The Journey Home

Multi-Discursive Perceptions on the Movement Patterns of Internally Displaced Persons, Northern Uganda

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- *Mot mot ocero munno poto* –

(Acoli proverb)

‘Slowly slowly prevented the European from falling’

Persistence, however slow, pays.
UGANDA
Gulu District has been divided into two districts: Gulu (North-East) and Amuru (South-West).
# OVERVIEW

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On paper, this thesis represents all the people that were part of my research in Northern Uganda from August 2007 to February 2008. It is about internally displaced persons, government officials, UN and NGO workers and the people in Kampala and Gulu Town. I dedicate this thesis to them. However, this thesis is just a fragment of the overall experience in being involved in the MPhil African Studies, the fieldwork and the writing process. I met new people and deepened relations for two years, from the moment I entered the first class of the MPhil up to this writing. Many I would like to thank.

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SUMMARY

In August 2006, the government of Uganda and the Lord’s Resistance Army – one of the most notorious rebel groups in Central Africa – signed a cease fire, putting a hold to 20 years of violent conflict in Northern Uganda. The conflict in Northern Uganda uprooted 1.6 million people. They found havens in one of the hundreds of ‘protected’ internal displacement camps in the region. Over the years the camps have become over congested and idleness was imposed upon the people as they were not allowed to leave the camps to cultivate their lands.

After 2004, when the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Egeland visited the region, pressure was put on the government to end this conflict. Hundreds of humanitarian agencies entered the region that had been neglected for almost twenty years. Two years later, the peace talks between the LRA and the government of Uganda started in Juba in the neighbouring country Sudan. The government of Uganda declared the war to be over and the region to be safe enough for the displaced people to return home shortly after. In some parts of Northern Uganda people did leave the camps for their homes. However, in Acholiland, people appeared to be hesitant to return.

The thesis will try for the reader to gain insight in how every single aspect contributes to the functioning or dis-functioning of the humanitarian and governmental response in current Northern Uganda in relation to the return process of IDPs. This research bridges different academic disciplines, and has a multi-discursive approach. In line with Mosse’s (2005) theories, it includes local perspectives in analysing humanitarian and development programmes. Local people, or beneficiaries, are part of a humanitarian programme; they shape and influence it.

This thesis is based upon fieldwork conducted in Northern Uganda between August 2007 and February 2008. It endeavours to answer the question: How can be explained why the Internally Displaced Persons of Gulu and Amuru districts are not returning home?

This question may be simple at first glance, but it is actually complex and multi-layered. Wanting to explain why people are not returning home demands an analysis that goes beyond current dynamics and experiences. The explanation lies in historical interpretations, various perceptions on war, peace, movement and development, the life worlds of the displaced and the relationships between several actors influencing and shaping the chain they are connected with. It will become clear that the simple question why people are not returning has complex and multiple dimensions. In finding explanations, three questions appeared to be crucial: 1. What are the perceptions on conflict, peace, return and development? 2. How is the humanitarian response coordinated and how do humanitarian actors relate to each other? 3. What are the local responses, those of the IDPs, on return and humanitarian
aid and what does this mean for the impact of humanitarian and government interventions and the process of movement?

This thesis approaches ‘war’ and ‘violence’ as social constructed phenomena. It implies that war is ingrained in society (Richards 2005; Hilhorst 2007; Lambach 2007). War does not ultimately result in peace, and peace does not always mean the end of war. ‘War’ does not always mean war in terms of violence and ‘peace’ is not always without violence. (Richards 2005:5) The lack of violence in an area is not an effective indicator of the end of the conflict. (Lambach 2007) In conflict situations, different players have different approaches to explaining realities. Humanitarian paradigms are dominated by terms ‘relief’, ‘reconstruction’, ‘rehabilitation’, ‘recovery’ etc. However, a universal approach is needed about the definition of the level of security, and the implications of shifting in programming. When this is not met, the social, political and economical positions of the war-affected people can be in danger or damaged. An approach touching upon local realities is therefore needed when responding to local needs.

The government of Uganda and most humanitarian agencies take a clear stand: The war is over, peace will come, and reconstruction is needed in order for Northern Uganda to develop soon. War is seen as something linear – rather than as a process. The notions of war by the Uganda government – that are adapted by the humanitarian community - fail to understand that the fact that the peace deal has not been signed yet is a serious restriction in the security situation in Northern Uganda. This not only creates a gap in perceptions between them and local realities, it also challenges the concept of ‘freedom of movement’, which is a human right according to the National IDP policy.

However, the war is not over yet. It will not even be ‘over’ when the deal has been signed. Twenty years of conflict have changed people and local societies. Violence, revenge, trauma; it will all prevent people from continuing their lives as if nothing has happened. IDPs, however, do not think in terms of ‘conflict’, ‘peace’, ‘reconstruction’ and ‘development’. They have very different notions and understandings of the current situation in Northern Uganda. The internally displaced persons of Gulu and Amuru district already reflect this in their movement process.

There is not one simple reason why people are not returning home. There are different reasons that vary from having no money to build a new hut, to animals that destroy their crops and homes and the lack of services in their village areas. However, there are two reasons that are brought forward by almost every respondent and being fear and doubt. Fear for the rebels that might come back and for boo_ kec (bandits); and doubt that these peace talks will fail again as the other attempts did in the past. The people in Northern Uganda dream of leaving the difficult circumstances in the camps and refer to their homes.
However, ‘home’ and ‘return’ are dynamic concepts. This thesis calls for a different approach to the movement patterns in current Acholiland. Movement should be regarded as a process, not as a solution, or an ending to a long lasting conflict. Despite the fact that some have built their huts in the villages, the village is not their home; many commute from the camp to the village. The leave at sunrise and return to the camp at sunset. They are too afraid to sleep in the huts where they are isolated and vulnerable to rebel activity and boo_kec. Others commute between the camp, Gulu town, and the village and leave family members in different sites.

In promoting the return process of IDPs in Acholiland, the government of Uganda are implicitly or explicitly creating influential implications for humanitarian programming and responses, and – even more important- to the life and the human rights of their citizens that are displaced. They have threatened to close the camps and push people home and to stop the food distribution in the camps on a large scale. Declaring the state of emergency over exonerates the government from the negative image of war and displacement within the country. At the same time – due to the launch of a major government driven development plan for the north – it fuels the government with millions of dollars form donor countries. The Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda would loose its credibility rapidly when it turns out that displacement is not yet over because people are not leaving the camps.

The presence of humanitarian agencies’ in the field enables them to observe the difficulties as well as opportunities of the displaced people’s lives. The humanitarian community should analyse the dynamics in the context of displacement critically. After all, there is a key role to play for the humanitarian community to monitor the government’s interventions and counter them when necessary. Humanitarian agencies should be aware of their social and political position in a society like the war torn Acholiland. They change the Acholi local society. However, there is no holistic approach to the situation in Northern Uganda by the government of Uganda, the UN and humanitarian agencies. There is confusion and there are disagreements about the legitimacy of the national IDP policy in the current situation which states that the war is over. The humanitarian aid chain in Northern Uganda is extremely bureaucratic; the frameworks are too complex; there are too many actors involved; there is suspicion and accusations between the actors; aid is politically charged and there are big differences in views between “the field” and the offices. There is over coordination that results in inappropriate and ineffectiveness of the humanitarian interventions. There is no agreement on how to facilitate the return process. All these mechanisms have resulted in a logistic disaster in which no one feels accountable for the lack of action.

This is deeply felt in the field. There are major gaps in terms of service delivery and humanitarian response. People feel that they are being pushed out of the camps against their will. Within the camps, far going selection procedures of agencies cause segregation in the community between those
who receive and those who are singled out. In the camps and sites where agencies do provide, internally displaced have encountered incidents of corruption and unfinished projects. There is frustration among the displaced about the assessments and interviews that are regularly conducted, because a follow up is rarely experienced. There is generally no direct communication between the IDPs and humanitarian programme officers which in turn results in a lack of response towards individual needs. Furthermore, many uncertain and mixed messages circulate about the provision of aid and the outcomes of the peace talks. The camps’ youth are accused of being ‘lazy’ and liking camp life too much where they can go to bars and discos. The Northern Uganda’s youth were born in a world of terror, in which they have lost family and friends, their childhood and their hopes and dreams. Moreover, these youth have been the major victims of this war; they fear the face fears of abductions and of becoming a child rebel. They stay in the camps because they still fear, as long as they are not certain peace in their region.

This thesis argues that humanitarian and governmental policies do not sufficiently correspond to the life world of IDPs. Pushing them out of camps is not the solution to the displacement in the region. Instead, this approach promoted by the government and some humanitarian agencies, seriously undermines the displaced people’s rights and their authorities to make their own choices. Education, health services, money for school fees and other service related activities help people to improve their lives. However, only one thing is seen as a solution to encampment and seen as a possible incentive to go home: peace. After all, the displaced people of Acholi have the right to decide when to move and where to.
1. INTRODUCTION

-‘Life in the camp is like someone has put you in a calabash.’2-

9 November 2003, Jan Egeland, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, travelled to Northern Uganda that had been in conflict for almost twenty years. His statements shook the world:

‘I am deeply shocked by what I have seen. (…) Northern Uganda is one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world. The situation can not be allowed to continue for another 17 years.’ (The Lancet 2003:1818)

All eyes were fixed on the invasion in Iraq following the war on terror after September 11th 2001. When Egeland called the crisis in Northern Uganda ‘worse than Iraq’ (The Lancet 2003:1818) the war in central Africa finally got the attention it deserved. Since 1986 rebel movements and most notably the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) have been in conflict with the Ugandan government army. The LRA’s leader is known as a notorious man fighting a horrific war. The LRA is infamously know for their atrocities committed on Northern Uganda’s civilians: an estimated 20000 children have been abducted by the rebels to either become a rebel or a sex slave; people have been killed, huts have been burned, ears, lips and hands have been chopped off and hundreds of thousands of people have fled their homes.

In 2004, the number of people that were displaced within Northern Uganda was estimated at 1.6 million: being 90% of the population. (Refugees International 2004) These Internally Displaced Persons lived in congested camps, excluded from basic services, economic activity and freedom of movement. After Jan Egeland’s interest in the region, humanitarian aid started to enter the region slowly, highly obstructed by insecurity and lack of access.

In July 2006, Joseph Kony and the Government of Uganda signed a cease-fire. It was the beginning of a long process of peace talks in Juba. Up to the day of this writing, a peace agreement has not been signed yet. Despite progression in making agreements on different sessions, Kony has not been signing the final accord.

This research took off during the first months of the peace talks. The interest for this region started to evolve after reading about the conflict, the displacement of the population and the lack of humanitarian response during the first years of the conflict.

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2 Interview in Agung main camp, female age 30, 26 September 2007.
I was intrigued by the astounding number of 90% of the population that had left their homes to live in camps. I was ashamed I did know any substantial detail about the situation in Northern Uganda and was at the same time astonished the region did not get any attention in the media or the international humanitarian community. I knew Uganda only as the Western “donor darling”. Million of dollars flow into the country each year from western governments to the government of Uganda. The conflict in the north seemed totally neglected.

This research was undertaken as part of the MPhil African Studies at the African Studies Centre Leiden and the University of Leiden. It included six months of fieldwork in Uganda – one month in the capital Kampala and five in Gulu district in the northern part of the country. Upon arrival in Uganda in August 2007, the cease-fire had lasted one full year. During this year the security situation in Northern Uganda had improved drastically. Rebel activity was absent and humanitarian organizations reported the return of people to their homes. This return process however differed from district to district. Upon arrival in Gulu district in September 2007, it was estimated that 70% of the Acholi people still remained in camps; about 25% had moved to smaller settlements outside the camps and 3 to 4% had moved back to their villages. The region had been declared safe enough to return, humanitarian relief started to respond to this new situation and the government launched the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for the North (PRDP). The great masses did not all of a sudden start to move however, this in contrast to what the government and the humanitarian community hoped to see.

However both return and the developing of the north are not possible when the people in the camps and new sites are not moving. They are not moving in great masses as the government and humanitarian community would like to see it. This thesis is therefore about the following question:

How can be explained why the Internally Displaced Persons of Gulu and Amuru districts are not returning home?

Northern Uganda is challenged with an impasse after two years of ongoing peace talks. The level of security has improved, but still people are not leaving the camps and going home. Wanting to explain why people are not returning home demands an analysis that goes beyond current dynamics and experiences. The explanation lies in historical interpretations, various perceptions on war, peace, movement and development, the life worlds of the displaced and the relationships between several actors influencing and shaping the chain they are connected with. The sub questions related to these different levels to understand the movement patterns of IDPs are as follows:

- What are the perceptions of various actors on conflict and peace?
- How is the humanitarian community constructed, in terms of coordination and relations between government and the humanitarian agencies?
What are the IDPs’ perceptions on returning and on humanitarian aid? How are relations with humanitarian agencies valued and what does this mean for the impact of humanitarian and government interventions and the process of movement?

I attempted to conduct a multi-discursive approach. This means that attention is paid on the functioning of the tensions between actors involved in the humanitarian field. The neglect of the dynamics, the negotiations and strategies between all actors leads to a one sighted and thus incomplete insight of humanitarian aid processes. (Mosse 2005; Wedel et al 2005) Often anthropologists conduct researches on micro- or grass roots level, involving local people and their life stories only. Political scientists or public administration research highlight for example political processes; analyse policy texts or measure effectiveness and efficiency. When wanting to analyse humanitarian processes I believe it is crucial to involve all actors involved as they are connected through money, power, and social relations. There is a constant interaction and influence between the chains of actors. Therefore I refer to the ‘humanitarian aid chain’ in Gulu and Amuru districts. It is important to go beyond prejudices against actors (Mosse 2005) and to see how the humanitarian process in Northern Uganda is constructed, providing the full picture. Not only is this research multi-discursive but thus also combining different academic disciplines.

This research is significant as it seeks to go beyond terminologies and language. Terminologies and language may be powerful and meaningful within certain discourses; it can however be completely meaningless within other discourses. It is up to the researcher to define the meaning and implications of certain choices in language and terminologies. And what it means when discourses compete or collaborate. Therefore it will critically examine developmental terminology like ‘relief’, ‘return’ and ‘reconstruction’, how –and if- it is given meaning in the local realities.

Furthermore, this thesis addresses new debates in the humanitarian and conflict discourse as the academic study on internal displacement has stayed behind, in contrast to refugee studies. The ethnographic model of David Mosse (2005) in which all actors play an equal substantial role in the analysis of humanitarian programming is yet to be applied to internal displacement settings. This would unravel interesting and unexplored dynamics between humanitarian agencies, IDPs and the government. The role of the government in humanitarian settings is rarely explored as it is generally assumed in academic literature that the government is unwilling or unable to cooperate. This thesis will shed a different light upon that assumption explaining the powerful role of the government. The government is implicitly or explicitly creating influential implications for humanitarian programming and responses, and – even more important- to the life and the human rights of their citizens that are displaced.
This thesis is structured as follows. Chapter two will provide the reader the necessary background information to the current situation in Northern Uganda. It will help the reader to situate the research by describing Gulu and surroundings. The chapter sheds light upon the historical dimension of the conflict and politics in Northern Uganda, as well as displacement and the humanitarian response.

Chapter three summarises the theories that are a foundation to the empirical data as well as the final analysis. It explores the theories on humanitarianism, conflict and peace as well on the more practical factors of humanitarianism; internal displacement, return, neutrality and the use of terminology and labelling.

Chapter four outlines the methodology used during the fieldwork in Uganda. It elaborates on the methods and the choice of respondents. This chapter however also describes the implications of conducting a multi-discursive research in an isolated town within a small international and humanitarian community. It reflects on the limitations of the research as well as the position of the researcher as well as her personal position – that are often intermingled.

The last chapters are based upon the empirical data obtained in Uganda. Chapter five and six are on conceptual understandings of various actors of the current situation in Northern Uganda. Chapter seven and eight explore the humanitarian aid industry in practice as well as the perceptions on local level. Chapter five describes the understanding of the current situation in Northern Uganda from the humanitarian community’s point of view - that includes the government of Uganda. It explains three different notions: (1) conflict (2) return (3) development.

Chapter six explains the movement patterns of the Acholi people by highlighting the IDPs’ views on ‘home’ and their reasons for moving or not moving. It will become clear that the internally displaced of Gulu and Amuru district have different notions - than the government and humanitarian community have - on what home means for them after years of encampment and what are seen as strong factors influencing their decision making concerning movement. Although reasons vary, the reasons related to security are prevalent in every person’s reality for being reluctant to move.

Chapter 7 goes into the more practical side of the humanitarian setting in Gulu district: it explores the actors involved in the humanitarian aid chain and the relationship between agencies and government. The chapter ends with a reflection of how agencies function and how bureaucracy, and the lack of accountability and responsibility negatively influence the humanitarian response and the facilitation in the return process.

Chapter eight finally seeks to understand the relationships of IDPs and government and humanitarian agencies by mapping the humanitarian response regarding equal distribution, selection of
beneficiaries as well as frustrations and the stigmatization of groups. This chapter reveals the rarely explored field of how IDPs perceive and value the aid, the agencies and the government and whom they think is responsible for filling the gaps.

Chapter nine is the final analysis of the research question as well as the sub questions and my understanding of the current situation in Northern Uganda, politically, humanitarian and socially. It will become clear that the simple question why people are not returning has complex and multiple explanations.

Although this research may seem ambitious in wanting to include all actors and their relationships in the humanitarian discourse in Northern Uganda, it is unavoidable when wanting to analyse and understand the dynamics in current Northern Uganda. This thesis is not about humanitarian aid only, nor on government structures, the life worlds of IDPs, the food distribution of WFP, the Cluster Approach of UN and the conflicting mandates of NGOs in isolation. The reader may be disappointed not to find an in depth analysis of one of these aspects. But that has not been the aim of this research. Instead the reader will hopefully gain insight in how every single aspect contributes to the functioning or dis-functioning of the humanitarian and governmental response in current Northern Uganda in relation to the return process of IDPs.
2. **BACKGROUND INTO NORTHERN UGANDA’S SITUATION**

**Introduction**

This chapter will give necessary insights into the context of Northern Uganda. It will start with a compact political history of the region followed by the features of the conflict. It will end with explaining the humanitarian setting in the north and the aid flowing into the region. This chapter serves to get a brief insight into the historical background that explains the current situation in Northern Uganda.

**Impressions of Gulu and Surroundings Today**

An approximately seven hour’s bus drive from Kampala takes you to the town Gulu in the Northern part of Uganda. During the drive the landscape changes from green banana trees to drier areas with high green grasses. The road is completely tarred from Kampala to Gulu but is also full of potholes. The 330 kilometre travel distance does not take the expected four hours, but seven hours and sometimes even more! (Depending on weather, passengers, traffic or the vehicle’s condition).

After about six hours the landscape turns into hills and green forest. This welcoming change in the view symbolises the ecological and social border between Northern and Southern Uganda. The two regions are taken apart by the Nile and only connected by the famous ‘Karuma Bridge’ near the town Karuma. The sight is spectacular when passing the bridge: the Nile roughly makes his way through rocks and small islands with big trees, to beautifully descent at Murchison Falls, a couple of dozen kilometres from the bridge. Baboons often relax at the roadside, picking up food leftovers people throw out of their vehicle’s windows.

Karuma Bridge area has not always been famous for its beautiful scenery. Most people in Uganda know the bridge as being the psychological border between North and South Uganda. The Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) has never crossed the bridge in order to terrorise the south. North of Karuma Bridge however, the roads were often the target of attacks and ambushes of the rebels. NGO vehicles coming from the south used to stop in front of the bridge to put up their white vehicle’s flag to show their neutrality. Passing the Karuma Bridge for years meant entering the war zone of Northern Uganda.

The last hour that it takes to get to Gulu Town shows the war’s legacy. Agriculture activity is almost absent. Along the road you will find no villages or spontaneous spots with street vendors. You do pass a number of large ‘towns’ along the road; with one level bricked storey buildings displaying some
economic activities and with numerous mud huts packed together, sometimes as far as your eyes can reach. These towns are not normal towns, they are known as IDP camps.

Passing them heading to Gulu Town does not reveal the hardships people face living in those camps. They look like ‘normal’ villages, not fenced or supervised, as you often see with refugee camps. From the outside there is nothing odd to see in these ‘villages’ if you would not know anything about Northern Uganda’s massive displacement. The bus stops regularly at these camps, dropping people with many suitcases full of commodities or presents arriving from the capital.

Entering the north instantly increases the outside temperature and the brightness of the sun. The north faces two extreme seasons; a long dry season in which the soil and rivers dry up and no single raindrop will fall. This season runs roughly from November until April with heat peaks around New Years, with a temperature reaching the 40°C. After April the rains come, often so unpredictable and devastating that roads flush away and harvests fail. On my arrival in the Gulu district September 2007, floods had separated certain areas from others, due to the increased level of water in the rivers. Roads and bridges were flooded and certain areas, especially around Lango and Teso districts, were isolated for roughly two months.

Although it is often said that Northern Uganda’s soil is extremely fertile, the ecological features make it very difficult to make optimal use of it. The Acholi are experienced in living in hardship when it comes to food supply. The Acholi have been farmers for over two thousand years, cultivating several crops, especially sorghum, millet and sesame (simsim)3. People had small cattle and people used to hunt to supplement their agricultural output. (Atkinson 1989:20-1)

![Entering Gulu town from Kampala, billboard](image1)

![White Nile taken from Karuma Bridge](image2)

Two large roadside billboards announce that we are getting closer to the town: one about sugar daddies and one excitingly tells us a famous bank has opened a branch office in Gulu. The billboards

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3 Simsim as it was always translated in English. Simsim is Arabic for sesame.
symbolise the rapid changes Gulu Town is facing since the peace talks have started in July 2006. The images of thousands of children commuting to the town every night, to sleep at the town’s verandas or in tents to be protected from abductions were day-to-day realities of the past. The images of an isolated Gulu town in which certain areas were too dangerous to go to, also belongs to previous times. The town is no longer isolated from the capital or the economic trading spots in the Sudan. People and commodities can now move freely and that is very visible. Supermarkets and local shops sell products form Kenya, South Africa and the Middle East, ranging from chocolate to sugar and pasta. Around five air-conditioned banks have opened their doors within two years. Local restaurants prepare local food as well as chips and fried chicken, or even pizza. The market has a great stock of all kinds of products, even apples and all kinds of spices.

The centre of Gulu Town is not very big. There are two parts, both on a hill. The first part is the hectic, lively and busy part of Gulu Town that has six parallel roads with two big roads crossing them. The market is quite large and divided into sections based on the products they sell there. Just across the street from the market is the compound where I was staying with three other families. Living ‘downtown’ meant a lot of advantages in terms of easy access to shops, people, public transport and local restaurants. But it also meant there was no escape from loud music, shouting people, and crossing streets without fear of loosing your life. The streets are dominated by the so-called bodabodas, motor taxis. Literally at every corner of the street you can find a bodabodas stand, with a number of boys waiting for customers - sometimes up to 15. I must say, although it is often advised not to take bodabodas because in most accidents in Uganda these motors are involved, ‘taking a boda’ was huge fun and moreover the best kind of public transport I have ever experienced. They are fast, cheap⁴ and if you will never need to walk more than 10 steps to get one. Also the Acholi enjoy this means of transport a lot. Not surprisingly, bodabodas are a huge business with a lot of competition and a job many young boys can easily do to generate income.

⁴ A one way trip to almost everywhere within town would cost 500 shillings, which is equivalent to 20 eurocents.
A Bodaboda would get me to the second part of the town every day, sometimes a couple of times. Not that it is very far: the main road between them is less then a 10-minute walk. The road goes a little down and then a little up, leaving swamp at both sides. You will pass the main post office and the District Government Offices before getting to the most beautiful street of Gulu. Years ago the missionaries planted big trees there, giving that area a relaxed and cool breeze. This part of Gulu has a completely different feel than the downtown one. Here big houses and offices with gardens and fences are part of the scenery. The two most expensive hotels -compared to the local ones, not to be compared to the Sheraton - are in this area, one already having an outdoor pool, the other hotel was constructing one. Most NGOs and UN offices are there, it also holds most of the houses for the international NGO staff.

Gulu Town is fascinating: walking around, you will find both optimism and hardship. The town is extremely crowded, as many people have fled to town during the war. But also crowded because Gulu Town is sometimes cynically called ‘NGO town’. Aid workers, drivers, researchers, volunteers: they are all there. Gulu keeps its local feel however, in which you will meet many contradictions. The gap between the urban displaced living in the slums with no penny to spend and the international aid workers enjoying their barbecues in their own gardens with local house staff is absurd. That’s Gulu. A town in the epicentre of one of the most long lasting wars in Sub Saharan Africa.

Turmoil years: post-independence and the rise of the NRM/NRA

Democracy in Africa rooted when indigenous people had to deal with colonial powers (Omara-Otunnu 1992:445) In the north ethnic groups were struggling within themselves and with others, but generally they joined their search for an opposition to the southern dominance that was created during colonialism. There was a general belief that a northerner as president of Uganda could make up for these imbalances. (Glentworth & Hanock 1973:240) The Baganda in the south were suspicious as they were convinced that the government was favouring the north. The UPC, Obote’s party, consisted of northerners and some people from the west. They needed the Baganda to form a majority in the National Assembly. During the first years of his regime a ‘political marriage’ was established between the political party Uganda People’s Congress and the Kabaka5. However this marriage was short-lived. In 1966 Obote attacked the Baganda militarily and politically by burning down the Kabaka palace. Obote got help from his army that consisted of predominantly northerners and was led by General Idi Amin. (Glentworth & Hanock 1973:241) There was no national unity. (Glentworth & Hanock 1973:242) The situation in Uganda got worse:

‘Shortly after independence, the country degenerated into tyranny, chaos, violence, recurrent upheavals, war, economic collapse and moral degeneration. (.s.) State-sponsored violence, extrajudicial killings and the violation of basic human rights were elevated to the level op public policy.’ (Mugaju 2000:8)

5 The Kabaka is the king of Buganda (region) and the Baganda (people).
Obote’s successful attempt to seize more power after the burning down of the Kabaka’s palace led to Obote’s knowledge that he needed the army to stay in power. (Glentworth & Hanock 1973:249) Amin and his army became powerful. A confrontation was inevitable. In 1971, Amin planned a strike that ended in a coup. Southerners were not against it, despite the fact that Amin was a northerner as well. He promised all Ugandans a life without mismanagement, corruption and a secret police. (Glentworth & Hanock 1973:250) Promises that would have been a relief to all Ugandans.

However, the presidents from the north did not bring national unity and stability. To the contrary: the distance between north and south was widened and the situation degraded desperately. Murders, imprisonment and exile marked Uganda’s history between 1962 and 1986. (Mugaju 2000:8) Obote was a brutal dictator. Amin’s regime represented eight years of oppression, killings and human rights abuses followed. His motto was: ‘I can fight therefore I must rule’. (Omara-Otunnu 1992:445) When the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) captured Kampala in 1979, Idi Amin fled the country. After the elections in 1980 Obote started serving his second term as president. Guerrillas accused Obote of sabotaging the elections. One of these rebel groups was the New Resistance Army (NRA) headed by Yoweri Museveni. In 1985 Obote’s own commanders overthrew him in a coup. Tito Okello became the president for a short period of time. He was overruled by the leader of the NRA, Yoweri Museveni, who was not happy that Okello had taken power while it was the NRA that had contributed to Obote’s leave.

The first years of the NRA were enthusiastically embraced by academia as well as the international media. (Omara-Otunnu 1992:447) In the 1990s Museveni was considered to be one the ‘new leaders’ or ‘new breed’ of Africa. (Oloka-Onyango 2004:29) During the first year of power, Museveni announced that his regime would be an interim one. He would restore peace and rebuild infrastructure and create unity. (Omara-Otunnu 1992:448) However, after one year of power it became clear that the ‘interim’ government of Museveni was not going to leave their ruling position for a long time. The first promised elections were not held and the president gave a statement that nothing were to be written about him or his party, the NRA, in a critical light. No one was allowed to hold meetings or rallies, or to express their political preferences in any way. (Omara-Otunnu 1992:448) In the meantime Uganda experienced a severe economic downfall. At certain times it was impossible for the people in the rural areas to obtain basic necessities like soap, salt and matches. The NRA was accused of spending 40% of the nation’s public finances on the military. (Omara-Otunnu 1992:453) People were puzzled why such a big amount was spent on military while Uganda had no serious external threat. The money was spent to control Ugandan citizens. (Omara-Otunnu 1992:454) The NRA troops destroyed villages in the northern part of Uganda and civilians were put in

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6 As were the presidents Paul Kagame of Rwanda, Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia and Isaias Afewerki of Eritrea 7 For a good overview of NRA’s restricting policies and actions during their first years in power I recommend to read Omara-Otunnu (1992).
concentration camps. (454) Museveni admitted that his troops had burnt food stores in Northern Uganda. His explanation was that everything should be done to weaken the rebels. (Omara-Otunnu 1992:454-5) In Northern Uganda an opposition party had emerged under the name Uganda Peoples Democratic Movement (UPDM). Alice Lakwena, a young female Acholi founded a movement known as the Holy Spirit Mobile Force. (Omara-Otunnu 1992:455) Her movement was a serious threat to the NRA. Nevertheless, her movement could not overcome the NRA’s superiority. (Omara-Otunnu 1992:457) Museveni took this opportunity to claim the Northerners to be backward and wild. Foreign journalists uncritically published these same allegations of Northerners. (Omara-Otunnu 1992:457-8) Although defeated within a short period of time, Omara-Otunnu analyses Alice Lakwena’s influence as something significant for what happened after her defeat:

‘Lakwena was merely a vehicle through which social discontent in the north of Uganda found expression. She was able to gain tenacious followers who were prepared to risk their lives against all odds because a cross-section of marginalised inhabitants recognised her as a symbol of both their plight and their aspirations.’ (Omara-Otunnu 1992:458)

Her followers did not have identity or ethnicity in common. Alice Lakwena brought all those together who had been politically and economically marginalised and fallen victim of NRA troops. (Omara-Otunnu 1992:459) The no-party democracy promoted by Museveni turned out to be a ‘militarist autocracy’ relying on ‘ethnic chauvinism’ (Omara-Otunnu 1992:463)

The ones promoting no-party democracy have argued that a ‘backward country like Uganda’ cannot afford the ‘luxury of multipartyism’. (Mugaju&Oloka-Onyango 2000:2) In their view, Uganda has suffered from dictatorial regimes, war, economic downfall and moral degeneration. Previous leaders were all sensitive for regional, ethnic and religious interests of their followers. Uganda needed to become one again, one national unity in which the economy gets time to revive and democratic systems are put in place. (Mugaju&Oloka-Onyango 2000:2) After establishing this, the country would be ready for multipartyism. Opposition of the no-party democracy model in Uganda claimed that it was just a way to legitimatise one leader ruler ship, obstructing opposition parties to organise themselves. It was an attempt by the NRM to monopolise power in Uganda. (Mugaju&Oloka-Onyango 2000:2)

**Historical Divide in Uganda: North/South**

The bus drive to the north reveals the ecological differences between northern and southern Uganda. There are many more expressions of this divide. Linguistically, the people in Northern Uganda speak languages that belong to the Nilo-Saharan language family as opposed to Southern languages that belong to Niger-Congo/Bantu. It is hard for people to speak of a Uganda that is one. (RLP 2000:10) Many authors have argued that the north/south divide was emphasised during the British colonial rule. (Doom&Vlassenroot 1999; RLP 2004; Gingyera-Pinycwa 1992) They go back to British colonial
rule, blaming the imperialists for the creation of differences between the northern and southern part of Uganda. The Baganda in the south were rewarded for their collaboration with the British. Roads, infrastructure, hospitals and a university were built in the south during colonial rule. Northerners were considered unorganised and tribal. (RLP 2004:10) In their indirect rule the southerners got more political privileges. The British enhanced migrant labour from the economically underexploited north to the more economical constructed south (Gingyera-Pinycwa 1992:10). Ethnic tensions were exploited by the British to ensure the Ugandans would not massively resist their colonial rule. (RLP 2004:10)

Doom & Vlassenroot (1999) point out that the British recruited northerners for the army, as northern Uganda was undeveloped. (Doom&Vlassenroot 1999:7) It was part of British colonial practice to recruit soldiers from areas that are outside the economic hearts of the country and from tribes that have warrior roots. In Uganda that were the northerners. (Glentworth & Hanock 1973:249) There was a military dominance in the north, which was maintained after independence in 1962. The following national leaders, both from the north: Milton Obote Idi Amin and again Obote, did not attempt to change the northerner’s predominant role as soldiers.

