



Chronic Poverty
Research Centre



Risks and Vulnerabilities in Post Conflict Environments: Lessons from Northern Uganda

Ikanza Betty Kasiko

A paper presented at the Chronic Poverty International Conference:
'Ten Years of War Against Poverty':
What have we learned since 2000 and what should we do 2010-2020,
8th - 10th September, Manchester, United Kingdom.

Ikanza Betty Kasiko is a Senior Programme Officer with Development Research and Training (DRT) and has been actively involved in Research, Policy Analysis and Engagement relating to Chronic Poverty in Uganda.



Introduction

This paper documents findings and experiences drawn from Development Research and Training's (DRT) work on chronic poverty in northern Uganda over the last decade; primarily a study done¹ in collaboration with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) on conflict and intergenerational transmission of poverty focusing on education and livelihoods as key aspects that support bounce back after shocks.

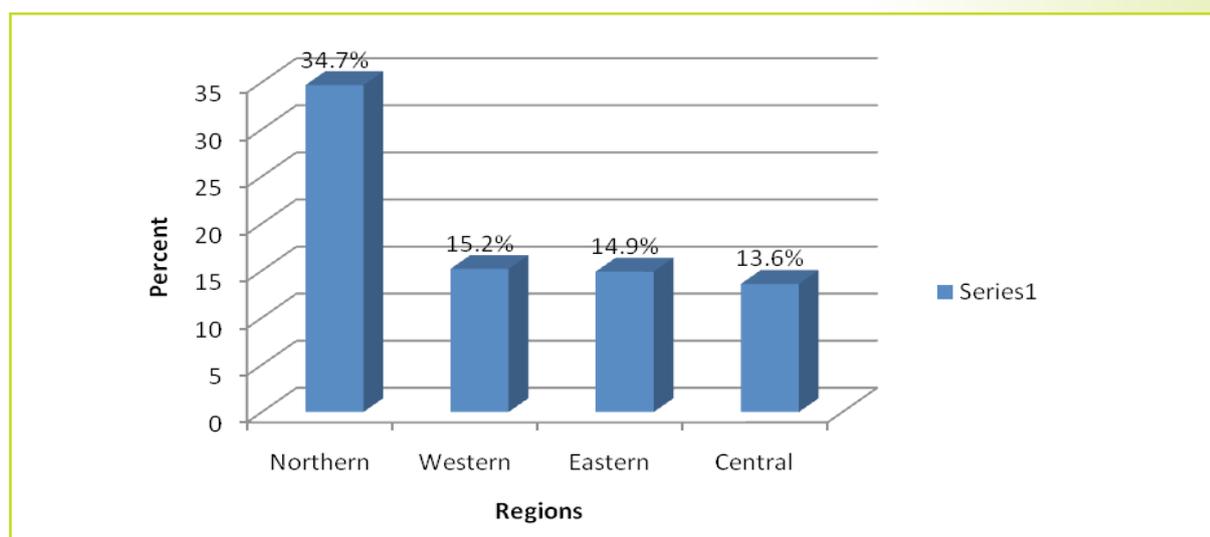
It is hinged on two main areas; firstly, it examines the barriers, risks and vulnerabilities in the post conflict northern Uganda region drawing keen attention of policy and programming. Secondly it suggests some policy considerations.

1 - The study was conducted in October 2008 in two post conflict districts of Pader and Kaberamaido

Background

The northern Uganda region has experienced long conflict and insecurity over the last two decades characterised by displacement, overcrowding in camps, loss of hundreds of lives, abduction of children and adults, destruction of property, interruption of delivery of services such as education, health and almost total disruption of livelihood activities mainly as a result of confinement and restricted movement leading to limited access to land outside the camp perimeter yet more than 80 percent of the population were farmers. This subsequently worsened conditions of Consequently colossal sums of resources have been invested by government, civil society and development partners to implement a range of reconstruction and development programmes aimed at rebuilding livelihoods and reducing poverty. The programmes include among others the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund I and II (NUSAF I&II) worth \$133.5 million and \$ 100 million respectively; Northern Uganda Rehabilitation programme (NUREP) worth \$98.2 million from 1992-1998; Northern Uganda Reconstruction programme (NURP); Northern Uganda Transition Initiative (NUTI) and more recently the regional overarching Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) at an estimated cost of \$606,519,297 over the 3 years (2007-2010)² not mentioning mainstream development programmes such as National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education (USE).

