Refugee Law Project Working Paper No. 12

Negotiating Peace:

RESOLUTION OF CONFLICTS IN UGANDA'S WEST NILE REGION

JUNE 2004

The Refugee Law Project (RLP) was established in November 1999 with the aim of protecting and promoting the rights of forced migrants in Uganda. The RLP operates as an autonomous project within the Faculty of Law of Makerere University, and focuses on three main areas: legal assistance, training, and research and advocacy. The Refugee Law Project works towards ensuring that asylum seekers, refugees, and internally displaced persons are, as specified under national and international law, treated with the fairness and consideration due fellow human beings.

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REPORT SUMMARY

This report considers the issues that led to the creation and eventual dissolution of the four main groups of insurgents that have operated in West Nile – the Former Uganda National Army (FUNA), the first Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF), the UNRF II, and the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF). The conflict has been played out primarily within West Nile and has had a serious impact on the stability of the region. The genesis of rebellion lies in the indiscriminate revenge killings following the overthrow of the dictator, Idi Amin Dada in 1979. Once exiled, members of the former army took the decision to fight their way back to Uganda. While the insurgents initially enjoyed a relatively high degree of civilian support for their actions, this dissipated once they began to get caught increasingly in the crossfire.

Following the overthrow of the Okello regime in 1986, these warring factions from West Nile then retreated to their respective home areas where, despite initial fear of revenge, the National Resistance Army/Movement (NRA/M) successfully acted to diffuse much of their fear. However, suspicion and mistrust between the UNRF and the NRA, and the eventual arrest and harassment of UNRF officers, led to the formation of the UNRF II in the mid-1990s. In addition, the WNBF formed under the leadership of former Uganda Army (UA) officer Juma Oris and appears, in particular, to have capitalised on the lack of development opportunities in the region in order to recruit members.

In ending the WNBF and the UNRF II insurgencies, local mechanisms for reconciliation were of primary importance: the active participation of the local communities laid the groundwork for negotiations, and their remarkable capacity for forgiveness was vital to the success of the peace process. The outcome illustrates that it is possible to reconcile people with a long history of vengeance and hatred where cultural mechanisms exist, and where there is the political will to do so. While the signing of the peace agreement was a symbolic end to the conflict and the beginning of a process of reconstruction and reintegration, numerous issues remain that need addressing in order to create sustainable peace in the region. The report concludes with a brief exploration of lessons learned and the implications for ongoing peace and reconciliation efforts in Uganda.

The principle investigators, Zachary Lomo and Lucy Hovil, were assisted by Jane Akello, Emmanuel Bagenda and Roger Furrer. The team would like to thank all those who participated in interviews and focus group discussions, as well as the many individuals and organisations that assisted us in contacting interviewees and sharing their own perceptions and understanding. In addition, the study would not have been possible without the support of CARE International who provided the necessary funding.

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADF: Allied Democratic Forces (operational in Western Uganda)
AROPIC: the Aringa-Obongi Peace Initiative Committee
DANIDA: Danish government development agency
DED-ZFD: Acronym for the German development agencies' civil peace service
DISO: District Internal Security Officer
DRC: Democratic Republic of the Congo
FUNA: Former Uganda National Army
IDP: Internally Displaced Person—a displaced person remaining in his or her own country
GoU: Government of Uganda
GoS: Government of the Sudan
LC: Local Council or member of the local council
LDU: Local Defence Unit
LRA: Lord's Resistance Army (operational primarily in the Acholi and Langi districts)
MONUC: Acronym for the United Nations peacekeeping body in the DRC.
NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation
NRA/M: National Resistance Army/Movement
Obote I: The first administration of Milton Obote, 1962-1971
Obote II: The second administration of Milton Obote, 1979-1985
PRAFORD: Participatory Rural Action for Development, an organization in Yumbe
RDC: Resident District Commissioner—a local representative appointed by the GoU
TPO: the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization, local branch of an international organization working with war-affected individuals and communities.
UPDF: Uganda People's Defence Force (the current Ugandan national army)
UN: United Nations
UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNLA: Uganda National Liberation Army (supported the Obote II administration)
UNRF: Uganda National Rescue Front
UNRF II: Uganda National Rescue Front II
USAID: United States Agency for International Development
TPDF: Tanzania People's Defence Forces
WNBF: West Nile Bank Front

1 INTRODUCTION

Since dictator Idi Amin fell from power in 1979, the West Nile region has suffered from both revenge killings by the national army taking over power, and the impact of a number of rebel insurgencies operating within the region. This period of armed rebellion appears to have all but ended with the signing of a negotiated peace agreement between the most recent rebel group, the Uganda National Rescue Front II (UNRF II) and the government of Uganda (GoU) on 24th December 2002. Although the event went virtually unnoticed by the rest of the world, it was a significant moment in the resolution of conflicts that have dominated Uganda's recent history. However, there is also the recognition that the potential for a return to armed rebellion still exists: peace agreements, while creating an immediate end to hostilities, do not necessarily guarantee sustainable peace unless fully implemented by all parties involved. On the national level, the successful implementation of the peace agreement and the reintegration of the ex-combatants into the community will directly impact ongoing peace building efforts elsewhere in the country.

As a result, this report seeks to consider the numerous issues that led to the creation and eventual dissolution of the four main insurgent groups that have operated in West Nile – the Former Uganda National Army (FUNA), the first Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF), the UNRF II, and the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF). From their bases in the Sudan and Zaire/Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), most of the conflict has been played out within West Nile, seriously compromising the stability of the region. Although the level of violence perpetrated by the different rebel groups has never reached the same level of intensity and media attention as the more infamous Lords Resistance Army (LRA) in the adjacent districts of Northern Uganda, the consequent impact on the civilian population has still been profound. As the region now looks towards greater stability and renewed economic development, it is vital that events of the past are documented, both in order to allow other regions to benefit from the numerous lessons that have been learned through the process, and to allow voices that have previously remained silent to be heard. Furthermore, while this report focuses on a specific series of conflicts following the overthrow of Idi Amin, the perceptions of marginalization and of a secondary social status are a recurring theme in the history of Uganda's conflicts.

The recent history of the region is highly contested and subjective: there are no specific reports on the insurgencies and there is minimal documentation of the conflicts or their related peace processes. Furthermore, the bearing of history on the present makes it politically and economically charged, and individuals and groups have vested interests in maintaining specific accounts of what has taken place. Thus, this particular history is simply based on a synthesis of all the different voices and opinions that contributed to the study, in the full acknowledgment of the fact that events in West Nile are open to numerous interpretations. Furthermore, having been fragmented through conflict and displacement, people in West Nile appear to lack a defined social consciousness that could articulate a commonly agreed history during this period.

However, while a consensus on precise details is almost impossible to develop, there are many common themes and perceptions that emerge, and this is what forms the focus of this study. Based on 88 interviews and focus group discussion in the three districts most

affected by the conflict (Arua, Moyo and Yumbe), as well as further interviews conducted in Kampala, the study seeks to understand the causes of the conflicts, why they were resolved more or less through negotiations, and what lessons can be learned from the processes. Finally, it considers briefly any useful application to resolving the conflict in northern Uganda.

1.1 Background to the insurgencies

The West Nile region, which lies in northwest Uganda, currently comprises of five districts – Arua, Yumbe, Moyo, Nebbi and Adjumani. Yumbe, the most recent district, was only created in 2002. There is a wide diversity of ethnic groups throughout the region, including the Lugbara, Aringa, Alur, Madi, Kakwa, Lendu and the Kebu. It is bordered by the Sudan in the north, and the DRC to the west.

Idi Amin, who came to power in 1971 by deposing President Milton Obote, was from West Nile. He was eventually himself deposed in April 1979 by Ugandans in exile under the umbrella of the Uganda National Liberation Front/Army (UNLF/A) with the support of the Tanzania People's Defence Forces (TPDF). During Amin's notorious reign, the Uganda Army (UA) came to be seen as largely a West Nile institution with a majority of the high ranking officers being seen to have come from the region, and the subsequent purging of high ranking Acholi and Langi officers. Consequently, when Idi Amin was overthrown in April, the entire Uganda Army was ousted, fleeing to West Nile. Following the departure of the TPDF, revenge killings by the UNLA began against former UA soldiers, as well as civilians within the West Nile region, forcing the former UA to retreat into the Sudan and the DRC, along with most of the civilian population from the region.

The remnants of the UA then re-organised and, in October 1980, launched an attack overrunning a number of UNLA garrisons in Koboko, Moyo, Yumbe and Arua, before splitting into two factions – UA, later to be known as FUNA, and the UNRF. They both continued to attack government forces over the next few years, until the successful coup of Tito Okello Lutwa deposed the Obote II administration in July 1985. Prior to and following his rise to power, General Okello extended an olive branch of peace and called on the different warring factions in West Nile to join his government and end the fighting. Okello's government was short lived, however, and in January 1986 Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army/Movement (NRA/M) overthrew him and a new political dispensation was put in place.

The initial confusion following the NRM gaining power temporarily gave way to a period of calm, in which many people from exile began to return cautiously to assess the possibility for eventual repatriation. However towards the end of the 1980s this calm was ruptured when key UNRF army officers, including their leader, Moses Ali, were arrested, leading to a period of heightened mistrust and preparing the ground for a return to armed conflict. By the mid-1990s, a second wave of armed insurgency had begun in West Nile operating from bases in the DRC and the Sudan, first with the West Nile Bank Front, and then a reconstituted UNRF, the UNRF II. Both groups were eventually brought out of the bush, culminating in the signing of the UNRF II peace agreement in December 2002.

2 THE FIRST WAVE OF CONFLICT: UA, FUNA AND UNRF (1980 – 1985)

The following section analyses the first wave of conflict in the region, which began in the early 1980s during the Obote II regime. It considers both the root causes that led the exiled former soldiers to re-group and eventually split into two separate armed insurgencies, and the ways in which the communities perceived them, particularly given the fact that the majority of civilians from West Nile were in exile in the Sudan and DRC during this period.

2.1 Sources of conflict

There was a clear consensus that the main cause of this first wave of rebellion in West Nile was the UNLA's general attitude of stigmatisation and revenge following the overthrow of the Amin administration. In particular, the fact that almost the entire Uganda Army fled following the collapse of Idi Amin's regime in April 1979 created, in effect, an army in exile with few options available. As an ex-UNRF combatant explained:

> The problem in Uganda is the culture of pushing out a whole army and replacing it with a new one. Then you have people who are so well trained. Then you start harassing the former soldiers. What do you expect? Why should the whole of West Nile be forced to feel guilty for Amin's sins? Human beings were pegged to the ground alive, left dying, rotting. So could we just sit and not fight the government of the day? People had to fight against such injustices.[1]

All soldiers from the Uganda Army were seen as legitimate targets for revenge and were treated accordingly. In the words of another former UA soldier, "We saw ourselves as Ugandan soldiers, but were treated as Amin's soldiers."[2] While it is indisputable that some members of the armed forces committed appalling atrocities during Amin's rule, the issue here is the extent to which collective condemnation and stereotyping countered a basic principle of criminal justice: that criminal responsibility is individual and not collective

The indiscriminate revenge did not stop with the ousted army. All West Nile civilians were subject to attacks by UNLA soldiers. Thus all of West Nile's citizens were held collectively guilty for the atrocities committed during Amin's regime. As one man said, "The persecution was not just against former Amin soldiers but all West Nilers. As long as you were from here, they planted allegations against you and harassed you."[3] The extent of the atrocities was appalling:

> The UNLA went into West Nile and started to massacre there. There are brutal stories from that time – babies being thrown up into the air and being caught on bayonets, that kind of thing. There was no attempt by the UNLA to reach out and reassure the West Nilers.[4]

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[1] Interview with ex-UNRF combatant, Kampala, 27th April 2004.
[2] Interview with former UA soldier, Yumbe, 25th April 2004.
[3] Interview with brother to the late Idi Amin, Arua, 19th April 2004.
[4] Interview with Major General Katumba Wamala, Inspector General of Police, Kibuli Police headquarters, 15th April 2004.

