

**EMERGENCY SITUATION IN NORTH AND NORTH  
EASTERN UGANDA**

**By**

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## **BACKGROUND**

Uganda is a land locked East African country with a population of about 24 million people.

For the last 18 years, the current NRM government has been fighting a rebellion in Northern Uganda led by the “Lord’s Resistance Army” (LRA). The activities of the LRA remained confined to the three districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader until 2002, when the Government launched “Operation Iron Fist”. Under this arrangement, the Sudan Government granted permission to the Ugandan Army to pursue the LRA.

However, instead of reducing the suffering the situation dramatically worsened. Since that time the insurgency expanded from the initial 3 districts of the extreme north, to six other neighbouring ones of Lira, Soroti, Katakwi, Kaberamaido, Masindi and Adjumani.

Along with this, the initially affected 4 CCF communities, expanded to 13, the others being in the seven new districts.

## **CURRENT SITUATION**

The situation in northern Uganda has variously been described as: “the worst humanitarian crises”, etc. These phrases, as extreme as they sound do not fully reflect the true level of suffering that has been going on in the affected regions and districts.

Carol Bellamy the UNICEF Executive Director said “I have seen a lot of bad situations in my working life, but few are as shocking”.

The total number of people currently displaced is estimated at 1.6 million, at one point it was about 2.0 million. This is about the population of Kampala city! The majority of these are the most vulnerable – children constituting more than a half; women and children 80%.

About 1/3 of the country has been affected by this insurgency in one way or another. 3 of the most affected districts have been under LRA insurgency for the last 18 years.

The forms of deprivation and suffering the IDPs (internally displaced persons) go through are to say the least untold. They range from insecurity, hunger, nonexistent modern medical facilities, extreme crowding, trauma and so on, not

to talk about lack of education. There is acute shortage of water; people go for up to 8 miles to get clean water.

Above all the northern Uganda crisis is a crisis of failure to offer protection to children. A very large number of the children are malnourished. There simply is not enough food. World Food Program (WFP), the only source of food, can at best provide only 40-50% of the food requirements for the IDPs. The hope was that the parents would somehow cultivate or secure food from fields surrounding the camps. This has not been possible as it is generally insecure outside these camps. People are literally starving in those camps.

Children in these areas are at risk of being abducted at all times. Those in the IDPs as well as those away from the urban areas are not safe. Since 2002, it is estimated that over 20,000 have been abducted. In an effort to protect them, parents release their children to leave their homes to come to town (urban areas) in search of relative safety from the marauding LRA abductors. It is estimated that over 45,000 (ages 5 – 12) children move into the urban areas every night, returning home at the break of day. While on their own in the urban areas, they are exposed to all sorts of dangers. As expected, they are exposed to the night cold since shelters are inadequate; there are no proper sanitation facilities; no water and many remain hungry. These commuting goes on every night, for many of the children.

For the younger children malnutrition and childhood illnesses are at crisis proportions in the camps. Many of these settlements are inaccessible. The medical personnel are not able to reach many of these with services at the right time (whether it is immunization or treatment).

As a result many children die needlessly in these camps. Very many are sick, and without suitable or adequate treatment in time.

The majority of the camps are inaccessible due to insecurity. Recently, the select committee of Parliament, in charge of the North, while traveling to these camps, have had to be provided with heavy security escorts. That simply means for the ordinary travelers, movement in such circumstances is untenable. The situation translates in lack of access to services by these most needy people in the camps.

For the children able to attend some form of schooling, the facilities are very badly crowded. Schools are meant to take between 500-600 children will have many times that number: sometimes 3-10 times! Even with the provision of short term facilities, they are still woefully inadequate. The children have simply lost the opportunity to have any form of normal education.

The major problems in the IDPs are:

## **INSECURITY**

This affects most of the camps, especially those farther away from major urban centers where well armed forces are stationed.

