

FINAL REPORT

Evaluation report of the conflict and peace impact of the Northern Uganda Shea Nut Project in Otuke County of Lira District

**Submitted to EPOPA and the Swedish International
Development Agency by Saferworld (UK) and the Centre for
Conflict Resolution (CECORE, Uganda)**

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**Saferworld, The Grayston Centre, 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT, United
Kingdom**

Tel +44 (0)20 7324 4646 Fax +44 (0)20 7324 4647

Web www.saferworld.org.uk

Email hesta@saferworld.org.uk

The Centre for Conflict Resolution, P O Box 5211, Kampala, Uganda

Tel +256 41 255033 Fax +256 41 255033 / 251922

Email cecore@africaonline.co.ug

Executive summary

The Northern Uganda Shea Nut Project (NUSP) is an organic export project, implemented by the Export Promotion of Organic Products from Africa (EPOPA) and supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida). The project is based mainly in the Otuke County in the northern section of Lira District – an area which has been badly affected by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict. The project involves a women's association of approximately 1500 shea nut gatherers (Rwot Ber), who sell the nuts they collect to ALCODE, a processing NGO in Lira town, where the nuts are processed into shea butter. An import/export company in Kampala, KM International/KFP, is leading on exporting the shea butter to the cosmetics market in Europe.

Saferworld and the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CECORE) have been engaged in a one-year process of assessing the impact of the NUSP on the conflict and peace dynamics in Lira District, and of the conflict dynamics on the NUSP. The overall aim of this process has been to support the project to ensure it is conflict-sensitive.

This process has involved the implementation of a number of key activities during November 2005–November 2006. An initial peace and conflict impact assessment was undertaken in November 2005 based on desk- and field-based research that involved conducting focus groups and interviews with project stakeholders, including government officials, civil society members, international NGOs and donors in Lira and Kampala. A draft peace and conflict impact analysis report was then presented to project and external stakeholders in Lira in December 2005 for their feedback and joint recommendations were developed. In January 2006, a training workshop on conflict-sensitive development was organised for project staff and others working on private sector development in conflict areas.

During July/August 2006, an update of the original conflict analysis was carried out and an updated conflict analysis report produced. A local consultant also conducted focused work with Rwot Ber women members in the local language in order to identify the main security threats they face, and ways to address these threats.

In November 2006, Saferworld and CECORE conducted a final assessment mission to Lira District. This report summarises the findings of this trip, and builds on the original conflict and peace analysis report (December 2005), and the update conflict and peace analysis report (August 2006), to provide an overall evaluation of the conflict impact of NUSP over the one-year assessment timeframe.

Conflict context in Lira

Since August 2006, there has been a significant improvement in the security situation in Lira District, as a result of a new round of peace talks between the LRA and the Government of Uganda (GoU) in Juba, and the signing of a ceasefire agreement. No LRA activities have been reported in Lira District over the past 6 months. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) have started returning to their homes – partially or fully - and there has been an increase in farming activities, indicating the increased ability of people to move outside of the camps to cultivate their land. Return trends are greater in the southern counties of Lira. The pattern of the return process is influenced by a number of key factors:

- **Security situation** – areas considered safe have attracted a greater number of returnees.

- ***Karamojong cattle rustling*** – Karamojong cattle rustlers are considered a serious security threat, reportedly killing and assaulting people, and thus in the sub-counties bordering Karamoja, there have been less returnees than in other areas.
- ***Changes in security provision*** – Police are gradually becoming the main security provider and police posts have been established throughout the district. On the whole, this has been perceived as a positive development, and a factor contributing to people's increased confidence to return. However, some allegations persist of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) by members of the security providers (including police, UPDF and local defence units).
- ***Landmines and unexploded ordnance*** – fear of landmines, unexploded ordnance and weapons caches has been identified as an obstacle to people returning.
- ***Perceptions of safety and security*** - People's perceptions of security, which are influenced by the violence they have experienced or witnessed, determine their confidence to return.
- ***Uncertainty about the Juba peace talks*** – Until a comprehensive peace agreement is signed, and the future is more certain, many people do not have the confidence to return permanently.
- ***Distance*** – People living in camps closer to their homes have been more likely to return, while others still prefer to sleep in the camps at night.
- ***Humanitarian assistance / social services*** – access to social services, health care, water and education at home in comparison to that available in the camps also contributes to how likely people are to return home.

Impact of the NUSP on peace and conflict dynamics and vice versa

Overall, the evaluation reinforced the assessment team's previous findings that the NUSP project is having a small but generally positive impact in Lira District.

The original conflict analysis report (December 2005) identified a number of potential impacts of the conflict dynamics on the NUSP project and of the NUSP on the conflict dynamics, and made a number of recommendations for how the project could maximise its potential positive impacts and mitigate some of the potentially negative ones. This report reviews these potential impacts and the project-related recommendations made:

1. The greatest violent conflict risk of the project is related to the safety of the women while collecting the nuts

Although the risk of women being attacked by the LRA whilst collecting shea nuts has reduced significantly since the start of the peace talks, they continue to be at risk of sporadic attack from cattle rustlers and of SGBV from armed members of the police, army, Amuka militia and unarmed ordinary men from their own communities. Risks of attack are heightened by the fact that the best time to collect the nuts is early in the morning when it is still dark.

The women have taken some precautions to improve their safety, including travelling in groups, using torches, and sometimes taking men to accompany them while collecting. Specialised Anti-Stock Theft Units (ASTUs) have also been deployed along the border with Karamoja to stop cattle rustling incursions. It is not yet clear how effective they are though, as they have only been on the ground since October 2006.

The recommendation made in December 2005 to *continue monitoring the safety of the gatherers and the impact of the project to make sure the benefits outweigh the risks* has been addressed through improved monitoring of the security situation, and ensuring that project staff are kept up to date on developments. Through the assessment team, a local consultant has also been involved to discuss the gatherers' safety with them and identify specific precautions they can take to improve their safety. It is now important

therefore for the project team to take on this function themselves. Rwot Ber also needs to continue developing good contacts with the new police posts as an important step to start addressing the issue of SGBV.