An event frequently referred to was when UNLA soldiers opened fire on a group of approximately 1500 unarmed civilians who had fled to an ICRC compound in Ombachi and were taking refuge there. It resulted in 53 civilians being killed, and approximately 100 injured. After the shooting, the soldiers looted and abducted several young girls to carry the loot and later become 'wives'.[5] Many living in that area saw the massacre as a turning point. Furthermore, many recounted the official response of the UNLA subsequent to the event:

> The day after the massacre, the commander of the UNLA, Army Chief David Oyite Ojok, came to address the survivors. He said he thought all the tribes were dead, and was surprised to see so many still living. He said they wanted to clear West Nile and leave it as a game reserve. He said that he only laughs at a dead Lugbara, but not at a live one. Because of this, many fled. They saw his words as a threat.[6]

Thus, as a result of such widespread atrocities, approximately 500,000 persons, or almost 80% of the population of West Nile, were forced into exile[7] along with the ousted army. The combination of physical abuse and verbal threats left people with little choice but to flee, and those who remained risked being killed: "War and devastation started and we were all forced into exile… The whole of Moyo district fled. All the tukuls[8] were burned, everyone who stayed behind was killed, even children."[9]

Having fled with their arms, and with few other options for earning a living given that, for the majority, their only training was military, the situation contained all the ingredients for armed rebellion. Once in exile, members of the former army took the decision that there was little alternative but to fight their way back to Uganda. As one civilian said, even if options had been available, few would have been able to capitalise on them:

> The government didn't compensate Amin's soldiers. They were treated as stupid. They felt as if soldiers trained abroad had been thrown away. They did not allow them to earn a living. They were not given training on how to run a business or how to dig. The army was the only vocation they knew.[10]

Major General Bamuze, for instance, gave his perspective on the decision to form the UNRF: "In 1979, I went into exile… We were asking, now what is our future? How can we go back to Uganda? We had to fight because the government was fighting our people in the country."[11]

In October 1980, the ousted UA, calling for the restoration of Idi Amin, launched a series of surprise attacks on UNLA targets in West Nile. Within days they had captured a significant area of land, but were not able to maintain their hold on it for long. By the end of the year,

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[5] Interview with Local government official, Ombachi, Arua, 18th April 2004.
[6] Focus group discussion with two men and one woman, Ombachi, Arua, 20th April 2004.
[7] Robert Gersony, *The Anguish of Northern Uganda*, August 1997.
[8] A tukul is a small, grass-thatched, wattle walled house.
[9] Interview with retired civil servant, Moyo, 27th April 2004.
[10] Interview with religious leader, Arua, 15th April 2004.
[11] Interview with Major General Bamuze, Fairway Hotel, Kampala, 28th April 2004.

rifts had emerged within the insurgent army, and they were soon repelled from most of these positions by the UNLA. Mindful of the impact of a sudden withdrawal from West Nile on the civilian population, the insurgents withdrew in stages. This withdrawal appeared to have functioned along ethnic lines, with the Aringa officers and those sympathetic to them going towards Yumbe, and the Kakwa officers and others moving towards Koboko. Most eventually then retreated into the Sudan or the DRC.

Divisions between former officers probably account for one of the primary reasons why the groups could not present a coherent, co-ordinated force against the UNLA. Conflicts between different factions were exacerbated by tensions over defining the leadership of the fighting force. There were additional differences between those who saw the principal aim of insurgency as being the restoration of Idi Amin, and those who were primarily interested in liberating West Nile and returning back home with the civilians. Tensions came to a head with the arrival of a cache of arms dropped at a Yumbe airstrip – which had been prepared for the event – by a plane reportedly from Libya. Some accounts state that when the arms arrived, most of the fighting forces thought that they were entitled to their share. But in practice, arms were given to selected officers on the basis of ethnicity, a number of Kakwa officers were allegedly rounded up, and internal fighting ensued.[12]

Thus, in February 1981 there was open fighting between the factions. Often articulated as conflict between the Aringa and Kakwa communities, the divisions between the two groups became increasingly clear, and it was soon apparent that a new rebel group calling itself the UNRF was in place, headed by Moses Ali. The UNRF remained in Uganda and continued to engage in warfare with the UNLA, while the majority of FUNA insurgents retreated into the Sudan and the DRC, launching occasional ambushes against the UNLA. Of the two groups, the UNRF appears to have been generally more active. While Moses Ali was the official leader he was, in fact, in exile in Pakistan mobilising external support and resources for the duration of the UNRF insurgency. Major Amin Onzi was the *de facto* leader, co-ordinating operations on the ground. The leadership of FUNA, on the other hand, appears to have been much less clearly defined – informants, reflecting an apparent lack of clarity and coherence within the group, gave a number of different names.

This situation continued until 1985 when Tito Okello Lutwa sought to overthrow Obote II and offered an olive branch by calling all the fighting factions in West Nile to join his government and bring peace to Uganda. Many informants referred to confusion within the UNRF at this point, generated by what was considered a mutual agreement between the UNRF and the NRA not to fight each other, which had been breached by the UNRF's partially joining the Okello junta.[13]

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[12] Interview with key informant, Kampala, 26th May 2004; Interview with ex-combatant, Yumbe, 23rd April 2004.

[13] For instance, focus group discussion, 2 male ex-combatants, Yumbe, 22nd April 2004, interview with a male cadre, Yumbe, 24th April 2004 and interview with a male ex-combatant, Yumbe 25th April 2004.

2.2 Displacement, exile and community perceptions

While the above synopsis tends to suggest some orderly occurrence of events, on the ground there was considerable confusion among civilians from West Nile as to exact dates and events that led to the formation of both FUNA and the UNRF. Indeed many informants did not distinguish between the two groups. Regardless of the lack of clarity, initially there was a considerable degree of community support for the fighting groups, especially in Koboko and Yumbe. The insurgents, who were sometimes referred to as their own children, were seen as liberators, sacrificing their lives in order to return their people home.

However, this attitude reflects the fact that the UNRF and FUNA were operating in a context where almost the entire civilian population of West Nile was living in exile. Inevitably, the way in which the civilians perceived and responded to the armed insurgents was clearly connected to the extreme hardships experienced in displacement. Not only had the refugees lost everything fleeing Uganda, but the areas they moved to – southern Sudan and northeastern DRC – were, themselves, insecure. Several informants related stories of looting and rape taking place even after they had fled Uganda. As one woman said, "In exile, the Congolese looted and raped us. Amin's soldiers too. They had nothing, so they looted. We were just refugees."[14] Furthermore, international assistance was disorganised at best, and non-existent at worse forcing people to live in appalling conditions. One man described his experience of being a refugee:

> We went into exile when I was a youth in [school grade] S1. We were tortured psychologically – we had no options, no funds for education. We didn't live in the camps in the DRC, because there was nothing… Food was scarce during the exile and many died trying to return to harvest what they had left behind… If they found you, the UNLA would torture or kill you.[15]

Thus, caught between the severe conditions of displacement and the dangers of returning home, not surprisingly there was a degree of support for armed rebellion that was focused on creating the conditions for return. As one civilian said, "The suffering in exile is what forced people to support the rebels. People wanted to come home."[16]

Furthermore, poverty provided fertile ground for recruitment: as a community worker said, "Young people saw rebellion as the only option. UNRF promised $300 for enlistment. Nothing else was available."[17] Informants recounted how they gave the rebels food and medicine, and provided intelligence on the activities of government soldiers.[18] As Brig Nassur Ezaga, later to become a commander of the UNRF II, said, "UNRF was greatly supported by the community because our people were driven into the Sudan and they

[14] Focus group discussion with four teachers, three men and one woman, Maracha Country, 19th April 2004.
[15] Interview with Local government official, Ombachi, Arua, 18th April 2004.
[16] Interview with civilian, Arua, 19th April 2004.
[17] Interview with two community workers, Yumbe, 23rd April 2004.
[18] Interview with ex-UNRF combatant, Arua, 14th April 2004.

wanted to come back home. The people had left everything behind, especially their shambas and property."[19]

However, others showed the extent to which such support was often given reluctantly or, in some cases, through force. Indeed, for many, the UNRF and FUNA insurgents were little better than the UNLA soldiers:

> During Obote II, people were forced to be with the rebels. Those who returned, the government forced them to inform on the supporters in the community. There were mass killings. Young girls were raped by both sides. If you responded [to either group's atrocities] you were killed. Sometimes they would make men be the pillow of their wives while they were raping them. All the groups were just considered *Gorogoro*.[20]

Lack of support for the groups was exemplified by accounts of the October 1980 invasion of UNLA positions in the region: numerous informants also referred to the fact that once the rebels reached Arua they simply started looting coffee, before withdrawing to Congo and the Sudan with their goods. Inevitably, the association with such criminal activity was strongly denied by ex-combatants from FUNA and the UNRF alike. Indeed, informants from both sides accused the other of having been the ones responsible for the looting.[21] However, civilian opinion remained sceptical of the combatants' actions on this occasion.

Thus, while the insurgents initially enjoyed a relatively high degree of civilian support for their actions, this began to dissipate once they began to get caught increasingly in the crossfire. Furthermore, the lack of understanding as to the specific agendas and profiles of the two groups reflects the extent to which the groups failed to articulate their grievances, as well as the lack of a coherent leadership that otherwise may have galvanised unity. As a result, it was clear that the majority of people had little idea why the groups were fighting beyond a general notion of survival or regaining their former status within the army.

2.4 The Okello regime: July 1985 – January 1986

The coup of Tito Okello Lutwa and Bazilio Okello in 1985 brought a lull in fighting within the region. Okello Lutwa invited all the insurgent groups into his government, and there are reports that the elders in both Acholi and West Nile communities met and held ceremonies in order to reconcile the people from the two regions.[22] Indeed, before the coup, attempts had already been made by the fighting groups in West Nile and northern Uganda to co-ordinate efforts to oust Obote's regime from power: they were united by their acknowledgement that Obote's regime was committing atrocities against Ugandans. Thus there was a level of coordination and communication taking place between the different groups. Furthermore, there was reportedly a mutual support agreement between Moses Ali's UNRF and Museveni's NRA brokered in Libya.[23]

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[19] Interview with Brig. Nassur Ezaga Ogara, Commander of UNRF II, Yumbe, 24th April 2004.
[20] Focus group discussion with four teachers, three men and one woman, Maracha Country, 19th April 2004.
[21] Interview with ex-UNRF combatant, Arua, 14th April 2004.
[22] Interview with religious worker, Arua, 14th April 2004.
[23] Interviews with Community leader, Yumbe, 23rd April 2004 and a cadre, Yumbe 24th April 2004.

