

The impact of returning home after the twenty-year armed conflict in the Acoli sub-region in Uganda: the case of Nwoya

Charles Okumu, Gulu University

Abstract: A number of successive coup d'états in Uganda from the Amin coup in 1971, the Okello coup in 1985, followed by Yoweri Museveni's seizure of power in 1986 marked the beginning of the twenty-year war by the remnants of the Acoli Generals, Alice Lakwena and Joseph Kony, armies against the Government army for supremacy over Acoliland. The insurgency forced some of the educated Acoli to flee into exile, while the majority was forced into the Internally Displaced People's Camps (IDPs) from the 1990s up to 2006, when the LRA fled from Uganda. The Camps were disbanded and the IDPs began to return to their former land. However, many of the returnees found their land taken over by those who had returned earlier or the rich who had bought their land, thus sparking new land conflict in Acoliland. The impact of the twenty years in the Camps fractured traditional Acoli culture but did not break the people's resilience. This article explores the impact of the LRA armed conflict on the Acoli population with special emphasis on internal displacement. The methodology used was qualitative where data was collected using open-ended questionnaires, interview guides for focused group or individual discussions and personal observation.

Keywords: Internal displacement, land conflict, post conflict.

1. Introduction. The Acoli of Uganda: a brief historical perspective

According to historians and oral sources (Anywar et al. 1954), the people known as the Acoli are said to have split from the main Lwo clan in southern Sudan in the 12th Century and settled in the Acoli sub-region of Uganda in the 16th Century. The historians advance a number of reasons for the split but generally agree that the main reason was the infertility and insufficiency of the land. The movement southwards brought the group to more fertile land teemed with animals.

There are many reasons why the Acoli settled in their present land. The main ones are: expansion to south was not possible because of the great *Onekbonyo Kulu*, the River Nile. The Langi had already settled further south. Expansion to the west was not possible because of the fear of the Lendo and Karakak of what is now known as the West Nile. Expansion to the east was not possible because of the war-like Karimojong. Thus, the Acoli had no choice but to settle where they are today.

1.2 A brief history of the conflict leading to the 20-year insurgency in the Acoli sub-region

The main cause of instability in Uganda dates back to the colonial period from 1900 to 1962 when Uganda became politically independent. The instability was caused by a lopsided policy of the Colonial Government, which focused its economic development and education in the central, south and western Uganda while the rest of the country was left behind. In the case of Acoliland, the challenge by the Lamogi people to colonial power and rule, which culminated in the Lamogi rebellion of 1910, exposed the Acoli as fearless warriors who could be recruited into the colonial army and a good source of cheap labour in the industrial town of Jinja. The missionaries were more concerned with conversion and training of religious teachers for the local churches than formal education which could have led to an early development of Acoliland.

When the First World War broke out in 1914, the Colonial Government conscripted many able-bodied Acoli men as carrier corps although a few of them saw fighting outside Uganda. When the Second World War broke out in 1939, many of the Acoli in the King's African Rifles (KAR) fought alongside the British army just like the Nepalese specialized regiment, the Gurkhas. More Acoli men joined the army after the war while those with basic primary education joined other

security organs, such as the police, prison and private security. A few educated took white collar jobs in the District or Central government, but the majority of the Acoli depended on peasant cultivation which was divided into cash and food crops. The livestock were kept not for the sale of their milk or meat, but as traditional wealth used in marriage and other traditional ritual ceremonies.

At independence in 1962, the economic situation in Acoli and the north as a whole was less rosy than that of the central, west and southern parts of Uganda. The north became a source of cheap labour and raw materials with cotton being the main cash crop grown. The Acoli were the dominant tribe in the army but when Amin came to power in 1971, he ordered the Acoli and Langi soldiers in the different military barracks around the country to surrender their guns. Many of those who complied were killed. Amin went further, and arrested and killed many of the educated Acoli while a few went into exile.

The coming into power of Museveni in 1986 did not bring stability to the Acoli region in particular. When Museveni ordered the defeated Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) soldiers to surrender their weapons and report to military barracks, memories of what Amin did when he gave the same orders in 1971 came back fresh in the minds of the defeated soldiers, some of whom escaped being killed by Amin. This was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. They instead formed fighting groups and started the rebellion which turned into insurgency with Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) as its main backbone.

There were several attempts at peace talks which ended with the Juba Peace Accord, but this was neither signed nor ratified by the LRA or the Uganda Government. The Uganda Government, with the support of the Americans, is still fighting a protracted war with Kony's LRA, albeit in the Central African Republic and Congo. As for the Acoli people, the war effectively ended in 2006, and since 2007, many of the people who were holed up in the Internally Displaced People's Camps (IDPs) have returned to their original villages where land and poverty wars are ongoing.

2. The purpose of the research

The main purpose of the research is to document the impact of the twenty-year insurgency on those who were internally displaced and forced to live in camps in Nwoya District. The article attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How do returnees from the IDP Camps reconstrue their lived experiences and challenges resulting from internal displacement?
2. How do political agents construe the situation, and to what extent do they take responsibility for finding solutions to the challenges facing the returnees?

