

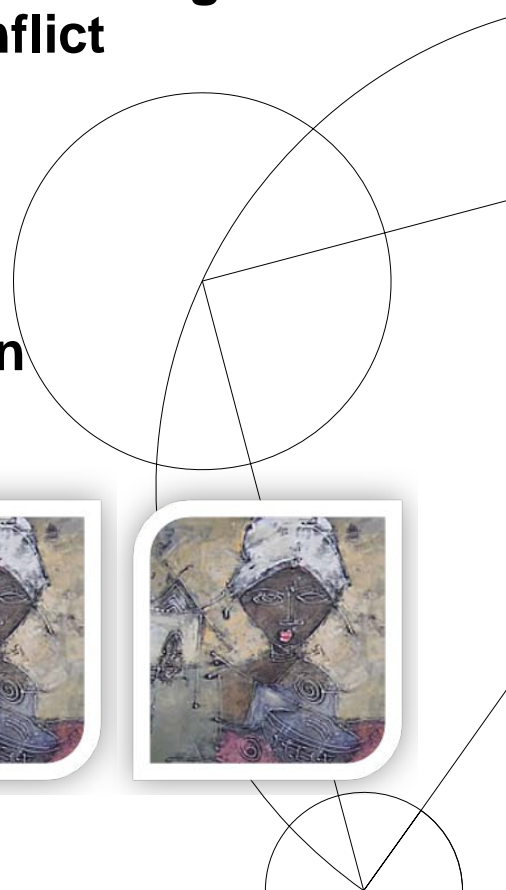


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Reconciliation as a Paradigm in Uganda's Post-conflict Reconstruction

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Reconciliation as a Paradigm in Uganda's Post-conflict Reconstruction

Violent and armed conflicts are essential parts of Uganda's post-colonial history. Militarization of governance and social life, the application of ethnic loyalties at the expense of the 'other' in the appointments to public office, the unfolding of tribal stereotypes and prejudices, misuse of power for the benefit of loyal population groups, gross human rights abuses and outright civil wars are all elements of conflicts in modern Uganda. However; the dynamics of established stereotypes and prejudices of 'the other' are often also reflections of deeply rooted pre-colonial diversities between ethnic groups, languages, cultures and social norms, merged together under the British Protectorate in 1894 and labeled Uganda.

Mass atrocities committed against the civilian population following Independence in 1962 came to a halt when the military wing of the current Government, the National Resistance Army (NRA) came to power in 1986.

Irrespective of this new power base though, rebellions and armed conflicts continued and at least 10 rebel groups have either been crushed militarily or ended through negotiations with the Government.¹ The current conflict involving the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) originated from other rebellions such as the Holy Spirit Mobile Force (HSMF) and the Uganda Peoples Democratic Army (UPDA) in 1986-87. What was initially rooted in an uprising against the Government has turned into a brutal and murderous campaign with the civilian Acholi population in northern Uganda as a main victim group. Furthermore, the LRA conflict has stretched across national borders into Southern Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The LRA has left deep marks on the Acholi population, abducting over 20,000 children, maiming and killing civilian populations, and forcing approximately 1.5 million people into displacement camps.

Histories of Conflict

I have encountered several speculations into why Uganda and particularly the northern population has fallen victim to this plethora of conflicts, including the failure to address the root causes of conflict in order to end cycles of revenge. In this regard, the Government has generally relied upon military responses while

¹ For purposes of easy reference, Appendix 2 provides a matrix that lists major conflicts in Uganda's recent history.

also recognizing that some conflicts have been concluded through negotiations and subsequent inclusion of rebel forces into the armed forces. As of 2000, an amnesty law was enacted in response to advocacy by the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), indicating the Government's new focus on a two-pronged approach: maintaining, if not re-enforcing the military campaign while simultaneously offering amnesty to persons denouncing rebellion.

The LRA conflict has persisted a host of peace initiatives to bring an end to the conflict, including increased military pressure and negotiation processes such as the Bigombe initiatives during 1993-94 and 2004. The current Juba talks involving the GOU and a LRA representative delegation has been ongoing since mid 2006 and has successfully produced a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement by August 26, 2006 and broad new dynamics to dialogue between the Government and the LRA.²

Part of the 5 point Juba agenda is the agreement to work for comprehensive solutions to the conflict and the question about reconciliation and accountability.³ Through this last agenda point the parties have agreed to address traditional justice mechanisms and the long-term interests of justice.

What presents itself as a new and untested opening is that peace-building through the application of reconciliation as a paradigm holds the potentials for addressing underlying issues in a homegrown peace process, including conflicts that plagued the country since Independence. National reconciliation - as both a process and an ultimate objective, has a dynamic potential to guide the future of the country to a more inclusive and unified socio-economic-political environment.

But reconciliation as a national process is without precedent in the country's conflict management and mitigation portfolio, which so far primarily has employed military interventions and appointment to political office in addressing a long row of armed rebellions. It is against this background that sustainable peace-building "*is seen as the employment of measures that consolidate peaceful relations and societal institutions*".⁴ in order to help create an environment that deters the emergence or escalation of tensions that can lead to violent conflicts. Such a conflict

² International Crisis Group, Northern Uganda: *Seizing the Opportunity for Peace*, Africa Report, No. 124, April 26, 2007, pp. 2-3; Prendergast, John, "The Answer to the Lord's Resistance Army", Strategy Paper 3, June 2007, www.enoughproject.org.

³ Enough Project, "Northern Uganda Update", May/June 2007, www.enoughproject.org.

⁴ International Peace Academy, *The Infrastructure of Peace in Africa. Assessing the Peace-building Capacity of African Institutions*, New York 2002, p. 58.

management portfolio is constructed on the vision that sustainable peace is a prerequisite for political, social, and economic stability and development with a conscious effort to link issues of democratization, human rights, gender, governance, rule of law, tolerance, and development to peace-building.

Therefore, peace-building involves long term planning and requires considerations of the inter-relationship between conflict resolution, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development. The association of conflict with underdevelopment, together with insecurity and instability, has served to promote security as a precursor to development. Peace-building then becomes a matter of working with peoples' behavior, through a consensus based process of conflict resolution.

This article is concerned with this consensus building process. During work in Uganda it became clear to me that people from different regions of the country had very different opinions about the conflict in northern Uganda and the history of conflicts in the country as a whole. Apart from recognizing the differences in opinions and attitudes towards the conflict, it also turned out that ethnicity, the country's history, past conflicts and regional politics were all factors influencing the dynamics of what widely is perceived as a northern Uganda problem. It is against this background I embarked on a comprehensive consultations program, interviewing more than 70 persons such as cabinet ministers, members of parliament (MPs), senior civil servants, religious leaders, cultural leaders, national, International NGOs and civil society leaders. The immediate objective of this consultation process was to seek experiences, ideas and advice from a broad range of people on how to design a peace process which would address the then 17 years old conflict in the north of the country.

The majority of respondents pointed to the fact that a military campaign alone will not produce lasting peace. They also asserted that sustainable peace is more than the absence of armed conflict and the peace process must involve Ugandans from throughout the country.

It was also widely accepted that the northern conflict is but a symptom of a larger conflict, involving uneven economic development and disparities between the north and south. Subsequently, sustainable resolution of the conflict necessarily requires a national effort. Within this context, it is recognized that the larger current conflict in northern Uganda will not be resolved through defeat of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) militarily or by simply reaching a peace agreement with the LRA. As such the reconciliation paradigm is a newcomer to the nation's peace-building formula.

The alleged grievances of the Acholi people in northern Uganda and the dynamics of their interrelationship with the Uganda Peoples Defense Forces (UPDF) and the Government made the Acholi ambivalent towards both sides. This ambivalence is widely acknowledged to be a significant impediment to a coordinated peace-building policy between the Government and the Acholi. Yet the onus for creating an environment for peace is on Ugandans at large, including the Acholi. Therefore, the grievances of the Acholi and the reconciliation of the Acholi with their neighbors, the ex LRA, the GOU, the UPDF and the rest of Uganda ought to be given high priority in a wider peace-building process.