2. The return process can have a positive and negative impact on the project

Divisions have started emerging between Rwot Ber members. This seems to relate partly to the return process, in that some perceptions exist that people who have fled to the towns during the conflict have not suffered as much as those who stayed behind. Internal disputes have also arisen regarding Rwot Ber's registration and who the key leaders are – those based in Otuke County or those in Lira town. As peace takes root and people return home, the potential of Rwot Ber and the NUSP project increases. This also means that the potential gain of involvement – and hence the importance of who controls what and who benefits – will become more important. The NUSP project will therefore need to support Rwot Ber to grow as an internally accountable and productive institution that can ensure maximum benefit for its spread-out membership.

Land disputes are a key factor that may ignite conflict during the return process, having a detrimental impact on the NUSP. There is a risk that, with more people returning to resettle their ancestral land, arguments over land boundaries, including access to shea trees, may arise. The assessment team have identified that some people are already becoming more protective of trees on their land, and see them as private rather than communal property, and that many returnees who have no alternative sources of income are reportedly felling trees for charcoal. This trend appears to be on the rise, and could accelerate should the shea trees become increasingly scarce due to felling, or if their value increases due to the impact of the project and the higher price available for shea butter. This could lead to disputes over access to trees or the land they are on by the gatherers, who were able to collect from any tree in a communal area during the conflict, or to disputes between those who are felling trees for charcoal and those who want to protect them and use them for shea nuts and butter.

3. By stimulating some positive economic activity, the project team can contribute towards addressing the perception and reality of marginalisation

Significant economic benefits have not yet materialised from the NUSP, due to the slow development of the export market. However, women are beginning to sell their nuts to other buyers. The project therefore continues to offer them an opportunity to lessen the poverty they face, and thus recover from the effects of conflict.

4. Forming groups or associations of women in conflict zones can generate important building blocks for peace and the potential for social recovery from the conflict

The strongest positive impact that the NUSP has had is the support that it has given to the gatherers to organise themselves, develop their skills, knowledge and life skills, which will help them recover from the conflict in the long term. In the process, the women have also begun to share their problems and support each other more.

The recommendation made in December 2005 to *continue strengthening social capital and the skills of the women in both livelihood and social matters* has been achieved through training the women on organic agriculture, storing nuts and tree planting. A workshop was also conducted on HIV/AIDS and SGBV. However, the livelihood/economic aspect of the recommendation still needs to be implemented, to enable the gatherers to attain maximum economic benefits from their work. Training Rwot Ber in voluntary savings and loans would ensure that the project impact extends

beyond income generation to include empowering the women economically through building their capacity to generate money and expand their businesses.

The recommendation made in December 2005 to *support project staff and gatherers to maintain good relationships with those outside the project* has been addressed through beginning the process of registering Rwot Ber as a formal NGO. This will lead to increased support from local authorities and potentially other external donors. Allowing men as (minority) members in Rwot Ber seems to be important in some cases to retain community support, but it is crucial that this should not undermine the clear benefits of empowering the women to organise themselves and support each other.

5. Protecting the shea nut trees

The NUSP continues to face the threat of the continued felling of shea nut trees in order to sell them as fuel. The recommendation made to *support awareness-raising campaigns about the value of the shea trees and the need for planting more* has been achieved through Rwot Ber members raising awareness within their communities about the value of the shea nut trees, and collaborating with local leaders on this issue. The establishment of nurseries and tree planting activities have further protected the trees. These activities should continue.

6. The expectations of the women and their families need to be managed realistically

The NUSP has made efforts to enhance communication within the project. Clear channels of communication are essential to enable the shea nut gatherers to know what stage the market development is at, and what they can expect to gain from the project. During the November 2006 assessment mission, ALCODE and Rwot Ber agreed to meet to improve communication between them and iron out existing problems.

7. Contribute to creating a culture of accountability among project stakeholders and towards those not involved in the project

As highlighted before, the NUSP continues to have the potential to contribute to creating a culture of accountability among project stakeholders and external actors by ensuring that project decisions are transparent, project spending is justified and fair and that people in positions of power (relative to the project) are held accountable.

Key lessons for development in conflict-affected contexts

The NUSP has highlighted a number of key lessons on the implementation of development projects in conflict contexts:

- The end of political violence can often give birth to, or create the conditions for an increase in SGBV. As SGBV is not considered a mainstream political conflict, it is likely to be given less attention than other post-conflict issues, and is often left to be dealt with as a 'social' issue. It is imperative that donors, police and government address SGBV as a priority post-conflict issue.
- The displacement of people as a result of political violence often creates the conditions for renewed communal conflicts around land to arise. It is essential that attention is given to this issue, and that steps are taken to mitigate the risk of local conflicts around land emerging, such as establishing conflict management committees made up of government officials, police and community members.

- Resolving the issue of cattle raiding and pastoralist needs remains fundamental to addressing violent conflict in the Horn of Africa and ensuring that the impact of development projects on conflict is positive.
- The police play an important role in post-conflict societies, as the military's role declines. The police therefore needs to adopt a community-based policing approach that will ensure that they have an active role in managing a range of safety and security concerns, including land conflicts, SGBV and pastoralist issues.
- Local militias or defence units, often created as additional security providers during conflict, often become the source of post-conflict violence. They need to be brought under control and given alternative livelihood options.

Although small, the NUSP project highlights some of the advantages and dilemmas of supporting development programmes in conflict-affected contexts. Clearly, insecurity poses immediate safety risks to all involved in implementing development projects, potentially even increasing the safety risk to project beneficiaries. At the same time, opportunities for income-generation and improvement of skills and knowledge are extremely scarce in conflict situations, thus making such engagements potentially very valuable to conflict-affected people. The difficulty lies in weighing up the benefits of such support against the risks inherent to living and working in conflict areas.

1. Background of project and peace and conflict impact assessment of NUSP project

The Northern Uganda Shea Nut Project (NUSP) is an organic exporting project, implemented by the Export Promotion of Organic Products from Africa (EPOPA) and supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida). The project involves an association of about 1500 women shea nut collectors in northern Lira District, who sell the nuts they collect to ALCODE, a processing NGO in Lira town, where the nuts are processed into shea butter. KM International/KFP, an import/export company in Kampala, is leading on exporting the shea butter to the cosmetics market in Europe.

The project operates mainly in Otuke County in the Northern part of Lira District, which has been badly affected by the LRA conflict, and Saferworld and the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CECORE) have therefore been contracted to support the project in ensuring that it is conflict-sensitive.

