern that the international community was either unaware of the situation, or simply neglected to take action to alleviate the suffering of the millions who were affected. Expressions like 'forgotten people / humanitarian crises, most under-reported humanitarian stories, and misery virtually unnoticed by the outside world' attest to these concerns. Yet, amidst these forgotten crises,

ordinary civilians in the fertile Acholiland have done everything in their power to survive.

From regionalisation to internationalisation of the conflict

The existence of civil war in a country implies a situation of armed conflict, and thus a potential threat to international peace and security. The concept of armed conflict has replaced the concept of war. According to Gareth Evans,⁵⁰ an armed conflict involves hostilities that breach or threaten to breach international peace and security. Such hostilities include invasions, armed interventions, border clashes, and incursions. While the definition, by omission or otherwise, excludes the existence of IDPs in a country, Evans argues that even situations of civil strife that have some external dimension such as the support of external patrons, or a threat of spillover effects in neighbouring countries from refugees, are part and parcel of armed conflict.

Regionalization of the war became manifest in activities involving coalition efforts such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), international community involvement or interventions

The external element to the conflict in northern Uganda became of immediate relevance in August 1986 when (as stated earlier) some of the former UNLA officers and men who had lost the power struggle in Kampala withdrew to southern Sudan and sought refuge there. They fled with a substantial amount of military equipment. The refugee situation whereby thousands of Ugandans fled the country to Sudan, the DRC and Kenya and to European countries, Canada, and the US before and after the war began, was the immediate causal factor that gave the conflict an external element.

These international perspectives of the conflict feed into the regional dimensions. The conflict has assumed a regional character at its inception in 1986. Later, the regionalisation of the war became manifest in activities involving coalition efforts such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), international community involvement or interventions (all in an unsuccessful search for a peaceful solution), and ubiquitous research interests aimed at scholarly aggrandisement and policy formulation. As such, the conflict has been shown to be part of the 'conflict corridor' traversing the Horn and the Great Lakes Region of Africa and became a manifestation of the 'new wars' that have continued to torment Sub-Saharan Africa.⁵¹

The parties to the civil war in northern Uganda have included state and non-state actors. The conflict began without any external military or financial support as the war was fought mainly between the government of Uganda and dissident rebel forces. To



this extent, it is seen as an internal armed conflict. This notwithstanding, in practical terms the parties took the conflict across the national borders. It is argued that after the government connived with the SPLM/A forces to launch an attack on the refugee camp at Magwi, former UNLA officers in turn sought support from Sudan to launch their first resistance against the NRM/A government.

However, bilateral negotiations later followed between the warring parties, culminating in the joint signing of a peace agreement in June 1988 between the UPDM/A ('The Army of the Earth') and the NRM/A in Gulu. But the peace process became infected with violence, frustration, and uncertainty, as Caroline Lamwaka writes:

The government's counter-insurgency campaign increasingly threatened the lives and livelihoods of [the] people in Acholiland and allegations of atrocities resurfaced. The government's stated aim was to annihilate the rebels – part of the [military] strategy was to deny them access to food – by destroying civilian food stocks and domestic animals – and other resources that could strengthen them politically, economically and militarily. In October 1988, the government began mass evacuation of civilians from war zones without providing adequately for their basic care.⁵²

According to her, the months following the peace agreement intensified the war's impact on civilians, making it more severe and widespread. The violent process of cementing war all over Acholiland continued for years to follow and many insurgents, especially from the UPDM/A, decided to remain in the bush, joining up with Joseph Kony's LRM/A.

The external dimension of the armed conflict became more prominent when external assistance, coordinated by opposition politicians abroad, was garnered to help boost the morale of the rebel soldiers in the field. This became pronounced in the early 1990s when the conflict acquired an international context and culminated in a regional conflict with neighbours such as Sudan and the DRC (to some extent). Since the transformation of the war into an inter-state conflict typically involving Uganda and Sudan, the involvement of Sudan gives the conflict international status.

It is alleged that from 1993 the government of Sudan in Khartoum began providing political and logistical military support to one of the rebel groups operating within Uganda, namely the LRM/A. For many years to follow, the LRM/A had its base camps in southern

Sudan, located close to military installations of the army of the government in Khartoum. This support came supposedly in retaliation for alleged military, political and logistical support by the Uganda government for the SPLM/A fighting the Khartoum government. This included the deployment of the UDPF inside Sudan. The Khartoum government gave the LRA military support in many ways, since it had an interest in using the LRA to erode the Ugandan government's support for the SPLM/A. Former rebels observed that the LRM/A camps located on the frontier of the war in southern Sudan (which ended only in 2005) functioned as a buffer between the central Sudanese army and the South Sudanese rebels of the SPLM/A. In return for this support, the LRM/A fought alongside the central Sudanese army and its allied groups against the South Sudanese rebels. Child combatants were abducted in their thousands and used in the front line by the LRM/A, both when fighting in Sudan and in northern Uganda. This, in part, provides a concrete example demonstrating that northern Uganda was deeply entangled in the larger revival war complex.

The external dimensions of the armed conflict became more prominent when external assistance, coordinated by opposition politicians abroad was garnered to help boost the morale of the rebel soldiers in the field

A recent study by Conciliation Resources depicts that the Uganda–Sudan border communities have been caught in the middle of this war. Their November 2008 report titled: *Perilous border: Sudanese communities affected by conflict on the Sudan–Uganda border* shows that the LRA spillover into Sudan made an already complex situation even more complicated and violent. It states that after formally establishing a presence in the Sudan in 1993/94 at the invitation of the government in Khartoum, the LRA, often alongside the government-aligned EDF, moved across vast areas of eastern and central Equatoria as an allied militia to the government-backed Sudan Armed Forces (SAF).

This enabled the LRA to secure a base and supplies in exchange for fighting the SPLA. It subsequently became the deadliest of the armed groups operating in central and eastern Equatoria. The report further reveals that in border counties such as Magwi and Ikotos most people experienced an attack on their villages by the LRA.

In a related development, concerns for a political rather than military settlement of the armed conflict provided a prelude to the US-based Carter Center-brokered Nairobi-Uganda-Sudan peace accord signed on 8 December 1999. The accord was aimed at normalising or restoring diplomatic relations, which had been severed in 1995 over the disagreement over Uganda's alleged support for the SPLM/A rebels in southern Sudan and the Khartoum's government counter-support for the LRM/A rebels from northern



Uganda. The signing of the agreement by Uganda and Sudan pledging that each would stop supporting the rebel forces of the other may be taken as proof that the two governments provided support to the rebel forces of the other. Paradoxically, however, the Carter Center excluded the LRM/A rebels from the one-day negotiating process and the final agreement, which obviously angered the rebels but pleased the Ugandan government.

Inevitably, the exclusion of the LRA rebels and war victims from northern Uganda complicated the implementation of the agreement. The LRM/A vehemently rejected the accord on the grounds that they would not be bound by its terms 'because it did not directly involve their leadership in any practical manner'.⁵³ The rebel group was incensed that the peace deal was sealed without any of the parties trying to involve the rebels, yet they went ahead to endorse a decision that appeared binding on the LRA. As a result the LRA refused to release and hand over abducted children to the Sudanese authorities, insisting that the children were LRA combatants. This put the Sudanese president, Omar al-Bashir, in an embarrassing situation as Sudan hoped the peace deal would help improve its diplomatic image in Western capitals.