While there was no clear indication as to the outcome of these encounters, the meeting between the UNRF and the NRA appears to have been of particular significance, given that it would later play an important role in understanding the eventual formation of the UNRF II. Indeed, numerous informants referred to some form of official agreement between Moses Ali and Museveni in Libya, where Quadaffi was allegedly supplying both groups with arms. An interviewee in Moyo had reportedly personally seen the correspondence between Moses Ali and Museveni saying that Moses would be made vice-president if the NRA took power first.[24] However, Moses Ali himself denied that a formal agreement existed stating, instead, that it was "a loose understanding based on the quest of liberating our country from Obote's dictatorship."[25]

Whatever agreement may have existed, according to the majority of interviewees, it was then compromised when some UNRF combatants joined Okello Lutwa in overthrowing Obote II:

> But then the trouble came when Lutwa went to Sudan and wanted UNRF to join them to overthrow Obote. It did this, without consulting its former ally, the NRA. In this way, the UNRF breached the terms of the Memo of Understanding, thereby forcing the NRA to continue the struggle against Lutwa, because in its view, Lutwa was not different from Obote. Subsequently UNRF soldiers upon arriving in Kampala found themselves fighting their former allies at Katonga.[26]

Despite its shortcomings, the significance of the Okello period was the fact that groups that formerly could not agree and who were determined to destroy each other, had accepted to put their differences aside and work together to build a united and peaceful Uganda. However, the Okello regime was short lived, and was overthrown by the NRA in January 1986, heralding a new political dispensation and a consequent confusion as to the future status of previous rebel groups. The immediate impact was that thousands of soldiers from both FUNA and the UNRF, along with some civilians, withdrew into West Nile and eventually into exile.

3 A SECOND WAVE OF CONFLICT: THE WNBF AND THE UNRF II (1986 – 2002)

Thus, following the overthrow of the Okello regime, warring factions from West Nile retreated to their respective home areas. FUNA seemingly faded from the scene soon after: most of the officers either retreated back to the DRC and the Sudan, or simply remained in Uganda under cover of civilian life. The UNRF, on the other hand, had greater cause for optimism given their earlier contacts with the NRA, and also appears to have maintained a more coherent command structure. Although there was initial fear of a repeat of the revenge attacks meted out by the UNLA on the part of all groups, the consensus among the informants was that the NRA acted differently, diffusing much of this concern. As one local government official said, "People feared a repeat of '79 – '80 so some decided to flee

[24] Interview with district official, Moyo, 27th April 2004.
[25] Interview with General Moses Ali, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Disaster Preparedness, Kampala, 8th June 2004.
[26] Interview with former member of UNRF political wing, Nairobi, January 2003.

back to exile. But as troops came to Arua they were met by elders, they talked, and it was a much better move. There was not so much looting and killing."[27]

As a result, there was cautious optimism among the refugees about returning, and many began to plan the best way to go about it. Most refugee families decided on a gradual process of repatriation, initially sending one or two family members back to Uganda to 'test' the environment under the new NRM regime and begin to reconstruct their old homesteads. As things became more stable, they hoped to slowly draw back further family members. This strategy was seen to be a way of avoiding some of the shocks created by the pervious sudden displacements.[28] However, this gradual, organised repatriation was disrupted by three major push factors. First, UNHCR policy demanded that the process happen much quicker than the refugees had planned, and began actively pushing for urgent repatriation. Second, there were systematic attacks on refugee settlements by the SPLA, beginning with those in the East Bank of the Nile in September 1986, and then moving to settlements on the West Bank of the Nile, making life all but impossible for the refugees – the SPLA appears to have been telling them to return to Uganda out of their support for Museveni. Third, the SPLA, had made significant gains against the GoS and began to occupy areas where the Ugandan refugees had self-settled, forcing the latter back into Uganda.

Thus while many did return, it was not the organised repatriation that had been anticipated. Furthermore, the way in which the process had taken placed had created a general atmosphere of uncertainty and suspicion, reinforced by the presence of the SPLA within the West Nile region, particularly at night.[29] During the late 1980s and into the 1990s, there was a build up of events that led to the eventual formation of a second wave of insurgent groups within the region – first the WNBF and then the UNRF II. The following section considers the factors that led to the creation of the second of these groups, the UNRF II, before returning to a brief analysis of the less structured WNBF.

3.1 A return to rebellion: the formation of the UNRF II

Several reasons were given for the reformation of the UNRF. In the first instance, numerous ex-UNRF II combatants referred to the fact that the agreement between Moses Ali and Museveni had not been honoured adequately. As a member of the UNRF II political wing said,

> The agreement was that UNRF combatants were to retain their ranks. But people were demoted instead… Many UNRF deserted the army, others retrenched, others retired. The whole process of integration was not done. All these things demonstrated lack of government commitment to the agreement, that the government was insincere to the whole agreement. But also, government is not only to blame. The UNRF leadership did not properly handle the matter – there appeared to be intrigue.[30]

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[27] Interview with Local government official, Ombachi, Arua, 18th April 2004.
[28] Interview with key informant, Kampala, 26th May 2004.
[29] Interview with ex-UNRFII combatant, Kampala, 27th April 2004.
[30] Interview with Asedri Oyemi, political wing of the UNRF II, 5th January 2003.

Although Moses Ali himself disputes that UNRF II was born as a result of the breach of the alleged agreement between himself and Museveni,[31] there was a clear perception amongst the majority of interviewees that such a breach had taken place.

Second, there was growing insecurity in West Nile, with individuals being imprisoned and killed. One ex-combatant told of the constant harassment of an ex-UNRF individual: "[He] was constantly harassed by security. His wife was tortured by security agents. They stuck a stick in her vagina. That was in Yumbe."[32] This led to a gradual build up of fear, as more and more individuals were arrested or simply disappeared, culminating in the eventual arrest of Moses Ali and Rajab Rembe, Major Alidiga, Major Noah Talib.[33] According to one ex-UNRF II combatant, this is what finally led to the formation of the UNRF II:

> The government was honouring individuals rather than the whole group. A number of UNRF officers were hunted down and killed. There was torturing of soldiers. Then when they arrested and imprisoned the Alis, we now realised the risk of another war. We suspected they were going to eliminate all leaders of UNRF, so then in 1988 UNRF II began.[34]

Other UNRF II informants cited internal divisions within the UNRF, which resulted in some being incorporated within the NRA/NRM while others were excluded or given lower rank than they had previously held.

These arrests were, in the words of another former combatant, "a complete repeat of what people had forgotten."[35] In other words, it was interpreted as a repetition of the revenge that had followed the UNLA rise to power: it proved their worst fears and was seen as justification for a return to armed insurgency. Reminiscent of the formation of the first UNRF, "the government had forced us into a corner and we had no choice but to take up arms and defend ourselves."[36] The exact details of what happened at this time are unclear. Furthermore, many ex-combatants attribute an incident in which Bamuze was shot while trying to hand over former UNRF soldiers in Arua, to the NRA trying to assassinate him. This apparent act of aggression was considered additional justification for fleeing and once again taking up arms. Indeed, the elders in the community encouraged Bamuze to flee in order to protect himself, but did not sanction him to go and start an armed rebellion.

> The elders told him, 'now these people are hunting for you – get a place to live. But they did not tell him to rebel. In 1987 Bamuze went to Sudan, there was conflict there, so he went to Congo…. He was trusted and loved by the community. The community sent boys to guide and protect him as he was negotiating with Sudan. UNRF II was originally formed to protect Bamuze…. [37]

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[31] Interview with General Moses Ali, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Disaster Preparedness, Kampala, 8th June 2004.
[32] Interview with Asedri Oyemi, political wing of the UNRF II, 5th January 2003.
[33] Interview with Major General Bamuze, Kampala, 28th April 2004
[34] Interview with ex-UNRFII combatant, Kampala, 27th April 2004.
[35] Interview with the Deputy Mayor Yumbe, 20th April 2004.
[36] Interview with Asedri Oyemi, political wing of the UNRF II, 5th January 2003.
[37] Focus Group Discussion, 2 male community workers, Yumbe, 23rd April 2004.

A third reason given for the formation of the UNRF II was the fact that inadequate development was seen to have been taking place in West Nile under the NRM government. This perception of marginalization was widespread and was articulated by ex-combatants and civilians alike: it was clearly dominant in the minds of many informants, and reflects similar findings in northern Uganda.[38] There was an overriding perception that development programmes had been concentrated on areas further south, and that West Nile had been left behind. This perception had translated itself into a general notion of political and social marginalization that was an ongoing grievance among combatants and civilians alike. In the case of the former, it was a factor that fuelled their decision to resort to armed conflict. In particular, lack of education and poor infrastructure were frequently referred to as reasons for a return to arms. As one man said:

> There is a feeling that we are not considered equal as other citizens in Uganda. This has frustrated the patriot feelings of our people and they have tended to head to the bush… Priorities tend to go to the areas near by the government.[39]

In addition, the issue of district status for Yumbe was frequently referred to. Given the fact that the majority of the UNRF II combatants were drawn from what is now Yumbe district, this appears to have been a specific focus for grievances, and encapsulated many of the issues relating to inadequate development and resources. As one ex-combatant said, "marginalization was a major cause of the war. When we were under Arua, central government funds were not making it to Yumbe."[40] Similarly, in Koboko, the loss of status as an administrative centre following the re-incorporation of North Nile District into Arua District by the Obote II regime continues to fuel feelings of marginalization and second class citizenship.[41] Furthermore, once again the lack of opportunities in the region certainly contributed to the potential for recruitment by both groups.

Thus Bamuze summarised the reasons for forming the UNRF II as threefold: the apparent breach of the government's agreement with the UNRF; arrests and killings without trial; and the lack of development in West Nile during the late 1980s.[42] The UNRF II was consequently formed in the Sudan in 1998 with a force of 3000 active soldiers.[43] They operated with the apparent sanction of the Sudanese government, which both allowed them to attack Uganda from bases in the southern Sudan, and supplied them with some of their arms. Their aim, according to Bamuze, was not to overthrow the government, but to create the conditions in which they could return to West Nile and live peacefully.[44] Or, in the words of a UNRF II foot soldier, "we didn't go to fight the government: we went to rescue our lives."[45]

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[38] See RLP Working Paper no. 11. *Behind the Violence: Causes, Consequences and the Quest for Justice*. February 2004.
[39] Interview with retired civil servant, Moyo, 27th April 2004.
[40] Interview with ex-UNRFII combatant, Yumbe, 24th April 2004.
[41] Interview with county official, Kaluba, Koboko, 19th April 2004.
[42] Interview with Major General Bamuze, Fairway Hotel, Kampala, 28th April 2004.
[43] Interview with Brig. Nassur Ezaga Ogara, Commander of UNRF II, Yumbe, 24th April 2004.
[44] Interview with Major General Bamuze, Fairway Hotel, Kampala, 28th April 2004.
[45] Interview with ex-UNRF combatant, Yumbe, 25th April 2004.