Saferworld and CECORE engaged in a one-year process, consisting of the following elements:

- An initial conflict analysis and conflict impact assessment of the NUSP project in November 2005, which included a field trip to Lira and interviews with project stakeholders, government officials, civil society, international NGOs, UN organisations and donors in Kampala and Lira.
- A stakeholder workshop in December 2005 in Lira town to validate the findings of the conflict analysis and conflict impact assessment and to facilitate the formulation of recommendations for the NUSP project to be more conflict-sensitive. The outcome of this process was a conflict impact assessment report which contained the recommendations for making the NUSP project more conflict-sensitive.¹
- A training workshop on conflict-sensitive development in January 2006 for EPOPA and other civil society organisations working on agriculture and/or connected to the Swedish Embassy. A report of the training was produced and disseminated to participants.
- An update of the conflict analysis in July/August 2006, which consisted of interviews with project stakeholders, government officials, civil society, international NGOs, UN organisations and donors in Kampala and Lira. An update conflict analysis report was produced.²
- Also in July 2006, a local consultant from Lira District was hired to do some focused work with the Rwot Ber women members on their security, in order to determine the exact nature of the threats they face and to come up with some ways to improve their security. The consultant is herself a woman from Lira, with previous senior experience in the police on issues of violence and abuse against women and children. She was therefore in a better position to discuss with the women shea nut gatherers issues that are still very sensitive in Lango society and that they were not comfortable discussing with the assessment team.

¹ Saferworld and Centre for Conflict Resolution, *Conflict and peace analysis report for the Northern Uganda Shea Nut Project in Otuke of Lira District*, submitted to EPOPA and the Swedish International Development Agency, December 2005.

² Saferworld and Centre for Conflict Resolution, *Update of conflict and peace analysis for the Northern Uganda Shea Nut Project in Otuke of Lira District, "Peace is coming"*, submitted to EPOPA and the Swedish International Development Agency, August 2006.

The current report constitutes the last activity in this engagement – an evaluation of the conflict impact of the project over this timeframe, and should therefore be read together with the original conflict and peace analysis report (December 2005) and the update conflict and peace analysis report (August 2006).

This report consists of the following sections:

- Overview of methodology/approach used
- Update of the context in Lira District
- Impact of NUSP project on conflict dynamics and of the conflict dynamics on the project
- Conclusion

2. Overview of methodology/approach used

As emphasised in previous reports, the NUSP project is a small and locally focused project, and as such has a relatively limited impact upon the conflict dynamics. This study is consequently small in scope and does not pretend to provide a detailed analysis of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict or the violence caused by Karamojong cattle rustling activities in Lira District.

The methodology used throughout this process is based on Sida's conflict analysis approach³, focusing on an analysis of Lira District with specific reference to Otuke County, and identifying the issues causing division or tensions, as well as those that connect people or can contribute to peace. These issues have then been considered in the context of the shea nut project.

The evaluation process consisted of three components:

- 1) Updating the conflict analysis for Lira District;
- 2) Noting significant changes to, or developments in the project;
- 3) Exploring in more depth the relationship between the project and the context in Lira District, including reviewing the relevance and impact of the recommendations made in the initial peace and conflict analysis report.

Some desk-based research and collation of recent research reports were completed to provide an update of the context (particularly the current peace talks between the LRA and the Government of Uganda (GoU)). This was followed by in-country interviews, where questions were asked relating to the three components above. The categories of people interviewed were as follows:

- Local government officials in Lira, including those dealing with security and return
- International NGOs
- UN agencies
- Local civil society actors, particularly those working with women
- Project stakeholders, including staff from ALCODE, KMI/KFP, EPOPA and Rwot Ber
- Local leaders in the sub-counties of Otuke County

³ Division for Peace and Security through Development Cooperation, *Manual for Conflict Analysis*, Methods document, Sida, January 2006

In addition, the same consultant who was previously contracted to work with the women shea nut gatherers on improving their safety, went back for a review visit of the safety threats they face in the current context and to see whether they have been able to implement some of the recommendations that were suggested during her previous discussions with them.

The assessment team consisted of the following members: Hesta Groenewald (Conflict Prevention Adviser, Saferworld, lead consultant), Stephen Okello (Project Officer, CECORE), Sarah Preston (Project Officer, Saferworld), Hellen Alyek (Local Consultant, Lira Rural Women and Child Development Initiative), Julie Akello (Recording Secretary, Christian Children's Fund), and Sarah Dalrymple (Report Editor, Programme Assistant, Saferworld).

3. Update of the context in Lira

Since the August 2006 conflict and peace analysis update, there has been a significant improvement in the security situation in Lira District, due to the initiation of a new round of peace talks between the LRA and the GoU in Juba, facilitated by the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) and the signing of a (first and follow-up) ceasefire agreement. In the last six months no LRA activities have been reported in Lira District.⁴ Despite the fact that previous LRA-GoU peace talks have failed, there is now a general mood of optimism that peace has finally arrived and a very strong determination among people in the district to return to normal life.

During the assessment mission in November 2006, the return process was described as very good by government representatives, local leaders, NGOs and women's groups and there was a clear increase in farming activities, indicating an increased ability of people to move around outside the camps and cultivate their land. Estimates of the figures of return vary, depending on the criteria used, with local officials talking about an 80% return in southern parts of Lira and 20% in northern parts. UN OCHA figures estimate about 50% of people in the southern and central Lira sub-counties (Ogur, Apala, Barr, Aloji, Abako, Amugo) to have returned home,⁵ while return is much slower in the northern sub-counties (Aromo, Okwang, Adwari, Orum and Omoro).⁶ This variation in figures can be attributed to the trend of people leaving the camps temporarily to toil their land or access services, often returning to the camps at night to sleep or every few days. This has meant that different agencies have come up with different figures, depending on when camp populations are counted and on what they define as 'returned'. The overall trends, however, are clear – that return is happening, largely unassisted, and that return trends are slower in the northern parts of Lira District that are still fearful of the peace talks failing and of Karamojong attacks. The GoU is clearly keen for people to return and the minister for Relief and Disaster Preparedness said in October 2006⁷ that the camps should be closed down by 31 December 2006.

The patterns for the return process seem to be influenced by a number of factors:

⁴ Interview with camp information centre at Orum, Lira 09 November, 2006

⁵ UN OCHA Lira District Humanitarian Situation, October 2006

⁶ UN OCHA Lira Return Trend, 2006

⁷ New Vision, "Uganda: IDP camps close in December", 30 October 2006, available on <http://allafrica.com/stories/200610310143.html>

3.1 Security and protection

Despite a strong desire to return home, people's movements have understandably been responsive to the security situation. In areas considered to be safe, fields have been cultivated and new homes built. Areas that civilians feel are not safe enough have experienced the least amount of people returning and are therefore less cultivated.⁸ All camps can now be accessed by humanitarian agencies without military escorts⁹ and there are more agencies monitoring human rights issues. The following are particularly crucial security-related developments.

