Rays of Hope in Lango Sub-Region, Northern Uganda
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For almost 20 years, insurgency caused by Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in Northern Uganda tore apart the fabric of the society. It caused many people from mainly Acholi and Lango sub-regions to move from their homes/villages into Internally Displaced Peoples’ (IDPs) camps. However since signing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Uganda and the LRA in 2006, the entire region has experienced relative peace for the last six years and the people have moved back to their homes albeit with many challenges. As a result, a lot of attention has been given to the Northern region, including the Lango sub-region to enable it recover from the ravages of war.

The Northern Uganda Early Recovery Programme (NUERP) was conceived with the idea of contributing towards early recovery in the Lango sub-region, where support to returning communities had been minimal. The project which has been implemented from July 2009 to November 2012 paid particular attention to the special needs of vulnerable members of the community especially women, children and the youth.

The project was funded by the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS) and it was jointly implemented by three UN agencies: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Health Organization (WHO) and World Food Programme (WFP). Its four main areas of focus were:

• Resettlement and Recovery support executed by UNDP and WFP
• Livelihood enhancement by UNDP and WFP
• Health, Nutrition, and HIV/AIDS by WHO
• Peace-Building and Conflict Resolution by UNDP

The main aim of the project was to support the rapid self - sustainable recovery of the conflict affected communities through an integrated service delivery and community based recovery approach. The project operated in four Districts: Lira, Oyam, Alebtong and Otuke.

The project sought to give the displaced people from those four Districts in Lango sub-region, a fresh start in life, by working together with a number of implementing partners such as World Vision, FAO, International Life Line Fund, Sasakawa Global 2000, ACTED, the Ministry of Health and the Local Governments in each of the four Districts.

Since 2009, many positive changes have been registered in the peoples’ lives, including improved farming methods and food security; a culture of saving through the Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs); a keen interest in maintaining peace through peace rings; increased awareness of the need to take care of both their health and the health of their environment. This publication chronicles some of the NUERP success stories that have brought hope to the Lango sub-region.
FROM EMERGENCY TO DEVELOPMENT

“Earlier efforts by Development Agencies in the North addressed emergencies, but the tripartite partnership of UNDP, WFP and WHO came in to address the development needs of the affected people.”

As Uganda celebrated 50 years of Independence on the 9th October 2012, the return of peace to Northern Uganda is one of its key achievements in setting a foundation for recovery in the region. The Northern Uganda Early Recovery project (NUERP) was started to assist the people in Northern Uganda, particularly the Lango sub-region, get back on their feet after almost two decades of insurgency. The project was implemented together with our sister agencies the WHO and the WFP with funding from United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS). UNDP played the roles of coordinating the partnership, as well as executing the livelihood, peace building and Local Government capacity building components of the project.

The project was started primarily to address the needs of the formerly displaced people, to enable a transition from emergency to the development phase in Lango sub-region. Among other supports, the project has been able to address the economic development needs of the people through the establishment of Farmer groups, Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and the Peace Rings. We have also worked with the local governments to ensure that there is participatory development management. To date, many of the project’s outcomes are spontaneously being replicated beyond the initial target. For example, from the target of establishing sixty VSLAs each with thirty members each, by project closure, there were thirty-two more VSLAs that had been formed and are operational.

During project implementation, UNDP organized the Project Management Steering Committee (PMSC) sessions at the National level and the Project Coordination Committee meetings at the District level. These organs ensured close monitoring of project implementation and the results. UNDP components of the project were implemented by World Vision.

Through this publication, I invite you to discover some of the UN’s experiences in empowering lives in the Lango sub-region.

FROM NOTHING TO PLENTY

“These days the farmer groups are able to sell their produce in Kampala and the neighboring countries.”

From the start, Word Food Program provided relief services to the internally displaced people’s camps (IDPs) in Northern Uganda. When the war came to an end, they handled two areas of Post Harvest Handling, infrastructure development and environment protection.

We had a role to play in two areas of resettlement and livelihood improvement, and WFP rehabilitated some of the roads that linked the farmers to markets after training them in post harvest handling techniques. We also handled the environmental aspects in the sub-region. To date, WFP has established four tree nurseries, trained farmers, and set up satellite collection points to handle bumper harvests. In one centre in Oyam District, where we began with five farmer groups, these days they are able to sell their produce to Juba in Southern Sudan, to Kigali in Rwanda, and in Kampala. The farmers are able to enjoy better agricultural prices and they have enough to eat in their families and also for sale of the surplus.

