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Article

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Weekly Report

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Weekly Report

How Do Individuals Cope During Post-Conflict Recovery? Evidence from Post-War Northern Uganda

Despite the widespread prevalence of violent conflict in most destitute regions of the world, little is known about the realities of individuals affected and the difficult decisions they have to take. In this report we address this issue by providing an insight into how individuals cope during post-conflict recovery in Northern Uganda. We particularly compare individuals who still reside in displacement camps with those that have already reintegrated into their original communities. Our focus is on opportunities and constraints they encounter during recovery with regard to employment choices. Individuals who reside in camps may be more inclined to engage in certain welfare-enhancing activities than their counterparts who chose to reintegrate. Results highlight the possibility of displaced individuals possessing productive skills that may be relevant for recovery.

Violent conflict often results in wide spread internal displacement which is associated with enormous threats to safety, marginalisation and limited capacity for households to adopt potential livelihood options. Households in displaced communities at times give up or reduce participation in certain income or welfare enhancing activities due to fear of insecurity or pessimism about the end of the conflict.

When conflict subsides, recovery is often associated with socio-economic transformation of the affected communities. The resulting security, infrastructure and development assistance lessen barriers to effective participation in various markets. Ideally the period of post-conflict recovery should result in welfare improvement.¹

In this report, focusing on civil conflict in Northern Uganda, we provide an insight into how individuals cope during post-conflict recovery. We particularly compare people who continue to reside in displacement camps (camps of Internally Displaced Persons, IDP) with those who already reintegrated into their communities. We focus on opportunities and constraints they encounter during recovery with regard to employment choices (such as work in agriculture, trading activities, handicrafts).

Understanding how communities adjust during recovery and the challenges they encounter can go a long way in aiding policy makers and other stakeholders in

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¹ Addison, T. and Brück, T. eds. (2008). Making peace work: The challenges of social and economic reconstruction. Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke.

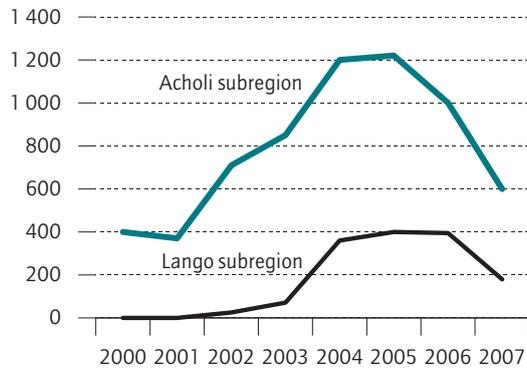
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Figure 1

Internal displacement in Northern Uganda

In 1 000 persons



Notes: The figure represents the estimates of the population in IDP camps in Lango and Acholi sub regions. The estimates were obtained from various agency reports. Information on the number of people displaced in the period preceding the year 2000 may not be reliable to report due to existence of few relief agencies and frequent movement of people between displacement sites and homes in response to intensity of conflict. The figures do not also capture individuals who sought refuge in towns or other districts but only consider those in designated camp locations. Nonetheless, available evidence provides a close picture of internal displacement and return which may coincide with intensity and spread of the conflict. For the geographic location of Lango and Acholi regions, see Figure 2.

Sources: IDMC reports for 2009 and 2010 available at: <http://www.internal-displacement.org>; OCHA reports, 2005 and 2007 available at: <http://ochaonline.un.org>; USAID 2006 and 2007 situational reports at: http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance.

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The number of individuals living in camps has halved since 2005.

designing programmes that specifically target affected communities. It can be generally argued that reconstruction efforts in communities affected by war may warrant specific policy interventions. In other words, the “one size fits all” approach is not advisable and that is why micro-level country studies are essential.² The conclusions about the most viable interventions can certainly be reached with knowledge about how individuals and households cope.

Conflict and displacement in Northern Uganda

Since 1986, conflict raged between the rebel Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and the government of Uganda, causing widespread insecurity and humanitarian crises in Northern Uganda and the neighboring countries of Sudan, the Democratic Republic of

² Verwimp, P., Justino, P. and Brück T., (2009). The analysis of conflict: A micro-level perspective”. *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 46, no. 3, pp. 307-14.

Congo (DRC), and the Central African Republic. The civilian population of Northern Uganda was often the deliberate target of the rebels who forcibly recruited children for use as soldiers and sex slaves, and targeted villages for food and medicine.

The long period of violent civil conflict which ended in 2006 was marked by the displacement of people from their homes. 1996 marked the beginning of widespread and systematic internal displacement following a government strategy to protect the civilians and aid the army’s counter-insurgency campaign against the LRA by forcing communities into IDP camps while the army pursued a “military solution” against the rebels. By 2003 an estimated 90 percent of the population in the Acholi subregion resided in camps (Figure 1).

