'When will this end and what will it take?'
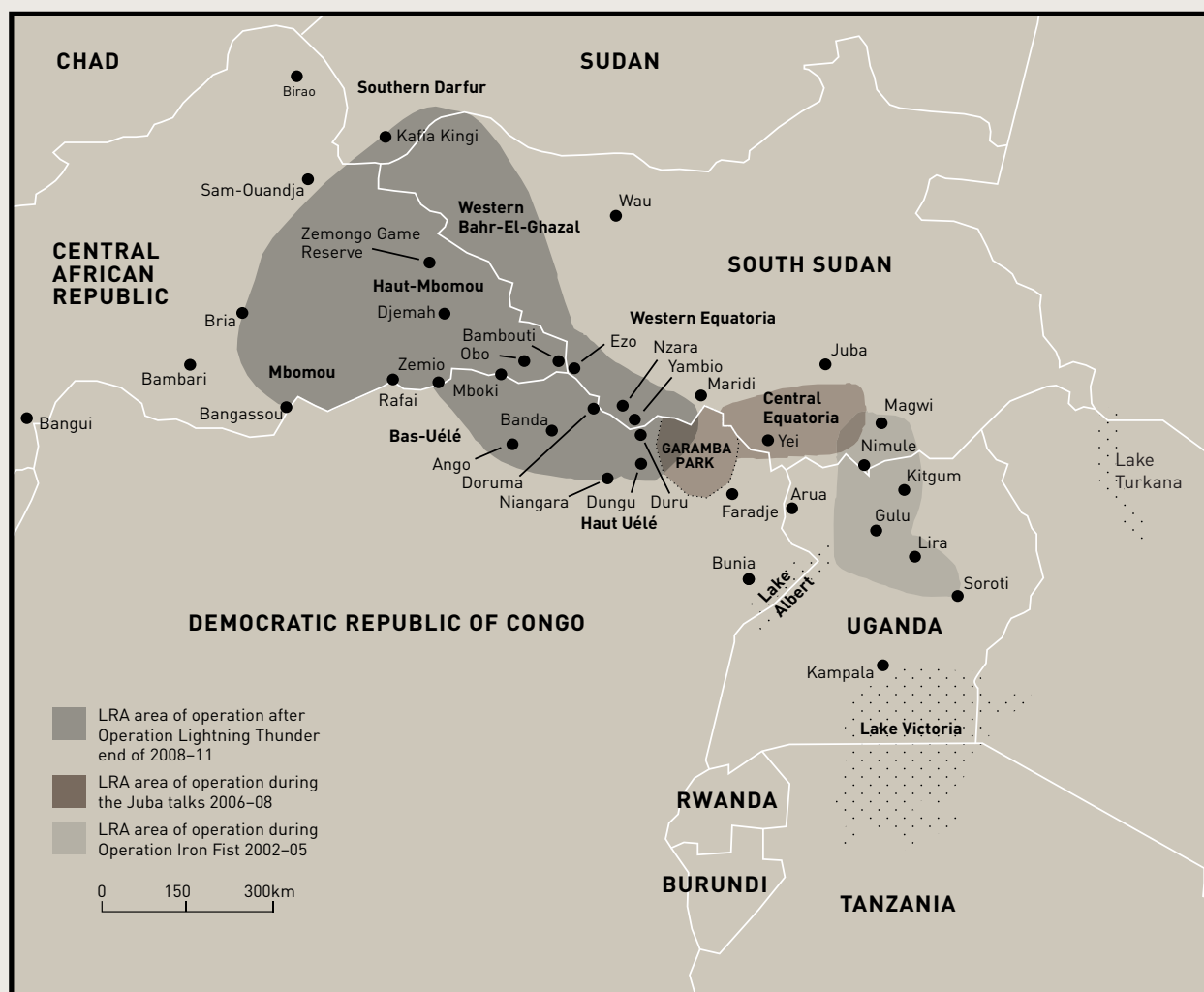
People's perspectives on addressing the
Lord's Resistance Army conflict

November 2011

CONCILIATION RESOURCES
working together for peace

'**With all the armies of the world here, why isn't Kony dead yet and the conflict over? When will this end and what will it take?**'

Civil society leader, Democratic Republic of Congo

CHAD

SUDAN

Birao

Southern Darfur

Kafia Kingi

Sam-Ouandja

Wau

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Zemongo Game Reserve

Western Bahr-El-Ghazal

SOUTH SUDAN

Haut-Mbomou

Bria

Djemah

Bambouti

Western Equatoria

Juba

Obo

Ezo

Nzara

Bambari

Mbomou

Zemio

Yambio

Maridi

Magwi

Bangui

Bangassou

Rafai

Mboki

Central Equatoria

Banda

Nimule

Lake Turkana

Bas-Uélé

GARAMBA PARK

Yei

Kitgum

Ango

Doruma

Duru

Arua

Gulu

Niangara

Dungu

Faradje

Lira

Haut Uélé

Bunia

Lake Albert

Soroti

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

UGANDA

Kampala

LRA area of operation after Operation Lightning Thunder end of 2008–11

LRA area of operation during the Juba talks 2006–08

LRA area of operation during Operation Iron Fist 2002–05

Lake Victoria

0   150   300km

RWANDA

BURUNDI

TANZANIA

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Acknowledgements

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Cover: The picture shows a young woman, held by the LRA for three years, sitting with her sister in a camp for Internally Displaced Persons following her escape a month earlier. Dungu, DRC, July 2011. © Conciliation Resources/Tom Bradley

A self-defence group's homemade ammunition, which consists of match heads and lumps of metal. It can be dangerous to manufacture and this man lost a fingertip while making them. © Conciliation Resources/Tom Bradley

1. Executive summary

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has its roots in a rebellion against the current Government of Uganda, which took power through an armed insurgency in 1986. The conflict with the LRA has now become a regional issue directly affecting Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR) and South Sudan as well as Uganda.

Operating in remote areas devoid of provision by the state, the conflict continues to result in destruction, abduction, displacement, trauma and death for civilians and whole communities. The conflict has also reverberated more widely, displacing people beyond the region and periodically drawing in external responses from the African Union (AU), the United Nations (UN), the International Criminal Court (ICC), the United States (US) and the European Union (EU), among other actors.

The following analysis, findings and recommendations were generated from research conducted between March and July 2011 in areas of Uganda, eastern DRC, south eastern CAR and South Sudan (specifically the states of Western Equatoria and Western Bahr el Ghazal) affected by the conflict with the LRA and also builds on Conciliation Resources' 15 years of peacebuilding work in the region. The objective of the research was to gain a "people's perspective" by involving those most affected in reflection on the dynamics and impact of the conflict and on national and international responses to it. This included community representatives, civil society leaders, LRA returnees (women and men), former combatants, members of the armed forces and local, national and international officials.

While the conflict with the LRA does not pose a direct threat to the authority of national governments in individual states, the terror and displacement caused across an already politically and socially fragile area pose a threat to the stability of the region as a whole. Yet, for national governments, beset by other urgent domestic issues, resolving the conflict is not high on their list of priorities.

For the people living in the affected areas, however, the LRA is a prime concern. These communities live in neglected hinterlands, areas with minimal infrastructure and poor communication. Here people express despair at the lack of prospects for an end to the conflict and anger at feeling "imprisoned" while the LRA has freedom of movement.

Civilian protection has been neglected in the military pursuit of LRA leader Joseph Kony and his commanders. When under pressure or attack, the LRA are widely known to strike out against easy targets: unprotected civilians. Those who bear the brunt of the LRA's violent retaliation are therefore all too aware of the risks of a renewed military strategy and an overwhelming majority of those consulted expressed an appetite for a solution based on protection and political engagement.

Local perceptions of the LRA vary across the region. In DRC many suspect the LRA presence to be a pretext for Uganda's exploitation of natural resources and continued presence its forces on DRC soil. Uganda is suspected of collusion. In South Sudan people see the LRA as an instrument of Khartoum, used in turn by Uganda as justification for its support for the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and its presence in South Sudan since 2002. In CAR, the LRA presence is considered a spillover from another theatre of war and ultimately Uganda's problem.

Such perceptions point to the complexity of relations at the strategic level; the underlying feature of this is the long-standing hostility between Khartoum and Kampala, which continues through alleged support to proxy forces.[1] Tensions between South Sudan and Sudan over contested areas threaten instability or conflict, which could trigger wider regional instability. Mistrust between the Governments of DRC, CAR and Uganda also exists over the presence of Ugandan forces in the affected area and complicate responses to the conflict.