LIFE SAVING EFFORTS

“A part from restoring health services in the health units and equipping them with drugs, the health sector was also supported to handle the neglected tropical diseases”

Life has been revived in Lira Sub-region after experiencing total war and destruction of lives and property during the last two decades. When the war ended in 2006, people started going home to start life a fresh. It was hard for the communities, as there were no medical services and the personnel were lacking. In 2009, the three United Nations Agencies signed an agreement to establish the Northern Uganda Early Recovery Project (NUERP). World Health Organization (WHO) working hand in hand with the Ministry of Health through the Local government, embarked on the long journey of taking health services to the people in rural areas.

Apart from re-establishing the health services in the health units and equipping them with drugs, the project also supported handling of the neglected tropical diseases like Bilharzias, and trypanosomiasis. From the time surveillance services were established, there have been noticeable improvements in recovery from 60% to 90% in the four Districts of Alebtong, Lira, Otuke and Oyam.
For a long time, Lango Sub-Region remained invisible and yet they too suffered from the war which was inflicted on them by the Lord’s Resistance Army of Joseph Kony during the twenty years of insurgency. Unlike Acholi sub-region which received overwhelming support from the Donor Agencies after the war was declared over, there was a gap in Lango Sub-Region. Based on the experience Japan went through after World War two, and recently from the nuclear disaster and the several earthquakes that they have experienced, the Japanese Government identified with and supported Lango Sub-region in order to revive life among the local population. This was said by the Japanese Ambassador in Uganda, “His Excellency Kazuo Minagawa while handing over Motorcycles, computers and bicycles to the beneficiaries in Alebtong District, one of the target districts of the Northern Uganda Early Recovery Project.”

He said, through the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security “the Japanese Government gave three point eight million United States dollars ($3.8) to support the Northern Uganda Early Recovery Project which was implemented by the three UN Agencies namely United Nations Development Program (UNDP), The World Food Program (WFP), and World Health Organization (WHO).”

He noted that from his visit, “life among the population had returned to normal, people had now settled in their families and had embarked on a development journey. He was impressed by the high level of project execution by the three United Nations Agencies who had initiated the journey to transform lives of the people in this region. “

Since the process of transforming lives takes a long time, a second phase of the project had been conceptualized, “he assured his listeners’ that he would take the information back to Tokyo to explore a possibility of a second phase of the project.”

Background

Following cessation of armed conflict in Northern Uganda in 2006, over 95% of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) returned to their homes to re-start their lives. The Government of Uganda and Development partners have since provided support to the war affected communities to enable them resettle and recover from the losses incurred during the insurgencies.

The Northern Uganda Early Recovery Project (NUERP) (2009-2012) funded by the United Nations Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS) was a joint programme implemented by UNDP, WFP, and WHO with the aim of supporting the rapid and self-sustainable recovery of the conflict-affected returning population and their communities through an integrated service delivery and community-based recovery approach.

The project’s main goal was to support the rapid and self sustainable recovery of at least 30 percent of the 228,190 persons across the 16 sub counties, by targeting the conflict affected returning population and their communities through an integrated service delivery.

The Project was implemented in the Districts of Lira, Otuke, Alebtong and Oyam in Lango sub-region that were most affected by the armed conflict that left thousands of people dead and several others bundled into the IDP camps. The project activities were carried out in sixteen sub-counties of: Abako, Adwari, Aloj, Amugo, Apala, Aromo, Barr, Ogur, Okwang, Olim, Omoro, Orum, Iceme, Minakulu, Ngai and Otwal.

Most of the project outputs were delivered to the beneficiary communities between 2009 and the second half of 2012 when the project finally closes.
Although it takes only twenty minutes to reach Minakulu trading centre from the Ajaga Corner, a ride over the 10.2km stretch of road used to take motorists more than an hour.

Previously, delivering service to the community was a huge challenge. During the rainy seasons, trucks ferrying produce would get stuck on the potholed roads and farmers in the area would not be able to transport their produce to the markets. Some of the expectant mothers also lost their babies due to the poor state of the road. One of WFP’s recovery activities was the rehabilitation of roads, upgrading this community road to a standard murram road, making the ride to Oyam District much easier than it was before. The road benefits villages of Ajaga, Okule, Abululyec and Acimi.

“We are happy that this road was worked on. At least I am able to take my produce to the market. At times trucks pick the produce from our homes because the road is good,” remarks Agnes Ajok, a resident of Bapama Village.