2.1 Context of the study

Nwoya District is one of the seven districts in the Acoli sub-region. It was curved out of Amuru District on 1st July 2010. It is bordered by Amuru in the north; Gulu in the northeast; Oyam in the east; Kiryandongo in the southeast; Masindi in the south and Buliisa in the southwest. It is located 44 km from Gulu and 330 km north of Kampala with a total land area of 4,736.2 square kilometres. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2014 Census, Nwoya has a population of 139,000 people, but according to the Village Health Team (VHT), which conducted household registration at village level assisted by *Rwot Kweri* (Village Headman) in 2017, the figure is at 200,000. The main economic activity is subsistence agriculture but since 2013, a total of 26 large foreign-owned commercial farms are operational with the largest (3000 hectares) being a German multi-billion shillings farm, Amatheon Agri Limited, employing 100 permanent staff and 200 casual labourers during peak seasons. A new economic activity is oil exploration and extraction in the near future.

According to the Nwoya District Local Government Chairman (LC5), Mr Patrick Okello-Oryema, the District plans to organize an investor's forum to bring commercial farmers together and regulate their activities. He also encourages the local landowners to lease their land for a maximum of 49 years using the bottom up approach where the investors negotiate with the landowners directly, unlike in Amuru where the top down approach has caused more land conflict than resolving it (Daily Monitor 2016).

A map of Uganda showing Nwoya District
(Map data: Google, accessed on 2 December 2017).



A detailed map of Nwoya District (Map data: Google, accessed on 2 December 2017).



3. Methodology

The research was mainly carried out using a qualitative approach commonly used in Social Science research. The fieldwork was done in the three sub-counties of Alero, Purongo and Koc Goma, and

Anaka Town Council where the District Headquarter is located. The choice of Nwoya district was twofold: one of the biggest Internally Displaced People's (IDP) Camps was located in Nwoya, and it is where many of the displaced persons returned to find their land taken and the survivors are again embroiled in land conflict with little hope for the education of their children in the post conflict situation.

The study was mainly qualitative using cross-sectional survey. The main instrument for data collection was a questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix) as most of the respondents are semi-literate or illiterate. The same instrument was used during the focus-group discussion (FGD) at the village and sub-county levels. Respondents were selected purposively and comprised returnees, Local Government officials as well as political leaders at district and sub-county levels. Due to time constraints, one sub-county chief was sampled out of the four; at the District levels, the Community Development Officer and Education Officer were interviewed together with the LC 5 Chairman who is the political head of the District. The Local Council Three Chairman (LC3) was also interviewed as he is the chairman of the sub-county/division Land Area Committee. The lower Local Council leaders (LC 2 and 1), who are elected leaders, and the traditional leaders were also interviewed using the semi-structured questionnaire.

Ethical consideration was taken into account throughout the data collection process which commenced after obtaining permission from the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) who is the Administrative head of the District. At the individual level, consent was obtained and explanation given that the data collected was for academic use and not political or funding, as the researcher is an academician with no political ambitions for any office in the district, and who is not working for any donor/funding agencies or Central Government. During the interviews, the researcher discreetly recorded the body language of the participants, as sometimes words do not tell the whole story especially of those involved in land conflicts, where spoken words may be used by one of the parties to escalate the conflict or prolong the discussion and delay resolution.

The paper is divided into two parts: the first part describes the life of the internally displaced people and the effects of displacement on the culture and education of the school-going age children. The second part looks at post conflict and the resultant land conflict after the closures of the IDP camps from 2006 onwards.

4. SECTION 1: The impact of the LRA war on the family structure in the Internally Displaced People (IDP) Camps in Nwoya District

During the insurgency, the majority of the people were forcibly driven from their homes to the biggest Camp in Anaka by the military. During the field interviews, some of the returnees spoke of how Government soldiers used military force including helicopter gunships to bomb areas near their homesteads to get the people to move. This information was collaborated by Ojok Francis of Ceke Ward, who, in an interview, said:

Wan jo ma onongo watye loka Acwa, kibedo ka bolo bomb ki latugutugu me ryemo wa ki gang. Jo mukene ma pe gi mito aa, ki wango odi wa dero gi ducu. Wa laro kom wa i camp i Anaka.

We the people, who were living across the River Aswa, were bombed out of our villages by helicopter gunships in the guise of bombing out LRA soldiers. Some homes were razed to the ground so that no one remains in the village. We had no choice but to move to Anaka Camp (translated into English by the author).

Those who were slow to leave the villages were roughened-up by the soldiers who were protecting

them from the LRA.

Each camp was demarcated into zones; for example Anaka Camp had five zones each of which had an elected zonal leader and Local Council One (LC1) Chairman as part of the camp administrative structure, with the Camp Commandant as the overall leader (a Military Officer). Once in the camp, an area to pitch your tent was allocated to you and your family. You had no idea who your neighbours were or which clans they came from. You were all the same: internally displaced and traumatized persons. This was where the family breakdown began.

Traditionally, the Acoli lived in closely-knit communities with the head of the family as the supreme ruler of his household. The wife (wives) and children were answerable to him. A number of close families belonging to a common ancestor or a great grandfather formed the clan (*kaka*) that had a clan head (*ladit kaka*) who was the oldest and respected male member of the clan. This was the unit which controlled the customary clan land, carried out rituals related to the clan, and settled family disputes. Beyond the clan is the chiefdom where the *Rwot/Chief* is the administrative head. During the insurgency, the clan played a minimal role in ensuring that all its members were safe but it was helpless in ensuring that they lived together in one zone in the camps. With restricted movements in the camps, it was not easy for the clan council to meet to settle family issues. Even worse was the fact that, over the years, the children of the clan in a large camp like the one in Anaka left the single hut, as they could not continue to share it with their parents, and wandered off to other zones. During the twenty years, many did not know each other and many cases of incest came to light. Charles Odongo of Pidati Ward, who spent ten years in Anaka camp, said:

Lok obedo ka kati ma nyutu ni wat ki wat obedo ka butu i kingi pien gin pe ngene.
Ludito kaka bedo piny ka ki tumu kin dano macalo meno ento kine mukene awobe pe
oo iye weko kwer pe tum maber.