On the ground, however, there appears to have been a lack of clarity as to why the UNRF II was fighting. While some ex-combatants asserted that they had an active political wing that was supposedly articulating the grievances and ideologies behind the insurgency, remarkably few community members were aware of such a group. What seems more common is that ex-combatants referred to sympathisers and mobilisers located in local communities as the political wings.[46] In short, they never had any clearly articulated ideologies defining the organisation and presenting its blueprint for their cause. The role of the political wing in articulating the agenda of the UNRF II appears to have only become explicit during the peace process, as discussed below.

3.2 The formation of the WNBF

Around 1995[47] another rebel group, the West Nile Bank Front, had formed under the leadership of former UA and FUNA member Juma Oris. Referred to by ex-combatants from the WNBF as a West Nile offshoot of the Uganda People's Defence Army (UPDA), it is generally perceived to have recruited most of its members from Koboko County in Arua, and Obongi in Moyo.[48] The WNBF appears, in particular, to have capitalised on the lack of development opportunities in the region in order to recruit members. Numerous informants referred to the fact that they offered money to individuals in return for them joining the group – money that, needless to say, rarely materialised. As one man living in Koboko said, "They recruited by offering the youth money to join them. Because of poverty, whoever promises money, people will rush that way. There were no schools in Congo and the Sudan, so there were so many youth who had no education."[49] The testimony of one ex-WNBF combatant supports this view:

> When we heard of WNBF we wanted to join. There was unemployment, and Juma Oris was promising us $300 each. We saw that the government wasn't caring about us, so we wanted to join. Also all the NRA soldiers here were Banyankole or Baganeda. There were no boys from here in the army. So it seems government had a hidden agenda. So this forced us to join WNBF.[50]

In the absence of other means of generating income, joining the WNBF became an attractive alternative to many. However, the same informant then went on to relate that this money never materialised: "They were just luring people with empty promises. Many boys had joined the WNBF merely to get the money."[51] When persuasive means of recruiting fighters failed, the insurgents resorted to using force and abduction became the primary means of replenishing fighters. One former abductee related his experience:

> For us we were abducted while we were catching fish and others were caught while they were in the gardens. Three hundred soldiers were ambushed at Kochi and NRA feared to

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[46] Interview with district official, Moyo, 27th April 2004 and focus group discussion with II male ex-UNRF II combatants, Yumbe, 22nd April 2004.
[47] Interview with male civilian, Oraba sub-county, 20th April 2004.
[48] Interview with ex-WNBF combatant, Koboko, 19th April 2004.
[49] Interview with male civilian, Koboko, 19th April 2004.
[50] Interview with three ex-WNBF combatants, Oraba border post, 20th April 2004.
[51] Interview with three ex-WNBF combatants, Oraba border post, 20th April 2004.

> follow and rescue us so we walked for one week. Two boys were killed out of our own group to illustrate to us what would be done to an escapee.[52]

This approach, which became increasingly brutal, began to alienate the WNBF from the people. As one interviewee explained: "WNBF was the most offensive, rebellious. If you refused to join you were immediately their sworn enemy. They lost a lot of favour due to the planting of land mines. Their negative relations with the community led to their failure."[53] Therefore, as the WNBF became increasingly destructive it also became increasingly unpopular.

It is possible that the brutal tactics employed by the WNBF were learnt from other rebel groups such as the LRA, which also had their bases in the Sudan, a suggestion that was made by several informants. Whether or not this was taking place, it illustrates an important dynamic at play during both the UNRF II and the WNBF insurgencies: given that both rebel groups were operating from bases in the Sudan and the DRC, they were directly or indirectly caught up in wider armed struggles that were taking place – both between the SPLA and the GoS and between various armed insurgents in the DRC. Furthermore, from the interviews it appears that both the WNBF and the UNRF II had contacts with the LRA in the Sudan. As Bamuze said,

> Kony and I used to sit together and compare notes. We would eat together around one table and talk. I was one of the first people that Kony informed that government wanted to talk with him. Kony and Museveni even exchanged letters. October 2001 is the last time I met him.[54]

The inter-relationship of these conflicts and the wider geopolitical issues they evoke, while inconclusive from the material, are important to bear in mind. Although the exact nature of the relationships between the groups is unclear, the extent to which insurgents were not acting in total isolation is an important dynamic that has to be taken into consideration when attempts to resolving these conflicts are being made.

3.3 Rebel perceptions, community support? The impact of WNBF and UNRF II

Given that both the WNBF and the UNRF II were conducting their operations in the West Nile region – although at slightly different times and with specific areas of geographical focus – there was a clear awareness by some of the ex-combatants of the extent to which the activities of both groups interacted with each other within the region, particularly in the eyes of the civilian population. Indeed, civilian support was recognised as a vital tactic in enabling the rebels to operate within the region. As one UNRF II senior commander said, "The first war you fight is popularity among civilians. We moved freely throughout West Nile with the cover of the civilian population."[55]

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[52] Interview with ex-abductee, WNBF, Obongi, 25th April 2004.
[53] Interview with female civilian, Koboko, 19th April 2004.
[54] Interview with Major General Bamuze, Fairway Hotel, Kampala, 28th April 2004.
[55] Interview with ex-UNRFII Ex-combatant, Kampala, 27th April 2004.

The need to maintain or create a positive image came through most frequently in interviews with those who had been fighting for the UNRF II: they were adamant that, in carrying out their mission, they only attacked government targets and not the civilian population. As one ex-combatant said, "we never touched civilians, never. We were fighting for civilians."[56] In particular, they emphasised that their tactics were not the same as those of the WNBF, who some former UNRF II referred to as 'terrorists'. [57] Each side attempted to project itself as the representative voice of the communities, refusing to acknowledge the positive aspects of the other group. As another former UNRF II combatant said, "Unlike WNBF, we had local support. The people came and told us when we were being targeted. We even travelled from Arua to Kampala and back with people covering us."[58] Although asserting this image is vital in the current climate of re-integration, as ex-combatants seek to be re-integrated into communities that were once under attack, it does appear that this was a deliberate, thought-out strategy on the part of the UNRF II.

Some of the civilian informants supported this claim. As one man said, "UNRF II built relationships. They didn't round up people like other groups. They came in and convinced people to go voluntarily. The level of education was a major factor. Increasing redundancy meant that this was something to do. Also there was the idea of seeking past glory."[59] Another referred to the way in which the UNRF II maintained discipline and confined their targets more to weakening government installations.[60] Or, in the words of another civilian, "they knew who they were targeting; they were not just killing in the Kony way."[61]

However, while some made distinctions between the two groups and acknowledged attempts to limit civilian casualties, what support there was for the rebels in the beginning appears to have disappeared once civilians increasingly became victims of the war. As one woman said, "They [UNRF II] only lost support when they turned on their own people."[62] Or in the words of another civilian, "When we found bodies from the fighting, we would find they were dead children of the area. There was no development in this area since it was now a battlefield."[63] Whether this was the result of UNRF II or WNBF activities – or simply criminal elements operating within the district – is seen here to be relatively unimportant in the face of the reality of a war that was fought in the midst of a civilian population. In the majority of cases, it appears civilians judged both the justification for violence, and the numerous unnamed actors using it, based on the impact on their own lives.

Rifts that are now known to have developed within the leadership of the UNRF II, could have accounted for a specific change in tactics to a more aggressive approach to the war, including methods such as obtaining fighters through abductions, which were formerly not

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[56] Interview with ex-UNRF combatant, Yumbe, 25th April 2004.
[57] Interview with ex-UNRF II combatant, Yumbe, 24th April 2004.
[58] Interview with ex-UNRF II combatant, Kampala, 27th April 2004.
[59] Interview with male civilian, Yumbe, 23rd April 2004.
[60] Interview with community leader, Yumbe, 23rd April 2004.
[61] Interview with civilian, Arua, 19th April 2004.
[62] Interview with female aid worker, Yumbe, 26th April 2004.
[63] Interview with the Deputy Mayor Yumbe, 20th April 2004.

acceptable. Several interviews mention this process and attempts made to reconcile specific individuals after the negotiation process indicate that this may have been taking place.[64]

An essential difference between this period of insurgency and that of the early 1980s, was that people had now returned to their homes and were trying to re-build their lives. As one woman said, "Once we were home, there was no more need for war."[65] Furthermore, given that southern Sudan and the eastern DRC were now in a state of internal civil war, returning to exile was not even a feasible option.

With further displacement out of the equation, civilians could see little justification for ongoing rebellion. As one civilian said, "The object of the war was not clear, therefore it was not successful. Recruitment into the armies was not done well. They were ill disciplined. Some were motivated by self-defence due to the atrocities. Innocent people were killed just because they were accused of being collaborators."[66] Furthermore, there was little distinction made between the two groups as this was seen as irrelevant. As one teacher said, "Rebels, they didn't have a name, were disturbing from the borders, looting. Others were killed. There was no communication, no support."[67]

The suffering was made worse by the fact that civilians were often caught between the rebels and the army. On the one hand, they were under pressure to show support for the rebels. As a local government official said, "If any of the community did support the rebels, it was out of fear or force."[68] The consequences of doing otherwise were summarised by one young man: "If you called them [the rebels] guerrillas, at night they would come and slaughter you. Many people's ears or lips were cut. At day they just point, at night they cut."[69] At the same time, they were wary of being labelled a collaborator by the UPDF.

In particular, the arming of civilians into local defence units (LDUs) in 1996 was seen to have generated retaliation by the rebels.[70] Numerous ex-combatants, when pressed on the issue of civilian deaths, explained that they were individuals who were siding with the government and, therefore, were perceived to have become legitimate targets. As a former UNRF II combatant explained, "You see, arming the civilians was the worst thing to prolong the war. The government forces people into the war by doing this. They start to become targets and that's why they were being killed… The moment you entangle the local population in your war, that war will never end."[71]

Once again, civilians were caught in the midst of a war they did not support, and which was only compromising the quality of their lives. It is reminiscent of the ongoing LRA conflict in northern Uganda, in which the process of arming civilians has proved to only generate

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[64] Minutes of the Reconciliation Meeting between Maj. Gen. Ali Bamuze, Brig. Gen. Nasur Ezaga, District Leadership and Elders which took place at Bp. Freedricas Centre Yumbe, on 23rd December 2003.
[65] Interview with civilian, Arua, 19th April 2004.
[66] Focus group discussion with four teachers, three men and one woman, Maracha Country, 19th April 2004.
[67] Focus group discussion with two men and one woman, Ombachi, Arua, 20th April 2004.
[68] Interview with Local government official, Ombachi, Arua, 18th April 2004.
[69] Focus group discussion with 3 youth, Obongi, 26th April 2004.
[70] Interview with Town Clerk, Koboko, 19th April 2004.
[71] Interview with ex-UNRF II combatant, Kampala, 29th April 2004.

increased violence from the combatants, as it turns them into 'legitimate' targets in the eyes of the insurgent groups and risks compromising the neutrality of the civilian population, one of the fundamental precepts of the Geneva Conventions.[72] It was in this context that a collective process began to end first the WNBF, and then the UNRF II insurgencies.