Karamojong cattle rustling

In Otuke County, particularly the sub-counties bordering Karamoja, Karamojong cattle rustlers have been identified as a serious security threat to the return process and have been reported to assault or kill people. The most recent phase of the GoU's exercise to forcibly disarm the Karamojong has led to an escalation in tensions as the Karamojong have begun to violently resist the army's disarmament activities. There is potential for insecurity to escalate due to Karamojong movement into Lira in search of water and pasture as the dry season approaches. Lira could also be affected if hostilities between the Karamojong and the GoU continue to intensify as a result of the disarmament exercise.

The GoU is attempting to deal with the Karamojong threat in Lira by reinforcing security along the internal border with Karamoja. They have established new Anti-Stock Theft Units (ASTUs) which are under the control of the police and have been deployed along the border with Karamoja in October/November 2006. The ASTUs were recruited largely from the Amuka militia and given police training (as reported in the December 2005 report). Many local people in Lira perceive these moves as a positive measure designed to protect them. Some also support forced disarmament and see this as a sign that the GoU is finally dealing with the problem. However, there appears to be a strong risk that this situation can lead to further insecurity.

Changes in security provision

Police are gradually replacing the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) as the main security providers. In Lira, police posts are being/have been established throughout the district down to the parish level and the number of staff employed has increased. This is a big change and people see this as a positive measure by the GoU to address their security needs. Many people we spoke to said that there are now 'enough police' and this seems to be boosting people's confidence to return. Some new police have been recruited from the Amuka militia, while others have been re-deployed from other areas. It appears that the Amuka members who have not been recruited into the ASTUs continue to exist as a separate militia under the command of the police (although there seems to be some confusion about the exact lines of reporting). Other Local Defence Units (LDUs) are under the command of the army. Clearly the command and control of these special armed forces, and the long-term plan in terms of whether and/or how they should be disarmed or reintegrated into the regular police and army, remain important issues in terms of effective and accountable security provision in the future.

Some abuses against civilians are apparently still happening, particularly sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). People's perceptions of the army and the police differ quite substantially from area to area and depending on gender and age groups. For example, camp authorities in Orum felt that the relationship between the civilians

⁸ Interview with camp information centre at Orum, Lira 09 November, 2006

⁹ UN OCHA, Lira District Humanitarian Situation, October 2006

and the military was improving¹⁰, but other interviewees felt that they still trusted the army less than they trusted the police. Women interviewees were worried in particular about the ASTUs, the LDUs, the police and the army, who seem to have been implicated in several cases of sexual assault, including on minors¹¹. In Orum and Okwang, interviewees reported feeling more positive about the police, referring to instances where soldiers or LDU members were punished and where cases of sexual violence had been reported. In Adwari the situation still seems to be more difficult, with interviewees seeing the LDUs and ASTUs not co-ordinating well and many abuses taking place (although it was suggested that some of the cases are consensual relationships rather than abuse). People in Olilim are most affected by the Karamojong violence (as they border the area) and felt somewhat reassured by the presence of the ASTUs.¹²

Landmines and unexploded ordnance

One of the issues people mentioned in Otuke County in particular that was impeding return was fear of landmines, unexploded ordnance and ammunition caches. UNDP are currently doing some work with the UPDF and former LRA combatants to identify ammunition stockpiles, landmines, etc and to begin clearance. However, focus group discussions revealed that people are unaware of which areas are safe. There seems to be a need for basic awareness-raising on identifying unexploded ordnance and landmines, the danger and appropriate handling of these materials, and information about which areas should be avoided. This could help facilitate the return process.

3.2. Perceptions of safety and security

Many people - whether victims or witnesses of the violence during the LRA conflict - have not fully recovered from the trauma they have lived through. Their fear of renewed violence by the LRA, particularly if the peace talks were to fail again, still makes them hesitant to return permanently. In some cases, this perception of insecurity may not reflect reality on the ground, but this is likely to continue informing people's behaviour and decisions until peace has really taken root.

3.3 Undecided people and the Juba peace talks

Uncertainty about the future influences people's decisions to return, with most people closely following the Juba peace process and waiting for a comprehensive peace agreement to be signed before deciding on definite return.¹³ This has left many people uncertain about whether or not to return. Some elderly people – particularly widows - are reluctant to return because they still feel vulnerable in the current situation and because of the physical challenges they would face when rebuilding their homes and re-establishing their fields. Some of the young people are uncertain about schools, livelihood options or prefer the 'town life' they've grown accustomed to in the camps. Many people feel that they will return home once they get positive news from those who have taken the initiative to go back.

3.4. Distance

Distance was identified as another factor affecting the return process. Those living in camps further from their homes tend to go and rehabilitate their homes and cultivate their gardens during the day and come back to the camps to sleep. Few of these

¹⁰ Interview with camp information centre at Orum, Lira 09 November, 2006

¹¹ Referred to as 'defilement' in the Ugandan legal system

¹² Also see section on women's safety and gender-based violence later in this report.

¹³ Interview with camp information centre at Orum, Lira 09 November, 2006

have actually gone back permanently. Those whose homes are nearer the camps seem to have resettled permanently, but continue to access services provided in the camps like clinics, schools and water.

3.5. Humanitarian assistance and social services

Key to the return process are the levels of humanitarian support people still receive and the access they have – both currently and when they return – to social services such as health, education and water delivery.

Food security

WFP is scaling down food distribution. In camps where WFP has scaled down food delivery, more people are reportedly returning home to cultivate fields for food. Return camps receive a one-off 3-month return and resettlement ration plus seeds and/or tools. All other camps receive a 50% food aid ration. According to the Action Against Hunger (ACF-USA) land access survey conducted in Lira and Gulu, IDPs in Lira are accessing an average of about 3.7 acres of land. Most of the land accessed is their own land, but a limited number of households also hire land for cultivation.¹⁴ There still seem to be many people who feel that they will need more support in terms of seeds and tools for them to return successfully. It does not appear as if the full return packages promised by the GoU have been distributed, although there are reports of some tools (particularly hoes and saucepans) having been received either from the GoU or from NGOs.