Given this complex regional context, a comprehensive and coordinated response is imperative, which gives priority to civilian protection and addresses the multiple dimensions of the conflict and its consequences. The AU's most recent attempt to structure a coordinated response through the 'regional cooperation strategy for the elimination of the LRA' is welcome, but there is concern that it is

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1. The Uganda–Sudan relationship and their proxies are explored further in Chapter 6.

A customary chief (left) in Dungu, DRC shares pictures of people who were attacked by the LRA.
© Conciliation Resources/Nicolas Tillon

not broad enough to achieve lasting peace. It risks relying too heavily on military means, which have failed to protect civilians and end the conflict over the past 25 years. It will depend centrally on the Ugandan People's Defence Forces (UPDF), whose credibility among people on the ground is tarnished by suspicion of collusion with the LRA and failure to protect civilians to date.

The AU's plans for a Regional Task Force (RTF) may, or may not, succeed in killing or capturing Joseph Kony; however the drivers and consequences of the conflict will remain intact without a coordinated and sustained strategy addressing the political, security and governance drivers of the conflict and its humanitarian and psychosocial impact. A comprehensive strategy should also put back on the table the option of dialogue with the LRA leadership and engagement with its support network.

The involvement of local civil society organisations, actors and networks – to date overlooked by international responses – is vital.

They have important roles to play in improving understanding of the local dynamics of the conflict, aiding return and reintegration of abductees and combatants, and in promoting reconciliation, particularly for women and young children who are the primary victims of the conflict. Investment in civil society capacities, their inclusion in programme design and implementation, as well as their protection as they encourage LRA members to return is essential, not least for the sustainability and local legitimacy of aid efforts.

As shown during the Juba peace process, civil society actors can also help pave the way for dialogue with the LRA – initially through informal engagement with mid-level commanders – in order to build trust and explore options and appetite for peace, as well as to create a basis for more formal engagement.

Recommendations

1. The LRA conflict requires a comprehensive and coordinated response from the AU, regional governments and other international actors, including the EU, which addresses the multiple dimensions of the conflict.

○ **A comprehensive humanitarian, political, security and peacebuilding framework** is required which addresses the external political drivers of the conflict, prioritises civilian protection, supports return and reintegration, addresses the humanitarian and developmental dimensions of the conflict and promotes a political settlement through engagement with the LRA. Efforts should build on local knowledge, mechanisms and networks.

○ The AU Special Envoy on the LRA issue, should be given a comprehensive mandate to lead on the **political and governance aspects** of an AU LRA strategy, in particular engagement with regional governments, Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR), engagement with civil society and establishing channels of communication with the LRA.

○ Greater **coordination** *within* key multilateral external organisations, including UN and EU institutions and between their respective missions, and also between external actors, both governmental, (EU, US, UN and AU) and non-state, to promote coherence. The EU should appoint a full-time EU Special Representative (EUSR) on the conflict with the LRA.

○ Address the **political dimensions** of the conflict:

  a. The EU and its Member States and the AU should use their good offices with Khartoum and Kampala and their allies to help address the outstanding bilateral political issues, which fuel the LRA conflict.

  b. The UN should establish a panel of experts to investigate the LRA's support networks within and outside the region and recommend appropriate actions.

○ Recognising that communication with protagonists to a conflict is never premature, the option of **dialogue with the LRA** should be kept open. The EU and UN should develop a strategy to re-establish informal contact with LRA commanders through civil society actors, in order to explore the appetite and options for peace.

○ The US Government, EU and UN should engage in **broader thinking** to understand the local human rights, governance, security and political context for the conflict and create mechanisms for consultation with local actors to inform that.

○ Recognising that ending the violence does not mean resolving the conflict, the AU, working together with the EU, UN, US and regional governments should develop **long-term strategies** to:

  a. promote a climate of return and reconciliation;
  b. deal with the psychosocial consequences of the conflict;
  c. support communities in the future through development investments;
  d. improve governance in the affected areas.

2. Civilian protection by national armies and the planned AU Regional Task Force (RTF) should be a priority, with progress monitored and reviewed and means for doing so elaborated prior to deployment.

○ In consultation with local civil society, clear benchmarks of progress should be integrated into military plans for civilian protection and a point for **review and re-evaluation** of the strategy agreed, should it fail to protect civilians from death, abduction and displacement. Clear plans for implementation, verification and review of civilian protection should be a precondition of EU, US and UN support for the strategy.

○ Means for **verification** and regional collation of data on civilian protection should be integrated into AU mission plans and those of the national armies. The EU and AU could draw on and support regional civil society networks for information, shared either as an independent report or as part of AU assessments.

○ Recognising the behaviour of national armies towards the local population, the EU, US and UN should press for an urgent review of the factors driving **human rights** abuses by national armies and challenge the practice by

the UPDF of recruiting former LRA members into their ranks.

○ To be more **accountable** to local populations, the AU, UN and national army missions should develop a strategy to communicate and engage with local communities on the efforts and progress in civilian protection, and to provide a focal point for discussion of local concerns and views.

3. **Policymakers should recognise and support the valuable role that civil society across the region play** in understanding local dynamics, building resilience of communities, aiding return, reintegration and reconciliation, as well as in facilitating unofficial contacts and engagement with the LRA.

○ The AU Special Representative and EUSR for the conflict should work to develop a deeper **analysis and understanding** of the conflict, through engagement with civil society organisations and, in order for this to happen, create mechanisms for regular dialogue.

○ Multilateral and bilateral donors should review **funding streams** and their duration in order to allow international support for the development of civil society capacity in LRA-affected areas.

○ International donors, humanitarian agencies and international NGOs should identify and include local civil society groups as **active partners**, rather than passive beneficiaries, in programme planning and in formulation of policy responses to LRA issues in order to build local legitimacy and sustainability.

○ UN missions and donors should liaise with and support the development and capacity of **regional civil society networks**. A regional information network would increase the availability of information, knowledge and understanding about the conflict among local, national and international actors.

4. **A coherent regional framework that supports the safe return and reintegration of LRA abductees is needed** in order to address the long-term impact of the conflict.

· EU and UN programmes should build on civil society's local knowledge and capacity to ensure more **sustainable reintegration** of former abductees, particularly women and children and, in so doing, address the long-term impact of the conflict on communities.

· International donors and regional governments should support more coherent mechanisms for the **return and reintegration** of former LRA, which incorporate civil society efforts, including:

a. Support to local and national initiatives to create legal frameworks that offer protection for returnees, intermediaries and communities across the region.

b. Inclusion of former LRA in national DDR mechanisms and provision for those over 18.

c. Work with UN agencies to maintain a regional database for abductees and returnees, in order to cross-check and verify information on both.

d. Support for regional radio platforms, through provision of equipment and training of radio personnel, including in sensitising communities to issues around reintegration of returnees.

e. A regional public information strategy about mechanisms and facilities for return and reintegration.

2. Methodology

The objective of the study was to research and present the perceptions and insights of those most closely affected by or connected to the conflict in areas in which the LRA now operate: north-eastern areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); eastern Central African Republic (CAR) and in the South Sudanese states of Western Equatoria and Western Bahr el Ghazal States.

The research was conducted over the period March to July 2011 and involved more than a hundred interviews and group discussions with local communities, religious and traditional leaders, government officials, members of parliament, army officers, diplomats and staff of international organisations.

Interviews and group discussions were held in DRC (Bunia, Dungu, Duru and Kinshasa), CAR (Obo, Mboki, Rafai, Zemio and Bangui), South Sudan (Maridi, Ibba, Nzara, Yambio, Juba, and Wau), and Uganda (Gulu and Kampala). Groups of Congolese refugees from the Uélé districts were interviewed in Nzara and Obo.

The focus groups involved discussions with: LRA abductees – separate groups for men and women – in Dungu, Obo and Yambio; Mbororo in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal and Obo; self-defence units in Obo and Yambio; and round-table discussions with local civil society in Dungu, Obo and Yambio. Preliminary conclusions and insights were checked in a validation meeting with representatives from local government, civil society and church leaders in Obo and Dungu.[2]

In addition, three workshops inform this report. From 3–4 March female civil society and local government representatives from Haut Uélé gathered in Dungu to discuss the impact of the conflict on their lives. In Obo from 16–18 March a group involving 12 former Central African LRA combatants and abductees, as well as religious leaders, civil society and local government representatives, assessed the situation affecting them and discussed the way forward. On 12–13 April, a similar workshop was held in Yambio with 12 South Sudanese former LRA combatants and abductees. On 4–5 July members of the Regional Civil Society Task Force[3] met in Entebbe, Uganda to discuss the findings.