4 BROKERING PEACE

To a certain extent, a precedent had already been set for resolving conflicts or differences within the region through negotiation and peaceful means. During his brief time in power, Okello had attempted to reconcile people from West Nile with people from the north following the apparently intractable atmosphere of hatred and revenge that had been generated between the two groups – first by the horrendous atrocities of Amin against the Langi and Acholi, and then by the revenge killings by the Acholi against people from West Nile. In addition, his attempts to try to bring out the warring factions, while received with initial suspicion, allowed the West Nile and Acholi people to achieve some form of reconciliation. Not only are local mechanisms for reconciliation available, they have worked to great effect – showing the extent to which it is possible to reconcile people who have a long history of vengeance and hatred. It was against this historical backdrop that multi-faceted attempts were made to end first the WNBF, and then the UNRF II insurgencies.

4.1 Ending the WNBF insurgency

The declining civilian support for the conflicts, outlined above, was often identified as the major reason why the rebels, in particular the WNBF, were eventually brought out of the bush. As one man summarised the situation: "the community did not support the rebels, and that's why they didn't succeed."[73] However, lack of civilian support in and of itself did not end the violence: it was only once the UPDF began to work with the civilians and generate an environment of mutual trust and confidence that the rebels began to come out of the bush. There was clear consensus among informants that it was Major General Katumba Wamala of the UPDF who enabled this level of civilian/military co-ordination to take place.

Wamala, who was posted to West Nile as the senior UPDF commander in 1996, capitalised upon the lack of civilian support for the rebels and initiated a process that was to allow for the eventual end to the WNBF as an armed insurgency. As he said,

> Seeing that the people didn't support the war, my approach was to reach out to them and deny the enemy fertile ground to work on. So I had to combine a military approach with a political strategy… Rather than just sitting in the barracks, I decided to go out and spend time with the communities to work on calling the rebels back. It was very important that we never mistreated reporters, so we built up trust.[74]

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[72] See Geneva Convention 4, Article 4 and Additional Protocol 1, Part 4.
[73] Interview with religious leader, Arua, 17th April 2004.
[74] Interview with Major General Katumba Wamala, Inspector General of Police, Kibuli Police headquarters, 15th April 2004.

His main emphasis was on building and maintaining trust, both among the communities, and among the rebels. Indeed, he recognised the intrinsic and crucial links between the two groups, given that the majority of rebels were actually related to individuals within the communities. Instead of marginalising those who had contact with the rebels, he used them as a vital source of intelligence. As one man said, "Katumba knew how to stay with people. He did not harass them."[75]

Through spending time with the communities, Wamala was able to work with the communities in encouraging the rebels to surrender voluntarily. He described his approach in this way:

> It was all about community outreach. We would go into a village, find out what was important to them, and show them the best opportunity. The communities used family contacts to encourage their sons back. We would go with them to pick up their son who would hand over his gun to us, so they could see for themselves that there was no harassment. My attitude was, we had guns, they had guns, and we may get killed. So if there was a way to get them out in a non-combative way, it was much better for everyone.[76]

In particular, he acknowledged the structures that already existed within the community and capitalised on their influence over the rebels. For instance, one civilian related the role played by the elders: "Our elders went to the WNBF and said, 'come home. Whether you are fighting or not, we still suffer. Don't lose your life in vain.' So they began to see the wisdom and started to surrender. Their performance weakened on the battlefield, their network weakened because so many were leaving. Finally, they collapsed."[77] Women in the community were also seen as crucial: "if your brother is not convinced [to stop fighting], talk to his wife. She then convinces her husband about peace. Many wives turned in the gun of their husbands to the local leader so that their husbands could surrender."[78]

Furthermore, Wamala made it clear that rebels could come out of the bush without fear of retribution. Given that there was no legal Amnesty in place at this time, he approached government to gain its assurance that combatants would be allowed to re-integrate into their communities without being arrested. He also made sure that the UPDF did not act aggressively towards combatants who were reporting, thus ensuring a safe environment in which they could surrender. As an ex-soldier said, "He calmed people. Even when rebels attacked, he would urge the UPDF not to retaliate. People will never forget Wamala."[79] Thus he created a level of confidence in the UPDF among the people that allowed the communities to actively participate in ending the conflict that was destroying their lives. Informants gave examples of the community's willingness to inform the UPDF regarding the WNBF's movements during this period, a clear indication of the level of trust that had developed between the UPDF and the communities. It was a tactical advantage to the UPDF, therefore, to create and maintain civilian support for their efforts.

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[75] Interview with Deputy Mayor Yumbe, 20th April 2004.
[76] Interview with Major General Katumba Wamala, Inspector General of Police, Kibuli Police headquarters, 15th April 2004.
[77] Interview with male civilian, Arua, 14th April 2004.
[78] Interview with male civilian, Koboko, 23rd April 2004.
[79] Interview with ex-Amin soldier, Koboko, 19th April 2004.

In addition, his confidence building efforts were supported by the fact that there were no contradictory or antagonistic comments being made within the public arena by government during the process.[80] This conciliatory approach helped to create an environment of trust that complimented the grassroots tactic of encouraging civilian pressure on the rebels with assurances of amnesty. As an ex-WNBF combatant said: "We came out of the bush because we had been receiving pleas from our people, and also because of the government's blanket amnesty."[81]

By contrast, the mutual trust that was built up by Wamala appears to have come under threat when there was a change in UPDF leadership. One ex-combatant talked of how, instead of begin allowed to return to his home, he was sent to jail instead: "a one Lieutenant Colonel Nelson Katagara later replaced Wamala and started fuelling mistrust by telling lies about rebel activity. He even arrested me, claiming I was a rebel collaborator. I was jailed for one and a half years. However, when he was removed, there have since been no problems."[82]

The strategy of community-initiated persuasion was certainly helped by the fact that the WNBF were coming under growing pressure in the Sudan, with the SPLA increasing their activities and challenging their military bases.[83] It is clear that a final battle in Kaya. Sudan, in which the SPLA, Congolese factions and the UPDF took part, was a decisive factor in ending the formal existence of the WNBF. As a result, some were captured by the SPLA and handed over to the UPDF in West Nile, others surrendered, and some fled and joined other rebel groups in the region as mercenaries. The extent to which such military pressure played a primary role in ending the conflict was debated in the interviews. However, what remains crucial is the fact that the vicious cycle of violence was broken through the pressure exerted on the rebels by both the communities and those using direct military force. The emphasis throughout was on allowing the rebels to return without fear of reprisal. While critics would say that this is rewarding impunity, from the perspective of the communities affected by the war, ending the fighting and the violence was their primary concern: it opened a new chapter in their lives and gave them the opportunity to both deal with the causes of the violence, and to reconstruct their futures. By 1997, therefore, the WNBF rebellion had all but ended.[84] Although remnants joined other groups such as that of Thabani Amin (son of the deposed dictator) in the eastern DRC, the majority have since returned to Uganda under the Amnesty,[85] in collaboration with MONUC.[86]

Several inter-related factors appear to have contributed to the peaceful resolution of the WNBF conflict. First, it appears from the interviews that the rebels lacked charismatic

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[80] Interview with Major General Katumba Wamala, Inspector General of Police, Kibuli Police headquarters, 15th April 2004.
[81] Interview with ex-WNBF combatant, Koboko, 22nd April 2004.
[82] Interview with ex-UNRF combatant, Arua, 14th April 2004.
[83] Interview with Major General Katumba Wamala, Inspector General of Police, Kibuli Police headquarters, 15th April 2004.
[84] Interview with key informant, Arua, 17th April 2004.
[85] Interview with Justice Onega, Chairman Amnesty Commission, Kampala, 17th May 2004.
[86] Interview with Lt. Col. Obitre-Gama (rtd.), Chairman, West Nile Amnesty Commission, 14th April 2004.

leaders with the vision that would articulate their grievances and maintain any form of external support. Second, the extent to which they violated the basic human rights of civilians had led to diminished community support. Third, both of these factors combined to give the UPDF opportunity to exact pressure militarily on the insurgents and made it possible for them to come and listen. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the wise handling of the whole process by Wamala generated the necessary environment necessary for resolving the conflict.

4.2 Negotiating peace with the UNRF II

Despite the progress made with the WNBF, the UNRF II force was still operating from its bases in exile, further destabilising the region. Wamala had been transferred from West Nile by this time, and several informants suggested that his transfer accounted for why the UNRF II was not brought out of the bush along with the WNBF. However, through a multi-pronged process that combined government involvement with community participation, the UNRF II finally signed a peace agreement on 24th December 2002, officially ending its armed insurgency.

There are numerous different perspectives on who initiated negotiations, and the different roles and actors involved in the whole process. In addition, there is much debate as to the extent to which the UNRF II was running out of alternatives and therefore had little choice in opting for a negotiated settlement. What is clear is that the insurgency could certainly have continued, if at a reduced level, but instead a negotiated resolution was successfully reached. Furthermore, regardless of which particular version is most accurate, there is consensus that two defining factors were of primary importance in the process. First, was genuine involvement of the local communities in the process both by the government and by the UNRF II leadership, ensuring that, to a large extent, it was a community-initiated process. Second, there was sufficient transparency in the government dealings with the UNRF II to build the necessary confidence for negotiation. While both ingredients had been present in the WNBF process, they are highlighted to even greater effect in the more drawn-out and complex end to the UNRF II insurgency. Furthermore, it was a process that showed clear and strong collaboration among all parties involved, without which none of the individual initiatives could have succeeded.

Community involvement

On one level, convincing the communities of the need for a peaceful resolution to the conflict was hardly necessary, given the impact that violence was having on their lives and the fact that many of those caught up in the insurgency were from within their communities. As one civilian said, "The community is happy if a rebel group comes to an understanding, if they come back. Then the suffering they had before, they won't have."[87] Or, in the words of one ex-combatant: "[the communities] said that it was better to resolve the conflict by talking, than continue to have to sleep outside."[88]

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[87] Interview with Local government official, Ombachi, Arua, 18th April 2004.
[88] Interview with ex-UNRFII combatant, Yumbe, 24th April 2004.