The 23-year-old adds that before the road was constructed, most people in the neighboring villages incurred a lot of costs in transporting their produce to the markets, but that has since changed since trucks go to individual farmers to pick the produce.

For Tonny Latek, a 24-year-old who sells roasted meat along the highway, the road opened up a business opportunity for him.

“I was jobless but when I discovered that many trucks were using this road to transport both produce and farmers heading to markets, I decided to start roasting meat for these passers-by,” he explains.

On a good day, Latek takes home Sh10,000 (4 US$) and about Shs 5,000 when business is not so good. With the savings from his business, he has been able to buy a piece of land and hopes to start building himself a permanent house next year.

Vincent George Ego, a teacher at Abululyec Primary School says he used to miss some classes as he would not be able to ride to the school on a weekly basis due to the bad condition of the road.

“I used to ride to school once a month because going every week was very hard for me,” he says. He adds that most pupils now attend classes on a regular basis compared to the past years.

However, Patrick Ogali, the District road inspector says that the stretch of road just before Ajaga corner also needs to be worked on even though it does not fall under the WFP mandate.

“When it rains, no truck can dare move to the area along that stretch because they get stuck and that takes them about three days to leave the place. This eventually delays the farmer to sell off his produce at a good market price,” Ogali notes.
Every Friday is market day in Anyoi ‘A’ village, Aloi Sub-county. Farmers transport their produce for sale at Alapa market in Alapa Sub-county, attracting people from all corners of the District of Alebtong. The market provides an opportunity for the farmers to sell their agricultural produce in one central place.

Through NUERP, farmers are now able to get high yields from their gardens, which enable them to sell the surplus during the market days in their villages. The farmers through UNDP/World Vision received seeds, farm implements and training on better farming methods.

Jacinta Akello, a mother of eight is a member of one of the 6,000 households which were trained on better farming methods. She hopes to get a good profit after harvesting and selling of her produce that covers eight acres of land. “We were given 2.5kg of Maize Longe V, I planted it and have harvested. From the soy beans we received, I have doubled the acreage I planted the last season,” the 46-year-old Akello says.

Akello is a member of Nyeko Pe Dongi farmers’ group. They receive visits from extension farmers who update them with the latest information on advanced farming methods. “I used to plant my cassava anyhow. Nowadays, I use standard measurements,” she says. The Agricultural Extension Officers’ impromptu visits to her gardens make her work harder. “The officers come unexpectedly. That has kept me working. Every time they visit, they advise us only when we are in the gardens. I now get healthy plants and get higher yields,” she explains.

The extension workers also receive continuous training from World Vision field staff and the impact is visible.

Bob Mike Alfred Etuku, an agricultural extension worker who has served his community for over two decades, says that this has been the most productive season for him. This is because farmers have been responsive to his advice and are already yielding results.

Each farmer’s group received supplies of cassava cuttings, simsim, soy beans, beans, ground nuts, two oxen and a plough from UNDP. Those who received these inputs are determined to have a future and have stopped living on handouts.

Akello recently received an oxen and a plough. She says her goal is to sensitize the community on how best they can farm on the land which has been overgrown with bushes.

Leonard Opio Ojok the District’s accounting officer says due to peace and resettlement, the communities have been transformed and their incomes have also improved significantly.

“Farmers in this sub-county are now earning as much as 3.5 million Shillings (approximately US$1,200) from the produce from NUERP agro inputs they received,” he says.

In Alebtong District many farmers have been enticed to join the farmer groups after their members benefited from the Longe V maize seeds, Soybeans (NAmsoy II), unshelled ground nuts (Serenut 4) and K-132 bean seeds.

“The numbers are overwhelming,” Patrick Ebin, the trainer says.

Badi En Papi group in Amugu Sub-County, Alebtong District has attracted hundreds of farmers from within and neighboring villages to learn how to plough and make yokes.

The challenge for the District officials is how to fill in the gaps due to raised expectation in the communities, particularly with regard to households that did not receive these inputs.

“On return from the camps, we lacked seeds to plant and our homes and gardens were bushy. Clearing the bushes would take us weeks unlike today when we use the oxen given to us by the UNDP/World Vision,” Patrick Ebin the area trainer says.

Demonstration farms have also been set up in Amugu sub-county to enable the farmers practice how to use the oxen ploughs. “The skills learnt included dry farming techniques, water harvesting and agricultural business and marketing techniques,” Bernard Okullu, a beneficiary in Badi En Papi group explains.

