

# PEACEBUILDING AND DISPLACEMENT IN NORTHERN UGANDA: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY OF INTENTIONS TO MOVE AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS FORMER COMBATANTS

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*Using data from a cross-sectional survey of internally displaced populations in northern Uganda, this article analyses individual-level determinants of attitudes toward peacebuilding processes, including returning home and the reintegration of former combatants. We find that perceptions of social services and livelihood opportunities at the current place of living and at return or resettlement sites influence individuals' decisions to move as do attitudes toward former combatants. Furthermore, we show that internally displaced persons are a specific group with needs and attitudes that differ from those of others. Such empirical information must be taken into account for the successful development and implementation of peace and reconstruction programmes.*

## 1. Introduction

For two decades, war, destruction, and the displacement of over 1.7 million people living in squalid camps transformed northern Uganda into a humanitarian disaster.<sup>1</sup> At the height of the conflict, over 90 per cent of the population was displaced in the northern Acholi districts of Amuru, Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader, and the neighbouring districts were also affected.

The conflict in northern Uganda began in 1986 as a rebellion against President Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) and its efforts to consolidate control over northern parts of the country. The conflict was transformed by the emergence of Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement, followed in the late 1980s by Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Miller, "Uganda's IDP policy", *Forced Migration Review*, (27), 2006, 78, available at: <http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR27/53.pdf> (last visited 30 Jan. 2009).

<sup>2</sup> R. Doom and K. Vlassenroot, "Kony's message: A new Koine? The lord's resistance army in northern Uganda", *African Affairs*, 98, 1999, 5–36.

The LRA, a spiritualist rebel group with no clear political agenda, is known for its brutality, having killed and mutilated countless civilians. To fill its ranks, the LRA has abducted tens of thousands of civilians, often children, to serve as porters, soldiers, or sexual and domestic servants. But the LRA has not been alone in committing abuses in the North. The government forces, the Ugandan People's Defence Forces (UPDF), have also committed serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, and the Government of Uganda's policies on the internally displaced, coupled with its failure to provide adequate protection, have made life in the displacement camps a daily misery.<sup>3</sup>

Late 2005 saw a significant shift in the war. On 14 October 2005, the International Criminal Court (ICC) unsealed arrest warrants against the LRA leader Joseph Kony and four of his top commanders for crimes against humanity and war crimes.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the LRA withdrew its forces to the Southern Sudan state of eastern Equatoria and then crossed the Nile, assembling in Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Eight months later, peace talks between the Government of Uganda and the LRA commenced in Juba, Southern Sudan, under the mediation of the President of South Sudan, Riek Machar. The first Cessation of Hostilities Agreement was signed on 26 August 2006.

On 14 December 2008, after two years of failed attempts to sign the Final Juba Peace Agreement, the governments of Uganda, South Sudan, and the DRC initiated a joint military attack named Operation Lightning Thunder on the LRA in Garamba National Park. In the aftermath of the military operation, the United Nations (UN) reported over hundreds of deaths due to LRA attacks in several locations in DRC and Southern Sudan which show strong signs that they remain a viable military force.<sup>5</sup> However, no security incidents have occurred in northern Uganda.

The shift in the dynamic of the conflict in late 2005 meant that for the first time in decades, northern Uganda enjoys physical peace – the absence of violence – permitting nearly 1.1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Acholi districts alone to return home. IDPs, however, did not choose to return rapidly to their villages. By November 2008, after nearly three years without combat in the area, and despite return assistance, only one-third of the IDPs had returned to their villages (33 per cent), while 29 per cent chose to resettle in smaller, transient camps (new sites) nearer to their villages of origins, and 38 per cent remained in the camps.<sup>6</sup> Many may fear leaving the relative safety of the camps until a final peace agreement has been signed and the LRA fighters have been demobilized. The decision among IDPs about when and whether to return,

<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Uprooted and Forgotten: Impunity and Human Rights Abuses in Northern Uganda*, New York, Human Rights Watch, Sep. 2005.

<sup>4</sup> ICC, "Warrant of arrest unsealed against LRA commanders", ICC press release, The Hague, 14 Oct. 2005.

<sup>5</sup> P. Eichstaedt, *Uganda: Offensive Against Kony Backfires*, London, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Computed by the authors using data for 2005/2008 from the Inter-Agency Working Group.

however, is likely to be influenced by a range of factors beyond an automatic response to the end of conflict or availability of return programmes, as suggested by studies among refugees.<sup>7</sup> The first objective of this research is to explore individual-level determinants of return or resettlement decision making among IDPs.

Moreover, returning IDPs to their homes is not the only challenge of the peacebuilding transition period. A durable peace requires a legitimate government that can rule effectively, reforms in institutional and security sectors, economic and social revitalization, and societal reconciliation.<sup>8</sup> The disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants have become recognized as vital steps toward stable peace.<sup>9</sup> Yet, despite the emergence of DDR programmes, factors influencing successful reintegration at a micro-level are not yet clearly understood.<sup>10</sup> In northern Uganda, forced conscription by the LRA and frequent abduction means the population continues to face the challenge of reintegrating former combatants. The second objective of this research is therefore to explore individual-level determinants of attitudes toward former combatants.

In this article, we argue that understanding the factors that influence plans to return home and attitudes toward former combatants is the key to reducing the potential for further conflict and for the successful development and implementation of peacebuilding programmes. Yet such programmes are rarely based on empirical research reflecting the views and opinions of those who have been displaced. Showing some progress toward the inclusion of victims into peace negotiation processes, the Juba peace process to end the northern Uganda conflict provided for a victims' consultation mechanism. However, the scope of the consultation was limited to accountability and justice mechanisms. Furthermore, the consultation process largely addressed practical details, while the general agreement provided for the overall framework. In addition, the consultation was conducted separately by the parties involved – the LRA and the government – not by an independent body. Still, the consultation offered at least a minimal opportunity for those consulted to influence the agenda and the policies proposed.