The scale of the affected area and constraints on time for fieldwork meant that access to communities was a challenge. The workshop, discussions and interviews therefore included a selection of representative voices to give a credible sample of experience and perceptions across the affected region. Conciliation Resources also drew on source material from its peacebuilding programmes and local civil society partners' insights to verify the findings and recommendations presented in the report.

3. Background to the conflict

Failed attempts to achieve a peaceful end to the conflict (dialogue culminating in the Juba talks from 2006 to 2008) and to contain LRA violence (through military operations since the 1990s, the latest being *Operation Lightning Thunder* and subsequent military intervention from end 2008 to the present) have resulted in a national and international-level consensus that the LRA can only be stopped by military means. Supported by the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), to date Uganda's armed forces (UPDF) have led the offensive across the region and claim that LRA numbers are low and the movement is near defeat.

However, evidence on the ground shows that the LRA are operating in new areas, notably in a corridor along the South Sudan–DRC and South Sudan–CAR borders and as far north as South Darfur. It shows that the LRA have adapted to their environment and collaborate with local groups. Originally composed largely of ethnic Acholi from northern Uganda, the composition of the lower ranks of the LRA has changed as they have replenished their numbers through abduction of civilians across the region. Since 2008, over 3,400 people are reported to have been abducted, many of them children.[4] The overwhelming majority of those within the LRA ranks are abductees, whether taken several years ago or more recently.

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2. A validation meeting could not take place in Yambio as government representatives were absent to attend the Greater Equatoria Conference in Juba, 14–16 April 2011.

3. The civil society task force was formed in 2009 and is composed of civil society (including religious) leaders from the LRA affected countries: CAR, DRC, South Sudan and Uganda.

4. According to Human Rights Watch and UN documentation. Human Rights Watch, *'US/Central Africa: Protect civilians from LRA abuses'*, (23 May 2011), http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/05/23/uscentral-africa-protect-civilians-lra-abuses.

The LRA has been embroiled in the antagonistic relationship between Sudan and Uganda for many years. From the early 1990s, in retaliation for Ugandan support for the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the LRA received assistance from Sudan's regime in Khartoum to destabilise northern Uganda and attack SPLA positions in South Sudan. The situation changed in 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Government of Sudan and the SPLA/M. The same year the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued its first ever arrest warrants for LRA leader Joseph Kony and four other commanders. In response, the LRA forces moved into north eastern DRC and Western Equatoria State in South Sudan.

Periodic attempts have been made by the Government of Uganda to engage in talks with the LRA, but these efforts have generally been accompanied or followed by efforts to achieve outright victory by military means. Yet no offensive has succeeded in securing a decisive blow. In 1992 the first major military operation, *Operation North*, failed to defeat the LRA and resulted in large numbers of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) housed in camps in northern Uganda. In March 2002 Uganda launched *Operation Iron Fist* in South Sudan, aiming to defeat the LRA by attacking them from the rear. Again the operation's failure had severe humanitarian consequences: increased abductions and more than 1.8 million IDPs in northern and eastern Uganda.

Efforts to reach a negotiated end to the conflict were made through the Juba peace talks between July 2006 and April 2008. The talks between the Ugandan Government and representatives of the LRA were hosted and mediated by the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) and built on groundwork done by international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Initially a process involving a few NGOs, the talks evolved to include former President of Mozambique, Joaquim Chissano, as the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General (SESG) and official observers from the AU, Kenya, Tanzania, the DRC, Mozambique and the EU. In January 2008, the US, who had proscribed the LRA on its terrorist exclusion list, also sent an observer to the talks.

The GoSS-led process provided the international community, including the UN, with a mechanism by which to engage with the parties in the talks while still supporting the arrest warrants issued by the ICC. Support for an 'African solution for African problems' was seen as compatible with support for a Final Peace Agreement (FPA) which would still adhere to the Rome Statute of 1998 establishing the ICC. Yet, while five signed protocols were produced in 21 months, the final agreement reached in April 2008 failed to gain Kony's signature, allegedly due to inadequate guarantees related to the pending ICC indictments and issues around the personal welfare and material needs of Kony and his top commanders.

Hope for a peaceful conclusion to the Juba talks evaporated completely with the launch of *Operation Lightning Thunder* on 14 December 2008 in response to LRA attacks. The military offensive was carried out by the UPDF in collaboration with the Congolese army (FARDC), SPLA and with US support. Aerial bombing of the main LRA base in Garamba National Park in DRC was followed by a three-month ground offensive. The official objectives were to force Joseph Kony to sign the FPA or to capture or kill Kony and LRA combatants. Yet the operation succeeded in scattering the LRA still further into the border regions of DRC, CAR and South Sudan.

Attacks by the LRA resumed in 2008 and remain a major threat in South Sudan's Western Equatoria State, the Uélé districts of DRC and the Mbomou prefectures of CAR. An LRA presence was also reported in 2009 and 2010 in the eastern area of CAR, in South Darfur (Sudan) and in South Sudan's Western Bahr el Ghazal State. Incidents are largely concentrated in the border areas of the affected countries, which have a history of insecurity and deprivation, where central governments fail to reach and there is limited infrastructure. As of May 2011 there are approximately 360,000 IDPs in the three countries as a result of LRA actions.[5] According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in 2010 and the first quarter of 2011, 413 LRA attacks were reported in the three countries resulting in 423 deaths and 857 abductions, including children[6].

5. UN OCHA, *LRA Regional Update: DRC, CAR and South Sudan: April–May 2011*, (22 June 2011)

6. Some armed actions have been attributed to the LRA without independent verification, while other incidents have not been reported. During a fact-finding mission, Human Rights Watch documented 25 previously unreported attacks since 2009 by the LRA in the area of Pasi and Zangabai in northeastern Bas Uélé district. In the attacks, the LRA abducted 166 civilians, killed 9 others, and wounded many more (see Human Rights Watch, No end to *LRA killings and abductions*, 23 May 2011)

4. The threat to regional stability

While the LRA does not pose a threat to national political authority or power in each of the affected countries, nevertheless it represents one of the most destabilising factors facing the region as a whole.

' How can a few hundred rebels displace 350,000 people?'

Question posed by diplomats in Kinshasa and Bangui

The impact of terror

The LRA use tactics of terror to displace inhabitants, deter opponents and to communicate and control. Some of the massacres committed, such as the Christmas massacres in 2008 in DRC, have been well documented[7], but the LRA also apply intimidation selectively. A traditional chief in Dungu explained how the LRA had killed two other traditional chiefs after they had taken in a number of LRA escapees. The latter had responded to radio-messages and leaflets urging abductees to flee and report to traditional authorities or army units.

Intimidation is used within the LRA ranks to enforce discipline. Almost all former abductees recounted tales of beatings and killings. A former LRA member in CAR reported how, as a trainee, he had to carry a wooden replica gun around for days. If he dropped the 'weapon', even while asleep, he risked a severe beating. One boy in Yambio caught trying to escape was beaten and forced to walk for miles carrying a sack of flour on his head, leading a goat and carrying a jerry-can of water. However, the usual punishment for attempted escape was death.

' We are happy to hear the cock crow in the morning.'

Former mayor, Obo, CAR

Displacement has had a severe impact on livelihoods. People have had to abandon their fields to move to the relative safety of towns or large villages. As a result prices have tripled; in some cases local markets are simply without supplies. Land conflicts are on the rise. Often there is a security perimeter around the village or town, within which land is at a premium. Humanitarian agencies draw in personnel from other areas in Congo, which adds pressure on limited resources. According to the Paramount Chief in Dungu, the whole area is becoming an area where communal law no longer applies.

One parent in Dungu, DRC, explained that 'our role as parents is to raise complete beings – now we are raising incomplete corpses'.

Meeting of the platform of women's organisations in Dungu, DRC, May 2011. © Conciliation Resources/Nicolas Tillon

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7. Human Rights Watch, *The Christmas massacres: LRA attacks on Civilians in Northern Congo* (2009)

Health services are badly hit, severely affecting the already high HIV infection rates; in Obo, CAR, according to a visiting doctor 11 per cent of the local population have the virus. In schools teachers complained of having up to 70 pupils in their class, though people still try hard to keep schools functioning. In the Congolese refugee camp in Obo, CAR, parents were teaching children in a few makeshift structures.

Neglected hinterlands

The areas in which the LRA operate are neglected hinterlands, where the sheer length and porous nature of borders play to the LRA's advantage. CAR has some 5,500 troops to cover borders of more than 5,200km. The DRC's borders with nine countries run for more than 10,700 km. The affected areas are also distant and remote from capitals and main towns. Obo, CAR, for instance is 1,300km from the capital Bangui, compared to a straight line distance between Obo and Gulu in northern Uganda of approximately 700km. Roads are poor or non-existent.