The 21 members group constitutes farmers from the surrounding villages of Ato Aria, Amugu and Alerere who have made yokes and also passed-on the skills to their neighbours. “Animal traction sessions have been helpful. I have also shared the skills with my wife and friends. When we sell our produce, we combine our incomes and plan for the family jointly,” Okullu, a father of five, from Ato Aria village says.

However, the benefits enjoyed by the few members of the group have created more demand from those who did not benefit directly.

“We also need support to boost our agricultural productivity like the members of Badi En Papi group who were given hoes, oxen and ploughs,” Rose Akello Rose, who also hails from the same village, said.

The Nortgently Uganda Early Recovery Project (NUERP)
Loro Storage facility ensures income from produce

Loro Satellite Collection Point, is 20 minutes drive off Kamdini-Lira road, and is a produce collection centre that has transformed lives of farmers in Oyam District.

The collection centre has moved the District from reliance on food handouts to being a food basket not only for the residents but also for neighboring Districts and the newly created state of South Sudan.

“Last year we kept 600 bags of produce in the store. The produce was jointly sold off and we reaped big,” Santa Ongel, the Note En Teko farmers’ group stores vice chairperson says. One hundred and fifty farmers keep their produce at the store at no cost.

“The produce is safe and we are all responsible for ensuring that the store is guarded against robbery,” he says.

The facility supported by NUERP through WFP was constructed by ACTED and the Oyam District Local government. The store became operational in 2010 and helps farmers to add value to their produce through milling hence are able to get better prices for their produce.

The communities have taken to farming on a large scale, unlike before when they only cultivated small portions of land due to lack of storage facilities.

Farmers say they will store more than four bags each in the forthcoming season.

“We are targeting storing between five and ten bags each. Our crops are doing very well and we anticipate getting higher yields," Ongel says.

Loy Dhikusooka Abenakyo, a World Food Programme Senior Program Assistant, says the store is an asset to the community. “Most farmers who are far from the facility have contacted the beneficiaries in Loro to allow them to store their produce there too,” she says.

However, farmers are only encouraged to store the surplus at the facility, to ensure that their families do not starve.

Mr. Ongel adds that group members are also able to access loans from banks, using their plantations as security. The money is used to buy oxen to facilitate ploughing the gardens.

According to Loy, once a Warehouse Receipt system takes off in Lango region, farmers will also be able to access loans from banks, by simply showing receipts from World Food Program Warehouses.

The warehouse receipt system enables farmers to keep their produce at WFP stores. The farmer is given a receipt of storage which can be used as security to acquire a bank loan. The store sells the produce in the presence of the farmer, pays off the bank and gives the surplus from the sale to the farmer.
Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs)

“Look, this is how I write my name,” 47 year-old Aida Akullo presses the pen’s nib onto a piece of paper repeatedly writing over one of the letters of her name.

“In this world if one does not know how to read and write, she could easily sell off her land without realizing it,” she says reveals the secret behind her determination to learn to read and write, “Each time my children returned from school, they would tease me with their songs. They would write on the ground and read aloud what they learnt in school.”

Akullo joined and started saving with Note En Teko Village Savings and Loan Association in Barr and this has been the path to achieving her dream. She never misses her weekly meeting with the group. “I wanted to be like our chairperson. She knows how to read and write. That is why I joined the group, to save, but most importantly to learn how to read and write,” Akullo emphasizes.

She would endeavor to make and deposit Shs.1,000 in savings, every week with the group. “I used to think saving Shs.1,000 was too little but I recently borrowed sh20,000. I had wanted to borrow sh10,000 but the chairperson said I could borrow as much Shs.20,000,” she says.

By learning to read and write Akullo, a widow with eight children, is confident she will be able to defend the land her husband left. Her husband was killed during the two-decade war. With her knowledge of how to read and write Akullo has started trading in sorghum. She buys sorghum from the neighbors and sells it in the market to earn money which helps her to pay for hired labor in the garden. She believes she will have enough food and sell off the surplus in the forthcoming season and increase her weekly savings to Shs.2000.

“I will then be able to borrow as much Shs.40,000 from the group. That is the amount I need to sustain my sorghum business and also put up a permanent house in the long run.

For 50 year-old Sophia Ogwang, saving has enabled her to build a two bed roomed house with a living room in Obito Ayenyi Village, Barr Sub county Lira district.

After living in a shelter at Barr Camp for more than two decades, Ogwang used savings from Note En Teko VSLA to realize her dream. “At first my husband was not supportive but on realizing the benefits he also joined the group and this has transformed our lives,” she narrates, the joy of owning a home vivid in her eyes.