Many such cases of incest were identified and the elders would then carry out cleansing ceremonies but in some cases, the boy or man would vanish leaving the ceremony incomplete (translated into English by the author).

There were other causes of family breakdowns during the insurgency, and some of these included physical abuse of family members especially by the husbands, many of whom had become drunkard or found other women including widows or even a neighbour's wife. The case that was documented and shared with me by one of the zonal leaders was that of a woman who ran off with another man who could provide her with material things such as clothing and food. The new 'husband' was luckier than other camp members. His original home was not far from the camp and he, like others in similar situations, was allowed to continue cultivating their land and sell the produce to the military personal, and a few camp members who had children outside the district and often sent them money. Other sources of financing alcoholism included selling off the food items from WFP. Families with children over the age of 18 years registered them as adults. They would get their handouts and some would bring them to the parents' 'home'. Therefore, there was excess foodstuff especially maize-flour which could be brewed and drunk as "*kwete, loci*" (fresh brew) or distilled into *waragi (spirit liquor)*. The drunkards who, I was informed, included women and young adults, spent most of their time at the various drinking bars. A study by Okello and Hovil (2007: 433-443), documented such places as an indication of "emergency of 'danger zones' within the camps (such areas close to military facilities) which are typically referred to as having many bars and are characterized by behaviour and activity likely to contribute to Gender Based Violence (GBV)" (2007: 439). Many of the women and girls became prey to the soldiers and civilians, who could offer them some form of comfort or material things, and the other alternative

was forced sex, which was classified as rape or defilement depending on the age of the girl. An earlier study, *Suffering in Silence: A Study of Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Pabbo Camp, Gulu [now Amuru] District, Northern Uganda* (2005) documents large scale GBV, a confirmation of what I found as one of the causes of family breakdown in Anaka Camp. Due to the high level of violence and sexual abuse of both adults and children, there was loss of respect for parents, some of whom were perpetrators of Sexually Based Gender Violence (SBGV), drunkards or idlers. Girl-children became mothers looking after their younger siblings, while the older ones copycatted their parents as they saw their behaviour as normal. The youth formed their own ‘clubs’ and organized dances (traditional and modern) in the Camp leading to early pregnancies and child-mothers. Since many, if not all, rural schools were closed, all school-going age children spent little time in the UPE Camp learning centres, which were Camp teachers conducted the teaching without any School Inspectors. Therefore, many of the children spent most of the time roaming in the camps or spending hours at the few water points. One of the parents lamented, “Kwan dong peke. Lutino lak ata calo dyel oro pien lunyodo pe paro pigi. There is no schooling here. The children roam around like goats during the dry season. The parents don’t care about them” (translated into English by the author). It did not matter what time the children came back ‘home’ since most of the parents would not be there anyway. Therefore, there was almost a total breakdown of family-hood, except for the few families that embraced Christianity and had strong moral values that kept them together throughout the years in the Camp. This was confirmed by James Okumu, one of the returnees I interviewed, who said:

Labongo keto Lubanga inyimwa, kono wan weng warweng i Camp. Lega ki kwano Jiri okonyo wan jo ma waribe dok wacung i kit me dini.

Without putting God first, we would all be lost in the Camp. Prayers and reading the Bible helped us in the Born Again group to survive the moral decay of the Camp (translated into English by the author).

A few who had gone as singles found partners (from the youth clubs or dancing arenas, etc.), cohabited and brought home their families. Some of the women who cohabited with soldiers and reckless young men or older married men, came back home alone with their children as did the widows and widowers. For example, Akumu Filomena of Paduny Ward said in an interview with me:

An adwogo ki lutino adek ma wegi dong pe anyego ka matye iye pien gin obedo lumony ma obedo ka gwoko dano I camp. Ngat acel latin Acoli me Palaro ki ngat acel wod Muganda ma gangi pe angeyo.

I came home with three children whom I produced with two men who were army men in charge of our camp. One was an Acoli man from Palaro and the other a Muganda whose home I did not know. Now I have to look after my children without their help (translated into English by the author).

Unfortunately, upon returning home, the traditional system of taking care of children brought home by daughters/sisters whose marriages broke down or husbands passed on or just bastards, broke down in the camps. This was the explanation I was given by the LC 5 Chairman of Nwoya District and the sub-county Chiefs of Purongo and Koc Goma when I asked them why there were many street children/idlers in Anaka Town, Purongo and Koc Goma trading centres.

One issue that we need to mention in terms of camp life is the constant fires that used to break out in the camps and burn down so many the 'homes'. According to some of the interviewees who lived in Anaka Camp, the fires often broke out mid-morning or in the afternoon when family members were not at home. Okumu James confirmed in an interview with me that he witnessed many such fires, including his own 'home' that was burnt to ashes. Okumu said:

I nino eno ni, an kijo ganga wacito odiko con ka tic ipoto ma tye cok ki camp. Nino ducu ki yee ni wacito ipoto cake caa adek nio wa caa apar. Nino memo mac ocake kine caa angwen ki nucu. Odi mapol owang wa mega bene ma jami mo keken pe olare. Dano cok kwedwa aye okonyo wa ki jami tedo ki me butu mapeya NGO obino ka poki wa jami mukene.

On that particular day, I and other adult family members left to work in our gardens, which were near the Camp. We noticed the fire but by the time we reached the camp, our 'home' was razed to the ground and all our possessions burnt (translated into English by the author).