Uganda’s ethnic diversities contrasted the way independence was enforced in Kenya and Ghana. There the British fought oppressive tribes that seized power after independence. In Uganda the transition from colonial rule to independence was developed behind the scenes. The ethnic groups in Uganda were too small to have one dominating, but were also too large – and not cohesive enough – to create an imbalance in power. The colonial period emphasised the divide between northern and southern Uganda, but there had not been a fight for power. Obote silently seized power, repressing the frustrations about the divide between the north and south. (Glentworth & Hanock 1973:239)

The divide between northern and southern Uganda is also prevalent due to lack of information. Southern Ugandans say that the issues in current northern Uganda are none of their businesses. They say they have problems of their own and are not concerned about the Northerners ‘who are killing each other’. (RLP 2004:12) During Obote’s second regime, people in the Luwero Triangle\(^8\) expressed their support for NRA. Obote reacted with reprisals against civilians ending in 300,000 deaths. Until today the southerners hold the northerners responsible for this mass killing. (Doom & Vlassenroot 1999:9) Northerners complain that Acholis are still discriminated among southerners in accessing jobs and university positions.\(^9\)

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\(^8\) The Luwero triangle is situated between the three lakes Victoria, Albert and Kyoga.
\(^9\) Personal communication with several Acholi.
The Conflict in the North and Displacement

There is no consensus on the question when the conflict ‘started’ in Northern Uganda. Numerous factors and incidents could have triggered the violence that followed. Or as Dolan (2005) puts it:

(...) what defines a particular period of violence as a war in its own right rather than simply one more in a succession of phases of violence? The so-called LRA war, after all, follows on from the violence of the Obote and Amin periods, violence during the establishment of colonial rule, and the depredations of the ivory and slave trade in the nineteenth century, to mention only the most obvious. (Dolan 2005:67)

In order to provide a quick overview of events and incidents of the war, Dolan (2005) adopted a chronological approach, divided into five stages.10 Dolan’s (2005) five phases are as follows:

Phase 1: 1986 - 1988
Phase 2: June 1988 - March 1994
Phase 3: April 1994 - early December 1999
Phase 4: Late December 1999 – March 2002
Phase 5: April 2002 – 2004

The first phase started when Yoweri Museveni and his New Resistance Movement (NRM) came into power in 1986, the people in Northern Uganda anxiously waited for what would happen. Soon the New Resistance Army (NRA), the army of the NRM, had captured the north. As a reaction, different insurgent groups were formed, the most notable one being The Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) of Alice Lakwena. Both the NRA and insurgent groups committed numerous killings, lootings and burnings. When the HSM was defeated, a peace agreement was signed. However, out of the HSM other rebel groups were formed, one was the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). (Dolan 2005: 72-4) There were severe tensions between the president Museveni and notably the Acholi in the north. When the NRM came into power, they accused the Acholi of being ‘tribal opportunists’. According to the president Museveni, the reason for the turmoil in Northern Uganda from 1986 onwards was because the Acholi people could no longer loot cattle from wealthy fellow Ugandans. (Westbrook 2000)

During the second phase tens of thousands of people were forcibly displaced by the NRA. The NRA was infamously known for the looting and killing of the Acholi’s cattle. Meanwhile, the LRA committed atrocities, horrific in nature: the cutting of noses, lips and ears for example. The government launched Operation North in 1991. Over the years the violence decreased until in 1993 there were the first attempt to have peace negotiations between the government and the LRA. The prospects seemed to be good for a while. However, in 1994 the talks failed, which triggered a tremendous increase in violence. (Dolan 2005:75-6)

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10 As this chapter serves to be a brief insight into Northern Uganda’s situation I will follow that approach and summarize it even more. For more extended literature on the conflict in Northern Uganda see Dolan’s (2005) complete dissertation, as well as Doom&Vlassenroot (1999)
The third phase was characterised by ongoing LRA atrocities of a rarely seen brutality. Apart from the ongoing killings, lootings, mutilations and abductions, the LRA committed three major massacres, ambushes and a big abduction operation on a girls’ secondary school.\(^\text{11}\) The level of insecurity made people feel that they were no longer safe at home. Thousands of young children commuted between their village and ‘safer’ areas like the streets of Gulu town, hospitals, NGOs and churches where they spent the night. Sometimes they commuted several kilometres in fear of abduction, every single evening and back in the morning. Others left their villages for the so-called ‘protected villages’ declared by Museveni’s government. Most of these sites were already trading centres or small towns.: the majority however were forced by the government’s army, the Uganda People’s Defence Force (UPDF). The people were ordered to leave their villages for the closest trading centre or new established camp. The displacement of people was a temporary solution. The displaced people were not allowed to leave the camps as they could be mistaken for rebels and be shot. In this phase, the conflict was marked a war between the Sudan and Uganda, as both countries were supporting the insurgents of the opposing government. The conflict then attracted more international diplomatic attention urging the government of Uganda to take initiative to end the conflict. The government of Uganda kept on emphasizing that this conflict with ‘bandits’ needed military solutions. In the meantime, international and local organisations took initiatives to help the formally abducted and the Acholi communities. In 1998 and 1999, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch published reports on the human rights situation in Northern Uganda. When finally the LRA seemed to get tired of fighting, international effort was made to get both LRA and Museveni around the peace talks table. However, the UPDF continued to fight rebels in the Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Under international pressure the government of Uganda signed a peace agreement with Sudan in 1999. Being furious about the lack of involvement of the LRA, Joseph Kony and his soldiers massively came back to the northern part of Uganda. The conflict has started all over again. The rebels were back and the Acholi who had found a way back to their homes found themselves back in the congested camps. (Dolan 2005:76-85)

\(^\text{11}\) These included the Attiak massacre of 22 April 1995, the ambush of the Karuma/Pakwach convoy of 8 March 1996, the Acholi refugee camp massacre of July 1996, St Mary’s College abductions in October 1996 (the ‘Aboke Girls’), and the Lokung/Palabek massacre of some 412 people in January 1997, as cited by Dolan (2005:77)
The fourth phase was marked with international military involvement. After September 11th 2001, a new paradigm known as ‘the War on Terror’ resulted in the LRA being put on the UAS list of terror. The effects were tremendous: the government of Uganda, together with the UK and Sudan, agreed to take serious military actions against the LRA by invading the region they kept themselves. In 2002, known as ‘Operation Iron Fist, troops entered Southern Sudan. The training of the troops was funded by the USA. (Dolan 2005:85-9)

The fifth phase started with the illegitimate optimism to fight the LRA. Ten thousand UPDF soldiers were deployed to Southern Sudan and many died. Instead of fighting the LRA and capturing or killing Joseph Kony, the UPDF let the LRA take its chances to go back to Northern Uganda while the government’s army was busy fighting in neighbouring Sudan. The LRA expanded beyond Acholiland towards other parts of Northern Uganda. The number of child abductions reached its peak, with 5000 in 9 months in 2002-2003. Night commuting was a daily reality for many other children. Museveni approached the International Criminal Court to prosecute Joseph Kony and his higher officials. By the end of 2004, around 80 to 90% of the Acholi people lived in displacement and the UN World Food Programme distributed food for around 1.5 million people in Northern Uganda. (Dolan 2005:89-92)

The violence continued in the years to follow. In 2004, the LRA attacked Barlonyo camp in Lira district, killing over 330 people. This was followed by a big demonstration in which ten thousand people urged to government to better protect the IDP camps. (HRW 2004) In early 2005 another attempt was made to have peace talks but again these failed. The LRA extended their attacks to Sudanese civilians
and aid workers in Northern Uganda making relief organisation temporary leave the region. The ICC issued arrest warrants for five LRA leaders, including Joseph Kony and his second commander Vincent Otti. Civic and religious leaders expressed their concern that the warrants would obstruct possible future peace talk attempts. (HRW 2005) The beginning of 2006 marked by a continuation of LRA attacks however less compared to previous years. In July 2006 the regional government of Southern Sudan initiated peace talks between the LRA and the government of Uganda. A cease-fire was signed and the agenda was agreed. The peace talks have been financed through bilateral and multilateral donors. Under pressure from critics, the government of Uganda proposed to withdraw the ICC warrants against the LRA leaders. This is however not possible: the ICC is now in charge and the government of Uganda is no longer in the position to influence the ICC process.12 The peace talks have raised the first expectations for those to return home who have been displaced. (HRW 2006)

**Humanitarianism: general background**

After the Second World War and the foundation of the United Nations, humanitarian responses got international attention. The centuries that followed humanitarianism changed. Duffield (1994:7-10) provides an overview that can be summarised as follows. In the 1960s the UN only operated in countries with recognised governments. NGOs (often church-based) filled the gap and acted cross-borders. This demanded a neutral and no mandated position of NGOs. In the 1980s the funding from donor moved away from states. That meant an increased humanitarian role for NGOs. The so-called ‘safety nets’ spread across the continent of Africa. At the end of the 1980s: the UN held the first mandated operations that crossed borders. Humanitarian aid was used as a promotion tool to peace initiatives. The UN also started to operate in unresolved conflict areas. It was the beginning of a search for an integrated approach to addressing needs in a complex emergency situation. However, UN itself has limited implementing capacity. NGOs were attracted as partners to do the UN implementation. This resulted in the change of operational status of NGOs. The NGOs now had the question whether to work under the UN or not. Moreover, the policy instruments of NGOs increased.

There was a search for new patterns of power in the global arena. The Cold War can be labelled as the war of “superpower rivalry”. (Diehl 2005:4) With the extension of their mandate, the UN started focusing on humanitarian assistance, nation building, and election supervision. (Diehl 2005:4) Operations of both UN and NGOs became more political in nature. Some interventions demanded partiality. That seemed inevitable, but new peacekeeping missions did not necessarily translate into greater effectiveness in halting armed conflict or promoting conflict resolution. (Diehl 2005:4) The downfall started when UN and NGOs performed badly in some of the most notorious wars: the Gulf war, Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda. Donors encouraged recipient bilateral governments to set up their

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12 Many scholars and professionals have written about the justice and reconciliation process in Northern Uganda and the tensions between justice (ICC warrants) and peace (withdrawing the warrants to encourage Kony to sign the deal)
own operational emergency capacity. In the 1990s humanitarianism started to get integrated with the
dynamics of violence. As Duffield (1994) explains:

‘Ordered war economies have given way to more fragmented patterns of violence
and asset stripping. For many movements and factions, the control and manipulation
of relief assistance has become an important aspect of the political economy of
conflict (Scott-Villiers 1993). Local power relations have been altered and new ones
fostered. It has placed aid workers in positions of great risk and uncertainty (Jean
1993).’ (Duffield 1994:10)

The humanitarian work of NGOs and the UN has resulted in seeing ongoing wars as normal instead of
unprecedented. This is what Duffield (1994) calls the “normalisation of the systemic crisis”. (Duffield
1994:10) The so-called new wars sometimes last so long that it is hard to appoint reasons for the
ongoing conflict. The new wars are messy and complex. Interventions are therefore complex as well.
Furthermore, the number of policy instruments of donor government had increased. They can choose
from funding ICRC, NGOs, UN, or own operations. This results in the diminishing of the collective
international responsibility ideas. Interests, media exposure and political advantages are now
determining engagement. (Duffield 1994:10)

**Internally Displaced Persons**

Humanitarianism in IDP settings faces other challenges. The official definition of an Internally
Displaced Person is:

Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their
homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid
the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human
rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an
internationally recognised State border.” (OCHA 1998: paragraph 2)

In the IDPs definition it is all about the words ‘**who have not crossed an internationally recognised
state border**’. Internally displaced persons are sometimes referred to as ‘**refugees, all but in name**’
\(^{13}\), meaning that IDPs are exposed to the same challenges, social and economical problems, fears and
traumas as **refugees, who did cross** an internationally recognised border. The main difference
between the two in humanitarian aid however, is the international mandate to protect. Refugees are
covered by the 1951 Refugee Convention established in Geneva. IDPs are legally, in theory, the
government’s responsibility.\(^{14}\) In most countries, this is a highly problematic construction. It is said
that often the governments lack the political will, resources, and funds and are often highly
mistrusted by the internally displaced. In these cases, NGOs have a complementary function. Both for
UNHCR and the involved NGOs there is an interesting dynamic between what is legally agreed, and
the field experience and the need to ensure human rights.

\(^{13}\) UNHCR website, 20 June 2007

\(^{14}\) Ibid.
During the 1990s there were more IDPs than refugees worldwide. Geographical obstacles were preventing people to cross a border. As Cohen&Deng (1998) explain, people tend to seek for familiarity in culture and religion and a place where they can speak the same language. It is hard for people to leave for places where they have never been. Or they go to places where they expect protection. (Cohen&Deng 1998:29) The US Committee for Refugees (USCR) acknowledges that these are estimates, but they state that there were between 20 and 25 million IDPs worldwide in 1994. (Cohen&Deng 1998:31) However, due to the lack of coordination between agencies, responses have been uneven. Since 1980s, UNHCR slowly started to respond to the IDP situation. The General Assembly appointed an Emergency Relief Coordinator in 1991. The Inter Agency Standing Committee created a Task Force for IDPs in 1992. (Cohen&Deng 1998:127) The Oslo Declaration Plan of Action, written in 1993, identifies IDPs as a specific group as was encouraged by many NGOs and UNHCR. They thought it would be easier to hold governments accountable as well as promoting the inclusion of this group in humanitarian programming. (Cohen&Deng 1998:29)

It is hard to define a person as internally displaced. Some see internal displacement as a result of conflict only, others include natural disasters and development projects. There are misunderstandings about if one should classify internal displacement as such as well as the question when displacement ends. (Mooney 2005:9) According to Mooney (2005) the answers to these relevant questions are in the concepts of equality and vulnerability Specific needs of IDPs need to be addressed. (Mooney 2005:23)

However internationally agreed, practically some agencies struggle with internal displacement. Within the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for example, internal displacement does not officially fit in their mandate. Specifically for Uganda the UNHCR established a couple of objectives for 2007 which includes the establishment of ‘an IDP return monitoring framework’ and ‘the completion of an assessment of the needs of vulnerable IDPs, linked to their return’. They are also attempting to set up a ‘protection monitoring and reporting mechanism in selected IDP camps’. Finally they will focus on training and capacity-building in protection, protection monitoring, camp management, counselling and support for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and in vulnerability-related issues and return methods’. (UNHCR 2007)

**Humanitarianism in Northern Uganda**

Having provided humanitarian assistance for many years in the mother camps, the humanitarian community currently faces a different challenge in the question of intervention in the resettlement process to the new and decongestion sites. Although labelled as the first steps to reconstruction and stability, the new sites are habituated in the background of fear, feelings of insecurity and lack of
solutions and needs. Humanitarian aid agencies in principle do not work together with governments.15 One can challenge this however, in questioning their interventions in camps established by the government of Uganda in the past, as well as the current decongestion sites. Now we are facing a transition phase from emergency to reconstruction, in which the government of Uganda and parish based governments are encouraged to take up their responsibility in reconstruction, new relations and interactions are about to emerge between humanitarian agencies and government officials. But how far can agencies go in the political context? (Dolan&Hovil 2006:4) There is a general fear for being thrown out of the country by the government of Uganda, so agencies are reluctant to speak out against government and donors. (Dolan&Hovil 2006:12)

In Uganda however, there has been an attempt to collaborate agencies within the UN system to address IDP issues. The Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division was established in July 2004 and is housed within the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). It includes the divisions of UNDP, UNICEF, OHCHR, OCHA, WHO, WFP and the District Disaster Management Committee (DDMC). The IDD has the objective to provide targeted support to specific country situations and to respond to IDPs’ needs. They work in the areas of protection, field support, capacity building/training and advocacy/public information.16

According to Dolan&Hovil (2006), the absence of consensus about the nature of the situation in Northern Uganda is an obstacle in engaging in humanitarian protection. Some have seen Northern Uganda as a humanitarian crisis, others as a protection catastrophe and others as a development project. There is disagreement about the humanitarian approach. (Dolan&Hovil 2006:10) The government of Uganda has refused to declare Northern Uganda a national disaster situation. The Uganda Constitution prescribes emergency measures to protect affected populations when a region has been declared a national disaster situation. (Dolan&Hovil 2006:10)

However, without this declaration, the region received much attention after Jan Egeland’s visit that progression has been made:

The designation of a humanitarian crisis in late 2003, and the subsequent proliferation of humanitarian actors and academic and policy studies, has clearly been an important factor in generating increasing pressure on both the government and the international community to be seen to be doing something. In short, the biggest protection success of the humanitarian community to date has been a political one.’ (Dolan&Hovil 2005:17)

In 1996 there were six humanitarian agencies in Acholiland. By 2000 there were about 60. (Dolan 2005:86-7)

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16 Dolan, Chris. Refugee Law Project. Personal communication, Kampala 23 August 2007
In refugee settings in which the humanitarian agencies operate, there is a recipient government that is often not a dominant player in the conflict that caused the displacement. In IDP settings the governments often are. The government of Uganda has played a vital role in the conflict. The government of Uganda has caused displacement by ordering the people to settle in crowded camps. It explains the government of Uganda’s dominance in the humanitarian interventions in the north. The government’s dominance and conflict perpetration contributes to a complex setting for humanitarians to operate in.

Conclusion

The history of Northern Uganda’s history is violent, dynamic and complex. The divide between northern and southern Uganda – that rooted many decennia ago- is deeply felt and has contributed to marginalisation and economic depravation in the northern part. More substantially there have been political tensions throughout the years between the Acholi and the ruling governments. Amin and Obote did not invest in the north and brutalised the region. The NRM under Museveni labelled northerners as backward, wild and very different from southerners. The brutality with which the Lord’s Resistance Army ravaged the north is sued to legitimatise these perceptions. The divide between northern and southern Uganda is at all levels and it fostered the conflict in the north. It is fuelled by mutual reproaches and misunderstandings between northerners and southerners.

The role the NRM played in the conflict in the North is complex but influential. The NRA violated human rights many times when they were ‘fighting’ the rebels in the north. Attempts were made to have peace talks, but all failed notably because Museveni promoted military actions against the LRA only. Due to the long term volatility in the north, people have left their homes, either voluntarily or forced. Some of those have lived in crowded and congested IDP camps for over ten years. These internally displaced persons have been depended on humanitarian aid. It took a long time however before the conflict had attracted international attention. The humanitarians that operate in northern Uganda face complex situations in which they have to cooperate with a government that caused and sustained displacement.
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This research addresses different disciplines, discourses and concepts. In order to explain the humanitarian aid chain of Gulu district, Northern Uganda, it is important to focus on humanitarianism in different angles. This chapter discusses the academic literature on humanitarianism in a conceptual as well as a practical manner. Therefore there are two parts; one is about concepts like conflict, peace, humanitarianism, relief and development and the shift from conceptual thinking to local realities through an ethnographic analysis of humanitarianism. The second part focuses on the practical part of humanitarianism; it addresses policy tactics like labelling and terminologies, as well as debates on internal displacement, return decisions and the neutrality of aid.

Humanitarianism in concepts

i. Conflict and peace

Numerous academic writings have analysed the transition from ‘conventional wars’ - to as it is often referred to - ‘new wars’. The former are interstate wars, crossing borders, for example the First and Second World War as well as the Gulf wars. After the ending of the Cold War the so-called ‘new wars’ entered the global arena. New wars were significant by new forms of violence, like through the use of machetes, the burning of houses and property and incidents of mutilations. These kinds of wars have always been there, but got minor attention before the fall of the Berlin wall. The new wars were ‘apparently provoked by poverty, population pressure or the bizarre hatreds of international terrorists.’ (Richards 2005:2) These wars are rather inter-zoned often within national borders – think of civil wars.

In the 1990s, the global community faced new trends in international politics; a growing political instability, a growing number of migrants, an increased number of wars as well as an increased number of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). (Duffield 1994:2-3) The conflicts in notably Africa are generally seen as obstructing and damaging economic revival. However, according to Richards (2005) there is a danger in approaching wars as tumultuous and ‘bad’. War is then taken out of context:

‘War is foregrounded as a ‘thing in itself’ and not – as we shall argue to be – one social project among many competing social projects.’ (Richards 2005:3)
Perceiving war as a bad discourse overlooks the factors that can reduce violence: being social organisation, culture and politics (Richards 2005:3) Wars are sociological phenomena that systematically include planning, organisation, training and the involvement of specific groups in society. (Richards 2005:4) It means that wars are not mindless actions of rebels or others, despite that their actions may seem random and unorganised. (Richards 2005:4)

It is claimed that war belongs to society (Richards 2005; Hilhorst 2007; Lambach 2007). According to Richards (2005), wars can only be explained in different causes as part of a social process. There is ‘no single explanation of war’. (Richards 2005:12) In his book the writers therefore focus not on what causes wars, but how war and peace is ‘constructed’. (Richards 2005:13) His book argues that there are many unconventional ways to look at ‘war’ and ‘peace’. Economic factors have often been attributed to the start of war,17 as well as ethnicity – new barbarism as Richards (2005:8) calls this trend. Richards et al (2005) promote an ‘ethnographic perspective’ of war focusing on ‘patterns of violence already embedded within society.’ (Richards 2005:11) In a failed attempt to summarise these new ethnographic perspectives this quote shows that the perspectives include:

‘(...) pre-war peace is often more delicate and finely balanced than appreciated; and that the seeds of war are to be seen shooting up in peace; that the shift towards intense armed conflict is a process with many twists and turns (and significant pauses, relevant as opportunities for peace makers); that conflict is sustained by an emergent sociology and economy of war; that turning back towards peace, even beyond a peace agreement, is a rocky path with many pitfalls; that the hidden or silent violence behind conflict has to be addressed if peace is to be sustained (justice matters); that sometimes peace breaks out even without formal peace making efforts; that war and violence echo in collective and individual memory for generations and that the institutional fabric to keep armed conflict within bounds over the longer term emerges from below as well as from above.’ (Richards 2005:13-4)

Therefore it is needed to focus on ‘small details’ (Richards 2005:14) of personal and societal lives. Every small detail, like displacement, abductions, and divided families are part of an armed conflict. And every detail matters when analysing war and peace. To conclude, Richards et al prefer to speak of a ‘continuum’ instead of making sharp distinction between ‘war’ and ‘peace’. This shift in thinking will encompass the irregular eruptions of violence in a period of perceived peace, as well as cases in which peace is even more violent than war. (Richards 2005:5) War does not ultimately result in peace, and peace does not always mean the end of war. ‘War’ does not always mean war in terms of violence

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and ‘peace’ is not always without violence. Therefore in some cases it is better to talk of ‘No peace, no war’ as is the title of Richards’ et al (2005) book.

**ii. Humanitarianism**

In 1994, the International Red Cross, Red Crescent Movement and the NGOs active in the disaster relief field developed a Code of Conduct to establish standards for disaster response world wide. It is used as an accountability tool for organisations. Previously, the organisations did not have guidelines and standards. The ‘charitable’ label on humanitarians is no longer applicable. It was acknowledged that organisations do make mistakes and that operations are complex. The Code of Conduct was developed to guard organisations’ behaviour. (IFRC 1994) Still, in 2003 among agencies the need was felt to develop principles of accountability to emergency and disasters survivors. The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership-International developed these principles, which include commitment to human rights, building capacity, communication, participation, monitoring and the addressing of complaints. (HAP 2007) However, these principles remained vague and implicit. Four years later in 2007, the HAP published the report ‘the HAP Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management.’ This ‘quality assurance tool’ should help to measure organisations’ processes, policies and products. (HAP 2007) It is obvious that the humanitarian community struggles with accountability and guiding principles and that the search for it is continuing.

A warlike situation very often attracts international involvement, political as well as humanitarian. In the humanitarian mandate the war becomes an ‘emergency’. When it comes to emergencies, a distinction is made between natural disasters and ‘complex emergencies’. The official definition of a complex emergency is:

‘A humanitarian crisis in a country, region or society where there is total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency and/ or the ongoing United Nations country program.’(IASC 2004:5).

A quick browse through different dictionaries provides numerous definitions for the word ‘humanitarianism’. They have in common that the term has something to do with ‘improving lives’, ‘humanistic values’, ‘human welfare’, and ‘doing good’. As Harrell-Bond analysed, the dominant ethos of humanitarianism is charity, and charitable giving is carried out by persons voluntarily engaged in giving to those in need. (Harrell-Bond 2002:55) The most famous humanitarian would be Henri Dunant, the Swiss merchant that founded the Red Cross. Numerous humanitarian agencies have been founded since then. The definitions of humanitarianism imply that organisations want to do good, by helping those in need, trying to improve their lives. The Red Cross was founded as a neutral organisation, in no sense tied to politics. Ironically, out of the hundreds of humanitarian
organisations, the ‘International Committee of the Red Cross’ (ICRC) is still the only organisation that has the neutral status. The ICRC and the other agencies ‘needs based’ and interventions should not be based upon political motives or any kind of discrimination. (Hilhorst 2007:1)

However, on the operational level the absence of political involvement and discrimination can be questioned. Harrell-Bond (1986) describes five questions that are being asked by agencies concerning relief, being: who, when, where, what kind of aid and how much. Who should make the decisions is however never questioned. (Harrell-Bond 1986:19) She argues that humanitarian agencies are governed by compassion. She accuses those notions of compassion of being ‘ethnocentric’, ‘paternalistic’ and ‘non professional’. (Harrell-Bond 1986:26)

‘Many humanitarian aid programmes fail for precisely these reasons; because the logic of compassion is believed to be morally right, it is the reality which must be wrong and which must be sent to conform to a compassionate template.’ (Harrel-Bond 1986:26)

Humanitarians are confused between feelings and thoughts. (Harrel-Bond 1986:26) This causes distortions when it comes to operations and response. There is distance between what humanitarians do and what the reality is asking for. As Hilhorst (2007) sees it, survival, protection and relief rests in local hands through social networks and local institutions. Humanitarian aid is often given without recognition for people’s capabilities. In that sense, aid can undermine people’s capacities and their social networks (Hilhorst 2007:8) Harrell-Bond observed in her research with refugees that these refugees are seen as helpless. The funds humanitarian agencies receive and spend are based upon this assumption. (Harrel-Bond 1986:11)

iii. Linking relief to development

In this phase of news wars and complex emergencies, the UN and international aid apparatus are now challenged with new dynamics based on political instability, insecurity, increasing gaps between the rich and the poor, conflict and population movement and displacement. (Duffield 1994:3) The new wars demanded new types of humanitarian aid. Humanitarian aid should be linked to development.

New dynamics demand new kinds of interventions. Emergency relief no longer means the provision of food packages in times of hunger or tents for shelter. Donors now demand more durable ways to address to people’s needs even when people do have hunger and have no shelter. Humanitarian interventions are costly. (Buchanan-Smith & Maxwell 1994:1) Organisations analysed a gap between relief operations and development operations. The theory then was to link relief and development to ensure durability and cost effectiveness. The model is as follows:
'Better ‘development’ can reduce the need for emergency relief; better ‘relief’ can contribute to development and better ‘rehabilitation can ease the transition between the two.’ (Buchanan-Smith&Maxwell 1994:1)

It was thought that effective development could even contribute to conflict prevention. (Macrae et al 1997:223) Development tackles poverty and poverty –as has been the common line of thinking - enhances the risk of war.

A new paradigm in the aid industry was born. This paradigm is dominated by terms like ‘relief’, ‘reconstruction’, ‘rehabilitation’, ‘recovery’ etc. As Duffield (2002) observed, the focus on sustainability resulted in interventions and strategies based upon ‘self sufficiency’ and ‘development’. The distribution of food to hungry people was no longer seen as an ethical and durable solution. Relief has been used to take ‘anti-impoverishment measures’.\(^{18}\) (Duffield 2002:89) He calls this the ‘liberal self-management’; to design programmes in order for people to ensure their own economic and social well-being. In the cases in which circumstances are more difficult (gender, discrimination, etc), NGOs can give a helping hand. (Duffield 2002:89)

Hilhorst (2007) analysed the two different approaches –the humanitarian versus the reconstruction-in examples from the past. Humanitarianism is about saving lives, alleviating suffering and maintaining human dignity. This is the more classical approach as we are used to from people like Henri Dunant. (Hilhorst 2007:1) Reconstruction is associated with the Marshall plan for Europe after the Second World War, guided by human security, reactivating development and creating peaceful environment. (Hilhorst 2007:2) However as she observes:

> ‘The realities of humanitarian aid and reconstruction, on the other hand, have travelled quite away from these two models and have become highly diverse in terms of the actors involved and the scenes in which they take place.’ (Hilhorst 2007:2)

The academic debate about linking relief to development is strongly connected to the debate concerning the definition of conflict/emergency and peace. As Hilhorst (2007) explains, ‘emergency’ and ‘reconstruction’ are socially constructed labels, linked to different political debates. (Hilhorst 2007:2) She argues – in line with Richards (2005) - that the distinction between emergency and post-emergency not that clear. (Hilhorst 2007:3) As she continues: peace agreements often illustrate peace and motions reconstruction. Instead she suggests that a crisis occurs over a long period of time. There will be a long ‘no peace no war’ phase. When war is ‘over’, violence and predatory behaviour may still occur. (Hilhorst 2007:3; Lambach 2007:10)

\(^{18}\) An example would be that people did no longer ‘just’ receive a food bag in relief operations. The World Food Programme extended its programme to a more developmental focus. In their Food for Education programme for example schools prepare breakfast and lunch for the pupils to prevent children from dropping out of schools. Another example would be attracting labourers by paying them with food.
If peace motions ‘reconstruction’ in the aid discourse it is needed that notions of peace are critically examined. In the developmental discourse emergencies are seen ‘as temporary interruptions to the process of linear development.’ (Duffield 1994:5) Duffield (1994) argues that these complex emergencies and its challenges affect social networks and systems as they are embedded in historical and societal dynamics. (Duffield 1994:4) He argues that:

‘So-called complex emergencies are essentially political in nature: they are protracted political crises resulting from sectarian or predatory indigenous responses to socio-economic stress and marginalisation.’ (Duffield 1994:4)

In the context of Sudan in the 1990s Macrae et al (1997) see two major questions to be asked when shifting to developmental aid in a complex emergency situation. One is the question whether the emergency is over and the second is the space for development aid. (Macrae et al 1997:229) The question when an emergency is over is not easy to answer. Different interests of stakeholder would claim different explanation of how to define a situation. Very often it is the local government that declares an emergency to be over. Their interests should be critically examined before generally declaring an emergency to be over. “The space for development aid” is related to that. The shift to development depends on the invitation of local authorities to start with development interventions. A space for development can be created, even when the emergency is not yet over, or the time is not yet ripe. Furthermore Macrae et al (1997) suggest that the shift to development can be a wrong signal in the relationship between donors and governments. The government can then claim that the situation is normalising and that the population is no longer in danger or need. (Macrae et al 1997:231) Therefore Duffield (1994) and Macrae et al (1997) argue that complex emergencies are always political. That would mean that every actor, national, international and local interfere with politics.

iv. Linear thinking

The terms like ‘development’, ‘relief’ and ‘rehabilitation’ deny the wider political context in which aid agencies determine their instruments and channels. (Macrae et al 1997:224) The writers observed in Sudan that different organisations do not have a common understanding of the definitions of these popular discourse terms. None of these terms provide a decent policy framework. The ones involved in the aid discourse think however linearly that one situation is followed by another. (See figure 1). Every stage demands a different aid response, from humanitarian aid to development. The linkage between the two extremes is defined in terminology. But how to respond to the different stages in practice is not clearly defined. Furthermore, thinking that war results in transition and peace conflicts with the academic debates on the social processes of violence. The following table represents the thinking in the humanitarian world.
Academics like Frerks (2003), Macrae et al (1997:225) and Richards (2005) and others have been sceptical about these linear approaches. As Hilhorst (2007) summarises:

‘Let us not forget that the transition from relief to development is an optimistic slogan that does not apply to most people in emergency situations. [citing Christoplos 1998] Their normality is not one of development but of bare survival, with few services to fall back on. Their return to normality is not a transition from relief to development but a transition from relief to muddling through. Safeguarding the meagre livelihood, safety net and service options of these people should be a major driving force of humanitarian aid.’ (Hilhorst 2007:12)

Linking relief to development is thus hard to make operational. The works assembled in Macrae et al (1997) explain that there are a number of fundamental conditions in order to move from emergency to development programming. These include humanitarian access, a minimum level of security and respect for human rights. (Macrae 1997:223) Furthermore the legitimacy of the national government structures should be acknowledged and it must be demonstrated that the emergency is over. (Macrae 1997:223) As van Uffelen (2006) concludes:

‘Uncritical pursuit of developmental strategies in situations whereby those criteria are not met may well negatively affect the welfare of the conflict-affected populations.’ (Van Uffelen 2006:29)

Common understanding is needed about the definition of the level of security, and the implications of shifting in programming. When this is not met, the social, political and economical positions of the war-affected people can be in danger or damaged. An approach touching upon local realities is
therefore needed when responding to local needs. Moreover, an analysis of the political and humanitarian situation is necessary before taking the next steps.

**v. An ethnography of humanitarianism**

Every actor in the government or the aid industry works according to specific frameworks and policies. When analysing a humanitarian situation it is needed that these are thoroughly analysed. Wedel et al (2005:38) point out that policy analysts often have a positivistic approach to policy as a linear construction, neglecting the conceptual and cultural bases of their own analytical assumptions. Instead the writers emphasise that policies often encounter unforeseen variables and consequences in different ways. (*Ibid.*) Therefore Wedel et al. suggest that policy enforces “chemical reactions”, as policies

‘(...)
are transformed by the agendas, interests, and interactions of the donor and recipient representatives at each stage of implementation and interface.’ (Wedel et al 2005:39)

They suggest an anthropological approach to public policy.

‘Public policies connect disparate actors in complex power and resource relations and play a pervasive, though often indirect, role in shaping society.’ (Wedel et al. 2005:31)

According to Wedel et al. (2005), there is an advantage in anthropologists examining the philosophical and cultural underpinnings of policy through a focus on discourses, metaphors, and ideologies with regards to a policy text. (Wedel et al. 2005:34) Or as they state:

‘Anthropologists can explain how taken-for-granted assumptions channel policy debates in certain directions, inform the dominant ways policy problems are identified, enable particular classifications of target groups, and legitimise certain policy solutions while marginalizing others.’ (Wedel et al 2005:34.)

It is suggested to focus on both relationships between policy makers and local populations, and how policy is interpreted and experienced by them. (Wedel et al. 2005:34) To put it differently, through the examination of processes and relations while translating and implementing policy one will find out about the *production* of policy – as well as about the production of a humanitarian aid chain. These processes and relations involve both policy makers establishing strategic plans and locals who shape and mediate this policy. (Wedel et al 2005:34) We should recognise the ‘*complexity, ambiguity and messiness of policy processes*’ by focusing on the construction of policy and its actors. (Wedel et al. 2005:43-4) An anthropological approach includes interconnectedness of individuals, organisations and institutions. A focus on policy discourse could help to sustain these connections. The inclusion of
the discourses, programs and prescriptions, through to those affected by the policy is what Wedel et al (2005) call the “studying through” method. (Wedel et al. 2005: 39-40, citing Reinhold 1994; Shore & Wright 1997)

David Mosse (2005) published an important book in the development and aid policy discourse. He criticises the generally accepted academic writings of for example James Ferguson (1994) in which Ferguson challenges the concept of development. Mosse accuses scholars of having preconceptions and prejudices against actors by not including them in the research. The focus is on policy dynamics, but Mosse argues that these analyses could never be successful. (Mosse 2006:6) Instead he suggests to have a multi-discursive approach when analysing development issues. He insists on conducting a ‘new ethnography of development’ (Mosse 2006:6) that includes the acknowledgement that governance of development policy requires collaboration and compromise. (Mosse 2006:7) The focus should no longer be on developments projects work, or whether a project succeeds. Instead it is important to see how ‘success’ is produced. (Mosse 2006:7) The new ethnography of development, or humanitarian systems should thus include all actors, to see how these systems actually function. Mosse stresses that all actors that are involved in development project act with a certain degree of autonomy from each other: this is acknowledged by Hilhorst (2003). While investigating the multiple discourses involved in a humanitarian intervention, it is important to focus on all actors involved. As Hilhorst puts it:

‘An actor orientation recognises that people operate within the limitations of structural constraints, but emphasises that such constraints operate through people. People in turn are social actors, whose agency is shaped by their life worlds, experience and social networks, among other factors.’ (Hilhorst 2003:5)

But one must acknowledge that actors are drawing on different discourses at the same time. Discourses are used and reshaped by the actors in different circumstances (Hilhorst 2003:83). When focusing on these ‘social interfaces’, Long (1982:2) refers to these dynamics between discourses, much will be revealed in the analysis. It brings out

‘(...) the dynamics of the interactions taking place and show how the goals, perceptions, interests and relationships of the various parties may be reshaped as a result of their interaction.’ (Hilhorst 2003:11, citing Long 1989:2)

As Mosse suggests, the researcher that is preoccupied with the analysis of a developmental or humanitarian project or discourse should therefore:

‘(...) reflect and to write means striving to break free from, or at least become sensitised to, the discursive hold of even one’s own cherished policy discourse, to try to understand perceptions and actions from another perspective (of course having its own context).’ (Mosse 2006:xi)
vi. Local realities

‘Aid agencies are part of the field of actors that together constitute the realities of crisis and survival, and the motives and attitudes of agencies deserve the same attention as the life worlds of local actors.’ (Hilhorst 2007:4)

In my view the studying through method as Wedel et al. (2005) suggest has one limitation. Although the writers acknowledge that social relations and interaction influence and shape policies views, they seem to overlook the dynamics of local population influencing the policy makers and vice versa. All people involved in policy, from the planners and the implementers, to the target group belong to different discourses. These discourses compete, collaborate and negotiate with each other, while shaping and influencing the specific policy. Wedel et al. (2005:39-40) acknowledge that discourses, programs and prescriptions of the source of policy should be examined all the way until it reaches its target. However, the target group is involved in discourses, programs and prescriptions as well. In my view these are influencing and shaping the policy during the process of its implementation, from the very beginning. The connections between people are circular, rather than linear, going both clockwise and counter clockwise: this is illustrated by Hilhorst (2003). In her ethnographic approach on the ‘real world of NGOs’, Hilhorst (2003) contradicts the understanding of NGOs in a hegemonic development discourse, as has often been discussed in academic development literature in the 1990s. Instead, she argues that this approach ignores the ideological and religious frameworks of NGOs and the changes made by local responses. (Hilhorst 2003:9) Local actors ‘interpret, bend and negotiate development’ (Hilhorst 2003:9)

This approach requires a mind shift among anthropologists doing research in development policy processes, going beyond preconceptions and prejudices about actors through the use of a multidiscursive approach. (Mosse 2005; Hilhorst 2003) One discourse may turn out to be dominant, but there are always parallel, residual, emerging and counter-discourses to deal with. (Hilhorst 2003:9) Discourses are not innocent, they can become very powerful, influencing the way people see and speak of the world surrounding them. The question to focus on is then, how, when and why do discourses become powerful. And how practises are influenced by it. (Hilhorst 2003:10-1) People are neither static. As Hilhorst (2003:77) puts it, people evoke, empower, challenge and reshape discourses in their everyday practises. But discourses can also be a forceful element in creating people’s realities. The question arises who has the power to speak, and which discourse is powerful for what reason.