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<sup>7</sup> R. Black and S. Gent, "Sustainable return in post-conflict contexts", *International Migration*, 44(3), 2006, 15–38; K. Koser, "Information and repatriation: The case of Mozambican refugees in Malawi", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 10, 1997, 1–18.

<sup>8</sup> N. Ball, "The challenge of rebuilding war-torn societies", in C. A. Crocker, F.O. Hampson and P.R. Aall (eds.), *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflicts*, Washington, DC, United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, "The Role of United Nations Peacekeeping in Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration: Report of the Secretary General", S/2000/101, Feb. 2000, available at: [http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/issueareas/measures/Measur\\_pdf/i\\_measur\\_pdf/UN\\_doc/s\\_council/s\\_2000\\_101.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/issueareas/measures/Measur_pdf/i_measur_pdf/UN_doc/s_council/s_2000_101.pdf) (last visited 30 Jan. 2009).

<sup>10</sup> M. Humphreys and J. Weinstein, "Demobilization and reintegration", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 51(4), 2007, 531–67.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. *The study*

This research draws on data from 1,404 interviews conducted in the four Acholi districts of Amuru, Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader, northern Uganda, between March and June 2007. The interviews were part of a larger cross-sectional survey led by the authors in eight districts of northern Uganda.<sup>11</sup> The objective of the survey was to measure attitudes toward peace, justice, and social reconstruction among the population. The survey followed a 2005 study with similar objectives.<sup>12</sup> This study focuses on the Acholi districts because they were most affected by displacements caused by the conflict. Since the sample procedure was stratified by districts, it is possible to provide valid estimates for the Acholi districts.

### 2.2. *Respondents*

Study participants were Ugandan adults (18 years of age or older) randomly selected using a multi-stage sampling strategy. Within selected districts, a minimum target of 320 interviews was determined using the difference in proportion formula (assumed level of precision of 10 per cent with 80 per cent statistical power) and was adjusted for stratification, design effect due to cluster sampling, and missing responses.

Within each district, camps for IDPs were randomly selected using a sampling technique proportionate to population size. In some cases, residents of the camps had recently moved to new settlement sites closer to their original villages. In order to capture this population, we randomly selected one new settlement site for each of the selected camps where population movement had taken place using a sampling technique proportionate to population size, based on the database provided by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Urban centres were included in the first-stage random selection procedure. In the selected locations, interviewers were assigned to zones of approximately equal size where they selected every other household in a randomly chosen direction. A household was defined as a group of people normally sleeping under the same roof and eating together. In each household, interviewers randomly selected one adult respondent, of the same gender as the interviewer, from a list of all eligible adults. Three attempts were made to contact a household or individual.

<sup>11</sup> P. N. Pham, P. Vinck, E. Stover, A. Moss and M. Wierda, *When the War Ends. A Population-Based Survey on Attitudes about Peace, Justice and Social Reconstruction in Northern Uganda*, New York, Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley, Payson Center for International Development, Tulane University, International Center for Transitional Justice, Dec. 2007.

<sup>12</sup> P. N. Pham, P. Vinck, M. Wierda, E. Stover and A. di Giovanni, *Forgotten Voices: A Population-Based Survey of Attitudes about Peace and Justice in Northern Uganda*, International Center for Transitional Justice and the Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley, Jul. 2005.

### *2.3. Data collection*

Sixteen local university students or graduates representing the same ethnic group and fluent in the local language of the population under study conducted interviews using a standard questionnaire developed by a team with expertise in human rights, law, transitional justice, epidemiology, psychiatry, anthropology, surveying, and the conflict in northern Uganda in consultation with local actors. The survey instrument was translated into Acholi, the local language. Independently, back-translation into English was conducted. Discrepancies between the two versions were resolved through discussion with the two translators and consultation with local experts. The questionnaire was field tested and validated in non-participating sites and mock interviews were organized during the training of the interviewers. Interviewers participated in a week-long training to familiarize themselves with the standardized pre-coded open-ended questionnaire, interview techniques, and selection process for respondents.

Response options were provided to the interviewer for coding purposes, but not read to the participant unless otherwise indicated. This is done to avoid leading the respondents. An “other” category was available to record responses when necessary or when the interviewers were unsure of the appropriate response option. The “other” category was recoded during analysis. Data were collected using Personal Digital Assistants (PDA). Each evening the data were synchronized with a central database and records were manually checked for errors.

One-on-one interviews were conducted anonymously in a confidential setting. Due to the sensitivity of some of the questions, the interviewers were assigned to same-sex respondents. Oral rather than written consent was obtained due to the high illiteracy rate. The consent form stressed confidentiality and respondents’ names were never recorded. The Committee for Protection of Human Subjects at Tulane University and University of California, Berkeley, and northern Uganda local government officials approved the research protocol. No incentive was provided to the survey participants.

### *2.4. Measurements and analysis*

Digital data from the interviews were imported and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 16.0. No weights were applied for the present study. Building on previous research in northern Uganda, we developed a list of thirty-three items to measure exposure to violence and experience of abduction. The list does not represent all possible traumatic events but rather focuses on commonly reported events. The thirty-three items were grouped in four summative scales: general exposure (maximum score of five), direct exposure (maximum score of three), witness exposure (maximum score of nine), and coercion (maximum score of six). A scale measuring the sense of security was developed using the self-reported sense of security (from very secure to very insecure) in thirteen hypothetical daily life situations. The scores for each item were summed resulting in a total score measuring the sense of security. Thirteen items measuring satisfaction toward selected socio-economic factors

from very good to very bad were used to develop five scales. Principal component analysis was used to determine how to group the socio-economic factors. A total score was then computed for each group of variables, resulting in the following scales: perception of housing, perception of services, perception of livelihood opportunities, perception of basic needs, and perception of social relations. Two scales were developed to measure attitudes toward (1) lower ranking LRA and (2) LRA leaders, who were former combatants. Ten items representing daily life situations were used to measure the level of comfort with each category of former combatants. The items were summed resulting in a scale ranging from zero to ten.