He further said that, in some cases, children were burnt in the grass thatched 'homes'. The affected families then relied on the generosity of the extended family/clan members and neighbours before the Camp Leadership and NGO would bring them help in form of tents and food but not clothing.

Movements were curtailed by the Camp rules, purportedly to protect the people from being abducted by the LRA. The irony was that the military facilities within the bigger Camp were surrounded by the zonal 'homes'. Daytime movements outside the Camp were restricted between 9:00am and 4:00pm. Within the Camp, there was a night curfew from 8:00pm to 6:00am in the morning. Anyone caught would be severely beaten by the military patrols. The patrols would also, according to Okumu and Odongo, throw stones on top of the 'homes' where there were noises as a result of quarrelling or drunkenness. Thus, drunkards, idlers and club/gang members were all under the control of the military during the night, but had freedom of movement during the day. The confinement of people to their 'homes' at night was also responsible for family breakdown. Some of the younger people intentionally stayed longer at their friends 'home' or detained their female friends up to the curfew time so that they could stay overnight. The parents could do nothing about the absence of the youth as it was better that they stayed with their friends than being beaten by the military patrols. Some girls who were caught in the curfew, according to information I collected, became 'wives' of some of the military men. Cohabiting was not frowned upon since the normal marriage system had also broken down. One of the women I interviewed was positive about cohabiting:

An abedo ki a Koc mo pi mwaka apar dok bene wanyalo lutino adek ma adok kwedigi gang. Coo mukene pe mito nyom ci dong an atim ngo?

I met and cohabited with a man from Koc for nearly ten years. We produced three children and I have come back home with them. What was I supposed to do since there were no men who wanted to get properly married? (translated into English by the author).

In some respect, the Camps became prisons for the Acoli people who traditionally lived in scattered villages within clan land. Camp life subverted the social, economic and the entire way of life of the Acoli people who were confined to the camps for a good part of the twenty-year

insurgency.

4.1 Analysis of the impact of the war on education

“The war created the lost generation in Acoli society”. This is the opening remark of Mr Dan Arwenyo, the District Education Officer (DEO) of Nwoya District, at the beginning of our discussion on the impact of the LRA war on education. The DEO, Mr. Arwenyo (whose name translates as “I have lost”), is himself a product of the Anaka Camp but one of the few who managed to obtain a better education than the rest of the “lost generation” who are young adults in their mid-thirties and early forties.

What caused the “lost generation” who has also turned out to be economically unproductive? According to my findings and documented records at the District Education Office, the main cause is the closure of both rural and some urban secondary and primary schools as a result of the LRA war. There were Camp schools but, according to the DEO, these were ‘displaced learning centres’ which were ill facilitated with some of the learners studying under trees, with few textbooks and instructional materials. The teachers, who themselves were displaced just like the learners, took advantage of the poor conditions, reluctance of the learners and the absence of School Inspectors to relax and not live up to the expectation of their professional training and teachers’ codes of conduct. This resulted in inadequate teaching manifested in the poor results, which are evident even in 2016, more than ten years after returning home. The cause is generic: the displaced learning centres produced sub-grade learners. Some of these found their way into the Teacher Training Colleges and became teachers themselves, teaching either in the same displaced learning centres or the former rural schools that survived the war. There are many primary schools in Nwoya which have never produced any Grade 1 or 2 in their Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE). For example, a school like Te-Okono in Alero sub-county has never in pre or post LRA war obtained Grade 1.

What became of the product of the ‘learning centres’ and the ‘lost generation’, a question one is bound to ask? According to Nwoya District officials and opinion leaders, some few have settled in petty trade as market venders (*awara*) or own local lock-up shops. Some sold part of their family land and are now proud *boda-boda* (motor cycle) owners and a few even own taxis. Those who have no land to sell or family members to give them start-up capital languish in the villages or in the mushrooming trading centres, which, according to the County-Chief of Purongo, Mr. Peter Okello, have become the new IDP Camps. Mr Okello said, “They claim that they cannot go back to the ‘vil’ – village and dig. Some live off petty thefts and spend what they gain out of the sale of the stolen goods betting in the many betting shops which have sprung up in the trading centres in the Acoli sub-region”. According to Okello-Oryema, the LC5 of Nwoya District, the District Council voted to ban betting /gaming in Anaka Town Council to prevent criminal activities associated with betting. However, outside the Town Council, betting and gaming flourishes with Koc Goma having the highest number of betting outlets patronized by the ‘new IPD campers’ who cannot go back to the ‘vil’. In this trading centre too one finds the highest level of anti-social behaviour, including the smoking of banned substances and promiscuity especially on market days and weekends. The situation is made worse by the high level of consumption of cheap but highly concentrated and intoxicating spirits in sachets costing Uganda Shs 500 (US 7cents) and therefore affordable to many of the poor people. The ‘deadly’ spirits trade under various names such as: ‘Chief, London No 1, Empire, Director and Kitoko’. These spirits are distilled and sold by Asians whom the Government classifies as “investors”. Some are returnees themselves after Amin chased them out of Uganda in 1972. These “investors” are destroying the Acoli youth who are the major consumers of the spirits.