The socio-economic and political signals in the Uganda-Sudan conflict became obvious, regionally as well as internationally. The dual-support scenario highlighted above meant that the two armed conflicts – in southern Sudan and northern Uganda – combined into one complex conflict across international borders. Tensions between the two governments exploded in April 1995 with Uganda accusing Sudan of complicity in the LRM/A rebellion. Since then both countries have been engaging in political diatribes, accusations and counter-accusations couched in military propaganda that transformed into military hostilities and proxy war. Each state accused the other of allowing dissident forces to operate freely under the auspices and military cover of the respective national governments and armies. Uganda was accused of providing diplomatic support and logistics to the SPLM/A while Sudan was accused of doing the same for the LRM/A and the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF) through organising, training and settling the rebels. Sudan justified its support for rebel groups in Uganda as retaliation for Museveni's support for the SPLM/A.

This inter-state conflict was compounded by politics and diplomatic propaganda, and sometimes blunders. The two states' continued reverberations and iterations of complicity culminated in the intensification of the originally internal armed conflict. Massive deployment

of troops by both sides along the porous Uganda–Sudan border posed a security threat to the territorial integrity of either state. Any perception of a military build-up, particularly in a region that has seen inter-state rivalry and disputes, tends to aggravate the conflict situation. A military build-up is also alarming to neighbouring states as it instigates a corresponding build-up. Soon a mutually perpetuating momentum is created, with a logic of its own. Usually a situation amounting to or approximating open war develops.⁵⁴

In April 1995, in the face of worsening relations between the two countries, Uganda severed diplomatic relations with Sudan, who promptly reciprocated. As a result, relations between border forces of the two countries deteriorated into sporadic military incursions – ample demonstration of the two states' complementary yet adversarial belief in the instrumentality of war: that war is only another instrument of diplomacy. This was followed by a combination of arrogant posturing, territorial ambitions, and an undisguised air of self-importance and omnipotence. Behind all this was the instrumentalisation of war through military dramatisation. Thus the intensity of the inter-state war could clearly be seen in the rampant show of military prowess, sporadic pre-emptive strikes, an upsurge of artillery and tank diplomacy amidst vain attempts at rapprochement, and the spreading of ambitious political and militarist expansionism nurtured in Uganda and Sudan.

Indisputably, northern Uganda has been involved in a war that involved both Uganda and Sudan. The intention to go to war (*animus belligerendi*) was constituted in each party's unilateral and unconstitutional declaration of war. Their acts of war (*actus belligerendi*) were manifested by the mobilisation of their forces, by sporadic incursions into each other's territory, by breaking off diplomatic relations, and by their active involvement in (overt and covert) acts inconsistent with peaceful relations, such as war propaganda.

In view of the human suffering, settlement of refugees, and lack of a lasting solution to the problem, the Sudan–Uganda conflict could easily have qualified as a serious global situation warranting international political intervention through preventive diplomacy. There is no gainsaying that the LRA enjoyed military and other logistical support from Omar al-Bashir's National Islamic Front (NIF), the Arab regime in Sudan. This was the entry point through which the armed conflict acquired a geopolitical dimension.

The relationship between the governments of Uganda and Sudan continued to be characterised by suspicion because of accusations and counter-accusations about

The two-armed conflict in southern Sudan and northern Uganda – combined into one complex conflict across international borders



each government supporting rebel movements against the other. More documentary evidence attests to this. *FOCUS*, a local newspaper of 7 March 1986, carried a story titled 'As NRA advance towards Gulu, Kitgum, Bazilio withdraws heavy weaponry towards Sudan'. It narrated that the NRA offensive had forced Bazilio to withdraw heavy weaponry from the centres of Gulu and Kitgum to locations close to the Sudan border. The paper on 27 June 1986 ran another story titled 'Museveni, Col. Garang hold talks as Bazilio, Sudanese rebel forces clash'. The story claimed that Bazilio's group had clashed with the SPLA over an arms deal that involved the ousted Obote regime and the SPLA. The article alleged that the conflict between the SPLA and the Okellos arose from the refusal of Bazilio Okello, then commanding officer of the Northern Brigade, to hand over munitions that had been sent to the SPLA by the Derg government of Ethiopia. However, the Obote regime was overthrown by the Okellos and the arms were never delivered. It is possible that the coup plan had already been hatched and the Okellos needed these arms themselves in case they met resistance. It is over this friction that Museveni was meeting Garang.

In yet another story, titled 'More rebels killed as fighting escalates in Gulu rectangle', in *FOCUS* of 22 August 1986, it was reported that the NRA was pursuing troops that had invaded Uganda from Sudan. Quoting Commander Salim Saleh, it was reported that the majority of the invaders came from Sudan. On 2 September 1986 *FOCUS* carried an article in which the Sudanese government is said to have warned that it was acting in restraint in the face of accusations against it concerning its alleged support to Uganda rebels. The article reported that the Sudanese government was demanding an explanation from the Uganda government over the allegations.

For much of the month various statements were issued by the government of Uganda accusing the Sudanese government of supporting LRA rebels, an allegation the Sudanese government always denied. In 1986, a *New Vision Newspaper* 1 September 1986 carried an article titled 'Sudanese still back rebels, says Museveni'. President Museveni was reported to have said that there was no doubt the Sudan government was assisting the LRA rebels. 'They are backed by the Sudan and other foreign interests, otherwise they would never have the courage to come and cause trouble in Uganda,' he is quoted as saying. On 23 September 1986, *FOCUS* reported that Uganda and Sudan had agreed on a number of measures aimed at securing their common border. These included relocating Ugandan refugees from the border areas to prevent the rebels from invading Uganda again.

The two governments also agreed on establishing committees for joint border control.⁵⁵

When the SPLA forces overran Equatoria Province, the Sudanese government assumed they had what they considered concrete proof that the Uganda government was supporting the SPLA.⁵⁶ Some of the accusations were that Radio SPLM/A was based at Gilgil barracks in Arua town and that there were SPLA camps at Koboko, Midigo and Oraba in West Nile and even at Gulu. The government arranged for the Sudanese military attaché in Uganda to visit these areas to counter the accusations. The government had concrete proof of the Sudanese government's assistance to Ugandan dissident forces in Sudan, but the Sudanese authorities never presented compelling evidence. The statement 'that the Ugandan authorities at one point or another gave assistance to the SPLA cannot, however, be ruled out, if only because they were so convinced that the Sudanese were aiding the Ugandan rebels that they simply had to retaliate'⁵⁷ may sum it up. The SPLA was given free passage through Ugandan territory to conduct war.⁵⁸

The LRA also reportedly killed and abducted civilians in the CAR- further widening the regional geographical coverage of the war

The developments involving Uganda insurgents in launching attacks on Uganda from bases in Sudan also had an impact on the Sudanese civil war. Some of the areas in eastern Equatoria were cut off from the rest of southern Sudan and thousands fled their homes. Ondoga suggests that the Sudanese government forces (who were in the south fighting the SPLA) actually enlisted former UNLA troops into their ranks to help them beat off the SPLM/A advance into Equatoria. He also quotes the London-based *Africa Confidential* which reported that 'Khartoum used the Uganda [that is,

former UNLA] soldiers to defend southern garrison towns [against the SPLM/A] in 1986, in return for which the Sudanese army gave them food, shelter, and transport. They then launched attacks into Northern Uganda.'⁵⁹

The LRA has also been accused of killing and abducting civilians in eastern and western Equatoria in southern Sudan. Just like in Uganda, most of their victims were children. This issue has been discussed during the Juba peace meetings and has made the local community of southern Sudan a major stakeholder in the peace process. The LRA also reportedly killed and abducted civilians in the CAR – further widening the regional geographical coverage of the war. However, as part of the Juba peace process, consultations on an alternative (or better still, appropriate) justice system were conducted with the communities in Uganda that were directly affected by the war. The discussions centred on the traditional justice systems



as an 'alternative' to the ICC indictments of the LRA leadership. The implication is that any reconciliation process should be extended to include the war-affected communities of southern Sudan.