Access to water

Access to safe water in the camps and returned areas is low. Queuing time at boreholes in the northern camps is more than one hour on average. Boreholes located within the camps are within acceptable distances from households. Other sources of safe water include shallow wells and protected springs. Currently, more than 70% of water sources are installed/ rehabilitated by NGOs.

In order to support the return process, the water and sanitation sector has identified the following priorities for 2006 to 2007:

- Focus on parishes of return instead of camps.
- Address the needs of 80% of returnees and supply 20 litres of water per person.
- Every school to have a borehole.
- Digging kits for every return community.
- Provision of tools and slabs for schools to build latrines (40 pupils per stance)¹⁵.

Education

By early 2006, 18 Urban Learning Centres in Lira had been closed as the displaced schools returned to their original sites - over 85% of formerly displaced primary schools have now returned to their original sites in the district. In Otuke County however, there is a much lower rate of return of only 15 out of the 45 schools.¹⁶ In areas where schools have returned, major challenges remain. Teachers, parents and pupils in Otuke County have highlighted the following: low participation of communities in clearing up the school compound; low attendance rates; lack of scholastic materials; inadequate school infrastructure, which was destroyed during

¹⁴ UN OCHA, Lira District Humanitarian Situation, October 2006

¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶ *Ibid*

the war (teachers' houses, classrooms, pit latrines, furniture).¹⁷ There are also complaints from local communities that NGOs have done needs assessments which were not followed up or where assistance was inappropriate. It is unclear whether this perception is based on unrealistic community expectations or poor project management on the part of the NGOs mentioned.

Health

Overall access to health services remains low, with some health centres not functioning at all while others are only open on certain days. Efforts have been made to create and train village health teams, but as this is a voluntary activity, rates of absenteeism are high. The health clinics that are open and fully staffed, have most of the necessary drugs available, but they do not cover the entire district. The district health authorities are stepping up health provision, with support from international agencies like UNICEF, MSF-Holland, UPHOLD and Christian Children's Fund (CCF).¹⁸ However, health provision will clearly remain a challenge as people return and become more removed from central health clinics.

4. Important developments in the project over the past year

The first peace and conflict analysis of the NUSP project started in November 2005, exactly a year before the evaluation assessment mission. It is therefore useful to highlight a few of the key project developments so that the interaction between the project and the conflict dynamics can be better analysed.

4.1. The registration of Rwot Ber as an official NGO

Over the course of the project, it has become clear that Rwot Ber would benefit hugely from formalising their registration with the district as an official non-governmental organisation (NGO). This not only puts them on record as operating in Lira – thus facilitating co-operation with local authorities – but it also makes it easier for outside organisations or donors to support them. This process has been set in motion and led quite strongly by the Field Supervisor (who is employed by ALCODE but working for the project as a whole), and some of the Rwot Ber leaders in Lira and Otuke. During the course of the registration process and the writing of a constitution for Rwot Ber, some differences apparently emerged about the geographical scope and name of the organisation. It was argued that, since the area certified as organic for the purpose of the project was Otuke County, the registered NGO should reflect this. However, a complete name change for Rwot Ber would create challenges for the project, as all documentation to date has been in this name. In addition, such a registration would exclude certain members of the existing Rwot Ber (including some of the founders of the association), who are not currently living in Otuke County. This issue has proved to be quite divisive and during the assessment visit, it became clear that communication about the process has been poor, giving rise to suspicions that the Field Supervisor and one of the Otuke County field officers are pursuing their own agenda. Rwot Ber has therefore agreed to have a meeting with its members to sort out the issue and get everybody on board for registering the organisation and determining the leadership.

This whole development indicates two challenges for the project:

¹⁷ *Ibid*, and interviews with local leaders and Rwot Ber members from Orum, Olilim, Adwari and Okwang, November 2006.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p 2

- The difficulties of communication within such a large and geographically spread out association as Rwot Ber, particularly when engaging in the fairly complicated process of finalising a constitution and going through formal registration.
- The improved security situation also means that the potential benefits from the project and from membership of associations like Rwot Ber are increasing. This is clearly positive. However, it also means that issues of who controls the association and the project, and how much different people benefit from it, are becoming increasingly important.

4.2. Expanding the membership of Rwot Ber to include men

Although Rwot Ber is a women's association, a few male members have been allowed to join. Reasons given for this include:

- Some of the husbands of the women members were very interested in the project and wanted to be part of it and provide support to it as well
- Some of the husbands of the women members feel less distrustful of their wives' movements (particularly when collecting shea nuts in the early morning hours) when they are involved in the project and can see for themselves what their wives are doing
- It is sometimes very useful to involve men in the shea gathering activities as they can help to carry the heavy bags of shea nuts and can provide some measure of protection to the women shea nut gatherers

In addition, it seems that it is normal practice for women's groups or associations in Uganda to include some male members, although usually in a minority.

This issue generated a lot of discussion in the focus groups, and the women seemed to be divided on whether men should be allowed to join as members or not. What they all seemed to agree on, however, is that if men are allowed to join (the current constitution of Rwot Ber defines a ceiling of 20% male membership), they should remain in the minority and should not be allowed to take over the leadership of the organisation. This could very well be the best way forward in terms of ensuring the support of the men in the community for the project, while safeguarding the benefits the women are deriving from working together as a group. This issue will have to be discussed when the registration issue is addressed so that it can be specified in the Rwot Ber constitution.

4.3. Market opportunities for the shea nuts

Despite a lot of effort having gone into this, the overseas market for the shea butter has not yet taken off. There are some potential opportunities emerging, but it seems unclear exactly how long it will take for the first big order to come in. In the meantime, some smaller orders have come to ALCODE from Kampala and Kenya, and the local market for the shea butter still exists. This has been frustrating for both Rwot Ber members and ALCODE staff, as the income they've expected has not yet materialised. As a result, some ALCODE staff are taking on other employment in order to get an income, although they have remained committed to the NUSP project and continue to work on this in their spare time. This will probably change once bigger orders come in.

In addition, there seems to have been some miscommunication about what this has meant for the Rwot Ber members, who seemed to think that they were not supposed to sell any of their nuts locally, as they were waiting for ALCODE to come and buy

everything. This has been a difficult situation for them, as they felt that they were taking substantial risks to collect the nuts, yet were then not able to sell them and were afraid that they may rot in the stores. Also, some of them had to start selling the nuts in order to pay for school fees and other immediate expenses. During the assessment trip, the EPOPA staff were able to address this issue and encourage the women collectors to also sell to other buyers while ALCODE and KMI/KFP were still developing the markets.