The manifestations of insecurity include the following (a) Abductions of many children for forceful recruitment by LRA; abductions of other people to carry loots for the LRA. Apart from the trauma resulting from abduction, many of the victims actually are killed at any time.

(b) Adults who attempt to venture away from the camps and other settlements in search of food, water, etc. risk being shot or being hit by anti-personnel mines.

Insecurity also adversely affects delivery of supplies and services to the camps. Medical personnel, and other humanitarian workers and commercial traffic are unable to reach the camps with requirements to support normal life. As a result, services to the camps are critically short, even in a situation when those are readily available to be provided to the displaced.

In general the people live in terrible fear at all times.

## **HEALTH SITUATION**

In many of the camps there are very few qualified medical personnel; there are no suitable medical services; drugs are in very short supply. The health problems are compounded by the poor feeding and shelter that is available to the IDPs. Many of the huts leak and do not provide protection for children. Shortage of clean drinking, cooking and bathing water and poor sanitation in the camps exacerbate the already poor health situation of the displaced especially the very vulnerable. Some of the camps have many as between 7,000 30,000 people to a clean water source(borehole).

## **FOOD SHORTAGE**

While in 2002, less than 500,000 people needed to be fed by WFP supplies, the situation has since then badly deteriorated. By June 2003, after operation Iron Fist (by UPDF to rout the LRA), the number of people that needed food from

WFP increased to 800,000. By March 2004, WFP was feeding 1.6 million people.

Because of the increased insecurity (more abductions, attacks on the camps, etc) the people are now unable to look for more food to supplement WFP supplies. WFP is therefore forced to supply about 80% of the food requirements to the IDPs, for even a larger number of people than 2 years ago.

The net result: many people are starving. The children below six years do not get the much needed corn-soya food supplement any more. Between 7-21% of the children are estimated to be malnourished.

On the supply side WFP, has not received sufficient response to its urgent appeal for more food aid. At the sometime, responses from other humanitarian agencies are down to a trickle compared to the looming urgent needs.

The WFP representative Ken Noah Davies in response to a New Vision reporter said "The situation is desperate."

About the same situation, Ms. Alaso, MP for Soroti District, had this to say to the Weekly Observer reporter "All of us are watching as people starve away, children are so malnourished."

In a nutshell, the situation of food shortage has gotten worse in the last two years; and there is no immediate prospect of improvement. It calls for urgent, drastic measures to avert a major crisis. The Government of Uganda knows this, the Parliament knows and so do Uganda's partners!

Hopefully they will act soon.

## **CCF'S RESPONSE TO EMERGENCY**

By mid March 2004, there were about 1.6 million internally displaced persons at estimated population of 2,995,928, from the 9 affected districts in Northern and Eastern Uganda.

Most of the people live in over-crowded camps, school buildings, church buildings and literally any empty buildings in these disturbed areas. The hope has been and is that by the people living in "close quarters" there would be sufficient military protection for the people in the camps and those traveling to and from the camps.

Needless to say, the effects of the war has meted untold sufferings on the people in the affected districts.

CCF and various humanitarian agencies have been doing their part in alleviating the suffering of the people in Northern Uganda.

The CCF responses have been made as follows:

- A. Where appropriate, funds from subsidy (as donated by sponsors) have been spent on emergency/relief supplies. These procured food stuffs, blankets, mosquito nets, plastic containers and scholastic materials, and pit latrines. These targeted the 13 communities where CCF works, focusing on the most vulnerable.

Between July 2002 through May 2004, a total of US. \$235,412 were spent for these purposes from subsidy. Furthermore, the activities of the enrolled communities have all been re-oriented to meet the challenges.