The regional dimension and complexity of the conflict extends to the neighbouring DRC, with important links between seemingly localised conflict and the outside world. Sustained military campaigns by the UPDF against the LRA in southern Sudan in late 2005 forced the LRA into the eastern DRC, where they set up camp in Garamba National Park. The LRA had to abandon their operational bases in southern Sudan that were used to launch attacks on northern Uganda. On the other hand, the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement between the government of Sudan and the SPLM/A in 2005 left the LRA with little room to operate – thus the need to relocate.

In September 2005 a large contingent of the LRA established a base in the remote, thickly forested Garamba National Park in eastern Congo, headed by one of the most senior LRA commanders and Kony's deputy, Vincent Otti (who is believed to have been killed by Kony in late 2007). Kony joined them later and still resides there with his troops mounting sporadic raids on civilians and abducting children. Long before that, the Ugandan army had for many years systematically plundered the eastern Congo under the pretext that they were dealing with Ugandan insurgents based there, especially the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).⁶⁰ In a case in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague the DRC successfully sued Uganda and received huge awards in redress.

The government of Uganda has consistently threatened military action against the LRA in the DRC if they launched attacks on Uganda. It came as no surprise, then, that in late 2005 the government requested the DRC army and MONUC (the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo) to hunt down the LRA in the eastern DRC with the threat that it would send its forces in pursuit of the LRA if this was not done. In an encounter with the LRA, nine soldiers belonging to the Guatemalan contingent of MONUC were killed. Since then, the LRA have continued to hold onto bases in Garamba National Park. The government of Uganda has maintained that if requested by the DRC and the United Nations, the UPDF would move into the DRC to flush out the LRA. This military chest-thumping seems to suggest that the collapse of the Juba peace process will enhance the efforts of the LRA to orchestrate heightened instability in the DRC, which will justify regional military intervention.

Recent developments seem to suggest that Uganda remains apprehensive of the presence of the LRA in the DRC. As Uganda and the DRC became locked in border disputes, there have been indications that the Uganda government would explore diplomatic means to resolve the disputes. The diplomatic and security authorities in Kampala would not wish to respond in provocative or reactionary ways that would stoke the conflict. Uganda's attitude reflects a conviction that only a diplomatic solution would help the country in the long run. This conviction relates to the much-hyped Juba peace talks – that have since ended in disarray – and to the possibility of renewed hostilities between the Uganda military and the LRA. Uganda could not jeopardise its relations with the DRC, whose remote jungles in the east may now be home to the LRA rebels.

In the early years of the 21st century, international efforts to improve the frosty diplomatic relations between Uganda, Sudan and Congo provided new avenues for alliances for peace in the region. After the 2005 peace deal in southern Sudan ended active hostilities there, Ugandan support for the South Sudanese became public. Because of the international nature of their terrorism, the LRA was declared a terrorist organisation by the US government following the attack by Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda fighters on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001. The LRA became the common enemy in the global 'war on terror' ordained by President George W Bush as America's dominant foreign policy theme after 9/11.

In 2005, the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague issued warrants for the arrest of LRA rebel leaders.⁶¹ The referral of the LRA's top commanders – including Joseph Kony – to the ICC has expanded the regional dimension. The LRA were referred to the ICC because they were operating largely in Sudan, outside the jurisdiction of Uganda. The referral was also meant to ensure that the international community accepted responsibility in the fight against international crime. In the context of regionalisation and internationalisation of the armed conflict, the referral seemed to have generated another avenue to resolve the conflict, namely through political roundtable talks. Accordingly, some successes were registered. For instance, Sudan reportedly began abiding by earlier agreements with Uganda and pledged to assist in ending the conflict. There were also the famous Juba peace talks, which had initially registered some success stories.

Another critical dimension of the internationalisation of the conflict relates to what has been hinted to earlier, namely the March 2002 military operation

The US administration pressured the Khartoum government to allow the Uganda army to enter Sudan to 'flush out' the LRA which had been black listed as a terrorist group



code-named Operation Iron Fist. In a desperate attempt to reach a settlement, the US administration pressured the Khartoum government to allow the Uganda army to enter Sudan to 'flush out' the LRA, which had been blacklisted as a terrorist organisation. This attempt failed to end the rebellion and instead permitted the LRA to cross back into northern Uganda with unprecedented ferocity.

Within the fourth estate, the war has also become known regionally and internationally. Media stories repeatedly portray the war to local, national, regional and international communities. The media fuels a constant, subtle fear that the region is a 'no-go area', as declared by the diplomatic mission in Uganda to their nationals. Policymakers and the media have been consistently paying attention to the violence in northern Uganda from the perspective of the 'victims', and this portrayal involves a strong bias towards describing the rebels, in particular, in disparaging terms. Other scholars – mainly conflict anthropologists – have argued that little attention has been paid to the social and structural motivations behind the violence and to those groups and individuals on both sides of the political conflict who are *perpetrating* and potentially *legitimising* it.⁶² The war has also involved a large number of NGOs, international humanitarian agencies and development workers ranging from small local agencies to large international ones such as the International Red Cross Society, Care International, and Save the Children, as well UN agencies such as the World Health Organisation, United Nations Development Programme, International Labour Organisation, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs.

The war gradually brought northern Uganda close to the rest of the world, who probed the specificities, characteristics and uniqueness of the conflict. The war-devastated region has become one of the most researched areas in the world and has been witnessing an astonishing array of multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary research activities from most parts of the world. The researchers include professionals, academics, students, policy advisors, bureaucrats, politicians, and humanitarian and development-oriented actors.

Through the Internet information superhighway, northern Uganda has become highly globalised – and even dominated – by commercialised research interests. The huge output from desktop and field-based research is geared towards academic

aggrandisement in disciplines related to peace and conflict studies or policy formulation.⁶³

In summary: the LRA have gradually become an international fighting group because of their numerical composition. They have been abducting members of the public and forcefully conscripting them into their ranks, and continue to do so. Their recruitment drives took place in Uganda, Sudan, the DRC and the CAR.

Peace processes

Right from the beginning of the conflict there have been attempts at pacific settlement or resolution through fragile peace overtures. A prominent one was conducted in 1994 under the leadership of Betty Achan Bigombe, State Minister for Northern Uganda. There were other significant attempts towards a negotiated compromise brokered by individuals, civil society organisations, religious and traditional leaders, etc. Almost all of these have failed to deliver any peace dividend, however. The LRA accused Acholi elders of betrayal, and with the government giving ultimatums for the LRA to surrender, the conflict flared up again.

