The Acronym Invasion:
Development Work in Northern Uganda

Sarah Nuernberger

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Dr. Rubongoya
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>Consolidated Appeals Process</td>
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<td>CPA</td>
<td>Concerned Parents Association</td>
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<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
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<td>FAC</td>
<td>Formerly Abducted Child</td>
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<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization</td>
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<td>FAP</td>
<td>Formerly Abducted Person</td>
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<td>GUSCO</td>
<td>Gulu Support the Children Organization Reception Center</td>
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<td>HDI</td>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
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<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Person</td>
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<td>IGA</td>
<td>Income generating activities</td>
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<td>IO</td>
<td>International organization</td>
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<td>LRA</td>
<td>Lord’s Resistance Army</td>
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<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Nongovernmental organization</td>
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<td>NRM</td>
<td>National Resistance Movement</td>
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<td>NUREP</td>
<td>Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Programme</td>
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<td>PEAP</td>
<td>Poverty Eradication Action Plan</td>
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<td>PRDP</td>
<td>Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan</td>
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<td>PSG</td>
<td>Parent support group</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNOCHA</td>
<td>United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs</td>
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<td>UPDF</td>
<td>Uganda People’s Defense Force</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<td>WAC</td>
<td>War-affected children</td>
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<td>WFP</td>
<td>World Food Programme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table of Contents

Table of Contents 3
Abstract 4
Research Inspiration 3
Introduction 6
Millennium Development Goals 8
Development Agencies 9
Justification for Development Work 11
Strategies for Achieving Development 14
Weaknesses of the Development Industry 19
The Conflict in Northern Uganda as a Context for Development Work 22
Inept Government Response and the Entrance of the Development Industry 28
Shortfalls of International Development Organizations’ Response 32
Continued Decline into Poverty of the Northern Ugandan Population 38
Non-Sustainable International Organization Response 41
Concerned Parents Association (CPA) – The Successes of an Indigenous NGO 45
Challenges to CPA in Implementing Sustainable Development Projects 54
Uganda’s Path toward Meeting the MDGs 57
Conclusions 60
Appendices
  Appendix A – Map 64
  Appendix B – Data 65
Works Cited 67
Bibliography 71
Abstract

Development work has been moved to the forefront of the international agenda with the adopting of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, which outline eight objectives, including poverty alleviation, that are to be met by 2015. The development industry, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations (IOs), are one of many vehicles through which these goals are to be achieved. However, international organizations have an inherent flaw, specifically, that they create dependency rather than self-sufficiency in their practices. Rather than empowering people at the community level to break free from the cycle of poverty, they weaken structures of self sufficiency at the local level thus making a prosperous long-term recovery hopeless.

While this phenomenon is happening across the globe, Northern Uganda provides a unique case study in which to analyze this flaw. For the past twenty-two years, child abductions, movements to internally displaced person camps, and guerilla rebel activity have been a normal part of life. Now, during a time of relative peace, development activities are imperative to the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the region. There are two main actors in the region—international organizations and indigenous NGOs. Indigenous organizations have been created as a result of the conflict and implement many self-sustaining programs that will benefit Northern Uganda in the long-run. Conversely, international organizations, including agencies of the United Nations and US based aid organizations, have failed to provide useful long-term assistance. The policies and practices of these organizations will need to better reflect the actions of indigenous organizations if the cycle of dependency is to be broken and success brought to the development field.
Research Inspiration

This project began in the fall of 2008, when I spent a semester studying abroad in Uganda. As part of my study abroad experience, I spent six weeks in Northern Uganda as an intern for the Concerned Parents Association learning about development work. While in the North, I saw the impacts of the twenty years of turmoil that has plagued the people and a lot of international organizations trying to offer poverty alleviation assistance. Yet, Northern Uganda still seemed to be a disaster. Then I began to go on field visits with staff from the Concerned Parents Association. Immediately, I saw a difference in the success of their projects compared with the projects of the international aid givers. These observations sparked my interest for this paper. First, I wanted to understand why some projects were successful and why some were not. I found that the difference lies in the dependency created by the international development industry and the truly grassroots nature of programs implemented by indigenous NGOs, like Concerned Parents Association. With the Millennium Development Goals holding a prominent position in international relations, successful development practice is imperative to the achievement of these goals. Additionally, most of the conventional development theories endorses top-down, non-sustainable projects. I wanted to highlight programs like Concerned Parents Association that work in a more unconventional way and are successful. I was humbled to work with the staff of Concerned Parents Association, who spends every day making small sustainable differences in their communities. These efforts often go unnoticed by the international community, and therefore, the Western world is largely unaware of an effective development method. Finally, after spending six weeks with people whose entire lives were full of conflict, I felt that it was my obligation to expose these struggles and begin to understand how I can make a difference. The formerly abducted children whose stories are included in this
project volunteered their heart-breaking stories in confidence that their sharing would work toward the better practice of assistance to vulnerable groups of people. Regardless of whether or not this paper directly impacts the people I interacted with or is read by anyone in a position capable of changing the nature of development aid, it has directly impacted me and my goals for my future.

The second phase of this project happened in the spring of 2010 at Roanoke College. I was challenged to integrate the information I had gathered from my time in Uganda with scholarly sources discussing poverty alleviation projects in general. I spent a significant amount of time reading books on the roles of NGO, international development agencies, and their practices. Most of these sources made no specific reference to Northern Uganda, so it was my task to combine the two parts of the project into once cohesive whole. While I was surprised to find multiple modern development theories that encouraged grassroots practices, when researching the work of international aid givers, I continued to find their implementation of these programs weak. The result is this research paper, which I hope successfully addresses some key concerns with the development industry and proposes a new light in which to view further development operations.

Introduction

Guided by the United Nations Development Programme, the Millennium Development Goals outline eight objectives, including poverty alleviation, that are to be met by 2015. The development industry, consisting of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations (IOs), is the main vehicle in achieving these goals. However, international organizations have an inherent flaw, specifically, that of creating dependency, and in so doing
frustrate long-term development goals. Furthermore, these international organizations do not take into account the specific culture or needs of a community when implementing top-down approaches to development. The case of Northern Uganda presents a good context in which to examine this flaw and propose a better method of development work that is comparable to the more successful indigenous NGOs.

Northern Uganda has been in a state of turmoil for the past twenty-six years, as a result of Joseph Kony and the Lord’s Resistance Army. Joseph Kony’s rebel group has been responsible for the abduction of children, ransacking of villages, and creation of sustained violence in Northern Uganda. After more than two decades of war, Northern Uganda is in need of a successful development program to alleviate the poverty-stricken people, rebuild an infrastructure, and rekindle hope. A multitude of development workers are active in the region, but sustainable development has yet to be reached. If development work is expected to succeed at the international level, the identification of the faults of the Northern Uganda case will prove useful in rethinking development theory. This paper therefore aims at addressing the following important questions:

- What are the driving strategies behind development work?
- How is the work of international development agencies ineffective in achieving their goals?
- How does the interaction between international development agencies and indigenous organizations inhibit development work?
- What qualities do indigenous NGOs possess that makes them more successful in implementing sustainable development projects?
- How are these themes seen in the specific context of Northern Uganda?
Millennium Development Goals

At the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, 189 nation-states pledged to achieve eight worldwide goals by 2015. These ambitious goals, known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aim to end poverty and hunger, provide universal education, create gender equality, improve child health, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, establish environmental sustainability, and build a global partnership. Due to the broad scope of these goals, it is easy to discuss any one at length. This paper will focus specifically on the goal of poverty alleviation. Poverty is the inability to access basic social and physical needs and the powerlessness associated with breaking out of this cycle of need. In order to break out of this cycle, the MDGs for poverty alleviation target to halve the proportion of people who live on less than one U.S. dollar per day from its 1990 level. Secondly, the goal seeks to achieve full employment and decent work for all citizens, including women. Finally the MDG aspires to halve the population of people suffering from hunger by 2015.

The United Nations Development Programme, a strong actor in pursuing these goals already sees much worldwide progress in this realm. However, Sub-Saharan Africa proves to be an exception to this success, as little progress has been made there. Today, there are five years until the deadline for these goals approaches. Although the MDGs have succeeded in putting development work at the top of the international agenda, significant changes need to be made on the international stage in order to meet the targets and guarantee that the projects have been sustainable.

1 United Nations Millennium Development Goals; see http://www.endpoverty2015.org/ for the Millennium Development Goals complete campaign
2 UNDP in Uganda – http://www.undp.or.ug/
3 UN Department of Public Information – DPI/2517 – September 2008 “Fact Sheet: Goal 1 – Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger”
4 UNDP “Global Progress” http://www.undp.org/mdg/basics_ontrack.shtml
Development Agencies

Development agencies, by nature of their goals and work, which are explained below, are one driving force behind the implementation and achievement of the MDGs. Politically, the end of the Cold War gave way to the increase of the number and involvement of these agencies across the globe. The high politics of the Cold War, with constant focus on nuclear abilities pushed development work to the back of the political agenda. But, the technological innovation of the 1990s was a driving force of the proliferation of development agencies on the international stage. The internet dispersed information, and with a click of the mouse, the world, for the average developed world individual, was interconnected. Suddenly through the computer, people became more aware to the needs of other nations and felt a stronger sense of responsibly to assist. Through the computer, these agencies had the ability to collect and compile massive amounts of data and connect people with resources to those who needed them.5

Given the large number of organizations that fall under the development industry framework, the implementing agencies are a very heterogeneous group, but they are often categorized based upon their overarching goals or their targeted beneficiaries.6 Some organizations focus entirely on women or children while others serve specific countries or regions. Some are primarily advocacy based while others work directly in the field. Development agencies can be think tanks, community groups or religion based organizations. Despite all of these differences, development agencies share the common characteristic of using the principle aim of engaging civil society as a means for change.7

5 Gordenker and Weiss 1996, 24-25
6 Dicklitch 1988, 4
7 Edwards, Hulme, and Wallace 2000, 13
Development agencies are conventionally defined as a catalyst for change through empowerment.⁸ Textbooks and theory outline five main roles for these organizations. The first is to serve as a “carer of last resort.”⁹ In instances where governments are ineffective at addressing the needs of the people, development organizations can provide food, educational facilities, and medical assistance to vulnerable populations. Secondly, these agencies can help local people organize through supporting community-based organizations and creating these organizations where they are absent.¹⁰ When a community is organized into groups with similar needs, resources can target more people and increase long-term benefits. Additionally, when the poor belong to a group of people with similar needs, the group’s voice has a stronger influence in the decision-making process, empowering the poor to break the cycle of poverty. Thirdly, they serve a “watchdog” role by putting checks on power systems.¹¹ Development work attempts to target the most vulnerable parties, who are often neglected by decision-makers. Both the “watchdog” and organizing roles of development agencies try to empower the poor through participation in civil society. And finally, the major operational role of development organizations is to fundraise in order to target emergency victims and vulnerable people or advocate and educate decision-makers and the public. The primary means to advocating is to collect and distribute information, attempting to appeal to people’s emotions.¹²

Over time, implementing organizations have evolved into these roles they play today. In the 1970s, with development work being relatively new, many organizations worked with authoritarian governments and states, believing that decisions made from above would trickle-down to those in most need. However, with inefficient resource allocation and massive

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⁸ Dicklitch 1988, 11
⁹ Edwards, Hulme, and Wallace 2000, 4
¹⁰ Crowther 2000, 165
¹¹ Dicklitch 1988, 12
¹² Gordenker and Weiss 2996, 38
corruption at the state level, the 1980s opened a new era of development operation, using the market as the method of change. These market-based programs followed a neoliberal ideology that less government was inherently good. Being smaller and more adaptable than large government operations, development agencies were more prepared to listen and work with the poor and could operate more effectively than the state.\textsuperscript{13} In the 1990s, development continued to work outside of the state sector, but instead of focusing on the market, they turned their attention to civil society.\textsuperscript{14} It is this focus on civil society which continues to direct development work today.