This section described the conceptual thinking about conflict and peace as well as developmental terms in the aid discourse. All these paradigms are important to take into account when analyzing a humanitarian setting. Different scholars have called for the inclusion of all actors and discourses in the analysis. The following section explains the more practical field of humanitarianism and the debates within that field.
Policy analysis often begins with text. As Gasper & Apthorpe (1996:5) emphasise, argumentative analysis is about a complementary examination of both text and context. It should include several points of views in a specific policy issue. One specific policy issue can be supported by several values and arguments. (Gasper & Apthorpe 1996:3, citing White 1994) It needs to be acknowledged that a policy issue is strongly about framing. (Gasper & Apthorpe 1996:7; Wedel et al. 2005:33) As Wedel et al. point out, categorization and conceptualization of every day society are artefacts of policies. Policies shape identities and ideas what it means to be human. It often presents ‘an ideal type of what a “normal” citizen should be’. (Wedel et al. 2005:37) Furthermore, as Hilhorst (2003) pointed out, the inclusion of people into a project labels that particular group as the ones in need of help. These labels change the social status of that group in their society. (Hilhorst 2003:83) It is interesting to note however, that those excluded from intervention face the same danger to labelling and social change. Labels have the danger to become ‘overdeterminate’ and ‘underdescriptive’ (Gasper & Apthorpe 1996:7).

Duffield (2002) argues that labelling people as an Internally Displaced Person (IDP) as well as ‘vulnerable’ is a way to dehumanise and homogenise people. This oppresses and dissocialises the people that are target groups of aid. (Duffield 2002:94, Bakewell 2000:103) Some households are labelled ‘more vulnerable’ than others. According to Duffield, the ranking household like that emphasises the distinctions between the rich, the average, the poor and the very poor. (Duffield 2002:94) He argues that humanitarian organisations use the label ‘IDP’ to legitimise their interventions, but at the same time try to ‘discipline’ the targeted people. (Duffield 2002:93-4) Instead he suggests that aid organisations should recognise distinctive social relations of particular groups to ensure effective interventions. (Duffield 2002:102) Furthermore he argues that aid organisations should support people in terms of how they themselves attempt to survive by maintaining ethnic networks and systems. (Duffield 2002:102) This was also said by Hilhorst (2007):

‘Providing relief marks solidarity but it also marks superiority: it defines ‘the other’ as victim and the assister as the one who determines what help is in order. The victim’s sole attribute is found in his suffering, and although the assister grants him the right to survival, the victim is stripped of the capacity to act that would recognise him as a fellow human being.’ (Hilhorst 2007:14)

Bakewell (2000) explains that the label that people have gotten from others is often used as a strategy to gain resources. The beneficiaries’ active search for resources is often explained by organisations as ‘dependency syndrome’. (Bakewell 2000:104; Harrell-Bond 1986:10) Bakewell disagrees with this moralizing perception. It is strategic behaviour. As he compares:
‘In the same way I describe myself as an academic when I want a job, or a student if I want a discount. The problem lies with the way the resources are delivered. (Bakewell 2000:112)

It is about how resources are delivered. Expectations of aid workers are high in interventions. When these do not perform according to plan, beneficiaries are accused of cheating the system. (Bakewell 2000:104). However as Bakewell sees it, there are competing strategies and interest involved when dealing with different social actors in aid programming. Even though the goal - to relief suffering - is the same, the behaviour of the beneficiaries will determine the outcome of an intervention. (Bakewell 2000:104) Therefore a strong focus is needed on how beneficiaries perceive the aid and the delivering organisations:

‘If the impact of the assistance is to be understood, it is important to understand the strategies adopted by the affected population, which will shape their response to the assistance and also be changed by that assistance. If evaluation focuses on the performance of the agencies delivering aid, many valuable lessons about how to alleviate the suffering of those caught up in the complex emergency may be lost.’ (Bakewell 2000:114)

**ii. Internal displacement**

In 1994, the number of people that had fled their homes to other places within their own country was estimated at 20 to 25 million worldwide. (Cohen & Deng 1998:31) Since the 1990s more attention has been paid to this group of people, Internally Displaced Persons19, as numbers were growing while refugee numbers were decreasing. In the context of the so-called new wars more people fled within their own state borders. The IDP discourse is far more complex than the refugee discourse when it comes to response and humanitarian aid. Whereas refugees are under a legal framework and formal protection of UNHCR (van Uffelen 2006:12), internally displaced are not covered under strict international guidelines. (Cohen & Deng 1998:38) The international community and the UN in particular have no right to intervene in domestic affairs of a country, even when human rights are violated and the people need protection. (van Uffelen 2006:14) The only difference between refugees and IDPs is the question whether they have crossed a border or not. Although the causes of displacement, the need for protection and the often poor living conditions may be the same for IDPs as for refugees, the internally displaced do not get the same protection. (van Uffelen 2006:14)

This is especially striking when referring to the Universal Declaration for Human Rights. As with refugees, IDPs experience hardships that are violating several human rights that are in the

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19 The official definition of IDPs is: “Internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border”. (OCHA 1998)
Declarations. These violations should be universally condemned and addressed. Although IDPs do not enjoy the same protection as refugees, the needs for IDPs are however generally acknowledged. UN agencies as well as NGOs try to find ways to fit the response to IDP issues in their mandates. Cohen & Deng (1998) suggest that it is important that international humanitarian law can provide protection to IDPs. Reason for this statement is that they have observed that governments – although responsible for the wellbeing and protection of their citizens- often cause or tolerate internal displacement of people in their country. (Cohen & Deng 1998:74) In some cases governments exert violence and violate human rights.

However, the absence of a legal framework on internal displacement has serious restrictions when it comes to response. The UN and NGOs selectively pick IDP situations depending on mandates, resources and interests. Their coverage is limited and inconsistent. (Cohen & Deng 1998:160) Agencies have their own strategies but are not always aware what is needed. Or in some cases there is duplication of services and items. (Cohen & Deng 1998:161) Furthermore, there is little consensus among UN agencies about human rights and protection and how it should be identified, monitored and addressed. (Cohen & Deng 1998:163)

The biggest academic debate concerning internal displacement would be the question when displacement ends. The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement state in principle 6.3:

‘Displacement shall last no longer than required by the circumstances’ (OCHA 1998)

For refugees there are clear guidelines on when someone is no longer a refugee. In IDP settings there is no consensus on that issue.

‘A common assumption is that internal displacement ends when the displaced voluntary return home and the situation causing the displacement has ceased to exist.’ (Cohen & Deng 1998:36)

This assumption cannot account for many circumstances. In some cases people do not return home for various reasons. (Cohen & Deng 1998:37) Or there is no consensus on if ‘the cause of the displacement has ceased to exist’. In an IDP setting there is no organization that has the mandate to facilitate return. All these factors make it difficult to determine when displacement is over and when it is time to facilitate return. In practice, organizations determine when displacement ends based on their ‘experience’. (Cohen & Deng 1998:36)

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20 See annex 2 for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

21 The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement are indeed ‘guiding’. This document is not an international legal framework.
The difficulties in addressing the IDPs needs, due to lack of international legal guidelines, result in many debates over terms and conditions. Van Uffelen states that forced migration was generally neglected in academic literature, until the day Harrell-Bond (1986) published her book on emergency assistance for refugees. (van Uffelen 2006:2) A lot has been written since then, however in the analyses an important group has been generally neglected: the displaced themselves. (van Uffelen 2006:2)

iii. Return of the displaced

Regarding IDPs, not much has been written about movement processes and return decisions of the ones displaced. Van Uffelen (2006) examined the intention to return of Sudanese refugee in Ethiopia as well as internally displaced Sudanese. He describes that there are there are different attitudes towards return and these can change over periods of time. The Ngok, the Sudanese displaced people in Khartoum felt different about return when talking about ‘now’, or ‘when a peace agreement has been signed, or ‘when there is a true and lasting peace in Abyei [their home area]’. (Van Uffelen 2006:245) It turned out that people may be slightly positive about returning now, however the signing of the peace agreement increased this positive attitude strongly. When there would be long lasting peace in their home areas, the intention to return became very strong. (Van Uffelen 2006:245-5) In other words:

Peace, and therefore conflict resolution, is seen as a crucial factor informing to a large extent the degree to which people plan their return. (van Uffelen 2006:86)

However, the question remains ‘what is peace’? And how see the displaced peace as an incentive to return home? Van Uffelen (2006) emphasises the need to focus on attitudes toward return of displaced people. Social pressures and influences have a minor contribution to the actual decision-making. This depends on individual cases. In line with this, Allen & Morsink (1994:7-8) came to the conclusion that movement of people cannot be regulated nor be controlled. In their study on returning and repatriating refugees in several parts of the world they have seen UN and NGOs being frustrated that the refugees do not always follow the easily controlled repatriation and return path. People have opinions of their own and make choices regardless the instructions of outsiders. Treating refugees as a mass ignores the needs, capacities and aspirations of individuals. (Allen & Morsink 1994:8) An over-simplified view like this results in labelling people. As Allen & Morsink (1994) observed, pinpointing people as ‘vulnerable’ results in including those who are not really ‘vulnerable’ and ignores the ones that are due to personal or societal factors. (Allen & Morsink 1994:8) As Van Uffelen (2006) concludes, the moral obligation to deal with complexity in return and repatriation comes down to the question of respect. Respect for the people who are forcibly displaced as well as respect for the complexity of what ‘voluntary’ return constitutes in today’s world. (Van Uffelen 2006:260)
iv. Neutrality

It was mentioned before that humanitarian interventions are always political in nature. UN and NGOs are challenged in finding position. As Macrae et al (1997) see it; NGOs and UN are buffers between donor states and recipient governments. In relief operations they are the ones circumventing the government, as donors demand that aid is neutral in cases of emergencies. However, as Macrae et al (1997) argue, governments and rebels manipulate the humanitarian aid relief. Especially at micro- and meso-level local governments also intervene in these “neutral” relief operations. Aid therefore becomes politicised. (Macrae et al 1997:226)

Humanitarian aid has been much more than distributing relief items only for a long time. Mandates have been extended toward protection, conflict resolution, capacity building and development. As Macrae et al analyse, the politicization of aid can have negative effects on a society:

‘In adopting the explicit aim of conflict resolution and using aid to reinforce a political process, aid loses its neutrality and impartiality. (...) In simultaneously claiming a role in both conflict resolution and mitigating the effects of conflict, there is a serious risk that all aid provided by the UN and its partners, including humanitarian, is seen to be politically biased.’ (Macrae et al 1997:232)

According to Duffield (1994), this bias is unavoidable. He calls for a shift in thinking that humanitarian aid should be neutral.

‘Ways of engaging the complex reality of internal war have to be found. In this respect, the notion of neutrality requires thorough critique. Solidarity rather than neutrality has to be the guiding hand.’ (Duffield 1994:11)

It is hard to find literature on the dynamics and relationships the UN, NGOs and the national and local governments in a humanitarian setting, specifically with IDPs. It is acknowledged that the government is responsible for its citizens, also in times of conflict and displacement. The Guiding Principles on Internally Displacement confirm this, as well as the role of UN and NGOs that should be complementary. (OCHA 2008: principle 3) However, in the academic and institutional literature there is a general assumption that the government is unwilling or incapable to assist and provide protection. Cohen & Deng’s (1998) book on internal displacement addresses important issues like a global overview of the IDP problem, the lack of a legal framework, institutional mandates and the role of the UN, NGOs and regional partners like the African Union. The role of the government, both central and local, is completely ignored in their analysis. There is no reference to the political tensions around internal displacement, nor the power relations between actors. The same can be said of Allen & Morsink’s (1994) book. Whether governments are willing to cooperate or not, in almost every IDP setting there is some kind of government structure that has the key responsibility. This positions as well as relationships with other actors need to be addressed when analyzing an IDP context.
Conclusion

The first section of this chapter elaborated on the different academic writings on a conceptual level. It is explained that the humanitarian aid and development discourse have a linear thinking in terms of how to explain security, situations and responses. It is thought that conflict means emergency that demands a humanitarian response. Then after conflict comes peace, which means a phase towards normality and reconstruction, through development programmes. There is no consensus on what to do between conflict and peace and how to respond. The humanitarian and development community invented a new model, the ‘linking relief to development’ approach. However, as academics have argued, the linear approaches to conflict, situation and responses will not help to understand local dynamics and the genuine needs of people. All terms in the boxes of the figure 1 are invented in the aid organisations paradigm. Better is to approach peace and conflict as part of social and nuanced processes as Richards (2005) and Hilhorst (2007) propose.

In the humanitarian discourse, numbers, figures, labelling dominate as well as treating people as masses. Humanitarian operations are never neutral. All these factors influence the basic principle of humanitarianism: improving lives for those in need. There is a general call from the academic literature to include local perspectives when analyzing humanitarian and development programmes. Local people, or beneficiaries, are part of a humanitarian programme, shape it and influence it. Their views are as much important as any others. Mosse (2005) suggests having an ethnographical approach when analyzing humanitarian and development programmes. That will exactly be the approach adopted in this research.

Lastly, academic literature on the movement of Internally Displaced People is almost absent, and minimal literature has been written about Internally Displaced People in general. In a world in which there are more IDPs than refugees this is striking. There is still a lot of opportunities for academics to explore IDP settings and especially the tensed relation between IDPs, government and humanitarian agencies.
4. **FIELD METHODOLOGY**

*Introduction: shifting positions*

‘External researchers undertaking an evaluation, funded by donors and working with the help of aid agencies, cannot separate themselves from the aid programmes. This will affect how they are perceived by local people as well as their own interests in making recommendations.’ (Bakewell 2000:104)

In the previous chapter it was explained that researchers analyzing a humanitarian setting in a specific area should take different approaches into account. One is in line with David Mosse’s (2006) multidiscursive approach, linking all actors in the analysis. Aid programmes demand an ethnographic approach, avoiding preconceptions and prejudices against certain actors involved. Recent literature calls for the involvement of local realities and actors as influential players in their discourses.

My intention to involve all actors asked for an open mind. My position shifted every day, sometimes a couple of times within the day. Use of language, use of methodology and use of positions varied throughout the fieldwork. It helped to be affiliated to one of Uganda’s renowned research institutes when I was speaking to a government official. But when going into the camps of Northern Uganda it certainly helped that I came there as an independent researcher not connected to an NGO or the government. The people in the camps and sites opened up and shared their –sometimes- critical perceptions on aid, organisations and government. This chapter will describe the researcher’s methods, focus, difficulties and decisions when conducting the fieldwork in Uganda from August 2007 to February 2008.

*The first weeks in Kampala*

On arrival in the capital of Uganda, Kampala, I went straight to the Centre of Basic Research (CBR) in the area called Kololo. The director was very helpful in helping me to write a proposal in order to obtain a research permit at the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology. Although the CBR has an excellent research documentation and skilled research staff, there was no specific expertise in the topic I was about to conduct research on. It was discussed to find that expertise elsewhere, at the Refugee Law Project.

I visited the Refugee Law Project (RLP) a couple of days later. RLP is a renowned institute that started as a project within the faculty of Law of Makerere University in Kampala. Its main aim is to protect and promote refugees and the internally displaced rights. It has an experienced research department,  

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22 See previous chapter
where they regularly produce working papers and briefing notes on a variety of issues related to refugees, IDPs, conflict, peace and justice in Uganda. In a conversation with the director and the head of the research department they encouraged me to affiliate myself with them. In accepting this, the RLP supervised some of my research work and provided me with useful contacts. While waiting for a research approval of the Ugandan government I spent my time revising my proposal, taking lessons in the language Luo/Acholi at Makerere University, and conducting my first interviews at country offices of UN agencies. When I finally got the research permit, I took the bus up north, to the town of Gulu.

**Gulu**

I took off to the field with the idea to focus on the different relations and interconnections between the different actors involved in the humanitarian aid chain. I had planned to focus on IDPs in the different settlements, local government, and three different humanitarian agencies to get a complete overview of how the actors are related to each other. Investigating the ‘resettlement process’ would make me able to expose these relations. Through the RLP I came in contact with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), one of the largest international humanitarian agencies in Gulu district. The original plan was to somehow work with them, to get an insight in their activities, standpoints and relations to other agencies, government and IDPs. On arrival in Gulu it became clear that a kind of internship was not possible within NRC, but the entire staff was very helpful and welcoming. We agreed that I could have regular contact with the Protection and Advocacy Advisor and the staff working on Camp Management. I could also freely interview other staff if I wanted to.

I soon realised in the field that certain assumptions and framings in my research proposal were not accurate, or were even debatable. Concepts like ‘resettlement’, ‘return’ and ‘decongestion sites’ appeared to be contested or irrelevant terms for the research I was conducting. The first two concepts will be explained elsewhere, but ‘decongestion sites’ were not the ‘new sites’ everyone was talking of. The local government, some years ago, initiated decongestion sites in order to decongest overpopulated camps. Decongestion sites were initiated by the local government some years ago, in order to decongest overpopulated camps. These sites are properly planned and smaller than most original camps. The decongestion process started while the insurgency was still going on so cannot be considered part of the movement process of IDPs after the peace talks started. Some decongestion sites have even been labelled as mother camps.

The first interview I conducted was with an official working for UNHCR, a government official, the Camp Management team of NRC and IDPs in mother camps. Soon I realised that the situation in Gulu district, Northern Uganda was full of competition, tensions and great distances between the ones in ‘town’ - government and humanitarian agencies- and those in the ‘field’ - the internally displaced. This was most prevalent in the ‘return process’ debate. As a result of this experience a big part of the interviews with IDPs, government and NGOs would be on perceptions on movement. In the
interviews with the internally displaced there was an emphasis on how they experienced camp life, how they saw home and how they reflected on aid, government and NGOs. In the interviews at ‘office level’ there was a greater focus on relationships with other agencies and government, interventions and coordination.

Data collection

I deliberately chose to work with qualitative data only. In a context in which numbers and figures get an awful lot of attention in the humanitarian agencies and governmental field – maps and excel sheets about the number of IDPs, ‘returned’ people, camps, formerly abductees, etc are numerous - I thought it would be more interesting to listen to life stories. To put time and effort to actually listen to people without framing at forehand what I wanted to hear. This is not only the case for those being displaced; the interviews with government officials and humanitarian aid workers were also qualitative for a reason. I wanted to get to know the people, the way they would prioritise the topics and the ways they would express themselves. I was interested in what was being said as well as how it was said. The attitude and priorities that became clear in these conversations helped me to get a broader picture of one’s and the organisational context.

The data collected consists of around 30 individual interviews at the governmental/humanitarian aid agency level, ranging from 45 minutes to one and half hours. These interviews were all in English, for some of the respondents the mother tongue. I conducted 28 interviews with the internally displaced, of which were 13 women and 15 men. The duration of these interviews ranged from 45 minutes to up to two and a half hours. I planned to talk as much to the local youth as to the adults. The youth is often a forgotten and stigmatised group. I was interested to hear their views on displacement, encampment and the movement process.

Of the 13 women, 6 were under the age of 24, with two girls of 15 years as the youngest respondents. Of the men 5 were under the age of 24, although one respondent was the youth leader of the camp but aged 40. Among the men interviewed, one was the local council leader of the area and one was the camp leader. The interviews with IDPs were held in three types of locations: 11 in mother camps, 9 in new sites and 8 in villages. For the individual interviews I visited 6 mother camps, 4 new sites and 7 villages.
Apart from the formal individual interviews I did three focus group discussions in three different mother camps. These were with men only, young men only and women and young women together. I had wanted to do more but was not able to due to the fuel crisis that hit Uganda due to Kenya's post election crisis in January 2008. To get different impressions and data I chose to visit several camps, new sites and villages in Gulu and Amuru districts, instead of focusing on one or two locations. The perceptions about return and aid of the displaced people depended on several factors. Firstly the ‘remoteness’ of the camp; the camps near Gulu town were often supplied with aid even during the conflict as ambushes were less frequent around the town. Very remote camps received little to nothing of aid agencies as the security would not allow agencies to access the camps. Also, the people in the camps close to Gulu town were better able to visit the market and hospitals in town during the war, making them less dependent of services and aid in the camps. Secondly, the location of the camps partly determined the movement decisions of IDPs; wild animals would be a decision factor for those near the parks whereas land mines could influence the decisions of people in an area known to have many land mines. Thirdly, those living at district borders had different opinions about the aid delivered to them as they saw the difference in aid deliveries in separate districts.23

Some of my data derives from the informal conversations I had with people in the streets and taxis, with my neighbours and friends, and with international people at Gulu’s pool and parties. These conversations addressed several topics and helped me to contextualise Northern Uganda’s situation and the people facing day-to-day realities. It also helped me to see the people and ideas behind the formal talk we had, especially with people working for humanitarian aid agencies.

Observation was a source of data collection as well. I attended some of the numerous meetings that were held in Gulu Town. The one I attended most often was the CCCM24-meeting that was later clustered with the Return and Resettlement meeting. Chaired by a representative of the Gulu district but hosted by UNHCR, this was one of the cluster meetings that have been brought to life as ‘the

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23 The list of interviews held with IDPs is in Annex 3. The list of UN, government and NGOs interviewed is in Annex 4.
24 Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster
provider of last resort. This meeting was held at the UNCHR premises once per month and was attended by several UN agencies and humanitarian agencies, especially those with Camp Management Teams. The second meeting I tried to attend every month, was the District Disaster Management Committee (DDMC) meeting, chaired by the Chief Administrative Officer of the Gulu District and co-chaired by UNOCHA. The meeting’s objective is to bring all humanitarian actors together to discuss the relevant issues and to make decisions together. The meeting would generally take three hours or more in which all sector groups and cluster groups would discuss their key issues. It was interesting to see how this meeting took shape and how people interacted.

The research team

The director of RLP, once doing his Ph.D. in Northern Uganda, was kind enough to get me in contact with his research assistant and translator based in Gulu. The second day of my stay in Gulu we met over coffee and to discuss our cooperation. We agreed that he would be my translator. He already had research experience and knew ways to get respondents in the camps, new sites and villages. Despite his research experience, we hardly discussed the progress of the research. It was not until my last week in Gulu that I shared my preliminary findings with him. Because he was also acquainted to another research project he introduced me to one of his friend, who filled in when he was not available. This friend might have been less experienced, he was a reliable and loyal assistant and very accurate in his translations. I am grateful to have had two amazing assistants, always being flexible and hardworking. As far as I can judge, their translations were accurate and objective, although it is unavoidable that some nuances may have been lost in translation.

My research set up contained a significant number of interviews in Gulu Town in the offices of government and humanitarian aid agencies. It was agreed with my assistants that they would be of help during my field trips to the camps, the new sites and the villages. The interviews in Gulu Town I did alone, since English was the regular language in which conversations were held. The interviews with the Acholi people in the camps, new sites and villages were predominantly done in the language Luo/Acholi, translated into English by one of my translators. Some of the respondents were skilled enough to answer in English and some interviews were done half in English, half in Luo/Acholi. It must be said that it was nice to have had some interviews in English for a more personal interaction with the respondent. However, those interviews were less extended than the ones in the mother tongue, due to language barriers.

On one occasion my research team expanded a bit. This was the case when I went to one of the main camps to do a focus group discussion with women only. My assistants and I thought it to be wise to send a female translator to ensure a certain level of trust during the discussion. The female translator

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25 The UN Cluster Approach will be discussed in chapter 7.
had gotten experience in translating interviews into English through some consultancy work with NGOs.

**Logistics; transport and housing**

Most IDP camps, and other sites where we could find IDPs, were not too far from Gulu Town, within a range of 5 up to 50 kilometres. In contrast with most researchers and international staff in Gulu, I was not in the possession of a car or my private motorbike. The first fieldtrip we used public transport to Anaka, which was a real pain because of the poor conditions of the roads due to the rain season. We delayed tremendously because we had to help trucks get out of the mud or we got stuck ourselves. Luckily we had planned to stay the night in the camp and to travel to the next the following day. We got a lift with the research team one of my assistants was involved in. Back in Gulu, my assistants and I decided that it would be better to have some kind of our own transport, so that we would not be depending on others. Especially in the rain season this was important; whenever we saw big grey rainy clouds in the air we hurried back home, or did not leave Gulu town at all.

We decided to rent a motorbike every time we would go to camps, new sites or villages. I had to cover the rental costs and the fuel. The limited budget I could spend because of my limited funds resulted in the choice to go into the field twice per week and to do two interviews per day. Sometimes we had to improvise, but in most cases we were able to plan our interviews just like that. In Gulu Town I mainly walked, or I used the comfortable and cheap bodabodas. Young men driving a (rented) motorbike could take you anywhere around the town for an equivalent of 20 eurocents. You could find a bodaboda stand practically at every corner.

When I arrived in Gulu my Luo/Acholi teacher’s sister, living in Gulu, had arranged for me to live with a family. It was a great Acholi family with a newborn baby of no more than 6 days old. Unfortunately the house was small and I had to share my room with the niece and the entire family’s stuff packed in boxes. After one and a half weeks I had found my own room in a compound in the middle of town, near the market. It was a clean and new build house, with a roof with a great view over Gulu. I shared the compound, the toilet and bathroom with three Acholi families. Next to me there was an NGO that hosted girls and women that had been victims of sexual violence. Sometimes it felt crazy living in the middle of the hectic town: in a compound with girls and women that had to be taken to the hospital because of sexual violence. I could have chosen to live in the ‘NGO area’ in a house with a garden and a fence. There were times I wished I had chosen that kind of accommodation. But generally I was happy to live with Acholi people and to build friendship and trust with them. More importantly, living in that compound reminded me of the day-to-day realities of the Acholi people. These experiences shaped my views and understandings of the conflict, the financial struggles and coping mechanisms of the people.
Position of the researcher

It might be a cliché, but before coming to Gulu I really did not know what to expect. I had learned that Gulu had about 120,000 inhabitants and 300 operating NGOs. I could not even imagine what it would look like. It is also not easy to explain. I often try to explain it ironically by saying that Gulu has two hotels with a sauna, steam bath and massages. There is one outdoor pool and cappuccinos, ice cream and pizzas are available throughout the year, as long there is power. International NGO staffs meet each other at the pool in the weekends or one of the nice restaurants Gulu has. A ‘normal’ life in a town that had been the epicentre of a horrific conflict for two decades.

I was very conscious of the fact that I wanted to maintain my independent status as a researcher. Going into the field to camps and other settlements I would travel and work independently, in cordial relationship with one of my assistants. I did not want the respondents to think that I belonged to an NGO or the government. I would also emphasise this in the introduction of the interview. I wanted to IDPs to know that they could express themselves freely and that possible critique would be in good hands.

Not only in the field had I tried to be aware of my being as a white young lady. Around my house and while walking in town I tried to keep a low profile position. I was sometimes ashamed to see how some international staff working for humanitarian aid agencies let their drivers take them everywhere in their NGO vehicle. I do not want to disapprove this – I know that numerous humanitarian aid workers hate it too, but some humanitarian agencies have certain restricting policies in terms of free movement of staff. I just knew I did not want to confirm the image of being the rich white myself. But it was sometimes hard to stick to this principle. I had personal needs myself and one of them was going to the pool to take laps; my only chance to do some exercise and also to distract myself from the images and stories of war affected people I was confronted with daily. Despite I had a small number of great Acholi friends; I also made friends among the international community. Some of these friends were also subject to my research data collection and this was sometimes confusing. It was hard to determine when I was Hilde, the girl from Holland, and when I was Hilde the researcher. It might be the case that these two were not separate. In the beginning I got frustrated of the idea that everyone is part of my research and that every remark or occasion was potentially important. While sometimes I just wanted to have beers with these people and be ‘just me’.

I am aware that these personal versus professional struggles have influenced my critical and analytical view, my decisions and my data. As a researcher you are also a human-being and you are surrounded by other humans. I found it hard to drag myself into a busy pub on a Friday night, knowing there would be the chance to speak to international NGO staff in an informal setting, while I was just too tired and knew that there would not be any friends. I might have missed out important informal
information at occasions like this, just because these kinds of events and decisions entered a personal sphere.

These self-reflections are important to take in mind while reading this thesis. The perspectives that derive from the writings are based upon my fieldwork. The fieldwork included, as explained, not only the interviews and observations. It includes, for the greater part, the position of the researcher toward the experience of bouncing between two huge extremes: from the IDP context and the extreme poverty of the Acholi people to the aid context that included beers, barbecues and parties. It was not easy to balance that and to stay objective at all times. The big gaps, the misunderstandings and the injustice toward certain individuals really got to me personally. The Northern Uganda context, in which the security situation felt fragile, made this fieldwork experience even more challenging. However, I was less distressed to interact with war affected people telling me their sometimes horrific life stories, than to shift between the two different worlds of IDPs and (international) aid workers and government, every single day.

It proved to be insufficient to draw conclusions about the humanitarian situation in Gulu district just by reading academic works and related articles. Relocating my life there brought many useful insights into the situation. The perceptions about the humanitarian aid industry that will prevail in this thesis are therefore developed during these six months. The entire research experience is the basis for this thesis.

**Limitations**

The research has experienced some limitations of different degrees. One was related to logistics. When I arrived in Gulu it was the rainy season. That season experienced heavy rainfall and floods. It even reached the news in the Netherlands. (NRC Handelsblad 2007) Because of the poor infrastructure in the Northern part of Uganda, the rain had hit quite a number of roads away in the area. Some camps were not accessible, not even with the best 4x4’s. The poor road conditions limited us in choosing the camps to do interviews in. Furthermore, the rains were so heavy that it would have been irresponsible to travel far away alone on a motorbike. For that reason we restricted our travels to the close vicinity of Gulu, to be sure we could head back home as soon we saw the rains coming.
After Kenya’s election turmoil around Christmas 2007, Uganda faced huge shortages in terms of fuel. The border between Kenya and Uganda was closed for several weeks and the fuel from the harbour of Mombasa could not reach the inland regions. Apart from some bus companies, there was basically no public transport in Uganda for several weeks. The fuel stations were out of fuel. It made it impossible for us to go into the field during the first weeks of January. We went however, a couple of times. But not too far, as my research assistant had bought the fuel of the black market, meaning it was ridiculously expensive.

Other restrictions were there in terms of respondents in the humanitarian and governmental sector. As easy it was to walk into the offices, or phone someone on his or her private cell phone, as hard it sometimes was to actually get an interview. Appointments were made, but cancelled, or phone calls were answered but in Kampala or elsewhere. This can be explained by two reasons: (1) as a student researcher I was certainly not a priority for people, and (2) humanitarian aid workers and governmental officials were almost as much elsewhere as in Gulu town, because of meetings, trainings or holidays. Furthermore, humanitarian agencies and UN agencies face high turnovers of staff, especially international staff that have two year or shorter contracts. These turnovers made it difficult to get to speak to the relevant actors. The assumption that I was not a priority, especially for the two highest district government officials, is based upon the fact that I had not interviewed either of them in the end. Not that I had not tried; numerous appointments were made, as well as phone calls and text messages. They both never showed up or appeared to have time. I had wanted to include their perceptions as government as important player in the field. Now their colleagues were kind enough to have them interviewed.
Clarifications on terms used

In this thesis I will refer to ‘humanitarian industry/community/chain etc’. This includes all UN agencies, NGOs and government levels if not stated otherwise. In the text I will shift from NGOs to humanitarian agencies or organisations. In the context of this research, I treat NGOs and humanitarian agencies the same, meaning all agencies that were present in Gulu during the fieldwork. I would sometimes speak of ‘Northern Uganda’ when I think that the remarks made apply to the greater region. Research has only been conducted in Gulu and Amuru district (and Kampala) however and I would not want to give the impression I am an expert on these districts, let alone on the other districts in Northern Uganda where I have not even been. Amuru district used to be part of Gulu district. As I did interviews with the displaced in the two districts, the administrative interviews were conducted in Gulu town only. In the text I do not make a distinction between the employees of different UN agencies. Rather I speak generally about ‘a UN official in Gulu Town’. Interviews were held with UNHCR, WFP and UNDP. However mentioning the specific agency would affect the respondent’s privacy, as the number of staff in the UN field offices in Gulu is small. It would be easy for the reader familiar with the region to track the name and position of the respondent. The same goes for the several humanitarian aid agencies. Respondents are referred to as ‘(Senior) humanitarian aid worker’. Concerning IDPs, I treat their statements with respect and therefore have not included names. I refer to them as the location where the interview was held, the gender and age of the respondent and the date. I tend to be less explicit in mentioning the location when I have the impression that it would be easy to track down the respondent. In that case I refer to ‘a village in district X’.

Lastly, as is explained in the introduction, the reader will find statements about IDPs, government and humanitarians as if they are all a homogenous group. I would want to emphasise that this is not how I see the different individuals. I have met wonderful devoted humanitarians who would agree with most criticism I have in this thesis. I have also met people that do not consider themselves an ‘IDP’, but face similar challenges as the ones who feel displaced. In cases where the situation would let me, I try to shed light on different perspectives within one ‘group’ as much as possible. However, this research will show that there are many similarities in how people perceive, interact and respond. These similarities then reveal the tensions in the humanitarian field.
5. RETURN AFTER CONFLICT

Introduction: can we speak of ‘return’, ‘after’, or ‘conflict’?

It was my first interview with a UN official in Gulu Town. Having read the National IDP policy for Uganda and many other documents related to the displacement of people in Northern Uganda, I was ready to hear some actual experiences from the field. As I started my introduction, using the terminologies ‘return’ and ‘resettlement’, which are being used as standards in the mentioned documents, the UN official interrupted me bluntly:

‘Resettlement’ applies to refugees not to IDPs. Resettlement means the movement to country of origin. IDPs return. If you speak of IDPs’ resettlement, people would not know what you are talking about. First work out your terminology properly before you start your research’²⁶

Little I knew that very moment how this comment would illustrate the biggest tension in the context I was doing my research in. What is return? What is resettlement? What is reintegration? And how do they relate to the many locations like main camps, new sites, villages and Gulu Town where you can find displaced people?

Her comment also illustrated a ‘we don’t know how to handle the situation’, an attitude that many humanitarian aid workers have as I found out during my research. This either resulted in indifference, activism or a big arrogance toward the situation and the people involved. As defeated I felt when we concluded that interview, -as she was not the most ‘welcoming’ respondent I have had - the more became clear later on that she had given me a most insightful interview, and I am sure, without her being aware of it.

This chapter explains the conceptual understanding of three terms that are dominant in the humanitarian discourse in Northern Uganda: ‘war’, ‘return’ and ‘development’. These three terms are interlinked and powerful in the determination of policy in the region. The government and the humanitarian agencies think in rigid time distinctions as when ‘war ended’, ‘peace started’, resulting in ‘transitioning from emergency to early recovery’. However, within this community there are different ideas of what these terms mean, causing a lot of confusion. Very practically this humanitarian confusion results in debates about the concept of ‘return’, how this is measured and promoted and why the fact of IDPs returning is so important for one dominant player in the humanitarian community.

²⁶ Interview with a UN official, Gulu town, 11 September 2007, emphasis added.
Notions on Conflict

‘The government has assured that Kony will never cause displacement anymore. The government should protect the people at home. The protected villages have been condemned by many. (...) Of course we have optimism about the peace talks. Keeping people in camps is even worse than return. (...) There has been a whole generation lost. Youth have been born in camps. If nothing will be done, they will not be useful for this nation. (...) There will be more investment in the north. There will be a focus on the sectors security, health and education. When people are in homes, parents can give guidance to the children. There is also a high HIV/AIDS rate in the camps. So in short people have all the reason to go home.’

This quote illustrates different reasons why the government promotes the return of people to their home areas. In terms of protection, people should leave the dirty and crowded camps for their own villages, where the government should also protect them. The government of Uganda is aware of all the critique they have received by putting people forcefully into camps where life became worse for many people. Home is now considered to be the best place for them. No one would challenge them on that, but the big questions remains: also now? According to the quoted government official it is. As his colleagues confirm, the government of Uganda has been very positive about the outcomes of the peace talks. The level of insecurity has drastically gone down and they have declared the region safe and ready for the return process. Government officials at the district and central level claim to have the ‘Kony issue’ perfectly under control. At the office of the Prime Minister in Kampala, it was even said that the conflict ‘was a temporary problem’.