In addition, the project partners (especially the women shea nut gatherers) clearly have ideas for other products that they can make from the shea nuts, such as soaps, and are keen to have their own processing machine at the county or sub-county level so that they can process the nuts locally and perhaps sell them in small pots – as ALCODE has started doing. They would probably require support in order to do this in terms of funds to acquire the press and skills training on soap-making or similar activities. It also seems as if there may be other potential clients for the women as there are two other businesses also buying organic shea nuts in the area, and since the women's organic certificates are in their own names, they could potentially sell to these other clients too.

4.4. Communication between Rwot Ber and ALCODE

Apart from their regular contact with the Field Supervisor and the Assistant Field Supervisor, it seems that many Rwot Ber members feel they do not get enough project updates and information from ALCODE. In particular, many of them have never met ALCODE's director and felt that this is important in order for them to continue working together successfully.

5. Impact of the NUSP project on peace and conflict dynamics and of these dynamics on the project

As previously noted, the NUSP project seems to have a mostly positive impact on the project stakeholders and their communities. One of the strongest positive characteristics of the project is the fact that it is totally owned by local people, a factor that has great potential for helping project stakeholders strengthen social capital that was so badly damaged by the conflict and creating livelihood options to help their post-conflict recovery. Another very positive element is EPOPA's willingness to continue adding to the project in order to generate the maximum benefit (within the limitations of the project funding) for the stakeholders, by responding to relevant requests from stakeholders, eg relating to HIV/AIDS awareness-raising or the development of new shea nut products that can be sold to other clients as well. This flexibility is crucial in unpredictable conflict-affected environments and also helps to support Rwot Ber members to develop their ideas and implement them with a growing level of confidence.

The original peace and conflict analysis report highlighted a number of potential impacts of the conflict dynamics on the NUSP project and of the project on the conflict dynamics, and made a number of recommendations for how the project could capitalise on its potential positive impacts and mitigate some of the potentially negative ones. These potential areas of impact and the project-related recommendations for each of them are reviewed below.

5.1 The greatest violent conflict risk of the project is related to the safety of the women while collecting nuts¹⁹

The safety of the women shea nut collectors remains a key concern for the project, although the level of risk they face has decreased and the causes for them being at risk have slightly shifted. Since the start of the Juba peace talks, the women have not been threatened by LRA attacks and no longer need to use escorts when they go out to collect nuts. However, the increase in Karamojong attacks in the middle of the year – and the fear that these may increase again as the next dry season takes off – remains a concern, particularly for Orum and Olilim sub-counties. The recently deployed ASTUs and re-positioned UPDF units are intended to address this threat and only time will tell how successful they will be.

The women are therefore currently free to collect shea nuts whenever they choose. This tends to be during the early morning hours, when it is still dark, because the shea nuts drop to the ground during the night and whoever gets to them early enough, will get the best and the most. This puts the women at risk, particularly as shea trees have quite dense leaves, which makes it even darker underneath the trees where they are collecting. Although they have been encouraged to wait until dawn before doing out, the women collectors seem very reluctant to do so, probably because of the existing competition for the nuts and their determination to continue this economic activity. They have however, taken some measures to improve their safety:

- They now travel in groups and stay together. If they are travelling by bicycle and one of them gets a flat tyre, they would all stop and walk with that person so as not to abandon her alone.
- They try to take along torches, if they have any, and Hellen encouraged them to use the income from the project to buy more if they need to.
- They have also asked for some self-defence classes in order to be in a better position to defend themselves when cornered by an assailant.
- They seem to feel more prepared to discuss these issues with each other and with somebody like Hellen, and to seek solutions together.
- In some cases, some of the husbands or other male community members who are supportive of the project accompany the women and even assist in the collection. This could help increase the women's safety.

Apart from direct attack by the cattle rustlers, the most serious threat to the women's safety is SGBV - a threat apparently emanating not only from armed individuals, such as Amuka militia members, police, army soldiers and ASTU members, but also from ordinary men from their own communities. This issue remains a serious challenge and highlights a shift from threats directly related to armed violence to threats that may remain in post-conflict communities in the area. According to many interviewees, this high risk of SGBV is to a large extent due to the camp situation, where normal moral codes and traditions have been seriously undermined, and where a big increase in alcohol use (particularly among men, but also among women) has severely aggravated the problem. In addition, from the anecdotes told by the women shea nut gatherers, it is clear that the lines sometimes blur between sexual violence and rape on the one hand, and breakdown of relationships (women becoming involved in extra-marital affairs) or economic sexual exploitation (mothers 'selling'

¹⁹ This section is based on the work that has been done by the consultant, Hellen Alyek, with the women shea nut collectors. Feedback from them indicated that they found it extremely useful to have had discussions with Hellen, to devise some solutions to their safety problems and to have somebody assist them in discussing these sensitive issues.

their daughters to soldiers, or women engaging in paid sex). This seems to again relate very strongly to the camp situation and the desperate poverty people face. Furthermore, given the culture of sensitivity surrounding these issues, it will remain challenging to address the very real problems affecting women across the board, including sexual violence, domestic violence, sexual economic exploitation and the consequences of these problems, eg HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and rejection by their communities. Hopefully the return process and the increased presence of specialised women and family units in the police will help to address this issue.

It is important to note, however, that should the peace talks fail and the LRA take up its activities again, the entire situation could again be reversed and the women's security situation would have to be re-assessed.

Recommendations for the project

The initial recommendations for the project included two that relate directly to this issue, discussed below.