These areas are devoid of provision of basic services by the state and affected by high levels of criminality, including human trafficking and the illegal arms trade. Small arms proliferation has provided the LRA with easy access to portable but lethal firepower. Forcible recruitment of adults and particularly children by virtually all armed groups in CAR, Sudan and DRC is commonplace. In Obo, Mbororo – nomadic Fulani-speaking pastoralists present in all three affected countries – spoke of the abduction of their children, many of whom were sent to Sudan. One woman even had the telephone number of a senior SPLA officer who wanted money in return for her two abducted children. The FARDC are also reported to have held Mbororo children for ransom, as have *zaraguina* (highway bandits) in CAR.

Capacity for law enforcement is minimal and a climate of impunity reigns. In South Sudan, the police are former SPLA soldiers, many of whom are illiterate, untrained and ill-equipped. The few police there are in Dungu, DRC, have no means of transportation. There are no functional courts in the LRA-affected areas in DRC and CAR.

Plans to spend US$1.2 million on economic development in eastern DRC under the Government's STAREC programme on stabilisation and reconstruction (*Programme de Stabilisation et de Reconstruction des Zones sortant des conflits armés*) have not materialised in the Uélé districts due to security issues, disappointing local hopes for recovery. Internal challenges mean government and international resources are spread thinly across the country. This sparsely populated region is neglected by Kinshasa; the President has never visited. In newly independent South Sudan people expressed feelings of abandonment and pervasive insecurity. As the Paramount Chief in Yambio County explained:

' *We are not at peace when people are displaced and killed. How can we celebrate the birth of a new nation? Independence will finish the people here. People are killed with guns and there is no reaction from Juba.* '

Understanding the threat and the conflict

Given the lack of verifiable figures, it is impossible to confirm the LRA's strength. Reflecting Kinshasa's tendency to play down the LRA problem, FARDC estimate the numbers of combatants in DRC to be between 12 and 18, whereas UPDF usually present a total figure of between 200 and 400 in DRC.[8] The UPDF estimates, which have been consistently lower since Operation Lightning Thunder, may reflect an over-optimistic UPDF assessment of the success of the offensive.[9] Numbers of LRA in CAR are also unclear and all figures fail to tally with the numbers of those abducted: more than 4,000 since 2008, the majority of whom were most certainly children since the LRA targets 12 to 16 year olds.[10]

8. Estimate of LRA strength by Joint Operations Intelligence Center (JOIC) in Dungu in March 2011 was 70 fighters of whom approximately 40 are of Acholi origin.

9. Marks, Joshua *Border in name only: Arms trafficking and armed groups at the DRC–Sudan border* (Small Arms Survey: 2007), p.28

10. Blattman, Chris & Jeannie Annan. 'On the nature and causes of LRA abduction: What the abductees say'.

Three former LRA abductees, Democratic Republic of Congo. © Conciliation Resources/Tom Bradley

'*Nobody has been to the forest to count the LRA.*'
Priest, DRC

Evidence from the research shows that the LRA are interacting with local dynamics and conflicts, for example, forming opportunistic alliances in attacks with local groups. Some interlocutors highlighted collaboration with Uda, a sub-group of the Mbororo, in the attacks in Bamangana, DRC, and with the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP) rebel group in Nzako, CAR. In Darfur, LRA fighters are alleged to have attacked IDP camps in Daffak with a group of Janjaweed.[11]

The composition of the LRA command structure has changed over the last 25 years, to include non-Acholi combatants (a northern Uganda ethnic group), as youngsters from other ethnic groups in Uganda and South Sudan – including the Teso, Lango, and Madi – have been forcefully integrated into the LRA ranks. LRA members are known to communicate in a number of languages and dialects, which aids their survival and their gathering of intelligence. Abductees are forced to learn Acholi language; in Obo,

CAR, a group of former abductees continued to speak Acholi to each other after return. Former abductees from other areas, including northern Uganda, had learned some of the local dialects in DRC and CAR, such as Lingala and Zande.

The murky security environment and lack of verifiable information about LRA movements, composition and alliances lead to rumour and suspicion of collusion with the LRA on the ground. Members of the state legislative assembly in Yambio claimed that Sudanese spy for the LRA; two of these alleged spies had been arrested in Maridi and one in Ezo. People in Obo suspected the Uda: "in the bush, if you see Uda you'd better hide, because the LRA will soon appear". In all three affected countries, people interviewed believed the LRA were trading with Mbororo, an accusation denied by Mbororo who insist this does not happen unless under duress.

Competing priorities

For national governments of CAR, South Sudan and DRC, the LRA conflict is overshadowed by other significant domestic concerns.

The LRA is just one of a number of insurgency groups operating in DRC. The DRC Government, which faces the challenge of forming a unified national army from disparate rebel groups and of reducing its ranks from 150,000 to about

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11. The JOIC confirmed that the LRA form opportunistic alliances.

130,000 troops, plays down the significance of the LRA. It claims that the violence in the north-east of the country is a public order problem caused by 'local bandits' and accuses the Mbororo of collusion with the LRA. For the Congolese people, and their Government, the overriding priority is withdrawal of UPDF forces. *A Memorandum of the Churches in Dungu-Doruma* in January 2011 calls for "the retreat of UPDF because DRC is a sovereign country".[12] Congolese suspect Uganda, whose forces occupied northern Congo from 1997 to 2003, of benefiting militarily, financially and politically from the current operation.

South Sudan is confronted with the need to build a new state while simmering conflict continues with Khartoum over contested areas. In addition, Juba must transform the SPLA from a guerrilla force into a regular army (South Sudan National Army), including the demobilisation of an estimated 30,000 soldiers, operating under democratic government control. Yet institutional and accountability systems barely exist. The tenuous integration of so-called 'Other Armed Groups' (OAG) into the SPLA affects its operational capacity and accountability; the loyalty of some elements to the Government of South Sudan is questionable. Opposition elements within the SPLA/M accuse the Government of unfairly representing and supporting tribal groups, of massive corruption and neglect of rural development since the conclusion of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005.[13]

In CAR, where UPDF forces are stationed, government officials view the LRA as a Ugandan problem and one which Kampala must pay for. As one interlocutor in Bangui put it, "the bill will be sent to Kampala". CAR is poorly prepared to contain the LRA problem. Its army, FACA, is small and undergoing security sector reform, which, according to an officer involved, means that only around 2,000 of the 5,000 troops are actually operational. There is no UN support mission in CAR, other than the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA), which is a

peace consolidation mission without a military component. In the LRA-affected area, small groups of FACA soldiers can be seen dispersed every 30km and, due to a lack of vehicles, the troops have no tactical support. At the political level, in June 2011 the last substantial rebel group opposing Bangui, the CPJP, signed a peace agreement with the Government,[14] although implementation remains a challenge. The LRA remain outside the peace process in CAR and thus represent a major obstruction to the consolidation of peace in the country.

Where are the LRA?

LRA groups appear to have exploited the governance vacuum and created a corridor for movement along the South Sudan–DRC and South Sudan–CAR border, extending along the border of CAR allegedly into South Darfur. According to media reports, the LRA's alleged presence in South Darfur was transitory, although this has not been substantiated or verified independently, as neither the UN mission in Darfur (UNAMID), nor the UN mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), have been permitted to enter Kafia Kingi, Sudan, or its environs.[15]

Military sources believe the majority of LRA fighters are based in the Obo–Zemio–Nzako triangle in CAR, although there is no reported presence in the north-east of the country or in the huge no man's land of the Zemongo Game Reserve in eastern CAR, on the border with Western Equatoria State, South Sudan. However, as a central point on the line connecting Dungu, DRC, to Birao, CAR, the Reserve offers a strategic position to conduct raids across the border into Western Equatoria and Western Bahr el Ghazal.[16] The UPDF has a base in Djemah, halfway between Dungu and Birao, which would in theory allow it to pursue the LRA into these

12. *Mémorandum des Ecclésiastiques du Diocese de Dungu-Doruma* (28 January 2011)

13. Some people in South Sudan referred to the 'Mayom Declaration' issued by opposing elements within the SPLA on 18 March 2011, which voiced these grievances in strong terms. *Sudan Tribune*, 'The Mayom Declaration' (11 April 2011)

14. CPJP will enter a number of mechanisms set up to enable national dialogue and promote improved relations between communities in the country, including the *Conseil National de Médiation* (National Mediation Council) and the *Comité de Suivi de la Dialogue Nationale* (Committee for the Follow-up of the National Dialogue). Both are broad-based organs with civil society representation.