Calling the conflict a ‘temporary problem’ is one way to look at a twenty years lasting conflict. It indicates the indifference of the central government toward this conflict and the lack of sympathy for its victims. At Kampala level, reasons for people to be hesitant to leave the camps are not seen and certainly not understood. As they see it, the war is over.

It will never be said in so many words but it is implied in many ways. The government does not speak about the threat of the LRA as a group. They focus on one man: Joseph Kony. Government officials claim Kony will no longer be a threat to Northern Uganda, that the region is safe enough to return, that the peace talks will certainly succeed. Others have taken over the perception that there is no longer a war going on. Especially in the media phrases like ‘When the war is over..’, have determinedly turned into ‘Now the war is over’. (AllAfrica 2008; Daily Monitor 2008a) Also other influential players spread this message:

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27 Interview district government official, Gulu town, 12 November 2007
28 Interview with the Commissioner of Disaster Management and Refugees & the Principal Disaster Management Officer, Kampala, 18 October 2007
‘The Bishop called upon the people to leave the camps now and go back to their villages in order to farm the land and therefore come out of poverty. On the LRA war the bishop said the war is over and that people should no longer have fear of LRA coming back to perturb them.’ (The Diocese of Northern Uganda 2008)

The notions on the conflict in Northern Uganda have implications in the humanitarian operational field. Northern Uganda is often just one of the many programmes humanitarian organisations run. Many international staff has worked in other (conflict) areas. Most of their programmes are based on a blue print with little room for contextual adjustments. However, it is interesting to see that the war in Northern Uganda is considered to be ‘different’ from other wars by many.

‘This [situation in Northern Uganda] is not a difficult programme. You don’t get shot at in Northern Uganda, there is democracy, structures, money, donors. We are making it so difficult for ourselves. Let’s pack and leave and concentrate on where the need is higher, Chad, Sudan, Iraq.’

This UN official pleads to leave the region because the situation is not serious enough for them to be there. According to him, the different structures that are in place make the situation in Northern Uganda less bad than in other parts of the world. This was acknowledged by another humanitarian aid worker who said that ‘in Darfur people do not have anything. There it is war.’ She meant that in Northern Uganda there is no war. The comparison to other regions in the world make Northern Uganda a ‘second-degree’ war zone for some humanitarians. That hundreds of thousand internally displaced still live in crowded and underdeveloped camps being uncertain of their future is not considered as a ‘difficult’ situation. There might be a bit peace prevailing in the region, but there is no peace yet. The improvement in security is not seen as a welcoming temporary relief to the ones who have suffered the 20 years of conflict. It is seen as an end of the conflict.

Why is this humanitarian situation considered to be so different from others? Many would appoint the presence of a government structure as one of the reasons, as the UN official mentioned. The district government of Gulu is indeed functioning. Roles and responsibilities are clear on paper: the government of Uganda is the main authority; humanitarian actors are there to help them. It is believed this is different in other countries.

‘Some international actors, not all, fail to appreciate the humanitarian structures that are there. The structures here are functional. This is not Darfur or a country where there is no government.’

29 Interview with a UN official, Gulu town, 13 December 2007.
30 Interview with a humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 6 November 2007.
31 Interview with a representative of Gulu NGO Forum, Gulu town, 22 December 2007
Ugandan government institutions and aid agencies work according to the National IDP policy of Uganda. The government of Uganda initiated the writing of this policy in 2001. The policy describes the rights of the internally displaced and highly focuses on the return and resettlement of the IDPs and how the various institutions should assist this process. The policy describes the term 'reintegration' as a process, while 'return' and 'resettlement' refer to the individuals that are part of that process:

**Reintegration** is the re-entry of formerly internally displaced people back into the social, economic, cultural and political fabric of their original community;  
**Returnee** refers to any Internally Displaced Person who returns to his or her home or place of habitual residence;  
**Resettled persons** are Internally Displaced Persons who settle voluntarily in another part of the country of habitual residence (OPM 2004:xi)  
**Integration** is the process by which formerly displaced persons get absorbed into the social, economic, cultural and political fabric of a new community, or the community where they first found temporary settlement.

The first three terms are used throughout the policy document, although 'reintegration' to a lesser extend- whereas the term ‘integration’ is nowhere to be found. In the case of Northern Uganda ‘integration’ would mean that the government of Uganda needs to think of strategies to ensure the IDPs’ rights in their choice to stay where they currently are, meaning the camps.

Although the policy does not describe how the displaced people should be guided in these three processes, the rights of the people are emphasised under the chapter ‘General Provisions’. Two are of main importance, which are ‘freedom of movement’ and ‘freedom of choice’. As the first one is described:

‘Free movement ensures that the internally displaced can take part in various subsistence activities and should, therefore, not be curtailed.’ (OPM 2004:21)

Strategies to ensure this right include the provision of security and the free choice of people where they want to reside. (OPM 2004:21) Related to the freedom of movement is the freedom of choice:

‘In order for IDPs to be able to make the decision to return with full knowledge of the facts and freedom of choice, the Government shall use appropriate means to provide Internally Displaced Persons with objective and accurate information relevant to their return and reintegration to their homes or areas of habitual residence, or resettle voluntarily in another part of the country.’ (OPM 2004:23)
The policy document strongly focuses on the return and resettlement of IDPs. In 2001 there was a certain level of relatively peace. After international attention to the conflict the Government of Uganda initiated the writing of the policy. The hopes for peace however vanished because of operation Iron Fist II. The situation became worse than ever resulting in a large humanitarian crisis in 2003. The formulations on the national policy on IDPs continued however, and one year later the policy was launched. This was in the middle of the Northern Uganda’s insurgency.

The Commissioner for Disaster Management and Refugees at the office of the Prime Minister, stated that the IDP issue is ‘as it is with refugees’. Following international guidelines, ‘one should always speak of return, resettlement and reintegration’. Formulating a national policy, it is needed to think in terms of durable solutions. These are the main governmental reasons to the dominant focus on return and resettlement in the National Policy, even though the policy was launched during the highest peak of the insurgency.

However, not every humanitarian actor explains the meaning of ‘return’ in the same way. Some see return as a process in which people move within different sites, others see the leaving of the main camp as the first steps in return. For those it does not matter whether people go back to their villages or new sites, they are considered to have returned, or in the process of returning. It is also not very clear what sites can be called new sites and what are camps. In the whole process of the movement of people, to, from and between the different sites, different terminology is used as the following table shows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location and the act of moving</th>
<th>Terminology used by individuals and policy papers</th>
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<tr>
<td>IDP camps in which people moved during the insurgency</td>
<td>‘Mother camps’</td>
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<td>‘Base camps’</td>
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<td></td>
<td>‘Main camps’</td>
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<td>‘Village’</td>
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<td>‘Original camps’ (CCCM Cluster Strategy 2007-8)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>‘Protected villages’ (government before declaring them camps)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

32 Interview with the senior advisor for Northern Uganda, one of the writers of the National IDP policy, The Netherlands Embassy, Kampala, 16 October 2007.
33 Interview at the Office of the Prime Minister Kampala. The Commissioner of Disaster Management and Refugees and the Principal Disaster Management Officer, 18 October 2008
34 The terminology outlined in this column represents the use of words either in conversations/interviews, or in policy documents. The brackets indicate the agency the agency spoke for, or the document that used that word. The terminology shown without brackets is more generally and frequently used.
The table indicates the various ways people and documents express themselves in terms of the movement process of IDPs. Some terms deserve extra attention. The term “village” is often used by the people that lived there before the war and before it was transformed into the now called “mother camps” or “main camps”. Most camps were trading centres before the influx of people started due to

| Sites in which people move from the main camp, not considered as their villages | ‘New sites’  
| | ‘Return sites’  
| | ‘Satellite camps’  
| | ‘Satellite sites’  
| | ‘Home’ (UNHCR, UNOCHA)  
| | ‘Transit site’ (camp closure guideline final draft)  
| | ‘Camp-like situation’ (CCCM cluster framework Oct06)  
| | ‘Camp-like temporary settlements (Ibid.)’  
| | ‘Smaller smaller settlements’ (Care)  
| | ‘Camps’  

| Sites which is considered home (by whom ever) | ‘Villages’  
| | ‘Villages of origin’  
| | ‘Home home’  
| | ‘Places of origin’  
| | ‘Parishes (of origin)’  
| | ‘Pre-displacement villages’ (CCCM Cluster Strategy 2007-8)  
| | ‘Habitual residence’ (National IDP Policy)  
| | ‘Home’  
| | ‘Original home areas’  
| | ‘Mango tree’  

| The act of moving | ‘Returning’  
| | ‘Movement’  
| | ‘Resettling’  
| | ‘Leaving’ (the camps)  
| | ‘Going home’  
| | ‘Fully return’ (camp closure guideline final draft)  
| | ‘Partial return’ (Ibid.)  
| | ‘Commuting’  
| | ‘Return without movement’  
| | ‘Return with movement’  

The act of moving
the insurgency. For those who were born in the places that now are camps, the places remain their villages.

Speaking of satellite camps, it implies the sites are somehow extensions of a base, being the mother camp. It implies having a connection with the mother camp, as well as resembling the mother camps, but being a lot smaller. Calling the sites ‘satellite camps’ is only used in policies and government rhetoric. People who have lived in these new sites for a longer time have sometimes referred to the place as ‘camps’. They have seen a major influx of people into these smaller sites, fearing that these will become so big it will become just like a mother camp.

The mango tree in the column that implies ‘home’ is used to indicate the place where people come from. Every settlement or ‘village’ was marked with a mango tree, to indicate that people resided there. Sometimes there were only one or two huts around the mango tree. It must be said however, that the use of the ‘mango tree’ to express a village like location was only used by humanitarian and government actors. The Acholi refer to these places by names of the villages, as every settlement, no matter how small it was, has a name.

It seemed very difficult to have consensus on how to label certain sites and how to call the act of moving. As a humanitarian aid worker admitted:

"There is confusion about what are camps and new sites. You can send your data about ten new sites and the district would say that 5 are camps and 5 are sites."35

Government officials, humanitarian aid workers, scholars and many others have scratched their heads thinking of reasons why people in Acholiland are reluctant to move away from their camps to their original homes. The biggest mystery of all appeared to be why people choose to replace their camp for a smaller settlement, in which people face the same difficulties as in the mother camp. The biggest advantage is the access to their lands. But why not move directly to their homes?

As the next chapter will reveal, there are many different reasons for the movement patterns the Acholi currently have. In order to illustrate the confusion about the terminology in the humanitarian field the following report published by UNOCHA in September 2007 deserves attention.

‘Waiting for Godot, Possible reasons for delay in IDPs return process’ was published in September 2007, just before the main author and Head of Office, Esteban Sacco left his post after two years in Gulu. As the introduction entails, Sacco endeavours to ‘challenge the notion of ‘return’ as requiring movement’. (Sacco 2007:1) His focus was a totally new one in the speculations about the movement process that time. His argument is that complete movement will not be the only mode of return.

35 Interview with humanitarian aid worker, Gulu, 2 November 2007
On the contrary, Sacco expects that most people will actually remain in the camps in order to enjoy the services. Meanwhile they will commute to their original homelands in order to do their productive activity in agriculture.

For the phenomenon of remaining in the camps, while commuting to their original homelands, Sacco invented in new terminology in the return discussion: ‘return without movement’. (Sacco 2007:5) According to Sacco, people can have the feeling they have returned to their original lands through the regained access to it without actually returning to the land. Or people can put up huts in their villages while keeping one in the camp in order to access ‘services, markets, security and social life in a cluster setup’. The latter option is what he calls ‘return with movement’. (Sacco 2007:5) Lastly, Sacco acknowledges the fact that people actually move to home areas, but these will remain few according to him.

Would this conclusion have been based on in depth interviews with people in the camps, and other settlements, this report would have been a real contribution to the return and movement debate. However, Sacco and UNOCHA base their conclusion on geographical data on the distances between camp and home areas. As they repeatedly state in their report: 63% of the IDPs living in camps have their home areas within 5 kilometres from the camp. (Sacco 2007:4) A distance that they can easily walk every day is their assumption. Thus as Sacco summarises:

’Since a large percentage of the population lives in camps within reasonable walking distance of their home areas, their return to home may be understood not as a physical movement out of the camps but as the repossession of their own farming land, while remaining in camps for the time being.’ (Sacco 2007:4)

Apart from Sacco’s assumptions relating to services, social life and IDPs’ decisions and motivations for movement that are very different from my data (which will be discussed in the chapter on movement patterns), Sacco’s methods are not very clear and accurate. He explains the sampling technique with which he selected households in camps equally. The sample size was 720 households in different camps in Gulu district, depending on the amount of people living in the camp. Within one week, 720 interviews of 15 minutes were held with one adult member of the household. (Sacco 2007:23) However, it is not clear what kind of questions was asked and how this survey was introduced. It could have been that people were asked questions in terms of locations as opposed to their movement motivations. Their answers would then feed their assumptions based on purely geographical data. People in new sites and villages were not included in this survey, which is in my view a missed opportunity. They could have challenged or agreed with UNOCHA’s assumption.

In reaction to this report, Sacco had both supporters as opponents. It represents the confusion among government and humanitarian aid workers about the issues of return. To a greater extent it
represents the disarray of the humanitarian field what interventions are needed, which movement to encourage and which other opinions should be challenged. One district government official was annoyed by UNOCHA’s report:

_We think that NGOs are thriving on the situation. Some even show resistance to the government (…) They focus on camps. Like in this report (takes Sacco’s report out), indirectly. This is misinterpreted by IDPs themselves._

Within the humanitarian field it appeared that Sacco finally translated ideas and frustrations of some aid workers. No one, except for the government for their own reasons, disputed Sacco’s ideas openly. During one of the CCCM/RR cluster meeting one humanitarian aid worker referred to the new type of movement Sacco referred to. The only protest came from an UN official who referred to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as well as the National IDP policy of Uganda in which the terminology is clearly defined. He protested against the invention of new terminology when there are two clear defined papers used as framework for all humanitarian partners world wide and specifically in Northern Uganda.

One humanitarian aid worker agreed on the misuse of terminology in Sacco’s report but suggested to replace the ‘return without movement’ with ‘_durable solutions without movement_.’ She praised Sacco for putting himself out there: something many aid workers would not dare to do. She agreed on most of the issues discussed in the report. Another humanitarian aid worker opposed this as she stated:

_I like Esteban [Sacco], but he is not a humanitarian aid worker, nor a protection officer. He was ten days in the field! How can you write a report like that? In most cases he did not inform people [of NGOs in the camp] he was doing this assessment. The UN does this all the time._

It is questionable whether there will be one clear definition about return in a context in which different players have different interests and ideas. One can argue that terminology should not matter. However, when action depends on political and humanitarian mandates, it does.

**ii. Government’s impatience**

When the peace talks started in August 2006, the focus on return and resettlement entered a different stage. On 10 November 2006 the UPDF and the Northern district leaders declared on the

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36 Interview a district government official, Gulu town, 12 November 2007.
37 CCCM/RR Cluster Meeting, UNHCR premises Gulu Town, 1 November 2007.
38 Interview humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 6 November 2007.
39 Interview humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 6 November 2007.
40 According to the report, this was actually 7 days (Sacco 2007:13)
41 Interview humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 5 November 2007.
radio that people could ‘voluntarily return’.42 Using the media as main channel of communication, different articles were published about the government declaring the region to be safe enough to return, encouraging people to resume normal lives and farming. For the majority in the camps that does not read newspapers -in most cases because the people cannot read- radio is a useful channel of communication to those far out of reach. The RDC and LCS of Gulu appear on the Gulu based Mega FM radio every week, making propaganda to leave the camps.

There are even occasions mentioned in which the RDC of Gulu visited a camp close to Gulu town himself to share his dissatisfaction about the number of people that are still in the camps. As one boy remembered:

‘[there was an] order of the RDC Walter Ochora, who stated that the camp should be closed, because most villages are very close to the main camp so people can live there. (...) He went to the camp personally. He told us that he himself has brought his mother back home. Why is it that people are still in the camp?’43

The people of NRC’s Camp Management Team remembered a similar incident in their camp. Government officials of the office of the Prime Minister in Kampala visited the camps in June 2007 to tell people to go home. As the Camp Management Team experienced, the office of the Prime Minister threatened the people they will tax the land or cut the food aid if the people would stay any longer in the camps.44

Very practically the government’s focus on return indicates their promotion to supply services in the ‘return areas’. This should encourage people to leave the dirty camps for their homes. The government calls for as little assistant as needed in the main camps. The government neither encourages the service supply to new established transition sites. Return means going to the home areas and nothing in between.

‘To promote return we adopted the parish based approach. Our focus is on scaling down the humanitarian organisations in IDP camps. We want minimal aid in transit sites. Services should be provided in the parishes. We provide schools, teachers, materials.’45

The camp closure ideas, the threats of cutting food aid or taxing land and the shift from aid in sites to parishes are all examples of the government’s agenda toward the current IDP situation. The government actively pushes people out of the places they are residing other than their villages. This

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42 Interview with a district government official, Gulu town, 21 September 2007
43 Interview in a village in Gulu district, male age 20, 10 November 2007
44 Field visit Camp Management teams of the Norwegian Refugee Council, Amuru district, 28 September 2007
45 The Parish Based Approach will be discussed later on. In short it means service provision in the parishes in which several villages are located, instead of providing every single village with services.
46 Interview with a government official, Gulu town, 21 September 2007
seriously endangers the two main rights for internally displaced, being the freedom of movement and the freedom of choice. When the government chooses to push it harder, by for example totally cutting the food aid, IDPs have no other option than to follow their government’s ideas of return.

The district government of Gulu has a more nuanced view on the return process. Despite their encouragement and promotion of return, and as some people in the camps have accused them of threatening to take measures when they do not leave, they are better aware of local realities.

‘I have heard many people saying: ‘if peace comes today, tomorrow we will be in our villages.’ Museveni has announced that the war is over. But people do not believe him. In August 2006 we as the district embraced return. Same activities should continue, but they should be more focused on return.’

District government officials have lived in a war as like any other Northern Ugandan. They are caught between the difficulties and nuances in the IDP setting and the less nuanced directives of the central government in Kampala. However, in terms of the so-called return process, the district government complies with what comes from the hierarchy above. Although they may have experienced the characteristics of war, they have never been displaced nor lived in an IDP camp.

Other government officials have, being the LC1s, LC2s and LC3s. Representing the government locally they have been a camp inhabitant and an internally displaced at the same time. They are torn between their governmental responsibility and their own experiences and observations in the camps. As one deputy LC3 explained:

‘There is still fear concerning the peace talks. The people think that it does not take the LRA long to get here [camp]. (...) We are trying [to communicate the government’s directives]. But we feel that the life of people is more important than then the directive of the government. So we encourage the people to settle together.’

Local government councillors are searching for alternatives to deal with the government’s pressure to close the camps. People are encouraged to move to the smaller sites together, as they feel that way. One LC1 left the main camp for a smaller new site, closer to his home and land. Confronting him with the question what he thinks of the government wanting to close the main camps he said:

‘I would welcome the idea. Because of the problems in the main camp; spoiled people’s life, children, women, elders. But if they are going to close the camps they have to do it when they are really sure that there is peace. If they close the camps now, the rebels can still sneak in Uganda and there will be a problem for people where to go again.’

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47 Interview with district government official, Gulu town, 15 November 2007
48 See chapter 2 for the different meanings and functions of the Local Counsellors.
49 Interview with vice LC3 in main camp, Amuru district, 14 November 2007
50 Interview with an LC1, new site in Gulu district, 27 October 2007
Ranging from declaring the conflict a ‘temporary problem’ to the conception that rebels can return to the region any time, shows the different positions within the government relating to the conflict and the movement process. It is clear from the local counsellor’s statements and the figures showing that over 70% of the people were still living in the camps at the end of 2007, that the central government’s promotion to return has not bore many fruit. As long as the central and district governments continue to claim that the war is over, while the internally displaced are far from convinced it is safe enough to return, one can wonder why the government is pushing it so much.

In trying to explain this, one enters a politically tensed debate about Northern Uganda. As one humanitarian aid worker analysed:

‘Uganda does not want to be the country with the humanitarian crisis. Then there is the question of not having a humanitarian coordinator of course. They want to portray being normal, developmental. You have more control as government; development money goes through the government whereas emergency money is not. Why is the conflict going on for so long? I am not an expert but if you see the number of the LRA, the UPDF could have dealt with it. The war has kept going on deliberately. An ongoing conflict ensures your power. They think if you close the camps and people go home everything will be fine. Of course not.91

Many people doubted the government’s commitment to end this conflict and their concern for the people of Northern Uganda. As a previous chapter explains, the government of Uganda is criticised for their lack of response to fight to LRA. Their reluctance to declare Northern Uganda as an emergency situation during those twenty years has made people even more frustrated.

The government of Uganda has taken every opportunity to conceal the horrors of the war torn North and its past by shifting their focus to future plans of the region. Without taking into account how people perceive the ongoing peace talks and the general doubt and fear it will fail, the government confidently proclaims that the war is over. As this chapter will elaborate, the fast transition into development is heavily promoted. Camps are part of a past the government does not want to be reminded of. People need to go home. Return is considered to be the first step into development.

iii. UNHCR and return monitoring

Many watch the movement process in Northern Uganda closely - including oversees. Messages that the war is over reach the donor community. Humanitarian agencies have to write their proposal creatively to still receive funding for their work in Northern Uganda. The donor community is confused now the government is focusing on development. Should the money go to humanitarian agencies or to the government that is considered to be functional and democratically chosen?92

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91 Interview with a senior humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 7 January 2008
92 Interview with a senior humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 7 January 2008.
The government of Uganda would want everyone to believe that people are returning in big numbers. Even within the humanitarian community there are arguments about the numbers and figures relating to the return process. UNHCR is engaged with return monitoring. They have appointed one NGO that collects the data and makes tables and maps. Every month the figures of people that have left the camps to new sites or villages are shared within the humanitarian community.53

As the previous table has shown, it is not really clear when someone is considered to have returned, and where. UNHCR have appointed their partners to collect the data about the returning people. The partners count the huts in the new sites and villages and multiply them by five, assuming every hut hosts 5 family members on average. However, as one UN worker explained, this is difficult for two reasons. Firstly, every partner counts in a different way and secondly, doing the assessment is difficult in sites with over 500 people. When asking why community leaders are not involved in the counting process as they are the ones who actually know who lives where, she answers:

“Community leaders would include commuting people but you want the people who construct huts and sleep there.”54

The ‘there’ in this quote is ‘everywhere else’ than the camp. One of her colleagues explained that she did not feel comfortable with the term ‘new sites’. According to her, ‘these people there are already in their home areas, so they are home’55 In short: UNHCR speaks of return the moment people leave the camp permanently for a different site. This would mean that the term ‘resettlement’ as described in the National IDP policy does not apply to the situation in Northern Uganda. Nor the ones commuting between different sites are considered to have returned. But how would UNHCR know that the ones living in the hut they count are not commuting? What does return mean when people are in new settlements that are not their home villages? This rigid position on return creates frustration among other humanitarian agencies. The return process is much more dynamic and multi levelled than UNHCR would want to believe.

Nevertheless, UNHCR as well as UNOCHA produce updated maps on return every month. The numbers and figures about return are used as a basis for interventions the humanitarian community think of during the coordination meetings. When in settlement X reside an increased number of people while there is no borehole this will be identified as a gap. A service supplying NGO will be asked to think of camp X when they are about to drill boreholes. Numbers and figures can become powerful means to base humanitarian interventions on. But numbers and figures are static. They do not include any nuances, exceptions or multiple explanations about return decisions.

53 See Annex 6 and 7 for maps on settlements in Amuru district December 20007 and June 2008
54 Interview with a UN worker, Gulu town, 13 November 2007
55 Interview with a UN official, Gulu town, 11 September 2007
In order to understand the movement process in Northern Uganda especially those factors are extremely important to take into account as the next chapter will reveal. Meanwhile the humanitarian community and the government are preoccupied with the numbers involved in return through the use of data in the media and reports. Images of the movement process are greatly manipulated:

‘(...) the IDP camps are 50 per cent empty, 40 per cent of the people have returned to their homes, 40 per cent have one leg in the IDP camp and another in the village. We can almost say about 80 per cent have returned.’ (Daily Monitor 2008:b)²⁵

The ‘almost’ in this sentence weakens this statement and reveals the inaccuracy. Despite the question whether this statement is ‘true’ or not it shows how important numbers are – with 4 different percentages in once sentence- as well as the perception on return. Having one leg in an IDP camps and another in the village is equivalent to return.

The focus on return – in interventions as well as the imaging- of the government is not welcomed by all players in the humanitarian field.

‘In the CAP protection strategy in February it was agreed that there are three ways of movement. 1. Return. 2. Resettlement, 3. Reintegration. Now here is where the confusion comes: some whom were considered to be 'returned' go back to the camps once in a while. Think of how many people in North America and Europe have summer houses. Two houses is always better than one. Some keep the hut in the camp for when they are sick or want to sell heir crops in the market. This is for international actors difficult to understand (...) it is a very subjective issue is what I am trying to say.'²⁶

Another humanitarian aid worker shared her frustration about the discourse in which agencies and the government keep on asking them how many displaced have returned: ‘They fight about figures, not about people.’²⁷ She warns the humanitarian community for the cunning projects of the government of Uganda relating to the situation in the north. There is no critical attitude towards the government’s agenda. When dealing with in internal displacement situation one should realise that there is often a government involved that is also a perpetrator. According to her, UNHCR’s staff is not skilled enough in human rights, which is a problem when wanting to challenge the government.

Notions on development

The focus on return from the humanitarian community that includes the government is based upon an adopted assumption that Northern Uganda is facing a ‘transitional phase’ from ‘emergency to reconstruction’. Or as it is sometimes put: ‘from war to peace’, or ‘from humanitarian aid to early recovery and developmental relief’. ‘Transition´ entails a notion of being ‘in between’; leaving a

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²⁵ Interview with the district chairman of Gulu in one of the leading national newspapers.
²⁶ Interview with a humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 5 November 2007.
²⁷ Interview with a senior humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 7 January 2008
certain phase and entering a new one. But if one looks critically, it is not certain what kind of phase the region is entering. Or even what kind of phase it is leaving. When can one speak of war, of peace, and how do we transfer from the one into the other? Why is it important to label the phases?

It is for the government and aid institutions. They often determine their policies and interventions on these certain labels and different phases. In the case of Northern Uganda, the government and agencies’ focus has shifted from ‘emergency’ to ‘early recovery’ since the peace talks started in July 2006. People address this situation as facing ‘somehow peace’. As if the ‘transition’ ultimately leads to peace. But there is no peace yet. The situation has improved, but Northern Uganda is not ‘transitioning’. That is because people are waiting and holding their breath.

With the upcoming of ‘new wars’ [ref] also humanitarian aid has moved into a new paradigm. Humanitarian aid no longer only responds to emergencies. (Hilhorst 2007) Their mandates have become less strictly defined. There is room for manoeuvre for humanitarian agencies within their fields of operation. Whereas World Food Programme used to provide emergency food relief only, now they have extended their activities toward many different programmes that ensure food security. Humanitarians enter the development scene. Donor money decreases drastically as donors believe the war is over and there is no longer need for a humanitarian response. In order to sustain their activities, humanitarian agencies should stretch their mandates. They would say that it is because programmes are more durable and effective when they are planned for the longer term. But on the other hand it will give them legitimacy to stay when the emergency is ‘over’. Why should you leave as long as you still receive donor money?

“We are a non governmental humanitarian organisation. But we are getting more developmental. Even when the situation improves, we will be staying in the community. As long as donors give.”58

The frameworks in which all agencies currently operate in Northern Uganda are humanitarian. However, when agencies suddenly shift to developmental activities things get different. Relationships among agencies and with the government change as well as roles and responsibilities. There will be competition as agencies get less direct donor money for developmental activities. A developmental focus includes the capacity building of the local government.

*The Marshall Plan for Northern Uganda: the PRDP*

Northern Uganda is changing. The government, UNHCR and some NGOs actively work towards a Northern Uganda without displacement, camps and aid. A camp phase-out committee has been established, plans are made to demolish huts and UPDF deployment in the camps is being reduced. (New Vision 2008) Northern Uganda should develop as it is *‘the major impediment to increasing GDP*

58 Interview with a humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 10 January 2008
growth in Uganda’. (PRDP 2007:vi). The government of Uganda initiated a huge policy plan to recover and develop the north called the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP). It is a framework for all operations in the north for a period of three years. The money involved is $ 606,519,297 US Dollars. The policy outlines four objectives: (1) Consolidation of state authority, (2) Rebuilding and empowering communities, (3) Revitalization of the economy, (4) Peace building and reconciliation. The budget as well as the coordination and implementation is the government’s task at all levels:

A Policy Committee and a PRDP Coordination and Monitoring Unit that is semi-autonomous will be set up at the national level to oversee that implementation and coordination of the PRDP activities, being undertaken by sector level ministries and local governments. (PRDP 2007:viii-ix)

The PRDP was officially launched in October 2007. The National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons is no longer used as the operational framework. The district of Gulu has been told to replace the IDP policy with the PRDP as their focus. The PRDP is overruling the national IDP policy even though Northern Uganda is still in the phase of displacement. But as it is promoted: displacement belongs to the past. Development is Northern Uganda’s new trend.

Relating to the movement process of the internally displaced, the PRDP allocated a budget of US$ 38,973,120 for a period a three years to

(…) facilitate the voluntary return of IDPs from camps to their places of origin and/or any other location of their preference as peace returns. (PRDP 2007:63)

Apart from the provision of “return kits” suggestions how to facilitate the return process are not mentioned. Almost 39 million dollars is involved in the return process of Northern Uganda: all to be spent before October 2010. As the government is obviously aware, formally there is not yet peace. But by claiming the war is over the PRDP plan in the return process can be implemented anyway. That means that the government has started to channel the first amounts of the 39 million through their government channels.

The PRDP influences everyone that is working in the humanitarian community in Northern Uganda. The government watches over agencies’ activities. The humanitarian community was not moved by the PRDP circus when the plan was just launched. Many humanitarians admitted they had not read the 157 pages plan. But there is no way to oppose the plan or the timing in which it was launched. The PRDP was an initiative of the UN and the World Bank and during the process several agencies were involved. The different stakeholders all committed to the plan at central level. Obviously they want to make a success of it. Thus in the meantime it is generally accepted that the war is over, that
people should return as soon as possible, that Northern Uganda is ready to develop, which is in the hands of the government through a plan in which half a billion million dollars is involved.

**Conclusion**

Northern Uganda’s current situation is about conflict, peace, reconstruction and development. The humanitarian community is principally occupied with these terms. All factors the government of Uganda takes a clear stand in. The war is over, peace will come, and we now have to start reconstruct so that Northern Uganda will develop soon. The first two steps have been taken, the last two will only occur when people return to their homes. The three different notions on war, return and development in the Northern Uganda humanitarian discourse have far reaching implications for the region.

The notions on war of the government – that are adapted by the humanitarian community- fail to understand that the fact that the peace deal has not been signed yet is a serious restriction in the security situation in Northern Uganda. They think in rigid time distinctions. July 2006 opened the doors to a new phase. They now speak of a ‘transition phase’ in which can be focused on early recovery and even development activities. Displacement does not fit that model, thus people should return. That means that the National policy for Internally Displaced Person is no longer needed now people are ‘returning’. It is promoted that there are no other kinds of movement than return, although the movement patterns of IDPs show differently (see next chapter). Furthermore there is a huge confusion about the meaning of the term ‘return’. The term ‘integration’ in the IDP policy means that the government should take care of means for people who choose to stay in the camps. However, the term is completely ignored. The government only speaks of return and to a lesser extent of resettlement.

The dominant focus on return is an oversimplified construction of government and the UNHCR in today’s context of Gulu and Amuru district. Geography and figures are used to support their view on the rapid change in the society because of the return process. This not only creates a gap in perceptions between them and local realities, it also challenges the concept of ‘freedom of movement’, which is a human right according to the National IDP policy. When the government threatens to stop the food relief in camps and stigmatises the people in the camps for not leaving them one can no longer speak of the freedom of movement being ensured. This is an alarming conclusion in a context in which the national IDP policy is praised by many and used as a framework of operations.

The discussion on return, and to a lesser extent on resettlement and reintegration, is one held in the humanitarian and governmental field. It is filled with assumptions about the movement patterns of the internally displaced persons trying to understand where people come from and going to. The
movement patterns of the internally displaced in the current context of Northern Uganda are very complex as we shall see in the next chapter. Issues like fear, doubt, access to land and food and many others influence the way people move. Terms like ‘return’ and ‘home’ are not easy to explain when focusing on the local realities.

Why would the government draw that much attention to return and peace while it is doubtful if we can even speak of return and peace? The answer lies in their objective to turn the society from an emergency into a developing region. In an emergency situation money is channelled mainly through the UN and NGOs. They are there to support the local government in saving people’s lives. Development money however, is channelled through the government. Uganda as one of the donor darlings receives a lot of bilateral aid. The situation in Northern Uganda has always disturbed the relationships between Museveni and donor governments. Now with the promotion that the situation is improving and all efforts are made to keep the peace talks going, it seems that the government of Uganda wants to change the negative image of Museveni’s agenda for the north. And to get more control over donor money.

The Peace, Recovery and Development Plan is an outcome of these efforts. The PRDP is the government’s pride. There is an astonishing amount of money involved in the implementation of this plan. The 600 million dollars coming from donors are channelled through the government of Uganda. The launching of this plan in this stage is not a coincidence. Return is therefore promoted. The PRDP would loose its credibility rapidly when it turns out that displacement is not yet over because people are not leaving the camps. It would mean that Northern Uganda is not ready yet for development strategies. And that is exactly the case.

Humanitarian agencies cannot say anything relating to the remarkable timing of the PRDP’s launch, as they were involved in the writing process. But there are plenty of things left to be critical about: the government’s attempts to push people out of camps against their will, the rapid shift to early recovery while there is still no peace yet. However, when humanitarians believe that there are now in a transition phase, this new phase in humanitarian relief is used to justify different approaches and new interventions as mandates are extended. It is a matter of being creative with the definition of the situation in order to get more funds and to sustain them. It is yet to be seen however what kind of implications these ideas have on policy and project level when peace indeed comes, or in the worst case, when the war will resume in the nearby future.

What about the displaced people themselves? The simplified assumption that people will go back to their ancestral lands and resume farming as they did in the old days, denies the fact that twenty years

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60 The Netherlands’ government has cut their basket funding twice because they were dissatisfied by the level of good governance in Uganda. The money was then used to fund humanitarian projects in Northern Uganda.

61 Transition between emergency and recovery
of conflict have changed social structures and societies. It also denies the problems these societies face due to destructed social relations and values and psychological problems of people after their conflict experiences. As a befriended researcher put it: ‘People here have a romanticised idea about the past and an idealised idea about the future.’ IDPs however do not think in terms of ‘conflict’, ‘peace’, ‘reconstruction’ and ‘development’. They have very different notions and understandings of the current situation in Northern Uganda as the next chapter will show.

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62 Personal communication, Gulu town, October 2007
6. MOVEMENT PATTERNS

Introduction:

East, West, Home’s Best?

In the previous chapter I elaborated on the political and humanitarian views on ‘return’. This chapter will discuss the notions of “return” as the internally displaced see these themselves. It will make clear that the ‘return’ process is a lot more nuanced and complex than the humanitarian industry portrays it. It will make clear that the term ‘movement’ is to be preferred in contrast to ‘return’. Notions about home and movement represent to local realities of IDPs. Lastly different factors of movement will be elaborated, mentioned by the several actors. This will help to understand the complexity of the motivations relating to the movement of IDPs. Different angles show different issues to be aware of. Therefore this chapter calls for a shift in thinking in humanitarian and policy terms in order to understand local dynamics in the movement process of IDPs.

i. Home as a nuanced concept

‘It makes me happy [to be in the village]. Life in the village makes me a person intelligent enough to know what is right and what is wrong. Compared to the life in the camp that is all about struggling to get income to feed on. As for the youth in the camp, if you do not go to school or do not have anything to do, you will either become a thief or a robber. Here in the village I can at least do something that generates income.’