In order to apply viable reconciliation modalities, understanding and analysis of the drivers of the conflict are important. Ethnic-based explanations are too simplistic, yet ethnicity plays a role. Politics are often divided along ethnic lines, with one group or a coalition of groups monopolizing power at the direct expense of other groups. Such situations may lead to economic underdevelopment and undemocratic patterns of governance. The conflict is perceived to evolve around ethnic, religious, cultural or linguistic differences, thus linking Acholi ethnicity with economic inequalities, poverty and north-south divisions. Latent ethnic based differences may be exacerbated by perceived nepotism and favoritism in appointments to military, political and bureaucratic positions.

The nature of the peace settlement drives the rest of the peace process. Sufficient time is needed to allow anxieties and concerns of all parties to be addressed, including the voices of the Acholi. But the process seems hampered by limited channels of communication as well as difficulties in establishing a common language between the protagonists. Unless some way can be found to cross these divides, the conflict is likely to resist a negotiated settlement or any other temporary peace deal.

Breakdown in earlier negotiation processes and the failure to fully implement agreements have contributed to the continuation of the conflict and made subsequent initiatives more difficult. As a result of the failing previous peace initiatives,

mistrust has impaired wider relations between the LRA, the Acholi political community and the President.⁵

New and innovative initiatives are required to make peace initiative successful. Historically, civil society hardly played any role in advancing peace plans and processes. For the reconciliation principle, it is essential that all parties to the conflict retain a sense of ownership over the process of building up the peace. As an integral part of the reconciliation process, a new security architecture could be emerging with civil society actors at its base. Civil society leaders can play a major role by working closely with Government officials to determine appropriate approaches to deal with security concerns. These actors, who are often closest to the problems of local communities, can assist Government officials in defining issues of concern and in articulating the needs and demands of the people to Government.

Civil society groups in this regard include eminent elders, women' groups, religious leaders, NGOs, journalists etc. who have promoted local justice, national reconciliation, socio-economic reconstruction, the integration of armed soldiers and ex-combatants into local communities.

The experience of the above consultation process demonstrates that national reconciliation is the most desired way to achieve sustainable peace. In this regard, reconciliation is perceived as both a process and an ultimate goal. Reconciliation is seen as a bridge to guide the country away from troubles resulting from cyclical armed violence to a more inclusive and unified socio-political environment.

Framing an Understanding of Reconciliation in Uganda

There is though, little agreement about the definition of reconciliation. Translating the terms peace and reconciliation strictly as a goal or a result runs the risk of perceiving vital processes in a static fashion, as the end game. Since peace and reconciliation are linked to processes of development, these subjects incorporate

⁵ *Protracted conflict, elusive peace. Initiatives to end the violence in northern Uganda*, Accord An International Review of Peace Initiatives, Issue 11, edited by Okello Lucima, London, Conciliation Resources, 2002.

matters of human rights, equality and representation. Peace-building subsequently include the engagement and transformation of communities and societies into more just places through the *“employment of measures that consolidate peaceful relations and societal institutions in order to help create an environment that deters the emergence or escalation of tensions that can lead to violent conflicts.”*⁶ The peace-building toolkit ultimately includes measures addressing structural elements of both local and national social and political institutions. Conflicts arise within a context. It does not have its origin at an exact space and time; similarly, it does not end without after-effects.⁷ Sustainable peace-building addresses the root causes of conflict through a conflict management framework, which includes transformation. Transformation at the structural level translates into the movement away from confrontation toward peaceful relationships. This structural framework must fulfill a sustainability criterion, creating a *“proactive process that is capable of regenerating itself over time – a spiral of peace and development instead of a spiral of violence and destruction.”*⁸

A chief part of the development of a conflict management framework is what Lederach describes as *“building a peace constituency.”* This concept, also referred to as *“citizen-based peacemaking”*, incorporates civilian populations as a vital resource in the process. It is exactly this resource that a reconciliation-based peace-building framework brings to the forefront of local peace action.

In Uganda, and in particular in the north of the country, the cultural history is often defined by people’s alleged ability to forgive and to reconcile. Reconciliation processes must be shaped by the particular cultural and regional settings in which they unfold. This supposition leads to the difficulty in reaching a simple, uniform definition. It is unreasonable to conceive a standard definition of reconciliation as the unfolding of reconciliation needs to address local concerns in order to be relevant to parties that have *“...experienced oppressive relationships or a destructive*

⁶ Monica Juma and Aida Mengistu, *The Infrastructure of Peace in Africa. Assessing the Peacebuilding Capacity of African Institutions*, New York, International Peace Academy, 2002, p. 58.

⁷ Johan Galtung, “After Violence: 3R, Reconstruction, Reconciliation, Resolution: Coping with Visible and Invisible Effects of War and Violence”, *Transcend: A Peace and Development Network*, 1998 (Accessed May 6, 2006).

⁸ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace. Sustainable Reconciliation in divided Societies*, Washington D.C., United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997, p. 75.

conflict with each other” and a willingness “to move to attain or to restore a relationship that they believe to be minimally acceptable.”⁹

Reconciliation supports all forms of social peace-building and is particularly concerned with building an infrastructure of people who are committed to creating a new peace culture within the social fabric of communal and inter-communal life. Therefore, reconciliation may be applicable to conditions other than situations following gross human rights violations. Societies may be divided for many reasons like ethnic disparities, regional underdevelopment, regional conflict, absence of viable communication and insufficient provision of information. As such, the drivers of conflict can separate districts or regions within the nation state, touching the fundamental structures of governance and the social fabric of society. Governance may then be described as unfair and undemocratic, resulting in minimum participation or apathy by the concerned public. It is within this context that reconciliation of relationships necessarily is part and parcel of systems of governance and processes of democracy.

According to Lerche, three sequences which reconciliation has to involve to be effective include:¹⁰

- Acknowledgment of wrong doings;
- Contrition for past actions, including public expression of regret and request for forgiveness; and
- Forgiveness on behalf of victims.

Quinn frames reconciliation as the restoration of relationships through a process of acknowledgment, forgiveness and trust-building¹¹ and arrives in a later study¹² at a definition centered on ‘social cohesion’ as the main objective for the process of reconciliation.

⁹ Mohammed Abu-Nimer (ed.), *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence. Theory and Practice*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2001, p. 48.

¹⁰ See Charles O. Lerche III, “Truth Commissions and National Reconciliation: Some Reflections on Theory and Practice” in *Peace and Conflict Studies*, Volume 7, Number 1, May, 2000.

¹¹ Joanna R. Quinn, *The Politics of Acknowledgement: Truth Commissions in Uganda and Haiti*. PhD diss., Hamilton, McMaster University, 2003, pp. 39 – 46.

¹² Joanna R. Quinn, *What of Reconciliation? Traditional Mechanisms of Acknowledgement in Uganda*. Paper prepared for a conference held by the Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict Research Centre at The University of Western Ontario, May 14-15, 2005.

Lerche's definition focuses on the price (forgiveness) victims have to pay in order to get the truth whereas Quinn's definition opens up for the political aspects of both justice and reconciliation. The correlation between the two spheres of reconciliation may be one of incompatible forces since the individual process can be determined by psychological or trauma relief, while a community or national process of reconciliation may be different. However, it "...is in the shift in focus from individual to social or political that the issue of forgiveness emerges..."¹³ While truth through forgiveness may be achievable at individual levels, "the ambition to create a single, complete, common truth from all possible accounts is rarely hoped for, let alone achieved."¹⁴

Pankhurst continues to conceptualize 'justice' by stating that following armed conflicts with a clear victor it is easier to establish a process of justice and prosecution (The Nuremburg trials illustrate this point). But the question of justice and certainly of criminal prosecution needs to be answered against the particulars of each and every conflict. Many conflicts in independent Uganda have been settled through political compromise, including payment of compensation, appointment to political office and the provision of amnesty.