From the beginning of the conflict there have been attempts at pacific settlement or resolution through fragile peace overtures

In 1997, the Acholi community in the Diaspora began to contribute to the quest for a peaceful resolution of the conflict by organising Kacoke Madit (grand) meetings, which did not contribute much towards ending the war. Likewise, the 1999/2000 Carter Center-brokered peace overtures failed to salvage the situation, as did the efforts of the religious and traditional leaders from 2002 to 2003.

In 2001, the government of Uganda launched Operation Iron Fist, which was meant to rout out the LRA from their bases in southern Sudan. But the operation failed to achieve its objectives and the LRA intensified their attacks – even spreading the war to new areas. As the war intensified, calls for a peaceful resolution of the conflict increased both within the country and in the international community. Amidst controversy over its effectiveness, Operation Iron Fist started yielding some positive results by 2004 when an increasing number of LRA fighters started to surrender. This was facilitated by the Amnesty Law, which, according to a member of Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), offered one of the best options for LRA fighters to surrender and be forgiven for opposing the government.

Civic and religious leaders from the region have for a long time entreated the government to pursue dialogue with the LRA. The most significant of the attempts at a negotiated peace was in 2004 after LRA spokesman 'Brigadier' Sam Kolo announced in a



BBC interview that the LRA was ready to commence talks with the government of Uganda to end the war in northern Uganda. The President responded in a statement published on 14 November 2004 calling for a seven-day ceasefire with the LRA to be followed by a ten-day ceasefire paving the way for dialogue with the LRA. On 29 December 2004 a Ugandan government delegation met LRA representatives in Kitgum district. The government peace team included the Minister for Internal Affairs and Betty Bigombe was the Chief Mediator between the LRA and government of Uganda in 2005 and a Minister of State for Pacification of Northern Uganda. She was NOT the Chief Mediator representing the World Bank or for the World Bank although she was working for the World Bank.

The agreement did not stand the test of time, because the LRA rejected it. President Museveni announced in Gulu on New Year's Day of 2005 that the UPDF would track down the LRA leaders, especially Joseph Kony and his deputy, Vincent Otti, and kill them if they did not surrender and come out of the bush voluntarily. Like with previous attempts, hopes for peace were shattered as the parties went back to war. The later Juba peace negotiations between the government and the LRA rekindled hopes for a peaceful resolution of the conflict in spite of the challenges, threats and setbacks the process has experienced thus far.

The Juba peace process

The turning point for the LRA came with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Government of Sudan (GOS) and the SPLM/A took place on 9 January 2005 in Nairobi, Kenya. The SPLM/A gave the LRA three options: negotiating peace with the government of Uganda; leaving southern Sudan peacefully and voluntarily; or be forced out militarily by the SPLM/A.⁶⁴ Evidently, remaining in southern Sudan was not an option. This could have given the impetus for the first option that prompted the Juba peace talks under the auspices of the government of southern Sudan.⁶⁵

Since July 2006, the on-and-off Juba peace talks between the government of Uganda and the LRM/A have been considered vital in the reconciliation of societies divided by a violent and seemingly intractable internecine conflict. The parties have shown more commitment than ever before, and the question of peace and justice has consistently been high on the agenda. One of the obstacles in the quest for a sustainable agreement continues to be an appropriate type of justice that will deal with atrocities committed during the conflict. The talks

have progressed steadily and recently reached a critical stage where the parties are supportive of the crucial role of the mechanisms of traditional justice in societies emerging from the conflict. Some hybridisation of principles from the restorative and retributive justice systems seems tenable.

The peace talks continue to be shrouded in discursive debate on the dichotomous restorative and retributive justice systems, however, with the latter manifesting in what is widely perceived as the ICC's intrusive legal fundamentalism rather than judicious judicial intervention. According to several discourse creators, most people in northern Uganda are in favour of traditional mechanisms of justice that are ostensibly based on the Acholi cultural heritage and a general environment of forgiveness and reconciliation. This traditional justice discourse is being mainly propagated by religious and traditional leaders in a form of cultural revolution and social activism.

The debates are premised on the twin ideas that justice is worthless unless it can be cheaply accessed and accepted by those who have been wronged, and that access to a remedy for victims of human rights infractions is in itself a fundamental human right. By implication, the corollary is that contemporary responses to heinous crimes and gross human rights infractions are being categorised in an abstract process of 'binary opposites' reflected in the dichotomisation and/or polarisation of restorative and Western-style retributive justice systems, practices and approaches. With African traditional mechanisms or systems of justice being compartmentalised in the restorative or reconciliatory camp, advocacy for restorative justice system

in post-conflict societies is gaining a strong following. This debate is being played out in academic and political discourses on the global criminal justice system and what is being referred to as the 'traditional' justice system.

There is an amazing desire for peace in northern Uganda and the country as a whole. This is demonstrated in the varying demands of the proponents of the two parallel justice systems. Interestingly, while the ICC demands and pursues retributive justice, the war victims support justice from the perspective of communal sorrow – prioritising peace before justice. There is consensus in the community that peace should prevail over justice, just as hope prevails over despair, and this seems to be a prioritised natural order. This unique clamour for peace is an animation of indigenous thoughts and perceptions about peace itself. The people of northern Uganda became rooted in reality and had

One of the obstacles in the quest for a sustainable agreement continues to be an appropriate type of justice that will deal with atrocities committed during the conflict



to fashion a consciousness of their own in relation to peace and justice.

This community perception of peace as a priority in a formal justice system should be understood in the context of the developments that explicate the conflict helix, its metamorphosis, and the move away from the 'carrot and stick' stance in the prosecution of belligerency to a more community-driven liberal approach aimed at a political or pacific settlement of the conflict as a moral imperative. First of all, peace and justice are the alpha and omega of human life. Therefore, with hindsight, there was hardly any desire during the abortive peace overtures and initiatives to have recourse to the now much-hyped Acholi traditional mechanisms of justice and reconciliation. The war-afflicted communities started to advocate for community or collective intervention in a search for peace as a matter of priority and as a critical 'public good' that had evaded them for over two decades. From the community perspective, it became clear that peace was to precede justice, a fact which has become a matter of debate and discourse in various fora, and is involving academics, professionals and practitioners.

The desires, aspirations, wishes and need for peace that have been preconditions for the return of IDPs from the camps to their ancestral homesteads seemed to have been influenced by the perceived authoritative, conditional and rigid intervention by the ICC. The people in northern Uganda, in particular, realised that they had become trapped between a horrifying grim past and a future full of uncertainty. Initially, the ICC was conceived as a powerful organ masterminded by the United States to effect the immediate arrest of Joseph Kony and his henchmen in the bush, perhaps with the help of Tomahawk helicopters! This was a pathetic misconception that was later dropped in favour of more practical alternatives or appropriate mechanisms that could bring about lasting peace.

In the wider context of ethnic, cultural and political rivalry between the Acholi and the incumbent government, the peace and justice discourse relates to the creation of ethnic boundaries. In this sense the government, the ICC and that amorphous body termed 'the international community' are seen as the 'other' while the Acholi traditional justice system becomes a sealed unit within the war-fragmented Acholi community.

It is precisely in the light of the polarised discourse over the efficacy and appropriateness of ICC versus African traditional mechanisms of justice, reconciliation and accountability in northern Uganda that the Juba peace talks have collapsed. The positions

of the parties and stakeholders differ as to the use of traditional systems of justice and reconciliation. It is not clear how or whether the parties understand and appreciate the African traditional system of justice vis-à-vis the traditional system of justice. This apparent lack of understanding will call for a critical analysis of the combination of traditional systems and international humanitarian law, geared towards bringing out elements in the traditional systems of justice that are consistent with international law and those that are not and determining what can be done to resolve the conflict.