Multivariate regressions were used to examine the relation between dependent variables and several independent variables. We performed one multivariate logistic regression to examine factors associated with the intention to move among IDPs. The outcome was a dichotomous variable indicating the intention to move (yes = 1, no = 0). We conducted two independent linear regressions to examine factors associated with attitudes toward former combatants. The outcomes were a continuous variable based on a scale of attitudes toward (1) low-ranking LRA members and (2) former LRA leaders. For all the regressions, the predictors of the greatest interest were displacement, perception of the various settlement options, and exposure to violence.

### *2.5. Limitations*

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The data were collected from four Acholi districts in northern Uganda. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to all of Uganda or any other internal displacement situation. The nature and context of the conflict at the time of the study influenced respondents' views and attitudes. The study further relies on self-reported scales and responses that may have been affected by social desirability and recall errors. Such errors were minimized through the training of the interviewers and careful development of the consent form. Finally, causal relationships cannot be established because of the cross-sectional design of this study. Further research will be needed to assess these relationships.

## **3. Displacement and conflict experiences**

Before turning to the IDPs' views of their settlement and return options and the reintegration of former combatants, this section explores the displacement and conflict experiences of IDPs. Understanding this context and how it shapes the views and attitudes of IDPs is essential to the development of successful resettlement, or return and reintegration programmes that contribute to a durable peace.

Of 1,404 respondents who completed interviews, 93.9 per cent self-reported being displaced at the time of the survey. Women represent 47.8 per cent of the sample and over half of the respondents (56.2 per cent) self-reported

being able to read and write simple sentences in at least one language. Almost all (98.2 per cent) respondents were Acholi (ethnic group), which is consistent with the geographic area covered by this study. The average age of respondents is 34.9 years [standard deviation (SD) 14.5].

The majority (61.9 per cent) of the respondents lived in camps, while 27.4 per cent lived in new sites and 10.8 per cent lived in urban centres. Respondents in urban centres were less frequently displaced compared with those in camps and new sites (86.9 per cent, 94.5 per cent, and 95.3 per cent, respectively). Those who were displaced most frequently cited general insecurity (68.7 per cent), fear of the LRA (55.9 per cent), and being forced to move by the government (24.7 per cent) as the reason for their displacement.

While LRA violence may have prompted displacement in Uganda, the emergence of camps for IDPs resulted from a “protective” strategy as part of the Ugandan Government’s military operations. The Ugandan Government began moving people into what it called “protected villages” in the mid-1990s. Most of those camps were established around pre-existing villages and trading centres. From 2002, larger numbers of people were forced into these camps both by an upsurge in rebel activity and by government decree. Movements around the camps were further limited to a perimeter of a few hundred meters around the camps as part of security measures.

Protecting civilians in northern Uganda was the government’s justification for the displacement of virtually the entire population in northern Uganda. Yet, for years, violence against civilians continued unabated. Several questions were designed to measure respondents’ exposure to violence over the course of the conflict. Exposures to four categories of violent traumatic events were assessed: general events (for example, loss of assets), direct exposure (for example, being beaten), witness to violence, and coercion (for example, abduction, being forced to loot, or beat someone). Summative scales were computed for each category, assigning a score of one for positive answer to specific exposure. With regard to general exposure, almost all the respondents had their house destroyed (92.8 per cent), had assets stolen (animals: 91.1 per cent, other assets: 94.5 per cent), or lost income (88.1 per cent). Looking at direct exposure, 32.8 per cent reported having been beaten by the LRA and 4.7 per cent reported being maimed. The UPDF also committed violence: 7.8 per cent of respondents reported having been beaten by the UPDF. Respondents frequently witnessed violence, including attacks by the LRA (79.0 per cent), abduction (76.9 per cent), or beatings by the LRA (65.9 per cent) or the UPDF (59.9 per cent). One-third (38.4 per cent) of respondents also reported having witnessed the LRA killing someone. The LRA is known for having abducted tens of thousands of children and adults into its ranks to serve as soldiers, porters, and/or, in the case of women or girls, sexual partners for its commanders.<sup>13</sup> The results show that 27.8 per cent of the respondents reported having been

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<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Uprooted and Forgotten*, *op cit.*

**Table 1.** Exposure to violence scores among Acholi respondents (2007)

Summative scale score, mean (SD)	Camp (N = 869)	Urban centre (N = 151)	New site (N = 384)	Total (N = 1,404)
General exposure*	4.6 (0.84)	4.2 (1.38)	4.7 (0.87)	4.6 (0.93)
Witness exposure*	4.2 (2.34)	3.4 (2.48)	4.3 (4.31)	4.2 (2.31)
Direct exposure*	0.5 (0.68)	0.3 (0.61)	0.6 (0.73)	0.5 (0.69)
Coercion**	1.4 (1.90)	1.0 (1.67)	1.5 (1.82)	1.4 (1.86)

\*Differences between groups significant at  $P < 0.001$ , and \*\* $P = 0.006$ .

Abbreviations: SD, standard deviation;  $n$ , number of people, number of responses may vary due to item-level non-response.

abducted for over a week. More had been forced to carry loads (39.0 per cent) or to walk long distances (41.3 per cent) by the LRA. Many respondents also reported being forced by the LRA to loot (19.2 per cent), beat or injure people (9.9 per cent), or kill someone (4.2 per cent). Such events typically are associated with the LRA's abduction and forced recruitment of civilians.