The development industry attempts to fill a void left by inept governments. This void will be very obvious in the case of Northern Uganda. The work in this sector can be divided into two categories – international organizations and indigenous NGOs. While both organizations work toward goals of development, their different approaches account for their success or failure in their work, an idea which will be unpacked throughout this paper.

\textbf{Justification for Development Work}

On December 4, 1986, the United Nations ratified the Declaration on the Right to Development. Article 1 of this agreement states that “the right to development is an inalienable human right, by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized.”\textsuperscript{15} The MDGs are a recent specific

\textsuperscript{13} Streeten 1997, 197
\textsuperscript{14} Dicklitch 1988, 2
\textsuperscript{15} UN A/Res/41/128 Declaration on the Right to Development. For full text, see http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/41/a41r128.htm
example of the attempts to guarantee this right to all of humankind. This declaration gives
justification to development work and study and its importance in today’s society.

The study of development is far from being an exact science. Ideas on the best practices
for development work are constantly evolving. The process of development is slow-moving
and never-ending, making it difficult for theorists to make strong statements about the correct
practices of development work. Despite these limitations, an ample amount of literature has
been written on what development is and how to go about development work. The
conventional definition of development is to better the condition of the poor through growth and
advancement. Texts subscribing to this theory are filled with jargon of empowerment,
building, and improvement. With this view comes an inherent value judgment that being
developed is better than being undeveloped.

If being developed is inherently better than being undeveloped, development theorists
have considered why Sub-Saharan Africa is undeveloped while much of the West is not.
Development theory suggests that Sub-Saharan Africa became undeveloped as a consequence of
the era of colonization. The era of colonization of the continent, spanning from the 1880s to the
1960s, marks a time of a high level of exploitation of African resources by the Western world.
The extreme exploitation of the time and the fast transition from colony to independent state sets
Sub-Saharan Africa apart from the Western world and forced them into a state of being
undeveloped. The West has tasked itself with bringing development back to the area. With
this exogenous view of underdevelopment come several key assumptions. First, these ideas
assume that development is something that can be created and brought to an undeveloped place

\[16\] Chambers 1997, 189
\[18\] So 1990, 96
\[19\] Hancock 1989, 41
\[20\] So 1990, 96-97
by outsider people. Development workers believe that they can bring development in the form of a modern economy or infrastructure into a place lacking both. Secondly, development is assumed to be linear and predictable. To become developed, a country must follow a path of specific objectives and building projects. Development also assumes that there is a preferred culture and value system, typically Western values, which needs to be inflicted upon underdeveloped countries in order to make them developed.\(^{21}\) In reality, this idea of development policy is not effective, yet, on this basis, the development industry has been built.

An alternative theory to the concept of development is to see it as meaning “to unfold.” In this view, changes unfold from within a community over time. This development theory allows local people to identify their own struggles and priorities as well as solutions to address these issues. Directly contradicting the conventional view, in this alternative framework development is not brought by the outside, but rather is found within. It does not follow a set of principles, rather morphs to address the specific concerns of a given time, place, and people.\(^{22}\) Breaking away from the cookie-cutter approach, this flexible view of development better achieves its goal in assisting the poor so that they might lift themselves out of poverty.

This paper adopts the latter view as a framework for development work. This view better incorporates the importance of the community and grassroots efforts. Indigenous NGOs are more capable of fulfilling this description of development, as the definition requires development to come from within. This theme will be specifically exemplified in the case of Concerned Parents Association, which evolved out of the conflict in Northern Uganda.

Development theorists have created a series of indicators to measure the success of development programs. One such measurement is the United Nations Development

\(^{21}\) Kaplan 2000, 30-32
\(^{22}\) Holmen 2010, 5
Programme’s Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI assigns numerical values to three dimensions of life – health, education, and standard of living. Through measuring life expectancy, literacy rates, and gross national product per capita, the HDI is a number between zero and one. The higher the number, the better the development level in a given country. In 2007, Uganda’s HDI was 0.514, ranking it 157th out of 182 measured countries.23 The HDI is a preferred measure of quality of life, because it averages multiple factors rather than focusing on one criterion, giving a more complete assessment. Although, the downfall of the HDI is that it does not take aspects such as gender equality or human rights into consideration.

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat also compiles a series of statistics to assist in the monitoring of development projects. Where their numbers do not give a complete picture of development in a country, they provide statistics on a variety of smaller areas of focus. The department’s statistics include information on child-bearing, unemployment, water supply and sanitation, housing, and human settlements. All of these numbers continue to put Uganda in the lower ranks of achieving a level of development.24

**Strategies for Achieving Development**

In either definition of development, it aims at well-being for all, specifically the poor and vulnerable. There are two main categories of development strategies to achieve these goals – top-down and bottom-up. The top-down method is most consistent with the conventional definition of development and is exemplified in large international organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The UNDP describes itself as the world’s

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23 UNDP Human Development Report - Uganda
24 Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat
largest development service network.\textsuperscript{25} Headquartered in New York, it works in 166 countries around the world, 45 of which are in Sub-Saharan Africa. UNDP runs five major program areas – poverty reduction, democratic governance promotion, crisis prevention and recovery, environmental and energy issues, and fighting HIV/AIDS. Through these programs, the UNDP takes a “pro-poor” stance toward international development, promoting policies that allow the poor to live longer and healthier lives.\textsuperscript{26} However, instead of implementing projects directly with people who need their benefits, UNDP works through “policy advice, technical support, and advocacy for strengthening coherence.”\textsuperscript{27} The poverty alleviation budget totals more than one billion voluntarily donated US dollars annually, although less than half of the $1.2 billion of the 2008 budget was spent on developing countries. Much of this budget was spent on global campaigns for advocating the MDGs, creating the “best strategy” for the implementation of the MDGs, monitoring and reporting progress on the MDGs, and supporting government projects.\textsuperscript{28}

The largest project undertaken by UNDP toward reaching the MDG targets was the creation of Millennium Development Villages. With funding from the government of Japan, the UNDP set up twelve villages in different geographical and climate zones in ten countries across Sub-Saharan Africa. UNDP searched the continent for a pre-established village suffering from problems related to their geography – including water access, health problems, agricultural challenges, and a lack of income. After identifying these locations, the UNDP began to provide “capacity building” workshops for the local citizens. The idea of capacity building implies the indigenous population lacks certain skills necessary to carry out development projects on their

\textsuperscript{25} Hancock 1989, 47
\textsuperscript{26} UNDP Annual Report 2009, 4
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, 5
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, 6
own. International organizations provide these people with the “correct” management skills so that goals in line with the international targets can be met.\textsuperscript{29}

Each village requires $300,000 of international donations per year to operate. Additionally, the villagers and local government must provide another $60 per villager per year to sustain the activities in the village. For five years, this funding provides healthcare, education, agricultural, and microfinance assistance to the villagers. The driving idea behind these villages is that with an initial capital investment, the villages will experience an accelerated economic growth, which will allow them to move from subsistence to “self-sustaining commercial activity.”\textsuperscript{30} After five years, the international support will be completely withdrawn from the villages, and they will be left to continue the implemented activities on their own. In 2008, the Ruhirira village in eastern Uganda was in year three of its formation. The villagers were still receiving free health services provided by the implementing program. When a UNDP field official was asked about the transition from a village entirely dependent on the project funding to an independent community, he claimed the UNDP had not made any plans regarding transfer of responsibility. This means that in late 2010, the international community will pull all support out of a village that had become dependent on financial contributions for the past five years.

This method of top-down development, where the UNDP identified a recipient and began to provide a large influx of monetary support ignores several important aspects of the development process. Development must be done slowly. A sudden influx of money does not put the poor in a position to build an institutional framework to support their activities.\textsuperscript{31} Too much money from international sources prevents a village from becoming self-reliant and furthers dependency on an outside organization. Prior to the arrival of the UN Millennium

\textsuperscript{29} Holmen 2010, 220

\textsuperscript{30} Millennium Project Website www.unmillenniumproject.org

\textsuperscript{31} Burkey 1993, 43-50
Village project, the people of Ruhiira were not reliant on foreign aid. While they were not rich, their economic situation matched that of other villages in the area. The UN project turned a group of subsistence farmers, already self-reliant, into a group of desperately dependent people on an external development assistance framework. Furthermore, it seems unjust to pump a ridiculous amount of aid into one village, while leaving their neighboring village with no assistance at all. A more effective program would have taken the specific needs of the area as a whole into account and helped the local people to develop their own self-sustaining solutions to what they see as their largest problems.

Other agencies of the United Nations also implement development-oriented projects. Many of these work under the funding and framework of the UNDP. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is the largest of these. In the 1980s, the FAO had 10,000 staff members, and the number has only grown since then. However, over half of them work at the organization’s headquarters in Rome, Italy. The main goal of FAO in the developing world is to provide technical assistance. In essence, the FAO does not invest or provide any physical capital to developing world farmers. Rather, it provides research and training on new techniques and concepts to be used by these workers. These projects strive to “build country capacity” and “empower small-scale farmers.” The FAO has over 2,000 implemented field projects at any given time, totaling US$800 annually. Any technical project supported by the FAO should “fill crucial gaps and have catalytic effects,” which should “stimulate the flow of bilateral and multilateral funding for agricultural and rural development.”

32 FAO Field programme factsheet
The World Food Programme (WFP) is another implementing agency. It has around 10,000 staff members who hope to provide food assistance in 73 different countries in 2010. The WFP mainly provides food handouts in emergency situations, but their program also hopes to prevent future hunger through skill and knowledge building. Through their large distribution sites, the WFP delivers an average of 3.7 million tons of food annually.\textsuperscript{33} The shortcoming with the WFP, as will be seen in Northern Uganda, is once again its distribution of non-sustainable goods. While it is important to provide immediate food assistance to people who would die without it, the transition away from dependency must be gradual and give people a sustainable option to replace their non-sustainable handout.

The juxtaposing strategy to that implemented by the UNDP is the bottom-up, or grassroots, method. This method specifically targets the poor and neglected groups of people. The idea of grassroots development is to help poor people address their position in global markets.\textsuperscript{34} The theoretical framework at this level is to empower groups at the community level. With an increase in participation, the poor groups can have greater representation, which leads to more in empowerment. These increases all lead to a reduction of poverty. The new empowered groups become a part of civil society.\textsuperscript{35} In order for development to be successful, there has to be a will from within.\textsuperscript{36} Each grassroots project is unique, as it takes the specifics of the situation into account. As projects in Northern Uganda will demonstrate, without community support, no implemented project can be sustainable.