Reconciliation as a paradigm in peace-building in Uganda subsequently translates into a complex process comprising several constituent components that all work and contribute to a common objective. These components include ending violent or polarized relationships, violent conflict, and the redefinition of identity or self determination from a 'us-them' understanding to a 'we' based accommodation of differences. This process of social cohesion is addressed through the tools of psycho-social healing, amnesty, justice and reparation.

Division and Identity

Central to the plethora of themes included in the reconciliation agenda stand the issues of identity and state legitimacy: Who and what to reconcile?

The LRA conflict has deeply deteriorated the socio-economic and political climate of Uganda's greater north. The River Nile, which is considered the southern boundary of the conflict, has acted as a natural line of division between the great-

¹³ Donna Pankhurst, "Issues of Justice and Reconciliation in Complex Political Emergencies: conceptualising Reconciliation, Justice and Peace" in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 239 – 256.

¹⁴ Ibid.

er north and the rest of the country. Displaced persons in the north often found themselves in 'survival mode', detached from developments in the rest of the country, or equally important, detached from the attention of the rest of the country and the world.¹⁵

This situation points to an absence of demonstrated national concern. Social and political life has been separated or clustered along cultural lines, driven by factors such as local language, ethnicity, religion or identity, resulting in exclusion as opposed to integration in the wider political process of nation and peace-building. Ethnic and geographical fractures within Uganda have also impacted the structures of the state.

Growing splinters in the wider social fabric of society might well be one of the new hallmarks of the conflict if not addressed adequately by public service delivery institutions, such education, health, roads and infrastructure, communication etc. The absence of traditional cultural reference points may push along this potential trend toward a polarized and politicized agenda.¹⁶

Building or re-building society is not restricted to addressing physical needs like infrastructure and housing through a poverty eradication portfolio; it requires action directly targeting social trust, historical tensions, and national identity. Successful re-building of social trust has much to do with life conditions and local cultural resources may constitute important assets in re-building social trust amongst both victim populations and the rest of the country. If the objective of a peace-building process is to *"renew and reconstruct society, then the mechanisms we employ must seek to heal social divisions, and to redress the exclusion and inequality that often characterizes societies."*¹⁷ Social cohesion in northern Uganda (and in other regions) is fragmented by insecurity and violence as well as alleged grievances against the Government, stemming from historical divisions. A dividing line along a 'them/us' disparity is fuelling perceptions of marginalization with severe implications for opinions of a common identity. Re-building of trust

¹⁵ See detailed studies like Sverker Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings. War and Existential Uncertainty in Acholiland, Northern Uganda*, Uppsala, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2003 and Christopher Gerald Dolan, *Understanding War and Its Continuation: The Case of Northern Uganda*, London, Development Studies Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London, 2005.

¹⁶ Alleged security threats imposed by the armed group Allied Defense Forces (ADF) in the Western region, the Karamoja question in the north-east of the country and others.

¹⁷ Timothy Murithi, "Rebuilding Social Trust in Northern Uganda", *Peace Review*, 14:3, Geneva, United Nations Institute for Training and Research, 2002, pp. 291 – 295.

subsequently has to include both a community and a national approach, established to work for identical objectives within an agreed framework.

The NGO network Civil Society Organisations for Peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU) published an interesting survey in 2004 titled: *The Need for National Reconciliation: Perceptions of Ugandans on National Identity*.¹⁸ The survey researched “*cultural diversities and historic perspectives that shape peoples perceptions*”; perceptions of fellow Ugandans and “*perceptions of conflict, reconciliation and unity*.” Although Ugandan national identity is said to be “*in a state of transition*” the vast majority of respondents believed “*that ancestry is the defining factor for being Ugandan*”. Respondents referred to “*cultural practices, physical appearance and language, all of which usually accompany an ethnic understanding of identity*”, rather than giving reference to territory, constitution, flag, common history or future.

Scarce information or knowledge about the current conflict negatively impacted perception about people from the north with some respondents attributing the conflict to self inflicted pain, greed, a tribal struggle or revenge. On this note, the local traditions of oral history maintain negative perceptions of others.

The conclusions of the CSOPNU survey and the country’s divided history tell identical narratives of the absence of a common identity, ethnic bias and negative perceptions of ‘the other’. There appears to be an absence of a structural ‘glue’ that holds the society together under a common national identity. It is at this juncture the LRA conflict and its resolution often is perceived as a northern rather than national issue.

Framing the Reconciliation Process

A reconciliation-based conflict management portfolio offers an opportunity to institutionalize forward-thinking conflict mitigation, ideally within a framework addressing issues such as:

- The nature and dynamics of conflict in Uganda;
- The Government and institutional framework for conflict management;

¹⁸ CSOPNU, *The Need for National Reconciliation: Perceptions of Ugandans on National Identity*, Kampala, CSOPNU, Civil Society Organizations for Peace in Northern Uganda and JYAK, Fellowship of Reconciliation, 2004.

- National security and defence perspectives on conflict management; and
- Humanitarian and economic aspects of conflict.

A systematic and re-designed approach to national conflict management, coordinated with civil society, religious and traditional institutions, will assist GOU strategies on insurgencies, conflict prevention and the management of complex post-conflict environments.

During research undertaken by the Northern Uganda Peace Initiative,¹⁹ the need to establish a Conflict Management and Peace-building Framework received wide support from respondents including GOU officials, executives of international organizations, the military, civil society executives, and camp residents. The general view was expressed that managing and resolving conflict through peace-building measures, as opposed to singularly military means, would provide more long-lasting conflict resolution results.²⁰

Different regions and localities often have their own practices and techniques of social recovery and overcoming the effects of violence and conflict. It is vital for the peace process to understand to what effect these practices work in tandem with the official peace process and the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to which the President referred the northern conflict in December 2003. The distinction between LRA leadership and rank and file combatants points towards the importance of an amnesty process. Therefore, citizen's involvement in the peace process is instrumental.

Reintegration of ex-combatants similarly will require the involvement of the citizenry. Any reintegration strategy must address the needs of the victims rather than applying a standard tool-kit assistance programs. The strategies may include techniques of coming to terms with the past as an element of traditional reconciliation.

The reconciliation process must synchronize reintegration with long term normalization and development projects. A properly designed amnesty process would reflect a locally developed reconciliation process, stressing the needs of seeing both combatants and civilians as victims.

¹⁹ USAID financed program in support of the peace process in northern Uganda 2004 – 2007.

²⁰ Northern Uganda Peace Initiative, Issues Paper on the Development of a Conflict Resolution and Peace Building Policy for the Government of Uganda, Kampala, 2006.

When trying to overcome the effects of violence and distress, reconciliation is introduced as a means of dealing with the memories of that violence and distress. While reintegration of ex-combatants is likely to be problematic for a long time, there is a need to develop and adapt techniques of healing and re-integration with inputs from the communities, the NGO community, and religious and traditional groups.

The reconciliation process is one of social recovery at both local and national levels. Locally, people increasingly wish to forget about what happened. Respondents sought to reduce the prominence of war and violence in their discussions, suggesting it should be discussed only within families or within circles of special social confidence. Public addressing of violence may exacerbate social tensions and make it more likely that violence may resume.

Social forgetting may be one of the main techniques when considering reintegration and healing for ex-combatants.²¹ Local reconciliation standards like Mato Oput are at work in restoring relationships with families and communities. The alleged capacities of traditional reconciliation methods to acknowledge and forgive can be effective in healing the effects of conflicts. Importantly, these processes do not force forgiveness among the community, as many citizens feel they can forget, but not forgive, the atrocities committed.