Despite all these efforts evidence continues to show high levels of poverty and chronic poverty in the region. Although the percentage of persons living below the poverty line in northern Uganda reduced significantly from 67.5 percent to 57.5 percent between 2004 and 2008³ respectively, poverty in this region remains way above the national poverty headcount of 31 percent in 2006. The northern region has also the highest chronic poverty levels with 34.7 percent of people living in chronic poverty compared to 13.6 percent, 14.9 percent and 15.2 percent in the central, Eastern and western regions respectively⁴.



Source:⁵

2 - GoU (September 2007): PRDP pp. ix

3 - Computations by Sara Ssewanyana using NUSAF panel data 2004-2008

4 - Computations by Sarah Ssewanyana using data from UBOS Panel Surveys 1992-99

5 - Ibid

The population slipping into poverty increased with 30.3 percent of people in the northern region compared to 8.0 percent, 11.4 percent and 8.4 percent in the central, eastern and western districts respectively⁶. Statistics from the Northern Uganda baseline survey (2004) also indicate that in the whole of the NUSAF region⁷, 40.2 percent are in chronic poverty while only 23.3 percent are never poor. More recent NUSAF panel data further show that 34.1 percent of the non poor in 2004 fell into poverty and accounted for 23.1 percent of all the poor in 2008.

Generally the estimate of 3.57million persons living in chronic poverty in the northern region between 2004 and 2008 is well above the 2.3 million persons between 1992/93 to 1999/00⁸. The discrepancy arouses debate about sensitivity and thus effectiveness of policy and programmes designs to underlying vulnerabilities and reduction of chronic poverty.

Why the paper?

Following a cessation of hostilities in 2006 and improvements in security, people across the northern region started leaving camps for transit sites and others moving to their areas of origin. By July 2009 it was estimated that more than 850,000 people-almost 80% of the population in Acholi sub region had left the camps and resettled in transit sites (Ellen Martin et al, 2009). It is important to note though that a range of vulnerabilities and risks have since emerged as people return and if not carefully addressed by current policy and programme interventions with in the recovery process, are likely to plunge the region into deeper poverty

6 - 1992-99 panel data

7 - This consists of Acholi, Lango, West Nile, Teso and Karamoja sub regions

8 - Computations by Dr. Sara Ssewanyana using data from UBOS panel Surveys

What are the risks and vulnerabilities in the post conflict northern Uganda region? To what extent are these being addressed by current policy and programme?

Demographic profile:

It is noted that a higher proportion (56 percent) of the population resettling are children below 18 years. Population demographics from mortality surveys also show an under representation of men and women between the ages of 20 and 40 (RoU, 2005; Medair Uganda, 2007; Ellen et al, 2009) which is largely attributed to abduction and killings during the war. Recent statistics from NUSAF panel data further show that households in chronic poverty with children below the age of 15 increased from 3.49 percent to 3.66 percent between 2004 and 2008 which is contrary for those that moved out (see table below). However there seem not to be much effort to target children or child headed households in the area of livelihoods with in the on going recovery and reconstruction process.

Though NUSAF I is noted to have had a component on vulnerable group support (VGS), there was no deliberate effort to involve this category of children who are out of school. NUSAF's challenges associated with group dynamics, elite capture, politicisation, illiteracy vis-à-vis proposal writing and registration fees generally excluded the chronically poor and vulnerable persons among them children. Policy attention ought therefore to point to this emerging risk if positive achievement is to be made towards reducing poverty and vulnerability in the region.

Household Composition by poverty trajectory

Characteristic	Chronic poverty	Slipped into poverty	Moved out of poverty	Never poor	All
Children<15years,2004	3.49	2.38	3.03	2.15	2.93
Children<15years,2008	3.66	3.27	2.79	2.46	3.12

Source⁹

Note: estimates in bold indicate a significant change at over 10%

Emergence of a 'missing generation':

There is recognition of a 'missing generation' constituted by the youth. These missed or dropped out of school as a result of several factors relating to conflict and long stay in camps and they find it difficult to rejoin mainstream education (primary and secondary) due to age and other limiting factors. Majority of them have deliberately stayed in upcoming trading centres (formerly IDP camps) despite the on going resettlement process simply because they were born and have grown in camps and are scared of the 'unknown life in bushy rural areas'. They are idle and redundant and thus pose both development and security challenges. Attention thus needs to be paid to increasing opportunities for this category of the population.