We met David in a village that is located a few miles from the main road from Gulu to Kitgum. There is one brick house and two mud huts surrounded by a lot of green grasses, trees and berry trees. Chickens are looking for food. David is digging in the garden - his feet and clothes are muddy. We explain the aim of our research and he is prepared to talk to us. Two fellow villagers bring us wooden chairs. We sit down under a big tree.

David tells us he was born in a camp close by. Some years later he was abducted by the LRA. Three years he stayed in the bush fighting for the rebels. When he came back from the bush years later his family was no longer in the camp. When he was younger his parents had told him the name of their village. Despite the fact that he had never seen the village, he went looking for it and his family. He found out they had all moved to a different camp.

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63 Interview in a village in Gulu district, male age 20, 11 October 2007
64 ’We’ mean my translator and I.
David and his family stayed in the camp for over five years. Due to his abduction and the years spend with the LRA as well as money issues, David could not resume school. There was nothing for him to do in the camp. He tried to apply for school sponsorship, but due to an overload of applications he never got one.

Beginning a few months ago, David now commutes between the village and the camp in order to access the land where he grows food. His parents decided to stay in the village permanently, but David explains he does not feel he has returned fully. He explains that he sometimes spends the night in the village, when it is already dark or when it is raining. When I ask him why he has not joined his parents in the village he answers:

‘The young people still fear the LRA. When they go back to the villages anything can happen and they can still be arrested⁴⁵. So most of them stay in the camp. The elder ones, like my parents are the ones going back to the villages. (...) They do not fear so much’.

David explains he has been coming to the village since the moment he came back from the bush. Not until July 2007 did he spend the night in the isolated village. In the early days he had to go back to the camp by 3pm. ‘Whenever the UPDF would see you after that time they had the order to shoot you.’ This changed when the level of security improved. There was a small UPDF detach built near David’s village. This encouraged David to sometimes spend the night in the village, even though he expresses that he does not feel very safe. He has not considered the detach an incentive to permanently stay in the village, despite his happy feelings about being home.

‘I have total fear. Because I was arrested one time. And when they capture me again that is either death or life for me.’

David illustrates the legacy of the war and how it is experienced by the youth. Being the primary targets of the LRA, the youth of Northern Uganda grew up in a context in which having fear, running away and experiencing extreme horrors belonged to their realities. The improvement of the security situation and the ongoing peace talks are of marginal importance in contrast to the level of fear the youth have.

David associates his village with the place where the rebels used to pass from. He often refers to his arrest, how it has influenced his life – how he could not finish school, how afraid he is and how he came back into the community. After a while he felt secure enough to show us his left hand that he had concealed from us: he had lost his little finger while at war for the rebels.

⁴⁵ Some people you the verb ‘to arrest’ for being abducted by the LRA.
Despite his fear and his bad memories he decided to stay in the village as much as he can. The reason he mentioned is brief:

‘(...) because I had to look for something to feed on. And to get some income to buy things like soap, salt and other needs.’

For David going back to village means access to land in order to cultivate and sell food. It was his only way to generate some income in order to buy other commodities.

As the example of David’s story illustrates, ‘home’ is a nuanced concept. He has never actually lived in the village where we found him; nevertheless he refers to the village as his original home village. The problem here lies within the definition of home – because of the fear and influences through the war, people are having issues with realizing their return as permanent and feel stressed to return to the camps out of fear that the war might break out again. His concept of home is about accessing land and growing your own food. Being home does not mean that people can easily resume normal life. Spending most of the time at the village does not mean return. Fear about the rebels and doubt about the peace talks are influencing people’s perceptions about home.

For David in particular, as for other ex-LRA or FAPs, there is an extra process of movement that should be taken into account. That is the act of escaping the bush, or being released from the rebels. Most FAPs return to their communities in the camps. They face an extra dimension in feeling somewhere at home. As David shared:

‘It was very hard to live in the community [in the camp]. The people might take you as a person just coming back from the bush, being traumatised. What you do does not correspond with what the people in the community do. At night people fear sleeping next to you, they think that you can kill them in the night. In the beginning it was very hard, during day and night. (...) Here [the village] I live freely. There is no disturbance. In the past people thought I had an evil spirit. But now I can freely interact with people.’

In the camps different communities live together. There are numerous activities and reports on the return and reintegration into society of FAPs. Those who experience difficulties in reintegrating into the camp’s society after their rebel experience are also the ones who are most afraid of returning to their homes. (JRP & QPSW 2008) Home can be associated with a more free life and acceptance among the smaller community; it also represents the vulnerability of living isolated and being the LRA’s target.

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66 Formally Abducted Person
**ii. Home associations**

The definition of home varies on a personal level. Many ideas and thoughts are associated with it. I asked the people in main camps, new sites, villages and Gulu town to name three words that they associate with ‘home’. Although numerous answers have been given, the one often mentioned is ‘digging own land’. This answer was also often first mentioned of the three associations I asked people to make. It is acknowledged that the tables only shed a little light on what home means for people. It is accepted that it can vary broadly from country and city – even villages. However, it does give us some insight on the themes that are thought about when asked to reflect on the word “home”. Out of the answers we can distinguish three main themes. These will be discussed separately.

**Table 2: Associations with home.**
Theme 1: Agriculture/ Income generating activities / Food / Money issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Home’</th>
<th>No of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dig own land</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough food</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No buying of water</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children to school</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating nice things</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough land</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saving money</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The access to own land was most often mentioned out of all other ideas people associated with ‘home’. Whether people were currently staying in the camps, in the new sites or villages, ‘home’ meant being able to cultivate their land. This meant having something to do, as well as cultivating enough to have some little income to pay children’s school fees or to buy more luxury goods like soap and salt. Money, agriculture and food are related to each other, it is about economic independence. That is why these answers are clustered together. ‘Children to school’ is also brought under this theme for the reason that the cultivation of land, having cattle or hunting generates income to pay the school fees.

**Table 3: Associations with home.**
Theme 2: Social factors / Freedom to do own activities

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community feelings, friends</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole family at home</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang-Oo68</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting wild berries</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting firewood</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

67 N= 21. 1 respondent answered only for home because she has been in boarding school
68 Acholi expression for ‘gathering around a fire and tell each other stories’
Ask elders advise 2
Bathing together 2
Having fun 2
Swimming 1
Fishing 1
Independent of aid 1
Fetching water 1
Digging paths for going school 1
Cultural dances 1
Disco time 1
Easy life 1
Collecting wild honeys 1

Being home also means feeling free enough to do activities of one’s liking, like swimming, fishing, or collecting firewood and wild berries. In contrast to staying in the camps where people were not allowed to move freely and where everyone is paying attention to you. Being home also has a social status, a place where the family lives together, where friends and community members are around and where there are Elders that you can ask for advice on important issues. One respondent mentioned being ‘independent of aid’ as a positive result of being home. As long as you can access the land and do your own activities, it is no longer needed to rely on aid.

Table 4: Associations with home.
Theme 3: Emotions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love for home</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proud</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving there immediately</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lastly, not surprisingly, thinking about home brought about many emotions by the people who were or have been displaced for a long time. Experiencing freedom was most often mentioned, as well as a great love for home. All emotions are positive ones and the majority of the interviewed displaced would answer in terms of emotions.

Table 5: Associations with home
Uncategorised

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obedient children</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good health condition</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running away from rebels</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too young to remember</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

69 This answer came from a woman who’s village was about 5 kilometers from Gulu town. When she was young she used to go to the discos in Gulu town.
Of course, there are also answers that are not easy to categorise. ‘Obedient children’ was answered by two adults that believed that home would bring back social norms within society that will get children to obey. ‘Good health condition’ refers to the diseases and deaths that still occur in the camps. Even without health clinics nearby this person believed that staying in less crowded villages where there is variety of food, people will become less ill as opposed to the living conditions in the camps. ‘Location’ means thinking about the place, remembering how it looks like. The last two answers came from young people. One remembered her home as the place where she used to run away from in fear of the rebels. The other one was a young girl saying that she has lived in the camp the majority of her life. She did not know how to picture home. But the camp did not feel as her home.

Analyzing these answers, for displaced people it is about the access to land and to grow own food, for a variety in own consumption, or to get some money from it. But it is also about living with own family and the clan, doing social activities like bathing together and wang-oo. Many have an idealised image of being at home, and many would express their love and desire to actually go back to their villages in order to obtain the above mentioned freedom.

It must be said that many issues were addressed during the interviews but not always associated with home. For example, the majority of the respondents expressed their happiness about being able to access their land or the desire to it. In an agricultural society in which the vast majority possesses a piece of land that they once accessed, it is not surprising that this is given attention when talking about home. Not only did people loose their freedom and their possessions when they were ordered into the camps, they also lost their economic and social status that was derived from agriculture activities or cattle herding. In the camps idleness was imposed upon the displaced, resulting not only in boredom, but also in complete poverty in the absence of money. People became dependent on what kind of opportunities were there in the camps. In most cases this meant total dependence upon aid and others. Home contrasts all this, people are looking forward to having a variety of food, having something to do and feel proud, to restore social structures like consulting clan elders and farming together. But most of all, people currently seek different ways to find some income as also life in the camps can be expensive. School fees, soap, salt, charcoal, sometimes even water, all must be paid for. A big task for the many that are not able to generate income in whichever way.

It is evident from the information gathered that the people all express nostalgic ideas and memories about home they have experienced before and wish to experience again. The associations with home clearly oppose the feelings about camp life. Home is associated with engagement in daily income generating activities, having the family together and the children going to school, dignity and

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30 I was told that in the early days of displacement, people in the camps were obliged to pay taxes to the local government. Later on, this was abolished.
community life. The associations with camp life lack all of the above. Especially the lack of a social community life is expressed which result in ‘immorality’, ‘drunkenness’, ‘stubbornness’ and ‘theft’. The following table shows the associations made with ‘camp’.

Table 6: Associations with camp.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Camp’</th>
<th>No of answers</th>
<th>‘Camp’</th>
<th>No of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drunkenness</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Poor housing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disobedient children</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Changed culture</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immorality (related to sex)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>People going to discos</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over congestion</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No traditional dishes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of food</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Short dresses</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diseases</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hate for camp life</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land renting/ no own land</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No health centre</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Idleness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No cattle</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Instead talk about home</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No money</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Total poverty</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search for water</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Begging</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffering</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No enjoyment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No hunting</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Theft</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Oppression</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=17

Camp life as experienced by the displaced has been discussed previously. This table shows the strong contrasting associations between camp life and “home”. Apart from immoral behaviour and the lack of access to own land was mentioned, and the lack of money. Moral issues and income generating problems are seen as being solved whenever people go back to their homes.

Not all displaced persons interviewed have lived in a camp. They either stayed in Gulu town, or elsewhere in Uganda. They have different associations with these places as the following table shows:

Table 7: Associations of the place the people stayed during displacement other than camp71

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘elsewhere’</th>
<th>No of answers</th>
<th>‘elsewhere’</th>
<th>No of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expensive things</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Digging</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Buying food</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hates renting</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxury things</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=3

A girl that had stayed elsewhere in Uganda during the insurgency remembered that place as where she was able to go to school and where they used to dig, although this land was rented. The people that lived in town mentioned money problems often in terms of renting accommodation and buying

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71: Digging’ and ‘school’ belonged to a girl that stayed in Bwiyale, on the other side of Karuma Bridge. The other answers were of people that stayed in Gulu town.
food as they could not access any kind of land. But the town was also more secure and had more luxury things as opposed to camps.

As I have tried to illustrate, the displaced people see ‘home’ as a place totally different from the camps, where they have the opportunity to engage in economic and social activities. The social aspect of ‘home’ is also illustrated in their language. In Luo/Acholi the word for ‘home’ is ‘gang’. Whenever people are done with the greetings relating to the time of the day (Have you woken up well? In the morning and ‘Have you spent your day well?’ from afternoon onwards) it is common to ask about the people in the house. Generally is used: ‘Gang gucoo maber?’ Literally the person is asked whether the home has woken up well, actually meaning the people in the home. The prefix gu- is the third plural pronoun prefix in the past tense. ‘Household’ is ‘dano.’, meaning the location as well as the people living in it. Dano means people. Home is seen as a social setting as well as access to own land and being able to generate income. Home is a nuanced concept in the life of the Acholis.

iii. Not ‘homehome’

The people I found in villages in Gulu district all have their personal stories on how they got there and how they perceived being home. David was one of them, explaining he did not feel ‘fully returned’ yet, nor very safe. But at least he felt happiness in cultivating the garden to provide his family with money and ‘luxury’ things like salt and soap. The others have stories of their own as I will them summarise them here.

Charles73 has never really left his village during the war. He commuted between his hut and Gulu town and a trading centre nearby. At the trading centre there is an army detach. Some of his children commute with him; the oldest are renting in town. He stayed in one of the camps during three months but he left because life was too difficult there. We meet him in his village with his three youngest children.

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72 ‘Homehome’ was frequently used by all actors to indicate the permanent staying home.

73 Interview with Charles in a village in Gulu district, age 55, 12 January 2008. Charles is not the respondent’s real name.
‘During the day I am here in the village for cultivation, but at night I am sleeping in the centre. I take my children with me’. Why don’t you spend the night here? The situation is very bad at night. Abductions and killings. By the rebels? ‘By the rebels and even by the government. Because if you are alone you are an easy target. You have to stay with others’. Even now when the peace talks are going on? ‘I don’t know anything about the peace talks. It is not my concern.’.

Dorothy\textsuperscript{74} started coming back to her village in June 2007 to cultivate the land.

‘Currently we sleep here, but in a secured hidden place. It is a small hut in a hidden place, just temporary. In the night we sleep there, during the day we come here and we hurry up with the building. I have gone to get grasses, my husband is constructing the hut.’

She is still keeping her hut in the main camp.

‘I still have fear. Anything can happen. Whenever I have that fear I take my kids to the camp and stay there for maybe two or three days. After that we come back. It is just instinct that tells me to leave here and stay in the camp for a while.’

Richard\textsuperscript{75}, a seventeen year old, does feel he has completely returned to their village. Their home is a couple of kilometres from Gulu town, where he and his family stayed during the insurgency. He feels more secure now living at home, even though he was abducted once by the LRA from the hut he now lives in. However, as more people tend to do, he anxiously awaits the conclusion of the peace talks. He explains:

‘The fact that the peace agreement has not been signed yet makes me feel a bit more insecure. Because any time it can fail and things return to as those days. So we are ready when it fails, we just go back to town.’

Rose\textsuperscript{76} has a bicycle with which she travels to Gulu town every day to trade in fish at the market. She lived in town for over twenty years but started to come back to her village two months before we found her there. She stays with her husband in the village and feels very happy. There is one desire left and that is that she can bring the children back to the village as well. They are kept in town in a rented house where they go to school. When I ask her if she wants the children to stay in town, she resolutely answers:

‘No! We don’t want to keep them there. But only that the situation, there is not enough security here so we fear.’

\textsuperscript{74} Interview with Dorothy in a village in Gulu district, age 43, 15 December 2007. Dorothy is not the respondent’s real name.
\textsuperscript{75} Interview with Richard in a village in Gulu district, age 17, 14 December 2007. Richard is not the respondent’s real name.
\textsuperscript{76} Interview with Rose in a village in Gulu district, age 35, 11 October 2007. Rose is not the respondent’s real name.
David, Charles, Richard, Dorothy and Rose all have different movement patterns and perceptions about home. It challenges the question of you can say someone ‘has been returned’ and ‘at home’ when you find them in the village. It is certain that the places are perceived as home. But not all feel at home.

Can you say that Charles has returned to his village, while he is commuting between the main camp, the UPDF detach and the village? His instinct tells him where to go that particular day. Dorothy has a similar story: she spends most of her time at the village indeed, but sometimes returns to the camp with her children when she feels less secure. At the village, she sleeps under a temporary shelter in the bush. Can you say she has returned? Rose would say she has returned, but because of fear and the uncertainties relating to the peace talks she keeps the children in town. A separated family makes it more difficult to resume normal lives back in the village.

These examples illustrate different mechanism of how people deal with returning home. They all keep in mind that they might have to leave the village again if the peace talks fail. Fear is an everyday reality. It influences the decision making of the people who experience it, whether or not to leave the camps to other sites or home. When they do decide to leave the camps, they think of mechanisms how to respond to a sudden change in the security situation.

Going home is a process. But being home is also a process for those who are back in the villages. The attempt to send people home in order to ‘resume normal lives’ is as yet a fairy tale the government and humanitarian actors would love to believe in. We cannot deny the fact that the statistics of the middle of 2007 show that only 3% were appointed to be back in the villages. As I have tried to show in this chapter, we also have reasons to doubt the accuracy of that figure, as being home has several meanings and ‘escape mechanisms’ back to the camp or other more secure areas. For the government and the humanitarian agencies it is a big mystery why people are not returning permanently. As the next section will show, in looking for answers, IDPs are victims of the general ignorance of humanitarian actors and a political game of the government. The next section focuses on factors of movement that are addressed by both the government and humanitarian actors, but more importantly, that are addressed by the IDPs themselves.

Factors of Movement

i. Premature optimism

As soon as appeared that the peace talks in Juba started in 2006 between the LRA and the government of Uganda were a serious attempt to end the long lasting conflict in Northern Uganda, the government declared the region to be safe enough to leave the camps for home. The media announced a massive return of Northern Uganda’s population from IDP camps to their homes. [New
Vision (2006), a.o.] The IDP camps got closed down, huts got demolished and people returned to their homelands receiving the aid they needed from the aid agencies and the Ugandan government. UNHCR, UNOCHA, the media, and other monitoring institutions frequently reported the numbers of IDPs heading home in Northern Uganda, speaking of thousands of people per week. Three months after the peace talks had started the BBC reported UNHCR’s expectations of a ‘largest-scale movements of its kind ever to occur in Africa.’ (BBC News 2006) People working in the offices of Kampala, New York or Geneva must have gotten the impression that the return process of IDPs in Northern Uganda would be a smooth and unproblematic one.

Partly, this was the case. The high numbers of returning IDPs were not illusory. However, they were just restricted to certain areas within Northern Uganda. In the districts of Lira, Lango and Teso the people did return home. Camps have been closed down and despite other factors causing problems, like heavy rainfall and serious floods, the people in these districts have been able to reconstruct their communities.

However, the people in Pader, Kitgum, Gulu, Amuru (Acholiland) and the West Nile districts were not included in the numbers. They have not left the camps. On arrival in Gulu district in August 2007, local authorities and agencies showed me completely different figures than the media had presented. In Gulu and Amuru districts, about 70 percent of the internally displaced living in camps was still there. About 27 percent had moved to smaller sites, closer to their land. It was estimated that only 3 percent of the IDP population had returned to their original homelands.

The question rose: why are the return patterns in Acholiland so different from other regions in Northern Uganda? The local authorities and international and national aid agencies have come up with different explanations. It has been acknowledged that Acholiland was the epicentre of the conflict; a greater number of people have been affected by killings, abductions, mutilations, village attacks and displacement. Not only was the violence more severe than in other districts, also the duration of the conflict was different in Acholiland. The conflict prevailed for a shorter period of time in other districts. Therefore it was easier for people to find their ways home once the level of security improved as the peace talks started.

The duration and the intensity of the conflict, the forced displacement to congested camps, the diseases and the years of idleness and poverty in the camps and the failed attempts to end the conflict are important notions in trying to explain the movement decisions of IDPs in Acholiland. This section will explain the different reasons that have been mentioned in one way or the other77 for moving or not moving out of camps one by one, not in a given order. The voices of the government of

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77 Most respondents would mention several reasons for moving or not moving that are important. First I will explain them all in a non hierarchical manner. Later I will elaborate on the ones that are directly influencing the IDPs decision making.
Uganda, both local and central will discussed, as the voices of UN officials, humanitarian aid workers and IDPs in camps, new sites and villages.

**ii. Mines and Unexploded Ordnances (UXOs)**

One humanitarian aid worker stated that the danger of mines and UXOs would be the number one reason why people are still in the camps. She said that a landmine explosion is different matter to people than a gunshot would be. Whenever that happens ‘you will know for sure that people will not go back there.’ She is the program manager of the humanitarian agency that primarily funds demining activities in Northern Uganda.

It is not clear how many landmines and UXOs are still hidden in Northern Uganda’s soil. This danger is mentioned by different actors, but not very often. Some IDPs have expressed their fear of not knowing for sure whether their original homelands are clear of landmines. Humanitarian agencies as CPAR and AVSI have mining sensitization projects in various camps. Planting billboards displaying safe behaviour, drama shows showing the dangers and radio broadcasting are examples of these projects. (AVSI 2006) Deminers removed 302 mines and UXOs in 2005, in 2006 they removed 150. (AVSI 2006)

**iii. Wild animals**

Some IDP camps in the south of Gulu and Amuru districts host people that come from areas from within Murchison Falls National Park, or from areas bordering it. Murchison Falls National Park is a fantastic hide-out for tourists and humanitarians on holiday, because it is a home for elephants, lions, many antelopes and giraffes. However, the IDPs originating from these areas have expressed their concerns in returning home. A 37 year old man explained why he was still in the camp:

“The place is too bushy and we are near to the animals. You can get killed by the animals. Those who have moved are the ones with the land only two to three miles from here. Beyond that it is difficult. May be they go to their lands to dig and come back here. (...)We will go back. When we all go back at once it would be easier to clear the land and the animals will be driven away.”

Clearance of land is often expressed as an obstacle in returning home. Villages have been destroyed and the grasses have grown disguising roads. It takes a lot of effort to clear the land before one can even start thinking about rebuilding huts. Some people have started actively with the clearance, others wait until they have gathered enough people to do the job. The latter is also done with relation to the wild animals. The more people return at the same time, the more chances they have to chase and to manage the animals near their villages.

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78 Interview with a humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 10 January 2008
79 Interview in Agung main camp, male age 37, 26 September 2007
iv. No Land

When humanitarians and government officials shared their thoughts about Northern Uganda’s reconstruction, they would often speak of ‘people to resume their normal lives’. ‘Normal life’ would mean going back to their original homelands in peace and to resume their farming on their own lands. In this sense home is equivalent to land. Displacement will be solved when everyone can return to their land.

But some people do not have land. They have either lost the family members who are entitled to claim their land back when returning home, others have never possessed land. The last group of people used to rent land from others in order to cultivate some food for home consumption. The former group consists of mainly women and orphans. According to the Acholi tradition, women are not allowed to claim nor inherit land. As a young woman explained:

‘I am an orphan. My mother had two children from my father and another two from another man. My mother and my father both died. My grandmother had land somewhere. In Acholi land you do not follow your mother. The blood chain is on your father’s side. I was living with my grandmother, mother to my mother. I have no right to claim the land. That is not our home. I have got no right, no place to stay. That is why I still continue to live in the camp.’

The 18 year old Judith faces a similar problem. She does not know her father and she was abandoned by her mother when she remarried. Her mother and stepfather live in a different IDP camp. Judith resides with her grandmother. When asked what kind of place she considers home she answers:

‘I don’t know. People consider home where their father comes from. No one told me who my father is. (...) I do not have any alternative than go wherever my grandmother is. Because I don’t know where my father is.’

Others explained that due to the war many people were killed, leaving children as orphans. In the camps family members have taken care of them. But these children cannot always be taken to the villages of those family members. The orphans have no where to go.

v. Bad memories

The concept of home is often romanticised by IDPs, humanitarians and government officials. As long as people can return to their lands and villages, and camps can be demolished or turned into ‘viable communities’, this conflict will end and normality will come to Northern Uganda. The process of return should be clear-cut, encouraging people to go home.

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\[^{40}\text{Interview in Anaka main camp, female age 23, 25 September 2007}\]
\[^{41}\text{Interview in Pabbo main camp, female age 18, 14 November 2007}\]
\[^{42}\text{As was explained in the focus group discussion in Anaka main camp, 19 December 2007}\]
But some of the internally displaced people I have interviewed have expressed their doubt whether all people will return to their villages. Some areas were ‘the path of the rebels’ as one boy calls them. He explains that some do return to their lands to cultivate, but they will never shift back to stay permanently because of the bad memories they have relating to the area and the hostilities that occurred there.

‘(...) this area was the path of the rebels. The inhabitants of here [village] who have shifted to town, some of them already have in their heart that they will never live a happy life here. So they have bought another piece of land. Some do come to dig, but they stay in town.’

vi. Return package

‘It is the government policy to provide a package. It will be a pair of oxes and ploughs and iron sheets. When you leave without the package you will never get it.’

Through an announcement on the radio in 2007, Museveni promised to give out return packages to those in the camps to help them to reconstruct their homes. People in the camps mention this package as a reason for not moving out of camps. They are still waiting for it. It is speculated why the packages have not been distributed yet. Some ask their local leaders when they can expect it, others picked up rumours that the government has stopped distributing before reaching Acholiland.

The district government has refused to distribute the package for it consists of iron sheets. Museveni wants the people of Northern Uganda to ‘develop’ and to build bricked houses with roofs of iron sheets, instead of mud huts. The district does not encourage this idea. Furthermore, as the district claims, they were provided too few iron sheets to benefit all people. So they decided not to distribute it at all. Within the international community there are rumours that some within the district are accused of stealing the iron sheets. The decision not to distribute the return package has not been communicated to the people in the camps. The humanitarian community now uses the issue of the return package as a reason for IDPs not move while they are still waiting.

vii. Services

‘People are attracted to the camps. They have fairly good facilities. Those facilities are not in the areas of return, so there is no incentive to move. (...) To encourage movement we should invest in roads, health units to become functional. The local government should

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83 Interview in a village in Gulu District, male age 17, 14 December 2007
84 Iron sheets to make roofs for brick houses.
85 Focus group discussion in Pabbo main camp, male age 56, 21 December 2007
86 Personal communication, Gulu town, 23 September 2007
recruit personnel. So that it makes sense for people to go back. We should ease pressure in the camps in term of facilities.\textsuperscript{47}

Another humanitarian aid worker complained that people in Northern Uganda expect living standards that are extremely unreasonable. Fellow Ugandans in other regions do not even face these high living standards. ‘Not every Ugandan village has a borehole’.\textsuperscript{48}

Services in the main camps are very often mentioned as incentives not to leave the camps. People have become ‘used’ to having services around like schools, hospitals and boreholes. This is partly true. As long as the children go to school in the main camp some people chose to stay there. Others have shifted to new sites or villages leaving the children in the main camp with relatives. The people in the main camps do refer to the services as ‘something that is here but not there’.

‘Social services like hospitals and clean water are nonexistent [in return areas]. No schools. People who have remained have seen the consequences of going back from the people who have gone far.’\textsuperscript{49}

However, for those who have moved from the camps to new sites or villages, the absence of services has not prevented them from going to these sites. On the contrary, the majority of the people in those sites or villages have moved to areas where there was completely nothing. For them, services were the last influence when making the decision to move. As one man in a new site explained:

‘Because the most important thing in life is land. Even without these materials, if you can access your land you can still feed yourself.’\textsuperscript{50}

\textit{viii. Camp is home}

Most camps were established in already existing trading centres. Before the massive displacement of people form the nearby villages, people actually lived in those trading centres. They have seen their home being changed into a congested camp and people putting up huts on their lands. Those people are not going home, they are already there. As one boy in one of the biggest IDP camps explained: ‘This is my land, I will not go anywhere.’\textsuperscript{51}

One girl had stayed with her family in another part of Uganda during the war. The day she went home with her father, she found their land turned into a new site. People had put up their huts on their land

\textsuperscript{47} Interview with a representative of Gulu NGO Forum, Gulu town, 22 December 2007
\textsuperscript{48} Personal communication, Gulu town, 16 December 2007
\textsuperscript{49} Focus group discussion, Pabbo main camp, male age 45, 21 December 2007
\textsuperscript{50} Interview in Lapuda new site, male age 47, 27 October 2007
\textsuperscript{51} Focus Group Discussion, Anaka Camp, male age 24, 19 December 2007
and were cultivating it. She explains she feels good about being home, even though her village has been turned into a small camp. She feels good as long as there is no continuation of the war.

It might also be the case that some have been displaced elsewhere, for example in Gulu town, while a camp was developing on their lands. This was the case with Richards’s family:

_We might own that land [in Palaro main camp], but we will not go back. Because people have stayed there for a long time in the camp, whatever you cultivate it might not yield. The land is exhausted._ ⁹²

Richard’s family decided to rent a piece of land in a village they now call home. The land where the camp is could never provide the family with enough income.

_ix. Food_

Access to land is a very important incentive for people to start going back to their villages to obtain economic and social independence. For some, the lack of food in the camps is a reason to leave the camps, or the desire to do it:

_‘I want to go back home because the food is not enough. When I dig at least there will be enough.’_ ⁹³

The World Food Program has started to give out ‘return packages’ in terms of food, containing three months food and seedlings. This was not understood by everyone.⁹⁴ For some people in the camps it seemed that World Food Program has stopped giving out food. For David, who was introduced above, this was also the reason to leave the camp and start digging their own land, despite his fear for the rebels. The decrease in food relief was for some people the reason to go the places where they could access land:

_‘Me and my mother were registered for food aid, but when an update exercise was carried out only one person was left. So there was not enough food to sustain ourselves.’_ ⁹⁵

This girl left the camp for a new site after the incident with the World Food Program.

_x. Materials for hut constructing_

Having spent sometimes over ten years in encampment, people have not been back to their villages for a long time. Most huts are completely ruined either by the rebels or by weather influences. In ⁹² Interview in a village in Gulu district, male age 17, 14 December 2007 ⁹³ Interview in Palaro main camp, female age 33, 2 October 2007 ⁹⁴ As will be discussed in later chapters ⁹⁵ Interview in Labora new site, female age 19, 24 October 2007
order to put up new settlements, materials are needed. These are predominantly natural materials, like mud, wood and grass. Some displaced people prefer to put up brick houses with iron roofs, but these are few as it depends on the level of income. The nature materials are free of charge, but it needs patience in order to obtain them- as the people have to wait for the seasons. The grasses to build the roofs need to be dry enough. During the rainy season in 2007, from roughly April to October, it was expected that the dry season would result in massive movement for the lum (grasses) to be ready.

'We expect in December the biggest push of people returning, 50%. Because then the grasses for the hut construction will be matured. The biggest complaint of the people is that they need materials to construct.'

December passed and the expected 50% did not return. On the contrary, there were minor differences in the population movement compared to earlier months.

'I am among those people to put up a structure in my home village. I have left four of my bulls there.'

This boy did not mention the materials for constructing a hut as a difficulty or an opportunity for his movement decisions. Bit by bit people can set up their huts, while waiting for the materials to be ready. But it seemed not an important factor in the movement process.

The UPDF is entitled to declare specific areas as safe:

'It is our mandate to declare an area safe. (...) We work together with AVSI and CPAR on mine issues, we give mine risk education.'

However, government statements do not convince people to move. The official statements are not the only message the displaced people receive on safety. The popular radio station Mega FM, based in Gulu, frequently reports about the peace talks and other events that influence people’s idea on security. Started as a radio station that mobilises rebels to give up their arms and return home, it is still regarded being the one and only communication channel between the rebels and the people in Northern Uganda. The second commander of the LRA, Vincent Otti, called the station many times. His messages were not always addressing people’s faith in the peace process. Mega FM does not censure in order to protect the people from confusing messages. As an editor of Mega FM explained:

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96 Interview with a government official, Gulu town, 12 November 2007
97 Interview in Pabbo main camp, male age 18, 8 November 2007
98 Interview with UPDF colonel, Gulu town, 12 December 2007
99 It is said that Vincent Otti threatened to attack the Acholi people many times. This is hard to verify for the station broadcasts in the local language. People also do not prefer to talk about it openly. Personal communication.
‘We report what we get. It sometimes confuses people.’\textsuperscript{100} In addition, the government of Uganda threatened to find military solutions for the conflict many times, because the peace talks had not been progressing for a long time.

Rumours can easily confuse people. And rumours are a daily practice. The confusion about the security situation highly increased after certain events. It was speculated that the LRA would attract international attention around CHOGM\textsuperscript{101} that was hosted in Uganda in November 2007. In October 2007, the newspapers reported the murder of the second command of the LRA, Vincent Otti, by his leader Joseph Kony. For a long period of time, it was not certain whether he had indeed lost his life. The reports ranged from Otti dying of malaria, to Joseph Kony eating his penis. It created huge confusion and people became anxious. Their hopes for peace were put on hold for a while.

On the 1\textsuperscript{st} of November 2007 two humanitarian aid workers got shot while they were heading to a camp with their vehicle. This was a big shock for both the humanitarian community as well for the people in the camps. It was a first armed incident in months. This event, as the others, challenged the government’s statement on the region’s security.

Apart from formal messages from the government and the media, and the informal rumours, Acholi people deal with traditional ways of determining a location’s safety situation.

‘Traditionally in Acholi culture if a place is to be declared free of any problems, the elders perform a ritual by placing an egg in that area for people to know it is safe. So we sometimes check if the egg is already there. As long it is not there some strange thing could be there that have could eaten the egg.’\textsuperscript{102}

It is not always certain on what people determine their decisions. When the different messages also create confusion, it is even more difficult to understand.

\textit{xii. Social Structures}

There is a general mentality within the humanitarian industry that the people in the camps actually like camp life because of the social structures that exist there. It is hard to imagine that people would favour the isolated life in scattered villages above the friends and bars that one can find in a camp. Suddenly the poor and crowded camps turn into lively and social centres. As two different humanitarian aid workers explain:

‘The war has changed social settlements. People are used to other people around them.’\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{100} Interview with an editor, Gulu Mega FM, Gulu town, 4 January 2008
\textsuperscript{101} The Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting
\textsuperscript{102} Interview in Pabbo main camp, male age 18, 8 November 2007
\textsuperscript{103} Interview with a humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 13 November 2007
‘Youth will be in the camps. In the camps there is alcohol, discos: it is social setting. I would want to stay also!’

In a previous chapter it was concluded that the displaced people associate social settings with home, and not with the camps. Having their families around, as well as elders and clan members is what they believe is part of social structures. As one man residing in a main camp rationalised:

Because the main reason for people coming here was not because of the social life. People have friends, but at night everyone goes to their own huts. In the villages each can move freely to their own homes.104

However, other displaced persons acknowledge that camp life has brought new social relations to the lives of people. During the years of encampment people were forced to find ways to live with different clans in a crowded setting. Children have been more likely to find age mates in their surroundings. From living with ten other people in the village to staying in camps with thousands of others, is of course a tremendous change. Emotions and incidents like jealousy, gossiping, rows and love have occurred on a larger scale than ever in the camps.

‘Although camp life is bad, it has also taught people some lessons of respect. You live with different people of different places, you do not know each other. You have to live with respect to each other. If you are not respectful to yourself, you will find yourself being bewitched or among the robbers. Because the moment that something happens in the camp they will grab those who have not been respectful as their suspect. Also, there is a lot of jealousy about things people have and others not.’105

The new kinds of social structures can be experienced as having more friends and enjoying bars and discos. However, it can also be experienced more negatively like others interfering in personal affairs, envying others and unwelcome social control.

xiii. Fear for violence

The next chapter will elaborate more on the psychological questions about security and fear. In terms of factors of movement, the fear for violence is mentioned many times, by both IDPs and the humanitarian industry. Very different ideas are communicated about the level of violence in current Gulu district as a decision factor. One humanitarian aid worker did not understand why people are still in the camps while the security situation has been improved:

‘If you look at the situation critically, it does not make sense. Encampment started in 1997. Before that people also lived home during war. The situation in Northern Uganda is very safe. In places like Nairobi and Johannesburg, death is everywhere. The level of insecurity cannot prevent people of going home. This Kony war is no longer a security threat.’106

104 Focus Group Discussion in Pabbo main camp, male age 45, 22 December 2007
105 Interview in a village in Gulu district, male age 20, 11 October 2007
106 Interview with a senior humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 12 December 2007
Others acknowledge that uncertainty and post-conflict dynamics result in other forms of violence. These are based upon the level of poverty and crime.