The return of ex-combatants entails a repatriation standard that addresses the fear of revenge from both home communities and from the armed forces. While the Amnesty Act has clearly been a public success, it cannot stipulate personal forgiveness, a matter for families and clans coming to terms with atrocities perpetrated by relatives.

Thus peace-building in northern Uganda is best served on a multi-track approach. Reconciliation comprises both local and national processes involving all segments of society in order to help create an environment that prevents the escalation of tensions that lead to violent conflicts.

²¹ The concept of social forgetting is adopted from Rosalind Shaw, *Rethinking Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. Lessons from Sierra Leone*, Washington, United States Institute of Peace, 2005.

The Government's peace-building strategy therefore should include two important steps: delivering justice to former combatants and fostering targeted dialogue in the pursuit of a reconciliation agenda. It is important to strategically integrate these two processes in order to a) harmonize policies and send unified messages to the public; b) build trust between the Government and communities in the conflict zones and c) create a framework of both local and national ownership to the peace-building process.

In line with this approach, the Government could come out strongly pursuing dialogue and direct interaction with the Acholi communities as a measure to complement the Amnesty Act. As noted above, the Acholi communities still have deep-rooted grievances against the Government that will be best addressed through a national reconciliation.

As the post-conflict setting draws nearer, certain approaches on how to integrate strategies of justice and reconciliation may be useful for Uganda to consider in the search for a way forward. The Juba process has created an atmosphere of relative calm in the conflict zones and seen a steady flow of combatants reporting to communities or the UPDF. The process is amongst other elements shaped by the military push factor and the combined dynamics of the amnesty process and civil society engagement seen as a pull factor. Any alternative strategy to this process will most likely be more focused on a military option, which has worked in the past, but this time. Therefore, the peace process is to be understood primarily as an amnesty process.

In dealings with the past there is principally three ways in which the past can be dealt with: Firstly, a Government can opt to 'forget' the past and grant blanket amnesty with a view to avoid a revival of the past through judicial processes. Secondly, a Government can prosecute the perpetrators of human rights violations. Thirdly, it can establish truth commissions to ascertain as much information as possible about past abuses and create ways to ensure that the violations are not repeated and victims are compensated for the wrongs committed against them.

The TRC Model

Quite often the term 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission' appears in discussions about how to come to terms with the effects of conflict. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) concept has been recommended in many group

discussions and by individuals in Uganda asked to suggest ways ahead. 'The Truth and Reconciliation deficit' was a key theme in an advertisement published by the three institutions: Refugee Law Project, Human Rights and Peace Centre and the Faculty of Law at Makerere University.²² The International Crisis Group recommends Truth and Reconciliation efforts to address traditional reconciliation initiatives.²³ In a newspaper editorial the TRC concept has yet again been highlighted as an appropriate means of addressing the past, giving reference to the processes in South Africa and Rwanda.²⁴ But before considering the model's appropriateness in the Ugandan context, we must understand the goals and processes of a TRC.

In general terms, TRCs are official agencies established to formally investigate and report on human rights violations that have occurred in a specific country or during a particular conflict. They are established on the premise that the shared truth is a fundamental prerequisite for reconciliation, which again is a necessary starting point for the restoration of social relations. Uganda features twice on the long international list of Commissions of Inquiry, Truth Commissions or Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, with the 1974 Commission of Inquiry into the disappearances of Ugandans during the first years of the Amin regime and the 1986 Commission of Inquiry into Violations of Human Rights, established a few months after the current Government assumed power.²⁵

In dealing with this issue, research undertaken in Sierra Leone has introduced the concept of "*social forgetting*."²⁶ The research is questioning the "...*problematic assumptions about the purportedly universal benefits of the verbal recounting of past violence*." The inquiry takes a starting point in the premise that after intra-state war or conflicts, when experiencing violence between neighbors "...*truth telling involves a much different politics of memory*." Because social memory is a process rather than a specific and fixed set of facts, it is "...*deeply problematic for*

²² *The Monitor*, October 5, 2006.

²³ International Crisis Group, *A Strategy for Ending Northern Uganda's Crisis*, Brussels/Nairobi, January 2006, p. 2. (At <http://www.crisisgroup.org>).

²⁴ *The Monitor*, October 21, 2006.

²⁵ Charles O. Lerche III, "Truth Commissions and National Reconciliation: Some Reflections on Theory and Practice", *Peace and Conflict Studies*, Volume 7, Number 1, May 2000 (Available at <http://www.gmu.edu/academic/pcs/LERCHE71PCS.html>, accessed: May 6, 2006).

²⁶ Rosalind Shaw, *Rethinking Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. Lessons from Sierra Leone*, Washington, United States Institute of Peace, 2005, p. 3.

*a national commission to produce a single "impartial" historical record – a definitive national memory – and to expect it to command agreement and heal social divisions.*²⁷

The core of the debate is the distinction between local and national approaches to memory and change and the question is if public testimonies, which may even be televised and eventually published, constitute acts of forgiveness. Galtung argues that such public evidence of guilt is in reality punishment and the act cannot "...produce the catharsis of the offered and received apology..., the hoped for and offered forgiveness. Truth alone is merely descriptive, not spiritual."²⁸

Returning to the concept of social forgetting, the notion comes into being because people want peace and restore social relations. As many respondents in northern Uganda expressed: they simply want to forgive and forget. Public addressing of violence may exacerbate social tensions and make it more likely that violence may resume through acts of revenge. However, the cry for peace and forgiveness may also be a reflection of fading capacities to deal with the effects of the long term conflict, resulting in people being desperately willing to agree with anything in order to get peace.

Social forgetting may be one of the main techniques working for the re-integration and healing for ex-combatants. Local practices of social recovery constitute arenas of healing. These practices are not by-passing the truth telling element, however; evidence of the past is left as a point for dialogue and rituals between the directly involved parties at the community level. It is also at this level, ex-combatants eventually will have to be re-integrated back to the communities. Social forgetting thus becomes a catalyst for practices of normalization, in that discussions of the past are kept within the confines of affected families or communities following performance of local rituals.

The successful re-integration of ex-combatants is a key driver of the longer term peace process to provide viable alternatives to life as combatants. It is from this perspective that re-integration and normalization of life in conflict affected areas will have to be boosted by development programs.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Johan Galtung, "After Violence: 3R, Reconstruction, Reconciliation, Resolution: Coping with Visible and Invisible Effects of War and Violence", *Transcend: A Peace and Development Network*, 1998: 77. Available at: <http://www.transcend.org/TRRECBAS.HTM>. Accessed: May 6, 2006.

Local Justice Traditions

Return and reintegration of ex-combatants will have to observe local mechanisms of justice through a process of acknowledgement and forgiveness. But what are then local justice mechanisms?

Quinn has argued that acknowledgement is a precursor for a successful process of societal recovery and that there is a strong relationship between acknowledgement and forgiveness.²⁹ However, bearing the lessons from the processes in both South Africa and Rwanda in mind, it is suggested that a discreet process of facing wrong-doing be applied in Uganda. It should not be forgotten that peace-building ultimately must unfold as a national program although recent atrocities have concentrated in the northern region. Therefore, as has been argued earlier, only people to whom the 'truth' is relevant need to take part in the process of coming to terms with past violence. In reality, this process would function as a silencing or social forgetting process, where persons share common intimate knowledge, which is kept within the confines of trusted social settings. Trust is one of the building blocks of any social development.

The ultimate result of acknowledgement is to further both the act and the process of forgiveness through the making of relations of trust towards social cohesion. But for forgiveness to provide a channel for social cohesion and healing, a precondition is that people are willing and able to forgive one another. Forgiveness is a process of overcoming attitudes of resentment and anger that may persist when one has been victim to wrongdoing. The processes of both acknowledgement and forgiveness are very demanding and seem best served when unfolding at personal levels.