15. One article mentions Radom National Park in South Darfur as a refuge for the LRA, from which they can reach into the Dongo and Kafia Kingi areas. See: Paterno, Steve. 'Ugandan LRA finds safe haven in troubled Darfur' *Sudan Tribune* (17 March 2010). Kafia Kingi is near South Darfur, Sudan, on the borders with Chad, South Sudan and CAR.

16. One source in Kampala mentioned Zemongo as a base camp of Kony.

areas. The whereabouts of the large numbers of abductees in CAR, where proportionally more people have been abducted relative to the number of incidents, remain unexplained.

5. The neglect and limitations of civilian protection

Over the past two years the military effort, led by Uganda's armed forces with support from US Africa Command (AFRICOM), has been focused on containment of LRA actions and movement, and on pursuit of Joseph Kony. Civilian protection, though a stated priority, has not been assured in practice, particularly for women and children. Local people feel abandoned and disillusioned.

The military effort has failed to take adequately into account the tactics of the LRA, which are to retaliate against civilians when they come under attack. Furthermore, the ranks of the LRA are made up of abductees, many of them children or female 'carriers', who are also put at risk by military pressure on the LRA.

'*Anybody who knows anything about LRA should have first planned for civilian protection. [..] This is because the pattern of their attacks is clear. When they are attacked, they strike against soft targets connected with those attacking, or to capture international media and divert attention.*'

County Commissioner, Western Equatoria State

Ensuring civilian protection is also complicated by the cross-border nature of the conflict and the speed with which the LRA are able to move. A military expert in CAR estimated the LRA can cover from 35 to 50 km a day, depending on the terrain. A UPDF officer described how the LRA is many miles away by the time they receive an alert.

The prefect of Haut-Mbomou in CAR explained that the local name for the LRA, 'Tongo Tongo', means to run from 'nightfall to nightfall'.[17]

National armies

The responsibility for civilian protection rests with national armies, yet the capability of the armed forces of DRC, CAR and South Sudan to provide this is compromised by weak political will, poor army integration, inadequate force levels (too high in DRC and South Sudan, too low in CAR) and the effects of a long history of under-resourcing, be it financial or logistical. The three armies have poor human rights records and are notorious for preying upon and abusing civilians in the course of military operations.

In DRC, the revolt in Equateur Province in 2009 led Kinshasa to redeploy the most professional FADRC units, a contingent of the Presidential Guard, away from the Uélé districts. Later that year, Kinshasa suppressed all self-defence units in the area leaving security delivery to poorly paid FARDC forces, who have earned a reputation locally for looting and human rights abuses.

The UDPF, who on the basis of a number of formal, informal and uneasy agreements with host governments are present in DRC, South Sudan and CAR, lack credibility and trust on the ground. Many people across the region expressed both resentment and suspicion towards the Ugandan forces.

'*The regional armies are spectators watching the UPDF play.*'

Member of Parliament, Yambio

A lack of transparent communication about UPDF operations, an apparent unwillingness to cooperate with other national forces and protect civilians and resistance to oversight appear to underpin these concerns. Local suspicions of UPDF motives were reinforced in all three countries by the sight of UPDF soldiers and LRA rebels dressed in the same uniforms; the LRA and UPDF seemed interchangeable. In Obo former abductees recognised LRA members

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17. The term *Tongo-Tongo* has different meanings in local languages. Other translations heard include 'those who never sleep' in Zande, and 'walk walk'.

Interview with Claudine, near Djema, Central African Republic

Claudine (17) was abducted with her sister by LRA combatants, who stole bags of cassava from their house and told Claudine and her sister to carry the load. They joined a large group of LRA and a number of other abducted girls.

On their way to join another LRA group they came under fire from UPDF forces. Along with some LRA, Claudine, three other girls and four male abductees fled the UPDF attack. Three of the men were shot because they were too slow. One escaped.

At night the girls were divided between the LRA soldiers and raped. Claudine suffered repeated rape by one particular commander during her three weeks of abduction.

One night Claudine and another girl escaped. Terrified, they ran as fast as they could until they reached a river bank where they slept. After walking for 10 days, the girls met a Fullah (Mbororo) herder. Because of community tensions between Claudine's tribe (Sango) and the Fullah herder, she hid her identity. However, the Mbororo took care of her, fed her and treated her wounds and then took her to the nearest city where she called her father.

Claudine is now in secondary school in Zemio. She still suffers from nightmares and has received no psychological support. At times she feels she wants to take revenge on her aggressors and at other times she wants to understand why they did this to her.

garrisoned with UPDF soldiers dressed in UPDF uniforms, presumably after surrender or capture. One FADRC colonel claimed that former LRA combatants made up the ranks of the UPDF 105th battalion, headquartered in Gulu. Former LRA commanders, such as Opio Makasi and Charles Arop, whom UPDF previously accused of war crimes, were allegedly in charge of some squads. A UPDF colonel in Obo, while not confirming the presence of such a battalion, acknowledged that some former LRA were indeed in the UPDF ranks, although "it was neither a system, nor a tactic". This practice should be challenged by international actors who provide support to the Ugandan government and UPDF.

FACA and FARDC officers also questioned the lack of results and apparent permanence of UPDF's war effort. Ugandan forces are suspected of engaging in resource exploitation, ranging from timber and diamonds to gold and ivory, though there has been no independent verification of such claims. US support for the UPDF generates resentment among other national armies, who suspect the Ugandan armed forces of prolonging the conflict in order to continue to benefit from US assistance.

Some people expressed doubt that UPDF forces were even engaged in combat. One FARDC commander related how he had once received a message from UPDF stating that a large group of LRA were heading for Congo, but the UPDF had done nothing to stop them: "it's as if Congo is the rubbish bin of the world".

UN missions

UN missions on the ground, in particular the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) (formerly the United Nations Mission in the Sudan) and the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) also have a responsibility for civilian protection.

MONUSCO has operated under a Chapter VII mandate of the UN Charter, which authorises it to use force to protect civilians from imminent threat, though the mission sees its primary role as supporting FARDC, rather than to undertake missions of its own. Many Congolese find it hard to understand this interpretation of its mandate. The basis for MONUSCO's presence in DRC, a UN Security Council (UNSC) decision, means that the mission must negotiate its presence with Kinshasa. In November 2009 President

A member of Doruma's self-defence group holding a homemade gun. © Conciliation Resources/Tom Bradley

UNSC Resolution 1906 of 23 December 2009 calls on the UN Secretary General to "enhance cooperation and information-sharing on protection between UN missions in the region": MONUSCO, UNMISS (formerly UNMIS), UNAMID, the AU–UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur, and the UN mission in CAR, BINUCA. Yet during the research there was little evidence of coordination on the ground. Mechanisms for dialogue between the missions and civil society, conflict-affected communities, governments (local and national) and various security forces were also lacking. More needs to be done by UN missions, in particular MONUSCO, to ensure protection of civilians.

Self-defence

In the absence of adequate protection by national armies or international missions, vulnerable communities feel they have no choice but to take up arms. Local defence units have multiplied across the region. In Western Equatoria State, South Sudan, parliamentarians as well as the coordinator of the so-called 'Arrow Boys', estimate around 17,000 people are participating in such units and the government and local population seem united in pushing for their expansion and consolidation. The parliament in Juba has earmarked US$1.2 million for their operations.

Kabila called for the UN peacekeepers to start withdrawing as of June 2010, with a complete withdrawal of the remaining 19,000 troops by August 2011. The UNSC resisted the call, but both parties settled for reduced troop levels. This has resulted in a reduced UN presence in the LRA-affected Uélé districts.

UNMISS was established on 9 July 2011 in tandem with the independence of South Sudan. Its mandate is to consolidate peace and security and to help establish conditions for development. A Chapter VII component provides for "proactive deployment and patrols" for the protection of civilians "under imminent threat of physical violence", particularly where the Government of South Sudan is not providing security. Based on the actions of its predecessor mission, UNMIS, in practice the mission has been reluctant to deploy force, even though it was repeatedly called upon by the UNSC to provide protection from the LRA. Local people in Yambio could not recall any UNMIS operation against the LRA.

' *In May 2011 Doruma suffered over six successive attacks by the LRA. [...]The community is sceptical about the effectiveness of FARDC [DRC's armed forces] and UPDF's efforts to protect them against LRA attacks [...]. Instead the population has more confidence in self-defence units.* '
Situation report by civil society leader, Doruma, DRC, July 2011

Due to lack of oversight and training in basic concepts such as human rights, self-defence units in themselves can become sources of conflict. Some have turned to banditry, been used for state-sponsored violence or themselves become rebel movements. Both the members of these units and their weapons are unregistered,

adding to the climate of impunity. Interlocutors related cases where Arrow Boys had taken over police tasks and killed suspected LRA members. In Uganda a religious leader highlighted the phenomenon of kiboko: former Arrow Boys who beat up National Resistance Movement (NRM) opponents during election campaigns.