Alongside suggestions about alternative non-violent Acholi traditional conflict resolution mechanisms to end the violent LRA conflict – the Juba peace talks, mediated by Riek Machar (vice president of Southern Sudan) and president Joachim Chissano, amnesty granted to the insurgents by the Uganda government, the investigation and prosecution by the ICC in The Hague and other on-going initiatives – there are other attempts to find a solution at international and regional levels. The common aim is to sort out the issues inherent in sustaining the northern Uganda war and to bring about a lasting solution. Thus, in May 2006, it was reported that Riek Machar had delivered a message from the LRA leadership to President Yoweri Museveni indicating that the LRA was interested in peace talks. This information was allegedly received with mixed feelings by many in government circles: skepticism from some and renewed optimism from others. Since there had been previous attempts at finding a peaceful resolution of the conflict (which never materialised) this was seen as just another opportunity not to be squandered. Although the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement

has been aborted five times by the time of writing, the achievements seem to surpass the expectations of most of respondents and indeed has been a source of high expectations for many.

The local people have seized the opportunity of the cessation of hostilities to try to pick up the pieces of their lives and most have started the process of cautiously returning to their homes. As one woman put it, 'You have to wait until the sim sim is fine paste' – meaning that the peace process needs to be completed before they can be confident of returning home. However, the cessation of hostilities alone may not restore broken relationships or address the root causes of the conflict.

Some military sources argued that the LRA became uncomfortable in their bases in southern Uganda and relocated to Garamba National Park in the DRC following the signing of a CPA between the government of Sudan and the SPLM/A. They argue that whereas

Although the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement has been aborted five times by the time of writing, the achievements seem to surpass the expectations of most of respondents



the government of Uganda received assurances from the government of the DRC that the LRA would not be allowed to use DRC territory to launch attacks on Uganda, this may happen still if the Juba process collapses. To them, an agreement was reached between the governments of Sudan and Uganda in which Sudan permitted Uganda to send its forces to Sudan's territory to wipe out the LRA. While this could pass as a commitment by the Sudanese government to cut down on assistance to the LRA, military officials indicated that the Sudanese government was still providing support to the LRA. Indeed, the *New Vision* newspaper ran a story on 20 March 2008 in which it quoted the government of Uganda confirming that Kony and his fighters had crossed into the CAR.⁶⁶ The State Minister for International Relations, Henry Okello Oryem, who has also been part of the government of Uganda's team to the talks, is quoted to have confirmed this and observed that the developments constituted a serious threat to peace in the region. He reiterated the government's position that a request to drop the ICC indictments against Kony would be made to the UN Security Council only after a final peace agreement had been signed.

However, the future of the peace talks looked grim.⁶⁷ An article quoted a letter allegedly written by Kony in which he said that he would not sign any peace agreement with the government of Uganda because doing so would mean that he would be taken to Europe to be hanged. Kony is also reported to have said that if he came back to Uganda to stand trial he would also be hanged because of untested local customary law. He vowed to die fighting rather than surrender. The government's response to the failure of the LRA leader to appear at the DRC–Sudan border to sign a final peace deal has been a threat to resume the military campaign against the LRA. This has raised the concern of all stakeholders who have been working towards a peaceful end to the conflict. Civic and religious leaders have attempted to persuade the government of Uganda to suspend the planned offensive and instead, with possible assistance from the international community, explore options of reviving the peace process.

Kony has argued that the ICC indictments are the main obstacle to his signing the final peace agreement with the government of Uganda. His position puts the ICC indictments at the core of discussions about the resumption of the peace process. The government of Uganda has indicated that it would request the ICC to withdraw the indictments only after Kony has signed the peace agreement, but recent developments indicate that this position is not acceptable to the LRA and should be reconsidered.

The concerns of local people about the regional implications of this war are centred on how the international community can influence the positive outcome of the Juba peace process. Many of the respondents held the view that the Sudanese government was responsible for dragging out the war because of its alleged support to the LRA. By and large the desire to leave the IDP camps and return home was strong and determined people's position about the war. People are doing everything in their power to bring an end to the debilitating war, but what they have in mind in terms of reconciliation may only become known in the aftermath of the peace process. It was noted by some respondents that some ex-combatants have been ostracised and have been victims of hate statements. However, the picture painted to the outsider is that of a community that is receptive to returnees. There is a general move by the locals to forgive the perpetrators of violence but probably not forget – yet forgetting is critical for healing society and reintegrating ex-combatants.

The concerns of local people about the regional implications of this war are centred on how the international community can influence the positive outcome of the Juba peace process

The people present two perspectives of their experiences of the LRA conflict – the pre-Juba period and after the Juba talks started. The pre-Juba period was often referred to with nostalgia, because of the terror unleashed by the LRA on the civilian population. So far, the peace talks have given people the time and space to consider their alternatives. There is no doubt that the people desperately long for peace so that their lives can return to normality.

Observations on the general war situation tend to suggest that the people feel the continued conflict has made the Acholi people perpetual beggars, exposing them to international humiliation. They are eagerly looking forward to the day when they will be receiving visitors under cool shades in their homes and serving them with sim sim paste and milk, or local beer, as they used to do. There is also a feeling that the current government is victimising the Acholi because of Kony. The respondents argued that Kony became a perfect scapegoat for punishing the Acholi people because there are other conflicts, like that of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which no one talks about. To these war victims, the war has dragged on this long because the government of Uganda is not interested in ending it. They also narrated stories about the LRA attacking supposedly protected camps, killing and abducting people, and they wondered where the army was when such attacks took place. Such perceptions have been presented to social workers and scholars alike. A resolution of the LRA conflict and national reconciliation needs to address these



concerns, otherwise the end of the LRA war may only give way to another conflict.

The individuals responsible for perpetuating much of the violence in northern Uganda are not only of the same lineage as the civilians who are the targets of their actions, they are often also their children. Abducted children were forced to participate in violence against each other and against their own communities mainly as a process of de-linking them from their kin, since this creates guilt in them and they will therefore fear to go back to their families. Some people in the Acholi region only know a world characterised by armed conflict. To them, the quest for peace is a quest for something alien to them, something that is just a rumour but which they believe is good. Such people have become used to a life based on relief food distribution from humanitarian organisations and depend on the government and the military for security and protection.

Optimistic that the war is coming to a close, the government of Uganda has been laying down strategies for reconstruction and development of the region. As stated earlier, this optimism has been expressed through the government launch of the PRDP, which is a government 'Marshall Plan' for the socio-economic recovery of the rebel-affected areas in the country. However, its success in achieving the expected goals and sustainable peace will depend on the ability to create a reconciled society in which individuals, ex-combatants and host communities will show their unreserved willingness to participate and work together for social and economic development. Some local leaders we spoke to expressed concern that the current debates on reconciliation are focused on the LRA top leadership – yet there is an urgent need to address the question of the reintegration of returnees with the rest of society. This calls for reconciliation to be looked at as a broad process that ought to be addressed at social, personal, psychological, economic and political levels. Forgiveness is central to the process of reconciliation in order to blunt the feelings of hatred and bitterness towards the perceived, imagined, or real 'enemy'. This prepares the parties for a common future.