9 - Computations by Dr. Sara Ssewanyana using NUSAF Panel data 2004-2008

A challenge of extremely vulnerable individuals (EVIs):

As a result of the conflict certain categories of the population found themselves extremely vulnerable and unable to provide themselves for different reasons ranging from loss of limbs; loss of breadwinners and relatives among other. These involve among others the elderly, orphans, female headed households and persons living with disabilities (PWDS). They largely depended on relief support and were for a long time a focus of most humanitarian agencies during the conflict and early recovery phases. Following the withdrawal of most humanitarian actors now, these people's lives seem to be cut-off. Majority are unable to move back to their original villages due to lack of necessary labour and non-affordability of costs involved in relocation and thus lie idle in former camps. Although special mention and attention has been paid to vulnerable persons in most recovery programmes such as NUSAF and PRDP, special needs of the extremely vulnerable that have little to offer in terms of labour have not been addressed. Additionally, a focus on agricultural restoration based on manual labour also automatically excludes this category of people.

Reluctance to engage in agriculture by especially the youth:

Additionally government and other development actors have put much emphasis on agricultural restoration during the recovery process due to the fact that it is the mainstay both in the region and the country at large. It is important to note though that the youth who are shying away from resettlement are reluctant to engage in agriculture.

Furthermore, proneness to rampant agricultural shocks (see table below) in the region is much worse in post conflict where people have lost alternative sources to livelihoods. The shocks are not to force many returning households to move further downwards into deeper poverty.

Most serious shocks by poverty trajectory, %

Type of shock	Chronic poverty		Moved out of poverty		Slipped into poverty		Never poor		All	
	2004	2008	2004	2008	2004	2008	2004	2008	2004	2008
No shocks	4.1	8.0	5.2	7.9	8.9	9.7	8.8	18.2	6.1	10.6
Agriculture	41.2	64.2	39.5	51.9	37.6	58.3	37.1	49.8	39.4	57.1
Death/illness	9.6	12.8	10.5	23.3	10.8	13.3	13.1	17.7	10.8	16.6
Rebels	41.6	7.1	40.1	9.0	39.3	11.9	35.7	7.1	39.6	8.1
Theft	0.9	1.5	2.1	2.3	1.0	1.4	2.3	2.6	1.5	2.0
Other	2.6	5.7	2.5	5.2	2.5	4.9	3.0	3.5	2.7	5.0
Not stated	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.4	0.0	1.5	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source¹⁰

It is therefore feared that unless policy attention is equally paid to investment in non-agriculture activities specifically targeting the youth in upcoming trading centres there is a risk of a whole redundant less skilled generation that poses major threats to development in the region and also exacerbation poverty and vulnerability due to the agricultural related shocks.

Loss of productive labour:

Support to agricultural development has continued to rely on household labour and use of rudimentary

10 - Ibid

tools (distribution of hand hoes, pangas together with planting materials as resettlement packages) despite the notable loss of productive labour through abductions of mainly young able bodied men, massacres, amputations, death and migration of primarily men as a result of the conflict and insecurity. This has left other households with only the elderly, children and persons with disabilities and therefore while some households may easily bounce back with support of seeds, tools and market opportunities, others primarily the vulnerable neither have the household productive labour nor the resources to hire outside labour and may thus require special interventions that are not prioritised in current policy interventions.

A group approach has been adopted by most interventions as a measure towards boosting labour and production. However the groups only work for specific project/programme beneficiaries (group members) yet in most cases the vulnerable persons are hindered from joining groups where one's entry is permitted largely on the basis of ability to offer physical energy. Furthermore it was noted that group efforts are concentrated on the 'joint farms' (project demonstration farms) commonly reserved for 'project monitoring visits' by the coordinators and other responsible parties while little is actually done to offer joint labour/support on individual farms.

Changes in gender roles:

Evidence from the DRT's study also reveal the fact that most men (who previously offered additional household agricultural labour) have turned to heavy alcohol consumption explained as an attempt to adjust to new circumstances around them, cope with loss (of property and beloved ones) and regain a sense of normalcy after the long suffering and trauma. As a result women are solely left with the burden of opening up land and crop production among other household provisioning responsibilities. This is likely to affect production, food security, and household wellbeing consequently reducing chances of achieving of poverty and chronic poverty reduction.

It was noted that most interventions have only worked to the 'advantage' of the gender changes with out necessarily addressing the underlying problem that poses a bigger risk. They concentrate on recruiting as many women as possible because they are active and 'easy' to work with thus facilitate quick project results¹¹. However it is recognised that with out equally targeting men women's vulnerability is instead increased.