Opinion on the ground is understandably divided as to the merits and dangers of self-defence units. The prefect of Haut-Mbomou in CAR thought the international community should support training; others in Bangui felt that protection was the responsibility of the state. In DRC a former President of the National Assembly in Kinshasa was insistent that to condone local-defence units would be "to sanction the death of the state". Yet the suppression of these village units by the DRC Government was seen as mistake by many local people, as a number of places which had been spared attacks because of self-defence units, such as Bangadi, were now regular LRA targets.

AU response

The proliferation of self-defence units points to the degree of vulnerability felt by local communities faced with inadequate security protection by the state. The AU's 'regional cooperation strategy for the elimination of the LRA', conceived in Bangui in October 2010, foresees a Regional Task Force (RTF), Joint Operation Centre (JOC) and Joint Coordination Mechanism (JCM). This attempt to forge greater coordination of regional effort, including through the appointment of an AU Special Representative for LRA-affected areas, is welcome. However, the means to achieve it, in particular the reliance on military means, once again places civilians at great risk.

In both policy and practice the IRF needs to have civilian protection as its primary objective. Protection should be provided across the affected region: in CAR the situation for refugees is precarious, with little to no state provision and a weak UN presence in the affected area. Clear plans, benchmarks for progress in civilian protection, means of verification for cases of abduction, displacement and death, and an agreed evaluation point need to be established prior to deployment.

Notwithstanding these measures, realism is needed as to the limitations of civilian protection in practice given the LRA's retaliation tactics, the AU's reliance on national armies to deliver and the difficulty of the terrain. Civilian protection should therefore be encompassed in a broader and long-term strategy, which involves security, humanitarian, political, governance and diplomatic efforts, which address the drivers and consequences of the conflict. Recognising that the LRA is part of a complex web of violent conflicts and regional political and security rivalries is an essential part of that strategy.

6. The need for a comprehensive strategy

Regional politics

The shifting geo-political regional context means alliances and enmities affecting the conflict are dynamic. However, the long-standing antagonism between Sudan and Uganda remains a constant factor fuelling the conflict and hindering effective responses.

Khartoum has long been accused of arming a range of proxies, such as the LRA, to destabilise South Sudan. Support for the LRA, which persisted throughout the 1990s, was reportedly suspended in the early 2000s, yet many interviewed across the region, including Members of Parliament in Juba, UN representatives in Bangui and FADRC and UPDF commanders believed that Sudan's support to the LRA resumed in the mid-2000s.

While Khartoum vehemently denies support for the LRA, the National Congress Party (NCP) has admitted that it arms militias in South Sudan, on the grounds that "we cannot tolerate [the fact] that the South started to host Darfur rebels".[18] Government representatives in South Sudan reject Khartoum's denials of support to the LRA and as evidence point to sightings of SAF Antonovs flying in the direction of DRC and CAR and the arrest of two intelligence officers linked to Khartoum in Western Equatoria, South Sudan. The Ugandan Government and civil society have long claimed that external support for the LRA comes from Khartoum. Government circles even assert that Khartoum has never closed its liaison

18. *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 52 No. 7 (1 April 2011)

office for the LRA.[19] There are also reports of Joseph Kony visiting CAR in 2007 and meeting with the leader of a Khartoum-backed Chadian rebel group.[20]

Uganda's support for the SPLA dates from the 1980s. More recent reports suggest that Kampala is extending support to Darfur's rebel leaders; recent media reports confirmed their presence in Kampala; others alleged that Uganda has provided them with training opportunities.[21] Seen alongside a recent announcement by the ruling party in South Sudan of the re-evaluation of its Darfur strategy, hitherto one of non-interference, Kampala's closer contacts with the rebels in Darfur seem a step towards a coalition with Juba to put military pressure on Khartoum and the NCP.

Khartoum, for its part, has bolstered itself against possible attacks by Darfuri rebels from rear bases in Chad and CAR through a security arrangement with those countries signed on 23 May 2011. Under the agreement the three countries agreed to stop support for rebellions on each other's territory and engage in joint border patrols, in addition to a range of economic measures. The trade agreements reached between the three states open up a potential trade route via CAR connecting Khartoum with Central Africa, by-passing South Sudan.

Illustrating perhaps the complexity and interconnection of the conflict systems in the region, the rapprochement between Sudan, CAR and Chad appears to have prompted the subsequent peace agreement reached between the Government of CAR and the main rebel group, the CPJP. It also appears to be behind the Government of CAR's calls to the UPDF to scale back its presence to two bases in the south of the country, level with the boundary separating Western Equatoria from Western Bahr el Ghazal. Previously UPDF forces had been positioned as far north as Sam Ouandja, which overlooks the area known as Kafia Kingi on the Sudanese side of the border.[22]

Kafia Kingi is part of South Darfur, Sudan, and a contested area claimed by South Sudan. The area offers a potential supply route for both the LRA and the Darfur rebels, hence both UPDF's presence and Khartoum's desire to move UPDF southwards. Its location is particularly strategic as it is close to the huge Zemongo Game Reserve and on the boundary between South Darfur and Western Bahr el Ghazal, South Sudan, where the borders of CAR, Chad and Sudan meet and where the north–south conflict and the war in Darfur intersect. Block 6 of Sudan's oil concessions – 95 per cent owned by China's state oil company – straddles Darfur near the border of Chad and CAR and is believed to extend into South Darfur and CAR.[23]

Interwoven conflict systems

The LRA conflict crosses two principle regional conflict systems. The connection point for both and the lynchpin that could set off regional turmoil is South Sudan. South Sudan's relations with Sudan are key. The two countries face critical border and resource issues, in particular the struggle to maintain control of the contested border areas – South Kordofan, Blue Nile State, Abyei and Kafia Kingi – and thus to maintain access to critical oil resources. South Sudan and Sudan are co-dependent on the oil industry. Sudan faces the prospect of losing much of its oil revenue, since 70 per cent of current exploitation is situated in what has now become South Sudan. Landlocked South Sudan is dependent on Sudan to export its crude oil. Both are highly dependent on oil consumption.

Any renewed conflict between South Sudan and Sudan would have significant regional ramifications. It would increase the risk that the LRA would be used again by Khartoum as a vehicle to destabilise South Sudan. Any spillover would increase the pressure on DRC and CAR, which are barely able to cope with existing security threats. Stability in South Sudan is also of vital importance for Uganda, given the strong trade relations between the two. Juba is a major export destination for Uganda: formal and informal receipts are estimated in excess of US $1 billion.[24] Moreover instability would create a permissive environment for other

19. Nyakairu, Frank 'Are resurgent Ugandan rebels backed by Khartoum?' *Alert Net* (10 September 2009)

20. Nyakairu, Frank. 'Kony Links Up With Chadian Rebel Leader' *The Monitor* (19 March 2008)

21. At least one of the Darfur rebel groups, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), has declared regime change in Khartoum as its strategic objective.

22. Many refugees from Daffak in South Darfur fled to Sam Ouandja in 2007 after particularly brutal fights between 'Arab' tribes that also involved *Fellata* (Mbororo). Daffak is where Kony was reportedly hiding in October 2010.

23. See Sudan oil concessions map at www.rightsmaps.com/html/sudmap2.html (link accessed 8 November 2011)

24. *East African*, 'Kampala Warns Khartoum Over Military Invasion of Oil-Rich State' (29 May 2011)

Reverend Mboligihe Ndalu, director of Radio RTK, Dungu. Run by volunteers and funded by donations from the community, this community radio station broadcasts to the population most affected by the conflict. Its programmes promote peace and unity through sensitisation messages. Radio messaging is a powerful tool to encourage the return of LRA abductees, their reintegration and community reconciliation. © Conciliation Resources /Tom Bradley

insurgent groups besides the LRA, such as the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF), which historically targets Uganda's northwest, an area where oil exploitation infrastructure is to be situated.

Future transport and refinery of oil from South Sudan are part of extensive plans for trade between Uganda and South Sudan. Plans include transport of mixed Ugandan and (South) Sudanese crude oil via new pipeline facilities to a new refining capacity on the Kenyan coast. If plans go ahead, significant investment would be made in infrastructure, politically liberating South Sudan from Sudan's control over critical oil export infrastructure and divesting Sudan of more resources, since it collects substantial fees from the South for oil transport and refining. The issue of pipelines to evacuate the oil holds further potential for major political disagreement involving Sudan and South Sudan, Uganda, and possibly the DRC.