However, the nascent support for the process had to be nurtured and capitalised upon in order to be of direct benefit to the process. Evidence suggests that both the government and the UNRF II recognised the need to involve the communities – indeed, that without community backing it would have been impossible to reach a durable solution. Thus their involvement and support was crucial to the whole process, recognising that civilians, rather than being on the peripheries, had been drawn into the centre of the violence: the war was not simply an external conflict between the UPDF and the UNRF II, but had been played out within their homes and villages. Furthermore, since the majority of combatants came from the region, the active involvement of the communities was also vital to any eventual re-integration. A community leader in Yumbe summarised many of these issues:

> We told the government they must involve the locals. The rebels cannot operate without contacts in the communities. The government must treat the community fairly if they are to win their favour and trust. So the government handed the issue to the community – it listened to us and did not act arbitrarily. The war affected the people here; therefore peace must be negotiated here too. They must involve people at the grassroots. It is a mistake to rely on prominent people or MPs – it spoils the process. It must be people with frequent contact, rebel agents or collaborators. They cannot be treated as enemies, as they are key. They will lead you, and you cannot isolate them.[89]

Community elders were often referred to specifically as having played particularly important roles, and their support for government efforts to end the war were seen as a vital step in building confidence and reaching out to the rebels. Their impact was based on the fact that their authority within the communities was widely recognised, despite the fact that communities had been displaced and in such circumstances social structures often weaken or break. This credibility enabled them to influence the UNRF II combatants towards a negotiated rather than military solution. As one civilian said, "When those who surrendered were rehabilitated and treated well, the elders said, 'the government is not killing us' and saw the opportunity to negotiate. During Obote's time there had not been that opportunity, which is why they supported UNRF."[90]

Indeed, the elders not only supported the process of peaceful resolution, but also made it an imperative, exerting pressure on the combatants by threatening them with a curse if they went against peaceful negotiation. As one woman said, "The elders of Arua passed a resolution that they were tired of war. Therefore any youth who didn't listen to advise were cursed. Elders worked hand-in-hand with the army to disarm the rebels. The community was happy for peace. They welcomed the ex-fighters back."[91] Or as one ex-combatant said, "the elders said "no gun shoots the UNRF II, no gun shoots the UPDF. If you fire, the ammunition will turn back on you."[92]

Complementing the role of the elders, both religious leaders and community-based organisations played an important role in supporting the dialogue efforts. Religious leaders,

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[89] Interview with community leader, Yumbe, 23rd April 2004.
[90] Interview with male civilian, Yumbe, 23rd April 2004.
[91] Focus group discussion with four teachers, three men and one woman, Maracha Country, 19th April 2004.
[92] Focus group discussion with two ex-UNRF II combatants, Yumbe, 22nd April, 2004.

both Muslim and Christian, used their authority and places of worship to preach forgiveness and reconciliation and, with other leaders, identified family members of those in the UNRF II who might be visited in their homes during the night. The family members were then encouraged to convince their sons and husbands to talk peace with their comrades. As one community leader explained, they told the rebels that "there were two ways to win a war: Shoot all the opposition – which is very expensive, costing lives and property as well as money – or dialogue. The government knows the causes [of the war], put down your guns and convince the government to change their polices."[93] Both the ex-UNRF II and the civilian leaders indicated that the wives of the rebels played a particularly important role in this process.[94]

In order to make this process viable, however, the UPDF commanders also had to be persuaded not to arrest those seeking contact with rebels as collaborators, and not to arrest rebels visiting home. "We told the government it had to forgive. It could not be harsh. The community can seek or sue for compensation from the rebels, once they come in. But the Government must have total forgiveness."[95] This willingness to listen to the community and tolerate the rebel presence within clearly defined bounds was a key step in building the initial confidence that allowed the peace process to move forward.

Interaction between the government and the UNRF II

Alongside the attempts made by the communities to foster a peaceful end to the conflict, there was a corresponding and complimentary process going on between government and the UNRF II. Bamuze himself identifies the starting point for a negotiated settlement as being when, on 15th December 1998, UPDF commander Colonel Nassur Izaruku asked government if he could initiate some form of dialogue with the UNRF II.[96] As a result, two days later the government apparently sent a letter through an informer, which initially was thought to be a government trap. As Bamuze said, "We thought it was a government ploy because of what had happened with UNRF I, so we sent a fresh attack… We still went ahead with our ambushes and activities."[97] The UNRF II leadership then allegedly went to ask the advice of the GoS in Khartoum, who responded by saying "if you don't respond positively to the letter, the International Community will accuse you of not wanting peace."[98]

Regardless of the details of what took place, the offer of negotiation was eventually accepted and the UNRF agreed to start talking peace. The Aringa-Obongi Peace Initiative Committee (AROPIC) was formed to act as mediators in the process on the part of government. Meetings between government and the UNRF II leadership eventually followed, first in Khartoum in November 2001, and later the same month in Nairobi,[99]

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[93] Interview with community leader, Yumbe, 23rd April 2004.
[94] Interview with male cadre, Yumbe, 24th April 2004.
[95] Interview with community leader, Yumbe, 23rd April, 2004.
[96] Interview with Col. Nasur Izaruku, Kampala, 8th April, 2004.
[97] Interview with Major General Bamuze, Fairway Hotel, Kampala, 28th April 2004.
[98] Interview with Major General Bamuze, Fairway Hotel, Kampala, 28th April 2004.
[99] Interview with Major General Bamuze, Fairway Hotel, Kampala, 28th April 2004.

before the final groundwork was laid for a ceasefire agreement on 15th June 2002, followed by several days of negotiations in Arua State Lodge with Justice Onega acting as mediator.[100] This all took placed during a four-year process of confidence building and dialogue that finally culminated in the formal signing of the peace agreement in December 2002.

Also crucial during this time, was the fact that the UNRF II was coming under increasing pressure to leave the Sudan, particularly when a division developed between the GoS and the UNRF II. As Bamuze recounted, "something developed between us and the GoS. I didn't want to fight them – I was surprised that they had been willing to give us land, and now they were doing this to us. We became entangled in a Bashir/Hassan al Tourabi rift. So I decided to leave the Sudan and come to Uganda. We could have fought, but we didn't want to."[101] It is likely that this functioned as a crucial push-factor in the whole process, encouraging the UNRF II to pursue alternatives to continued armed insurgency. However, while it may, indeed, be true that changing geo-political dynamics in the region left the UNRF II with little choice but to return to Uganda, it is important to remember that, as with the WNBF process, this option was made easier because the groundwork for a negotiated settlement had already been laid.

Building trust

The length of time that the whole process took allowed both sides to reach the conviction that the other was committed to peaceful resolution. For instance, the UNRF II at one point sent some of its combatants into Uganda in order to test the genuineness of government. As Bamuze said, "after two years we decided to test government. They allowed me to send one platoon [40 people] to Uganda. I said to them, you go, and if the government kills you, then you are a sacrifice to prove that we cannot trust them."[102] The fact that they were unharmed was a significant signal to the rebels that the government was not trying to simply trick them into returning to Uganda in order to be arrested or killed.

At the same time, a number of incidents appear to have occurred that gave off the opposite message, and threatened to de-rail the whole process. For instance a government official in Yumbe claimed, "Government people who were leading AROPIC were not handling it very well. They were arrogant and their conduct was not up to date – this situation needed friendly moves. So we requested that Salim Saleh be sent to replace Kategaya."[103] Furthermore, there was an incident in the final stages of negotiation when it appeared that the UPDF were going to attack the UNRF II base, having demanded they surrender their arms earlier than had been agreed, in order to give the impression of a UPDF military success.[104] Both examples reveal the extent to which the process was precariously balanced such that it could have been easily de-stabilised by actions or attitudes that were interpreted as antithetical to negotiation.

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[100] Interview with Justice Onega, Chairman Amnesty Commission, Kampala, 17th May 2004.
[101] Interview with Major General Bamuze, Fairway Hotel, Kampala, 28th April 2004.
[102] Interview with Major General Bamuze, Fairway Hotel, Kampala, 28th April 2004.
[103] Interview with elected official, Yumbe, 20th April 2004.
[104] Interview with ex-UNRF combatant, Kampala, March 2003.

What is clear is that both government and UPDF actions were being carefully scrutinised by the rebels – as well as the communities – and their relative consistency played a vital role in the progression of negotiations. In particular, restraint on the part of the UPDF was vital in an environment in which every action was being carefully observed and interpreted. Interviews with ex-UNRF II combatants suggest that the process of bringing the WNBF out of the bush was being carefully watched by the UNRF II leadership: "We saw that they were not treated as guerrillas but treated as human beings."[105] Likewise a member of the community said, "What was important was the commitment of the people to speak one language. We told the government that instead of shooting these people, they should give them food. The government was calm."[106]

It was also important that the UNRF II reciprocated and did not give off mixed messages to the government. Complex leadership struggles appear to have been taking place within the UNRF II during this time, not least with the dynamic between the UNRF II combatants on the ground, and those from the political wing. This dynamic was further complicated by inclusion of individuals in the political wing who had not previously been recognised as part of the UNRF II. However, in the final analysis, there was adequate coherence for the process to move forward, with an identifiable leadership in place. For instance as one NGO worker said, "The discipline exercised by Bamuze [during the peace talks] was amazing. There were 2500 in his camp, and no incidents. He managed to keep them there from April 2002 to the demobilisation in April 2003. It was important he stayed right there with them. He walked with them."[107]

The role of the international community

A further group of actors involved in the process mentioned in some of the interviews was the donor/NGO community. There were several donors and NGOs involved in the process, supplying the UNRF II combatants with support while they worked toward a final resolution, and providing the funds and expertise for workshops and other awareness-building exercises.[108] While their role was certainly seen as having been vital to the process, several informants expressed concern that they had also come close to jeopardising it at times. Clearly, balancing genuine needs with the danger of unfettered wants dominating the process was a challenge, particularly given the uncertain environment in which all the actors were operating. The main criticism that came through was that too much money was being made available to the combatants, creating false expectations. As one witness to the process said,

> It seems that Bamuze and his people got the impression that if they exerted enough pressure, they could get anything. There seemed to be the spirit that the donors would give anything. Every other week one ambassador or another would come to Bidibidi. It seemed as if

[105] Interview with ex-UNRFII combatant, Yumbe, 25th April 2004.
[106] Interview with community leader, Yumbe, 23rd April 2004.
[107] Interview with aid worker, 26th April 2004.
[108] A by-no-means exhaustive list of government and development agencies involved in supporting the negotiations would include DANIDA, DED-ZFD, the Irish Embassy, and USAID.

> everyone wanted to be seen with this 'rebel fighter'. It made him feel so important. But all this attention nearly stopped the whole process.[109]

Another informant said, "Some of us thought that the donors were giving [the UNRF II] too much. Whatever they asked for, they got. We were concerned that they were creating unrealistic expectations."[110] While the role of the donor community was clearly vital in facilitating the process by equalising the perceived power differentials, making needed resources available and building confidence, further study is needed to understand the benefits and limitations of such interventions.

What is clear, however, is that none of these efforts would have been successful if they had not been rooted in a genuine consensus of both the local community and the combatants to make the peace process work. Thus the signing of the negotiated settlement was the culmination of a complex process that had involved numerous different actors, all of whom played an important role. It was certainly recognised as a great achievement, not least by those whose lives had been dominated by conflict, and was cause for celebration in the region.