In order to fulfill the ideas of development, these organizations claim to be an important vehicle, providing characteristics and aspects absent elsewhere. They claim to be good at

\textsuperscript{33} World Food Programme website
\textsuperscript{34} Edwards 2000, 3
\textsuperscript{35} Blair 2000, 110-114
\textsuperscript{36} Burkey 1993, 48
reaching the poor and using these grassroots processes. These processes empower people at a lower cost than government programs with a more innovative and flexible framework. And finally, development agencies claim to be promoting sustainable development projects from below.\textsuperscript{37}

**Weakness of the Development Industry**

Although in theory, international organizations appear to be the perfect mechanism to carry out development work, their claims do not always hold true. Frequently, these organizations do not reach the poor or bring sustainable projects. Their objectives are often vague.\textsuperscript{38} Many agencies operate from a harmony model, which assumes that everyone in a village is interested in a common goal. They see their efforts as grassroots, because they address the village level. The idealistic view of village life is that everyone is working toward one common interest. This view comes from aid workers not being present in the field.\textsuperscript{39} However, elites exist even at the local village level. Aid aimed at the village level will still favor the relatively rich. Minorities and vulnerable people struggle to gain recognition at the village level. Furthermore, the poor are often not organized. Organized groups tend to gain more aid attention.\textsuperscript{40} In order for development work to be successful, small groups of similar people must be formed.

International aid organizations are very focused on short-term results. The addition of capacity building to the development agenda is evidence of the desire to see results. Furthermore, international organizations go to great length to document their beneficiaries and

\textsuperscript{37} Streiten 1997, 195
\textsuperscript{38} Streiten 1997, 196-197
\textsuperscript{39} Burkey 1993, 40
\textsuperscript{40} Blair 2000, 113-114
project timelines. Foreign agencies not familiar with the slow development process or the culture of Sub-Saharan Africa struggle in their ability to deliver successful projects. These organizations hold the mindset that “projects are defined by time” and require a specific start and end date, making sustainable projects much harder to implement than immediate handouts.\(^{41}\) Whereas the immediate objectives are often very concrete, the long-term objectives are often vague. For example, the WFP can easily set a specific amount of food to be dispersed in a given time period in a given area. However, it is much harder for the WFP to measure the number of farmers who were able to provide enough food for themselves and their families for a year. Further evidence on the vagueness of long-term projects is the key vocabulary words that appear in the development industry’s objectives. Practically all organizations aim to “empower,” but they fail to explain how empowerment will happen. Even if empowerment happens, it seems to be immeasurable, going back to the original purpose of immediate rather than long-term project implementation. Moreover, projects implemented are often not sustainable, as they require a charismatic person to carry out. Once the field officer loses interest in the project or leaves, it is often hard for the community to take ownership of a project they did not initiate themselves.\(^{42}\)

Given all of these constraints and difficulties, “the result, today, is that the collective psychology of aid-giving is schizophrenic, shot through with contradictory urges and rationalizations, some of which are benign, some sinister, and others just plain neurotic.”\(^{43}\)

The majority of these problems stem from international organizations work. The goal of development work, as previously stated, is to empower people to lift themselves out of poverty. This would imply that if the development industry were successful in their work, they should

\(^{41}\) Interview with Father Robert Omara from Caritas Lira Field Office, 23 November 2008  
\(^{42}\) Streeten 1997, 197  
\(^{43}\) Hancock 1989, 69
have put themselves out of business.\textsuperscript{44} Instead, the development field seems to be growing more than ever now. Ironically, development staff whose job it is to serve the poor are well paid and make less and less contact with needy regions. Many organizations are urban-based with foreign origins, run by professionals who have little knowledge of the local conditions.\textsuperscript{45} These professionals draw from a stock-pile of cookie-cutter theories and implement them in various corners of the globe which they have never visited. In fact, in order to continue to be a needed link in the development chain, agencies pursue an agenda opposite of their goal. They must create dependency in order to continue to work, and dependency works against self-reliant sustainable development practices. Therefore, rather than empowering people to work out of poverty, the development industry must teach people that they are helpless and lack the skills needed to make this transition.\textsuperscript{46} They must convince local populations that outsiders, being development workers, bring the skills necessary to work out of poverty. This process turns “tenacious survivors into helpless dependents.”\textsuperscript{47}

The relationship between international organizations and indigenous NGOs further propels this creation of dependency. Since the late 1980s, international organizations have set up “partnerships” with indigenous NGOs. International agencies feel they need to do more than monetarily fund indigenous NGOs, so they have taken up the process of “capacity building.” In this way, international organizations impose foreign frameworks and standards to local efforts, causing the local efforts to continue to rely on these external frameworks. Although international agencies use the term “capacity building” to describe this partnership, the implementation process is disempowering and destructive to local sustainable efforts. This

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 74
\textsuperscript{45} Holmen 2010, 19
\textsuperscript{46} Burkey 1993, 53
\textsuperscript{47} Hancock 1989, 190
dependency forced upon indigenous organizations stems from the Western world's continuous discontent with development policies. Donors to international efforts like to see immediate results from projects to ensure their funds are being put to good use. This pressure in turn transfers to indigenous organizations to quickly implement projects and force artificial results much faster than they would occur naturally. Furthermore, international agencies assume that they have skills and experiences that are lacking in indigenous NGOs. These skills range from medical knowledge and agricultural practices to managerial tools. The important thing to note in the efforts of international organizations is that too much money and materials from external sources can prevent self-reliance and sustainable projects. Although development missions and visions are strong in their expressions of empowerment and sustainability, they are often weak in practice. This dependency is created not just between international organizations and local populations, but also international agencies and local NGOs. The creation of dependency is the main flaw to development work and continues to plague any efforts of reaching and sustaining the MDGs.

The Conflict in Northern Uganda as a Context for Development Work

Civil society in Uganda has grown immensely in the past twenty years. As space for civil society has expanded, the role of NGOs has increased. The Uganda National NGO Forum was created in 1997 to bring all of these NGOs under one collective voice. By 2000, they already had 3,700 registered members, a number assumed to only have grown since then. This heavy presence of NGOs in Uganda should imply that Uganda is one of the leaders in successful development work and that their goals of poverty reduction should be met. Unfortunately, this is

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48 Simbi and Thom 2000
49 Uganda National NGO Forum http://www.ngoforum.or.ug/index.php
not the case. Poverty is the greatest challenge facing Uganda today, and thirty-one percent of Ugandans live on less than $1 per day.\textsuperscript{50} The highest levels of poverty are found in Northern Uganda, where a twenty-four year war may be ending. In this region especially, prospects of reaching the MDGs seem very poor. It is for precisely this reason that the case study of Northern Uganda was chosen. With so many NGOs working, but so little progress made, there evidently must be a flaw in NGO work.

As one travels north from the bustling capital city of Kampala toward Lira, the vegetation transforms from the lush rolling hills and temperate climate of southern Uganda to the dry plains and heat of northern Uganda. The paved and maintained road becomes dirt and full of pot holes. The multi-story buildings give way to pockets of grass huts. The power lines and vehicles disappear into the streams of pedestrians and bicyclists. These physical changes correspond with the extensive economic, political, and social regional divide between northern and southern Uganda. The majority of Ugandans today identify themselves not with the state, but with their specific regional ethnic group. Two large and notable ethnic groups in the North are the Acholi and Langi people. Acholiland includes Amuru, Gulu Kitgum, and Pader districts while the Lango sub-region contains Lira, Oyam, Apac, Dokolo, and Amolatar districts. While many of these people have similar experiences as a result of the insurgency in the North, recovery processes in the two regions have differed. These ethnic groups can be referenced individually or by using the term Luo, which refers to the combination of the Acholi and Lango people. As seen across the continent, the arbitrary political borders determined by the colonial powers across the continent have forced Africans into unfortunate conflicts. The internal divide in Uganda has its roots back to the era of British colonization. With the indirect rule administration system in place in Uganda, power was concentrated in the hands of specific geographical ethnic groups.

\textsuperscript{50} UNDP in Uganda - http://www.undp.or.ug/
The British concentrated military recruitment from the North and economic power in the South of the country. Upon gaining independence in 1962, the political leaders of the country continued to isolate power accordingly, as they knew no other national government system than what was left by the British. Similar to other African nations, the control of political power in Uganda was very unstable, allowing for numerous coups and propelling instability.

In 1966, Milton Obote, from the Lango, declared himself president and naturally consolidated power among his clansmen of the North. Obote was overthrown in January of 1971 by his army commander, Idi Amin, and other discontented army members. Amin’s rule of the country became known world-wide for its autocratic qualities, human rights abuses, and economic turmoil. Furthermore, Amin, from northwest Uganda, placed his clansmen in positions of power where they could repress other ethnic groups previously holding power. In 1979, Amin was overthrown, and after several brief unstable presidencies by others, Obote and his party, the Uganda People’s Congress (UPC), were elected in a contested poll in 1980. Obote’s regime was continuously challenged by rebel groups opposed to the rigged elections, and corruption continued through Obote’s military appointments. After the appointment of a Langi as the head of the military, anti-government Acholi soldiers overthrew the Obote regime. This coup left General Tito Lutwa Okello, an Acholi, as president of Uganda. In response to his goal of national unity, many rebel groups agreed to sign his Military Council regime. The National Resistance Movement (NRM) notably did not join this regime. This divide caused significant violence between the government and NRM. As a result of the instability, Yoweri Museveni and his NRM seized control of the government of Uganda. The armies from the northern region had lost all of their political power, and many returned to take refuge in the North. With Museveni’s control of the government came the disproportion of prosperity
between northern and southern Uganda. Museveni, a southwesterner, concentrated ministry power in the hands of southern Ugandans and took little notice of the deteriorating condition of the north. Although he has been quite successful in combating HIV/AIDS and providing economic stability in the South, the northern part of the country faces one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world. Throughout Museveni’s regime, several rebel groups based in the north continued to actively oppose the government. The Northern rebel groups consisted of supporters of the Obote regime and the Holy Spirit Movement. Although these groups undermine the credibility of the president, they have not actively challenged control of the government in Kampala. This regional divide and history of violence in Northern Uganda, as driven by the strong military recruitment set the stage for the eventual emergence of Joseph Kony and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in 1986.  

A self-proclaimed priestess, Alice Lakwena began the Holy Spirit Movement in Northern Uganda in 1985. An Acholi herself, she claimed that she had been granted spiritual powers by Lakwena to cleanse the Acholi people. In 1986, she was defeated and fled to Kenya, and her absence left a power vacuum in the north. Claiming that he had inherited Alice Lakwena’s spiritual powers, Joseph Kony created what became known as the Lord’s Resistance Army. Since 1986, Kony has been waging war against his own people and the government of Uganda, ransacking villages, abducting children, raping and enslaving women, and terrorizing his people in specifically the Luo region of Northern Uganda. Due to the nomadic and decentralized nature of the LRA, little is known as to the actual motives of the LRA, and even the surfacing information contradicts itself. It is debatable as to whether or not Kony even has a political agenda. Whereas the common belief is that he strives to discredit the NRM and its platform in favor of a theocracy based on the Ten Commandments, the methods of his insurgency are

51 Ofcansky1996, 39-58
uncommon to any other form of political resistance and rebut the Ten Commandments doctrines of “thou shall not kill” and “thou shall not steal.” The majority of Kony’s LRA forces are abducted children. Playing off of children’s impressionable nature, Kony uses a strategy of fear and spirituality to coerce the children into becoming armed combatants, porters, or sex slaves in his army.