Looking at the summative scales, out of maximum score of five, the average score for general exposure was 4.6 among all respondents, indicating the widespread nature of such events. The average score was 4.2 out of a maximum of nine for witness exposure, 0.5 out of a maximum of three for direct exposure, and 1.4 out of a maximum of six for coercion. The summative scales suggest significant differences in exposure to violence across settlement types: respondents in urban centres were less likely to report general exposure, direct exposure, witness exposure, and coercion compared with respondents in camps and villages (Table 1). Since the exposure information covers the entire period of the conflict, it is unclear whether the reported exposure predates the displacement or occurred while in the camps. Nevertheless, the dynamic of the conflict suggests that camps offered little protection, while urban centres were generally considered safer. For example, over 40,000 children, known as "night commuters", left their homes in camps every night to seek shelter and protection in urban centres.<sup>14</sup>

Since insecurity was central to displacement in northern Uganda, it is likely that perception of security will be a factor in the return/resettlement decision process. Respondents were asked to rank their perceived sense of security in a range of daily life situations. Reflecting the improved security at the time of the survey, a majority of the respondents felt safe to very safe in most situations. Events least frequently perceived as safe were meeting strangers, meeting people who were abducted by the LRA, and meeting former LRA leaders, as well as talking openly about the LRA and the UPDF. A summative scale was computed to measure the overall sense of security (Table 2). The scale ranged from one to ten, one being the safest and ten the least safe. Results suggest that respondents feel least safe in the camps compared with urban centres and

<sup>14</sup> K. C. Dunn, "Uganda: The lord's resistance army", *Review of African Political Economy*, 31, 2004, 99 at 139–42.

**Table 2.** Perception of security among Acholi respondents by type of settlement (2007)

	<b>Camp</b> ( <i>N</i> = 869)	<b>Urban centre</b> ( <i>N</i> = 151)	<b>New site</b> ( <i>N</i> = 384)
<b>Sense of security: safe and very safe, <i>n</i> (%)</b>			
Walking around in your camp/village at night	568 (65.4)	116 (76.8)	294 (76.6)
Going to your field/work/get water/wood	681 (78.4)	136 (90.1)	333 (86.7)
Sleeping at night	745 (86.0)	132 (87.4)	339 (88.3)
Going to the nearest town or village	685 (79.1)	134 (88.7)	336 (88.0)
Going to the nearest market	788 (90.9)	142 (94.0)	354 (92.4)
Meeting strangers	351 (40.6)	89 (58.9)	169 (44.1)
Meeting former LRA abductees	469 (54.4)	84 (55.6)	248 (64.9)
Meeting former LRA commanders	458 (52.8)	82 (54.3)	239 (62.4)
Talking to the authorities	673 (77.7)	120 (79.5)	311 (81.0)
Talking to UPDF soldiers	627 (72.4)	102 (67.5)	300 (78.1)
Talking openly in public about the LRA	456 (52.5)	71 (47.7)	243 (63.3)
Talking openly in public about the UPDF	519 (59.8)	81 (54.4)	261 (68.0)
Complaining to authorities when victim of a theft	707 (81.4)	117 (77.5)	310 (80.9)
Complaining to authorities when victim of violence	713 (82.0)	118 (78.1)	314 (82.0)
<b>Sense of security score (mean), maximum score = 10*</b>	4.1 (1.48)	3.8 (1.71)	3.9 (1.63)

\*Differences between groups significant at  $P < 0.001$ .

Abbreviations: *n*, number of respondents, number of responses may vary due to item-level non-response.

new sites. This suggests that the government of Uganda failed to deliver on its promise to bring protection to those who moved to the camps. Yet, until the Juba peace negotiations started, respondents were not allowed to return home and their freedom of movement was limited to a security zone of a few hundred meters around the camps.

In addition to exposure to violence and lack of security, displacement greatly affected the population's livelihood and social situations. In 2005, it was estimated that 85 per cent of all households in the camps were dependent on food aid.<sup>15</sup> The poverty level in Gulu alone was three times the national average.<sup>16</sup> That same year, poor sanitary conditions and insecurity resulted in a crude mortality rate (CMR) and an under-five mortality rate (U5MR) well above respective emergency thresholds (1 per 10,000 per day and 2 per 10,000 per day).<sup>17</sup>

To better capture perceptions of the socio-economic environment, respondents were asked to rate their perception of thirteen items, such as access to land for farming or health services (spectrum from "very bad" to "very

<sup>15</sup> M. Boas and A. Hatloy, "The Northern Uganda IDP Profiling Study", Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies and Department of Disaster Preparedness and Refugees of the Office of the Prime Minister, Sep. 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Gulu District Local Government, *Revised District Three-Year Development Plan 2005/06–2007/08*, Jun. 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Health of Uganda, UNICEF, and World Health Organization, *Health and Mortality Survey among Internally Displaced Persons in Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader Districts, Northern Uganda*, Jul. 2005, 29–32.