Note En Teko VSLA is one of the 92 savings groups in the project area. UNDP through its implementing partner World Vision executed the VSLA model: VSLAs mobilize the returnees to form groups through which they learn, amongst other things to save.

To build the house, Sophia and her husband George Ogwang would borrow sh40,000 from the VSLA each month. “If I borrowed this month, George would borrow the following month. We would use the money to buy basic necessities to help with the garden work,” Sophia explains.

Sophia and her husband saved sh250,000 to buy their first bull and would borrow the second bull from neighbors when they needed to plough their gardens. For a year they tilled the land and planted different crops. When they sold the rice that they had grown, they earned sh1.25 million which they used to build their permanent house roofed with twenty iron sheets, each costing Shs.35,000.

Sophia kept her grass thatched hut to “remind me of where we started from and the future ahead.” The achievement has motivated Sophia to share her experience with her community.

“Every time I attend the VSLA meetings, I get home late since I have numerous stopovers, to share what I have benefited from saving. I want the whole village to have permanent houses,” she says. Her vision is catching on.

One of the people dreaming about saving to build a permanent house is 40-year-old Francis Okol, a resident of Obito Ayenyi Village, Barr Sub county Lira district. “I started by saving sh5000 and that is what I have maintained for the past one year,” he says adding that his weekly savings will increase to sh10,000 as soon as he starts building a permanent house.

Francis’ desire to buy another bull to ease ploughing of his garden motivated him to start saving. He hated asking friends to lend him theirs so that he could easily plough his gardens. “ Even after buying the second bull, I will still work harder,” he says. He is also one of the 200 VSLA members that have undergone training on business and marketing. “The skills have helped us to make profitable businesses. Now I am in a better position to start buying agricultural produce from farmers,” he states.

Mary Akello the chairperson of Note En Teko VSLA says that the skills have helped members to access loans to invest in buying agricultural produce.

Note En Teko VSLA group started on April 10, 2011 with thirty members. It has saved sh1.3 million. However, the group is not yet able to lend out more than shs.500, 000.

“We only lend from what we have saved. We need more capital to easily give our people as much as one million shillings,” Akello says.

Akello believes that before the year ends, they will be the best VSLA with over sh10 million in savings.

Today from the little savings, the over 90 groups are anticipated to save and loan out approximately 900m UGX (equivalent to US$ 375,000) within the next one year.
After twenty years of the insurgency in Northern Uganda, the people struggled to return to their homes, only to encounter a new challenge of sleeping sickness or trypanosomiasis. This disease is caused by the tsetse fly and is classified by the WHO as one of the Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs).

The affected people got weak and could not go out in the fields to work. Some of the oxen given as agro-inputs by the Northern Uganda Early Recovery Project to the returnees to boost agricultural productivity also got infected with the disease and died.

Project implementers had to act fast to establish treatment centers and surveillance units to track and trap the tsetse flies. They trained Village Health Teams to sensitize and involve the community on how to lay the traps. Over 2,000 tsetse fly trap nets are to be laid in Alebtong, 1,200 for Otuke, 400 in Oyam and 200 in Lira District. “We need more nets because the problem is immense. We have to protect our lives,” Francis Ongom a Village Health Team member heading Amuria parish, Aloi Sub-county in Alebtong District says.

Richard Ekwan the Acting District Health Officer in Alebtong District says trapping tsetse flies has reduced the rate of sleeping sickness in the District. “Our VHTs are on the ground to offer the required technical back-stopping service. The outpatient departments give medication to the patients who turn up for treatment. This has simplified our work at the sub-county and District level,” he says.

Dr. Joaquim Saweka the Country Director of WHO says the organization, has facilitated access to medical services by taking the service to the people at the grass roots. Preventive drugs are also being distributed in schools and surrounding communities. “These boost the body’s immunity so that once a person is bitten by a tsetse fly, he is able to resist the disease,” he says.

But sleeping sickness and Nagana are not the only diseases affecting the community. Ekwan says that over 155,000 lives in the sub-counties of Aloi, Akura, Abako, Awei, Abia and Amugu are at risk of Schistosomiasis infection. “Though we have safe water points, most families fetch from the dams that are in their vicinity,” he explains.

The dams were sunk by WFP to solve the water shortage problem in the District. However, they also harbor snails which are the intermediate hosts of Schistosomiasis. Ekwan says the most affected victims are children. Joshua Opio is one of the many children in Alal Atidi village in Aloi sub-county, Alebtong District, suffering from Schistosomiasis (bilharzia). He contracted it from swimming in the dam.