Although exact numbers are impossible to obtain, it is estimated that the LRA has abducted at least 25,000 children since the beginning of the insurgency in 1986. Immediately after abduction, LRA commanders perform a series of beatings and altered traditional ceremonies. The purpose of these acts is to instill fear into the abducted children, so that they will not attempt to escape and will continue to follow the orders of the LRA commands. Once a part of the LRA, these abductees are often tasked with killing their neighbors and abducting their friends. Most of the LRA commanders are comprised of abductees. Best stated by a formerly abducted person, the only difference between a rebel and abductee is that “a rebel is an abductee who has lost the will to think for himself or escape.”

Although the LRA attempts to instill a level of fear that discourages abductees to escape from their ranks, the harsh brainwashing techniques are not always successful. Shortly after abduction, the commanding ranks of the LRA perform a ceremony, where they smear abductees with oil and sprinkle water on them, claiming that this ritual prevents escape. Whereas this ritual convinces some abductees of their “duty” to the LRA, many abductees spent their days, weeks, months, or even years under the LRA searching for an opportune escape moment, keeping in mind the severe consequences of failure. Return levels of abductees to their

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52 UNICEF Field Office Lira estimation November 2008; the majority of the children were ages 9-12 years old when abducted
53 Interview #2 – FAC Aloi sub-county 18 November 2008
54 Interview #2 – FAC Aloi sub-county 18 November 2008
communities were highest in 2002 and 2003, when the frequency of LRA activity in Uganda was highest. The most successful escapes happen in moments of confusion during looting tasks or ambushes with the UPDF. One formerly abducted person (FAP) recalls while looting medicine from Kalango Hospital, some people were chasing goats and chickens while others were collecting cassava from the garden and others were gathering any medical supplies at the facility. He took advantage of the chaos of the situation and escaped.\footnote{Interview #1 – FAP Ogur sub-county 17 November 2008}

Once becoming free from the ranks of the LRA, the first reintegration step for the escapee is deciding where to go. The LRA and any people associated with the rebel group are seen as unclean and traitors by their Northern Uganda communities. Many of the abducted children revisit their home communities as rebels, beating their neighbors, abducting their friends, and killing their families. Therefore, when they escape from the LRA and return to their communities, they are shunned and provided with no support. Because everyone’s escape happens in a different time and place, it is impossible to generalize the escape route and return portal. Abductees who escape the LRA by surrendering to the Uganda People’s Defense Force (UPDF) tend to spend several days under the army’s ranks before being passed on to a rehabilitation center. Others recognize their surroundings and report immediately to sub-county governing offices and local chairmen. Those who escape far from any structured assistance must rely on ordinary citizens, which can often be difficult, because citizens too live in fear of the rebels. When an escapee approaches a village that has not been abandoned, citizens often flee or refuse to offer services. When the LRA was pushed out of Uganda and into Sudan in 2004, it became practically impossible for abductees to cross back into Uganda. Currently, with the hub of the armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Southern Sudan, abductees who have the opportunity to escape from the LRA would be killed by another rebel
group in the DRC or Sudan before reaching the Uganda border. Although there are still thousands of abductees under the LRA’s ranks, the current return rate is very low. At the time of high returns, the reception of FAC is one area in which NGOs took a strong role. However, the heavy presence of NGOs at the time does not imply complete neglect from the government of Uganda in addressing the Northern conflict.

**Inept Government Response and the Entrance of the Development Industry**

Uganda has signed the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Right of Children, the Geneva Conventions, and the Statute of the International Criminal Court. All of these international documents campaign, either explicitly or indirectly, against the use of child soldiers. Furthermore, the 1995 Uganda Constitution obliges the Government of Uganda to protect the life and property of all Ugandans, making the state the duty-bearer for the preservation of human rights. Joseph Kony and the LRA present a challenge toward the state’s duty in upholding these rights. Kony’s tactics of child abduction are quite successful, as they force parents to blame the government for being unable to protect the children. Additionally, some Ugandans believe that it is actually the state military, and not the LRA, that is massacring villages and killing children. The discord between the people of northern Uganda and the government presents an even greater challenge to the government of Uganda in its counter insurgency and rebuilding efforts to bring the violence to an end and implement a positive rebuilding project to the north.

In 2000, the Ugandan legislature enacted the Amnesty Act. The Amnesty Act pardons former rebels who have been involved in the armed conflict since 26 January, 1986 and who

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56 Additional Protocol II Article 4[30] of the Geneva Convention, which is applicable in non-international armed conflicts, states that “children who have not attained the age of fifteen ears shall neither be recruited in the armed forces or groups, nor allowed to take part in hostilities.”
voluntarily give up fighting from any prosecution by the government. Furthermore, the Act established a commission to monitor demobilization and reintegration programs, sensitize the public about the Amnesty Act, and promote reconciliation.\textsuperscript{57} Between January 2000 and December 2006, the Amnesty Commission pardoned 12,119 former LRA members.\textsuperscript{58} As part of its programs, the commission was expected to provide former combatants and FAC with a resettlement package, containing $150 US, a mattress, a blanket, a hoe, and some seeds. However, not all former combatants have received these kits, forcing the government into a two-year project worth over $2.2 million to provide resettlement kits for those who have not received them.\textsuperscript{59} Unfortunately, the resettlement packages offered by the Amnesty Commission are only short-term immediate assistance to people who require long-term sustainable solutions, and the legal protection does not heal former combatants’ traumatized minds.

Additionally, in 2002 the army initiated a large-scale offensive action, titled “Operation Iron Fist” against the LRA. The LRA had set up many of its bases across the northern border of Uganda in southern Sudan. Nomadic in style, the LRA would use these bases to stockpile looted goods, train abductees, and rest between attacks. The benefit of the bases in Sudan is that the government of Uganda has no political jurisdiction over the area and therefore could not destroy the operating centers of the LRA. Operation Iron Fist was approved by the Sudanese government and allowed the UPDF to enter southern Sudan to attack the LRA. When this operation failed to bring an end to or limit LRA activity, the government of Uganda launched “Operation Iron Fist II” in March of 2004. Both operations were a disaster, and rather than stabilizing the situation in the North, Operation Iron Fist I and II lead to an increase in LRA

\textsuperscript{57} The Amnesty Act, 2000 Government of Uganda
\textsuperscript{58} Uganda Ministry of Internal Affairs
\textsuperscript{59} “Ex-Rebels to Get Demobilisation Kits” New Vision 7 November 2008
activity and brutality. However, with the increased rebel activity in close proximity to FAC home region, some abductees were able to escape.

An immediate solution was needed for the resettlement of FACs. With their homes uprooted, family members dead, and their status in the communities, these uncertain people needed somewhere to go. Since the government of Uganda was in no position to support these returning children, international organizations began to set up reception centers across Northern Uganda. It was the goal of rehabilitation centers that all escapees funnel into a center before returning home. Therefore the UPDF transferred any abductees who surrendered to these centers, and rehabilitation centers campaigned directly to abductees while they were still under the commands of the LRA. Caritas International, an NGO organized through the Catholic Church, headquartered in Vatican City, and present in Northern Uganda, sponsored a weekly radio program, where escapees who had passed through their center were able to speak unscripted about their feelings and how they were treated at the center upon return. Due to its decentralized nature, the majority of the LRA’s communications were through the radio, making the Caritas radio program very accessible to FACs.

Despite these attempts, the majority of returnees have not passed through a rehabilitation center. Centers were either too distant or FACs did not know of their existence. The largest concentration of reception centers were in Gulu, although other reception centers existed in Kitgum, Lira, and Teboke. However, given that FAC escape from all over Northern Uganda, returning to these centers is not always feasible or practical. In June of 2008, a mapping of 569 FAC in Lira District revealed that only 140 (about 25 percent) of them had passed through a center. The majority of the 140 passed through Rachele Rehabilitation Center this trend is not surprising, as Rachele Rehabilitation Center was located in Lira District, where the mapped FAC

60 Interview with Father Robert Omara from Caritas Lira Field Office, 23 November 2008
currently reside. Although these numbers only represent a small portion of the FAC population, similar trends are assumed to happen across Northern Uganda. The empirical nature of this study serves to reinforce claims made on a broader scale.

The purpose of the rehabilitation center is to be a safe haven for escapees to debrief on their experiences in the bush and prepare to return home. These centers implement some of the basic steps of the reintegration process and serve as the pivot point where the demobilization process ends and the reintegration process begins. The exact extent of the services offered to FAC depends on the length of time FAC stay at the center. Studies claim that returnees should spend the least amount of time possible at reception centers and return home as soon as possible. However, this claim ignores the particularities of Uganda. Many FAC looted their home villages, assisted in the abduction of their neighbors, or killed their families. Furthermore, FAC were returning at a time when the entire population was living in internally displaced person camps, so reunification with the family was not synonymous with returning home.

Returnees arriving at Caritas Rehabilitation Center in Teboke generally stayed for forty days, though the length of stay was flexible when considering the best interest of the child. Between 2004 and January 2007, 324 FAC passed through the center. A typical day at the center included prayers, group counseling sessions, individual counseling sessions, sports and entertainment, and meals. When children were released from the center, they were sent with a resettlement kit in order to assist with the transition from having everything provided for them in the bush and at the center to providing for themselves. At the Gulu Support the Children Organization Reception Center (GUSCO), another international organization, FAC typically stayed between 21 and 42 days. Similar to Caritas, GUSCO offers counseling, food, community

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61 Verhey 2001
62 Interview with Father Robert Omara from Caritas Lira Field Office, 23 November 2008
interaction, spiritual guidance and family mapping assistance. Of the mapped FAC in Lira who indicated a specific duration of stay at a reception center, the majority stayed between one to three months, which is consistent with rehabilitation center policies.

However, both Caritas and GUSCO are designed to provide only temporary services to FAC. After providing FAC with vocation training, such as tailoring, Caritas has closed their reception center in Teboke. GUSCO’s program offers FAC that have passed through their center one year of follow-up support before assuming the children will be integrated into long-term support systems within their own communities. With the low return rate, Rachele Rehabilitation Center, established by the Belgian government, has since been turned into a secondary school to address the needs to meet educational needs. Today, there are no open reception centers in Northern Uganda. The reception centers provided a short-term solution to a long-term problem, assuming that FAC would find support through another vehicle.

Shortfalls of International Development Organizations’ Response

The short-coming in the reintegration process is the transfer of responsibility between the institutions providing immediate and sustainable assistance. The international organizations, such as GUSCO and Caritas, providing rehabilitation center services did not establish long-term projects. Furthermore, all center services were completely dependent on foreign assistance. If the return rate of abductees ever reaches a point similar to that of 2003-2004, Northern Uganda would be unable to provide these same reception center services. The international organizations brought in an outside framework, foreign to the context of Northern Uganda in which to “solve” the problems faced by FAC. Reintegration theories do not address the particular concerns of the

65 GUSCO Reception Center Operations Manual
specific Ugandan situation. Imposing these theories only makes Uganda more dependent on outside patches to internal problems.

A follow-up survey with FAC immediately falsifies the assumption by GUSCO and other rehabilitation centers that FAC will be reincorporated into community. This survey of forty-eight FAC was conducted through Concerned Parents Association in Lira District in the fall of 2008. With the highest return rate in 2003, when asked in 2008 whether or not any follow-up had occurred, only thirteen of forty-eight (27 percent) FAC answered affirmatively. Furthermore, of the thirteen receiving follow-ups visits nine visits happened within three days after reunification, a time frame that does not fall into the sustainable assistance category. Of the four FAC who passed through a rehabilitation center, only two received follow-up visits, both of which happened immediately after reunification.