**Table 3.** Ranking of socio-economic factors among Acholi respondents by type of settlement (2007)

	<b>Camp</b> ( <i>N</i> = 869)	<b>Urban centre</b> ( <i>N</i> = 151)	<b>New site</b> ( <i>N</i> = 384)
<b>Perception of: Good to very good, <i>n</i> (%)</b>			
Housing	166 (19.1)	32 (21.2)	71 (18.5)
Access to water	335 (38.6)	32 (21.3)	131 (34.2)
Access to food	26 (3.0)	12 (7.9)	9 (2.3)
Opportunity to work	20 (2.3)	5 (3.3)	8 (2.1)
Access to land	58 (6.7)	6 (4.0)	181 (47.3)
Access to education	349 (40.2)	73 (48.3)	136 (35.5)
Quality of education	308 (35.6)	71 (47.0)	111 (28.9)
Access to health care	384 (44.2)	68 (45.3)	76 (19.8)
Quality of health care	272 (31.3)	55 (36.4)	64 (16.7)
Access to family planning	301 (34.7)	58 (38.4)	64 (16.8)
Relation with family	755 (87.1)	135 (89.4)	33 (86.5)
Relation with friends	762 (87.8)	134 (88.7)	358 (93.2)
Relation with community	777 (89.5)	133 (89.3)	349 (91.1)
<b>Summative scale, mean score (SD)</b>			
Perception of housing*	3.5 (1.10)	3.2 (1.09)	3.6 (1.04)
Perception of services*	14.8 (3.98)	13.5 (4.64)	17.3 (4.41)
Perception of livelihood opportunities*	8.7 (1.33)	8.9 (1.23)	7.1 (1.58)
Perception of basic needs	7.5 (1.66)	7.8 (1.73)	7.5 (1.76)
Perception of social relations	5.6 (1.89)	5.6 (2.11)	5.5 (1.75)

\*Differences between groups significant at  $P < 0.002$ .

good”). Using the thirteen items, five summative scales were designed to measure (1) perception of housing, (2) perception of services (education, health, family planning), (3) perception of livelihood opportunities (access to land, work), (4) perception of basic needs (food, water), and (5) perception of social relations (family, friends, and community). A higher score is associated with more negative views. Results for the original thirteen items are presented by type of settlement in Table 3. Reflecting the high dependence on food aid, few respondents in all settlement types ranked access to food and opportunity to find work as good or very good. Access to land ranked poorly among respondents in camps and urban centres, but was more frequently seen as good to very good in new sites, which are typically closer to the IDPs’ home villages. On the other hand, access to services, such as education and health care were more frequently seen as “good” to “very good” in camps and municipalities compared with new sites.

In addition, respondents were asked to compare seven items between their current place of living and villages, using “better”, “same”, or “worse”. Over half the respondents found access to services to be better in camps and urban centres compared with villages, while few said access to land or opportunities to find work were better. In new sites, access to services was not frequently seen as better than in villages, but nearly half the respondents said access to land was better. New sites and urban centres provided a more secure alternative to villages for over half the respondents. Only a third of those

**Table 4.** Comparison of socio-economic factors between current location and villages among Acholi respondents (2007)

	Camp ( <i>N</i> = 869)	Urban centre ( <i>N</i> = 151)	New site ( <i>N</i> = 384)
<b>Better in current settlement compared to village, <i>n</i> (%)</b>			
Access to food	26 (3.0)	5 (3.3)	16 (4.2)
Access to water	375 (43.2)	43 (28.5)	110 (28.6)
Access to education	509 (58.6)	101 (66.9)	137 (35.7)
Access to health care	509 (58.6)	99 (65.6)	76 (19.8)
Access to land	26 (3.0)	1 (0.7)	182 (47.4)
Opportunities to find work	16 (1.8)	14 (9.3)	12 (3.1)
Security	338 (38.9)	77 (51.0)	239 (62.2)

living in camps said security was better in the camps compared to villages (Table 4).

In summary, based on respondents' general perception, camps were viewed as providing better access to services, but lacked security and access to land and jobs needed to sustain the livelihood of the households. Urban centres were viewed as providing better access to services and security, but still offer limited opportunities for employment and farming. New sites, on the other hand, provide better access to land because they are generally closer to the villages of origin, but the trade-off is that access to social services is worse compared to camps and urban centres. Finally, villages were seen as providing the best access to land but the worst access to social services. As this research will show, these perceptions influence IDPs' decisions to return home, settle in their current location, or settle in a different location.

#### 4. Returning home

Consistent with the general assumption that most IDPs want to return home, 81.9 per cent of the displaced respondents reported that they were planning to move away from their current location if a hypothetical peace was achieved. Few non-displaced respondents reported they were planning to do so (18.6 per cent). Respondents in camps said most frequently they were planning to move away (85.6 per cent), compared with those in the urban centres (67.5 per cent) and those in the new sites (64.7 per cent). A multivariate logistic regression was conducted to examine the factors associated with a decision to move. The dependent variable was whether or not respondents were planning to move away. Gender, age, income, level of education, scales on perception of basic needs, social services, livelihood opportunities, and community relationships, sense of security, exposure to violence (general exposure, witness, direct exposure, and coercion), type of settlement, and displacement were considered as independent variables. Results are presented in Table 5.

Displaced respondents were more likely to report they intend to move away from their current location compared to those who were not displaced.

**Table 5.** Logistic regression: variables associated with intention to move among Acholi respondents (2007)

	Adjusted OR (95% CI)	P-value
Displaced (versus not displaced)	22.56 (12.28–41.45)	<0.001
Type of Settlement (versus camp)		
Urban centre	0.36 (0.22–0.57)	<0.001
New site	0.39 (0.27–0.55)	<0.001
Perception of livelihood opportunities <sup>a</sup>	1.33 (1.20–1.47)	<0.001
Income (log, 1 point increase) <sup>b</sup>	1.16 (1.07–1.25)	<0.001
Witness violence (1 point increase exposure) <sup>c</sup>	1.08 (1.01–1.15)	0.022

<sup>a</sup>A higher score corresponds to a more negative perception or sense of security.

<sup>b</sup>The logarithm of the income was used to yield a more symmetrical (normal) distribution of income. The OR is provided for an increase of 1 in the value of the logarithm of the income.

<sup>c</sup>The OR is provided for an increase of 1 in the score for the witness violence scale.

Abbreviations: OR, Odds Ratios; CI, Confidence Interval.