While living in camps the households were subjected to political marginalization, healthcare crisis and strained social bonds resulting in wide spread poverty. Less than half of the displaced persons could access land that was more than two kilometres outside of their camps, which affected their ability to produce their own food.³

By 2007, the security situation had dramatically improved and many of the displaced started returning home, though patterns of return varied between locations that were earlier affected (Acholi subregions) and those affected later (Lango subregion) by conflict (Figure 2).⁴ Nonetheless, Northern Uganda still faces several challenges to bring it to the same level of development as the rest of the country.

Employment choices during recovery

When the war ended, there was an increasing need for households to return to normalcy by reintegrating into their original communities. The return process was designed by the government as a voluntary action of households. By 2007, some households had returned and resettled back in the community. We refer to this category as “returnees” while those who chose to remain in the camps are referred to as “stayers”.

Using the Northern Uganda Livelihood Survey-NULS (2007), we investigate how stayers fared compared to returnees (Box 1). This is important for a policy perspective because one or both groups

³ International Crisis Group, (2006). A strategy for ending Northern Uganda’s crisis. Policy Briefing N°35.

⁴ Bjorkhaug, I., Morten, B. Hatloy, A. and Jennings K. M., (2007). Returning to uncertainty? Addressing vulnerabilities in Northern Uganda. United Nations Development Programme.

Figure 2

Districts covered by the Northern Uganda Livelihood survey (2007)



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may suffer burdens even after the end of conflict. Studying activity choices (i.e. what households do to earn a living) is one way to see how they can return to a self-sustaining situation. Our hypothesis is that returnees are more likely to engage in income generation activities than stayers since they may face fewer constraints. In our analysis we consider three key variables representing activity choices. A variable scores 1 if an individual is reported to be currently participating in a given activity and 0, otherwise. The choice of these activities is justified by the proportion of the sample engaged in them. The questionnaire provided for a wide range of activities but very few were chosen by a sizeable group of individuals. We therefore selected activities with 10 or more percentage points of the sample participating. In this regard, our analysis focuses on cultivation, handicrafts, and petty trade. Another variable “any activity” was constructed to cater for the possibility of engaging any activity including those where few individuals were involved.

Because “returnees” and “stayers” may be different, a simple comparison of activity profiles may not be useful, because individuals may not be comparable.⁵ Therefore we perform a recursive bivariate probit procedure to account for this comparability issue (Box 2).

⁵ They may differ in observable such as age and gender as well as unobservable characteristics for instance skills and risk taking behavior.

**Box 1
Data**

The NULS (2007) was conducted between April and May 2007 at the time when the 20-year conflict in the region was coming to an end. The survey covers 5000 households in Gulu, Kitgum, Amuru and Pader district in Acholi sub region, and Lira and Oyam district in Lango sub region and is representative of all households that resided in IDP camps at some point during the conflict. With this survey we are able to capture a special “window” immediately after war, characterized by large flows of internal migration. This “window” is another crucial point in our study, because many decisions that affect the dynamics of recovery are taken at this point (for details see Bjorkhaug, et al, 2007).

**Box 2
Controlling for endogeneity of IDP status and activity choices**

Because households relocating away from camps may be different from those staying in them, we use a recursive bivariate probit procedure to control for selection on unobservables. Our empirical procedure relies on instrumenting for residence status by constructing a conflict intensity index at the expected place of return using disaggregated a geocoded micro-level dataset on conflict events (Armed Conflict Events Data-ACLED). In order to construct the index, we require information about the geographic location of each event in that year (y_i) as well as the location of the household (h). We consider the year 2006 for two reasons. First we can tell where the household was located during that year. Second, between January and March 2007 (shortly before the survey was collected), the dataset recorded only 4 events in two districts, and no events in four districts.

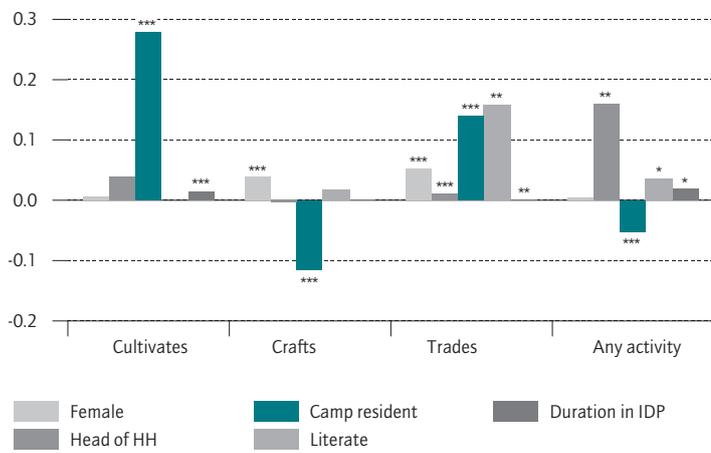
We then estimate the absolute squared distance (d) in degrees between the household and each of the events. This is defined as $d(y_i, h) = ||y_i - h||^2$. The resulting index ($C(h)$) is obtained by aggregating events in a given year and discounting them by their respective distances from the household.

