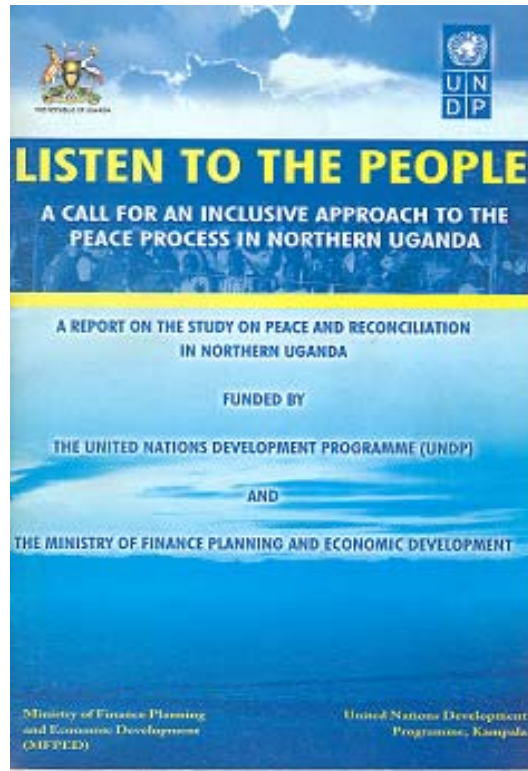


LISTEN TO THE PEOPLE!

A CALL FOR AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO THE PEACE PROCESS IN NORTHERN UGANDA

**A REPORT ON THE STUDY ON PEACE AND RECONCILIATION IN NORTHERN
UGANDA**



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UGAJ02/UO 1 PROJECT

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Executive Summary

The task in this study was to generate empirical data on the conflict in northern Uganda to help define a peace policy and advocacy framework aimed not just at ending the violence in this part of the country, but to manage and prevent the reoccurrence of similar conflicts in Uganda. The conflict, which has dragged on for almost two decades, has had serious consequences for the people in the conflict areas and the country as a whole. Almost two million people are displaced, living in squalid and congested camps; thousands have died due to conflict related causes; an estimated 20,000 children have been abducted by the LRM/ A. The entire social structure of the communities in the conflict areas has been disrupted by the various insecurities arising from the conflict.

The sheer persistence of the conflict has led to a rebuilding of efforts and interests among different actors to find alternative solutions. The Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED), with funding from the United Nations Development Programme, appointed the Human Rights and Peace Centre (HURIPEC), Makerere University; to generate empirical data by investigating the structural, provocateur, trigger and escalating factors behind the conflict, as well as the actors, their interests, agendas and networks; the impact of the conflict; and, the attempts at resolving it.

The conflict in northern Uganda has reached a very complex magnitude and ending it requires a clear understanding of the underlying factors for the occurrence and protractedness of such violence. It would be difficult to propose tangible approaches and solutions without such an understanding.

The study relied on qualitative as well as quantitative methods to generate the required data. But it is the former that was largely relied on because of the need to capture both the conflict and peace scenarios as processes, hence discover the series of interlocking events, behaviours and interests as well as the descriptions, and interpretations they invoke from perceived victim and perpetrator alike. Therefore, the approach adopted was to capture the different perceptions of individuals at the community level, of policymakers in government and civil society, researchers and the media. This was in anticipation of the difficulties in getting consensus on anyone issue because of the way the conflict has been portrayed. Hence, data was collected using individual and focus group discussions and interviews. Theoretical and conceptual frameworks were used at the analytical stage. There was also a review of the publications on the conflict arising from research work, reports of conferences, seminars and workshops as well as newspapers.

As expected, a number of challenges confronted the study, insecurity being the most prominent. We were also faced with a dilemma of how much reliance be put on information from some of the respondents, who often gave two contradictory versions of the situation: one seemingly reflecting the official position, and the other, reflecting perhaps, their conscience.

The study revealed that there already exists a wealth of information about the conflict in northern Uganda, although it is scattered and poorly disseminated. For purposes of getting it together, more exhaustive compilation and systematic categorization of this information should be undertaken. A combination of this information with the data collected during the study give a clear picture of the nature and character of the conflict and why it cannot easily be ended through the military option.

The conflict in northern Uganda, it was established, is part of the chronic conflict corridor covering the Sahelian belt, the Horn and Great Lakes regions of Africa, and is a manifestation of the "new wars" phenomenon. Though some of the underlying causes of the conflict and its escalation are historical and global in nature and character, they are essentially political and interlocked with local, national, regional and global politics. This aspect has largely been ignored in the peace process resulting in characterisation of the conflict as simply driven by "primordial, terrorist" and "opportunistic" intentions. This has shaped government and the international response to the conflict, prompting the pursuance of a military solution to totally crush and vanquish the LRM/A and their backers, which, as history can reveal, has not been possible. Instead, the conflict has been very agonising, with violence unleashing more violence and suffering on the communities in the conflict areas as well the economy as a whole.

A multi-pronged political approach to the conflict is therefore more desirable because it will be able to address the political issues that were responsible for the outbreak of the conflict. Such a political approach must be inclusive of all actors - including friend and foe alike - and should avoid the winner-take-all result. Whether politically or ideologically acceptable or not, the Government of Uganda must be prepared to draw in the political leadership from Acholi and Lango sub-regions and the political opposition in Uganda to build partnership for peace making and building. The price that has to be paid is to resolve the conflict on a win-win all basis. This will be helpful in facilitating trust and confidence building, and a reconciliation process this country needs at this point in time, than vindictiveness based on some abstract justice.

As Uganda looks forward to the end of the conflict soon or later, we must also be worried about the post-conflict challenges. Drastic changes have occurred in the demography of the region, characterised by extreme deprivation, breakdown of the social fabric, psycho-social problems, increased HIV/AIDS prevalence levels, and inter and intra community tensions. Resettling such a population is, therefore, a daunting task, which requires a comprehensive policy that must be participatory, take special care of the interests of the returning children who were either soldiers, wives, killers, or born in the jungles of captivity, and some of whom might be nearing adulthood. The policy must address the issue of property rights and claims, as more people will be looking for land to settle and start afresh. Affirmative action might be necessary to alleviate the imbalances that have emerged in the educational needs of these children. It might also require policies that encourage investment flows into the region, with particular focus being put on the Acholi Diaspora, whose savings and networks can bring "investible" resources into the region.