In view of these regional political, security and economic dimensions, the LRA problem can neither be tackled effectively in isolation, nor on a country-by-country basis. It needs to be part of regional political dialogue, which would involve Kampala, Juba and Khartoum. Apart from an initiative by the Carter Center in 2002, Sudan has not been formally involved in any dialogue on a resolution to the LRA conflict. Persistently DRC–Uganda relations stifle meaningful progress on regional security and would also need to be brought into the process.[25]

Coordinated return and reintegration

A comprehensive approach would also help to address the disjointed efforts to tackle the long-term impact of the conflict and, in particular, a coherent regional framework for the safe return and reintegration of LRA abductees.

25. These stem from Uganda's military involvement in DRC's political and economic affairs, for which the Ugandan regime experienced little international censure. The two countries have also quarrelled over oil reserves under Lake Albert, disputing how much oil lies on which side of the border. See for instance the *Economist*, 23 August 2007, 'Do you want to share or to fight?' The commercial production of Albertine reserves would make Uganda, by some accounts, Sub-Saharan Africa's fifth-largest oil producer.

Escape from the LRA is perilous, both for escapees, local intermediaries and receiving communities. The usual punishment for attempted escape is death, while receiving those fleeing the LRA poses equal risk. The LRA are also known to carry out fake surrenders, which target the receiving community as well as potential escapees among its own ranks.

Defection from the LRA has been encouraged by donors and the UN in some areas through leaflets and radio messaging. Radio messaging is limited by the capacity of some local stations to broadcast within a very small radius. In addition, for Radio Zeleda in Obo, CAR, mixed equipment from China, Japan and Europe poses serious compatibility problems. A coordinated and more effective approach to encourage defections needs to operate from a regional platform and to be linked to safe procedures on the ground. One such platform, run by Fondation Hirondelle, which runs Radio Ndeke Luka in Bangui (reaching Obo), Radio Okapi in Bunia, and Radio Miraya in South Sudan, exists but is not used; all these stations are managed locally.

Radio Ndeke Luka was the exception in running a regional radio programme in which issues in the surrounding countries were discussed in live interviews. The station also uses mobile phone towers as relay stations for its radio signals, which reach far into the interior.

Feedback from former abductees suggests mixed results from radio and leaflet initiatives. Most LRA are reportedly aware of the messages, although permission to listen to the radio was dependent on an arbitrary decision of LRA commanders, who also instructed those in the LRA ranks not to pick up leaflets or look at them. Those interviewed felt that the initial wave of prominent surrenders had not been sustained. Certainly no higher-level commanders had recently surrendered. The majority who manage to leave the LRA are rank-and-file combatants, who either escape or are rescued from the battlefield – a euphemism for being shot by advancing forces and left behind by the LRA, who do not usually carry their wounded.

Fear of punishment at the hands of hostile communities in foreign countries or death

In focus: Conflict systems

The LRA conflict crosses a number of conflict systems and as such fits within a broader historic and strategic framework. A conflict system can be understood as a series of interactions between states that support and sustain the conflicts within those states in a systemic way. Two principle conflict systems in the LRA-affected area can be traced, the connection point for which is South Sudan:

○ A Sudan-Chad-Central Africa-South Sudan system, or 'northern system', connecting South Darfur, Western Bahr el Ghazal State and north-eastern CAR (Vakaga prefecture). Historically, the dynamics of this conflict system are influenced by the interactions with Chad, although it is not a factor shaping the LRA conflict.

○ A Rwanda-Burundi-DRC-South Sudan, or 'southern system', linking south-eastern CAR, north-eastern DRC, Western Equatoria State and Uganda. Historically, the dynamics of this conflict system are influenced by the interactions with Rwanda, although it is not a factor shaping the LRA conflict.

China is an influential player in the 'northern system' in particular. By 2002, Sudan had become China's fourth largest oil supplier and by 2004 China was taking up to 65 percent of Sudan's oil production.* China's engagement is based on contracts for infrastructure projects and natural resource exploration to maintain its high growth rate, and active diplomacy with non-Western powers to offset American influence. Its presence is considered by some to play into regional dynamics: one CAR government representative thought China's influence was behind the recent security agreement between Chad, CAR and Sudan signed on 23 May 2011.

*'Sudan: China's outpost in Africa', *China Brief*, Volume 5 Issue 21, The Jamestown Foundation.

at the hands of the LRA acts as a deterrent to return. Messaging programmes therefore carry a responsibility to ensure the safety of LRA escapees and receiving communities. Communities and army units need to be informed of clear procedures for defection, especially for small group surrender, which holds the greater risk for communities.

The lack of success in efforts to encourage return in the region contrast with the results of the Ugandan Amnesty Act, which offered a legal framework for safe return, therefore protection for returnees, intermediaries and receiving communities. As of November 2010, Ugandan Amnesty Commission figures cited 26,118 returnees in Uganda who had benefited from this Act. Of these 12,873 were former LRA. No such legal framework exists in other LRA-affected countries or on a regional basis.

Repatriation of LRA fighters to their native countries is highly problematic as programmes across the region are not adapted to the regional nature of the conflict. Demobilisation, Disarmament, Repatriation, Resettlement and Reintegration (DDRRR) processes for foreign combatants can be inordinately long; youngsters from CAR related how it took months from demobilisation in DRC to their return to CAR. In another account, six women interviewed in Yambio, South Sudan, told how they had escaped during an exchange of fire and had simply walked back to DRC. The trip, fraught with danger, took them a month.

Self-demobilisation and the lack of a regional registration process or regional database (to collect and collate all the data on returns and match the identities of returnees against those of abductees), mean there is no clear idea of how many people are actually still missing.

The lack of prospects beyond return and fear of stigmatisation, especially among women, also act as a deterrent to return. Reintegration of former LRA abductees into impoverished communities without support is a recipe for future instability and conflict.

Informal mechanisms exist in DRC for reinsertion of former LRA fighters under the age of 18 into communities. Non-state actors working in this area rely on host families, which appears to work reasonably well, although less so for severely traumatised children. In South Sudan basic

institutions exist in the voluntary sector, again for those under 18, such as the Totto Chan Centre for Child Trauma and the centre run by the Ministry of Social Services in Western Equatoria State. However, former LRA fall outside those armed groups which qualify for the DDR process. In CAR no formal DDRRR process exists and, bar the efforts of one NGO in Obo, there is scant reinsertion support for those under 18.

Former LRA combatants over the age of 18 years face even bleaker return prospects. This group do not benefit from national DDR processes in any of the three countries and may be excluded from repatriation processes: for instance, a 19-year-old South Sudanese LRA member who escapes in South Sudan cannot benefit from the DDRRR process because no repatriation is involved, but neither is there an entry-point into the Sudanese DDR process due to his age and the ineligibility of former LRA in the DDR process.[26] For this group, no facilities or mechanisms appear to exist to assist reintegration into their communities. Unable to return to school, without jobs and no longer living with their parents, they are extremely alienated and isolated. To compound matters, people are generally afraid of them.

‘ *Before, I could go out and grab a chicken or radio or anything, now I'm trying to do the right thing, but I have no money to buy anything.* ’
Former combatant (over 18), CAR

Girls or young women returning with a child or children from the LRA face specific problems of acceptance into society. Several who were interviewed felt that their life in the bush had had more meaning and that the years after return were wasted time. This contrasts sharply with the attitudes of young people who went through a reintegration process and adults who spent less time with the LRA or stayed on the fringes of LRA life while abducted. These mothers are also a group neglected by civil society, state and international responses.

26. Moreover, in Western Equatoria (South Sudan) many insist that there are no 'national former [LRA] combatants' from the state, therefore denying the need for DDR to cater to former LRA. However, it was easy to find people over 18 who had spent between one to three years (2008–2010) in the LRA with combat experience.

7. What will it take?

Support for a peaceful strategy, based on protection and engagement, is widespread among those who bear the brunt of the conflict across the region. People are sceptical about the potential success of a military strategy and suspicious of Uganda's commitment to ending the conflict. In Dungu, local NGOs felt that some international organisations' push to scale up the military offensive against Kony was unaccountable – at least not to the people on the ground who endure the violence and backlash by the LRA.

' *The Government tells us that LRA are finished. But on the ground people are dying. People are still internally displaced and scared of returning home. Those who have ventured to their farms are either killed or kidnapped by the LRA. We do not know who to believe and trust.* '
Commissioner, South Sudan

Sister Angelique, member of the Justice and Peace Commission (CDJP Dungu), stands in remembrance of a nun who was killed in 2011 in an alleged LRA attack.
© Conciliation Resources/Tom Bradley

A comprehensive approach

A comprehensive approach needs to combine political, mediation, security, humanitarian and developmental efforts. It should start by addressing the regional military and political rivalries that hamper resolution of the conflict, through a process of political dialogue focused on Khartoum, Kampala and Juba, but involving other regional actors. The objective of the coordinated military effort should be protection of civilians, rather than pursuit of the LRA.