“We used go swimming with my friends at Te-iconga dam while on the way back home from school,” he says.

Paul Omara the District’s focal person on Neglected Tropical Diseases says most of the schools surveyed had their sampled pupils infected. “In a random sampling of thirty boys and girls, over 400 pupils were found to be infected,” he explains.

World Health Organization has also stocked drugs and trained medical practitioners on how to manage the disease.

Josephine Adongo a Nurse at Akura Health Centre II says the facility has been receiving drugs, and facilitation for the staff to reach out to the schools to create awareness about the disease.

David Enyang, the head teacher Aloi High Primary School says they write messages on small sign posts in the local language warning pupils on certain diseases. As a result the sick have been able to report any anomalies to their parents or teachers at the earliest.

Elephantiasis is another disease affecting the people in the region. Bernard Ekwang is a primary five pupil at Alier primary school in Akura Sub-county in Alebtong District. He has swollen legs due to elephantiasis. Despite his ailment, Ekwang usually walks over two kilometers to school from his village in Te-konga LC1. “Nobody wants to play with me. They say my feet smell,” he says. His father Leo Alele prays that the health units at various levels within the District will be able to cure his son’s ailment. He says VHTs go to his home and advise the son never to miss school as the researchers work out the medication for the diseases.

43-year-old Akello, a mother of three in Oluro, Bardago parish in Akura Sub-county is also suffering from the disease. “The men just made me pregnant. They promised to pay the bride price but never lived up to their word. They said, they could not marry a woman suffering from Elephantiasis,” she says.

Akello can however, fend for herself and the family members. She is happy that VHTs have been moving from door to door encouraging people to access medical services at the nearest health centers in the village other than staying home.
Peace Rings resolve conflict among the returnees

Dennis Okello’s mind had never settled despite peace returning to his home area after two decades of insurgency. He was always thinking about his wife and the vows he had made to her on their wedding day.

For 11 years, Janet’s whereabouts had remained unknown. She had walked away from their matrimonial home over a misunderstanding.

The guns had gone silent and restoration of peace was the talk in the camps but Okello, a resident of Aboke Sub-county, Oyam District, was worried about returning home without his wife. His three children’s constant queries about their mother traumatized him.

As government supported families to return to their homes, Okello only wished for a reunion with his wife. He needed more than material support. He sought psychological support but it was hardly available. His friends urged him to forget about her but he couldn’t.

“I want her back, our children need their mother. Where shall I find her,” he told friends.

It was Francis Akona who had been trained through NUERP as a Peace Ring member in Otwal Sub-county, who came to his rescue. Francis was trained with support from UNDP, to settle land and domestic disputes in Otwal.

83-year-old Akona walked 13 kilometers to Aboke Sub-county in search of the depressed Okello. He managed to reconcile Okello and his wife Jane in September, 2011 and the two are now living happily together.

Francis is a hero in Otwal and Aboke sub-counties, for not only helping Okello but many others. Being one of the 30 Peace Ring members in Otwal Sub-county, elder Akona has reached out to families with land wrangles and couples whose marriages are marred with domestic violence.

Arnold Bongo Debuni, Oyam District Vice Chairperson remarks: “Our people have now stopped quarreling over land and resorted to farming. None of them sleeps hungry and our harvests are gradually increasing.”

16 Peace rings in the project area, comprising of women and the youth are behind this achievement. To facilitate their work, UNDP donated one bicycle for each of the 480 peace ring member from all the 16 sub counties, to facilitate their mobility in the communities. They were also given kits to record and document all the peace activities they undertake.

The Peace Rings are also messengers of vital information dissemination to discourage harmful practices in the community. For example in Aputi village, Apoka parish, Ogur sub-county, the Peace Ring groups have moved around to stop acts which victimize girl children. Similarly, battering of girls to force them into marriage in exchange for a few heads of cattle has been reduced.
Challenges

Whereas the Northern Uganda Early Recovery Project performed very well over the last four years (2009-2012) in terms of delivering services to the target population in the four Districts, in terms of resettlement and recovery, the project has experienced a number of challenges. These included among others: the biggest proportion of the population had been staying in IDP camps during the insurgencies, hence were used to getting hand-outs in form of free food. Therefore, when they returned to their homes, they still had negative attitude towards work and they expected free things. Changing that attitude took quite a while before people could get used to working again for themselves through hard work.