Forgiveness is not as easy as one would want to believe, because victims' sight of ex-combatants who had hurt them can be a heart-rending reminder of the pain and suffering they caused them. Yet the words 'reconciliation' and 'forgiveness' are common rhetoric in almost all gatherings such as workshops and seminars, perhaps because the peace negotiations in Juba have not yet been successful. All in all, the attitudes shown by most respondents from government

and civil society indicate a desire and commitment to a peaceful resolution of the LRA conflict.

Summary and conclusions

This paper has attempted to show that the northern Uganda war is a classic example of Africa's historical problems of internal disunity, easy capitulation to imperial interests, and conflict entrepreneurship – resulting in endless poverty and misery, violence and disease, suffering and death. It has also tried to show the complexity of the dimensions of the LRA war by arguing that external factors impacted heavily on the dynamics of what is often viewed as an internal situation in Uganda that is localised in the northern region.

The paper discusses the causes of this war and argues that the colonial legacy held the potential for future conflict in Uganda. The colonial administration needed to define, categorise and administer people, often balancing the interests and benefits gained from one group against another through the infamous divide-and-rule policy. It was clear that the colonial development interventions were engendering ethnic tension. This created artificial divisions and new hierarchies within groups and sowed the seeds for conflict after the colonial leaders departed. As a result, the paper postulates, any quest to determine the root causes of conflict can run the danger of discounting the critical role that the historical processes and political developments in the country have played in preparing the ground for this conflict. It also provides accounts of how Acoliland remains a region on the brink of population decimation through ferocious warfare.

The paper further indicates that whereas the government of Uganda and the LRA are the chief protagonists of the war, numerous other actors are also involved: civil society, local leaders, and the international community. The consistency with which civil society and local leaders have called for a peaceful resolution of the conflict have paid off in the form of peace initiatives and abortive peace overtures, the latest being the Juba peace process, whose outcome remains unpredictable. One of the most contentious issues in the talks has been the indictment of five top LRA commanders, including LRA leader Joseph Kony. Whereas most government and military officials agree to respect the government's position, namely that the ICC indictments are responsible for pressuring the LRA to the negotiating table, some local people and civic leaders are of the view that the indictments are to blame for plunging the talks into limbo.

There is no doubt that the conclusion of the Juba peace process will continue to have ramifications for

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a long time to come – not only in northern Uganda, but also nationally and regionally. The worst-case scenario is collapse of the talks. In the event that this happens, there will most likely be a relapse into conflict, at an intense level at that. There has been war rhetoric by the government of Uganda, and at regional level the ground has been laid for regional military action against the LRA in the event of the talks collapsing.⁶⁸

The geopolitical configuration became part of the reasons that would lead to the signing of the Ngurdoto-Tanzania Agreement on 8 September 2007 between Presidents Yoweri Museveni and Joseph Kabila of Uganda and the DRC respectively. The agreement clearly envisaged main rebel groups such as the LRA and the Allied Democratic Force (ADF), rebel groups operating in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Even though the pact was signed when the government of Uganda and the LRA were negotiating a peace deal, it was supposed to result in the disarmament and expulsion of the LRA from the DRC's Garamba National Park within 90 days. The agreement has not been implemented yet. In related developments, and at a wider regional level, Uganda, Rwanda, the DRC and Burundi are organised under a loose politico-military umbrella termed the Tripartite Plus Joint Commission (TPRC). This is being seen as a collective effort to forge a lasting peace in the Great Lakes Region. Several meetings of members of the alliance have taken place, and the arrangement is to rid the region of what its members term 'negative forces', which invariably includes the LRA.

Accusations that the LRA has violated the CHA reached during the peace talks, together with the continued presence of the LRA in the DRC and the abduction of civilians while the peace talks were taking place, further legitimise military action against the LRA. On the other hand, with the ICC indictments hanging in the air, MONUC may get sucked into the hunt for indictees. In the end the civilian population will have to bear the brunt of a resumption of hostilities. The optimism that emanated from the current lull in hostilities will quickly be dashed and people will return to the IDP camps. It comes at no surprise that the local people did not want to become involved in discussions that pointed towards such a likelihood. In the meanwhile, the cessation of humanitarian interventionist policies in favour of development-oriented and human rights-focused interventions has been advocated. It is therefore likely that humanitarian organisations operating in the region will have to take time to arrange relief operations

because most are already raising funds for recovery, community rehabilitation, and reconstruction and development. Such a time lag will have negative consequences for the communities who are currently returning to their original homesteads.

Since the impact of the LRA war has been felt beyond the borders of Uganda, it is imperative that the peace process be implemented beyond the country's borders as communities that feel left out may become spoilers.

The best-case scenario will hinge on the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement between the government of Uganda and the LRA. Components of the agreements signed so far will have to be implemented. The most significant of these is the Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation.

The role of alternative – or rather, *appropriate* justice mechanisms – in promoting reconciliation is critical. One of the challenges is to determine the appropriate type of justice provide equitable remedies to the national, regional and international victims of the war.

The Juba peace talks would seem to be the best bet for peace not only in northern Uganda, but also in southern Sudan and the eastern DRC

The Juba peace talks would seem to be the best bet for peace not only in northern Uganda, but also in southern Sudan and the eastern DRC. Past support to the LRA by the government of Sudan makes an agreement between the government of Uganda and the LRA a prerequisite in ensuring the long-term success of the CPA between the Khartoum government and the SPLA. The LRA poses a formidable threat to the stability of Sudan because it can be used by the Khartoum government to undermine southern Sudan in the

face of the pending independence referendum for the south.

To local people and their leaders in all the regions affected by the war, the final outcome of the Juba peace talks remains hope for a sustainable peace. The local people cannot wait to be free – free from the fear of being killed or caught in crossfire between the UPDF and the LRA; free from keeping a watchful eye at night lest the LRA sneak in and abduct one; free from being caught in an ambush; and free from being victimised by the UPDF for being a rebel 'collaborator' or 'sympathiser'. The people are looking forward to return to their ancestral homes and start a new and peaceful life.

The only hope of realising this is the signing of a CPA by the two parties. The success of the Juba peace process will pave the way for the return of the more than 1,8 million people who have been internally



displaced in northern Uganda and will enable the implementation of the PRDP for the social and economic development of the LRA-affected areas. The PRDP, as a policy framework, will provides people with the opportunity to engage in income-generating activities and will foster self-reliance among those who have depended on relief assistance for years.

Recommendations

The quest to bring an immediate end to the prolonged suffering of the people of northern Uganda should not blur the need to address issues that are part of the history of Uganda. Perceptions of the people of northern Uganda that they have become alienated from national political processes have to be addressed if the country is to attain a lasting peace and prosperity at all levels. A lasting solution to the war can only be sought at national level by crafting a comprehensive peace plan that will take into consideration issues of national unity, reconciliation and solidarity, and will operate beyond ethnic schisms. Attempts by civil society organisations to forge national reconciliation are yet to bear fruit, as ethnic communities in Uganda remain hopelessly divided, disunited and incapable of defending machinations geared towards divisionism. The communities and the more than 56 nationalities in the country need a uniting constitutional order that will free their energies to pursue national developmental interests more aggressively, with high levels of social cohesion and socio-economic and political nationalistic vitality and fervour. Group consciousness and constructive assertiveness can free Ugandans from political narrow-mindedness and war-mongering leading to a perennial drum beating for war, conflict and violence. This will contribute to the creation of collective interests within a lively, peaceful union of citizens instead of conflict-ridden, lifeless communities.