Land disputes and landlessness:

A focus on agricultural restoration by almost all recovery programmes with out matched effort to address rising land disputes and resultant landlessness which primarily affect the chronically poor and vulnerable (women, children, widows among others) poses a big challenge to poverty reduction.

Following a two decade of stay in camps and loss of some elders and adults with better knowledge of the land boundaries during the time, a number of land boundary-related disputes have been registered during resettlement. The disputes continue to claim lives, impede on-time resettlement and full engagement in crop production and other livelihood restoration initiatives such as bricklaying, charcoal burning, and firewood gathering and sale thus keeping people in poverty. In Pader district, the gravity of such disputes prompted the minister of Lands to undertake a fact finding mission to the village of Olyelowidyele in Kotomor Sub County where 2,000 people have been unable to access their ancestral land (UNOCHA, 2010). Preliminary findings of a joint assessment done by district officials

¹¹ - Almost all projects were noted to have more female beneficiaries as opposed to their male counterparts. This in most cases is lightly considered as achievement in terms of gender inclusion however the underlying risk needs to be tackled.

and partners in Amuru district in a wake of a violent land dispute in Koli village, Pabbo Sub County indicated that one person was killed and several others injured in the dispute involving two clans. Some 40 huts were torched and many members of either clan had fled the village (Ibid).

Generally, although nearly 90 percent of the displaced population in northern Uganda had left the camps as of June 2010 and a total of 108 of the 121 officially recognised IDP camps in Acholi sub region closed, 13 camps (1 in Gulu, 4 in Pader, 3 in Kitgum and 5 in Lamwo) still remain subject to protection concerns specifically relating to land (UNOCHA, 2010).

Other notable land disputes common in the region include land ownership disputes, inheritance disputes and user rights disputes¹² and these exacerbate chronic poverty in one way or another. Patrilineal customary practices in northern Uganda limiting women and girls to only land user rights and with out ownership yet at the same time women are more actively involved in agricultural production and thus participate more in most recovery programmes than men poses a challenge to the success of these development initiatives. Relatedly, patrilineal formal customary court systems that handle these land disputes further exclude women primarily the unmarried and widows thus increasing vulnerability to poverty.

New land policy developments at national level such as the proposed taxation of idle land are likely to harm the northern region more than any other part of the country if implemented universally across the board.

It was recognised that majority of programme interventionists shy away from land discussions given the current associated political risk yet land remains a key factor in all the existing livelihood interventions. Communities noted that it is only individuals or households who demonstrate having 'flawless land' that are allowed to join groups and benefit from the seeds and tools distributed while those with out land or with land problems are left out to avoid plunging a given programme into 'risk'.

Service delivery gap:

Humanitarian actors domineered and led service provisioning over the two decades of war with limited involvement of local actors-local governments and other related local institutions and structures. It is recognised that most local structures almost 'died out'. Now with return of peace and immediate withdrawal of most humanitarian actors with out enhanced capacity (logistical, financial and human resource) for local governments and efforts to rebuild local institutions, delivery of services to a growing and spread population outside the confines of the camp has increasingly become a challenge that is likely to impede success of most development programmes and achievement of Millennium Development Goals.

It was noted for instance that delivery of extension services to facilitate smooth operation of the NAADS programmes has remained a mystery for some lower local governments for whom certain positions are still vacant and also facilitation in terms of logistics and budgets to reach out to people in their original communities is lacking.

Lack of infrastructure and services in transit sites and villages of origin: Besides the service delivery gap, all the infrastructure and services available are only concentrated in former camps while people

¹² - Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2009) Land and Rights; Laws, Institutions and Conflicts

are moving back to 'bare' and 'abandoned' communities. Resettling communities have to trek long distances to access these services. It was noted that this not only hinders a smooth resettlement process but also poses risk for certain families for instance in Ongalo, Adilang and Angole Laroo in Pader district it was noted that as families move back to their original villages, they leave their children behind in former camps so as to access education. However this is feared to expose them to a range of dangers with out parental guidance and control. Vulnerabilities such as Maternal and child mortality, malaria related deaths and school drop out are feared to exacerbate due to the lack of services in transit sites and villages of origin.

Furthermore, the lack of access routes for certain communities such as Angole Laroo also inhibits the resettled communities from accessing markets, credit and financial services, vital information and also benefiting from most development initiatives which are also concentrated in the upcoming urban centres.