In the area of environment conservation, the project performed well, particularly by planting trees and re-establishing tree nurseries, and scaling up the use of energy saving stoves in ten sub counties within the project area. However, one challenge is that the traditional three stone fire stove is still in use in many homes because some beneficiaries are stuck to the old attitudes towards the facility.

In terms of scoping, at the beginning the project targeted beneficiaries from two Districts of Lira and Oyam Districts, but along the way the Government curved two more Districts out of Lira District, hence coordination expanded to four Districts in Lango sub-region. Working with the new Districts was a challenge as they lacked experienced staff to handle the project, and the Districts did not have capacity in most areas of governance and technical practice. Hence NUERP had to extend extra support via non-governmental organizations in order to bridge the manpower gap. Moreover the local leaders had expected the project to cover all the sub-counties in the four districts, yet this project covered only the most seriously affected sub-counties. Speaking to the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Alebtong Mr.Leornard Opio Ojok, remarked “The project is operating in three sub-counties out of thirteen, so the people keep wondering why they are not benefiting.”

The other challenge has been on land disputes, where conflict cases were originally taken to courts of law, which got overwhelmed with workload, and could not cope up, until UNDP working in partnership with World Vision introduced the peace rings strategy which has provided appropriate solutions to land wrangles, and domestic violence at village level. As the project winds up, this intervention needs to be sustained by the Districts.

The other challenge is the educational gap which was created by the prolonged insurgency where many youth had missed going to school, are illiterate and without jobs. Hence there is need to establish vocational training institutions in order to build skills for this group of people. Similarly, the girl-child is disadvantaged as most of them are illiterate and have resorted to early marriages without proper family planning guidance.

The need for services on the ground is overwhelming, since the population had to start afresh to rebuild their lives from scratch. The project cannot meet all the basic needs of the communities and more support is still needed in the short run. The communities are still asking for services especially those coming from the neighboring sub-counties that were beyond the mandate of the project.”

Similarly, in the heath sector, a number of gaps still exist in the four Districts: Lack of transport, limited infrastructure, lack of other facilities like accommodation for both patients and staff, lack of trained staff and manpower like Doctors and nurses to render the services are among the key challenges faced. In order to respond to some of these concerns, the project has supported the recruitment and training of the Village Health Teams (VHT’S) who are local volunteer community workers. Many of them still need training and retraining so as to provide effective services. Through this model, only two people were identified and trained per village and yet some of the villages are quite expanse, hence the need to motivate the VHTs to continue serving the communities without remuneration. Speaking to the Acting District Health Officer (DHO) Lira, Ms Beatrice Akong, she remarked, “we trained 500 VHT’s in disease surveillance, from three sub-counties, she wondered how about the others who had not yet been trained and yet all of them need to speak the same language?” She also intimated that sometimes funds are not enough to run the services in the health units.

Dr. Joaquim Saweka, the Country Director for WHO also noted that “service delivery was a key challenge and developing the Human resources was essential. WHO conducted service availability mapping in order to identify critical gaps, and they realized that the needs were huge while the resource envelope was very small and the time allocated to the project was very short.”

The country Director of WFP, Mr. Sory Ouane remarked “the other challenge the project experienced was that due to inflation, we could not meet our targets due to increased cost of services and inputs”. On the other hand, the Country Director of UNDP, Mr. Lebogang Motlana, who is the Chairman of the Project Steering Committee, noted on the issue of sustainability “the beneficiaries embarked on it fairly late, therefore it may not yield the expected results by the time the project comes to an end. The problem arose from the time constraint that could not allow for consolidation of the gains made on this project, hence the need for a follow up programme. It is also imperative that the Districts should take responsibility for the good practices and gains made through this project.”
Mr. Simpson Biryabaho, a field staff for World Vision, UNDP’s implementing partner field staff, noted that, “co-ordination with the local government during the implementation of this project was very essential. This enabled the shift from relief to comprehensive community development.” Mr. Pascal Onegiu Okello, the NUERP Project Manager noted “The Quarterly District based Project Coordination Committee review meetings and the National Project Steering Committee meetings were critical for getting feedback on the project strategies and results to ensure implementation was on course”.

Mary Francis Okello a Clinical Officer from the Ministry of Health in the field, working as acting head of Ogur Health Centre IV said, “Organizations which come to support us come and go, time is ripe for us to think of a sustainability plan in order to keep things moving. The health units do not have enough support to keep running on their own and yet the health facilities need to be improved. The Districts should be given enough money in order to run the services better.”