‘We have to be optimistic, but the situation can easily slide back. There is less military, which is good, but there is now other violence. Violence has gone up, with a peak during Christmas of course. (...) Some are purely criminal. Others commit crimes disguised as LRA.’

People in the camps express their fear about leaving the camps and going to the villages. Despite the fact that the LRA has not committed any registered crimes since the beginning of the peace talks, Northern Uganda is far from being a safe environment. Several incidents have taken place in which robbers attack small villages at night while killing and looting. These robbers are called *boo-kec* in the local language, meaning ‘bitter vegetables’. People fear these robbers, especially because people are aware of the big number of guns that is still present within communities. The attack on the NGOs vehicle in November 2007 is one of the examples of violence incidents in current Northern Uganda. Several people in the camps have heard about or experienced incidents with *boo-kec*.

‘Though you can dig in your homeland there are also other robbers you can rob you during the day or night.’

‘This is the real life situation. Two months ago my uncle went back to the village. He was slaughtered. People first have to protect their own lives.’

The fear for *boo-kec* keeps people in the camps, waiting for the security situation to improve. But *boo-kec* are not the Acholi’s only concern. The conflict has affected all people and involved all people. People were part of the LRA or the UPDF and both parties are responsible for many deaths and other atrocities. The years of encampment resulted in a perfect understanding of who knows who. In the process of movement feelings of revenge and clan disputes are likely to increase when people go to isolated places where there is less social and military control.

*People fear revenge. They fear atrocities in their own village. For example with two clans, one plans revenge if the other is going to resettle to the village.*

Some people were in the LRA and some in the UPDF. This is a problem in the village, unless there will be a programme. For example, when a retired UPDF soldier came back, he wanted to slaughter the ones sleeping in his house, but could not because there were so many in the hut.

The fear for revenge is a great concern among those who were formerly abducted. (JRP & QPSW 2008:10)

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107 Interview with a senior humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 7 January 2007
108 Mentioned earlier in this chapter
109 Interview in Agung main camp, female age 30, 26 September 2007
110 Focus Group Discussion in Anaka main camp, male age 28, 19 December 2007
111 Focus Group Discussion in Anaka main camp, male age 29, 19 December 2007
112 Focus Group Discussion in Anaka main camp, male age 25, 19 December 2007
As explained in this chapter, the government and many humanitarians promote the return of the internally displaced persons to their villages. In their perception the beginning of the peace talks meant the conclusion of a 20 year old war. It is said that the war is over, that Kony is no longer a threat for the people. In some cases, these actors wonder why people are not returning, believing that the fear and doubts of the people relating to the peace talks could never be an option. They think of other reasons, like hut materials or the lack of services in return areas. It is true that these reasons are mentioned by the displaced as factors influencing their decision making whether to move or not. Nevertheless, the displaced people first mention another prominent reason for not moving either out of camps, or going straight to their villages. This reason is first about fear, for the Rebels that still can kill you or abduct your children. And second it is about doubt, concerning the success of the peace talks. Why move out of the camps while there is risk that the peace talks fail? For several people this would be the worst case scenario: after leaving the camps now, being forced to go back to the camps when the security situation would worsen.

In order to illustrate that the peace talks are a concern to almost every IDP involved in the research, the following table will show one comment per person relating to Kony and the Juba peace talks as a factor of movement.

Table 8. Kony/Peace talks as a factor of movement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of IDPs mentioning Kony /Peace Talks as a factor of movement.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>‘The reason why some people are moving and others not is because of the Juba peace talks that have not been finished. Because if you are staying home, may be after one month, the rebels do come back’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>‘Of course there must first be peace before I go back. I might loose my family and children if we go now.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>‘I just want to go back to my homeland (...) We hope that peace comes soon.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>‘Kony has not gone back home. Anything can happen’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>‘I still have fear for LRA. I am not certain of their next move.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>‘I and others have fear about the state of the talks. We are not sure how it will end. If you rush and go and it will resume then we have problems coming back.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>‘We can go back when we are very sure that there is peace.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>‘I am not going to the village; there is still enough fear of the LRA.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>‘It is not good to resettle when the situation has not calmed down.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>‘If we are sure there is peace, I will go back to my village. (...) We first want and see the progress of the peace talks. If you were to isolate yourself it would be easy for a rebel’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Text</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>‘Some have remained [in the main camp]. They have the fear that the peace talks might fail. Anything might happen. The strong hearted people have come here.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>‘As the peace talks continue and people are starting to go back home.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>‘They [others] keep their ears open about the peace talks. That would be the final factor before going back permanently.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>‘The young people still fear the LRA. When they go back to the villages anything can happen and they can still be arrested. So most of them stay in the camp. The elder ones, like my parents are the ones going back to the villages. They do not fear so much’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>‘But only that the situation... There is not enough security here so we fear. We want peace if possible.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>‘There is no fear because the war is over.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>‘People want peace first so that they can move peacefully.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>‘When the situation improves [we will go to the village]. The family will stay here. (...) I don’t know when the peace will come, but I think it will come soon.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>‘The fact that the peace agreement has not been signed yet makes me feel a bit more insecure. Because any time it can fail and things return to as those days. So we are ready when it fails, we just go back to town.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>‘Some have gone back [to their homes] but others have not gone back. They just go, do some garden work, and they take like two days, three days. (...) They still have that fear obviously.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>‘People are not sure of the peace talks in Juba. They have not yet signed the peace talks.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>‘Some people leave youth behind. The security is not yet good.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>‘I fear abductions due to what happened in the past. If I go back to the village, the LRA will roam while we are not protected. Nobody is sure whether this will end peacefully. The LRA might still be in villages.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>‘The war is still going on.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>‘People have doubts about the peace talks. It may not end peacefully, and this will lead again to displacement when people have returned. Why we came was because a lot of killings in the villages. It is difficult to go back unless Juba is successfully ended.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>‘People are following what happened in the past. In the past it was declared that the war was over. Rebels came to the new sites. There is still a lot of fear about people getting killed in the villages.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>‘People experience the peace talks in 1993. These ones [peace talks] have similarities. They doubt these peace talks. People still fear. When people will hear that Kony has...’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
signed the deal they will leave the camp.’

| 28 | ‘The first reason is because of the peace talks. I have fear of being killed as long as Kony is still in the bush.’ |
| 29 | ‘My brothers were all killed in the village before coming to the camp. I want to be sure that there is peace.’ |
| 30 | ‘Once peace is there I will go straight to my village, instead of first going to a satellite camp.’ |
| 31 | ‘When the peace talks started we saw signs of people returning. When peace comes people will move from the camp completely.’ |

It is a substantial group that mentioned fear and doubt as one of their dominant reasons for not moving. Twenty years of conflict have resulted in a general distrust of people in the successful ending of it. There were two moments in the past that were similar to the current one: of peace talks that seemed to go well. The two failures harmed their hope of other attempts to end the conflict. Two years of relative peace is nothing compared with twenty years of conflict and ten years of encampment. People are waiting for something tangible to come from the peace talks. That would either mean an actual signing of the deal, or the moment that ‘Kony comes out of the bush’. For some it feels like the war is still going on and that the rebels can attack at any moment. Others see improvement in the security situation, but are sceptical whether it will hold in the long-run.

Apart from living in hardships during 20 years, people have not been able to have any future perspectives. It was simply impossible to plan, to have dreams. The improvement in the security situation does not mean people can easily take up what they have not been doing for two decades: plan ahead and have faith in believe in the future. Government and agencies deny this fact by demanding people to return because Northern Uganda is, in their eyes, no longer an emergency situation.

In the majority of the interviews conducted within the governmental and agencies field, fear of the people was put aside as a minor reason for people not returning home, or was not addressed at all. Very rarely, players in this field acknowledged the impact of fear. The ones that did acknowledge were either working in the camps, or were Acholi staff members that were aware of the historical perspectives of the conflict. One camp management humanitarian analysed:

‘For the question why people are not moving now, there is one major answer: ‘we are not sure of tomorrow’. The big man [Kony] must come out. (...) All people are interested in going home. When it [peace deal] is signed 80% will go’

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113 ‘Kony coming out of the bush’ is equivalent to the Kony being caught or killed in the place he now hides: ‘the bush’.  
114 Field visit Camp Management teams of the Norwegian Refugee Council, Amuru district, 28 September 2007
One Acholi UN official acknowledged that the displaced people question the peace talks after the previous peace talk failures. People tried to go back home two or three times, but found themselves back in the camps in the end. As she said: ‘This goes in the mind of the community.’

Two displaced people did not bother about the peace talks process. They wanted to go home as soon as possible. They were both waiting for the grasses to be ready in order to construct the hut. As one of them said:

‘I am willing to go even though the talks do not go well. I will go and construct my hut temporarily so when we go back we find the hut ready.’

These two people were both above the age of 60. They both had different perceptions about the conflict as they could still remember a time before displacement. They also did not consider the lives of their younger children, as community members did in fear of the rebels. These two people are an exception. In most lives of the internally displaced, fear and doubt are dominant emotions in current Northern Uganda and influencing their decision-making more than all other reasons do.

In this section I have outlined the several reasons in the movement process that have been appointed by all the different actors. In all motivations except for the ones relating to security, there are many nuances and no one is completely right or wrong. However, when focusing on issues relating to security, violence, fear and doubt concerning the rebels and the peace talks, there is different trend. There is a huge gap between the governmental / humanitarians’ perspectives and the perspectives of the internally displaced. As the former speak of the war being over and the time being ripe to return and close the camps, the latter do not consider the war over at all. The internally displaced are afraid of the rebels and the resuming of the war, making the situation even worse than it is now. In denying the IDPs’ emotions and the motivations based upon these emotions. The government and humanitarian agencies create huge misunderstandings about why people are not moving.

**Conclusion**

This chapter calls for a different approach to the movement patterns in current Acholiland. Movement is to be seen as a process, not as a solution, or an ending to a long lasting conflict. The people that have made the first steps of going home have not returned. However in the humanitarian discourse they have, because their huts have been counted and reported in the return monitoring of UNHCR. But talking to the people presents a whole different story of what it means to go home, or be at home. People search for alternatives for the traumatic years in the camps in which they have become socially and economically dependent on others. Going home means access to land, cultivating, generating income and sending the children to school and being able to buy necessities.

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115 Interview with a UN official, Gulu town, 18 December 2007
116 Interview in Adak decongestion site, male age 64, 3 November 2007
The perception of home is often two sided. On the one hand there is an overall desire of IDPs to go home. But on the other hand the thought about home also brings them back to the times when they lived their in fear because of the LRA’s atrocities. In principle the Acholi people were not against the idea of being brought to the camps. It would be a temporary solution to get protection. However, a temporary solution turned out to be a long term problem. The years of encampment have worsened people’s lives. The obvious tendency of IDPs is to idealise and romanticise home as being a better place than they are now. However, perceptions of home seem not to impede or enhance return. The majority still remains in the camps, or in new sites. The Acholi movement patterns show that home is not necessarily linked to place and time.

This strongly contrasts the government and humanitarian community’s perceptions about IDPs’ homes. For them home and thus return is linked to geographical areas. This represents a crucial clash. If one defines new sites as ‘home’, or people in the villages as ‘returned’, the humanitarian players do not need to address the complexities of the movement process. It is then easier to write proposals for donors, to make plans for intervention and to coordinate at district level. Speaking about the war as it belongs to the past also carries political implications. Challenging the government’s promotion of return and the violation of the rights as described in the National IDP policy is not easy. In the policy it is described:

The government recognises the right of IDPs against forcible return and resettlement in any place where their life, safety, liberty and health would be at risk. (OPM 2004:23)

It depends on how one defines ‘risk’. The government claims the life of IDPs is no longer at risk because they claim the war is over. This definition enables the government to operate within the policy’s framework, but risk can be felt differently by others. For many, there is a realistic risk that the security situation will worsen. For them, the government’s promotion of return could be a violation of their rights. It is questionable that the UN and humanitarian agencies hardly challenge the government’s return campaign. While it is obvious the government has its own agenda for distracting all eyes away from the unpopular concept of encampment.

In acknowledging that migration and movement patterns of the Acholi are complex it is uncertain to know what will happen in the nearby future. We don’t know if clearing land mines, the returning of schools or the peace talks will get people to go home. However, there are certainly interventions the humanitarian community should not do. IDPs do not need incentives like food packages, services in return areas or contests who can build the best latrines because ‘they have forgotten how to do that’117, in order for them to go home. Education, health services, money for school fees and other service related activities help people to improve their lives. But only one thing is seen as a solution to

117 As one humanitarian agency organizes these contests in one of the main camp, ‘encouraging the community to do it themselves from now on, without relying on aid’, Interview with a humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 6 November 2007
encampment and seen as a possible incentive to go home, and that is peace. People need to gain trust in a successful ending to the conflict, and to gain faith in the security situation in their region. Government and humanitarian agencies should play a role there if they want people to leave the camps and to let people ‘resume normal lives.’ Protection and security should be provided to all displaced, all efforts should be focused on a successful ending of the peace talks and fear of guns, revenge and boo-kec should be acknowledged and addressed. But above all, the Acholi displaced people have the right to make their own choices based upon their experiences whether to move or not, and when.
7. THE HUMANITARIAN AID CHAIN

Introduction: going into practices

The previous two chapters explained the conceptions of different groups about the notions of return and conflict. There is no common understanding about what return is or how to define the current security situation. As explained, these two things are interrelated as the movement patterns of internally displaced persons depend on the perception of the level of security in individual lives. Having the different conceptions as a starting point there now will now be a focus on the practical implications in terms of humanitarian interventions in the region. This chapter elaborates briefly on the decentralization system in Uganda and how the humanitarian aid is structured in the IDP setting of Gulu district. It will become clear that there are different stakeholders and leaders who are supposed to work together closely. How these are interlinked will be explained in the first sections. Later the construction of institutions will be unravelled, that of humanitarian organisations and the Gulu district department. The chapter will end an analysis of the humanitarian aid chain in Gulu district, while evaluating the neutrality of aid.

Decentralization

When the last dictatorial regime in Uganda was overthrown in 1988, Uganda developed a system in which local governments would become part of decision-making and public service supply. Uganda is considered to be the first Sub Saharan country that has successfully decentralised on own initiative. (Scott-Herridge 2002:21) During the insurgent activities of Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Movement (NRM) local Resistance Councils were established in the areas he controlled. After he became president these local resistance councils were turned into local government councils. (Scott-Herridge 2002:22) The NRM promoted democracy and participation and in 1995 decentralisation was recognised in the 1995 Constitution:

Decentralisation shall be a principle applying to all levels of government and in particular, from higher to lower local government units to ensure people’s participation and democratic control of decision-making. (Uganda Government 1995)

Practically decentralisation in Uganda means that the ministry of Local Government in Kampala helps to build capacity of local councils at different levels. There are five levels:

Local Counsellor 1 at village level (LC1)
Local Counsellor 2 at parish level (LC2)
Local Counsellor 3 at sub county level (LC3)
Local Counsellor 4 at county level (LC4)
Local Counsellor 5 at district level (LC5)

In every district there is Resident District Commissioner who is appointed by the president. He coordinates the administration of the district and is the representative of the central government at local level. (Scott-Herridge 2002:23-4) LC1 and LC2s have limited power to change policies and legislation. Their role is to mobilise people and to advocate for issues that arise in their region. The LCs are funded by the central government as well as by generating taxes from individuals. (Scott-Herridge 2002:24)

The decentralization model is progressive and idealistic. The reality is however different. LCs often belong to a smaller elite, silencing the people who do not belong to these groups of people. Meetings are not always held and elections are not always fair and without corruption. Policy plans are considered to be ‘top down’. (Scott-Herridge 2002:30)

Mapping the humanitarian aid chain

A range of different actors and stakeholders are involved in the humanitarian interventions in Northern Uganda. These people represent different levels of decision-making and operational capacity. Roughly the humanitarian aid chain is as follows:

At central level there is the Office of the Prime Minister, department of Disaster Management and Refugees. This is headed by the Minister for Disaster Preparedness. The minister is the government’s representative on those issues, but the monitoring and coordination of all government institutions

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118 Recent authors that have written about the Ugandan state and politics are Roger Tangri and Andrew M. Mwenda.
and humanitarian and development agencies lies in the hands of the Commissioner for Disaster Management and Refugees. The principal disaster management officer assists the Commissioner. The Inter-Ministerial Policy Committee, chaired by the minister for Disaster Preparedness, does the policy formulation. This committee consists of ministers of different departments. Then the Inter-Agency Technical Committee plans and coordinates activities of sector ministries, government departments, private sector, the UN, INGOs and NGOs. Finally, most NGOs and UN agencies have their head offices in Kampala, where they deal with central policy issues.

At district level there is the Resident District Commissioner, who is directly appointed by the president. He monitors the LC5, who has been elected by the people. The lead agency for the protection and assistance of IDPs is the District Disaster Management Committee (DDMC), chaired by the chief administrative officer. The committee assists those who are displaced and seize that they are assisted during displacement. The DDMC is comprised of the RDC, LC5, security agencies, UPDF and humanitarian actors in the district. The committee provides local policies in which actors can operate. De UPDF takes part in all security issues in the district. At agency level there is UNOCHA that coordinates all humanitarian activity in the district. UNOCHA is the co-chair of the DDMC in Gulu. UNOCHA is also the global Cluster lead of other UN Clusters (see below). Finally, there are the humanitarian actors in the field; UN agencies, NGOs (monitoring NGOs and service supplying NGOs), CBOs, and religious groups.

At sub county level there are the sub county DDMCs, chaired by the sub county chief and the LC3s. In the case of Northern Uganda often the sub county chief and LC3s have their offices in one of the big camps in the sub county, overseeing other camps in the region.

At village level, or in most cases ‘camp level’, there is the LC1, who is the contact person of the civilians and the UPDF in case of any problems. LC1s have regular contact with the camps leaders on camp issues. Camp leaders mainly oversee the food distribution in the camp. Every zone in the camp has a zonal leader and a block leader and finally there are clan leaders who represent the clan. In some cases the LC3, LC2, LC1, camp leaders, zonal leaders, block leaders and clan leaders all represent the same camp.

There are also actors that have less direct influences on the humanitarian process in the region. The donors at bilateral and multilateral level all play a very important role in the humanitarian process by the provision of funds, priorities and strategies. Researchers in the field, independent or on a consultancy base are involved in the humanitarian process as is the media; radio, television and the newspapers.

119 At parish level there are the LC2s. However, their role is not visible as parishes have become non existent due to the encampment of people.
All these actors have a say in the humanitarian process one way or the other. The final decisions – the ones that are implemented - are in the hands of the government at all levels. However, the humanitarian community consisting of particularly UN and NGOs is dominantly present in Northern Uganda. While they are supposed to work according to existing governmental structures like the DDMC, humanitarians have thought of one huge new framework that is supposed to complement governmental structures: the Cluster Approach. This approach is yielding new challenges.

**Humanitarian response: the Cluster Approach**

In 2005, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee\(^ {120} \) designed a system in which all humanitarian needs in refugee and IDP settings can get response. This so-called ‘Cluster Approach’ is there to help the humanitarian coordinators. Different Clusters represent different sectors and members are active in these fields. The Clusters are led by a UN body. Uganda has been one of the three pilots, as well as the DRC and Liberia. (Morris 2006)

The thought behind this new framework is the experience that the sector approach in humanitarian response is never adequate enough to address all issues. There are always certain gaps that do not fit in one of the sectors –think of water and sanitation, education, health, etc- or it fits in a couple of sectors leading to no response because no one feels responsible.\(^ {121} \) The Cluster Approach should link all different actors in the field beyond the sectors to improve accountability. The Clusters are therefore called ‘the provider of the last resort’. (Morris 2006)

In Northern Uganda there are six Clusters:

- **Health**, chaired by the World Health Organisation (WHO)
- **Nutrition**, chaired by UNICEF;
- **Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene**, chaired by UNICEF
- **Camp Coordination and Camp Management**, chaired by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- **Protection**, chaired by UNHCR
- **Early Recovery**, chaired by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

In the Humanitarian Appeal it is prescribed that there should also be a Cluster in logistics. (UN 2006) A UN official explained that the logistics were sufficiently organised by the World Food Programme in Northern Uganda. They decided not to form a Cluster for logistics as Clusters are only in place when ‘the UN is not functioning’.\(^ {122} \) UN Cluster leads are in the first place not responsible for implementation, but when other actors are not able to respond, they are. (Morris 2006)

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120 The IASC consists of eight UN agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, NGOs, the World Bank and the International Organization for Migration.
121 A classical example is the question who should be responsible for the education of health workers: the education sector or the health sector.
122 Interview with a UN official, Gulu town, 8 October 2007
several implementation difficulties in this Cluster Approach. One is the question of accountability and response. (Morris 2006) In the Cluster meetings I attended in Gulu town, gaps and needs were addressed over and over again. But no one dared to answer the question who should address them. No one has the authority to ensure that everyone lives up to their responsibilities. Service supplying NGOs can easily say it is not their cup of tea, while the Cluster lead can consider the gaps not yet suitable for a last resort response. The UN say they are mainly there to give data through their return monitoring, not service supplying. The other difficulty is the absence of NGOs in the Cluster meetings. (Morris 2006) Non-UN employees have shared their reluctance about the Cluster Approach; it has increased the number of meetings and bureaucracy and is seen as a UN attempt to let the UN internally function better in the region. For them there is no other way than to adapt to this system as they are partners of the UN. Nevertheless, the participation is under implicit protest. Not only some NGO staff is sceptical, also UN staff in the field offices is reluctant about the Cluster Approach. They complain about the lack of follow up and transparency.

‘Here it is duplication of efforts and coordinating to death. The Cluster Approach takes a lot of time and is an excuse not to make decisions. There are no proactive people, topics are discussed over and over again.’

Some humanitarians see the Cluster Approach as a tool for the UN to increase their mandates. Especially UNHCR lies under attack. They are the lead of two important, but less defined Clusters: Protection and Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM). However, humanitarian agencies complain that UNHCR does not have a clear strategy, as they are a refugee agency in the first place. The Cluster Approach is also new to UNHCR. They tend to ask the humanitarian community what to do. Humanitarians are annoyed that the UNHCR - as lead a main donor of agencies – does not take the lead.

The district government of Uganda reacted differently to the Cluster Approach. Before its introduction the humanitarian response was based upon sector meetings and the coordination body of the DDMC. Some see the point of last resort, knowing that there will be funds outside the government ones to address them. Others feel that the Cluster Approach has been imposed upon them. The internal struggle of UNHCR about whether to focus on IDPs or not and how added to a district response:

‘They [UNHCR] came here refugee minded, they had no clear standpoints on IDP issues. They did not have an IDP mandate until last year. The directors coming here thought that the government would follow them. We told them that IDPs are the government’s responsibility and that they should assist us. Now we enjoy cordial report, mutual consultation and we report on a monthly basis [in the DDMC].’

123 Interview with a UN official, Gulu Town, 15 November 2007
124 Interview with a UN official, Gulu Town, 13 December 2007
125 Interview with a supporting UN worker, Gulu Town, 11 November 2007
It is felt that the Cluster Approach is invented in Geneva: far away from the local realities of the district government officials in Gulu. The suspicion and the lack of commitment of the district government is prevalent in their absence in the meetings. In Gulu district, there are sector meetings, Cluster meetings and the DDMC meeting. This last meeting is supposed to be the overall meeting in which all outcomes of other meetings are addressed. Sector meetings, which includes health, education, water&sanitation and others are led by sector leads and attended by the service supplying NGOs in that field. The Cluster meetings are chaired by the responsible UN agency and attended by all kinds of agencies, including the district. Every meeting is held on a monthly basis, which means that there are about two to three meetings per week in Gulu that you can attend.

There is a general perception that white female aid workers dominate the meetings. They are often mockingly referred to as the monthly tea gathering. A humanitarian aid worker told me that she was supposed to go to several of them but she stopped out of frustration. The most necessary issues are not addressed according to her. She told me how she in her first meeting asked why there were no Ugandans present. She got the impression that people were not too happy she asked that. Others have complained about the repetition of gaps and issues without making decisions. Gulu district officials fail to be present in these meetings. They are the final decision makers, so if they are not there, nothing will happen. Issues were easily pushed to the DDMC meeting that was held every month. However, in the DDMC meeting nothing is really decided. It has become a platform of reporting and networking. Every sector and Cluster reports the main updates within their field but there are no substantial discussions. The DDMC meeting is a meeting of appearances. Decisions and collaborations are done through informal networks which can be efficient but lack overall coordination.

**Cordial relationship**

On the surface several actors would like to state that there is ´cordial relationship´ between the government and the humanitarian agencies. Both parties need each other in the humanitarian field; government needs the agencies´ resources and funding to address people’s needs, which are their responsibility. The agencies need the government to allow them to operate in an area and to approve their agendas. Without support of the government agencies risk to be kicked out of the country. It is thus not surprising that both parties would claim that their relationship is ´cordial´ and ´transparent´.

However, there are interesting tensions. The government of Uganda would insist that they have the overall leadership in the humanitarian process in Gulu. As the National Policy repeatedly states:

‘United Nations agencies, humanitarian and development agencies and donors may be invited to render support in this [various priorities in the policy] area.’

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127 The last DDMC meeting I attended it was agreed that the meeting would be bi-monthly.
The humanitarian aid chain is constructed in the sense that the Office of the Prime Minister is the lead agency, with the District Disaster Management Committees (DDMC) at local level as their representatives. The DDMC in Gulu is the humanitarian chair of all agencies operating in the humanitarian field; all agencies are accountable to the DDMC in this construction.

But the agencies would often accuse the government institutions, both local and central, of not taking their responsibilities. The implementation of the National Policy on IDPs has been disappointing in their view. In meetings, the agencies would often ask the government representatives to clearly set their priorities and opinions, so that they can operate in the appropriate way.

The government however accuses many NGOs of ‘helping themselves with the money’. The Commissioner of Disaster Management and Refugees questions the way NGOs spend their money if you consider the number of NGOs and the huge amount of money destined for Northern Uganda. ‘The improvement should have been drastic,’ as he said, ‘something funny must be happening.’ The government of Uganda also accuses agencies of wasting money on expatriates in high positions, while Uganda has ‘well trained and highly educated people’ to fulfil these positions. Agencies however accuse government officials of being corrupt, non-transparent and poorly committed.

In order to monitor the incoming money and spent money of the operating NGOs in the North, the government of Uganda came up with the ‘NGO bill’, which is still discussed in parliament. The NGO bill entails the government’s authority to demand complete transparency of all activities of NGOs: where their money comes from, how this is spent and on what kind of activities. This bill deals with a huge opposition. Critics fear a restricting operational field if all activities are monitored by the government. As the government has the right to dispatch agencies from the country, people fear that the government would do just that when agencies operate in a politically sensitive field, like human rights. The governmental mandate control would affect the number one principle of agencies; that they are non governmental.

In an IDP setting in which government and humanitarian agencies are supposed to work together closely there are several tensions and suspicions in terms of power and authority. Government institutions often lack the money and capacity (or will) to give response to the humanitarian crisis. Humanitarian agencies enter the region to support this government. This is often seen as a temporary but helping intervention. The temporal aspect of humanitarianism can bare fruits for a certain period in a region in need. However, it can also have limitations.

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128 Interview with the Principal Disaster Management Officer, Office of the Prime Minister, Kampala, 18 October 2007
129 Interview with the Commissioner of Disaster Management and Refugees, Kampala, 18 October 2007
130 Interview with the Principal Disaster Management Officer, Office of the Prime Minister, Kampala, 18 October 2007
Apart from the difficulties to set an agenda in the uncertain phase Northern Uganda is currently facing, there is another aspect in the humanitarian process that is limiting a clear and long-term strategy for the IDPs in the north. This is the organizational aspect of NGOs, humanitarian aid agencies and UN agencies. Despite the fact that many of these institutions hire local staff, the top positions (with the most responsibility) are taken by expatriates that come from different countries all around the world. Many of them have gained experience within the organisation elsewhere, or at different organisations in other parts of the world. Most “ex-pats” are on a one-year contract in Gulu. When I interviewed them, they based their experiences on the few months having worked in this position. This not only restricts the accountability of my data, but also influences the operations of the organisation as a whole. It influences an organisation’s continuity and consistency. Local staff complain that every expat brings previous experiences from their work in other countries to Gulu, sometimes even to the extent that they change an organisation’s entire priorities and range of activities. The ones in power of doing so are the ones who leave after one year. The danger is the neglect of historical dynamics of an organisation and local differentiations. Decisions and policies are made in a short-term perspective. Or are initiated as long term objectives, but these are nevertheless likely to be changed after replacements of the ones in top positions. Organisations hardly learn from mistakes in the past as no one feels responsible for them when they were made in the past.

Furthermore, humanitarian interventions and its implications dominantly depend on people. It depends on how head of offices, government staff and programme directors act, react and influence. How they would chair meetings, direct their staff and deal with donors and their colleagues in Kampala. Aid is about personal relations (Hilhorst 2003). Taken in mind that most people leave Gulu within a year or two, or even less, it is very hard for the humanitarian industry to come up with a coherent and consistent humanitarian plan for a region.

Also humanitarian agencies as a whole are in principle of ‘temporary existence’ in a certain area. Humanitarian agencies react on emergency situations, which are approached as temporary disturbances of a normal functioning of a society. Whether we can speak of ‘disturbances’ or not, humanitarian agencies, according to their mandates, operate in the assumptions that ‘they will not always be there’. Someone else needs to take over their activities when the emergency is ‘over’. Their eyes are fixed on the government or developmental NGOs to fulfil this role. In principle, humanitarian aid and emergency relief supplement the responsive role of the government. Developmental NGOs fill in the gaps when the government is not able or willing to supply the necessary resources. This prejudiced approach of ‘taking over’ of humanitarian aid operating in a certain country highly influences the relationships between them, the concerned government and the existing or incoming developmental NGOs. The expectancies of the commitment of those parties are high and frustrations are common when these are not met.
Another important aspect greatly influences the temporary and short-term activities of humanitarian aid agencies. Donors are the ones who keep an organisation operating in the first place. But donors are also highly unpredictable players in the field. The generosity of private donors is not easy to predict, while governmental donors adjust their funding on the political agenda of their country, which may change every two, three or four years. Humanitarian aid agencies establish their projects depending on the available funds every financial year. Some projects may be cancelled after a short time due to lack of funding. Others may have an uncertain implementation depending on the amount of money. All above-mentioned short-term notions on humanitarian activities influence the decision-making, planning, implementation of projects and relations with other institutions.

Humanitarian aid workers seem to struggle with different opinions at the same time about the humanitarian framework. These can be categorised in professional opinions and personal opinions. In formal interviews with them they would share their professional perceptions about the functioning of the humanitarian community. However, in informal settings, like barbecues, Christmas parties and at the Gulu swimming pool I picked up other perceptions that were by far less diplomatic and nuanced. Sometimes these perceptions are not that separated. In one formal interview with a UN official in Gulu town I encountered a flood of cynicism and frustration about the local government, the UN, other organisations, IDPs, thus everyone. It is hard to determine how these personal opinions are influencing his performance as a UN official. I cannot be certain how widely spread this phenomenon - personal frustrations in a professional position - are within the humanitarian community. But if others like this UN official have difficulties separating this it could pose a problem for the functioning of the humanitarian aid chain.

Planning and implementation: an ocean in between

Three humanitarian agencies (of the dozens) have actual people living in the camps to identify gaps and needs. These are the camp management teams of NRC, ARC and AVSI. The three of them cover a dozen camps, from where their mobile teams go out to other camps and new sites in the area. Still the majority of the camps and sites are not covered, but their presence in the other camps is appreciated. Camp management teams however face an organizational restriction. They do not provide, they only identify gaps and write reports. These are taken to the camp management officers at the main office in Gulu who take it to the UNHCR, to be addressed in sector meetings to service supplying NGOs. These services supplying NGOs investigate whether it fits in their programme and if there is funding for it. This depends strongly on the agenda of donors. Camp management teams blame the service supplying NGOs for a slow response and the UNHCR for being unable to set their priorities and a framework in which the NGOs can operate. In the end, the IDP can wait a long time for the specific service asked for. In the camps with a camp management team they can complain to them, but camp management teams give it out of hand as soon as they report to their offices in Gulu. In camps and sites where there is no camp management team, which is the majority of the camps and
sites, people do not know where to refer to other then their camp leaders and the LC1s, LC2s and-or LC3s. The LCs are government officials, and they would report back to the district. District officials would take it back to the meetings. In the meetings, nothing is decided.

There is a long channel to response and camp managers, local leaders and IDPs would complain about this long bureaucratic process. Camp Management report that IDPs call them ‘liars’ because they are seen on the ground every day while nothing is happening.

World Food Programme’s operations are another example of having disruptions in the communication and implementation chain. WFP provides food, are not the ones distributing it in the field. Volunteers of NRC take care of that. Registration however is WFP’s task. When NRC identifies mistakes in the registration (of people not receiving for whatever reason, loss of cards, ‘becoming’ EVIs, etc) they have to report back to WFP. Feedback however rarely occurs. Both parties do not feel responsible, for the one is not in the field and the other one is not in the planning position.

All these actors are interrelated in the sense that no one is responsible and accountable for both the beginning and the end of a humanitarian process. In the humanitarian process in Gulu there are so many actors and channels involved, that it is easy to blame ‘the other’. At the same time it is difficult to know whom you can address for what. Final decisions depend upon the efficiency of meetings and the will and commitment of individuals. The gap between the ones who plans and the ones who implements needs to be addressed in order to come to a quick, necessary and effective response. Now those who plan never go into the field. And those in the field are powerless.

**Conclusion**

Humanitarian agencies in refugee settings remain somehow their independency when they operate in a crisis area. Their mandate is the framework of operations and coordination is between other agencies. In an IDP setting this is different. In the case of Northern Uganda, the government of Uganda determines the policies and strategies for humanitarian operations. They are responsible for the life and care for their inhabitants and the internally displaced. Humanitarian agencies who work together with the government of Uganda are therefore never totally neutral. Their operations and the aid is embedded in political policies and agendas.

In the humanitarian environment in Northern Uganda decentralization and the dozens of present NGOs result in a chain of stakeholders and decision makers at all levels. There are different operational frameworks designed, the most influential ones being the DDMC by the government and the Cluster Approach by the IASC. Both frameworks need all actors to be involved to ensure legitimacy. What is attempted to uphold is the so-called ‘cordial relationship’ between the government and humanitarian agencies. However, under the surface there are tensions, power
struggles and suspicion. The collaboration between government and agencies is therefore far from smooth. Nevertheless all parties would say the relationships are good. They both depend on each other: without the agencies Northern Uganda would be a lot worse and Uganda’s image to the outer world would be damaged. Humanitarian agencies cannot operate without government’s approval so it is recommended to keep good relations with them.

So how should government and agencies work together? This is difficult to say as relationships are about people. Individuals may work together in good faith, but agencies and government as a whole can compete. In a humanitarian setting it is even more difficult to build long lasting relations and to put effort in them. Humanitarian interventions are seen as something temporary. International humanitarians often do not stay long and donor money is unpredictable. In light of this it is very difficult to make long-term plans and to build long-term relations that will contribute to cordial cooperation.

The UNHCR can complain they do not have the mandate to respond to the IDPs’ needs, but they certainly have enough money to mean something for the displaced. It must be awfully concluded that the struggles over how to structure and coordinate the humanitarian response in Gulu obstructs the shifts into concrete actions. The IDPs of Gulu and Amuru districts are sadly not only victims of war, but also of the humanitarian communities’ internal quarrels.

Several things are sure in the case of the humanitarian aid chain in Northern Uganda. That it is extremely bureaucratic, that the frameworks are made too complex, that there are too many actors involved, that there is suspicion and accusations between the actors, that aid is politically charged, that there are big gaps between the field and offices. There is over coordination that results in ineffectiveness and ineffectiveness of the humanitarian interventions. Humanitarian communities do not communicate with others, or with the beneficiaries.