The importance of forgiveness is that the concept is embraced in Acholi cultural practices, but also the fact that perpetrators of atrocities will remain in society even after a peace deal is reached. The settlement of the LRA conflict will entail a social future where both perpetrators and victims and families of perpetrators and victims will have to live together, including the more complicated issue of the

²⁹ Joanna R. Quinn, "What of Reconciliation? Traditional Mechanisms of Acknowledgement in Uganda", paper prepared during a conference held by the Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict Research Centre at The University of Western Ontario, May 14-15, 2005, p. 7.

same person being both perpetrator and victim. In this last case, abductees induced or forced to commit atrocities would qualify for being both perpetrator and victim.

Forgiveness at this level is a process of taking ownership of conflict resolution. However, a question here is, if the justice bar is set to low through the promotion and application of forgiveness for past crimes? From the perspective of a retributive or punitive justice system, the practice of blanket amnesty and forgiveness may be perceived as defying justice with critical accountability deficiencies as a result. But again, who is responsible for what happened? Have crimes also been committed by others than the LRA, in the name of the LRA or by the nation's armed forces? Should these questions be answered in a court of law, a prime assumption must be that access to justice does exist where it is needed. That would hardly be the case in northern Uganda. Instead, local practices of restorative justice mechanisms seek alternative forms of justice, just like the Government did when the Amnesty Law was enacted in 2000 as a means of offering incentives to give up conflict. However, the Government's referral to the ICC and subsequent ICC indictments run counter to the rationale of both amnesty and forgiveness. The complication lay in the simultaneous functioning of the two systems, with the one targeting punishment of the LRA leadership while the rank and file members are offered amnesty by the Government, while at the same time left to the local restorative justice practices.

Because generational and social teachings have been severely hindered by the uprooting of approximately 1.5 million displaced persons, the understanding and adherence to local standards may come across as insufficient. Traditionally, local justice systems were managed by the leaders of communities, but because of encampment of the general population the authority of elders and traditional systems seems to be weakened.³⁰ It is against this background, elders and camp residents often call for revitalization and empowerment of traditional structures of local communities.

With increased attention given to these issues, the question of the relevance of traditional justice mechanisms has generated debates about how to understand

³⁰ The lack of common knowledge about the traditional justice systems was constantly articulated during conferences and the Chiefs' Tour in 2005

the practices and about the relationship between peace and justice. It is quite apparent that the understanding of this practice is still relatively obscure.

The purpose of the Acholi reconciliation ritual referred to as Mato Oput is “usually to interpret the spirit work and the experience of misfortune, and to re-establish or make manifest appropriate social relations.”³¹ The principle of conflict resolution in Acholi is to create reconciliation which brings the two sides together. The principle of Mato Oput is enshrined between acceptance of responsibility and forgiveness. It is a process whereby parties to a conflict (homicide) resolve to deal with the consequences of the conflict and its implications for the future in a collective and mutually acceptable manner. The process recognizes and seeks to salvage and affirm the moral worth and dignity of everyone involved – victims, perpetrators, and the community at large – in the pursuit of a community giving primary focus to co-existence and the restoration of relationships between former enemies as a basis for the prevention of the reoccurrence of human rights abuses or killing. The act of separate relations between conflicting societies until a cleansing ceremony is performed, is an act of condemnation of evil. It permits, for the period, the victims to suppress their resentment and developed hatred as a way of moving on in anticipation of the beginning of a new relationship. The act of slaughtering a goat and lamb and exchanging the heads between opposing representatives, reminds the perpetrators and those witnessing the act that there is a price to be paid for violating the agreed rules of co-existence. Mato Oput contends that society and the perpetrator contribute to the extent possible, to the emotional restoration and repair of the physical and material well being of the victim.

The Involvement of Non-state Actors

Two decades of conflict has produced an ongoing and simultaneous process of disintegration and re-integration, with the population bearing the physical and emotional problems that Jan Egeland, the former UN Under-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs, described it as the worst humanitarian catastrophe that received the least international attention.³²

³¹ Tim Allen, *Trial Justice: the International Criminal Court and the Lord's Resistance Army*, London, Zed Books Ltd., 2006, p. 163.

³² *BBC News*, November 10, 2003.

A large proportion of the population is living in crowded camps, with little access to land or sources of livelihood. This displacement is alien to the traditional Acholi lifestyle of homesteads and community life based on extended family and kinship support.

With the enormous suffering, the Acholi have allegedly formed a low opinion towards the Government and become suspicious of its ability and intentions to mitigate the conflict. It is in this environment NGOs increasingly have had significant impact upon the authority and governance structure in the region as compared to the rest of the country.

There have been calls for peace structures in northern Uganda to be strengthened through capacity building of existing networks for a consolidated and grass-roots driven peace process. The calls include requests for a peaceful negotiated end to the hostilities.

Locally-driven coalitions, like Quaker Peace and Social Witness, Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, People's Voice for Peace and others support the integration of peace processes with local partners. At this local level, initiatives seek a broad based community dialogue on reconciliation, reconstruction and re-integration.

Beyond the humanitarian characteristics of the conflict, a potential political undercurrent is at times part of local considerations. The legacies of mistrust and ethnic confrontation that have distinguished the post-colonial political landscape seem to lock the heritage of conflict into renewed cycles of violence, depriving large segments of the population from life opportunities, turning experiences of conflict into a root cause for future life possibilities.

Thus, even without a concrete political program sponsored by the LRA, the effects of LRA actions have profoundly been political. The amalgamation of civilian life into forced displacement and the exposure to terror to some extent undermine any intrinsic linkage of violent means and good causes.

Human rights abuses and violence divide people, catapulting tension and feelings of mistrust, hatred and fear. Perceptions of right and wrong, of justice and injustice may reflect direct and instantaneous experiences. It is against this background that victims display a high level of frustration and annoyance being sandwiched between violence and inadequate security response.

As a result, the Acholi have tended to look to other authorities, including traditional cultural leaders, religious leaders and civil society organizations with high hopes as their main partners in mitigating the effects of conflict. Importantly, a gap in the exercise of authority exists in the conflict zones, which these three entities fill to some extent, but not completely. For example, many local disputes go unaddressed, as the local population often is left with no authority to turn to. Likewise, services such as education, sanitation, water, and others are often not provided for, despite NGO interventions addressing exactly these shortcomings.

The above scenario has had significant impact upon authority and governance structures in the region. As a consequence, traditional authorities, religious leaders and civil society organizations have taken up roles nearly equal to the responsibility, accountability and authority of the state. To some extent, the special circumstances have developed to create a sense of mutually shared authority between the state and non-state actors.

It is important to note that these shared authority structures differ significantly from those in the rest of the country. The 20 years of National Resistance Movement (NRM) rule have produced a stable and secure environment, particularly in the western and central parts, where the state plays a significant role in service delivery and authority representation.

The lack of attention given to the impact of the northern conflict on authority structures both at the national and the sub-regional levels propels the search for avenues that can foster national reconciliation by the reconstitution of authority in northern Uganda, subsequently giving the central Government both control and responsibility. Again, joint agendas involving both the Government and civil society would bridge authority divides.

There is a critical relationship between conflict and shared authority. This aspect is significantly reinforced by the functioning of articulated enemy images, power politics, displacement and other humanitarian challenges.

Alternative traditional and religious groups are turned to by people seeking assistance to the resolution of local disputes. Likewise, NGOs in cooperation with local Governments provide the majority of services, which often do get provided, such as access to health, sanitation, and water. The cooperation between NGOs and local officials is especially noticeable when providing for persons in displacement

camps, where the Government only provides at very minimal levels. Non-state actors are thus elevated to a greater degree of authority in northern Uganda.

The conflict has continually justified and reinforced the relevance of non-state actors in the state domain. In such a scenario, the state's legitimacy should be reinstated by a conscious effort by both state and non-state actors through the creation of relationships between the state, civilians, civil society groups, humanitarian and development practitioners.