4.2 *The return from the IDP Camps and resettlement*

Return and resettlement did not take place in one day. It was a gradual and phased movement unlike the forced movement to the IDP camps. The guns began to fall silent in the Acoli sub-region towards the end of 2005 when Kony and his LRA fighters were gradually pushed into the Sudan. By 2006, most of Acoli land was free of LRA though there were sporadic attacks or encounters with the Government troops. The process of decongestion of camps began in mid-2006 with people being moved to smaller camps nearer to their original villages. This allowed people to go home during the day and begin to rebuild their homes and plant food crops in preparation to formal return home. For those who were nearer their original homes, like Nyeko Fred and James Okumu, they went straight to their villages from the big Camp in Anaka. Most of the others finally reached and settled home from 2007, although a few elderly and sick people remained in the Camps until the policy of forced return was implemented whereby the ‘homes’ in the big Camps were destroyed. The return and resettlement also had impact on the life of the Acoli people and we begin with education.

4.3 *The challenges in the revamping of the educational system in post war Nwoya District*

Education is not only confined to formal education but there is also the informal education through which the community’s culture is transmitted from generation to generation. The displacement into Camps led to the failure of the community itself to transmit Acoli culture values and philosophy to their children as indicated by two of the interviewees, Charles Odongo Pidati and James Okumu, and confirmed by the DEO Nwoya District. Parents did not or were not allowed to organize *wang-oo*, the outdoor fire, where all members of the family meet and participate in the oral transmission of the Acoli oral literature and other cultural milieu. The camp rules demanded that everyone must be indoors by 8:00pm (20:00hrs) and no noise, which meant that no one could sing or dance in the evenings. The ‘displaced learning centres’ were no place either to transmit Acoli culture since the teachers were just as traumatized as the learners. The DEO called this situation of cultural morbidity “cultural wash down”. According to Charles Odongo Pidati, the elders who could teach the younger generation in the traditional dances and songs after the war have either passed on, or are so disillusioned with their present social and economic status that they have no stamina to engage in what they view as a waste of time. The current crop of teachers in both the primary and secondary schools were either born in the camps or went through the learning centres in the camps. As communities began to return home, the Local Governments became more active in rehabilitating the former schools since the learning centres in the Camps were also closed. According to the DEO Nwoya District, the main challenge was the rehabilitation of the school infrastructures, many of which were badly damaged during the war. Although rehabilitation of school infrastructures has been slow, Government and other donor agencies have been supportive. Invisible Children, an International NGO, rehabilitated Pope Paul Secondary School in Anaka while Uganda Wild Life, through the revenue from Paraa National Park, built a brand new Secondary School in Purongo sub-county. In the rural areas, many school buildings, including laboratories for the Secondary Schools and teachers’ houses, have been constructed through World Bank funding under the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF 1 and 2). Some of the schools have been equipped with hardware, solar and anti-lightning arrestors. The Uganda Government under the Schools Facility Grants has also been supportive in the reconstruction of schools.

While the community applauds the continuous rehabilitation of the school infrastructures, there are still other factors which the Central and Local Governments need to tackle. These include the inadequate supply of textbooks, scholastic materials, and the teaching staff partly accounts for the continued poor performance of the learners at both primary and secondary levels. Many of the

current crop of teachers were either born or raised in the camps. The overcrowding and breakdown of family structures which impacted on the moral behaviour of the children have psychologically affected “the lost generation”, some of whom are teachers in the current schools not only in Nwoya but in the Acoli sub-region as a whole. These teachers lack mentorship from the pre-war teachers who were well grounded in teaching as a profession and abiding by the Teachers’ Codes of Conduct which demanded high moral conduct. Few schools have teachers’ houses and some even have solar power for lighting, but these have not improved the commitments of the teachers who are poorly paid and hence the poor results at all levels of education. Returning home after the closure of the Camps brought new problems that have affected education. The confinement in the Camps, including restricted night movements and low morality, led to increased population. The resultant increased population meant a need for more land. If the father/grandfather of many children, forming one large household, had one hundred acres of land in pre-independence period, the population in that household might have doubled or even tripled by 2007. According to the LC 5 of Nwoya, Mr Patrick Okello-Oryema,

the Acoli are not misers. Very often, the elders would donate land to institutions be it Missionaries or Government for worthy developmental projects such as education and health unit. With pressure now on the land, the children or grandchildren of these elders who have passed on, have started staking claims on the given where these projects have been erected. What is worse, even those born in the camps who had no idea of the boundaries of the family or clan land now claim that the elders did not consult them before donating the land (Mr Patrick Okello-Oryema).

With specific reference to education, the DEO said that out of the 44 government aided Primary Schools (PS) in Nwoya, 24 have been affected by land disputes where the returnees are demanding that the schools return their land for family use. Some of the affected schools include Koc Goma Central PS and Lebngec PS in Koc Goma sub-county. In Alelele PS in Alero sub-county, community members clashed with the members of the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) which is the governing body. As a result of the violent clash, a brand new school building was burnt down together with all the desks and scholastic materials. Government policy states that where there is land dispute, Government will withhold financial support from the school until the dispute is resolved. This further impacted negatively on education programme in the district. In the examples given above, the pressure was on the school authorities to remove their structures and find land elsewhere and the resistance from the school authorities led to the clashes. My findings show that the land dispute is not only limited to schools but other institutions such as churches, health centres and community roads.