The impact of the war is an indication that the legitimate grievances and concerns of the people must be addressed as a part of post-conflict resolution efforts at a national level. One mechanism that could become a crucial conflict prevention initiative in Uganda is national reconciliation based on the formation of an inclusive, broad-based government of national unity. As both a process and an ultimate objective, it will become a bridge to guide the future of the people of Acholi, in particular, to a more inclusive and unified socio-economic and political environment, and a sustainable peace. The reconciliation programme

should be designed to address the underlying issues that may spiral out of control in future. These must include post-conflict military and security issues of encampment, disarmament, demobilisation, re-insertion, re-integration and rehabilitation, as well as an awareness of landmines.

There is a strong belief that a national process of reconciliation is a prerequisite for a sustainable peacebuilding process that transforms war-affected societies and creates sustainable peace relevant to and appreciated by the people on the ground. The government of Uganda, together with its development partners, should develop reconciliation programmes at different levels, including the reintegration of ex-combatants and restoring relations between people at national level. Reintegration of former LRA fighters into the community calls for the involvement of civic and traditional leaders in peace efforts, particularly the involvement of traditional and cultural institutions and leaders, especially from the Acholi region. Greater sensitisation about the ex-rebels is crucial – not only among the people of Acholi, but also nationally and internationally. Acholi cultural/traditional practices will not only need to be accepted throughout the Acholi region and Uganda at large, but will also need to be reconciled with national and international standards of reconciliation, forgiveness and punishment within the framework of criminology and penology. In this context, there is a need to prepare concrete plans for the psychological rehabilitation of ex-combatants through psychosocial programmes. Experience has indicated that inadequate preparation of ex-combatants and local people may lead to the returnees being rejected.

A lasting solution to the war can only be sought at national level by crafting a comprehensive peace plan that will take into consideration issues of national unity, reconciliation and solidarity

Relations between the LRA and neighbouring communities should be restored not only at country level, but also between the LRA and affected communities outside Uganda. This calls for the involvement of regional bodies such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), and the African Union. Like in any conflict scenario, it is important to carry out a situational analysis in this area.

There are also perspectives for the future. At this time, there are a surge of opportunities and challenges in respect of post-war recovery and sustainable peacebuilding. All ideas, hopes and considerations are increasingly hinting to the prospect that the war may one day come to an end. The general impression is that events unfolding in the near future may favour the peace that has eluded the region for decades. *Ceteris*



paribus, there are clear pointers – external, internal and even at local level – to the prospect of peace.

The imminent silence of the guns may not necessarily usher in positive peace. Rather, it will push the war-affected communities towards enhanced humanity. But the potential for a re-emergence of the conflict is ever present in a society that has been a quagmire of violent situations for more than two decades. Post-conflict recovery, rehabilitation and development require proactive (not reactive) interventions in a blend of prophylactic and curative measures. Assuming that peace could soon be realised, peace-building and development interventions should consider volatile issues such as land; the protection and observance of human rights; sustainable livelihood strategies; optimal service delivery; measures to facilitate resettlement and rehabilitation; citizens' active participation in decision-making; and effective and efficient communication between communities. Reactions, responses and lessons learnt from the various peace overtures, initiatives and processes should be resorted to provide an informed contextual background for transformation from war to peace and to deliver to the war-afflicted communities an eventual peaceful situation for development.

Sustained efforts are required to address, at post-conflict level, not only the military dimensions of the conflict, but also its political, humanitarian, economic, developmental and social dimensions. These efforts will emphasise the necessity of linking security and development to achieve meaningful peace and pursuing this through special peacebuilding measures. Further research is therefore recommended as a tool for identifying and documenting the post-conflict challenges inherent in post-war recovery and development. The research findings will be useful in designing relevant conflict-sensitive programming interventions with focus on development. Understanding post-war challenges appears increasingly necessary for the implementation of effective post-conflict interventions that would preclude any possibility of further conflict and build a sustainable peace.

There is a dire need to know more about the social dynamics that will be at play after a cessation of hostilities. The recommended situation analysis and needs assessment study should aim at identifying and prioritising the required interventions and policy agendas. Expectations on the ground are that the post-conflict period will be characterised by the application of conflict resolution mechanisms that will lead to, inter alia, an end to violent confrontations or conflagrations, war and conflict; a decrease in tension; the re-institution of a state of normalcy and sanity in the communities; adoption of a relevant peacebuilding processes; and normalisation of friendship, harmonious coexistence and relationships. Above all, it should be a situation devoid of a

repetition of the conflict cycle but that can contribute to a comprehensive community transformation.

Similarly, current community activities and the transition from relief-based to sustainable livelihood interventions should be investigated. It is our considered view that a major contributor to sustainable peace and economic recovery in northern Uganda will be economic empowerment to promote the sustainable livelihood of the war-affected communities. This will enhance market development aimed at job creation by using or emphasising a conflict-sensitive value-chain approach. But in promoting economic growth and coping mechanisms in communities that have gone through unruly times, there will be a need for theoretical and practical support from the relevant government institutions or civil society organisations as well as the international community. There is a need for the international community to become increasingly involved in the push for a peaceful end to the war. Observer countries at Juba – including Mozambique, the DRC, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa and the United States, as well as countries belonging to the African Union, the European Union and the United Nations – can play a significant role in encouraging the government of Uganda and the LRA to give peace a chance and stave off the threat of another armed campaign by the belligerents. They should try to give dialogue as much opportunity as possible.

Notes

- 1 The study was commissioned by the Centre for Policy Research and Dialogue (CPRD) and the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, under the rubric 'Regional Dimensions of the War in Northern Uganda' as part of a project entitled 'Local Conflicts in the Horn and their Sub-Regional Implications: Phase II: Case Studies from Acholi, Borana, and Somali Regions'. The author was assisted in his research by Marino Ongee-Lol, a research assistant currently pursuing an MA in Public Administration at Gulu University.
- 2 The Juba Peace Process – the peace initiative aimed at ending the war in northern Uganda – began on 14 July 2006 and took place in Juba, southern Sudan. Dr Riek Machar, vice president of the government of Southern Sudan, was the chief mediator of the Juba peace initiative.
- 3 A B K Kasozi, *The social origins of violence in Uganda, 1964–1985*. Kampala: Fountain, 1999.
- 4 Ibid, 3–11.
- 5 H Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the holy spirits: war in northern Uganda, 1986–1997*, Oxford: James Currey, 1999, 23.
- 6 A Alice Lakwena, a Ugandan warrior priestess, was born Alice Auma, the daughter of a clergyman from the Acholi people, in northern Uganda. Ms Lakwena – whose name means 'messiah' in Acholi – claimed to have the spiritual power to protect her fighters from bullets by anointing them with oil. She mesmerised her