The Role of the State

Weak state structures pose a problem for the continued cultural 'binding' of the nation into a coherent shared identity. The problem is not one of destruction of identity; rather, shared authority attests to the significance of the identity question. It is this proliferation of locally based identities that causes problems for the State's general authority over its population's sense of cultural attachment.

The social-psychology of attachment to locality is a powerful phenomenon, but is also a complex one, with different possible modes of articulation and different consequent implications for people's sense of belonging. "*Strong ethnic identities are today frequently seen as a source of social disintegration, violence, and terror,*"³³ or may as a minimum be regarded as a reaction to the failure of the state to meet the needs of its miscellaneous population. Is the persistence of the conflict ultimately a governance concern? Is the military in reality filling the gap left by power vacuum in the wake of north-south disparities?

Immature development of political institutions may lead to a confrontation of social interests. In this situation, the military may take on the task of modernization, seeking representation of the state through the unbiased recruitment from all ethnic groups and the subsequent identification with the idea of national strength and progress. But the absence of credible political interaction and productive political dialogue between representatives of the North and the Government constitute a setback in the political process, arresting possible political development in systemic limitations such as: "(1) regional, ethnic or religious conflicts; (2) poorly educated and corrupt military leaders; (3) the unwillingness of political elites to

³³ Elise Boulding, *Cultures of Peace. The Hidden side of History*, New York, Syracuse University Press, 2000, p. 165.

accept defeat and; (4) the organizational weakness of civil society.”³⁴ The latest presidential election results are testimony to the fact that the severe level of human rights abuses and violence has significant negative impact on politics with only sporadic support for the President and his Government.

The Government has launched a number of different peace, recovery and development plans and has thus realized that it can not single handedly answer the peace problem of the North, unless other challenges are answered simultaneously: the displaced people, hunger, psycho-social problems, education needs and medical care to mention but a few. This has been the reason why different authority structures have been encouraged to engage in complementing the Government efforts.

The patterns of events in Uganda bring to attention a fundamental structural problem in the system of conflict management. The dominant actor will attempt to suppress the belligerents at all cost without attracting popular support for this position and action. Just like any other major political manifestation, the peace-process must ideally be backed by the entire nation and the question arises to what extent the current political system is willing to include northern concerns into the peace-building agenda.

Political space in the immediate Independence years was about grabbing power rather than sharing power. Prime Minister Obote’s exiling of the King, the Kabaka, in reality saw the beginning of a patrimonial governance structure. Between the mid 1960s and 1986, power was exercised indiscriminately. During this period the country went through no less than seven different regimes, all of which ignored the rule of law. The majority of leaders during this time were persons from northern ethnic groups. It was this governance pattern the current President Museveni challenged by beginning a bush war in 1981.

Following the NRM’s take over of power a system of ‘resistance councils’ was established through a hierarchical model encompassing presentation from the village to the national level, creating a framework for national legitimacy. In doing so, it also slipped into a basic challenge by imposing a system of choice. In order to warrant as diverse participation as possible, invitations were extended to other groups active in the bush war, but political space was limited to those loyal to the

³⁴ Kees Koonings and Kirk Kruijt (eds.), *Political Armies. The Military and Nation Building in the Age of Democracy*, London, Zed Books Ltd., 2002, p. 321.

policies of the NRM. Political opposition was suspended, a major feature of the no-party (or one-party) political system. The *raison d'être* underlying this political limitation was based on the assumption that as long as the country is divided along ethnic and religious lines, it takes some degree of economic development until a broader based political system can be trusted. It is only following the 2006 elections the suspension of organized opposition has been lifted.

Challenges articulated by civil society to the governance system in addressing the conflict should not be perceived by the Government as a threat or failure, but rather as a window of opportunity to engage more capacity in working for lasting peace solutions alongside civil society. Legitimate challenges should be translated into vehicles for wider participation, resulting in a situation where civil society is afforded space for involvement and action. A strengthened civil society will eventually also strengthen the state, as a democratic functioning state is in fact constructed on the mobilization of citizens, just like the NRM system in its early years.

Crafting the Reconciliation Process

The weak state performance in resolving the conflict may also relate to failure of the state to unite the different ethnic identities. Reconciliation as a vehicle for national unity, complemented by recovery and construction programs, may be the yet untested answer to a new conflict management principle in Uganda.

The following is intended to first and foremost suggest practical solutions to general aspects of communities dealing with the past and assist or guide discussions about GOU and citizens' involvement in the process of peace-building at different levels. The rationale underlying the guide is thought on the grounds that mistrust and hatred between former adversaries inhibit peace-building, reconstruction, governance, economic development and unity. Distorted or broken relations between ex-combatants, peoples and authorities of different regions of Uganda can be alleviated. The tool of reconciliation can be used to address the past in order to reach the future. The peace process is both a local and a wider national issue and requires the robust involvement of both civil society and the Government in the process.

The following clusters constitute main groups of issues, including Participation, Infrastructure, Reintegration, Local Dispute Resolution, Amnesty and Compensation, Information and Communication, and Mourning:

Cluster Issue 1: Participation as a means to end conflicts

Conflict resolution in Uganda has followed dynamics of concluding and implementing peace agreements. The most recent settlement was the peace agreement with the rebel group Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF II) in 2002 offering incentive packages to rebels. The implementation of the agreement has recently been concluded in April 2006.

While this approach successfully ended armed rebellions, creating some space for public participation would complement the peace-building process. Such concerns may involve approaches to include the Eastern Uganda Karamoja question into bridging local disputes. Most importantly, public participation programs aim at making the processes of dealing with the effects of conflict relevant to all citizens by inviting local priorities into mainstream recovery plans. It then becomes an issue of how the interests, aspirations and values of different regions can inform the peace-building process, through representative participation, civil society consultative mechanisms and direct participation inviting the engagement of particular individuals and groups.

Decades of conflict have undoubtedly fragmented societies with divisions along which conflicts evolve. Public participation in the process provides an opportunity for a degree of social and political reconciliation. Effective participation mechanisms open up for addressing the underlying causes of conflict and provide legitimacy for their solutions. Ultimately, this approach helps promote transformation of relationships impaired by conflict through discussions aimed at developing greater understanding and striving towards a consensus on how contested issues should be addressed. The peace process then becomes entwined with the recovery and development plans for northern Uganda and Uganda in its entirety.

Cluster Issue 2: Infrastructure for Peace and Reconciliation

Post-conflict reconciliation is probably best served if a holistic approach is adopted, seeking sustainable resolution in the widest possible translation of peace. Such tasks involve disarmament and demobilization, repatriating and resettling IDPs, rehabilitating and reintegrating ex-combatants into local communities, restructuring and reforming security forces, and enhancing civil services and judiciary structure.