5.1.1 Continue monitoring the safety of the women shea nut gatherers and the impact of the project to make sure the benefits outweigh the risks

This recommendation was addressed through the implementation of more vigorous monitoring of the security situation (eg by obtaining the UN's security reports) and by making sure that project staff are kept up to date on these. The involvement of the consultant, Hellen Alyek, also contributed to monitoring the safety of the gatherers, but as she was part of the assessment team rather than the project team, her involvement has not yet become part of the normal running of the project. There is therefore still a need to assign responsibility to somebody within the project (within Rwot Ber, ALCODE or EPOPA) who could ensure that the gatherers' safety is monitored on a regular basis as the project continues. Clearly if the peace talks succeed and the Karamojong violence is contained, this function would focus more on the general risks of SGBV they face. This could include, for instance, supporting Rwot Ber field officers to establish good contacts with the new police stations, particularly their family units (which, according to the district authorities, every police post will now get) to help them report abuses and seek support. It could also include supporting somebody like Hellen to stay in touch with the gatherers so that they have an opportunity to discuss these issues with somebody they know and trust. Hellen can then provide feedback to relevant project staff on ways to increase the women's safety. The project could also link up with other initiatives (whether NGOs, local leaders or police etc), that work on SGBV issues. The project could also continue to support the gatherers to take all possible precautions, including, for example, buying torches or bicycles. Even if the project cannot provide these items, the women should be encouraged to buy them from the earnings they make from selling the shea nuts.

However, if either the LRA or the Karamojong threat escalates, there would be need for more rigorous monitoring of the safety of the gatherers again, building on the experience gained through this process. It will be important to consider again to what extent the project is putting the women at risk and whether the benefits still outweigh the risks – and to put the opinions and perspectives of those most at risk at the centre of the analysis and decision-making.

5.1.2. Improve the safety of the women shea nut gatherers by supporting them to take all possible precautions and reducing their vulnerability to demands from armed escorts

As the gatherers no longer need to travel with armed escorts, this part of the recommendation no longer applies. However, the rest of the recommendation, for example the safety of the gatherers, is still very relevant, particularly with regards to SGBV, and is covered under 5.1.1. above.

5.2 The return process can have a positive or negative impact on the project

Rwot Ber's field groups have always been set up around parishes, and as the women collectors and their families start to return, these are still in tact. However, there appear to be some tensions emerging between those members who are returning to their home villages and those who are still remaining in the camps or towns. This partly relates to the practical difficulties of co-ordinating Rwot Ber and its work if the members are divided between the towns and the rural villages. But this division also relates to the current discussion within Rwot Ber about its registration and who its leaders are. Some members of the group seem to feel that the leaders of Rwot Ber should be based in Otuke County, not in Lira town. The update conflict and peace analysis report highlighted that "(t)hose who fled to towns are sometimes stigmatised as being 'cowards' who got richer from the conflict"²⁰ or who did not suffer in the same way as those who stayed behind. This perception may also influence the current divisions.

The update peace and conflict analysis report also raised the following as potential difficulties that may affect the return process, and influence the project as they determine the social environment that the project stakeholders operate in:

- Some youth have been urbanised and will not want to return to the villages. Many parents have lost control over their children and do not know how they will deal with this problem.
- Once people start cultivating more food in the villages, although it is felt that they will not be able to produce more than subsistence level, they fear that the renewed food production might act as a 'pull factor' to the remaining rebels and the Karamajong.
- Some women do not want to return with their husbands to the villages. There has been an increase in 'diversity and different thinking' during the conflict years and some women do not want to return to the 'old ways'.
- Possible stigma attached to returnees.

The return process will have implications for access and rights to land, including the shea trees. People in Lira have fortunately not been displaced as long as in parts of Acholi, meaning that in most cases, elders would still be in a position to indicate the boundaries of land.

Before the conflict, the accepted custom was that anybody could collect nuts from trees that were on communal land, but when a tree was situated on a farmed area, it belonged to the owner of the farm. During the conflict, people were able to collect from any tree, as there was no land being farmed.

However, there is the risk that, as people return to, and resettle their ancestral land, arguments could arise regarding the access to, and ownership of land, including

²⁰ Saferworld and CECORE, August 2006, p 6.

shea trees. Some people are already more protective of trees on their land, and see them as private rather than communal property. Now that security has improved, there is greater access to the shea trees, and many returnees who have no alternative sources of income, are reportedly cutting trees for charcoal.

This trend could accelerate even further if the trees become increasingly scarce due to cutting, or if their value increases due to the impact of the project and the higher price available for shea butter. On the one hand, this could be a positive trend that would help protect trees from being cut. On the other hand, it could lead to disputes between those who are cutting trees for charcoal and those who want to protect them and use the nuts, and disputes over access to trees or the land they are on by the gatherers.

As people return, it will become clearer which trees are still accessible to everybody and what this means for the shea nut gatherers and the NUSP.

The office of the District Internal Security Officer (DISO) has been encouraging civil society, including elders, religious and cultural leaders, to mobilise themselves to handle any land disputes that may arise. This is important in order to prevent the return process from creating new divisions.

Recommendation for the project

No specific recommendations were previously made for the return process. However, given that this is now truly underway, it is crucial for the project to support Rwot Ber to properly discuss and resolve the issues currently dividing them so that the return process does not aggravate these divisions. It is also important for the project to monitor how the return process is impacting on the lives of project stakeholders and their ability to participate in the project (in terms of their safety, but also issues like access to shea trees, other livelihood opportunities that may be emerging, difficulties for them to access social services etc).

5.3 By stimulating some positive economic activity, the project can contribute towards addressing the perception and reality of marginalisation

The direct economic benefits from engaging in the project have not yet significantly materialised, due to the slow development of the markets. However, the women are able to sell the nuts they are gathering to other buyers and are likely to increase this activity now that the misunderstanding has been cleared up about them only selling to ALCODE. As peace takes root in Otuke County, the women should be increasingly in a position to obtain a regular income from their shea nut products (including the new ones they want to develop). The nurseries that the project has supported – although some have been more useful and successful than others – also have great potential to earn income for those managing it, as they should be able to sell the seedlings produced to other projects or local communities at some point in the near future. The return process is likely to provide increased opportunities for this, as much more attention is expected to be paid to rehabilitating the environment and restoring agricultural activity.

The project therefore remains a key opportunity for the women to return to normal life, and help get their families out of poverty, pay school fees and start recovering from the effects of the conflict.

Recommendation for the project

The broader issues of strengthening the skills and social capital of the women shea nut gatherers are addressed in 5.4 below. To ensure that the project extends beyond

income generation to empower the women economically, the project should support the stakeholders (particularly the gatherers) to maximise the economic benefits they can derive from the project by, for instance, providing them with training on budget and business skills.