The follow-up interview was comprised of open-ended questions inquiring about the social environment, economic situation, psychological wellbeing, and health concerns of the FAC. By classifying the varying qualitative answers into three categories – poor, fair, and good – one can easily note the failure of FAC to successfully reintegrate into society. By definition, reintegration targets multiple sectors of an individual’s life. Therefore, a classification of poor in any of the aforementioned categories reflects the failure of the reintegration program in Northern Uganda as a result of neglect on the part of international organizations to provide sustainable projects. Without a solid reintegration base, FACs fail to break the cycle of poverty, a key development goal.

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64 This follow up survey was conducted by Concerned Parents Association of 48 FACs in Lira District. I took the responses and observations from the CPA field team and categorized the state of the FAC into poor, fair, and good for social, economic, psychological, and health concerns. The data from this study will continue to be referenced in this section of the paper. For a chart representation of the data, refer to Appendix B.
In regards to social integration, 17 of the 48 interviewed FAC are categorized as "good," while 27 are still socially "poor." Although, the results of the follow-up interviews show that FAC are most successful in reintegrating socially compared to economic, health, or psychological aspects of life, FAC cite stigmatization from the community as their largest obstacle in reintegration. When FAC return to school, they are often much older than the other students in their class, which automatically sets them apart from children who were not abducted. Additionally, the students call the FAC rebels and chastise them about having been part of the LRA. Girls who were raped by LRA commanders and now have children are referred to as the "wife of Kony," and their children are called "children of the LRA." Not only do returnees face stigmatization from the community, but they also face isolation from their own families. One girl mother was not even allowed to use the soap in her own home, because she was "unclean" in the eyes of her family. Another returnee explains that because his parents died while he was in the bush, he now must live with his uncles. When the boy returned to his uncle's home with his personal belongings and saucepans from his reintegration kit, the uncle took the boy's possessions for his own benefit. The uncle then refused to provide the boy with any livelihood or emotional support, forcing the boy to leave the only family support available to him. Instead of embracing the returnees, communities continuously turn their backs on them, pushing former abductees into a further state of isolation, rather than providing a much needed support system. They live in fear of the rebels returning and suffer from emotional behavior challenges due to the guilt from their actions under the LRA.

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65 Interview #3 – FAC Aloi sub-county 18 November 2008
66 The term girl mothers will be used to refer to girls under the age of 21 who bore a child. In this case, most of these girls were impregnated due to rape by LRA commanders.
67 Participatory Action Research on Girl Mothers Formerly Associated with Fighting/Armed Forces Training on Group Dynamics and Record Keeping held in Apala sub-county, Lira District, 29 October 2008
68 CPA Psychosocial Department 19 November 2008
International organizations are completely unprepared to deal with social outcasting of FAC. Staff members are typically not familiar with the cultures and customs of the region, nor do they understand traditional practices to overcome these social obstacles. One indigenous technique to overcome these social obstacles is the use of traditional cleansing or prayer ceremonies. The traditional beliefs of the Luo people are rooted in ancestral and religious spirits, where one’s actions have either positive or negative ramifications. According to Acholi beliefs, when a person commits a murder or similar crime, the *cen*, an angry spirit, enters into the physical body of the culprit for a period of time. The *cen* typically haunts and attacks both the person who committed the crime and their family. The specific details of cleansing ceremonies vary among the different sub-regions. However, the overarching goal to cleanse an individual from the presence of the *cen* is constant.⁶⁹

In February 2008, an indigenous NGO, Concerned Parents Association, held a workshop on Lango Traditional Justice Mechanisms, which drew about seventy traditional and clan leaders from the Lango sub-region together to identify vital traditional ceremonies. Among these ceremonies, the leaders recognized the importance of *nyono tong gweno*, translated into English as the stepping on eggs. In the past, this ceremony has been used to rid someone of the *cen*. The clan leaders, with the guidance of the indigenous NGO, have redesigned it to relieve a person who has undergone a traumatic event, traditionally of bad nightmares and psychological torture. Thus, this ceremony can reintegrate former combatants to cleanse them of the guilt of their wrong-doings.⁷⁰ In this ceremony, the returnee is presented with an egg from his home before reaching his home. The egg, representing purity, is placed on the road, and the returnee steps on

⁷⁰ Conference content from CPA report on the conference by Hellen Omara, program officer for the peacebuilding department
it. After the egg is broken, the returnee can proceed to his home. The breaking of the egg, in Lango tradition, cleanses the returnee and guarantees that the atrocities committed and experienced will not happen again.  

Not only do communities struggle to forgive FAC of the war crimes they have committed, but FAC mentally struggle to forgive themselves. The LRA takes specific care to numb abductees of all normal human emotions, a process which is necessary in order to convince children to take up guns and clubs to kill their families and friends. After physically escaping this torture of the mind, FAC struggle to mentally escape the guilt and memories from the bush. The most apparent sign of psychological struggling is inappropriate behavior or thinking. 33 of the follow-up interviews show signs of poor psychological recovery of FAC, while only six FAC prove to be in a good psychological state of being. This type of behavior includes aggressiveness toward others, inability to concentrate in school, and a lack of interest in improving upon these conditions. Much of the inappropriate behavior stems from fear. FAC often do not feel secure at home and believe that they are not protected from a future rebel ambush. Other categories of psychological distress include emotional outbursts, trauma, anxiety, isolation, depression, and flashbacks. An FAC explains, “that there is still too much fear in my life. When I sleep, I dream about the rebels, which makes me much more fearful.” With the lack of follow-up visits, there are no support mechanisms in place to process these emotions. Furthermore, FAC feel isolated, alone and unable to relate or share their experiences from the bush with anyone at home. While in the bush, friends were FACs strongest support mechanism. Even in the rehabilitation centers, FAC had a large support network of people in similar situations. The feeling of seclusion when resettled does not assist in the mental reintegration

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71 Interview #1 – FAP Ogur sub-county 17 November 2008
72 Interview #3 – FAC Aloi sub-county 18 November 2008
process. Once again, international organizations, through their false assumptions of harmonious village life, are ill-equipped to address the psychological support mechanisms FACs need. They, unlike indigenous NGOs, do not take the time to analyze the community conditions that abandon FAC.

Health concerns of FAC are the most easily identified challenges of FAC upon return, and they share the same basic health problems as the rest of the population in Northern Uganda. Two FAC claim to be in good health, four in fair health, and the remaining forty-two in poor health conditions. The largest percentage of FAC visited had poor nutritional practices. This problem is yet another example of the interconnectedness of the reintegration strategy. Without adequate food stocks, due to the lack of money to buy seeds and the condition of the land as a result of armed conflict, people are unable to obtain enough food to eat. Additionally, FAC suffer from the same illnesses, such as malaria, that also affect Uganda in general. Poor nutrition and illness are not unique to FAC. These health concerns plague all of Northern Uganda, which creates a challenge when determining the beneficiaries of aid. Their health concerns are set apart from non-abductees by their weakness and physical pain, caused by the heavy loads and guns they were forced to carry on the long LRA marches across Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan.

Girl mothers and their children born in captivity are especially vulnerable to health problems. One girl mother, who gave birth to three children in the bush, explains that, because they were born in the bush, her children did not receive the proper immunizations. Now one is crippled as a result of polio. “If only he had been born at home,” she wishes, “Now he will always be labeled, just when people see him, as a child of the bush.”73 Due to the nature of international organizations, they are ill-equipped to address the ongoing concerns of the community. While providing an original medical check-up is a good first step, without

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73 Interview #4 – FAC Apala sub-county 21 November 2008
empowering the community with the skills they need to identify and solve their own medical problems, international organizations are prolonging the dependency process.

In all forty-eight follow-up cases, the FAC did not have any economic opportunity. The lack of economic means is the root cause of other sustainable failures. Without money, FAC cannot pay school fees or receive medical attention. Additionally, without money, FAC do not have access to proper food. Girl mothers are especially victim to the lack of economic means. Many girls who became mothers are not able to return to school, because they are now heads of households. Therefore, they, as a single parent, are required to provide economic stability for their offspring. Economic instability also factors into school attendance. At the time of the original mapping, ninety-nine FAC who were eligible to be enrolled in school were not.  

Many international organizations provided kits for FAC upon return home. These kits were designed to improve livelihood, but the items in the kits were not sustainable in nature. Whereas an FAC needs food immediately, he also needs a method in which to gain food for the rest of his life. Given that the FAC has no belongings, a simple kit with a bag of rice will not sustain the FAC’s needs for an extended period of time. Activities that work on the grassroots level and genuinely address community concerns are the most effective in combating the dependency of FAC on international aid.

Continued Decline into Poverty of the Northern Ugandan Population

In 1996, the government of Uganda made a decision to force citizens in the north into “protected villages” as a response to the increasing rebel activity. These internally displaced

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24 This statistic refers to the larger mapping project undergone by Concerned Parents Association of 569 FAC in three sub-counties of Lira District. Different from the follow-up surveys, the mapping exercise only recorded the current location of the FAC, whether the FAC had passed through a rehabilitation center, and if the FAC is currently enrolled in school.
person (IDP) camps became home for these people for the next eight years. The idea for the camps was that the UPDF would be able to better protect the citizens of Northern Uganda if they were concentrated in these camps. Instead, the UPDF used the people of Northern Uganda as a barrier between them and the LRA, making the camps only marginally successful in their purpose.\textsuperscript{75} While in these camps, the people had no way to earn income and relied solely on the handouts from organizations such as the World Food Programme for survival.\textsuperscript{76} People were uprooted from the land where they had lived for generations and forced into unsanitary temporary sites. This action forced the community into a state of dependency with no viable alternatives. By the end of 2005, with the failures of Operation Iron Fist I and II, more than 1.8 million people, which totals 90 percent of the Northern Uganda population, lived in camps. As the nucleus of the armed conflict has migrated to Uganda’s neighbors, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Sudan, and negotiations for the Final Peace Agreements had begun, Northern Uganda is believed to have begun to enter an era of peace. By March 2008, all 61 IDP camps in the Lango sub-region had been officially closed, and by July 2009, 60 of the 121 camps in the Acholi region had been phased out.\textsuperscript{77}

In 2006, the government of Uganda and LRA entered into the Juba Peace Talks in Southern Sudan in an effort to conclude the insurgency in the North after twenty-two years. This series of negotiations includes agreements on Cessation of Hostilities, Comprehensive Solutions, Accountability and Reconciliation, Permanent Ceasefire, Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration. The Agreement on Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration, which was signed on 29 February 2008, reflects the reliance on the capability of the government to provide

\textsuperscript{75} Dr. Peter Gusolo, Lira District Health Officer
\textsuperscript{76} World Food Programme Lira Field Office – Interview 6 November 2008 with Solomon Asea
\textsuperscript{77} IDMC 2009
for its citizens. In this agreement, the government of Uganda is specifically responsible for implementing a reintegration program for FAC.78

However, the signing of the Final Peace Agreement, which was originally scheduled for March 2008 has been put on hold due to opposition of the LRA delegation. On 5 November 2008, a committee organized to determine the future of the Final Peace Agreement convened in Kampala and gave Kony until the end of November to sign the agreement.79 After Kony refused to meet the November deadline, he fled Uganda and was thought to be in the DRC. On December 14, 2008, the governments of Uganda, Southern Sudan, and the DRC launched “Operation Lightening Thunder” to offensively attack LRA camps in the DRC in hopes of killing Joseph Kony or forcing him to sign the peace agreement. The operation was declared successful in March 2009. Although Kony was not found, the attacking forces claim to have significantly reduced and scattered the LRA structure.80 Without the capturing of Joseph Kony, this claim of victory seems weak. The stalled state of the agreements and the inability of the army to even locate Joseph Kony once again illustrates the complexity of the specifics of the conflict in Northern Uganda and the challenges confronting the government of Uganda to execute a successful development program. This inability of the government to successfully address the continuing conflict in Northern Uganda opens the opportunity for the development industry to fill the supportive void. That is exactly what the United Nations did.