Respondents' type of settlement also influenced their desire to relocate. Respondents in urban centres and new sites were less likely to express desire to move compared to respondents in camps. Although camps provide good access to services such as education and health care, the limited livelihood opportunities undermine any local settlement option, prompting most IDPs to plan for moving away from the camps. Further, perception of security was lowest among respondents living in camps. New sites, on the other hand, provide relatively good access to land and sufficient access to services; they therefore offer a good alternative to returning to the villages.

In addition to the characteristics associated with the type of settlement, the results highlight the importance of livelihood opportunities in the decision whether and where to move. As perception of livelihood opportunities becomes more negative, the odds of intention to move increased. Two additional variables were found to be statistically associated with the intention to move: income and exposure to violence as a witness. Individuals with a higher income had higher odds of planning to move away. Financial constraints seem to influence the resettlement options because of the cost of rebuilding one's way of life and production system. Exposure to violence as a witness also increased the likelihood of wanting to relocate. This is possibly due to a desire to leave a place associated with violent memories. It may also reflect the sense of security. However, the scale used to measure sense of security was not found to be significant. Since the question on respondent intention to move was explored in the context of a hypothetical peace, security may not have been factored in the decision to move.

More generally, the analysis suggests that, in northern Uganda, finding a durable solution to displacement, for those who can afford it, means having to choose between the means to sustain their livelihoods or access to services. But, while the decision to return to the village, settle at their current location or settle in an alternate location ultimately lies in the hands of the displaced, policy choices play an important role in influencing that decision. During the

critical transition phase of peacebuilding, policy makers can choose to promote semi-urbanization encouraging local resettlement, or on the contrary, promote a rapid return to villages. The data from northern Uganda suggest that with the first alternative in mind, peacebuilding must provide for the development of livelihood alternatives and income-generating activities for the IDPs, while the second requires investment in decentralized health and education infrastructures, including physical and human resources, adapted to a rural population, not one concentrated in IDP camps. The findings support the proposition that a return and/or resettlement programme is, at its core, a development programme.<sup>18</sup> Regardless of the policy option advanced, a sustainable solution to displacement is central to achieving peace and has long-term implications in shaping the post-conflict society.<sup>19</sup> The involvement of the beneficiaries – the IDPs – along with other stakeholders is key to the successful design and implementation of such programmes.<sup>20</sup> But the involvement of IDPs in peace processes should not be limited to displacement-related issues. Arguably, the reintegration of former combatants is not a displacement-specific issue since it concerns the non-displaced as much as those displaced. However, the analyses presented next found that IDPs share views that may differ from the rest of the population.

## 5. Living with former combatants

The LRA's method of warfare had a profound psychological impact on the local population.<sup>21</sup> Not widely accepted as a liberation movement representing all Acholi, the LRA used extreme violence, especially against civilians, to instil terror in the local population. The violence has ranged from a low-intensity campaign of attacks to major massacres leading to the deaths of hundreds of people. Civilians have been the main targets. In the course of their campaigns, the LRA have mutilated their victims, including cutting off lips, ears, and noses, and have abducted children and adults, forcing girls and women into sexual slavery. Killings through brutal means were widespread.<sup>22</sup> Many attacks were conducted at night, when the LRA raided villages or IDP camps for food and other supplies. Once abducted, civilians were conscripted as combatants, porters, and sexual slaves. New recruits were often forced to commit atrocities as soon as they were abducted to make it more difficult for them to contemplate

<sup>18</sup> M. Cernea, "Bridging the research divide: Studying refugees and development oustees", in T. Allen (ed.), *In Search of Cool Ground, War, Flight and Homecoming in Northeast Africa*, London, James Currey Publisher, 1996, 314.

<sup>19</sup> K. Koser, *Addressing Internal Displacement in Peace Processes, Peace Agreements and Peace-Building*, Bern, The Brookings Institution – University of Bern, Sep. 2007.

<sup>20</sup> J. M. Cohen and N. Uphoff, "Participation's place in rural development: Seeking clarity through specificity", *World Development*, 8(3), 1980, 213–35.

<sup>21</sup> P. Vinck, P.N. Pham, E. Stover and H. M. Weinstein, "Exposure to war crimes and implications for peace building in northern Uganda", *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 298(5), 2007, 543–54.

<sup>22</sup> Refugee Law Project, *Behind the Violence: Causes, Consequences and the Search for Solutions to the War in Northern Uganda*, Refugee Law Project Working Paper No. 11, Kampala, Refugee Law Project, Faculty of Law, Makerere University, 2004, 23.

**Table 6.** Attitudes toward former LRA combatants (% comfortable) among Acholi respondents (2007)

	Lower ranking LRA	LRA leaders
<b>Comfortable, n (%)</b>		
Living in the same community	1062 (75.7)	1014 (72.4)
Living as close neighbours	1097 (78.2)	1058 (75.6)
Living as household member	1007 (71.8)	959 (68.5)
Sharing meal in your home	1217 (86.9)	1167 (83.5)
Working with them	1126 (80.3)	1090 (77.9)
Going to the same market	1269 (90.6)	1255 (89.6)
Sharing a drink (alcohol) together	890 (63.6)	870 (62.1)
Going to the same church	1326 (94.6)	1302 (92.9)
Marrying a member of your family	940 (67.0)	891 (63.6)
Attending the same school as your children	1182 (84.4)	1155(82.3)
<b>Attitude Summative Scale, Mean (SD)</b>	7.97 (3.07)	7.70 (3.28)

return. The LRA operates through a combination of extreme punishment for unwanted behaviour and incentives for good behaviour. Discipline is strict, and senior commanders are rewarded with power, resources, and wives. It was estimated in April 2006 that the LRA had abducted 24,000–38,000 children and 28,000 to 37,000 adults.<sup>23</sup> The whereabouts of many LRA abductees remains unknown. Given this context, it important to understand how the population perceives the LRA and how open they are to reintegration of former combatants.