- followers with claims that spirits spoke through her.
- 7 Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the holy spirits*, 22.
 - 8 H Behrend and U Luig (eds), *Spirit possession: modernity and power in Africa*, Oxford: James Currey, 1999.
 - 9 C Clapham (ed), *African guerrillas*, Kampala: Fountain, 1998, 116.
 - 10 Severino Lukoya was the father of Alice Auma and a pastor of a small, virtually unknown church.
 - 11 Betty Bigombe is a former Uganda government minister. She is an ethnic Acholi and has been involved in peace negotiations to end the insurgency of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) of Uganda since 1994. As of 2005 she was acting as chief mediator between the LRA and government of Uganda.
 - 12 Arop Madut-Arop, *Sudan's painful road to peace: a full story of the founding and development of the SPLM/A*, LLC: Book Surge, 2006, 424.
 - 13 Tim Allen, *Trial justice: the International Criminal Court and the Lord's Resistance Army*, London: Zed Books, 2006, 72.
 - 14 *The New Vision Newspaper*, 10 October 2001.
 - 15 US Congress, Public Law 108–384 of 2 August 2004, Section 2(10).
 - 16 The Northern Uganda Crisis Response Act (Public Law 108–283 of 2 August 2004).
 - 17 *Development and the next generation*, World Bank Report, 2007, cited in the *New Vision* newspaper, Kampala, 11 February 2007.
 - 18 Ibid.
 - 19 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3514473.stm> (accessed 28 October 2008).
 - 20 In March 2002, the Ugandan army (Ugandan People's Defence Force, or UPDF) launched a military offensive against the LRA codenamed 'Operation Iron Fist', sending troops into southern Sudan with the permission of the Sudanese government. The purported aim of the offensive was to eradicate the LRA. Instead, the conflict inside northern Uganda intensified and spread to the eastern district of Teso – (http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/international_justice/regions/uganda/uganda.htm.)
 - 21 See Refugee Law Project, Position paper on the announcement of formal investigations of the Lord's Resistance Army by the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court and Its Implications on the Search for Peaceful Solutions to the War in Northern Uganda, Kampala, <http://www.refugeelawproject.org>.
 - 22 See Allen, *Trial justice*, which discusses in detail how the ICC has run into problems with its first big case with the indictment of the LRA commanders.
 - 23 See Allen, *Trial justice*.
 - 24 For a detailed account of Uganda political history, see Tarsis Bazana Kabwegyere, *The politics of state formation and destruction in Uganda*, Kampala: Fountain, 1995.
 - 25 Allen, *Trial justice*, 28.
 - 26 Ibid.
 - 27 See A G Ginyera-Pinchwa, Is there a northern question? In Kumar Rupesingye (ed), *Conflict resolution in Uganda*, Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1989, 4.
 - 28 Bethuel Kiplagat, Reaching the 1985 Peace Agreement, in *Accord: Protracted conflict, elusive peace: initiatives to end the violence in northern Uganda*, Issue 11, edited by Okello Lucima, London: Conciliation Resources, 2002.
 - 29 Allen, *Trial justice*, 25–30.
 - 30 Ibid, 26.
 - 31 Ibid, 25–26.
 - 32 Ronald R Atkinson, *The roots of ethnicity: the origins of the Acholi of Uganda before 1800*, Kampala: Fountain, 1999, 25.
 - 33 Ibid, 25.
 - 34 See also Kabwegyere, *The politics of state formation and destruction in Uganda*, 20.
 - 35 Atkinson, *The roots of ethnicity*, 111.
 - 36 See, for instance, Samwiri Lwanga-Luyiigo, The colonial roots of internal conflict, In Rupesingye, *Conflict resolution in Uganda*, 29, 1989.
 - 37 Serge Michailhof, Markus Kostne and Xavier Denctot, *Post-conflict recovery in Africa: an agenda for the Africa region*, Africa Region Working Paper Series 30, World Bank Working Group, 1998, 3.
 - 38 D Welch, *Justice and the genesis of war*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 8.
 - 39 See Allen, *Trial justice*, 30.
 - 40 Caroline Lamwaka, The peace process in northern Uganda 1986–1990, In *Accord: Protracted conflict, elusive peace: initiatives to end the violence in northern Uganda*, Issue 11, edited by Okello Lucima, London: Conciliation Resources, 2002.
 - 41 Sallie Simba Kayunga, The impact of armed opposition on the movement system in Uganda, in Justus Mugaju and J Oloka-Onyango (eds), *No party democracy in Uganda: myths and realities*. Kampala: Fountain, 2000, 112.
 - 42 Ibid.
 - 43 Allen, *Trial justice*, 33–37.
 - 44 Kayunga, The impact of armed opposition, 115.
 - 45 See Gulu District Development Plan, 2007/8 – 2009/10, 9.
 - 46 Ibid, 9.
 - 47 See Overseas Development Institute and Development Research and Training (DRT), *Livelihoods in crises: the case for Pader district*, Unpublished Research Report, 2007
 - 48 Allen, *Trial justice*, 53–71.
 - 49 Médecins Sans Frontières Holland, The health situation in camps: case studies of Pader and Lira Districts Northern Uganda, 2004.
 - 50 Gareth J Evans, *Cooperating for peace: the global agenda for the 1990s and beyond*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1993, 7.
 - 51 Conflict research has generated the concept of 'new wars', based on examination of the mode of warfare, the goals and the resource bases of the conflicts encountered in Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and elsewhere. Africa is seen to be witnessing wars that thrive on primordial social ethnic identities and metaphysical belief systems and seemingly, by implication, lack of clear-cut ideological agendas. The



goals are characterised as bizarre, irrational and even crazy. Often the same characterisation is extended to the leaders themselves.

- 52 Lamwaka, The peace process in northern Uganda.
- 53 *New Vision Newspaper*, 16(128), 30 May 2000, 3.
- 54 For further reading in this regard see N Bunn, Kumar Rupesinghe and Sonia Munoz, International actors and perspectives: economic international as a means of conflict resolution, in Lindgren Goran, Peter Wallensteen and Kjell-Ake Nordquist (eds), *Issues in Third World conflict resolution: report from the 1990 Advanced International Programme in Conflict Resolution*, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 25.
- 55 Uganda, Sudan agree on joint border ventures, *FOCUS*, 3 September 1986.
- 56 Oori Amaza Ondoga, *Museveni's long march from guerilla to statesman*, Kampala: Fountain, 1998, 134.
- 57 *Ibid*, 136.
- 58 *Ibid*, 138.
- 59 *Ibid*, 117.
- 60 Gerard Prunier, Rebel movements and proxy warfare: Uganda, Sudan and the Congo (1986–99), *African Affairs*, 103(412) (2004) 359–383.
- 61 Allan, *Trial justice*.
- 62 Chris Dolan, Understanding war and its continuation:

the case of northern Uganda, PhD thesis, Development Studies Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London, 2005.

- 63 To date, the Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies of Gulu University has continued to register a sizeable number of such researchers for PhDs and master's and undergraduate programmes. Others have led to the creation of projects such as the Community Outreach Peace Project of Gulu University, Transitional Justice in Gulu NGO Forum, the *Mato Oput* Project, etc.
- 64 Priest traces Kony's deadly flow of arms, *Daily Monitor*, 24 June 2003.
- 65 The government of Sudan was formed as a result of the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) between the government of the Republic of Sudan and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in Naivasha, Kenya, in 2005.
- 66 Kony confirmed in Central African Republic, *New Vision Newspaper*, 20 March 2008.
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- 68 The Ngurdoto Agreement signed in Arusha, Tanzania, on 8 September 2007 by the government of Uganda and the DRC mandates military action to disarm the rebels.



About this paper

This paper seeks to examine the origin and causes of the conflict in northern Uganda, demonstrates the complexity of the dimensions of the LRA war its regional dimensions, considers the principal actors and provides some backgrounds to the peace process and ends with some future projections on the peace, recovery and development plan and process in northern Uganda.

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