In the way the humanitarian aid chain is now constructed, organisations will never be able to facilitate the return process of IDPs. Because they do not know what to do, when, with whom and why. There is no agreement on how to facilitate the return process, pilots are randomly run without clear strategies and there are no serious assessments undertaken on how IDPs would like to be facilitated and when. There is a general organisational failing of agencies in the aid chain. Nothing else could be expected when such a hideous humanitarian aid chain is created like the one in Gulu district.
8. PERCEPTIONS ON AID

Introduction: examining the experiences in the field

Now as the humanitarian framework of operations in Gulu district has been explained, this chapter will describe the perceptions on aid from the field and what delivered for the IDPs. As much as it is important to analyse the operational framework at ‘office level’ - meaning the government and humanitarian agencies- it is equally important to examine how the displaced people of Gulu district perceive the relief efforts. The internally displaced have their own strategies in dealing with agencies and the provided aid. The relationships between the IDPS and the humanitarian agencies will be described, as well as the relationships between IDPS and government. The first section elaborates on the visibility of aid and the knowledge the IDPs have on NGOs. Then the service gaps are identified and the question will rise who is responsible to address these gaps. This is followed by a section on the government’s incentives to provide aid. The majority of this chapter is however devoted to the aid distributed by the humanitarian agencies. It will investigate the aid operations in terms of equality, selecting beneficiaries and the frustrations that are encountered.

Visibility of aid

Although there is no accurate data on how many NGOs and CBOs are active in the field of Gulu and Amuru district, people have estimated the number of operating agencies at around 300.131 The three hundred national and international agencies work in various sectors ranging from protection, health, water and sanitation, gender based violence and many others. Some agencies, mostly the bigger international ones, have different operations in different sectors. Some of those agencies work both in the ‘humanitarian’ field as well as in the ‘developmental’ field, as they would distinguish those fields themselves.

Donors such as the Embassy of The Netherlands for example also fund their own projects in Northern Uganda. The government of Uganda funds projects within their governmental mandate. These projects are mainly within the sector of community services, like building schools and employing school and health staff. Apart from providing aid relief through existing structures, initiatives of private funding and investments in Northern Uganda are countless. As far as I know, no one really knows how much money flows into the region through these initiatives. Children are sent to schools with private money from the developed world, books are donated to the University’s library and ‘old’ clothes are sent to the poor people in the camps.

131 See Annex 8 for the humanitarian presence in Gulu district per camp.
The crisis in Northern Uganda is no longer a forgotten one. A Dutch official at the ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague, Netherlands said: ‘Money is not an issue in Northern Uganda.’ I have heard from various respondents that the money should have been enough to solve the most disturbing problems in the region.

In Gulu town, you will find yourself in an amusement park of NGOs: There are colourful signboards of NGOs at the sides of the roads, hundreds of vehicles drive around the town with their logos printed on the doors; some have even flags waving in the wind. You will meet local people walking around in t-shirts of different NGOs are one of their campaigns. Even in the field one would pass a signboard regularly announcing a certain project, like the ‘NGO X Water and Sanitation Project, Amuru’. Restaurants, offices and cafes have posters with sensitizing messages on the walls. The presence of the hundreds of NGOs active in Gulu and its surroundings is undeniable. Operating in the region is about competition and the struggle for recognition. When NGO cars are seen and their t-shirts are worn it will give the impression that the NGO is very active in the field. This is important for NGOs are accused of spending too much money on themselves and too little on the intended beneficiaries.

However, when one drives through the districts of Gulu and Amuru from camp to camp, visiting the camps, the schools and the health clinics (if present), one can only wonder what happened with all the money that reached the region. IDPs live in poor living conditions and there are major gaps in terms of services. As obvious the presence of NGOs is in Gulu town, as difficult it is to see the direct impact of them in the field. Most people in the camps know that there are many NGOs active in Northern Uganda. But what does that mean for them as individuals?

Most camps are situated along a main road to other camps, towns, or to the capital Kampala. The majority of NGOs have big 4x4s to go into the field. Especially during the rainy season this is not a waste of money. Some camps are extremely difficult to reach as the roads are in bad conditions, or even flushed away. Only strong jeeps can manage the tough drive in order to access the camps. However, despite the many cars, IDP respondents claim that cars never stop, nor that they have spoken to an NGO worker that got out of the car in their site. Communication happens through the local leaders:

Big vehicles do not stop. Small vehicles come here and talk to the camp leader. But what is discussed with him I do not know. (...) The ideas of the NGOs the camp leader only shares it with the executives but not with the main people in the camp.132

Most IDPs responded that they are not sure to which NGO the cars belong to. Others clearly recognise the Red Cross symbol – for that you do not have to be able to read - or the symbol of World Food

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132 Interview Adak decongestion site, male age 40, 3 November 2007
Programme, the agency all IDPs are familiar with through the provision of food relief. None of the respondents however felt included and consulted whenever an NGO would reach a camp.

This was different in terms of NGOs actually operating in a certain area. However, the level of understanding of which NGOs do what and where strongly depended on where and to whom the question was asked. The majority of the IDP respondents could name at least one NGO they know, often added with the kind of operation they do. The one most often mentioned was not surprisingly World Food Programme (WFP), as most of the respondents received food aid at the time, or somewhere in the past. The knowledge about other NGOs hugely varied from one respondent to another. A young girl in a village close to Gulu Town easily explained which NGOs she had conducted to apply for school sponsorship. It seems obvious that people can mention the NGO they got assistance from. The agencies distributing tangible things like food (WFP), blankets (Red Cross), oxes and hoes (CARE, CARITAS) are the ones often mentioned and most appreciated. World Vision was mentioned a lot as well, as they are famous for their centres for ex abductees. In the table there is a list of all NGOs mentioned.

Table 9: The number of IDPs that mentioned NGOs by name.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGO</th>
<th>Mentioned (number of IDPs)</th>
<th>Direct Assistance (number of IDPs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WFP</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRC</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Vision</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Cross</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action (fame)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caritas</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War Child</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angalot</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARC</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Save the Children</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned Parents</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda Red Cross</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUSCO</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPAR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMREF</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSF</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakarabe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight Talk</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUSAF</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulu Youth Centre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windle Trust</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCF</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walokokwow</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights Focus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invisible Children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Only two respondents could not name any NGO. They said they did not know anything about the NGO business. As the table also shows, naming NGOs is a different matter than receiving actual aid directly. Help from NGOs included everything from receiving food, non-food items, school fees, trainings or a new constructed hut. The majority of the IDPs interviewed claimed that they had never received any kind of aid apart from food aid. However, whenever I asked who had constructed the school, health centre or boreholes – if I had seen them in the site- generally they did not know. These services were than taken for granted, something probably ‘a certain NGO’ or ‘the government’ must have placed it. Nevertheless, considering the fact that there are about hundreds of NGOs operating in Gulu district, the list of NGOs mentioned by the IDPs is then surprisingly short.

Although a number of NGOS operate in the main camps, little to nothing is provided in the new sites constructively. People who moved there constructed their own huts, and dug their own latrines. Children commute to school in the main camp, stay at home, or go to the nearest school if that one has opened. The humanitarian community is internally discussing whether to intervene in these new sites or not. Some organisations think it is better to encourage full return not by supplying services in new sites. Others claim that the living conditions in the new sites are difficult and that those people cannot be left out of services. It was appreciated by some IDPs that they were given some items to help to put up their new huts, although not everyone benefited. Displaced people are limitedly informed about who gave assistance to them or the community. Aid is not valued in terms of who provides what. I could be either NGOs or government. What is important however, is what is provided and or even more specific: how much.

A great number of the displaced people interviewed received food aid. The ones excluded from the food relief either lived in Gulu Town, or were displaced in another part of Uganda.134 Receivers however thought the food provided to be enough. Halfway the month the food would all be finished if you would not supplement it with bought or cultivated food. The food provided was appreciated and in most cases considered to be helping the household. Other factors like irregular distributions, cancellation of registered names and the decrease of the rations all contributed to a diminishing faith in the provision in food relief. The World Food Programme (WFP) bases the amount of food relief on the needed calories per day, being approximately 2100 calories. Since the people ‘have now started

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133 Some remarks: (1) Direct Assistance does not include the constructing of schools, health centers and schools. Some of the respondents would mention the names of the NGOs responsible for that, but the majority was not aware which NGO had constructed those. (2) The mentioning or the provision numbers do not show the opinions about the quality, level or distribution of the aid. (3) Two respondents could not name any NGO.

134 WFP labels people as IDPs entitled to receive food relief, when they were the camps in 2004, 2005 and the first half of 2006. Interview with a UN official, Gulu Town, 8 October 2007.
farming\textsuperscript{135} people get 40 to 60\% of those calories in food relief. Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (EVIs) get 100\%. In October 2007, the WFP covered 467000 IDPs in the districts Gulu and Amuru. People are not given the 100\% \textit{to reduce the dependency syndrome}.\textsuperscript{136}

Internally displaced persons value aid as it has been brought to them. NGOs are seen as helping a camp or community develop by constructing schools, boreholes and health centres. Others received training in certain skills so that they can generate income. As a young lady in one of the big main camps explained:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Had I not been given the aid I would maybe not surviving at the level I am now. As a poor person they might not give you the necessities in lives. To me it is like if they [NGOs] have given me a hook to fish in the river. If you don’t fish, that is up to you. That is due to the education GUSCO\textsuperscript{137} has given me. Had it not been like this I might have died or might have worked as a house guard somewhere in town. I cannot predict.}\textsuperscript{138}
\end{quote}

Some expressed their thankfulness that NGOs had come to dig latrines and build schools, things they did not have back in the villages.

However, giving people something for ‘free’ because they are suffering, does not necessarily mean that people are always happy with it. On the contrary: they value whatever is provided, as anyone else would do. The food relief is helping, but it is not enough. It has been reported –however rarely– that people had received rotten food. This was confirmed by one humanitarian aid worker, explaining the competition in the world food market that contributes to the low quality of food.\textsuperscript{139} People are gathered in the camps to get a sensitization session on HIV/AIDS, landmines, or hygiene. Direct result from these sessions is rarely seen and it made people wonder why to invest time in these gatherings.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{135}Interview with a UN official, Gulu town, 8 October 2007.\textsuperscript{136}Interview with a UN official, Gulu town, 8 October 2007\textsuperscript{137}Gulu Support the Children Organisation. A Ugandan NGO that given her a tailoring course and tailoring machines.\textsuperscript{138}Interview Anaka main camp, female age 23, 23 September 2007\textsuperscript{139}Interview with humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 7 January 2008. She explained that the US sells the food cheaply to for example WFP, whereas the same food is also available at the local food markets.
\end{flushleft}
as long as there is nothing to gain. The internally displaced have good ideas about what could be ‘good’ aid. As one boy made clear:

‘People are desperate. Whenever something small is given to them people will remember. CARITAS did something tangible. (…) They brought seeds. (…) One NGO that had a silly program was Emmanuel International. They were weighing people, and if you were below a certain amount of kilos they made you to eat the food they cooked from that very place, mostly fish. You can easily mistake someone for his or her kilos. This had no impact at all. Then Care. They did applications, got 20 people for saving. But with this level of poverty where do people get the money from?’

Gaps and needs. Who’s responsibility?
The displaced people do not ask for unreasonable things. They do not ask for loads of money, cars, houses or electricity. Nor do they ask for high-tech agricultural machines. People responded the same no matter in what kind of site. Hoes, tarpaulins, cooking utensils and blankets I heard most often. In terms of services health clinics was mentioned frequently. People sometimes walk or cycle great distances before they can access health treatment. The level of poverty made people mention food as needed more in the site, as well as clothes and soap. Education is also high listed. Children can access a primary school either in the nearby surroundings or back in the main camp. Secondary education is less available for children, partly due to the great distances. However in many cases parents are not able to pay the children’s school fees. This is even the case with the access to primary education despite the Universal Primary Education system; an initiative of free education for primary school students. Despite UPE the costs of books or uniforms remain too high for parents. As a result young displaced kids are excluded from primary education. Not surprisingly, as the people in the Northern region of Uganda are yearning for good education, the displaced people interviewed called for help in order to help them pay their children’s school fees. Frequently parents cannot afford to send all their children to school. They send either their first born to school, leaving his or her followers at home working, or vice versa: they keep the first born at home to do the work so that his or her brothers and sisters can obtain education. Keeping money aside for school fees is real struggle for the families in Gulu and Amuru district. Sometimes children drop out for a certain period because the fees cannot be afforded. If the child is lucky it can resume the following year. Many children, especially those in the senior schools work to get the money for fees themselves. As one boy in senior two told me:

‘What should be provided is in terms of education. There are so many children that don’t go to school because of money problems. Instead they go to the quarry to do some work to pay instalment. I am also facing that same kind of problem. Without the work in the quarry I cannot pay myself. My mum can’t pay me, I have to pay myself. There should also be services for the elder children like me.’

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140 Focus Group Discussion, Anaka main camp, male age 25, 19 December 2007
141 Either in main camps, villages, new sites or one decongestion site
142 Interview Obiya Highland village, male age 17, 14 December 2007
There are two main NGOs that supply school fees for senior students. These ones are called Windle Trust and the American based Invisible Children. Thousands of children register every term. As the funds are limited, the can only allow a small number of children. The interest in becoming educated was tremendous. Education was considered to be a solution for problems, a first step toward a better future. Some people in Northern Uganda feel more ‘backward’ and ‘illiterate’ than other people in Uganda. The school drop outs, the thousands of children who were abducted during the war, the poverty: it is all deeply felt. Education is felt as being the key to generate income, to do something productive.

*‘If you are educated it does not mean that you have to become rich. You can still be poor, but you will know that it has opened up your mind to let you think widely. When I go back to school it will give me a paper that will give me something to do. To sustain my family and other relatives. My education will be for my children in the future’.*

Another gap that is frequently mentioned by both IDPs and humanitarian organisations is health clinics. One UN worker explained that there is a general lack of medicines and health staff. The health clinics that are there cannot handle the number of people visiting them. IDPs are sometimes forced to walk or cycle miles to Gulu Town, or wait until the following morning for staff to be back in nearby clinics.

So whose responsibility is it to supply these services and needs for the IDPs in Gulu and Amuru district? Are the gaps identified a real problem? Are the tangible items like blankets and soap mentioned by IDPs really an unreasonable thing to ask? Many IDPs would say that any NGO is welcome to help them. It does not really matter which NGO. They are considered to be in Northern Uganda to help them. It is interesting to see that people living in the areas that NGOs operated visibly, mentioned them without hesitation by. Having many examples of NGOs helping the community, it was more expected of them to continue operating and assisting the IDPs. In camps or sites where there was little to nothing assistance provided, people were less specific about who should provide, not being really sure.

Yet as many IDPs said it should be the government to support them for it is their responsibility to take care of its citizens. However it was also acknowledged that the level of the problems is too complex and the suffering people are too many for the government to do it alone. In that sense NGOs should help the government to fulfil its task. It was sometimes mentioned that it was better to approach NGOs because the government meant long bureaucratic processes. The supply of NGOs could be faster and was also better valued.

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143 Interview Akonyi Bedo village, male age 20, 11 October 2007
144 Interview with a UN worker, Gulu town, 16 November 2007
When it comes to the return package the government is held fully responsible for the realisation of that project. The message had a tremendous impact as it was announced on the radio, a very popular medium in Northern Uganda. The needs addressed in terms of going home and the assistance that should make that possible was mainly focused on the promises of the government to provide every IDP with iron sheets and housing items. Not only was the central government considered to play a role in terms of assistance to IDPs. In Uganda’s political decentralization structure the local leaders from the camps or the villages up to the district played a dominant role in the provision of aid as the next section will illustrate.

**Government and aid**

_If we were to survive on aid of the government, we would not have survived._

The road between Gulu and the capital Kampala is about 330 kilometres long. However, psychologically Kampala would seem at the other side of the world when you wander around Northern Uganda. Some people in the camps even have never even reached Gulu, so they can only speculate about how Kampala looks like. However, many factors of the IDPs’ lives are determined at Kampala level at the Office of the Prime Minister. The fifth floor of this Soviet like grey building hosts the Department of Disaster Management and Refugees. This department uses policy as a guiding method in their intervention in the Northern part of Uganda. First they used the National IDP policy, now they are focusing on the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda. The Commissioner of Disaster Management and Refugees, said that a lot of national money was thrown down the drain by investing in the army to fight the rebels. Development, that will be the new focus for Northern Uganda. As his direct assistant, Madam Nakabugo Bwenvy, Principal Disaster Management Officer, explained:

‘Ninety percent of the people in the north lived in camps at a certain moment. They were unproductive, not adding to the economy. Meanwhile, the rebels were destroying the infrastructure. Now, we still invest in the army, because we have to build security roads. But the level of expenses has gone down. Now we invest in security and issues of law and order.’

At district level government officials complain about the lack of funding coming from Kampala. In Gulu district the district departments work alongside the District Disaster Management Committee (DDMC). The DDMC operates according to the National IDP policy. As is stated in the policy, the central government should fund the DDMC. This has not happened. As one government official

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145 See chapter 6.
146 Focus Group Discussion Anaka main camp, male age 22, 19 December 2007
147 In November 2007 this building was fully and nicely painted in white and orange. This was most likely done for CHOGM.
148 See previous chapter 5.
149 Interview at the Office of the Prime Minister Kampala, The Commissioner of Disaster Management and Refugees and the Principal Disaster Management Officer, 18 October 2008
sighed, Gulu district has received as much money from Kampala as other districts, but as he said: ‘we had a crisis to deal with in our district development plan’. Furthermore it was not possible to generate revenue from the inhabitants as almost the entire population was displaced and not economically engaged. Gulu district has therefore been dependent on aid agencies.

Within the district, different departments work on different sectors. The DDMC is a coordination body. Every sector has contributed to the writing of the district development plan. The implementation is a different story. The district claims that they do not have enough money and capacity to run the necessary programmes. They feel powerless in demanding for more money from the central government.

The people who should be the beneficiaries of all, the IDPs, have different opinions about the involvement and responsibility of the government. Positive remarks are predominantly based upon the government’s involvement in providing protection to the people of Northern Uganda. The government brought the people to the camps, they built detaches around it and provided UPDF soldiers to protect the citizens. Interestingly enough, exactly the practise of forcing people into the camps has been highly criticised by international actors, scholars and humanitarian agencies (Dolan 2005).

The Government’s failure to deal with the high levels of impunity enjoyed by the UPDF seemed to many people in northern Uganda to be an implicit authorization of that abuse, further proof that the Government shared in the devaluation of the Acholi. The impact on the political stability of the area of the double and triple violations which took place under the guise of protection was in this regard more grave than the atrocities of the LRA. (Dolan 2005:231-2)

By ordering the Acholi people to leave their villages to live in crowded camps their human rights were violated. Nothing was catered for them, except for ‘protection’. The UPDF army abused the people in the camps, people were dying of diseases and hunger and their freedom of movement was seriously restricted. Critics have often said that it was not the LRA that caused the many deaths in Northern Uganda; it was the life in the camps.

In an earlier chapter it was explained that the displaced people do not like camp life. However, although life in the villages brings up nostalgic memories about the easiness at home where you can move freely and access your own garden, it also brings back memories about the brutal way the LRA disturbed their lives. It is almost certain that every single individual has faced the rebels at a certain moment in his or her life. Due to the burning of villages, abducting children, the killings and mutilations, fear has become a daily emotion. Although people were neither that safe in the camps – think of the massacres and the camp attacks in which children were abducted by hundreds- most

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124 Interview with A Gulu District official, Gulu town, 15 November 2007
people experience a level of security in camps due to the government soldiers around. Despite the many problems in the camp in terms of social, economic exclusion, people generally appreciate the government’s attempt to protect the displaced. The LRA and Joseph Kony in particular is considered to be the real enemy causing the problems in their lives, not their government.

Equality

How would a small humanitarian community cater for a tremendously great number of 1.5 million uprooted people in an ongoing war? In order to illustrate the context and environment of Northern Uganda in this respect I will share one of my memories during the fieldwork.

I remember that day as the first day I went into the field with my research assistant. It was going to be my first experience in an IDP camp, as it was going to be first field interviews of my life. Excited and nervous we embarked a truck in Gulu Town going to I don’t remember where. We were supposed to be dropped in Anaka, one of the biggest camps in Amuru district. Luckily the driver had reserved for us a seat in the cabin. About twenty others including their loads were at the back of the truck.

It was September, at the peak of the rainy season. As we drove off it became clear it was going to be a very long drive. The unsurfaced road was narrow and at certain points almost inaccessible. Big muddy potholes challenged the driver who, used to these kinds of adventures, easily manoeuvred our truck around or bluntly through those potholes. Twice we had to stop to see how cars were pulled out of the mud by a big truck. Another time angry villagers stopped us saying we could not go through unless everyone would help them to carry three stones to rehabilitate the road. As my research assistant did not want me to do the hard work, he paid the drunken village head a small amount of shillings. As our passengers came back after helping the villagers out one lady complained: ‘Finally the rebels do not force us to do things any longer, now we have to deal with commands of other villagers!’ It made everyone in our truck laugh.

After 3,5 hours drive we arrived in Anaka (four months later we would do the same trip in the dry season and by motorbike; it took us less then one hour). An interesting place with a main road with little shops, two guesthouses, bars and on the hill a big hospital. Behind the small storey buildings, hundreds or may be thousands of mud huts attracted my attention. In an instant I understood what was meant with people having no privacy and the prevalence of diseases because of congestion. The rainy season had made the camp a muddy place.

101 Or town as it was referred to by others. Before becoming a ‘camp’ Anaka was a small town and trading center for the surrounding villages.
We entered a local bar to get some refreshments. Low tables and blue and green plastic chairs were part of the interior. What was striking however, were the dozen posters hanging on the wall. Apart from the Coca Cola poster, they were all ‘sensitizing posters’ of NGOs. ‘Be careful with drinking water that looks clean’, ‘do not step on unrecognisable objects’ and strips with a drunken man contrasting an image of a man being surrounded with his happy family, are messages of NGOs for the people in the camp.

As we walked to a sub office of Gulu NGO forum, I noticed some logos of NGOs, either on boreholes, or on t-shirts and sign posts. Inside the office there was handwritten poster with all the NGOs operating in the camp including their activities. There were seven, and it did not include NGOs that come once in a while like World Food Program, Red Cross and CPAR. Meanwhile we conducted our first interview. My respondent was a lady that could easily mention all NGOs operating in the camp of which four of them had helped her directly. I have to confess I was impressed by the coverage of the NGOs and their operations. Anaka camp felt like a somehow developed place.

After good one night sleep in one of the guest houses along the main road, after we had eaten illegally poached smoked Ugandan kob\textsuperscript{126}, we headed to another camp in the same sub county. It was a forty minute drive, luckily this time we got a ride with the other research team we arrived in Agung Camp. The camp is a lot smaller than Anaka and has tidy appearance. This because Agung Camp’s main road is along the Karuma – Arua road, that was paved by the Chinese in 2005. Ludicrously, this road is sometimes referred to as the best road in the whole of Uganda, which is, in my view, certainly true.

However, my optimism was soon gone. Anaka and Agung differed as day and night. Whereas Anaka was ‘fortunate’ to have the NGOs attention, Agung was a totally neglected place. Children were playing with caps of sodas, adults were gathered around the bar, drinking local brewed beer and spirits. My two respondents received me in their huts, where they hardly owned anything. NGOs had not come to provide them with blankets are saucepans. Only World Food Programme reaches the camp, once every two months. But many do not receive, as I was explained, due to mismanagement in registration.

\textsuperscript{126} Ugandan kob is an antelope, a symbol for the country Uganda
After these first two days of fieldwork it became clear how different camps can be in terms of distribution of aid. How some people could be totally excluded from aid and that others, not far from them, do receive. I wanted to compare more camps and try to explain the big differences. This was not an easy task.

![Agung IDP camp, Amuru district](image)

It is acknowledged by many humanitarians, that there is an unequal distribution of aid. The long-term insecurity, the lack of money and capacity and the sometimes difficult access to camps are mentioned as explanations. Since the security improved, things have not changed dramatically. There has been a great influx of agencies into the region, but their programmes are not extended to other regions. The distribution of aid is not sufficiently coordinated. Gaps are identified, but no agency feels responsible for actually filling that gaps. It is easier to operate in areas where there are others. There, there are the structures in place that make operations a lot easier. People are better registered and the relationship with the local leaders is a lot smoother.

Another reason for running different programmes in one site instead of divided them between different ones is the message agencies want to spread about their projects. When an agency operates in a big camp like Pabbo that had at one point 60,000 people, it can report to their donors that their project has had an impact on many people and has a large outreach. It is also about logistics: it is easier to plan the activities in a camp that is conveniently located along a main road. Efficiency and statistics seem more important than improving individual lives.

The internally displaced people that only receive food aid feel excluded. They see NGOs’ cars and they hear announcements on the radio how much money is spent in projects that not affect them. In case of the people in Agung, they know that their neighbour camp Anaka receives a lot of aid. They are perfectly aware of what is given to whom, how much and by whom.
‘Nothing has been done. But we are here. In other camps like in Kitgum the assistance is different. In Kitgum they have been provided soap, saucepans, blankets. It is not provided for us. That camp has just started so they needed assistance, but we were already here.’\(^{153}\)

IDPs often make comparisons to other people, camps, districts or even countries. Being displaced and living in difficult camp life conditions make people see aid as their right. Their situation would always be different and more difficult than compared to the life of aid workers and government officials. They are the ones who should supply them with necessities as in this context they have the right to be helped. Until the day they can cater for themselves again.

There is one big limitation to the distribution of aid and that is money. There is simply not enough money to provide every single individual with basic necessities. Almost 2 million people are in need. The humanitarian community therefore invented a system in which criteria determine whether a person should get aid or not. The criteria are based upon the level of ‘vulnerability’. The so-called Extremely Vulnerable Individual (EVI) gets special care and help. EVIs are people with mental and chronic illness, disabled people, pregnant women, elderly being over 60 (not having a son above 15) and child headed households. EVIs are considered to find difficulties returning to their homes, as they are not able to. Huts are constructed for them in the new sites and EVIs get 100% food relief – compared to 40 – 60% for ‘non EVIs’. They get extra relief items.

Who defines someone an EVI is however not clear. During a food distribution of EVIs in November 2007 in Palenga Camp the term ‘EVI’ was randomly written on the distribution cards or deleted from them\(^{154}\). A man with a big elephant foot was not considered an EVI as he was not registered in the book as such. He did not get any food. Others bring their food to their complete families as the entire family benefits from the fact that a household is headed by an EVI. The question remains however, if every labelled EVI is indeed vulnerable: and a non-EVI is not. It is not clear how long someone remains an EVI: and if these EVIs cannot cope. Can someone be more vulnerable than others? According to one humanitarian agency it can. Due to lack of money to run programmes they have identified ‘Extremely EVIs’ who are their beneficiaries.\(^{155}\)

\(^{153}\) Interview in Koch Goma IDP camp, male age 34, 1 October 2007.

\(^{154}\) Field visit with NRC’s distribution team, Gulu district, 26 November 2007.

\(^{155}\) Fieldtrip with Camp Management Team, Amuru district, 28 September 2007
Meanwhile, fellow camp inhabitants see how these people are favoured and get more and more frequent aid. Not only EVIs are the agencies’ main target, also orphans, people living with HIV/AIDS and formally abducted persons (FAPs) get special care. All the other people complain that they are left out and that it will be very difficult to get registered while there are so many others who are considered to be in more need. These people do not feel treated fairly as they see that all Northern Ugandans have been affected by the war and displacement.

‘NGOs give support to certain people, especially ex abductees. Leaving the others. We all have been affected by the war one way or the other. This causes segregation. Those in the bush did a lot of evil to the people but the support is not given to those ones who have stayed at home. They have to consider the group as one.’\(^{156}\)

**Reciprocal frustrations**

‘It is the WPF officials that sell food off. They came to me. But I told them I do not have money to buy from them. (…) I got the food with my card, the food that I was supposed to get. They study who can buy more from them. So when I was carrying the food back home they stopped me on the way. They watch during the distribution who can buy and who cannot buy. It happened the last distribution.’\(^{157}\)

In terms of relief expectations and frustrations are involved. Both the receiver and the giver expect something of the other. The giver may expect gratitude of the receiver; the receiver may expect a certain level of quality of what has been given. But aid is also about money and power. There are several incidents reported like the one described above. The ones distributing the food relief are volunteers and receive little pay for what they do. The distributors have approached some IDPs – they want them to pay the food relief. There are also reports of sexual exploitation related to the distribution of food.\(^{158}\)

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\(^{156}\) Focus Group Discussion Anaka main camp, male age 21, 19 December 2007

\(^{157}\) Interview IDP camp, Gulu district, 2 October 2007

\(^{158}\) Personal communication with a humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town.
Locally in the camps corruption is felt by the internally displaced:

“When it comes to the food distribution, I blame the camp leaders. Though they are the ones to organise the people in the camp, they are the ones that activate the selling of food among people. They pretend that they give the food to the right people, but on the cards these names might not be existing. They are ghost people. So when the food comes they first get the food for the ones who do not exist. They set the bags aside. So some of the ones really living in the camp are not been given. Or the food will go back with the lorry, back to the office of the World Food Programme.”

I came across several stories of IDPs about local leaders who keep the relief items themselves instead of distributing them equally among the camp inhabitants. Nepotism is also a frequently heard complaint. One young boy explained that in cases in which the local leaders are supposed to register the poorest people of the camp he registers his family members first.

It is not my intention to claim these allegations to be true or not. However these stories about corruption and nepotism do result in IDPs’ distrust and scepticism relating to relief. Others factors also contribute to these emotions. One is communication. To start with food relief again, there is a lot of confusion about the decrease of food relief since a couple of months. Food is distributed according to the number of people in the household. Many of my respondents have experienced, or seen happening, that people were cancelled from the list without explanation. This creates huge suspicion.

The lack of communication is also prevalent in registration of people, or gaps in the service supply. The displaced people experience field visits of NGOs investigating the area. They write down names of people and leave. The same thing happens when NGOs come to register the lack of health services, school material or sufficient working boreholes. They leave and people wait long, sometimes forever, for the feedback or follow up. The issues get lost in the humanitarian framework as was explained in chapter 7. The registration creates expectations. These expectations change into frustration when people are not updated about their status or that of the service.

The distrust that sometimes results in IDPs’ indifference toward aid could easily be solved when people are kept informed about the relief status of an individual or a sight. Openness about an NGOs situation when for example donor money is decreasing will result in more understanding from the beneficiaries. Equal participation is crucial when an agency wants to create trust. When people feel to be left in the dark about the amount, the quality and consistency of aid there is more room for them to spread rumours due to dissatisfaction.

139 Interview in a village in Gulu district, male age 20, 11 October 2007.
140 Food relief is a good reference since all the IDPs I interviewed receive food relief
Another frustration that is deeply felt by all actors is the long channel of communication and bureaucracy. There are dozens of decision makers involved and these actors often do not trust each other. The WFP accuses people and communities of provoking as they call it ‘double feeding’. They claim that families register in different places to get more food. As a UN official stated: ‘the camp leaders and the communities are not helping out at all.’\textsuperscript{161} That is why they do the ‘cleaning process’ themselves. Camp leaders are accused of increasing the number of camp inhabitants on paper to get more relief from agencies. Humanitarian aid workers feel defeated when they find out that IDPs sell their relief items off to get income. This great lack of trust between agencies, beneficiaries and mediators disturbs any relation between them. As a result agencies call IDPs ‘lazy and dependent’ and local leaders ‘corrupt and self-interested’. Local leaders call the agencies ‘corrupt and show people’. IDPs call the local leaders and agencies ‘corrupt and arrogant’. This does not seem like a healthy environment in which relief needs to be distributed.

\textit{Dependency syndrome}

\textit{There is so much dependency here. The people of Northern Uganda expect living standards that are extremely unreasonable.}\textsuperscript{162}

It was often said by humanitarian workers that people are not leaving the camps because of lack of services in the new settlement or the village. They would speak of a ‘dependency syndrome’ among IDPs after years of encampment and a health clinic, a school and a couple of boreholes just few steps from their hut. As said before, some humanitarian workers even state that IDPs ‘like’ camp life because of social reasons. IDPs are accused of being ‘lazy’ and ‘spoiled’ and many humanitarians wonder why IDPs are so ‘demanding’ while people did not used to have all these services in their villages before displacement. Humanitarians say: ‘they used to dig their own latrines and now they want us to provide them with the tools.’\textsuperscript{163}, or ‘people have forgotten that the community can help themselves, it is easier to wait for an NGO to come and help.’\textsuperscript{164}

Going into the field visiting several camps has left a different impression however. It must not be forgotten that the majority of Northern Uganda’s people have received very little assistance from government, UN nor NGOs since they have been displaced. UNHCR acknowledges that aid only reaches about less than half of the IDPs. Many displaced people cannot name any NGO, or have no idea what all these big cars do in Northern Uganda since they never seem to stop in their camps. Many people do not even care. When they feel secure enough they leave, with or without services in their home areas. Or they feel pushed away because of the decrease in the amount of food WFP distributes, so that they can supplement with food from their own gardens.

\textsuperscript{161} Interview with a UN official, Gulu town, 8 October 2007.
\textsuperscript{162} Personal communication with a humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town.
\textsuperscript{163} Interview with a UN worker, Gulu town, 16 November 2007.
\textsuperscript{164} Interview with a humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 6 November 2007
Secondly, the people that have moved from their camps to new sites or villages have done so regardless the lack of access to services. People do dig their own latrines and do fetch water from streams or wells when there is no borehole. True, some people have moved while leaving their children to go to school in the main camp, or stay in the camps because the children are enrolled in the school in the camp, but very few have appointed the access to schools as the main reason to move or not.

Thirdly, the Acholi society has changed in the places where there has been substantial humanitarian aid during the encampment and displacement. In the early days few people attended schools. Due to encampment children have been able to access schools; obviously people want to continue the kind of life including education. In the humanitarian discourse it is the agencies that have provided services for many years in specific areas, and now they are the ones complaining about ‘dependency’.

When NGOs do their assessments on return, it is obvious that IDPs will answer in terms of services as a main reason to move or not. They might just try their luck, since people know very well that NGOs are there for a reason. Local leaders are expected to get the best out of the NGOs presence. As the displaced individuals are powerless and not assumed to keep contact with NGOs, the local leaders feel this pressure as it can damage their status within the community. The humanitarian agencies’ judgmental stance toward the displaced people in Northern Uganda is greatly influencing the image of displacement within the region as well as to the outside world. Not only does this damage individuals, it also represents the inaccuracy of humanitarian agencies relating to their understanding of the region’s context. Their interventions are therefore based upon emotions of frustrations. One NGO organises contests in one of the camps:

‘Here in Northern Uganda they want us to give first before they look what they can do themselves as a community. Not in every camps, but in most of them. We are telling the communities that we and the UN will eventually leave. So we organise contests: who is keeping the latrines clean, who is emptying the garbage bin most often.’

The people in the camps are displaced, but they are not little children that need to be educated by international NGOs. The internally displaced feel that little has come out of the humanitarian aid industry. They feel dependent on aid, they just want to pack and leave as soon as the security situation permits.

‘They [NGOs] are the ones being dependent. On behalf of the people they are extending their stomachs with the aid. Acholi people are not lazy. Because of the war we have struggled, trying to get the life to normality. People lost everything. In south Sudan people are helped to rehabilitate their lives. It is just a way of struggling. The one who stated that does not want the war to end. He benefits from it. During the

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103 Interview with a humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 6 November 2007.
Not every humanitarian generalises as such when it comes to the ‘dependency syndrome’. However in one case humanitarians take the same stance. That concerns the youth.

Youth

The youth of Northern Uganda have never experienced a life without war, terror, hardship and encampment. Many children have been born in camps. They do not know life without problems of congestion, diseases and poverty. However, the consequences of this type of life for young kids are explained in different ways. Displaced adults are concerned about their children, as they are said to be ‘spoiled’, ‘stubborn’ and ‘immoral’. Congestion has resulted in the diminishing of social norms as adults see it. One IDP asked me how he was supposed to educate his children on morality when his neighbour urinates publicly for children to see it. Drunkenness in the camp has led to the copying of abusive language by children. Idleness turns children into thieves, as is one of the adults’ concerns.

