



Twenty years of civil war between the rebel Lord's Resistance Army and the Ugandan government has caused great suffering to people living in northern Uganda and southern Sudan.

War has displaced people from their homes since 1996, and today more than one million people live in makeshift camps, far from their land and livelihoods, dependent on food aid. Conditions are squalid and dangerous.

Conciliation Resources is working with local organizations to help people identify and deal with the issues that caused, fuel and prolong the conflict.

Rebuilding relationships to end war

2006 saw dramatic changes in the conflict situation in northern Uganda.

Against the backdrop of Ugandan elections in February, in which President Yoweri Museveni secured another term, the Ugandan army offensive in Sudan and Uganda continued, as did the immense suffering of the civilian population. Under pressure from the military and the successful amnesty process in Uganda, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) dispersed widely, with groups in northern Uganda, southern Sudan, and north-eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

The fragile peace between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, signed in 2005, has provided both an incentive for dialogue in the LRA/Government of Uganda conflict, and a potential forum for talks. Both sides had apparently become willing to negotiate, and on 14 July southern Sudan's President Salva Kiir opened the Juba talks, with Sudanese Vice-President Riek Machiar as mediator. This process has progressed falteringly, but significant obstacles remain, not least the outstanding issue of accountability and the International Criminal Court indictments for the LRA's high command.

Support for civil society peacebuilders is central to our approach. It gives us the legitimacy that is essential to underpin our work, and a strong basis for our analysis. The immense scale of the suffering of adults and children affected by the conflict, both directly at the hands of combatants and indirectly from disease, extreme poverty and malnutrition, underline the importance of a locally engaged and sensitive approach.

Supporting returning fighters

Research that we carried out in northern Uganda in partnership with Quaker Peace & Social Witness (Gulu) in 2005 has provided valuable insights into what motivates LRA combatants to return to their communities.

Through interviews with former LRA commanders, we found that the decision to quit is often well thought through, and influenced by the availability of information and opportunities.

We also found that while radio broadcasts are important, telephone conversations, letters, notes and personal contacts between LRA commanders and members of their families and communities were decisive factors in influencing their decision to return.

The report offered recommendations on how the process of encouraging middle-ranking LRA commanders and their units to return can be strengthened. Our partners and other local, national and international organizations have built this learning into their programming and advocacy work.