5. SECTION 2: Land conflict among community members in Nwoya District.

Introduction and review of previous study of land conflicts in Northern Uganda

Land conflict in Acoli land in particular, and northern Uganda as a whole, pre-dates the 20-year insurgency. The land conflicts have been documented in many studies but the most relevant to my study are *Northern Uganda Land Study: Analysis of Post Conflict Land Policy and Land Administration: A Survey of IDP Return and Resettlement Issues and Lessons: Acoli and Lango Regions* (2008) and *Northern Uganda Conflict Analysis: Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity (ACCS)* (2013). The Consortium was made up of the Saferworld, Alert and Refugee Law Project. Both studies provided useful background reading for my research. The 2008 study covers my two areas of study: the IDP situation and the land conflict after the formal closure of the Camps and return to the original land where land conflict began. The study was commissioned

and funded by the World Bank and was to feed into the Government programme of Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP). The study looks at the situation in the Acoli and Lango sub-regions generally but with clear indicators of the level of conflict in the Acoli sub-region prompting me to focus on Nwoya District in particular. The study includes the IPD Camps decongestion, return of the Campers and their resettlement, which was overseen by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), the International and National NGOs with support from the European Union and other donors. The study recommends, among other things, that there is urgent need for “cultivating a desired level of trust in the people over land issues enforced through administrative procedure that overtly shows commitment to protecting land and natural resource rights of IDPs on return” (Rugadya et al. 2008: iv), and, secondly,

immediate enforcement of administrative or political or policy overtures to *effectively suspend issue of land titles to indigenous Acoli or Langi investors or any other persons* who wish at this particular time to acquire legal interests in land until IPD return is completed and sensitization of land rights in the sub-region has taken place, therefore the actions of Uganda Land Commission and District Land Boards have to be temporarily frozen... (Rugadya et al. 2008: v [emphasis in the original text]).

As our study shows, the last recommendation was largely ignored and hence the escalation in land disputes with major clashes between Central Government and the local communities especially in Apaa in Amuru District. In Nwoya, by 2013, large chunks of land had been acquired by both local and foreign investors as indicated by the LC5 of Nwoya.

The second study, which also informed my study, *Northern Uganda Conflict Analysis: Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity (ACCS)*, focused mainly on (i) providing analysis of

conflict drivers that have the potential to undermine development and peace-building efforts underway in the Peace, Recovery, Development Plan (PRDP) II and (ii) people’s perceptions of whether the PRDP and associated interventions are in fact bringing them up to a par with the rest of the country and increasing the likelihood of long term peace and stability (Llamazares et al. 2013: i).

What came of the study is not very different from the 2008 study: there are conflicts at community level with district and Central Government officials over land and natural resources (Uganda Wild Life Authority [UWA] and National Forest Authority [NFA]); disputes over boundaries and the study too documented cases of Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBV), which we discussed in Section 1 of this study with respect to Nwoya District IPD Camp in Anaka. Although the conflict drivers are similar to those in the 2008 study, the additional drivers identified in the 2013 study are what I also found in Nwoya.

The third study *Whose land is this? Assessing the land conflict between the Acholi and Jonam tribes in Northern Uganda* (Saferworld 2014)¹ deals with the land conflict between the Acoli of Nwoya District and Jonam of Nebbi District. The study noted that the Acoli and the Jonam lived side by side in the pre-colonial period. The outbreak of Tsetse flies in the 1950s caused the split of the two neighbours with the Jonam moved to the present Pakwack while the Acoli were moved towards Anaka leaving the eastern Nile bank empty. In 1952, the British gazetted the empty land Murchison Falls National Park. The conflict in the disputed area started after the closure of the IDP Camps when community members returned to their homes. The actual driver of the

¹ It is part of the original text where the authors are asking whose land is it: the Acoli’s or that of the Jonam?

conflict, according to the study, was not the return but “the discovery of oil in 2007/2008...both Jonam and the Acholi are acquiring land to sell because of the discovery of oil” (Saferworld 2014: 2). The sales of land together with the corruption among local government leaders are the two conflict drivers escalating the land conflict in Purongo sub-county. What the study established is that the level of conflict is gradually reducing as violent clashes have reduced due to the meditations and Peace-building by the Local Governments of Nwoya and Nebbi. The recommendation of the assessment team was that the Local and Central Governments implement the two resolutions of the mediation teams: “setting up a technical land verification committee to establish a reliable land ownership system in the disputed area, and to set up a community police post at the most disputed location in Got Afoyo to improve the communities’ security” (Saferworld 2014: 2). In an interview I had with the Purongo sub-county Chief, Mr Peter Okello, on 12 October 2016, he confirmed that there were no serious conflict cases from eastern bank of the Nile occupied by both the Acoli and Jonam people (not tribes). Isolated cases sometimes occurred but they are handled at the Parish level with the help of the police at Got Afoyo. What this study shares with my own study is that land conflict resolutions are possible if all sides in the conflict have the desire to reach a peaceful resolution and the mediators are not corrupted by money.

5.1 A study in land conflict in Nwoya District

Land, according to a resolution of a group discussion we held in the Town Council Hall on 10 October 2016, is the most valuable asset for any family in Acoli. Traditionally, communal land was held in trust by the clan for use by all clan members and this was known as *ngom kitaa*. There were no mark stones but there were objects such as trees, anthills, streams or rivers which separated clan A’s land from that of clan B. Even these boundary marks were often ignored when relationship between the clans were forged through marriages or friendship. The Colonial Government introduced artificial boundaries for administrative purposes since they did not separate clans and families. A case I documented during the study was the land conflict between Payira and Alero clans. Traditionally the two clans crossed into each other’s communal land for purposes of cultivation as a result of the inter-marriages that had taken place over many years. When community members from both clans came back from the Camps with increased population, they both needed more land. Thus, the common land between the two clans was claimed by both communities. Most of the elders who knew about the mutual sharing and usage of the land were no longer there to stop the younger generation from conflicting over the land. The matter reached fever point and the Local Council Three (LC 3) from both sides were drawn into the conflict. It was through mediation by the elected leaders supported by the clan elders from both clans that the conflict was resolved and the two clans are peacefully sharing the land again. This example illustrates the mind-set of the returnees: a traumatized community is a suspicious community. The war disrupted social and cultural institutions, which are building blocks in character formation of community members. The harsh Camp life added to the trauma and loss of trust especially of children towards the elders whose moral behaviour became questionable and therefore not dependable.