Unfortunately existent programmes such as UPE, USE and Primary Health Care (PHC) only emphasise provision of 'free services' without necessarily tackling barriers relating to limited access due to both long distance and lack of prerequisites such as scholastic materials, drugs and delivery kits for expectant mothers among others; limited number of service providers (teachers, extension and health workers); lack of food or no meals which hinders adherence to education and health seeking.

Low quality human capital:

The low quality of human capital in the north remains a big challenge to overall development in the region. The human development index of 0.499 is the lowest compared to other regions¹³. Adult literacy rates of 59% compared to 80% in the central are low not mentioning high death rates, maternal and child mortality as a result of the conflict. These limit both production and productivity and point to low returns to labour. The low literacy directly reduces participation in development efforts, limits access to vital information for instance regarding credit and markets which subsequently leads to poverty. Still most programmes mentioned above have focused more on infrastructural reconstruction, livelihoods restoration through distribution of seeds and tools and little emphasis is being put to adult literacy, vocational training and other human capital building initiatives.

Generally, evidence from the DRT's study highlights several vulnerabilities in the post conflict such as limited household assets thus reduced resilience to shocks; low presence of private sector hence limited access to alternative quality services albeit low purchasing power; limited livelihood options; adverse coping; disruption of social support and value systems; high levels of gender based violence; high prevalence and seemingly increasing rates of HIV/AIDS; disability; trauma; weakened governance structures and hesitation by civil servant to work in certain remote cut-off areas in the region. These present both security and development risk however much has not been done yet to address these vulnerabilities in the on going recovery and reconstruction process which may hinder the country's achievement of the millennium development goals and over all reduction of poverty.

¹³ - UBOS (2006): Uganda National Household Survey 2005/06

Key conclusions and policy implications

Universality of development policy design and programme implementation across the country may not address underlying vulnerabilities in post conflict environments. In other words post conflict communities facing landlessness, land disputes, low literacy, and limited livelihood sources among others will require more than NAADS, UPE, USE, and Prosperity for all among other programmes in their current form for them to benefit.

Proposed national land policy reforms particularly the proposition to tax idle land also need to pay attention to the unique case of the northern region where the population out of their own will have not been able to access, utilise and develop their land for the last two decades

Post conflict environments are not uniform; risk and vulnerability differs for the different northern Uganda sub regions. This partly explains why for instance the NUSAF evaluation presents varying results for different sub regions and locations there in. There might be therefore need to do sub regional and even lower level targeting with in sub regions in order to effectively address chronic poverty and vulnerability.

The youth and other vulnerable categories stuck and redundant in former IDP camp pose a big challenge to both security and development efforts. There is need therefore for reconstruction to deliver special targeted interventions particularly provision of vocational training and apprenticeship for this category of the population.

Additionally, a mix of both agricultural and non-agricultural activities/enterprises presents wider livelihood choices and also helps to reach a range of persons thus reducing vulnerability to agricultural related shocks.

Rebuilding traditional social support systems will facilitate promotion and achievement of social protection interventions which will help address exclusion of the chronically poor and vulnerable in the recovery process.

Attracting private sector investment in upcoming urban centres presents both growth and employment opportunities for the redundant population that has not heeded to the return process for varied reasons. This may subsequently help to reduce poverty.

Conflict has long term impact on well being and livelihoods. In protracted crisis therefore effective recovery and reconstruction requires long term government led investment in order to achieve substantial results rather than short term donor-led projects which have dominated the northern Uganda reconstruction process.

A factor of a low taxable base due to depletion of assets and resources and thus limited local revenue for supplementary local government funding in the region doesn't seem to inform central government budget releases. Additional central government funding and other requisite support is needed to rebuild and strengthen capacity of local governments in the northern region in order to effectively deliver within post conflict contexts and thus address regional and interregional imbalances.

Full involvement of local actors in humanitarian/relief support is crucial for capacity building and sustained delivery of services in protracted crisis.

The transition from humanitarian support to sustainable development efforts is complex. It thus requires proper planning, coordination and a gradual phase out keenly involving government and other local actors in order to limit gaps in service delivery.

There is need for social protection interventions in the region specifically targeting the extremely vulnerable persons who are likely not to benefit from the recovery process as it is currently implemented.

DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH AND TRAINING (DRT)

P. O. Box 22459 Kampala

Tel 256 (0) 312 263 629/3 (0) 414 269 495

Email: info@drt-ug.org

Website: www.drt-ug.org