Ms Beatrice Akong, the acting District Health Officer Lira District said, “Continuous contact and collaboration with Village Health teams which are constantly in touch with people right from households to the villages and to the health units, facilitates monitoring, indirectly contributes to improved performance. We are able to gauge the village Health Teams’ abilities and performance and we can ascertain their real needs, if we are to improve them.” She also emphasized the need for documentation and sharing information which posed a big challenge in the District.

On the contrary, the Head Teacher of Amugu Secondary school, Mr. James Caleb Ogwang, shared his happiness as a result of an environmental project which the school is running in partnership with International Life Line Fund an implementing partner for WFP. He confessed that, “the school had now managed to save five hundred thousand shillings per term as a result of using institutional energy saving stoves, which money they had now diverted to improving education standards in the school and improving the students’ welfare”

Never the less, Mr. Sylvester Ocham a Community Development officer who has been working on this project for more than a year said, “When we work as a team we succeed, and involving communities and their leaders bears good results.”

On the other hand, the Chief Administrative Officer Alebtong Mr. Leonard Opio Ojok said, “When people are given a direction and hope they can move to the Promised Land.”

The WFP Country Director Mr. Sory Ouane, noted, three lessons came out strongly from this project. These included: maximum impact and benefits to each other; the participatory approach from the design stage to ownership of the project; and lastly, the decentralized approach of project implementation speeded the work, and made decision making and monitoring easier.

The WHO Country Director, Dr. Joaquim Saweka noted that, “ownership and engaging the beneficiaries to participate in project activities was critical, mobilizing people in the community to follow up activities strengthened the ownership by everyone. Engaging the local government to lead the process, the service availability mapping carried out was a mile-stone, training of community members, the ownership process and the plans to include resource mobilization for potential partners and donors was an important step forward. The integrated approach, and the joint implementation, the ownership were all essential in order to continue what they had started”, he said.

Lastly, the UNDP Country Director, Mr. Lebogang Motlana noted that “this project has proved the feasibility of joint programming among UN agencies as Collaboration achieves better response to the multi sectoral needs of the community by harmonizing expertise, monitoring tools and comparative advantage of the participating agencies. This strategy is essential to avoid duplication of efforts, hence efficiency in implementation”. Through this integrated approach, lives have been saved and a ray of hope has burst through the dark clouds that had long covered Northern Uganda.

Lessons Learnt

Feed-back from the project’s experience indicate that despite the short project life, many beneficiaries gained from this project, and the available resources were equitably distributed to the targeted communities, with positive outcomes for the beneficiaries. By involving the communities right from project inception to implementation the strategy has contributed to project sustainability and ownership.
Conclusion

The Northern Uganda Early Recovery Project is a good example of how quick impact projects in areas recovering from insurgency can jump start development in communities.

The Project restored hope for thousands of people who were displaced from their homes for almost two decades. Giving them an opportunity to become self reliant through growing their own food, making and saving their own money. This approach has enabled the communities to wean off from depending on food hand outs and other forms of aid.

Many of the initiatives such as the peace rings, VSLAs, the Farmer Groups and the VHTs have shown that the communities are capable of moving forward in developing their human capital and their area.

Joyce Angwech on her way back home after successfully having her one day old baby immunised against tuberculosis and Polio
As the project phases out, following are some of the observable outcomes:

- There has been an improvement in food security due to increase in crop outputs especially Maize, Cassava, Ground nuts and Beans;

- There is an increase in the culture of saving in the communities as a result of the technical support to the Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), with emerging small and micro enterprise development;

- Capacity building of beneficiaries is improving project ownership, which is a positive step towards sustainability. The local government staff themselves are able to review and implement their obligations as a result of this project input;

- The Peace Rings are resolving most of the conflicts in the communities particularly those relating to land disputes, domestic violence and are linking with the Police and Local councils for complicated cases;

- Communities are well sensitized on the benefits of preserving the environment and utilizing it in a sustainable manner, hence increased interest in tree planting and use of energy saving stoves;

- The household income for most of the farmers from the supported communities has increased due to improved bulking and the marketing of their produce;

- There has been an increase of attendance in out-patient department, due to availability of essential medicines and the confidence in the health facilities;

- As a result of increased timeliness and completeness of the weekly epidemiological reporting, major outbreak of epidemic prone diseases were averted throughout the project lifespan;

- Complementary support to Government’s immunization drive in the Districts has reduced infant mortality in the project area