78 Juba Peace Agreements
79 “Govt, LRA meeting in Kampala today.” New Vision 5 November 2008 and “Your time is up, mediators tell LRA’s Kony.” New Vision 7 November 2008
80 Schomerus and Tumutegeereize 2009, 4
Non-Sustainable International Organization Response

All of the citizens of Northern Uganda faced hardships upon their return from the IDP camps. One of the most basic problems is land disputes upon return home. After living in IDP camps for eight years, some families are unable to recognize their previous homeland. The entire region has been decimated by the LRA, causing many families to choose to resettle in a place different from their original dwelling. Furthermore, ninety-three percent of the land in Northern Uganda is held under customary law, which has no land boundary registration.\textsuperscript{81} Thus, citizens have no way to show a legal right to the land which they wish to reclaim. As a result of the conflict, many people were murdered, leaving twenty-three percent of all households in Northern Uganda headed by women.\textsuperscript{82} With traditional gender roles still very evident in the region, these households are often denied access to their land.

Even those people that have access to their land face severe food security problems. Currently, only 34 percent of the land in the Acholi region is being cultivated.\textsuperscript{83} Prior to the insurgency, the majority of people in Northern Uganda farmed to feed their family. Some of the lack of agricultural activity stems from the lack of agricultural resources available to the people of Northern Uganda. Without crops growing for eight years, the people had no seeds to even plant. While living in the camps, fields were ripped apart and farming equipment was looted. Furthermore, landmines covered much of Northern Uganda. The fear of uncovering these mines prevents some citizens from cultivating their fields. While in the camps, the citizens were unable to grow food and relied on the WFP to provide all food resources. When the camps closed, WFP handouts decreased as an attempt to force the citizens into self-reliance, putting the people of Northern Uganda in a situation where they could not provide for themselves and their food

\textsuperscript{81} IDMC 2009, 12
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, 13
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, 12
source for the past eight years was no longer available. In March 2009, the WFP saw the need for food in the region and made plans to distribute food to 750,000 IDPs still living in the camps and recent returnees. However, two months later, a lack of funding forced the WFP to immediately stop their distribution of food.\(^4\) At the end of the year, as a response to the dry spell ruining staple crop harvests, WFP one again promised a one-month 50% ration distribution to over one million people in the Acholi sub-region.\(^5\) The continuing promise of free handouts and the inability to deliver continue to force the people of Northern Ugandan into a stage of dependency on international NGOs.

Another challenge to those IDPs who have returned is the lack of infrastructure and services in returning areas. Over forty percent of households in Northern Uganda left their children in IDP camps, because of the better access to education and healthcare. The dependency created in the camps by complete UN support cannot be found anywhere else in Northern Uganda. Even still, in IDP camps, there were thirty people using a single pit latrine. The situation was far from sanitary, healthy, or pleasant, but it was still significantly better than the situation waiting in return areas. In the camps, the various branches of the United Nations provided emergency services to all IDPs. However, these services were not carried over to the returning population, who had little if any resources to build from. Less than 30 percent of all returnees have access to clean drinking water outside of the IDP camps.\(^6\) The lack of sanitation leads to major health problems including typhoid, cholera, and most recently an outbreak of Hepatitis E.\(^7\)

\(^4\) Ibid, 12-13
\(^5\) 2010 Uganda CAP
\(^6\) Ibid, 1
\(^7\) IDMC
Upon leaving the camps, all aid was lost, as international NGOs did not implement any sort of transition programs. The resettlement movement has coincided with the withdrawal of United Nations (UN) agencies working within Lira District. Of specific note is the absence of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), the umbrella organization under which all other UN programs operated.\textsuperscript{88} These agencies were not prepared to meet the long-term needs of recovery and reconstruction. Rather, they only provided immediate assistance. The withdrawal of these organizations comes simultaneously with the elimination of the minimal, but necessary, livelihood support offered to the people in the camps. Additionally, although emergency situation funding has been phased out, there has been no increase in the allocation of funds for recovery programs. The dependency created by international NGOs has left the people of Northern Uganda searching for an alternative solution to development.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided over half of the food distributed by the WFP in Northern Uganda. Claiming to be the largest provider of humanitarian assistance in Uganda, USAID provided $138 million of aid to Northern Uganda in 2008. USAID, operating under the direction of the Secretary of State, has a goal of “furthering America’s foreign policy interests in expanding democracy and free markets while improving the lives of the citizens of the developing world.” Similar to UN implementing agencies, USAID mainly provides handouts and works at the macro level with the government of Uganda. One USAID program aims at promoting economic growth through increasing the commercial agriculture sector of the Northern Ugandan economy. The underlying belief is that more marketable agricultural products, such as corn and coffee, will expand the economy of the country, lifting it out of a state of poverty. What USAID fails to recognize are the more pressing individual needs of food to sustain life rather than macro-level growth. USAID, as an outside

\textsuperscript{88} World Food Programme Lira Field Office – interview 6 November 2008 with Solomon Asea
organization is trying to implement a program not in line with the needs to a community. While commercial farming would make Uganda significantly more competitive in international markets, these international organization goals are not in line with the priorities or needs of the community. Community members do not see the immediate benefits of the program, and are therefore less likely to participate. Without a community will, there is little hope for USAID’s projects to become a sustainable part of Northern Uganda.\(^{89}\)

In 2009, USAID and International Alert, an international peacebuilding organization, published a guide for Western investors in Northern Uganda. The goal of this program is to revitalize the Ugandan economy through capital investment in Northern Uganda. The publication and project’s goals are to provide investors with the knowledge and skills needed to maximize success. USAID and International Alert claim that the “rudimentary and retrogressive methods of working the land are not sufficient to address the poor development indicators of the region.”\(^ {90}\) This perceived lack of ability to “properly” farm leaves room for the investor to more effectively use Northern Ugandan land. The condescending vocabulary of this claim shows the conventional belief that development must be brought from the outside by people who are more knowledgeable than local populations.

The publication outlines simple steps to making a successful investment in Northern Uganda. One major obstacle facing investors is the acquisition of land, which is needed to farm commercially or build factories and warehouses. USAID and International Alert recognize that land ownership is a sensitive issue in Northern Uganda. They acknowledge the returning population’s desire to resettle their homes, but claim that investment “will help raise the productivity of local farmers by adding value to local production activities.” Therefore, USAID

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\(^{89}\) USAID in Uganda [http://northernuganda.usvpp.gov/usaid.html](http://northernuganda.usvpp.gov/usaid.html)

\(^{90}\) International Alert Uganda “Contributing to a Peace Economy in Northern Uganda: A Guide for Investors”
and International Alert suggest that investors acquire land through the central government. Undoubtedly, this action will raise tension in Northern Uganda, as most land is held under customary law. Regardless of the political tensions investment would raise and with no regard for the views of the local population, USAID and International Alert believe that “local producers and the economy will feel immediate tangible benefits.”

This program completely ignores the individual needs of the community. It is very much a top-down approach to development. While a growing economy would be beneficial for Uganda as a whole, these benefits tend to only reach elite members of society. The majority of Northern Uganda’s society is looking for basic livelihood support. Indigenous NGOs are more aware of these wants and implement programs accordingly. This proposed project only further exploits the local population and implements a non-sustainable activity. Furthermore, even though commercial farming brings more food to the region, it is all exported. The exported food does not help the starving population of the region. While Western decision-makers may see an “investment program” as a positive step for Uganda, the local population sees otherwise. Rather than promoting the needs of the community, this program abuses the community for outside gain.

**Concerned Parents Association (CPA) – The Successes of an Indigenous NGO**

One successful way to overcome the dependency created by these large international NGOs, which are ill-equipped to provide long-term sustainable outcomes is to rely on indigenous NGOs. These indigenous NGOs are formed out of the conflict or problem which they are trying to improve. Concerned Parents Association (CPA) is an excellent example of an indigenous organization in Northern Uganda. CPA was created as a direct result of citizens affected by the

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91 Ibid
conflict in the North and has evolved into one of the major NGOs working on post-conflict transformations in Uganda.

On October 19, 1996, the LRA abducted 139 girls, ranging in age from 14 to 16 (Senior One to Senior Three), from St. Mary's College in Aboke. Immediately after the abduction, Sister Rachele, the Italian deputy headmistress of the school, set out to follow the LRA and demand the return of the girls. After a night of chasing, Sister Rachele caught up to the LRA unit that had abducted the girls. Choosing her words carefully, she asked the commander for the release of her girls. Finally the unit commander agreed to release 109 of the 139 girls to Sister Rachele. Unable to persuade the commander for the release of all of the girls, Sister Rachele reluctantly left thirty of her students under the brutal control of the LRA and returned to Aboke with the released girls.

Sister Rachele did not end her efforts content with the release of only 109 girls. She dedicated years to the pursuit of the thirty abducted girls who became internationally known as the Aboke girls. The parents of the thirty missing girls came together to form the “Concerned Parents Association,” whose main goal was to lobby for the release of specifically the Aboke girls, but also all children abducted by the LRA. They first began by writing letters to people in positions of authority requesting for assistance in demanding the release of their children. Eventually, they united into an organization and met every Saturday at the school to both lobby and build community support. Throughout the efforts to trace and return the Aboke girls, members of CPA were present at diplomatic meetings and even went into the bush to look for their children.92

92 De Temmerman 2001
To date, only two Aboke girls are still missing. However, CPA’s work is far from complete. Around the year 2000, CPA extended its support to not only FAC, but also to vulnerable children and war-affected families (WAF), and in 2003, it created its first Strategic Plan. Today, CPA works in Lira, Apac/Oyam, Gulu, Amuru, and Kitgum/Pader districts with a liaison office in Kampala. Striving for “a peaceful society where children’s rights are respected and protected,” CPA coordinates programs falling into four categories – child protection, livelihood support, peace building and reconciliation. Although the office operations are divided specifically to these departments, all of CPA’s projects are interlinked and imperative to the reintegration process in Northern Uganda and are divided for ease of implementation.

Combined, the programs of CPA address all three stages of the reintegration process – family reunification, psychosocial support, and economic and educational opportunity – and work on both the individual and community levels. The foundation for the success of CPA’s programs lies within the communities where the projects are implemented, making CPA the prime example of a grassroots approach to development. CPA operates through parent support groups (PSGs), an organization of community members dedicated to the goals of the project. The population of Lira District is estimated at 629,846 people, therefore making it impractical and impossible for the CPA office staff to reach everyone individually. Instead, each community empowerment group’s activities are integrated into CPA’s broader child-centered mission to bring peace to war-affected children (WAC) and their families. Already, it is evident that CPAs programs are tailored to fit the specific needs of the community. They work from a grassroots approach through each of their program areas, encouraging community members to identify and solve their own problems.