In an interview with Jeffrey Akena, Nwoya District Community Development Officer, and Patrick Okello- Oryema, the LC 5 at the District Headquarters in Anaka on 11 October 2016, they identified the following as some of the causes of land conflict:

The creation of access road by Government soldiers to ease their patrols removed some of the ancient boundary markers. In Acoli society, boundary markers are respected and never removed even if there was war between clans. The land was unoccupied for the many years people were in the various Camps and those who returned earlier because

their homes were near the big Camps extended their boundaries. Poverty, according to the LC 5, is another cause of the land conflict. Before the war, money was not the focus of many Acoli people since not everything depended on having money all the time. Land was held as a form of wealth and not for sale just like domestic animals. This shift in attitude brought new value to land which could be sold to cover financial needs of the family.

5.2 Possible solutions to the land conflict

Analyses of the data for this study have indicated a number of possible solutions to the land conflict if both the Central and Local Governments can work hand in hand.

- i. Most of the community members who returned from the Camps expected Government to partially continue with the hand-outs which they were receiving while in the Camps. From the data collected, it is clear that this was not the case. However, many were offered training opportunities and support from the Government and the Development Partners through projects such as Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) funded by the World Bank; Peace, Recovery and Development Programme (PRDP) operating from the Office of the Prime Minister; the European Union (EU); United States of America through USAID, and the British through DIFID. A few community members who formed into groups have benefited from some of these initiatives and have viable alternative means of livelihood and are thus freed from dependence on sale of land. The majority have no alternative except to sell part of their family land but, in some cases, even land which does not belong to them, leading to land conflict.
- ii. Government has come up with a new programme of Operation Wealth Creation which replaced another Government initiative, National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS). If Operation Wealth Creation, which is managed by the Military, can work, it will alleviate some of the causes of land conflict.
- iii. Governments (Local and Central) should improve the social services to the community. This should be possible with the creation of so many districts under the slogan “taking services nearer to the community”. However, in the provision of these services, the Government should consult with community members to avoid further land conflicts especially in the constructions of road networks and infrastructures for public use (health units, schools, etc.).
- iv. Central Government should not interfere in community land conflicts which can be mediated by the local elected leaders with support from the Land Area Committees and the traditional elders. For example, the land conflict between Okello Geoffrey (aged 42 years) of Kulu Amuka village, Ogom Ward, Anaka Town Council and his cousin was successfully mediated by the LC 3 Chairman and cultural leaders as indicated below. Okello went to Anaka Camp in 1997 with his wife and two children and returned home in 2004 during the first phase of decongestion of the big Camp. His father died in the Camp but was buried at home since his home was nearby. Okello explained his case as follows in an interview with the author,

Ikare ma adwogo gang, omara, obedo ka winyo pia pa nyek mine ni ngom yam kwara en aye omiyo ki wora ma kume dong peke pien en oto ki I Camp.

When we returned from the IPD Camp in Anaka, my cousin, under the influence of a step-mother, told me that I should leave the land since my father who was given the land is now dead (translated into English by the author).

This created land conflict between the two, which reached a point of violence. Okello took the case to the *Rwot Kweri* (Village Headman) but he could not resolve the issue and the matter was transferred to LC 2 court which also failed to resolve the case partly because the LC 2 Chairman was not keen on seeking advice from the elders whose moral authorities are also questionable. Okello brought the case to the LC 3 Chairman who used his mediation skills and, also, other elders and people who had previously lived in the area before the war. Three meetings were held and during the third one, an agreement was reached. As it turned out, Okello should have been the one to ask his cousin (the accuser) to leave since his own father was given land by Okello's father. The cousin was not even living in Kulu Amuka but in Gulu Town in Gulu District. It seemed that greed led him to claim the land which he wanted to sell and go back to Gulu. The value of land near Anaka Town Council has gone up since the creation of Nwoya as a district in 2006. The step-mother, who was the instigator, was reprimanded and the matter was closed. The LC3 Chairman issued a 'Letter of Settlement' signed by both parties, a pattern followed in two other land disputes resolved under his Chairmanship (see Appendix). Okello now lives happily with his four children and he rears animals as an occupation. He is able to pay fees for his children who are in schools in Anaka Town Council.

There have been other efforts to stabilize the land conflict. These include:

- (a). Building partnerships with Local and International NGOs in development projects that draw members of communities, some of whom might be having conflict over boundaries of family land. In Nwoya, ZOA, an international Dutch relief and recovery organization has been working in the community through sensitizing the residents on land rights and protection. They support communities in getting land certificates for the customary land. This is being piloted in Alero Kal and Panyabongo Parishes in Alero sub-county. During the fieldwork in October 2016, the researcher observed the land being demarcated according to customary land boundaries which have no encumbrances or all members of the family present. Where there is dispute, the community members are left to resolve the dispute through mediation by cultural and political leaders. Nwoya District issued certificates to the successful families in a ceremony attended by the Minister of Lands on 3 December 2016.
- (b). Acoli Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) through their own initiative also set up an umbrella organization under the Chairmanship of the Rev. Fr. Dr Joe Okumu. They are advocating that all Acoli land should be held in Trust by the various clans, for example: Bwobo Clan Land Trust and Alokolum Clan Land Trust. This initiative has failed partly due to lack of consultation with all the stakeholders, and partly because many of the clan members want the certificates to be issued in the individual family names. A single certificate in the name of the clan will make it difficult for families or individual family members to sell land whereas if families register their own land, they can divide the land among themselves and individuals can sell or lease their portions even without consultation with family members.