$$C(h) = \sum_{i=1}^I e^{-\alpha d(y_i, h)}$$

The parameter α is a distance-discount factor. Different values of α evaluate the potential influence of respective events on the household. The larger the value of α , the less important the distant conflict events may be to the household’s point of view. Choosing a lower value of α would imply attaching importance to distant conflict events. The best practice is to construct the index for different values of α and choosing the index with the parameter that maximizes the log likelihood function.

Figure 3

Effects of residence in displacement camps on employment choices



Dependent variables are: individual cultivates, crafts, trades, is engaged in any activity. The bars represent the marginal effect of respective alternative explanatory variables on activity choices. The y-axis indicates the change in the probability of adopting an activity resulting from a unit change in a given variable. *** implies significance of the variable at 1 percent level. In most cases, the impact of living in an IDP is the most influential factor determining activity choice.

Sources: Northern Uganda Livelihood Survey 2007; Armed Conflict Events Data; own calculations.

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Camp residents are more likely to be involved in agriculture and trades than those who returned to their villages.

Results of the procedure illustrated in Figure 3 indicate by how much the probability of engaging in a certain activity is affected by being a camp resident.⁶ Findings for some activity options do not conform to what we hypothesized. Results show that returnees may not necessarily be better off than stayers with regard to adoption of productive activities during the initial period of recovery.

In particular we find that although return may be associated with participation in making handicrafts and the probability of engaging in any activity,⁷ returnees are less likely to engage in cultivation, which is traditionally the mainstay of communities in the region.

A number of factors might be at play. First, individuals living in displacement camps may have limited livelihood options available and therefore opt to cultivate. In the absence of active labour markets farming may be the most obvious fallback position to keep individuals active. Farming activity in

Northern Uganda was highly pronounced among internally displaced communities in spite of challenges of access to land around camps.⁸ The second possibility is the likely adjustment costs associated with return and the initial period of recovery. Households in return communities may require longer time to resettle to farming. This period may involve land preparation, identification of potential markets, and settlement of land wrangles. This partly explains why continued relief effort may be required during early periods of recovery to facilitate household adjustment. Due to absence of longitudinal data, this argument can only be speculative.

Our analysis also reveals that that individuals living in IDP camps are more likely than returnees to engage in small-scale trading activities. In the short term a potential challenge to recovery might be the deterioration of the local economy that results from the long period of conflict. Our study suggests that trade may be more active in camps due to a “concentration” effect. Markets in return communities are basically non-existent and the population is sparse given that less than 40 percent of the population had returned. Infrastructure especially in return communities is often poor to facilitate a conducive environment for income generation. For communities still in displacement camps, a large population may provide a market for products however meager proceeds might be. Evidence of economic opportunities related to petty trading in IDP camps has been cited as one of the major hindrances to return.⁹ Thus, in the process of resettlement, it is important to foster infrastructure and to stimulate local demand that allows returnees to self-sustain after the war.

Conclusive remarks

The end of a violent conflict often leads to households leaving camps or displacement areas and re-integrating into their original community. But it may not be certain that recovery will set in for all returnees in the immediate term. One possibility is that households may have to cope with initial adjustment costs of return. The challenges associated with resettlement may slow down recovery efforts. There is evidence of households in Northern Uganda opting to stay in camps where they can continue receiving services such as health care and schooling as well as participate in better functioning product markets than in return sites where infrastructure is almost

⁶ The figure presents determinants of activity choices beyond IDP status. Here we only discuss the results that pertain to our main focus.

⁷ The negative effect of IDP status on participation in any activity suggests the importance of a number of activities beyond what we cover here.

⁸ Bjorkhaug, I., B. Morten, A. Hatloy, and K. M. Jennings, (2007). Returning to uncertainty? Addressing vulnerabilities in Northern Uganda. United Nations Development Programme.

⁹ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, (2010). Peace, Recovery and Development: Challenges in Northern Uganda. March 2010.

non-existent.¹⁰ This calls for a pragmatic recovery approach to ensure a conducive environment for return to enhance household capabilities. We also find evidence of individuals being economically active during the immediate aftermath of conflict. Individuals in displacement camps are able to carry out a number of livelihood enhancing activities. This is an opportunity that recovery interventions may have to tap to improve on household welfare of the poor in post-conflict countries.

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¹⁰ Uganda Human rights commission, (2008). 11th annual report. Kampala, Uganda

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