93 Of the 139 total Aboke girls, 133 have returned, 4 are reported dead, and 2 are still missing
94 Concerned Parents Association vision statement
95 Concerned Parents Association population estimate
The goals of the psychosocial department are most in line with the long-term needs of FAC and strive to improve the social integration and livelihood of war-affected children (WAC). They empower PSGs to perform basic counseling services to WAC, which include FAC, and to recognize the instances where further referral is needed. These skills are provided through seminars and workshops, where community members first learn skills, such as stress management, themselves before assisting children in overcoming the mental effects of war. By teaching community members these counseling skills, the community is not reliant on an outside independent source to provide these services. As members of the community continue to teach each other formally and informally, the community can sustain knowledge of these skills in the rebuilding process. Additionally, the department assists in family tracing and resettlement for FAC. The CPA-Kitgum branch is the only branch with a reception center. Therefore, the majority of resettlement activities happen there. However, in Lira District, CPA works with other NGOs, such as the Red Cross to take returnees back to their homes and monitor their resettlement progress. Furthermore, the psychosocial department works to fight community stigmatization toward FAC, cited by FAC as the leading challenge upon return from the bush. Through encouraging youth groups to perform dramas, songs, dances, and radio shows, the programs combine fine arts with traditional culture in an effort to explain the experiences of the bush and encourage the community toward reconciliation.

These programs are effective, because of their compatibility with the local culture. The staff members of CPA all lived through the conflict in the North and grew up as part of the Luo culture. They therefore understand the significance of songs and dances to the culture. An outside assistance organization would never implement such a program, because they do not understand the important aspects of Luo culture. Furthermore, CPA understands that one song
will not transform an entire community’s perception of FAC; they have the patience to work through a multiple step program, revising the steps as needed to create results.

Working with the psychosocial department to fight stigmatization and promote reconciliation is the peacebuilding department. The department’s two-year Steps Toward Reconciliation Plan strives to improve relationships between ex-LRA commanders and WAF and empower families and clans to transform conflict into reconciliation. The continued fear of instability in the region and inability of the community to forgive LRA forces for their atrocities prevents any successful development work from taking place. With these fears, communities are hesitant to invest time and energy into recovery projects that will lead to poverty alleviation. Many international NGOs have not identified this hesitation, and therefore, do not have community support of their implementing projects. Without community support or a will from within, development projects have no hope of being sustainable. Once again, the ability of the implementing organization to have an in-depth background of the situation and the proper cultural tools to address the concerns makes them significantly more effective than international NGOs.

On a broad level, CPA is coordinating a series of dialogues and public forgiveness meetings between ex-LRA commanders and parents. The department has also encouraged public prayers for those who died in or still are in captivity.96 At the grassroots level, the department has trained PSG members to serve as community-based mediators. Across Lira District, they have trained twenty-four mediators, who have successfully resolved 86 conflicts.97 The majority of these conflicts are either domestic violence or land dispute cases, which have

96 From Concerned Parents Association Lira Branch Steps Toward Reconciliation “A Logistical Framework for the Project”
97 Communication from CPA at the Community Mediator’s Quarterly Review meeting Ogur sub-county, November 2008
immediate roots in the LRA conflict. After the LRA has passed through a village, the land in that area is annihilated. Therefore, when people returned from the IDP camps, they were often unsure of their land boundaries or location. As land is one of the most valuable assets to Ugandans, guaranteeing property ownership is a large concern to returning IDPs. In order to solve the conflicts, community mediators combine consultations from clan leaders and local chairmen, encourage traditional cleansing ceremonies, or when necessary, refer the case to higher authorities. Individual conflict resolution is just as important as cooperation between the LRA and the government of Uganda toward the prospect for a peaceful future in Northern Uganda.

The livelihood department supports communities with the knowledge and skills to create and maintain successful income-generating activities (IGA). This department is the most direct counterpart to international NGO projects. These skills are presented in a variety of workshops, with topics ranging from small business management to vocational training. After providing access to skills, the department helps community groups in the implementation of IGA through grants and supply of start-up materials. Many projects in this department are implemented at the community level, where members are taught that through efficient communal work, groups can earn a small income. Most crop fields had to be abandoned when the population moved to IDP camps, and the ones that remained were destroyed by the LRA, upon return. Therefore, returning citizens are left with bare fields. Reintegration suggests the importance of IGA, and seventy percent of Ugandans are involved in the agricultural sector. The providing of modern agricultural production technique education, animals, and crops by the livelihood department pushes communities in the direction of reconstruction and sustainable self-sufficiency.\footnote{UNDP \textit{Uganda Human Development Report 2007}} Once the skills are taught and the items given, it is the community’s responsibility to manage the
project and create a positive output. The livelihood department also monitors the community’s work to make sure IGA start-up tools are utilized to their fullest potential, providing the community with the highest yield possible. As previously argued, simply providing handouts to communities is not a sustainable form of development practice. Therefore, the livelihood department’s skills development program and supply of start-up tools rather than final products strives toward sustainability. Additionally, it is entirely impossible for the livelihood department to supply each individual in need with a set of start-up tools. By operating through community groups, providing a sub-county with one grinding mill or a parent support group with a small herd of cattle, the livelihood department has maximized the capacity of their assistance to benefit the greatest number of people.

Child protection fits into the poverty alleviation goals as a means to encourage primary school education and promote the rights of a child. CPA has constructed youth centers across Northern Uganda, providing a central meeting location for youth education programs. At the community level, CPA has established child protection committees, which train teachers and other adults in the community to identify and report child abuse cases. Additionally, the department puts particular pressure on local schools to map school drop-outs. School drop outs are often directly or indirectly a result of the war; through monitoring children’s school attendance, CPA can provide assistance to the most vulnerable children. As well as empowering the community at the adult level, the child protection department created child’s rights clubs at schools. This way, children are also made aware of their rights, through CPA sponsored events, such as video shows. These videos tackle topics such as early pregnancy and sexual abuse, which, as a result of the war have become increasingly more common. 25.8 percent of teenage girls (ages 15-19) in Northern Uganda have given birth. It is believed that education and teenage
pregnancy are inversely related, and therefore, the more CPA can guarantee that children are in school, the lower the pregnancy rate. Furthermore, focusing on healthy lifestyle choices promotes the ideals of the MDGs in Northern Uganda. As has been discussed several times, without an inner will, no development programs will be successful. An important aspect of building a will from within is starting with the individual.

In July 2007, CPA became an implementing organization for a two-year program called Participatory Action Research on Girl Mothers Formerly Associated with Fighting/Armed Forces. A similar project is also happening in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and three other districts in Uganda. Because many of these girl mothers are heads of households, have no form of IGA, and are considered community outcasts as a result of their abductions, they are a prime target group for a poverty alleviating activity. In Lira, with the assistance from CPA, Girl Mother Groups are found in Railways and Apala. Before the program could be implemented, the girls who would compose the group needed to be identified. Each group began with thirty girl members, between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four, who were either FAP or labeled as a vulnerable person by the community PSGs. The Apala group remains with 25 members and the Railways group has 28. Both groups have seven advisors, chosen by the girls from the PSGs. Here, it is important to note that the selection of the girls came from the grassroots community level, not the administrative level. This program is already contrasting to that of the UN Development Villages, where needs were identified from above.

The project was implemented in four stages, with the final goal for the girls to be able to pass on their knowledge to others, creating a domino effect. The domino effect makes this project sustainable and not reliant on international NGO assistance. The girls were first asked to identify their problems. The major problem cited by the girl mothers was stigmatization from
the community. Additionally, they saw their lack of sustainable income and livelihood as an obstacle to lifting themselves out of the poverty cycle. After the girls identified their own problems, CPA encouraged them and guided them to find solutions. Whereas it was important for the girls to create their own solutions, so that the project implemented would be valued as their own, it was also important for CPA to guide the conclusions made by the girls. For example, CPA discouraged the girls from returning to school, as they needed an immediate source of income and had a responsibility to their children. Once the girls decided that an IGA was the most appropriate form of action, CPA assisted with the education needed to successfully run a business and workshops on group dynamics. In Railways, the girl mothers decided to run a bakery and the Apala group chose to run a hotel/restaurant. CPA provided cooking equipment and building space for the start-up of these projects. Additionally, CPA provided a workshop on income and expenditures, loans, and interest rates to make sure the girls properly managed their IGA and did not waste the asset. To fight stigmatization, the girls created dramas and songs to perform to the community about reconciliation. In order to interact with the community, they created a netball team in a league that would play against groups of other girls around their same age. The final stage for this project will be the evaluation, where the girls discuss what they have learned and take complete control over their IGA, making it a sustainable, rather than short-term, solution to some of their identified problems.

The structure of this participatory action project is the same structure that many of CPA's successful reintegration and development programs take. The program relied on the community to identify the recipients of the aid, created a forum to give the recipients an opportunity to identify their challenges, provided the knowledge to overcome the challenges, assisted in the creation of a sustainable activity, and passed on the resources for the recipients to take ownership
and responsibility of the project. The girl mothers project serves as a model of a successful grassroots sustainable development project. The general framework of the project should be lifted and used by other organizations, but the framework should also be adapted to fit the specific needs of given poverty and cultural situations.

Challenges to CPA in Implementing Sustainable Development Projects

CPA’s programs do not go without their challenges. They struggle with travel to project sites due to poor infrastructure, lack of funding, community cooperation, and the large scope of the conflict. Program officers and support staff often find a roadblock in traveling to the field. Projects are carried out in rural areas of the district, where the primary road material is dirt, which becomes mud during the rainy season. Regardless of the road condition, regular travel to the field is required, because project monitoring and follow-up meetings are an important aspect of CPA’s operations. In order to visit projects operating all over Lira District, the program staff members utilize motor bikes instead of a car or truck. Whereas the motor bikes can navigate the potholes and bumps presented by the dirt road, it is difficult to carry supplies, such as flipcharts, livestock, and food to meeting sites.

Another inevitable challenge is funding. Although the funding process seems very efficient on paper, the actuality of funds arriving on time leads to many implications, alternations, and cancelations in CPA’s programs. As will be discussed shortly, CPA is one of many actors working in Northern Uganda. Although I argue that their programs are more successful than international NGO work, they are constantly competing for financial resources to implement their programs. Additionally, several international NGOs have formed partnerships with CPA. These partnerships fund a specific aspect of the CPA program. CPA often struggles
with earmarked funds. Often, they receive funds specifically for seed purchase during the dry season. Farmers do not grow food during this time, due to the lack of water. Instead of using this money toward another program lacking funds that does not depend on the weather, CPA is forced to purchase seeds that cannot be used. Sometimes, this money comes at intervals where the capital inflow is not even useable by the time it reaches the field. Agricultural products rot or machinery breaks down, leaving CPA with an unwanted stock of international NGO waste. Although this partnership supports CPA with funds they would not in other circumstances receive, the nature of the aid by international NGOs hinders the effectiveness of CPA and other indigenous NGOs.

Community attitude and response causes a challenge to CPA and its reintegration programs, because the success of the programs lies within the community. CPA relies on community mediators and child protection committee members to punctually file cohesive reports; too often these reports are incomplete or never arrive. Without the community feedback through the reporting process, CPA does not know the success level of the project or aspects of it that need improvement. Without these facts, international NGOs will not provide funding for projects. As previously discussed, the international NGO mentality has projects with deadlines, specific outcomes, and statistics. CPA is forced to collect this information to the desire of international NGOs when it is often not a needed aspect of CPA’s implementing program. Additionally, CPA relies on the commitment of community members to the program through their attendance at meetings and workshops. When the lines of communication fail so that a community is not prepared for the event or when members are absent from the meetings, it is impossible for CPA to have confidence in the ability of the community to uphold their responsibilities to the project. In one instance, a sub-county was given a grinding mill. After
monitoring the sub-county’s activities for several months, CPA determined that the grinding mill was being continuously not cared for and neglected by the community. Therefore, CPA was required to threaten to remove the grinding mill from the community. With the threat looming, the sub-county reinstated their commitment to the project and reformed their actions with the mill. Even indigenous organizations face struggles of a community will to break the cycle of poverty. However, unlike international NGOs, indigenous NGOs are more prepared to address ownership in the specific cultural context of the project.