6. Conclusion

This Paper explored the impacts of the LRA war on the Acoli population through a close study of the situation in Nwoya District. It is clear that people were forcibly moved to the Camps,

sometimes at gunpoint by the military. Once in the Camp, families were subjected to Camp rules and life, which included alcohol abuse, GBV leading to the breakdown of clanship and the family-hood. Education of the school-going age children was disrupted at all levels. There was semblance of education under the ‘camp learning centres’ [v] for the primary school children but no provision was made for the secondary school children. Many of the affected secondary schools were relocated to makeshift structures in the Towns or outside the Acoli sub-region. Informal education, through which the Acoli pass on their culture from generation to generation, was also disrupted. Parents who are the teachers in this informal learning were not able to impart traditional knowledge to the younger generation as many became either disillusioned with camp life or turned into drunkards –idlers and abusers of their family members.

When the guns fell silent between 2006 and 2007, the slow return home began. The high expectations of the campers were not met: they expected the Government to continue with the handouts they lived on in the camps and that they would get financial and other support to make their ‘homecoming painless’. Some found their former land and even home occupied either by those who returned earlier; had stayed behind since they were nearer the camps and operated as commuters, or the land had been bought/acquired by rich or powerful individuals. There is serious land conflict going on in the whole of the Acoli sub-region at many levels: individuals within the family; families with neighbouring families or clan; families versus institutions (school, health units, or churches and other natural resources, such as oil along the eastern Nile basin in the Purongo sub-county). The influx of investors which began in 2013 is also another land conflict driver.

Central Government has put in some measures to handle the various conflicts but these often clash with measures by the Local Government and traditional and elected leaderships. The Central and Local Governments need to clearly demarcate their duties in handling land conflicts. Central Government should handle national rather than district land issues. The Local Governments should be given autonomy to mediate land conflicts working with the traditional leadership at the level of *Rwot Kweri* (Village Headman) who knows land boundaries of all family land under his jurisdiction. The case studies of land conflict documented during the study show that if the District and traditional leaders were left to handle individual family and clan land conflicts, through impartial mediation, many of these can be settled amicably. Where too many players are involved in land dispute, the conflict escalates. A case which is now in court is that of Apaa land in the Kilak sub-county, Amuru District where the Minister of Lands is pushing the community to ‘give’ land for sugar production. This case has been documented at local, national and international levels as indicated in Monitor Publications of 13 November 2016. Investors (local and foreign) who want land for commercial farming should have the consent of the whole family or clan and lease the land for an agreed period not exceeding 49 years without due pressure from political or traditional leadership.

Where families want to register their land and get certificates, they should be helped to do so but with the consent of all members of the family.

7. Recommendations

This paper, therefore, recommends that both Local and Central Governments pull their resources together in the rehabilitation of the fractured families through offering Psych-Social services to the returnees, including the ‘lost generation’ who has lost the will to work for its livelihood and instead spends its time at the trading centres and in towns betting/gaming and ‘slowly killing themselves’ on cheap but highly intoxicating spirits. The elders in the villages who have lost their traditional leadership to the youth with economic powers also need the same Psych-Social support to regain their cultural authority.

The schools need improved infrastructures, software and revamped Teacher Training Colleges which will produce committed teachers bound by the “Teachers’ Codes of Conduct”; willing to be mentored by the older teachers of the pre-insurgency period and constantly inspected by Education Inspectors. This will mean employing more Senior Education Officers and equipping them with the tools to carry out their duties. In Nwoya District, the DEO rides a motorcycle while the other staffs in the Department share one motorcycle. They have to supervise 44 primary schools plus additional secondary schools.

Finally, the researcher recommends other studies that will evaluate the Local and Central Governments in their efforts to improve the welfare of the returnees’ education and the resolution of land conflicts. Another study explores the effects of commercial farming on the schooling of school-going age children whom I found fully engaged in some of the commercial farms during planting and harvestings seasons. This is mostly on the semi-mechanized medium commercial farms. The study would then inform the Department of Education in Nwoya District of the best measures to improve pass rates at both Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) and Secondary Schools; both O and A-Levels.

Charles Nelson Okumu is Associate Professor of Literary and Cultural Studies, affiliated to the Department of Languages and Literature at Gulu University, Uganda. Area of research: Literature and culture in general and African Literature and culture as current research area.
E-mail: c.n.okumu@gu.ac.ug; charles.okumu52@gmail.com

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Appendix

Interview guides.

The key questions the interviewees were asked:

1. Why and how did you go to the Internally Displaced People's (IDP) Camp?
2. How long were you in the Camp and what was the effect of the Camp life on the family, education of the children and Acoli culture as a whole?
3. When did you leave the Camp and what did you experience upon the return to your former land/home?
4. If there was conflict over land, who was involved and how was it handled?
5. What are the current challenges you are facing and how has the Government or others helped you to overcome them?

The following structured questions were for the Government and political officials:

1. What was your role as a Government or political agent in the pre and post internal displacement?
2. What are the possible solutions to the problems faced by the internally displaced people in reference to education, land conflict and socio-economic welfare of the returnees?