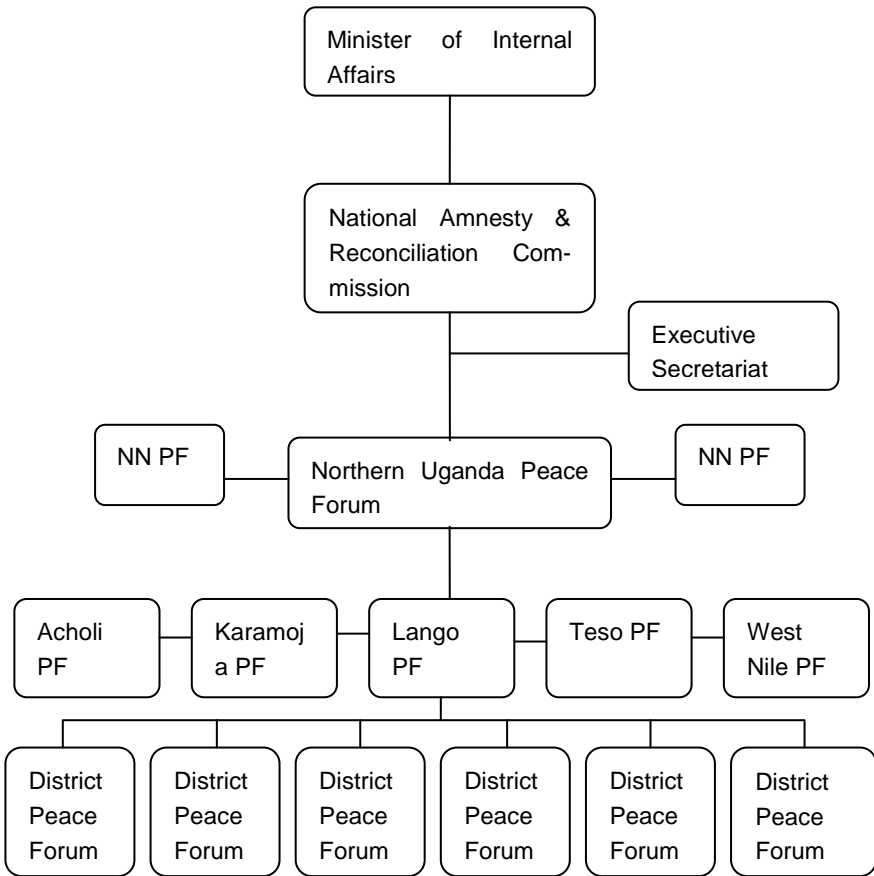
In order for the initiatives to succeed, all actors must undertake comprehensive efforts to support structures that will consolidate peace and create a sense of confidence in the post-conflict scenario through a multi-dimensional framework.

The aim of this framework is to integrate economic, social and development tools into a coherent national political agenda. While the Office of the Prime Minister leads the development of a National Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP), concerns with establishing a civil society inclusive peace infrastructure are addressed by the District Peace Teams in the north, a system that would be wise to duplicate in the rest of the country.

As a means geared toward addressing regional and national level reconciliation, this infrastructure so far has been developed to including all districts in northern Uganda. Further to this, the formation of a sub-regional Peace Forum in West Nile, Acholi, Lango, Teso and Karamoja has materialized. Finally, a body coordinating the work at this sub-regional level, the Northern Uganda Peace Forum has been established.

While terms of reference for the responsibility and work of this infrastructure for peace-building must be worked out by persons and institutions directly involved, a prime objective may focus on harmonization of differences among the various sub-regions to lessen the possibility of new conflicts flaring up, demystify the negative perceptions that exists among the communities of the different parts of the regions, and offer important channels for the flow of communication and information.

The following diagram proposes an organizational set-up of the reconciliation infrastructure led by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. It is proposed to establish a National Amnesty and Reconciliation Commission performing under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.



The National Amnesty and Reconciliation Commission, comprising representatives from the Government, the Amnesty Commission, Human Rights Commission and the broader Civil Society could be operationalized through the formation of an Executive Secretariat tasked with working for the following immediate results: Terms of Reference and Strategy based on broad collaboration and consensus among interested groups for the reconciliation program.

While the above infrastructure is being legally recognized, consolidated and operationalized, real time reconciliation in the communities should be promoted and facilitated through an all inclusive, bottom-up process, illustrated below.

Cluster Issue 3: The return and re-integration of ex-combatants

Community reconciliation is first and foremost perceived as measures addressing the return and re-integration of ex-combatants. This process has been ongoing throughout the conflict and experiences from past re-integration efforts point to constraints in achieving key objectives and successful re-integration probably takes new initiatives and closer monitoring.

A starting point for addressing these constraints may be community sensitization about the fact that ex-combatants are themselves also victims of the conflict, highlighting the difficult issue of how to address the question of one person both being perpetrator and victim.

Cultural practices of reconciliation and forgiveness can support the re-integration process through acknowledgement of wrongdoing, forgiveness and compensation; however, the practices will probably fall short of coming to terms with atrocities in that the cultural ceremonies seem inadequate as instruments of justice. The cultural practices may best be understood as serving social healing.

Atrocities have taken place in all parts of northern Uganda and are not only an Acholi issue. Knowledge and understanding of different cultural practices vary with no harmonized traditional justice system in place. Justice and reconciliation must be understood as two distinct processes with reconciliation being promoted through extensive psycho-social counseling, involvement of youth and women groups, religious and traditional leaders and civil society organizations. It is recommended to launch a psycho-social counseling portfolio through a training of trainers program. The counseling program should assist groups of mothers, elders and others in how to receive and welcome ex-combatants back home. Admission of wrongdoing could be part a village level reconciliation, but it is important to assist and inform the process.

Structures for healing and counseling should be established to enhance the process of social re-integration and resettlement to enable community members suffering from degrees of mental disorder receive psycho-social support needed in the process of rebuilding personal lives.

Cluster Issue 4: Local dispute resolution

It is proposed to establish sub-regional and local conflict monitoring and mitigation structures, involving local people in proactively mediating disputes and facilitating localized agreements. Locally appointed persons or leaders stand at the nucleus of this structure, which could be facilitated by and report to the District Reconciliation and Peace Teams. The objective of establishing a local dispute facility is to promote factors contributing to stabilization through de-escalating potential conflicts over problems emanating from re-integration of ex-combatants, inter-family disputes or land demarcation disputes. Such solutions may not be legally binding; however, the processes may create a sense of social pressure, resulting in willingness to cooperate in abiding by such agreements.

The approach advocates a 'pragmatic peace' at community level by aiming at creating an enabling environment for co-existence. In the wider context, work at the community level may engage larger segments of people in face-to-face dialogues.

Cluster Issue 5: Amnesty and compensation

The Amnesty Act offers persons who give up armed rebellion against the Government amnesty. Often though, communities look to this practice with mistrust, seeing the package not as the pull factor it is meant for, but more as a reward. In order to overcome such negative perceptions it is vital to adopt a holistic approach to programming.

Elaborate research undertaken in northern Uganda reveals an absolute need for educating ex-combatants. A call for vocational training and other support programs is also articulated. However, if such programs only target ex-combatants the programming itself contribute to establishing the target audience as a group apart, complicating the re-integration efforts. Additionally, the above needs do equally apply to the general population in the conflict affected areas, thus assistance programs should ideally be modeled over a community based ratio, absorbing ex-combatants into mainstream programming.

The issue of traditional compensation is complicated by the fact the perpetrator and the victim may be the same person or may belong to the same clan. Often, the LRA attributed geographical areas of responsibility to persons originating from exactly that area. The advantage is the obvious solid local knowledge of terrain;

however, a side effect remains community knowledge of who did what. In many cases, the perpetrators are known to the victim community.

Again, a first step in the return and resettlement program include acknowledgement of wrongdoing. Both cultural and religious institutions are important venues in this regard. It may be an idea to locally maintain records of wrongdoing.

But it is against this background that community based compensation programs should be considered as a way forward. In reality, the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan could act not only as a peace dividend, but also a degree of community compensation, especially, if space for local participation in the design and execution of local recovery plans is promoted and made possible.

Cluster Issue 6: Information and communication

Barriers caused both by limited channels for communication and the difficulties in developing a common language to bridge different views or positions, may impede the otherwise prospective peace process.

Building bridges between peoples separated by insecurity, decades of armed conflict, language, stereotyping and perceptions take an active program of information and communication. Information management needs to assure that information is released and broadcast in a fashion whereby any deliberate misinformation is controlled.

Access to information and the establishing of means to make voices heard are vital preconditions for credible participation and inclusion in the peace process. Likewise, the coordinated and informed functioning of the infrastructure for peace and reconciliation is constructed over the constant flow of information. Ultimately, the role of Government departments as lead agencies in the wider recovery and reconstruction program should include an information and communication component.

It is proposed to establish Centres for Information and Communication (CIC) across the country with a view to stimulate social cohesion and empowerment of human capital.