The second objective of this research is to explore individual-level determinants of attitudes toward former combatants. A ten-item scale was used to examine respondents' perception of former combatants. Each item asked respondents if they were comfortable in the presence of former combatants in hypothetical daily life situations. A distinction was made between LRA leaders and lower ranking LRA members. We had expected to see a difference in attitude because lower ranking combatants were frequently forcibly recruited, and therefore are considered victims themselves. The results showed, however, no statistically significant difference in attitudes toward the two groups.

Respondents showed an overall positive attitude toward former combatants. Depending on the situation, between two-thirds to over 90 per cent of the respondents were comfortable in the presence of former combatants (Table 6). Respondents were most comfortable in situations that do not involve direct interactions, such as going to the same church or the same market.

As highlighted above, most LRA combatants were forcibly recruited and many respondents were themselves abducted at some point during the conflict (27.8 per cent self-reported having been abducted for at least a week).

<sup>23</sup> P. N. Pham, P. Vinck and E. Stover, "The Lord's resistance army and forced conscription in northern Uganda", *Human Rights Quarterly*, 30, 2008, 404–11.

Many more have friends and relatives who were abducted. A general empathy towards those who were forcibly recruited, and the shared experience and understanding of the experience of abduction likely influences respondents' openness to former combatants. In addition, most LRA combatants belong to the same ethnic group as the respondents (Acholi), reducing the negative role of group identity on openness to the reintegration of former combatants. Respondents' attitudes may further be rooted in the "culture of forgiveness and reconciliation" that seems to prevail among Acholi.<sup>24</sup>

It is also possible that respondents understated their level of discomfort in the presence of former combatants since the situations were hypothetical. From the perspective of those who were abducted, a more complicated reintegration process becomes apparent. Among those who had been abducted for at least a week, 56 per cent self-reported having experienced problems when returning. The types of problems most frequently reported were: health, injury (18.0 per cent), problems with family relationships (13.7 per cent), generally adjusting to life (13.7 per cent), difficulty with school, work (13.3 per cent), stigmatization (12.3 per cent), mental health (8.5 per cent), and problems with friends (7.6 per cent). Twelve reception centres were established by local communities and international humanitarian organizations in northern Uganda to help with the reinsertion of former LRA abductees. These centres provide basic care, counselling, and socialization services. Staff members further attempt to track parents and relatives before proceeding with reunification. However, the results of this survey suggest that only 21.3 per cent of those who were abducted by the LRA went through one of these centres. Despite the recognized importance of such programmes and evidence of their usefulness,<sup>25</sup> there has been only limited follow-up of those who returned and no systematic evaluation of the success of their reintegration.

Returning to data on the Acholi population, a summative scale was constructed using the daily life situations to measure attitudes toward former combatants. The result was a score from zero to ten, with a higher score corresponding to a more positive attitude. The average score was 7.97 for the attitude toward lower ranking LRA and 7.70 for the attitudes toward LRA leaders. Two stepwise linear regressions were conducted to explore factors associated with openness toward former combatants using the scale scores as dependent variables. Independent variables included gender, age, income, level of education, scales on perception of basic needs, social services, livelihood opportunities, and community relationship, sense of security, exposure to violence (general exposure, witness, direct exposure, and coercion), type of settlement, and displacement. Results are presented in Table 7.

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<sup>24</sup> E. Baines, "The haunting of Alice: Local approaches to justice and reconciliation in northern Uganda", *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 1(1), 2007, 91–114.

<sup>25</sup> T. Allen and M. Schomerus, *A Hard Homecoming – Lessons Learned from the Reception Center Process in Northern Uganda*, New York, USAID, UNICEF, 2006.

**Table 7.** Linear regression: Variables associated with attitudes toward former LRA combatants among Acholi respondents (2007)

	<b>Lower ranking LRA</b>		<b>LRA leaders</b>	
	<b>Regr. Coeff. (95% CI)</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>Regr. Coeff. (95% CI)</b>	<b>P-value</b>
Gender (Female)	-1.66 (-1.99, -1.33)	<0.001	-1.77 (-2.11, -1.42)	<0.001
Sense of security (insecurity) <sup>a</sup>	-0.27 (-0.38, -0.17)	<0.001	-0.28 (-0.39, -0.17)	<0.001
Perception of basic needs <sup>a</sup>	-0.14 (-0.23, -0.44)	0.004	-0.16 (-0.27, -0.06)	0.002
Perception of livelihood opportunities <sup>a</sup>	NS		-0.13 (-0.24, -0.2)	0.017
Perception of social relation <sup>a</sup>	-0.10 (-0.19, -0.01)	0.031	NS	
Displaced (yes)	0.98 (0.34, 1.63)	0.003	0.87 (0.19, 1.56)	0.012

<sup>a</sup>A higher score corresponds to a more negative perception or sense of security.  
Abbreviations: Regr. Coeff, Regression coefficient; CI, Confidence Interval.

Unlike other research, the Uganda data do not suggest that exposure to violence was directly associated with less openness toward former combatants.<sup>26</sup> Being displaced even resulted in scoring a more positive attitude toward both lower ranking LRA members and LRA leaders. Several factors may explain this finding. Compared to non-displaced individuals, displaced people were twice more likely to have experienced abduction for over a week (OR: 2.25, 95% CI: 1.23–4.11,  $P=0.008$ ). Having more frequently experienced abduction themselves, IDPs may be more likely to empathize with, and be positive about, the return of former combatants. Other factors such as exposure of IDPs to awareness and outreach programmes by traditional and cultural leaders may have influenced their opinions. Importantly, the results suggest that on this issue, apparently unrelated to their displacement status, IDPs appear as a singular group with views that differ from those who were not displaced.