Also humanitarian actors see youth as a group that needs special care. It is argued that they are among those who are expected to stay in the main camps. This is because youth are considered to like camp life where they can find discos, alcohol, friends and sex. One UN official in Kampala claimed that younger generations expect a health centre in their villages within 500 meters, ‘because they are used to services close by.’167 In his view it will be hard for them to leave the camps when they find out that the nearest health centre will be a longer walk.

The Acholi youth get stigmatised in different ways. Their elders think they are stubborn and immoral, humanitarian actors think they are lazy because they prefer to stay within the camp instead of doing the hard work in the fields. As some humanitarians see it, camp life is nice:

‘Youth will be in the camps. In the camps there is alcohol, discos: it is social setting. I would want to stay also!’168

The government, humanitarian actors and adult IDPs neglect the genuine motives of youth not to leave the camps. The youth involved in this research all express their dislike of the camps and their desire to go home. Some acknowledge that other youth indeed drink a lot and go to discos, but this is seen as a way of survival. They have seen young age mates die of diseases and hunger in the camps. Many cannot go to school because of money problems. There is nothing to do in the camp. The youth of Northern Uganda have been brought up in an environment of imposed idleness. Hanging out with friends is one way to escape the hardships. Youth have indicated that they speak of the problems

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166 Focus Group Discussion Anaka main camp, male age 25, 19 December 2007
167 Interview with a UN official, Kampala, 5 September 2007.
168 Interview with a humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 6 November 2007.
among their peers, or go into the fields as a group. They have found ways to cope with their situation. Some have indeed found their survival in alcohol and clubbing. But the majority is hardworking and strong.

The generalization of claiming that youth do not want to leave the camps as most of them are still there overlooks the fact that youth are afraid of leaving the camps. They fear abductions by the rebels as many have been abducted in the past or have seen peers taken away. The youth of Northern Uganda are the main the victims of this war. They were the rebels’ target as well as the mean to continue the conflict as child soldiers. It is true that the ones who have left the camps for new sites and villages are mainly adults. It is not because youth like camp life, on the contrary; they have all reasons to be afraid to leave the somehow protected camps and to doubt the outcome of the peace talks.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter the beneficiaries’ perceptions on aid is investigated. The internally displaced in Gulu and Amuru districts have clear opinions about the relief, regardless the fact they receive it or not. They are part of the humanitarian aid chain. The NGOs are visible to them, although not always by name. However, what NGOs actually do with all the money is generally not clear to them.

Bakewell (2000:114) argued that the strategies adopted by the beneficiaries should be understood in order to understand the impact of relief. The humanitarian community is often frustrated that their programmes do not run according to plan. This shows an ignorance of local strategies and dynamics. IDPs are not spoiled children whining for another candy. They live in difficult circumstances, much more difficult than humanitarian aid workers have in their homes with garden in Gulu town. IDPs see the provision of aid as their right. In the camps and sites where agencies do provide, internally displaced have encountered incidents of corruption and unfinished projects. The main frustration among people however is the lack of feedback and response of agencies. When people are registered as beneficiary for a certain project NGOs create expectations. When these are not met due to lack of communication or complete absence of feedback, the targeted people get frustrated or indifferent toward aid.

It is a complete mystery for the IDPs what is going on in the humanitarian and political field. They receive mixed messages about the security situation, as well as about the return process and the peace talks. In these uncertain times it is understandable that the IDPs are sceptical about aid interventions and the organisations that deliver the aid. There is few to no communication to IDPs about the policies and the strategies of aid organisations, let alone that IDPs are consulted and asked to participate in the developing of those policies and strategies. The distribution of food, items and services are unpredictable, unequal and inconsistent. Many internally displaced have been excluded
from aid while others live in camp where there is duplication of NGOs. The selection of camps and individuals should be based solely on humanitarian principles, based on needs. In Gulu and Amuru districts however, the selection of camps and individuals is based upon practical factors, like logistics and success. The number of people that are left out is tremendous. It is therefore also understandable that IDPs manipulate the process – which is often explained as ‘dependency’ by aid workers - as IDPs can never be sure what will be given to them in future, how much and when. Manipulation of systems in order to obtain more is part of human lives.

Humanitarian agencies have great impact on societies, both positively and negatively. Some IDPs have expressed their gratitude and happiness towards the aid they have been given. However, the provision of aid is never neutral and untied of politics. In order to have the operations fit their mandates, NGOs label people and locations. By doing so, they create distances between the people in the society. The one who is labelled ‘Extremely Vulnerable’ gets more food, more items, and more attention. The ones that are formally abducted get psychological treatment for their experiences in the bush. I do not want to claim that this is not legitimate and that those groups do not need special care. However, it cannot be denied that the unequal distribution of aid and the favouring of people are creating segregation that is felt among the Acholi people. Their perception on aid and agencies is fuelled by these imposed changes in societies.

Lastly, there is a serious mind shift needed in the agencies’ community when it comes down to the stigmatisation of people. Claiming that people are ‘lazy and dependent’ and that youth ‘like camp life because of alcohol and discos’ does not represent humanitarian and compassionate views about people have lived in extreme hardships for the last two decades. It is an superior thought thinking that humanitarian operations have had such a big impact that people do not know how to live without them. They have been surviving without, for over twenty years. The youth of Northern Uganda have been born in a world of terror, in which they have lost family and friends, their childhood and their hopes and dreams. Moreover, the youth of Uganda have been the major victims of this war, every day fearing for abductions and a life as a child rebel. They stay in the camps because they still fear, as long as they are not sure of the region’s peace. Humanitarians would get a much better understanding of the region and the people, if they were able to set aside their pride, prejudices and superior attitude.
9. CONCLUSION

Introduction

Why are the internally displaced persons in Gulu and Amuru districts not returning home? It may seem a simple question but in attempting to answer it, complex issues and multileveled approaches need to be addressed. This thesis has explored the perceptions of different actors and how they relate to each other in the humanitarian aid chain. There are no simple explanations for the current movement patterns of IDPs.

In finding explanations however, three questions appeared to be crucial: 1. What are perceptions about conflict, peace, return and development? 2. How is the humanitarian response coordinated and how do humanitarian actors relate to each other? 3. What are the local responses, being the IDPs, on return and humanitarian aid and what does this mean for the impact of humanitarian and government interventions and the process of movement?

The Government of Uganda promotes the return of IDPs since the peace talks started. Their perceptions on conflict and peace influence their agenda for the north, as the PRDP as one of the visible aspect of this agenda. Humanitarians – especially the international ones – think similar about conflict and peace. Their interventions, their potential phase-out and the search for development projects in their programming all depend on how conflict and peace is defined. IDPs however do not think in terms of conflict and peace. They think in terms of security that is interpreted by experience and fear. It was important to focus on the different perceptions on conflict and peace in order to understand the return discourse in current Northern Uganda.

Ending there would result in an analysis that is incomplete. Not only it is important to investigate perceptions, it is also needed to focus on how these perceptions are used and shared with others. In the IDP setting in Northern Uganda, humanitarians and government officials need to work together in the response to IDPs’ needs. This research focused on how the different actors are related in the humanitarian aid chain. It sought to understand how discourses clash and collaborate, how people plan and implement and how responsibilities and accountabilities are defined.

Finally, without the inclusion of IDPs there can never be a comprehensive understanding of the movement process and the current situation in Northern Uganda. The internally displaced are part of the humanitarian aid chain. It is about the strategies in receiving aid and the authority, decisions and
the life worlds of IDPs that explain why the return home is far more complex than is acknowledged by others.

This last chapter elaborates on these three discussions in order to explain why the IDPs in Northern Uganda are not returning.

1. Is the war over?

The government of Uganda and the humanitarian aid agencies label the month August in 2006, as a breakthrough in Northern Uganda’s history. The ceasefire that resulted from the first beginnings of talks was considered a serious attempt to end 20 years of conflict. The level of security drastically improved after this month. No rebel attacks have been registered in Gulu and Amuru district up to now. Despite the peace talks’ failing to conclude, the war in Northern Uganda is considered to be over.

However, as Lambach (2007) explains, the level of violence in an area is not an effective indicator of the end of the conflict. Human security regularly deteriorates and death and injury rates remain high. (Lambach 2007:10) In Northern Uganda there has been almost no violence but that does not mean that the conflict has ‘ended’ - meaning the beginning of a post conflict situation. Furthermore, by claiming that the war is ‘over’ it means that the war one day ‘started’. That there was a life before the conflict and that there will be a life after the conflict. Interestingly enough, it has proven to be hard to attribute a certain event or a certain year to the beginning of the conflict in Northern Uganda. It is hard to define the war torn situation in the north. It is not important to attempt to unravel the features, causes and outcomes of the war. What is important is how the definition of war and peace relates to humanitarian interventions. And how the displaced people themselves perceive their security situation and how this influences their decisions to leave or stay in the camps.

Since the government of Uganda has declared to war to be over in the north many attempts have been made to encourage people to leave the camps and go home. The region has been declared safe enough to return to the villages. Joseph Kony will never be a threat again, is what is generally used in the government’s rhetoric. The government takes every opportunity to distract outsiders from the crisis in Northern Uganda, both military and humanitarian. The humanitarian community – with rare exceptions follows the government of Uganda in its footsteps. The government of Uganda has launched a huge development plan (PRDP) for the north, the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP). The government of Uganda and the humanitarian community have prepared themselves for a post conflict period.

However, if we look at the conflict in Northern Uganda as a “socially constructed process’ (Richards 2005) then the conflict in Northern Uganda is not an event in itself. It is part of a structural problem
between northern and southern Uganda – as well as between the government of Uganda and the Acholi people. In that sense, the situation in Northern Uganda can indeed be identified as ‘no peace no war’ situation. The current peace talks and even eventual peace will not solve the structural problems relating to Northern Uganda. The tensions between north and south, government and the Acholi will remain. It started decennia ago and there is indication to think that these will disappear in the nearby future. IDPs are aware of these tensions and the structural political problem in the north. Their perceptions on the future in political and social domains are influenced by this knowledge. The peace talks and peace are just –although important- fragments of a long historical and political struggle between northern and southern Uganda. The government of Uganda would deny the structural complexity in the region. Humanitarian agencies lack the historical knowledge and the feeling with political nuances. There always will be an element of insecurity that particular groups might find difficult to live with. Already IDPs have shared their fear for the rebels to come back, or for boo-kec who are looting and robbing the people in the villages. People who have committed crimes during the war – as a rebel for instance - also fear revenge of community members. In their daily lives, the cease-fire has not been a breakthrough. Some violent acts have continued, others have entered the stage. People do not tend to think in rigid time distinctions, in terms of the end of the conflict and the start of the post conflict period. Instead, the displaced people have not changed their perceptions about security. Rebel activity has decreased, but as long as people think it is still a potential threat in their lives amongst other security threats, it is difficult to speak of a major change in their situation.

Still, the government and the humanitarian agencies interventions are based upon a perception on the reality that is different from that of the IDPs. The war is over, thus people should go home. The rebels do not attack anymore, thus it is safe enough for IDPs to return. The linear thinking of both the government as well as the humanitarian agencies in the implications of ‘now the war is over’ resulted in new interventions. The humanitarian community speaks of a ‘transition phase’ between war and peace. Interventions are in light of ‘early recovery’. The conflict is treated as if it was a ‘temporary interruption of development’, whereas emergencies are imbedded in historical and societal dynamics. (Duffield 1994:4) Referring to ‘early recovery’ when describing the current situation in Northern Uganda has advantages for both the government as well as humanitarian agencies. This so called ‘transition phase’ legitimise the humanitarian agencies to extend their mandates to development programmes, as their donors would like to see it. In the implementation of the PRDP roughly 600 million dollar is available that is to be channelled through government bodies. Emergency money circumvents these bodies. Declaring the emergency over discards the government from the negative image of war and displacement within the country, and at the same time fuels the government with millions of dollars.

However, Northern Uganda is not ready to focus on development. People are not ready to resume ‘normal lives’. The government of Uganda and the humanitarian community have an unrealistic image...
of how Northern Uganda should be in the nearby future. The fact that the peace agreement has not been signed yet is of huge influence of what will happen in the north. The war is not over. It will not even be ‘over’ when the deal will be signed. Twenty years of conflict have changed people and societies. Violence, revenge, trauma; it will all prevent people from continue their lives as if nothing has happened. Volatility is part of people’s lives. The internally displaced persons of Gulu and Amuru district already indicate this in their movement process.

2. The construction of the humanitarian community

2-i. Partnership government and humanitarian agencies

The government and the humanitarian actors seem to think that the war in Northern Uganda is different from other long lasting conflicts in the world. I heard humanitarians saying: ‘This is not Darfur or Iraq.’ suggesting that these conflicts are much worse. The government of Uganda called the conflict in the north a ‘temporary problem.’ Every conflict is different. However looking at the intensity of the war in Northern Uganda I do not see how this conflict is ‘less’ horrific than other conflicts. Or how conflicts can be classified as such. Twenty years of conflict uprooted almost 2 million people in the north, an estimated 20000 children were abducted, and an estimated 146 people died every day due to atrocities and encampment. Infrastructure, services and social structures have been seriously affected and destroyed. People still die every day due to lack of services. In the meantime no UN peacekeepers have entered the region after the signing of the cease-fire; camps should be closed as soon as possible, forcing reconstruction and development upon people while there is no formal peace agreement yet.

The reason why Northern Uganda is seen different from other conflict zones is the presence of a government structure. The situation is not considered difficult as ‘there is a functional government’. The government and the humanitarian agencies are considered partners in the humanitarian community in Northern Uganda. They are guided by the national Policy for Internally Displaced Persons. However, As Macrae et al (1997:224) observed many policies and the terminologies used do not provide clear frameworks. It is the same in Northern Uganda. There is no integral approach to the situation in Northern Uganda from the government of Uganda, the UN and humanitarian agencies. There is confusion and disagreements about the legitimacy of the national IDP policy in the current situation in which is believed that the war is over. The PRDP has not yet become operational. The camp phase out committee has started even though some humanitarian actors have opposed against the idea of camp phase out in this stage. The district of Gulu heads the DDMC framework in which different sectors coordinate different interventions. However, UNHCR runs a pilot with the Cluster Approach in which the UN heads the different clusters. This system is felt as overtaking the government structure. UNHCR has tried to fit the Cluster Approach into the DDMC structure but it is easy to conclude that all these mechanisms have resulted in a coordination mess in which no one
feels accountable to move to actions. One NGO can identify that camp X needs a borehole. This is taken to the sector meeting on water and sanitation. A service supplier might take notion of it, but it does not have to account for their interventions there. They justify their interventions to their donors. They have already written their proposals mentioning the exact camps they are going to operate. Camp X is not in their proposal. However, one representative of the water and sanitation sector needs to take it to the Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster Meeting for they are responsible for the last resort. The district government is asked to approve the intervention, or asked to see into their district plan. However, the district official is not present at the meeting. The whole issue comes back exactly one month later at the next meeting.

This is a simplified example of the complexity of the coordination system in Gulu district. It is completely uncertain how this system could be effective. Whatever happens, the cordial relationship between the various actors is maintained for the sake of appearances. No one dares to surpass another. The consequence is great over coordination that results in no coordination at all.

The government of Uganda has had its own reasons to set a particular agenda for the north. It is contradictory that the government first wanted people to leave the villages to stay in camps while they are now pushing the people out of camps. A same thing happened when they asked the International Criminal Court to investigate the LRA’s atrocities and while they are now asking the ICC to withdraw the warrants. The central government’s commitment to the north has always been questionable. Northern Uganda has never been declared an emergency. Suddenly there is plenty of attention for the PRDP, however previously the government has never wanted to invest in government structures like the DDMC. The government of Uganda’s agenda for the north has been extremely nebulous, ever since the rise of the NRM in 1986. It would be an illusion to think that this agenda can be unravelled after conducting this research. However, a few observations are made that are important to mention.

2-ii. The government’s agenda

The Government of Uganda actively endeavours to keep control of the situation at all levels. The Government of Uganda has great influence in every situation that determines current Northern Uganda’s context. The following figure shows at what level the government of Uganda has had great influence. The first one is the conflict. From the beginning it has been involved in contributing to this war, politically and militarily. The second one is the encampment of people by ordering with authority the Acholi to leave their villages for ‘protected villages’, alias the camps. This was on the pretext to protect but happened forcefully. The box Peace talks represents the failed attempts in ending the conflict in the past, as well as the current peace talks and the ICC indictments. Development represents the launch of the PRDP and the will to develop the north as soon as possible. The
government of Uganda is responsible for protecting their people’s rights, as it has been described in the national IDP policy. They control the humanitarian community, prescribing and deciding the humanitarian interventions.

*Figure 2. Mapping the government’s involvement in different processes.*

2-iii. *Humanitarian agencies’ silence*

Humanitarian agencies do not draw their own conclusions about the current situation in Northern Uganda. Their perceptions are based upon incorrect or manipulated information about security, camp life and the return process. They do not know how to deal with the IDPs’ creativity and self-organization. They do not have any feeling with the Acholi culture and spirituality. They seem not aware of feelings of revenge and fear among the people. They do not have a clue how Northern Uganda’s history is marked with a thorough northern/southern Uganda divide – politically, military, economically and socially. They base their actions upon the ‘cordial relationship’ with the government of Uganda and the rhetoric the government uses. The government of Uganda should be the last institution to base the intervention upon in this context, as they manipulate ‘reality’ by stating that the war is over and that they will close the camps as soon as possible. The Government of Uganda has a specific hidden agenda that is not easy to unravel. When acknowledging this, the government’s rhetoric should be critically examined. The role of NGOs as critical observers can hardly be applied to the ones active in Northern Uganda. There is a lack of advocacy to raise awareness of the difficult circumstances of the IDPs and the violation their rights, notably the right to the freedom of movement. There are few advocacy officers in the humanitarian agencies whose main task is to put critical issues on the donor and government agenda. Very rarely humanitarian agencies write critical reports, apart from the human rights agencies.
Their presence in the field enables them to observe the difficulties as well as opportunities of the displaced people’s lives. The humanitarian community should critically analyse the dynamics in the context of displacement. This includes the application from identifying gaps and needs to concrete actions, as well as sending out clear messages to the IDPs and the outside world. Above all, there is a key role to play for the humanitarian community to monitor the government’s interventions and counter them when necessary.

The humanitarian community does not publicly oppose the GoU’s agenda of pushing people out of the camps, or against the development plan for the north. On the hand, they are not in the position to do so and on the other hand they are not aware of the context. Humanitarian agencies should be aware of their social and political position in a society like the war torn Acholiland and that they change the Acholi society. The IDPs are all victims of this war. Actually taking the effort to listen and work together with the people in the field, as well as to learn from mistakes of the past would certainly improve the humanitarian interventions in order to improve the displaced lives. This not only demands a mind shift toward the awareness of the social implications of their work, but also the search for an efficient political humanitarian system in which needs and gaps are accurately addressed. The humanitarian actors have searched with the government, but have come up so far with an incoherent framework that is simply not functioning.

The humanitarian agencies need to shift toward sympathetic perceptions and relations with internally displaced people: from stigmatizing people claiming they are lazy and dependent toward a careful and nuanced understanding of their life worlds fostered by many years of conflict and hardship. The thousands of displaced people are not crazy. They are not passive victims of their fate. Over many years they have dealt with violence and extreme horrors due to rebel activity. The government ordered them to leave their homes by force, to be congested in camps where they lived a life without being able to generate income or fight the boredom. People had no choice than to rely on food aid and other kinds of provision. The rebel activity continued attacking the camps and kidnapping children by hundreds, others died of diseases or malnutrition. There were only few aid agencies operating until the beginning of the new millennium. There was no hope for a better future. Not only properties or livelihood were taken from them, but also their self esteem and independence. I would not want to deny that most humanitarian agencies have done a lot for many. That without them, especially the ones that were present before 2004, the IDP situation would have been a lot worse. However, their impact could be so much more substantial if the current construction of humanitarian community in Gulu and Amuru would not obstruct it as it does now.

3. Responses from the Field

It was argued that one should not investigate if an intervention succeeds in order to understand its impact. It is important to see how ‘success’ is produced. (Mosse 2006:7) Mosse (2006) and Hilhorst
(2007) emphasised that it is important to include all actors involved in a humanitarian intervention. The internally displaced persons of Northern Uganda are social actors. They are part of the humanitarian aid chain and they shape and manipulate it. Bakewell (2000) called for the understanding of how beneficiaries manipulate and shape aid responses. The tendency for IDPs and camp leaders to ask humanitarian agencies for more aid is often analysed as an expression of dependency. Humanitarian actors believe that their role is indispensable. It may not be enough to cater for everyone, but at least they try to bring hope in a context of violence, disease and hunger, is the general assumption.

However, the messiness of the humanitarian framework of the government and the humanitarian agencies is widely felt on the ground. Identified gaps and needs take ages to be fulfilled if at all. Aid is not consequently distributed and unequally; NGOs tend to choose their camps and sites where there are already others operating. There are major gaps in services, especially in health. Many camps do not receive any kind of aid apart from food relief. The humanitarian community is a master in collecting data; IDPs are regularly asked questions about their needs, but actual response is very rare. Operations are not adequately communicated and explained to the displaced people. There is a general lack of participation of the displaced people in finding solutions. Communication and sometimes relief items go through the camp leaders and local leaders. Depending on their personalities, messages and items are transferred to the rest of the people, or —sadly in many cases— not. Not being heard and the lack of response and actual output result in indifference toward the aid community. Despite the uncertainties about the security situation and the future, IDPs also feel uncertain about the policies that (could possibly) affect them. One can say, to put it simple, that there is a destructive kind of miscommunication both ways between the displaced people and the ones distributing aid. There is miscommunication about the interpretation of aid, the political features of aid and the needs and possible responses. The internally displaced are not just helpless victims; the lack of feedback, the segregation and the alleged corruption influence their perceptions on aid and aid agencies. This results in frustration leading to ways of self-organization. The fact that people get aid ‘for free’ does not mean that they are unconditionally grateful. The people see aid as their right and they have thought of strategies to obtain it. Without the reciprocal frustrations and lack of mutual understanding the humanitarian response could be so much more effective. Clear communication and clear policies can really improve lives.

An open mind to nuances also improves humanitarian programming. In the return process the humanitarian community perceives ‘home’ as ‘villages where people can resume normal lives’. The concept of home is however nuanced and complex for those who are displaced. Home is idealised, but it is also equivalent to bad memories and fear for insecurity. Many are hesitant to permanently return home. There is doubt about the security situation linked to rebel activity and other violence. For those who would be considered home by the humanitarian communities – the ones staying in the
villages – often commute between village and camp or other locations where they feel safer. People think of escape mechanisms for when the security worsens, or they keep family members in more secure places. Despite the fact that they stay in their villages, they are far from being at ease at home. Let alone that they are resuming ‘normal lives’.

A short note should be added: this research was conducted with care but does not allow sure knowledge whether incidents and issues are incidental or characteristics. However, I did discover certain patterns in the different ways the government, IDPs and humanitarian agencies perceive the situation and how they act upon it. I should add that I have met humanitarians who would agree with most of my observations. There are occasionally attempts made to circumvent the formal relations to play meaningful roles in individual lives of IDPs. Interventions in partnerships are sometimes discussed over dinner between humanitarians, not in the bureaucratic meetings. The agencies that have Camp Management teams in the IDP camps really endeavour to keep short communication channels with IDPs. They are however trapped in the system of too many decision makers and the lack of accountability. Some humanitarian agencies have advocacy officers who are the critical observers. But individuals cannot change the political system in which the government, UN and humanitarian agencies are entangled.

**Conclusion: Why are people not returning?**

This thesis addresses different angles in the humanitarian response in current Northern Uganda. It has tried to unravel the complexity concerning the displacement of people and the movement process. I should note however, that the situation in Northern Uganda is so complex that it is expected to evolve in different ways. It would be overconfident to even think that I have gotten a small grip on what is going on in Northern Uganda. The situation as it is now is a result of many complex processes over a period of several decennia. The tensions between the LRA, the government and the Acholi people have their roots in history. The current situation in which the government pushes people out of camps and the displaced are reluctant to do so, appear to have causes we don’t know and which are not easy to unravel. I have argued that security would be the incentive for people to leave the camps. But we can never know for sure. What will be decided is in the heart of the Acholi people.

The complexities of the issue of return in Northern Uganda are described. Return is not an ad hoc process. It must be seen as part of a movement process that is not linked to a specific time or place. Concepts like ‘return’ and ‘home’ do not entail the multilevelled approach of movement and individual decisions. The movement decisions of the Acholi people are imbedded in historical events, political pressure, and emotions like trauma and fear. On the side of the government the movement process of IDPs indicates hidden agendas and political prestige. Humanitarians face a changing world as donors demand to see durable solutions and accountability. Humanitarianism is no longer about
charity. It is about developing accountable frameworks, more screening of activities, creatively getting funding and getting measurable results.

Government officials and humanitarian aid workers tend to think in linear processes. The start of the peace talks for the government means that the LRA and Joseph Kony belong to the past and that it is safe enough to return.

The president Yoweri Museveni as he talked to IDPs, six months after the peace talks started:

‘There is kuc (peace) and security. Kony has run away. We are dealing with the cattle rustlers from Karamoja. This is not accidental. It is a result of years of deliberate work especially building our military capacity to contain peki acon (old problems) like Kony and cattle rustling. So kuc is here to stay. (…) The time has come. Take advantage of this kuc, go home and reorganise yourselves.’ (AllAfrica 2007)

Humanitarians in the field offices are concerned with the reasons why IDPs are not returning home. Various reasons are thought of, but there is a general belief that IDPs should indeed return home because the security allows them to move. The following statement of a UN official in Gulu Town summarises what is widely felt among other humanitarians.

‘There is the dependency syndrome, especially relating to food and the return package. There is the service issue, water and schools. People got used to living in a community. That is why we need to challenge this. If you want to stay in the camp that is great, but we have to turn this into a future town, and withdraw our assistance. Or you can go back to return sites or villages, then we can help you with tools. But no one challenges them [IDPs].’

However, the return process is for IDPs much more dynamic.

‘In 1996 my brother was abducted. Whenever LRA was coming to this camp people would say that my brother came here to give money that he got after looting. They tried to get my father arrested, but they did not succeed. They tried to get my father back to the village, it was a trick. We are still waiting. Everything is related to my brother's abduction. He has still not come back from the bush. We wait till the war is over.’

‘Most of my life I have grown up in the camp. I fear abductions due to what happened in the past. If I go back to the village, the LRA will roam while we are not protected. Nobody is sure whether this will end peacefully. The LRA might still be in villages.’

Their decisions whether to return home or not, are based upon personal experiences and the legacy of a horrific war. The fact that the peace talks are ongoing is not convincing enough for IDPs to gain faith in their security. The ones that have left the places in which they were displaced for their...
villages, most of them keep their eyes and ears open for when the talks may fail or when the security situation deteriorates. The fact that they now stay in their homes does not mean that they feel safe and that they can resume normal lives. As one respondent, who stayed in Gulu town during the war and had gone to his village explained:

"The fact that the peace agreement has not been signed yet make me feel a bit more insecure. Because any time it can fail and things return to as those days. So we are ready when it fails, we just go back to town."172

For the people in Northern Uganda there is no peace. The camp phase-out approach, the PRDP, the WFP return kits, it all does not address the life world of those being displaced. Pushing them out of camps is not the solution to the displacement in the region. Instead, this approach promoted by the government and some humanitarian agencies seriously undermines the displaced people’s rights and their authorities to make their own choices. The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement describes the IDPs rights. Some of these rights are ignored or even seriously violated.173 There are no conditions established for IDPs to return voluntarily in safety and with dignity. Nor are they participating in the planning and management of their return. The internally displaced should be protected at all stages, security threats should be tackled and above all, all efforts should be made to end the peace talks positively to bring light in the darkness of people’s lives.

Many times of darkness, many times of sorrow,
but joy will come in the morning.
The light outshining the darkness.
God's mercies are new every morning
and Gulu will shine again!

Do not fear for I am with you!
(lyrics by Steven Ogwang)174

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172 Interview in a village in Gulu district, male age 17, 14 December 2007
173 The two principles that are ignored and violated are in Annex 9
174 Steven Ogwang is an Acholi musician. This is a part of his song ‘Gulu will shine again’, which was very popular in the streets of Gulu. The song can be downloaded from the following website: http://artforall.nl/html/oeganda_04.htm
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ARC</td>
<td>American Refugee Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCCM</td>
<td>Camp Coordination and Camp Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>CM</td>
<td>Camp Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDMC</td>
<td>District Disaster Management Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>The Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
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<tr>
<td>EVI</td>
<td>Extremely Vulnerable Individual</td>
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<td>GoU</td>
<td>Government of Uganda</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAPs</td>
<td>Formally Abducted Persons</td>
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<td>HSM</td>
<td>Holy Spirit Movement</td>
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<td>IASC</td>
<td>Inter-Agency Standing Committee</td>
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<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Person</td>
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<td>LC</td>
<td>Local Counsellor</td>
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<td>LRA</td>
<td>Lord’s Resistance Army</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non Governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>NRA</td>
<td>New Resistance Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>NRC</td>
<td>Norwegian Refugee Council</td>
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<td>NRM</td>
<td>National Resistance Movement, the ruling political party</td>
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<td>PRDP</td>
<td>Peace, Recovery and Development Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>RDC</td>
<td>Resident District Commissioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<tr>
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<td>United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>UPDF</td>
<td>Uganda People’s Defence Force</td>
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<td>Uganda Peoples Democratic Movement</td>
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<td>World Food Programme</td>
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Articles that are explicitly addressing people in internal displacement.

**Article 1.**

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

**Article 2.**

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

**Article 3.**

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

**Article 5.**

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

**Article 12.**

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

**Article 13.**

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

(1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.
Article 18.

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 23.

(1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

Article 25.

(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Article 26.

(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

Article 28.

Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realised.

Article 30.

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.
Annex 3: List of interviews

Individual interviews with IDPs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location, Date (Age of respondent)</th>
<th>Main Camp</th>
<th>New Site</th>
<th>Village</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female adult</td>
<td>Agung, 26-09-07 (30)</td>
<td>Lapuda, 24-10-07 (40)</td>
<td>Akunyi Bedo, 10-11-07 (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female adult</td>
<td>Koch Goma, 1-10-07 (47)</td>
<td>Adak, 3-11-2007 (64)</td>
<td>Iraa, 15-12-07 (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male adult</td>
<td>Agung, 26-09-07 (37)</td>
<td>Labaro, 24-10-07 (28)</td>
<td>Awich, 14-12-07 (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male adult</td>
<td>Koch Goma, 1-10-07 (34)</td>
<td>Lapuda, 31-10-07, LC1 (^{175}) (47)</td>
<td>Layik, 12-01-08 (55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female youth</td>
<td>Anaka, 25-09-07 (23)</td>
<td>Labaro, 24-10-07 (19)</td>
<td>Layibi Teko, 15-12-07 (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female youth</td>
<td>Pabbo, 14-11-07 (18)</td>
<td>Koch Amar, 27-10-07 (15)</td>
<td>Laliya, 12-01-08 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male youth</td>
<td>Pabbo, 08-11-07 (18)</td>
<td>Koch Amar, 27-10-07 (19)</td>
<td>Akunyi Bedo, 10-11-07 (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male youth</td>
<td>Parabongo, 14-11-07 (17)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Obiya Highland, 14-12-07 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra: Male adult</td>
<td>Palaro, 2-10-2007 (30)</td>
<td>Adak, 3-11-07, YL (^{176}) (40)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra: Male adult</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Adak, 3-11-07 CL (^{177}) (60)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra: Male LC (^{178})</td>
<td>Pabbo, 14-11-07 (?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra: Female adult</td>
<td>Palaro, 2-10-2007 (33)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(N = 27\)

List of Focus group discussions with IDPs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>gender, age, number</th>
<th>Location, Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys, youth, 11 (one girl)</td>
<td>Anaka, 19-12-2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men, adults, 5</td>
<td>Pabbo, 21-12-2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls youth, 5 and Women adults, 7</td>
<td>Amuru, 8-01-2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(Total Number of People: 23\)

\(^{175}\) Local Counselor 1
\(^{176}\) Youth Leader
\(^{177}\) Camp Leader
\(^{178}\) Local Counselor 3
List of interviews with NGOs and Government

1. Commissioner for Disaster Management & Refugees, Office of the Prime Minister, Kampala
2. Principal Disaster Management Officer, Office of Prime Minister, Kampala
3. District Official, Head of the DDMC, Gulu
4. District Official, Chief Administrative Officer DDMC, Gulu
5. District Official, District OPM/UNDP, Gulu
6. Vice- Local Counsellor 3, sub county level, main camp in Amuru district
7. Government/UPDF, Civil Military Relations Officer, Gulu
8. UNOCHA official, Kampala
9. UNOCHA official, Gulu
10. UNOCHA official, Gulu
11. UNDP official (former), Kampala
12. UNDP official, Gulu
13. WFP official, Gulu
14. UNHCR official, Kampala
15. UNHCR official, Gulu
16. UNHCR official, Gulu
17. UNHCR official, Gulu
18. UNHCR official, Gulu
19. UNHCR official, Gulu
20. Humanitarian aid worker, CartonG, Gulu
21. Humanitarian aid worker ARC, Gulu
22. Humanitarian aid worker AVSI, Gulu
23. Humanitarian aid worker CARE, Gulu
24. Humanitarian aid worker CPAR, Gulu
25. Humanitarian aid worker NRC, Gulu
26. Humanitarian aid worker NRC, Gulu
27. Humanitarian aid worker NRC, Gulu
28. NGO Forum official, Gulu
29. Editor Mega FM, Gulu
30. Senior Advisor for Northern Uganda, The Netherlands Embassy, Kampala
31. The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs official, Den Haag, The Netherlands
Interagency Standing Committee in Uganda, Protection Cluster

In order to ensure consistency and common understanding of the situation in Northern Uganda, the Protection Cluster proposes the adoption of the following definitions by the IASC.

**Camps**

Long-standing IDP camps created prior to the decongestion policy in 2005. They are also known as “mother camps”.

**Decongestion sites**

Sites which were established after 2005 by the government, sometimes with assistance from humanitarian agencies, following the decongestion policy.\(^{179}\)

**Transit sites/areas**

Locations populated by IDPs settled outside the boundaries of their pre-displacement villages and outside the camps. In these sites the great majority of the population accesses its own land.

**Villages of origin/home**

A village of origin is a pre-displacement village. When IDPs return to/ settle in an area within the boundaries of the village they inhabited prior to the displacement, even if they are not exactly on the same spot where they used to live, they are considered to be living in their own village. According to the data provided by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, the average surface of a village in Gulu/Amuru is 25 square km which can be crudely visualised as a circle with a radius of about 3 km.

**National Policy for Internally Displaced Persons**

**Reintegration** is the re-entry of formerly internally displaced people back into the social, economic, cultural and political fabric of their original community;

**Returnee** refers to any Internally Displaced Person who returns to his or her home or place of habitual residence;

**Resettled persons** are Internally Displaced Persons who resettle voluntarily in another part of the country of habitual residence (OPM 2004:xi)

**Integration** is the process by which formerly displaced persons get absorbed into the social, economic, cultural and political fabric of a new community, or the community where they first found temporary settlement.

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\(^{179}\) In Gulu and Amuru the local authorities considers the decongestion sites as camps.
Annex 7: Humanitarian agencies present in Gulu district, June 2008
Annex 8: Guiding principles for Internally Displacement (OCHA 1998)
Principles ignored or violated in Northern Uganda

Principle 14

(1) Every internally displaced person has the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his or her residence.

(2) In particular, internally displaced persons have the right to move freely in and out of camps or other settlements.

Principle 28

(1) Competent authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to establish conditions, as well as provide the means, which allow internally displaced persons to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence, or to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country. Such authorities shall endeavour to facilitate the reintegration of returned or resettled internally displaced persons.

(2) Special efforts should be made to ensure the full participation of internally displaced persons in the planning and management of their return or resettlement and reintegration.