A second strand should focus on establishing a functional regional DDR platform for former LRA, including a regional database to log returnees against information on abductees. Legal frameworks for return should be explored. Regional radio messaging platforms and guidance to communities to encourage return from the LRA, but ensuring the safety of returnees, local intermediaries and receiving communities, should be strengthened. This component should include investigation and censure of the LRA's external supply lines and national and international

strategies and to seriously address the governance, social and developmental challenges in these neglected areas.

A third strand should put the option of dialogue with the LRA back on the table and create space for informal engagement to happen. Recognising that this is not currently possible at government level, engagement could initially be envisaged through informal, back channels to explore the options for dialogue, paving the way for possible formal discussions on issues of substance.

Civil society

People can play peacebuilding roles across borders that governments and intergovernmental bodies cannot. Due to their understanding of local dynamics and consequences of the conflict, their access to affected areas and communities and their long-term engagement in addressing the impact of the violence, civil society actors are well placed to assist in the development and implementation of many

aspects of a comprehensive strategy. However, in order to do so, they need to be seen by national and international actors as partners, rather than passive beneficiaries in that process, and investment is needed in their role and capacity.

Local civil society actors and organisations are invaluable potential partners in humanitarian and development efforts to build up the resilience of communities to the LRA, for example through information dissemination to otherwise inaccessible areas. Their role in facilitating return, reintegration and reconciliation in communities is vital, as is their role in holding governments to account for neglect of the regions in which the LRA operate. Civil society action in Uganda monitoring progress in the implementation of the Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) for northern Uganda is a case in point.

' *[International] humanitarian NGOs in Dungu act as if [local] civil society does not exist.*'
Civil society network memorandum, Dungu, DRC, 13 September 2011

However, the range of civil society in Uganda is not mirrored in the affected regions of DRC, CAR and South Sudan, where the humanitarian imperative is driving international aid and where the weakness of local civil society is part of broader governance challenges. In these regions, many local civil society organisations (CSOs) complain about a lack of consultation in the design of international aid programmes, poor communication by international agencies and NGOs about their role and objectives and lack of accountability to the local population for their actions and policy messages. The predominance of short-term, international humanitarian funding programmes attracts staff away from local CSOs, who cannot offer comparable salaries. International organisations in turn often do not see CSOs as credible partners, given their weak capacity and occasional cases of corruption. Recognising the impact of their presence on local society, international agencies and NGOs should seek to invest in the capacity (skills and resources) of CSOs and include them in planning and implementation in order to build local ownership and sustainability of programmes.

Civil society can help deepen national and international understanding of the conflict by providing vital insights into the impact of the LRA on local dynamics, as well as into local perspectives on the conflict. In some cases civil society actors research and collate data on LRA attacks by travelling to affected areas, and share this with interested civil society colleagues and international actors across the region (as has been the case with this study). Local interlocutors suggest a series of local conferences involving national and international NGOs (for example, in Dungu, Yambio and Obo) to help identify and prioritise local issues and establish a mechanism and agenda for coordination and dialogue between national and international decision-makers.

Only civil society has so far in practice endorsed the importance of a regional approach to end the conflict by peaceful means. A Regional Civil Society Task Force, comprising a number of religious and traditional leaders from across the conflict-affected countries, gathers at regular intervals to analyse the status of the conflict, provide mutual support and look for ways forward. Achieving regional consensus at civil society level is not without its challenges and dissenting voices are inevitable. Yet, since they began, these interfaith meetings have come a long way in achieving consensus and provide evidence that civil society is playing a key role in bringing diverse voices together through dialogue and thus laying the ground for coordinated action.

Support for the development of more regional civil society networks is needed. In DRC local coordination efforts in Dungu are not linked up with other organisations in the Uélé districts. There are no local networks in CAR prefectures or in Western Equatoria, although a civil society network has recently been set up in Western Bahr el Ghazal. The provision of internet connection alone would facilitate the creation and effective functioning of such networks.

Dialogue and engagement

The AU's efforts to bring together security responses into a more coordinated framework are a welcome move in the history of a conflict which has met with disjointed and incoherent responses. As the report sets out, these efforts need to go further, encompassing the

Photo shows cultural and religious leaders from Uganda, CAR, DRC and South Sudan meeting to discuss the LRA (as part of the Regional Civil Society Task Force), Entebbe, July 2011. © Conciliation Resources/Sarah Bradford

multiple dimensions of the conflict, in order to achieve a sustainable end to the LRA conflict. Those who have to live with the conflict and its consequences are committed to using the peacebuilding tools of dialogue and engagement with the LRA.

Initiating any dialogue process would require contact to be re-established with the LRA leadership. There has been no official engagement in talks with the LRA since 2008 so little is known about their expectations and objectives. Experience of successful concerted radio messaging, including that supported by the UK (Department for International Development), Sweden and Netherlands in the past decade, could be drawn upon in this regard.[27]

Civil society representatives with competencies in peacebuilding could play a vital role in acilitating initial contacts between Joseph Kony and his commanders and national and

international policymakers in order to establish communication and a basis on which to build negotiations. In the lead up to the Juba Peace Process (2006–2008) civil society leaders in Uganda and South Sudan played a pivotal role in building bridges between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. Notwithstanding the limitations of Juba, this experience offers an opportunity to learn lessons and a basis upon which to build a permanent and sustainable peace.

Finally, the AU Special Representative for the LRA could create a framework for creative thinking around negotiation and expectations of dialogue. Such a process would include discussion of the ICC indictments on Kony and his key commanders, blamed by some civil society representatives for the failure of the Juba talks and for closing the door on dialogue and an end to the conflict. All those in the field recognise the legal and political complexity of walking the fine line between justice and peace. An AU-led framework could explore the challenge the ICC indictments pose to a dialogue process and options to address this legal dilemma.

27. In 2005, the governments of Norway, the Netherlands, the UK and the USA sponsored a radio messaging programme asking LRA leaders to get in touch with the then mediator, Betty Bigombe. The message was broadcast in English and Luo 18 times a day and announced the creation of a special radio monitoring post at which the rebels could pass a message to re-establish contact

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Glossary

BINUCA   United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (*Bureau intégré des Nations Unies pour la consolidation de la paix en République Centrafricaine*)

CAR   Central African Republic

CNDP   National Congress for the Defence of the People (Democratic Republic of Congo) (*Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple*)

CPA   Comprehensive Peace Agreement

CPJP   Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (Central African Republic)

DDR   Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration

DDRRR   Demobilisation, Disarmament, Repatriation, Resettlement and Reintegration

DRC   Democratic Republic of Congo

FACA   Armed Forces of the Central African Republic (*Forces armées centrafricaines*)

FARDC   Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (*Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo*)

FPA   Final Peace Agreement

GoSS   Government of South Sudan

ICC   International Criminal Court

IDP   Internally Displaced Person

JOIC   Joint Operations Intelligence Center, DRC

LRA   Lord's Resistance Army

MONUSCO   United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (*Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République Démocratique du Congo*)

MP   Member of Parliament

NCP   National Congress Party, Sudan

NGO   Non-Governmental Organisation

NRM   National Resistance Movement

PRDP   Peace Recovery and Development Plan

SAF   Sudan Armed Forces

SPLA   Sudan People's Liberation Army

SPLM   Sudan People's Liberation Movement

UNAMID   African Union/United Nations Hybrid operation in Darfur

UNMIS   United Nations Mission in Sudan

UNMISS   United Nations Mission in South Sudan

UNSC   United Nations Security Council

UPDF   Uganda People's Defence Force

WNBF   West Nile Bank Front (northern Uganda)

About this project

This study is part of the People's Peacemaking Perspectives project. The project is a joint initiative implemented by Conciliation Resources and Saferworld and financed under the European Union's Instrument for Stability.

People's Peacemaking Perspectives provides European Union institutions with analysis and recommendations based on the opinions and experiences of local people in a range of countries and regions affected by fragility and violent conflict. For more information about the project visit www.c-r.org/PPP

Conciliation Resources is an independent organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence and build peace. We're there for as long as we're needed to provide advice, support and practical resources. In addition, we take what we learn to government decision-makers and others working to end conflict, to improve peacebuilding policies and practice worldwide.

Part of Conciliation Resources' work is to support the efforts of local civil society actors in areas of northern Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Central African Republic affected by the Lord's Resistance Army. We've been working on this conflict since 1997.

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