The socio-economic environment influenced respondents' attitudes toward former combatants. More negative perception of access to basic needs (food and water) translated into a more negative attitude toward both lower ranking LRA members and LRA leaders. A more negative perception of the livelihood opportunities (access to land and work) resulted in a more negative attitude toward former LRA leaders, and a more negative perception of community relations resulted in a more negative attitude toward lower ranking LRA members. The implications are important for the design of successful reintegration programmes. Results suggest that DDR programmes must be accompanied by programmes aimed at improving the satisfaction of basic needs, livelihood, and overall community relations. In addition, guaranteeing security also

<sup>26</sup> M. Humphreys and J. Weinstein, "Demobilization and reintegration", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 51(4), 2007, 531–67.

contributes to successful reintegration. The regression analysis suggests that feeling insecure is associated with less openness toward former combatants.

Finally, the results suggest that women are less open toward former combatants than men. In most protracted displacement situations women are more vulnerable to health problems and abuse, especially sexual violence. Women in northern Uganda may be fearful of former combatants because they are at higher risk of abuse when they go outside of camps to gather wood, tend gardens, collect water, and perform other domestic tasks.<sup>27</sup>

## 6. Conclusions

The “protective village” policy of the Ugandan Government that led to the displacement of virtually the entire population in the Acholi districts failed to bring protection to the civilians. Respondents in urban centres were less likely to report general exposure, direct exposure, witness exposure, and coercion compared to respondents in camps. Those who settled in IDP camps continued to be the victims of LRA attacks and the predatory behaviours of UPDF soldiers, and they more frequently expressed a sense of insecurity compared to respondents who settled in urban centres and new sites. Lack of food and water and epidemics further transformed the camps into humanitarian disasters. At the same time, restricted movement within the camp perimeter and on-going insecurity meant that displaced people were cut-off from their way of life and livelihood activities, especially farming. On a positive side, the semi-urbanized setting of camps permitted more effective delivery of and access to services, including education and health care.

As benchmarks of physical peace (that is, improvement in security and progress in peace negotiations) were achieved in northern Uganda, IDPs began to return home. But many chose to remain in camps or move to new sites, an intermediate settlement closer to the villages that still functions like a camp. The decision-process regarding whether to move is influenced by multiple factors. This research found that a negative perception of livelihood opportunities, including access to land and to work opportunities was associated with increased odds of planning to move. The type of settlement currently occupied (camp, urban setting, and new site) also influenced the decision to move, possibly because each type of settlement is perceived as providing different levels of access to services and livelihood opportunities. Camps were viewed as providing good access to services but lacked security and access to land and jobs needed to sustain the livelihood of the households; urban centres were viewed as providing better access to services and security, but as still offering limited opportunities for employment and farming; new sites were seen as providing a better access to land because they are generally closer to the villages of origin, but the trade-off is that access to social services is worse compared to

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<sup>27</sup> M. C. Okello and L. Hovil, “Confronting the reality of gender-based violence in northern Uganda”, *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 1(3), 2007, 433–43.

camps and urban centres; and in comparison with other settlement types, villages were identified as providing the best access to land but the worst access to social services. The Uganda data suggest that IDPs, like refugees, base their decisions to move, in part, on a comparison of conditions at their current place of living with conditions at other settlement options.<sup>28</sup>

The implications are important for the design and implementation of policies to return IDPs or to settle them in their current location or elsewhere. In the case of northern Uganda, the government has the choice to support a semi-urbanization process by providing IDPs with employment opportunities. On the other hand, if a return to rural life is preferred, investment is needed to ensure that returnees have access to basic health care and education. Importantly, the findings suggest that expecting IDPs to return home simply because the security is achieved is not a valid assumption. Rather, return and settlement policies must be developed at the core of the peacebuilding process and be integrated with broader human development programmes since they share the same mechanisms (for example, income-generating activities, investment in infrastructure, and social services).

In many settings, the demobilization and reintegration of former combatants within a hostile community is a daunting challenge. In Uganda, however, looking at attitudes toward former combatants showed that Acholi were generally comfortable in the presence of both lower ranking LRA members and LRA leaders. The widespread forced conscription of civilians is likely to have created a sense of empathy among the community. In addition, former combatants do not face the hurdle of strong group identity when reintegrating into the communities. Nevertheless, the reintegration process is not straightforward, and many former abductees reported experiencing problems in their relations with friends and family upon their return. Linear regression analyses found that gender, perception of security, perception of basic needs, perception of livelihood opportunities, perception of relationships with the community, and displacement status at the time of survey were associated with the level of comfort toward lower ranking LRA members and LRA leaders.

Again, the findings have several implications. Successful reintegration requires first a relatively secure environment in which violence is not an acceptable means of resolving a conflict. Perception of security was associated with increased odds of being comfortable in the presence of former combatants. Second, satisfaction of basic needs and access to livelihood opportunities are needed for successful reintegration. The findings are further supported by anecdotal evidence of resentment among the population toward former combatants who receive a reintegration package, when nothing is provided to the IDPs. To avoid stigma associated with such “positive discrimination”, it is important to coordinate reintegration with broader development programmes aimed at satisfying the basic needs. Furthermore, the fact that displacement was associated

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<sup>28</sup> Koser, “The case of Mozambican refugees in Malawi”, *op. cit.*

with a more positive attitude toward former combatants points to the unique needs and views of IDPs that need to be taken into account in the peacebuilding process.

Overall, the findings suggest that peacebuilding policies including return, settlement, and reintegration must be part of a broader human development approach taking advantage of the opportunities for reform offered by transitional periods. Return and reintegration policies are more likely to be successful if they are part of programmes that develop access to basic needs and services and provide opportunities to rebuild or renew livelihood strategies. IDPs, especially in situations of large-scale and protracted displacement, are an important constituent among the population. The concerns of IDPs must therefore be taken into account by peace negotiators and donor agencies, and IDPs must become actively involved in peacebuilding, not merely bystanders to the process.