Given the number of people in Northern Uganda affected by the LRA conflict, it is hard for CPA, or any organization, to distribute aid, especially when trying to consider the best interest of the child. Too many international relief programs have a narrow focus and only provide services to a select group of individuals. For example, one NGO may pay school fees for children under the age of ten, or another may distribute blankets to physically disabled children. Unfortunately, the conflict in Northern Uganda does not target specific groups, but the population as a whole, causing parents and other people in authority to use the support for the benefit of other people. Say, the disabled child who received the blanket is in good health, other than his amputated leg, but he has a sister, not physically disabled, who is so malnourished that her body cannot keep her warm. Is it in the best interest of both children to give the blanket to the sister? The interconnectedness of the problems challenging former abductees, and the communities of Northern Uganda, are far too complex for one simple program to suddenly improve the standard of living. CPA’s program attempts to address these issues through working at the community level and forming homogenous groups to implement certain aid programs. However, grassroots development is a slow process, and it is often hard to see how these programs will come together in the long-run and produce poverty alleviating results.
Uganda’s Path toward Meeting the MDGs

CPA is only one of many actors working in Northern Uganda. The government of Uganda has taken on some of the responsibilities given to it through the early stages of the Juba Peace Agreements. On 1 July 2008, the government of Uganda implemented the Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan (PRDP) as a coordination framework for programs undergone by all actors working in Northern Uganda. The plan specifically outlines fourteen different program areas, including stability, resettlement, and infrastructure building. These are to be done through four main strategies. The first is to consolidate state authority. Through increasing state presence in the region by enlarging civilian police forces, the government of Uganda hopes to “create an enabling environment for stabilizing the political, economic and social conditions in the region.” Secondly, PRDP hopes to rebuild and empower communities through providing assistance to returning IDPs. Third, the PRDP hopes to revive the economy. Through a focus on the agriculture sector, the government hopes to recreate the livelihood activities of the people of Northern Uganda. Finally, the PRDP hopes to build peace and reconciliation. While all of these goals have ideal outcomes for Northern Uganda, the practicality of the plan is low. Estimated to cost over $606 million over the three year period, too much state corruption and an indirect implementation process will make this project unsuccessful. It is important to note that the government of Uganda has taken an interest in implementing programs working toward peacebuilding in Northern Uganda, and the PRDP is the overarching framework of this interjection. However, it is also important to note that to date, this program has not been successful, as the government is continuously unprepared to address or solve the growing concerns of the region. The faults of the government still create a strong need for indigenous NGOs to operate in the gaps. The potential for a relationship between the government and civil

99 PRDP 28-29
society is healthy. However, the current state of the North and lack of funds on behalf of the government challenge the success of creating this connection.

After the three-year project is complete, it is hoped that Northern Uganda will be in a position to operate under the government’s Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), which encompasses all projects working toward development in Uganda. PEAP ambitiously aims to reduce the poverty level in Uganda from 44% in 1997 to below 10% in 2017. These goals are well beyond the minimum established by the MDGs. However, success is still unlikely. PEAP primarily targets economic management and is strongly supported by the UNDP working in Uganda.\footnote{100}

Different from other United Nations organizations in the region, the UNDP has had a presence in Uganda for thirty-two years. The relationship between the government of Uganda and UNDP was established with the signing of the Standard Basic Assistance Agreement on 29 April 1977. This agreement defines the “basic conditions under which UNDP and its executing agencies shall provide assistance to the government in carrying out its projects and under which the projects shall be undertaken.” All assistance provided by the UN agencies must be funneled through the framework established by UNDP and is subject to the funding available through UNDP. Not surprising, UNDP’s work in Uganda aims to “focus on empowering national capacities to execute and deliver national programmes and our efforts strive to strengthen and empower national systems.” UNDP supports the government of Uganda in reaching the Millennium Development Goals through PEAP. But, once again, UNDP focuses on the macro-scale, where little progress is actually made.\footnote{101} These government and macro-level strategies are

\footnote{100 UNDP in Uganda - http://www.undp.or.ug/}
\footnote{101 UNDP in Uganda - http://www.undp.or.ug/}
not effective in promoting sustainable programs in the development field. This inability to
provide leaves room for the dire need of indigenous NGOs and their projects.

A part of the funding for the PRDP, the Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Programme
(NUREP) is a joint program between the GoU and the European Union (EU). As its name
suggests, the program's goal is to improve living conditions, reduce poverty, and protect
civilians in Northern Uganda. The program has two projects, one of which is in the Acholi and
Lango sub-regions. The idea of NUREP is to serve as an organizational framework for the
funding of the seven major organizations working in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions,
including CPA. These organizations write grants to NUREP in order to receive funding for their
projects. However, this process puts indigenous NGOs reliant on international organizations. As
previously discussed, international organizations create a sort of hierarchy in the aid process. In
order to receive funds, indigenous NGOs must conform to international standards on monitoring
and using aid. Often, these guidelines are inconsistent with the effective development practices
of indigenous NGOs. While monetary resources are necessary for any implementing
organization, the relationship between international organizations and indigenous NGOs must
focus on the needs of the latter and not the priorities of the former.

In countries, such as Uganda, which require humanitarian assistance, a collaboration of
NGOs, UN agencies, and government organs meet annually to create the Consolidated Appeals
Process (CAP). Managed by UNOCHA, the CAP is designed to coordinate and increase the
delivery speed of international humanitarian aid; however, in 2006, only 490,998 USD of the
needed 4,529,750 USD for early recovery projects in Lira District were provided. Although
people have returned from IDP camps, and the 2008 CAP recognizes the changing focus from
emergency relief to recovery activities, the pull-out of major international NGOs, such as several
UN agencies, and the decreased donor support creates an even larger need for programs to support and stabilize the population during the early recovery phase. Even more discouraging is the absence of the Lango sub-region from the 2009 and 2010 CAP, showing the neglect from the majority of the humanitarian community on Lira District and the importance of the success of programs such as CPA. Once again, the CAP specifically outlines funding options and procedures for recovery in Northern Uganda, limiting the success of programs like CPA.

One of the most difficult shifts that need to occur in Northern Uganda, and development aid as a whole, is the change in the mindset of the purpose of international organizations. International staff members need to realize that rather than providing free handouts, they need to provide access to knowledge and skills so that local populations can sustain the activities themselves. The overarching goal, along with the improvement of the standard of living, should be to decrease local dependency on outside sources. Additionally, local populations need to adapt this mindset as well. They must be willing to take initiative and ownership over projects and prepared to invest time into project upkeep.

Conclusions

An old proverb states “give a man a fish, feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime.” At the core of this saying is the idea that only sustainable projects are effective at targeting the basic needs of people. This idea of sustainability and breaking the cycle of dependency is at the center of this paper and at the heart of the struggles in Northern Uganda. The United Nations and USAID have provided examples of international bodies imposing their own beliefs on the “best” practices for achieving development in Northern Uganda. If these methods were successful, the UN and USAID should no longer be present in the region.
Unfortunately, they are still there, and their continued presence and handouts of “fish” has not prepared Northern Uganda for a sustainable future.

During my time in Northern Uganda, I went on several house calls to visit with members of the community. I remember one visit vividly. As we pulled up to a small hut, a naked woman was sitting in front, and I could see all of her bones through her skin. The boy she was holding was in the exact same condition. Then, around the corner, four half-clothed children with huge malnourished stomachs appeared. The oldest could not have been more than twelve years old. We talked with the old woman for a couple of minutes and then leave. Robin, my companion and translator for the visit, did most of the talking. On our journey back, I asked about the situation we just witnessed. Robin told me that the woman was the only caretaker for the children. She was so malnourished that she could not move, and the boy in her arms was paralyzed. They had no food to eat, no way to grow crops, and no money to buy any. Basically, Robin explained, they were sitting there waiting to die. This concept bothered me, and I asked why something was not being done or why the neighbors were not helping. Every day, this hut was passed by multiple all-terrain vehicles plastered with acronyms of aid organizations presumably present to improve life in Northern Uganda. I did not understand how a family with such close access to aid headquarters could still be suffering to the point of death. Nor could I understand how aid providers could pass the situation daily and not address it. Robin looked at me and said, “This is the rule, not the exception. If you were to visit any other hut here, you would find the exact same situation.”

In a country so changed by the development industry’s presence, but barely touched by its effects, it is easy to see the problems facing development work. Top-down approaches are obviously not targeting the individuals needing aid the most. If the methods did work, families
like the one I visited would be receiving assistance. International organizations are ineffective in achieving their goals, because they do not understand the cultural context in which they are working. Furthermore, international organizations encourage dependency. Their projects are not self-sustaining, and they only provide handouts for a specific period of time before leaving a community to struggle. International organizations are very focused on time frames and large returns in the short-run. These short-term visions encourage organizations to provide handouts rather than develop grassroots projects. Indigenous NGO programs have created sustainability at the community level. The staff at CPA works daily to help communities overcome obstacles to breaking the cycle of poverty. CPA is effective in their work, because they understand the needs and operations of the community. The programs they implement rely on community participation for sustained success. However, these indigenous NGOs are only one small part of the development industry. In order to truly see development changes, international organizations will need to adapt policies more consistent with indigenous NGOs and provide the latter with more flexible funding options.

With five years left until the MDG deadline, the focus should shift from how much poverty can be eliminated by 2015 to how much poverty can be eliminated forever. The deadline of the MDGs encourages international organizations to provide handouts without regard for sustainable projects, as seen in the case of Northern Uganda. When the deadline passes, international organizations have no incentive to provide food to the hungry or healthcare to the sick who cannot afford it. When all of these non-sustainable projects are combined, their failure creates a huge implication for the international community to fight poverty. The solutions offered by indigenous organizations are a good place for the international community to start in reworking development practice.
As the United States Agency for International Development continues to boast being the largest international aid organization in Northern Uganda, its strategies will have to change in order for its efforts to be effective. Additionally, the United States, with its strong presence in the United Nations will need to become a key proponent for grassroots development technique. The individual interest of the international aid organization needs to give way to an approach that better focuses on the community and will make successful policy decisions in the future.
Appendix A – Maps

MAP OF UGANDA
Showing Areas of Humanitarian Operations – February 2008

Legend:
- District with IOMs in camps, transit and areas of return (e.g., Kasese & Amuria)
- District with former IDPs (e.g., Bihoro & Kabarole)
- Districts hosting refugee population
- Districts affected by natural hazards/other sudden-onset emergencies (Kenyan refugee influx)
- Districts affected by major protection and development challenges

Map from UNOCHA CAP 2008
## Appendix B – Data

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Table 1: This chart classifies the information provided by the 48 CPA follow-up interviews with FAC. The exact responses of these interviews are not given here, only a categorical division of responses.

![State of Being of FAC](image)

Graph: This is a graphical representation of the responses of FACs in their follow-up interviews as seen in Table 1. The results of these figures are discussed in the text (pages 31-36).
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