- B. Because the intense pressure to act in the face of the conditions in the internally displaced camps (IDPs), CCF Richmond responded by raising additional funds (NSPs) as follows:
- In August 2004, US \$50,000 were received and used for food items for communities in Gulu, Lira, Kitgum and Masindi Districts. About 70,000 IDPs
  - An additional amount of US.\$125,000 was received for purchase of blankets, jerricans (plastic water containers) for Soroti, Lira and Gulu covering about 9 communities which were relatively worse off than the others.
- C. CCF as always, has been working with partners in addressing the emergency challenges.

## 1. Partnership with WFP

Because of CCF's strong presence in the communities and the trust it has developed with them, WFP entrusted CCF with the task of distributing relief food to the displaced communities. There have been in Lira and Soroti areas. These have been in phases.

- Before September 2003, 285 Mtonnes of food valued at US.\$154,755. This benefited 9,014 people from 1,581 (vulnerable) women and children headed households.
- (Sept – December 2003) 5,641 M.tonnes worth US.\$3,063,269 benefiting 276,200 IDPs
- (January – June 2004) - 2,729 M.tonnes worth US.\$1,482,009 to benefit 81,156.

Thus between August 2003 to June 2004, CCF would have distributed about 8,655 metric tones of food (worth US.\$4,700,033) under agreement with WFP, the central UN agency entrusted with food distribution; benefiting 366,370 vulnerable people in internally displaced camps.

CCF is one of the main partners working with WFP in northern and eastern Uganda.

## 2. Partnership with World Vision International (Uganda).

World Vision procured and delivered tarpaulins and blankets worth US.\$200,000. These were distributed to 50,000 IDPs in Lira District, just before the rains set in in April 2004.

## 3. Partnership with Refugee International Japan (RIJ)

Partnership with Refugee International Japan (RIJ) donated US.\$24,522 to Bedmot community to construct a five classroom block, and purchase desks and text books to cater for children displaced by the war. There is ample opportunity for further collaboration with RIJ in the years ahead.

## 4. CCF Germany

CCF Germany obtained and donated US.\$1,082 as emergency assistance to Patongo community.

During the process of the distribution, including the preparations, CCF benefited from support and collaboration with various UN Agencies (UN OCHA, UNICEF, WFP), NGOs and Government of Uganda Agencies and Ministries (OPM, DDMCs, DDHS, etc).

## D. Other investment areas expected to materialize soon.

1. Sky fund for fight against malaria in IDP camps.

CCF put together a proposal after a thorough survey on combating malaria fever in the camps. CCF Richmond has financed this initiative worth about US \$100,000. The implementation of this program is underway with the Richmond appointed staff arriving in the country soon.

## 2. Child Protection Program Co-financed with UNICEF.

CCF put together a child protection proposal which is being co-financed by UNICEF. This will take off shortly as soon as the Richmond appointed staff arrives in the country. This program will initially cover districts of the Teso region (Soroti, Kaberamaido, and Katakwi). With more funding, this program can expand. The program is worth about US.\$200,000.

## 3. Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBV) Survey

This is jointly funded by IRC, UNICEF and CCF. This survey to be carried out in the IDPs has just taken off with the arrival of the Richmond appointed staff. The results will inform many other programs that deal with violence in the camps. This initial program is worth about US.\$80,000.

## 4. OFDA-ASP Proposal to USAID

This proposal has just been accepted for further consideration by USAID. We are hopeful that there is a good, chance of financing. It is aimed at addressing the needs of child protection in the regions of Teso and Lango.

## **ESTABLISHMENT OF EMERGENCY UNIT**

CCF Richmond has invested into CCF Uganda by putting together a functional emergency support unit.

This has comprised essential quality emergency administrative staffing, procurement of vehicles and radio equipment for strengthening field security of staff while in emergency areas. Alongside that, office space has been rented.

The emergency unit will provide the essential support to successfully implement the current relief operations in the north, as well as outsource essential funding for continued funding of the program for the displaced. This may continue into rehabilitation in the event that relief phase has ended.

Part for the work of this unit is to provide and package information for advocacy and fundraising, make contacts with funders and potential funders.