Cluster Issue 7: Memorial and remembrance

Apologies, acknowledgement, records of testimonies and other symbolic gestures for past events may be helpful for the psycho-social rebuilding process. Symbolic forms of apology, reparation and restitution - public ceremonies, awards, and

memorials can also be effective means of getting to terms with the past. Such public apologies, however, must be carefully constructed, as many horrific crimes were committed by victims themselves.

Systems for and expressions of social normalization may be at work for the promotion of national belonging and shared identity. The capacity of traditional systems and structures for peace is important players in the process. However; it is equally important to see the commitment and engagement of the State in the process of healing, building of relationships and most importantly, and the mobilization of a sense of national belonging.

Conclusion

There is probably no clear-cut answer to why Uganda has been plagued by an unbroken circle of conflicts since Independence. Yet, understanding of the causes and drivers of conflict is essential to discontinue or break the circle of conflict. The causes may be complex and it may be tricky to nationally agree on the nucleus of conflict origins. Confronted with dire humanitarian effects of the two decades long LRA conflict, interlocutors in Uganda tend to overlook the conflict history in the pursuit of bringing an end to immediate suffering.

Traveling in northern Uganda is a journey not only through outright human suffering, but also testimony to insufficient management of the responsibility to protect and guarantee the security of citizens. The forced encampment of around 80% of the Acholi population was officially launched as a security measure; however, offences continued more or less unabated. Furthermore, assistance to or provision for the displaced has been left to the capacity of the international community, civil society organizations and NGOs.

Pursuing peace in this context raises particular challenges. A military victory on a battlefield with no clear frontlines does not come easy. Looking beyond the immediate LRA conflict, the military solution may not constitute the appropriate tool for addressing the root causes of the longer conflict history although the armed forces have been successfully deployed with the aim of achieving quick solutions to the UNRF II rebellion.

Sharing an understanding of why the conflict has persisted is a crucial factor for national reconciliation and gradually it seems likely that a real catalyst is the fragmentation of society: the absence of unity.

In this brief study, reconciliation has been introduced as a mechanism holding the potentials to guide a home-grown peace-building process towards sustainable settlement of not only the current LRA conflict, but also as a means capable of contributing to addressing the root causes of what appears to be a long national history of conflict. In this regard it is important to acknowledge that reconciliation is only one element of a bigger transition framework, including economic development and the opening up of political space.

In efforts aimed at qualifying the energies of reconciliation, the term refers to adaptive and dynamic processes, which at community level target a conflict settlement portfolio comprising acknowledgement, contrition and forgiveness aimed at facilitating the re-integration of ex-combatants. On higher societal levels, reconciliation work for the transition and the restoration of relationships.

The transition process towards building the peace offers an opportunity of inclusion, of political opportunity. The process involves the addressing or transition of the root causes of conflict, violence and injustice and the conscious political link to build a society which reflects these commitments. Peace is subsequently achieved through systems of conflict management intended to averting the recurrence of violent conflict. Conflict management is concerned with the multiplicity of interdependent elements and actions that contribute to the constructive transformation of the conflict. It is within this process of transformation, reconciliation is applied as both an objective, but more importantly as a methodology of a long term process of transformation.

For the Acholi, the effect of conflict is one of exclusion. The peace process must reverse these bitter recollections by offering acknowledgement of the full range of diverse memories and contribute to stimulate inclusion. Positive affirmation is a pillar in building up the capacity that is required to tackle the challenges of normalization of social, economic and political life. Physical evidence of acknowledgement may take the form of a substantial recovery and development program and public recognition such as memorials and acts of remembrance.

Seeing the state as a network of institutions capable of delivering services elsewhere in the country, the state has primarily delivered the UPDF in the North. Looking at the performance of the state, it is far from failing, but governance in the North is weak. The solution is, of course, to strengthen institutions and address the apparent lack of leadership in the region. The peace-building process offers a

unique possibility to facilitate and consolidate governance structures, addressing feelings of exclusion and lack of unity.

Appendix 1: References and Sources

The article draws on personal interviews, participant observations and Focused Group Discussions (FGD) in addition to the following survey instruments:

- Consultations with more than 70 civil society leaders and Government officials from May 2004 through April 2007.
- Stakeholders Conference in Gulu: "Reconciliation: the Way Forward", December 9 - 10, 2004, drawing 137 participants from Central Government (including the current GOU chief negotiator, Hon. Minister of Internal Affairs, Dr. R. Rugunda), MPs, Local politicians, religious and cultural leaders, military representatives, NGO representatives and student representatives.
- Meeting of 70 Acholi Cultural Leaders, January 16, 2005, including the Paramount Chief, Rwot Acana II.
- Youth Partnership for Peace Conference entitled "Reconciliation: Rising up Against the Challenge", March 14 – 16, 2005 in Gulu. The conference drew 188 youth representatives from the three Acholi districts: Gulu, Kitgum and Pader.
- Women in Peace-building and Reconciliation Camp entitled "Reconciliation: How do we do it?" in Gulu, April 12 – 14, 2005. The Camp drew 186 women from across northern Uganda.
- Chiefs' Tour September 1 – 7, 2005. Cultural Chiefs from Acholi land visited 21 IDP camps in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts populated by a total of approximately 500,000 inhabitants. The Tour targeted sensitization and dialogue on the role of traditional Acholi values and mechanisms of healing.
- Survey questions on perceptions of reconciliation conducted during May – August 2006 in northern, central, and western regions of Uganda.
- Continuous consultations with GOU during May 2004 – April 2007.
- Consultations with formerly abducted child soldiers and mid to senior level ex-combatants of the LRA during late 2004 until May 2007.

The above conferences were organized by the team making up the USAID financed Northern Uganda Peace Initiative. The research used FGDs when visiting displacement camps in northern Uganda and when inviting civil society organizations for dialogue meetings.

Key Informant Interview was applied when searching for the opinions of key players or experienced leaders. It is opinion-based and used to get views on an appropriately presented segment of issues pertaining to the northern conflict, the dynamics it has taken and opinions about how to solve the conflict. These are people who not only have the experience of the conflict, but also have been involved in its resolution.

Secondary Data

In preparing for the article, relevant research reports, literature, new papers, articles and websites in addition to the authors own research has been included.

Appendix 2: Historical Overview: Conflicts in Uganda's Recent History

Region	Conflict	Years	Targeted group(s)	Tensions increased
West Nile	Former Uganda Army (FUNA)	1980-1	Acholi, Langi	WN-Langi, North-South
	United National Rescue Front (UNRF)	Early 1980s	Obote II Government	WN-Langi, WN-Acholi, North-South
	West Nile Bank Front (WNBF)	1988-98	NRA/M Government, West Nile civilians	Intra-West Nile ethnicities (Yumbe, Madi, Lugbara)
	United National Rescue Front II (UNRF II)	1997-2002	Government, West Nile civilians	Intra-West Nile (Yumbe and Madi), WN-Acholi North-South
Acholi	Uganda People's Defense Army (UPDA)	1986-8	NRA/M Government	North-South
	Holy Spirit Movement (HSM)	1986-7	NRA/M Government	North-South
	Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)	1987-present	Acholi (recently, Langi and Iteso) civilians, Government	Inter-Acholi, Acholi-Iteso, Acholi-Langi, Acholi marginalization
Teso	Uganda People's Army (UPA)	1987-92	NRA/M Government	Iteso-NRM
Karamoja	Ongoing raids, insecurity	1979-onwards, increased since mid-1990s	Civilians and cattle in Karamoja, Teso, Acholi	Karamojong-Iteso, Acholi and Government
Buganda	Federal Democratic Movement of Uganda (FEDEMU)	Early-mid 1980s	Obote II Government, Acholi, Langi civilians	North-South, particularly Baganda-Acholi and Baganda-Langi
Western Uganda (Bundibugyo, Kasese, Kabale)	Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)	1996-2001	NRA/M Government; Civilians in Western Uganda	Muslim-NRM, Intra-Bundibugyo

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