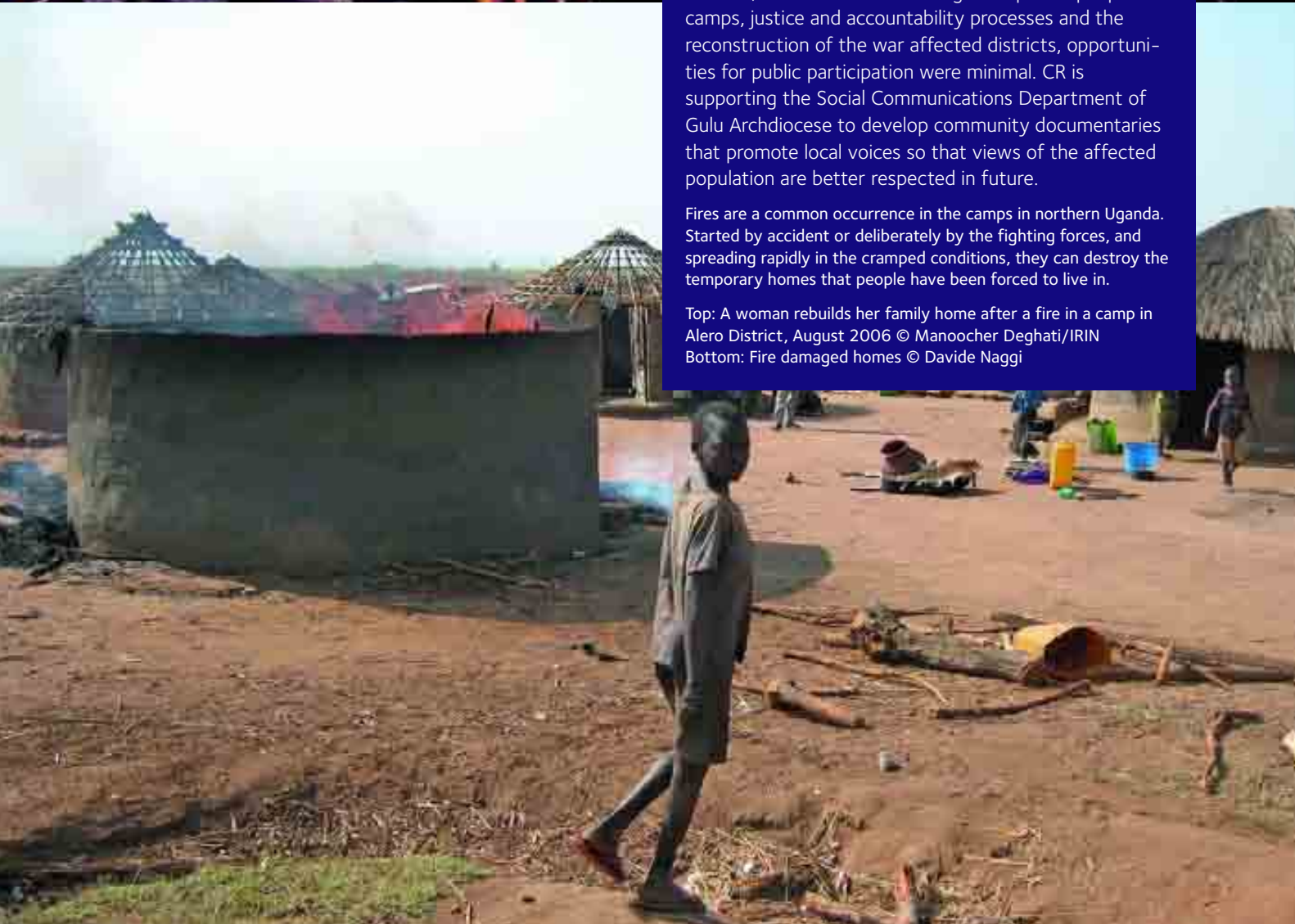


Community documentaries

For years, one of the conflict's main characteristics has been the lack of respect on all sides for the opinions of affected people themselves. On issues of abduction of children, creation and disbanding of displaced people's camps, justice and accountability processes and the reconstruction of the war affected districts, opportunities for public participation were minimal. CR is supporting the Social Communications Department of Gulu Archdiocese to develop community documentaries that promote local voices so that views of the affected population are better respected in future.

Fires are a common occurrence in the camps in northern Uganda. Started by accident or deliberately by the fighting forces, and spreading rapidly in the cramped conditions, they can destroy the temporary homes that people have been forced to live in.

Top: A woman rebuilds her family home after a fire in a camp in Alero District, August 2006 © Manoocher Deghati/IRIN
Bottom: Fire damaged homes © Davide Naggi





Overcoming fear and mistrust

In late July, in cooperation with traditional and religious leaders from Sudan and Uganda and the Forum for Peace in South Sudan, we hosted a three-day workshop in Juba, where community leaders from all the LRA affected areas could learn from each other.

Over 100 people took part, and were able to discuss their own experiences of the violence, explore the antagonisms between them, and move towards a common understanding of events. They developed their ability to work together, and were able to begin planning measures that can help fighters return to live again in their communities, even from Sudan.

The event also provided a platform for civil society to express their support for the Juba talks process, which had opened nearby only two weeks previously.

Above: Participants at the Juba workshop

Engagement in Sudan

CR stepped up our work in Sudan in response to requests for support from civil society groups in Sudan.

From May, building on visits by our partners, CR began a series of visits to southern Sudan, engaging with community and political representatives, radio station staff and others. We were rapidly able to establish positive relationships with some key individuals, and form practical partnerships.

By late July, our links into Sudan were strong enough to convene a workshop in Juba bringing together seven ethnic groups, traditional and religious leaders, women and young people from LRA affected areas of Uganda and Sudan.

Understanding the conflict

Our joint research with Quaker Peace & Social Witness has pushed ahead this year.

In May, we published *Coming Home*, the results of our research into the factors that influence LRA commanders to return to civilian life. We took our findings back to the individuals who originally contributed to the research, who supported our conclusions and further informed our analysis.

Strengthening practical action

Towards the end of the year we secured significant new funds, which enabled us to contract a skilled Ugandan accountant to support our partners' financial administration. He has made a strong contribution to their work already, and we expect to follow this with Ugandan management support to establish and sustain their systems in 2007.

Looking ahead

With our partners we anticipate broadcasting the first CR supported community radio programming in south Sudan; developing a more robust vision of locally appropriate justice mechanisms in northern Uganda that are relevant to the developing dynamic for peace; strengthening cross-border exchange work to help communities to address past grievances; and backing civil society's support for the peace talks. We will also be redoubling our capacity support to partners, from within Uganda and Sudan.