5 BEYOND NEGOTIATIONS: THE EXPECTATIONS OF PEACE

While the signing of the peace agreement was a symbolic end to the conflict and the beginning of a process of reconstruction and reintegration, the agreement also presents a number of challenges to the process of constructing lasting peace in the region. First, given that the agreement is essentially between the government and the UNRF II, the challenge remains to incorporate the needs of the communities into any post-conflict processes. Many civilians expressed the opinion that they had been excluded from the actual negotiation process and, as a result, their direct input is lacking from the agreement. For instance, the grievances of the victims of atrocities are not addressed in the process. As one community worker observed, "the aggressors get packages, but the victims get nothing. Reintegration does provide some assurance, but it also galling for the victims. The question remains, how do we convince returnees to think about reconciliation?"[111]

This is not to infer that the parties negotiating the peace process ignored the concerns of the community: clearly, peace is advantageous to the community as a whole, and the development-oriented demands of the UNRF II, such as the construction of roads, building schools and the introduction of electricity, obviously had the benefit of the whole community in mind. However, the role of the communities in the post-conflict phase is not made explicit and needs to be carefully determined. While the formal agreement might fit with an accepted standard of peace agreements, it is vital for the overall peace process that the communities – given their vital role in initiating the peace process and given the impact the conflict had on their lives – feel fully integrated in the post-conflict process. Both of these factors have grave implications both for the community owning the peace agreement and for its successful implementation. As one informant observed:

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[109] Interview with NGO worker, Yumbe, 26th April 2004.
[110] Interview with civilian, Yumbe, 24th April 2004.
[111] Interview with female community worker, Yumbe, 26th April 2004

> There is a problem, which may be slowing implementation. The community is not well sensitised. It might feel it (the peace agreement) is not theirs. They make comments that it is the UNRF II's agreement. We expected the local Government to discuss the agreement in the Local Council, to endorse and adopt it. So far they have not shown interest. They appear to see it as a document of the UNRF II. It is very unfortunate if it is that way. A donor conference was supposed to happen within four months of signing. It has never happened.[112]

Second, it is essential that the cessation of hostilities and reintegration are not seen as a complete process, but that the need for ongoing reconciliation needs to be recognised at every stage of the process. Indeed, this is a component that appears to be missing from many international peace processes, with devastating long-term effects.[113] In particular, it is vital that groups do not feel excluded from the process. Although the issue of reconciliation is implicit within the agreement, ongoing peace building initiatives need to make it explicit. It appears from many of the interviews that in the rush to conclude the negotiations, those brokering the agreement may have weakened the potential for a sustainable peace by excluding certain voices and thus limiting the reconciliation process, especially considering the genesis of the UNRF II. Thus, while the religious community, traditional elders, and community-based organisations such as PRAFORD, Give Me a Chance, and the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization are working to ensure that a meaningful reconciliation process be implemented, they are also having to address the concerns of aggrieved parties.

In the light of such concerns, the following section gives a brief overview of how the post-conflict phase is seen to be playing out on the ground. It focuses first on the level of community acceptance of the ex-combatants, and second on the actual implementation of the agreement, including the issue of individuals and groups who currently feel excluded from the post-conflict process and benefits. Finally, it looks briefly at the issue of arms, which continue to be a source of instability within the region.

5.1 Community acceptance

Overall, there was a very sincere level of acceptance by the communities for the returning combatants. Indeed, the role played by the communities has been vital in the post-conflict phase: many of the tools that were used to put pressure on the different rebel groups continue to help prevent a return to armed insurgency. As one ex-UNRF II combatant said, "People aren't really considering going back to fight. To do so would be to go back on the hopes of their wives and their elders."[114]

The majority of ex-combatants claimed that their initial reception from the communities had been positive. As one former UNRF II combatant said, "We have had an excellent response from the community. We were accepted just like your brother was returning."[115] From the perspective of the civilian population, the overwhelming feeling was one of relief that the

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[112] Aruka Harruna Ajaga, former AROPIC vice Secretary, 24th April 2004

[113] For example, in the Burundi process, the exclusion of certain groups has continually undermined the whole process.

[114] Interview with two ex-UNRFII combatants, Yumbe, 22nd April 2004.

[115] Interview with ex-UNRF II combatant, Yumbe, 24th April 2004.

conflict had ended, and, at one level, reintegration was seen as a small price to pay for peace. As one teacher said,

> When they came out, people were glad because they were afraid of them staying outside. The rebels used to come and loot. We were worried. But upon returning, we welcomed them. We started doing small things to sustain their lives, helping them get established. We really experienced war and wanted peace.[116]

In particular, the religious leaders and elders appear to have played a significant part in sensitising the communities on the need to accept back former combatants. In the words of one religious leader, "The chief Khadi has been very active in arguing for forgiveness. The religious leaders have encouraged the traditional practice of slaughtering sheep. This is very helpful, especially where there have been atrocities."[117]

While community acceptance has clearly been impressive, there were also indications that there is a strong residue of resentment. There was an undercurrent of feelings that those who were victims of the war had not been adequately acknowledged in the dividends of the negotiated settlement. As the representative for the Amnesty commission in Arua said, "In the general community, some people feel bad, especially the victims. They feel like it is rewarding the killers... We have to tell them, your compensation is peace. Now you can sleep, you can dig."[118] Or, in the words of a civilian, "People accept them, but the grudge is still inside."[119]

In many instances, these feelings stem from the atrocities committed by the rebels, feelings that did not disappear with the ending of hostilities. This has raised a plethora of complex issues summarised by one civilian:

> In some communities, arms were amputated, ears were cut off – but not so much. Questions are being raised: the government has pardoned these people, given them packages, but what about me whose ears were cut? They need some specific programmes to support war victims.[120]

While the general attitude towards ex-combatants has clearly been overwhelmingly accepting, it is not a reintegration process without difficulties. The potential for renewed antagonism between ex-combatants and civilians clearly exists, as unresolved issues threaten to re-appear if they are not addressed. Even though communities are enormously relieved to see the conflict at an end, there are still numerous unresolved issues that have to be addressed, particularly where individuals have been personally aggrieved by the conflict.

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[116] Focus group discussion with three teachers, Maracha Country, 19th April 2004.
[117] Interview with religious leader, Arua, 15th April 2004.
[118] Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Obitre-Gama, chair Amnesty Commission for West Nile, Arua, 15th April 2004.
[119] Interview with Town Clerk, Koboko, 19th April 2004.
[120] Interview with male civilian, Yumbe, 23rd April 2004.

5.2 Promises made

A dominant issue with regard to long-term stability appears to revolve around the issue of promises made in both the peace agreement with the UNRF II, and those made to the WNBF. A number of dividends were agreed upon in the UNRF II agreement: first, each ex-combatant is entitled to a package under the Amnesty Commission;[121] second, the government committed itself to give the defunct UNRF II a lump sum of 4.2 billion Uganda shillings, to be distributed by a Liaison Committee that would be formed to implement the distribution of the money;[122] and third, it was agreed that there would be some form of Development Conference organised within four months after the peace agreement had been signed, in order to promote wider development within the region.[123]

However, there is also the complex issue of determining how the benefits are distributed. There were allegations that certain sections of the UNRF II had deliberately omitted some names from the roster due to internal grievances.[124] While there were numerous different opinions on the exact status of many of these issues, two concerns recurred throughout the interviews: first, the question of whether or not what had been promised was actually going to materialise, and second, when it does materialise, who is going to benefit directly and how is it going to be distributed. The outcome of both these questions was then directly linked into people's perceptions of long-term stability in the area.

Thus there was concern as to whether or not government will deliver on its promises. In particular, there was frequent reference to the issue of previously broken assurances that had been a root cause of the UNRF re-forming into the UNRF II. People were clearly worried about the possibility of history repeating itself. In the words of an MP from the region:

> The former UNRF who were still at home in West Nile had not been given the packages they had been promised. When the arrests began, they went to Sudan and formed UNRF II… Now if the government is not careful, there will be another UNRF III. For instance, up to now, Bamuze and his boys have not been paid. Those boys are just loitering around in West Nile and anyone with 10 000 shillings can lure them to the bush.[125]

However, since the completion of these interviews, the GoU has approved the release of the initial installment on their commitment.[126]

Furthermore, other groups of combatants were referred to as not having received what was perceived to be rightfully theirs. As one ex-WNBF combatant said, "I feel bad for the boys

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[121] Article III (2) The Peace Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the Uganda National Rescue Front II, 24th December 2002.
[122] Article III (3) The Peace Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the Uganda National Rescue Front II, 24th December 2002.
[123] Article V (3) The Peace Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the Uganda National Rescue Front II, 24th December 2002.
[124] Interviews with Elder, 23rd April, 2004; community worker, 23rd April 2004; and former UNRF II officer, 24th April, 2004.
[125] Interview with West Nile MP, Kampala, 7th April 2004.
[126] "West Nile ex-combatants get sh530m", page 4, New Vision, 12 May 2004.

because we have not been paid up to now. UA were told to fill forms so that they can be paid, but up to date not one of them has been paid."[127]

There was divided opinion, however, on whether or not, if expectations were not met, this could generate a return to armed insurgency. On the whole, attitudes towards the sustainability of peace were fairly positive, but many individuals qualified this with statements that the peace depended on whether or not the settlement was adequately honoured. As Wamala said, "Nobody wants to see more war in that area after all they have been through. There is no fertile ground to re-start war, unless they are pushed against the wall again."[128] Or, in the words of a religious leader from the area, "The current government came in a blind way – the people ran. Later the government learned, listened, consulted. But now it must fulfil what it has promised."[129]

By contrast, a former FUNA and WNBF combatant expressed both strong anger over the lack of payments, and his optimism that it would not drive people back to the bush:

> When government granted us amnesty, we were promised resettlement packages but up to now, there's nothing. The entire former WNBF has not been paid any resettlement packages. These are over 4000 people, including those who were detained in Luzira. People are starving. We're being used like rats. When a cat eats more than 10 rats, it leaves on moving.[130]

But he then later added: "I don't think people will go back to the bush. They're tired of fighting. And when you fought, who do you end up fighting? Your own brother and sister."[131]

Thus, the extent to which the government was seen to keep its word was perceived as crucial to sustaining the peace. It was also seen as a useful precedent to any future negotiations with the LRA in northern Uganda: many informants talked of how, if the process goes smoothly in West Nile, it might encourage Kony and his fighters to follow a similar process. As an ex-combatant said, "If the government fulfils its pledge, then the West Nile will be a model to prove the government's sincerity."[132]

At the same time, there was a corresponding notion that if promises were seen to be broken in West Nile, it could have a profoundly negative impact on the potential for peaceful resolution in northern Uganda. As an ex-WNBF combatant asked: "How will those who are still fighting be encouraged to come out when those of us who came out are

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[127] Interview with ex-WNBF combatant, Yumbe, 25th April 2004.
[128] Interview with Major General Katumba Wamala, Inspector General of Police, Kibuli Police headquarters, 15th April 2004.
[129] Interview with religious leader, Arua, 14th April 2004.
[130] Interview with Lt. Col. Abdalatif, Arua, 15th April 2004.
[131] Interview with Lt. Col. Abdalatif, Arua, 15th April 2004.
[132] Interview with ex-UNRFII combatant, Yumbe, 24th April 2004.

suffering?"[133] Others referred to the fact that the LRA is watching carefully to see whether or not the government will meet its agreement with the former UNRF II.[134]

Distributing the dividends

The issue of expectations being met is further complicated by the lack of proper dissemination of information over what exactly had been agreed on, and who was to benefit. From the interviews it appears that the exact definition of who is an ex-combatant is still unclear and, in particular, refers back to the issue of certain individuals and groups feeling excluded from the peace process. Indeed, it relates to how the conflicts are defined, and the extent to which the different groups have been given legitimacy. In this environment of 'rewards', labels of 'ex-combatant' or 'terrorist' become a crucial means of legitimising someone's future economic and political status.

At one level, there was some degree of resentment among the communities that it was the rebels who were the ones benefiting rather than the victims, an issue that has been referred to above. As a community worker in Yumbe said, "Rebel reporters were given incentives to stop fighting, like 200 000 Uganda Shillings, iron sheets, bicycles and mattresses. But the common person is given no incentives. It only proved to youth that rebellion, making havoc, was a good means to gain something and then join the government."[135] Or, in the words of a civilian from Yumbe, "War affected the whole district, but the benefits of peace are primarily going to the two counties where the ex-combatants are. It should be spread across the whole region. We all suffered, we were all left behind."[136]

However, there was also considerable resentment among the ex-combatants about how money and goods that are available are being divided. An ex-UNRF II combatant articulated how he perceived the distribution of resources to have been unjust:

> Bamuze is being very unfair to some of the ex-combatants by rewarding people who don't deserve the money it is like "You grow your food and another persons comes to eat it." It's only a matter of time; Soldiers will go back the bush. Just like in the past Leaders were eating alone and yet people are working alone in the field.[137]

Or, as another ex-UNRF II combatant said, "I can't talk about the handover of UNRF II because they were very unfair in their transactions, they have decided to reward people who did not participate in the wars but opportunists. Even we who came back earlier have not been paid."[138] Such feelings of resentment are exacerbated by the extent to which the defunct UNRF II is maintaining a level of organisational structure, reinforced by initiatives such as the Bidibidi cooperative.[139] While officially open to membership outside the

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[133] Interview with Lt. Col. Abdalatif, Arua, 15th April 2004.
[134] Interview with Major General Bamuze, Fairway Hotel, Kampala, 28th April 2004.
[135] Interview with two community workers, Yumbe, 23rd April 2004.
[136] Interview with male civilian, Arua, 14th April 2004.
[137] Interview with ex-UNRFII combatant, Yumbe, 25th April 2004.
[138] Interview with ex-UNRFII combatant, Yumbe, 24th April 2004.
[139] Interview with female aid worker, Yumbe, 26th April 2004.

defunct UNRF II, by preserving their identity, including ranks and the authority which come with them, it makes it clearer who is 'in' and who is 'out'.

5.3 Ongoing security concerns: the presence of arms in the district

A further concern that relates to both issues outlined above is the presence of numerous small arms within the region. As one community leader said, with reference to the number of weapons: "We have attained peace, but how do we sustain it?"[140] While a gun buy-back programme has been initiated with partial success, it has also served to create a more profitable market for guns. A religious worker described how this functions:

> In Yumbe they were paying between 125 000 and 150 000 Uganda Shillings depending on the weapon… But guns cost 25 000 – 50 000 Uganda Shillings in Sudan, and in Congo you can buy a gun on credit. Soon so many people were bringing guns across the border from Sudan that the SPLA lodged a complaint.[141]

Furthermore, there was consensus that, while considerable numbers of weapons had been handed in many still remained. As one civilian said, "Bamuze agreed that there should be no more war. He handed over all the soldiers to the government with the weapons. But you can't remove all the millet from the granary – some has to remain."[142] The presence of arms within West Nile, therefore, is seen to have the potential to threaten future insecurity and is an issue that needs to be addressed.

Thus what comes through clearly in this brief overview of the post-conflict dynamics of the region, is the extent to which sustainable peace can only be created if the ongoing process includes both the security and the development concerns of all elements of the community: the combatant parties, the victims of the conflict and the community as a whole. Indeed, what the interviews show is the extent to which all these issues are interrelated and need to be treated holistically, particularly in creating long-term and sustainable reconciliation that is appropriate to the affected communities. In doing this, the goal of a complete peace process does not stop with simply ending the fighting and completing a peace agreement, but rather through the full implementation of the peace agreement itself.

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[140] Interview with community leader, Yumbe, 23rd April 2004.
[141] Interview with religious worker, Arua, 14th April 2004.
[142] Interview with civilian, Arua, 19th April 2004.

6 CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNED

Irrespective of any shortcomings in the negotiated agreement, the West Nile peace process proves that ending conflicts in Uganda through peaceful means is possible. It therefore gives a glimmer of hope in situations where seemingly intractable conflicts continue, not least of all in the neighbouring districts currently suffering from the LRA insurgency. It is therefore helpful to summarise the specific factors that enabled the conflicts to end in West Nile.

1) It is clear that peace in West Nile would not have been achieved without the community initiating it and sustaining it. Therefore it is vital that communities are integrated into each step of the peace process.

2) It is essential that the traditional mechanisms and institutions of peace building in a community be considered and effectively implemented. Several examples played a significant role in West Nile, including the authority of the elders – in particular their ability to use the threat of the curse; the significant culture of forgiveness within the Lugbara and Kakwa communities; and the intact community and family structures in West Nile.

3) Also significant was the strategy implemented by the community of approaching the rebel organisations both through family members, and through suspected collaborators or mobilisers within the community. The willingness of the UPDF to allow this process to proceed without interference or intimidation contrasts significantly with practice elsewhere.

4) The creation and maintenance of an environment of trust on the part of those in authority was essential to ending the UNRF II conflict. It is essential that all levels of leadership be honestly committed to the process; and that messages be consistently sent and that they be consistent with all practices. Refraining from demonising the rebel groups, and the willingness of the UPDF and government representatives to show genuine respect for both the combatants and the community, were essential to creating a level of trust that led to the conclusion of the peace agreement. Without this trust, cycles of violence would have remained unbroken. Such trust-building measures were also demonstrated by the government in its handling of the conflict in Teso in the late 1980s. However, while in Teso government commitment was illustrated by the creation of a presidential commission for Teso that had a more comprehensive approach and brought the whole weight of the central government to bear on the process, such cohesion was lacking in the West Nile process. Therefore it is important that the government's involvement must be seen to be comprehensive and unequivocal.

5) The role of the International Community was vital to the success of the peace negotiations. Their participation lent legitimacy to the process, validated the views and the concerns of the Ugandan participants, and facilitated communications and relationships through the infusion of resources not otherwise available. However, the potential negative impact of these interventions cannot be over emphasised, and

needs to be carefully calculated. While the presence of international bodies does lend credibility and visibility to the peace process, the weight that the donor community carries can either sustain the process or risk derailing it by pushing for completion at the expense of the integrity of the process.

6) Above all, the peace process must be an integrated process including a cessation of hostilities, a negotiated peace agreement and the successful implementation of the agreement. Furthermore, the necessity of giving focused attention to reconciliation processes must not be overlooked. The complete and successful implementation of the whole process not only ensures the sustained credibility of those involved, but it also lays the groundwork for future negotiations. Issues of security, human rights, governance, development and reconciliation are all inherent parts of a comprehensive peace process.

7) All actors and voices must be included in each step of the peace process. In order to ensure successful implementation of the peace agreement, and the sustainability of the peace, it is important that the views of the government, the combatants, civilian victims and the community as a whole be included at all steps. Without this level of participation, long-term ownership of the peace process is jeopardised.

While it is impossible to simply transplant what has been effective in ending one particular conflict onto another, given the highly complex nature of armed insurgency, there are clearly lessons that have been learned in West Nile that can be applied to the situation in northern Uganda. Therefore the following section summarises some of the lessons that are specifically relevant to the ongoing conflict by the LRA (see RLP working paper 11 for details):

1) The way in which government has conducted itself in West Nile contrasts significantly to perceptions of how it has carried out its efforts in the North. While in West Nile messages from senior officials were consistent and matched practice of government agencies on the ground, in the north the government is perceived to have been sending conflicting messages: inconsistently expressed policies have not always matched the practice of government bodies on the ground. The confusion this has generated has seriously eroded the ability of both the Acholi community and the LRA to trust the government's commitment to peace. Furthermore, while in West Nile the government was willing to pursue solutions to the conflict other than military means, even when discussing the possibilities of peace in Northern Uganda, the Museveni administration has consistently asserted the pre-eminence of a military solution and accused advocates of peaceful resolution of the conflict of being rebel collaborators.

2) The importance of community structures and institutions in bringing peace to West Nile offers valuable lessons for the peace process in Northern Uganda. Both traditional and local political leadership, as well as cultural practices, offer significant opportunities for furthering the peace process. It is essential that the government and the UPDF work to support and facilitate these mechanisms as a means of building confidence and trust. As long as the community has the support

and trust of the government, it can exert strong pressure on individuals within LRA circles that will open possibilities for dialogue.

3) In West Nile, the communities remained cohesive, because they were not scattered into IDP camps, allowing the authority of the leaders to remain intact. Furthermore, once they had taken the decision to work with the security forces, they became a vital source of intelligence. The continued policy of maintaining the population in Northern Uganda in IDP camps fosters ruptures between clan and political structures, and the people. Therefore it is essential that people be allowed to return to their original communities and rejuvenate these structures. The benefits of allowing this to happen is supported by the recent incursion of the LRA into Teso: since the community remained intact and in contact with its structures, it was easy to mobilise unified resistance, and consequently the LRA had less room to manoeuvre.

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Map


UGANDA
SUDAN
KENYA
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
RWANDA
Kigali
UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA
Lake Victoria
Lake Albert
Lake Edward
Lake Kwania
Lake Kyoga
Kampala
YUMBE
MOYO
ADJUMANI
ARUA
NEBBI
GULU
KITGUM
PADER
KOTIDO
MOROTO
APAC
LIRA
KATAKWI
KAKAPIRIPIRIT
MASINDI
SOROTI
KUMI
SIRONKO
KAPCHORWA
HOIMA
NAKASONGOLA
KAYUNGA
KAMULI
PALLISA
MBALE
KIBOGA
KIBALE
LUWERO
IGANGA
TORORO
BUNDIBUGYO
KABAROLE
KYENJOJO
MUBENDE
JINJA
BUSIA
KAMPALA
KASESE
KAMWENGE
MPIGI
WAKISO
SEMBABULE
MASAKA
MAYUGE
BUGIRI
BUSHENYI
MBARARA
MUKONO
KALANGALA
RAKAI
KANUNGU
RUKUNGIRI
NTUNGAMO
KABALE
National capital
International boundary
District boundary
0 25 50 75 100 km
0 25 50 75 mi
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Map No. 3852.1 UNITED NATIONS September 2002
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