5.4 Forming groups or associations of women in conflict zones can generate important building blocks for peace and the potential for social recovery from conflict

The strongest positive impact of the NUSP project has been the support that it has provided to the women shea nut gatherers to organise themselves, work together and develop their capacity, knowledge, and real life skills - which have given them some hope during the conflict and that will help them recover and improve their lives after the conflict. This approach has generated a variety of additional benefits. The women seem to be very supportive of each other and have started to share their problems with each other – as evidenced by their reaction to the work that the consultant did with them on their safety. In addition, they seem to have been able to create quite a tolerant and open culture within the association. Evidence of this is that the 2006 elections did not cause any disruption in the group despite them voting for different parties; and that the discussions about the registration of Rwot Ber (as observed during the assessment mission) – even though this is clearly a very divisive issue – have seemed to allow for everybody to speak their minds and to be listened to. The discussion about the registration process, if handled well, could also be a good opportunity for the Rwot Ber members to learn about the process and other organisational matters, such as the constitution, the election of the leadership etc. This is very positive in terms of the long-term success of the organisation and the project, but is also crucial in terms of strengthening the social capital of the gatherers.

The renting of the stores where the nuts can be stored until ALCODE buys them is another useful tool in strengthening the organisation and networking of the gatherers. The NUSP has made it clear that the stores can also be used as a meeting or office space, and this creates a useful space for the gatherers to meet for whatever purpose they choose.

This component of the project therefore seems to have developed well and should certainly be supported to continue in the same way.

Recommendations for the project

A previous recommendation was made relating to this issue and to 5.3 above:

5.4.1 Continue strengthening social capital and the skills of the women in both livelihood and social matters

This recommendation has been implemented to some extent through the additional support given on training about organic agriculture, storing of the nuts, tree planting and the tree nurseries. A workshop on HIV/AIDS, including components on domestic violence and SGBV, was conducted at the end of November 2006, as previously recommended. These efforts should be continued and the project should – as far as is practically possible – continue to support the women shea nut gatherers on these and other issues that may emerge. It does not seem as if the livelihood/economic side of the recommendation has been followed up on to date, and this still needs to be addressed in order for the gatherers to attain maximum benefit from their group work. This is particularly important in relation to the safety of their savings, i.e. that they should not become victim to others stealing their income. During the assessment mission, some gatherers mentioned that people in their communities

think that they are better off now, while they have not really earned much money yet from the project.

5.4.2. Support project staff and women shea nut gatherers to maintain good relationships with those outside of the project

Equally important is the relationship between the gatherers and those in their broader community. It seems inevitable that there will be some measure of jealousy particularly between the Rwot Ber members and other women not part of the project. The danger would be if such jealousies give rise to violence or to violence-generating divisions in their communities. It is worth monitoring how these dynamics develop as the women's incomes increase. Registering Rwot Ber is one way of ensuring collaboration with and support from district authorities and should also assist other organisations to support them in future. Allowing men as (minority) members in the association also seems to be important in some cases to retain their support, but it is crucial that this should not undermine the clear benefits of empowering the women to organise themselves and support each other.

5.5. Women working together across political affiliations can significantly contribute to peace and change the nature of local politics

This impact is very closely linked to the issues discussed in 5.4 above in terms of how the women shea nut gatherers are able to work across political affiliations. However, it is not really clear whether this has had a wider social impact yet or changed the nature of local politics. It certainly seemed as if the elections in 2006 did not cause significant violence and it will be worth monitoring how political opinions change as peace takes root – or indeed what will happen if conflict returns. Lira District voted overwhelmingly in favour of the opposition in both the presidential and parliamentary polls, and opinions about who to back politically will certainly be influenced by whether the peace process succeeds or not.

5.6. Protecting the shea nut trees

In the initial report, three findings related to the use and protection of the shea trees, namely:

- Through the project, the UPDF's role in cutting down shea trees can be better managed.
- The shea nut trees are used for different purposes by different people, including the rebels, increasing competition for the nuts.
- Efforts need to be put in place to conserve the shea trees and explain their long-term use to people.

In the current context, the UPDF is no longer chopping down trees for the purpose of security. However, individual UPDF soldiers, just as people from across the spectrum living in the area, are still involved in chopping down the trees in order to sell them as charcoal. Despite the return process and the increase in security, poverty in Lira District – and in Otuke County in particular – is still pervasive and selling shea tree charcoal is still a quick option for generating some income.

Recommendations for the project

The following recommendation was made in the previous report:

5.6.1. Support awareness-raising campaigns about the value of the shea trees and the need for planting more

This recommendation has been implemented and is set to continue. The Rwot Ber members have done some work on raising awareness of the value of the trees within their communities, including collaborating with local leaders (who now try to actively monitor protection of the trees) and by letting people know if there is a dead tree that they can collect wood from. The NUSP is also about to print some posters about the importance of protecting the trees and other actors, such as the district authorities (this issue was mentioned in particular by the DISO), and UNDP are also aware of its importance. This work needs to continue, as the felling of shea nut trees is clearly a widespread practice.

The establishment of the nurseries and tree planting activities further supports the protection of the shea trees and can contribute to limiting the damage being done to the shea tree population in Lira.

5.7. The expectations of the women and their families need to be managed realistically

This issue ties in with the dire circumstances the project stakeholders have been living in as a consequence of the conflict, but also communication and transparency within the NUSP project. Regular updates and clear channels of communication should help the women shea nut gatherers to know what stage the export market development is at, what they can expect in terms of an income and what other members of the project are gaining (or not) from the process.

Recommendations for the project

The following recommendations relate to this issue:

5.7.1. The project should promote transparency and constant sharing of information about the shea oil exporting business

The NUSP project has made quite a bit of effort to enhance the communication within the project, including encouraging regular contact between KMI/KFP, ALCODE and Rwot Ber field officers. This seems to have had a good impact, and it also seems crucial to continue promoting this as the project progresses, particularly if the markets take off and more income flows to the project stakeholders. The divisive Rwot Ber registration discussion provides an example of how increased power and/or resources can put organisations under strain, and the same could happen if the rest of the project development is not handled in a transparent and accountable way. Rwot Ber and ALCODE agreed, during the assessment mission, to participate in a meeting to discuss communication issues between them. It is important that this meeting takes place and that it is attended by the relevant senior managers and leaders to ensure high level buy-in.

5.8. Contribute to creating a culture of accountability among project stakeholders and towards those not involved in the project

This was the final recommendation made in the original project assessment. It is a cross-cutting issue, encompassing the relationships among project stakeholders, but also between them and those external to the project. One of the issues consistently generating conflict in Uganda – including in Lira – is the perception or reality of unequal distribution of resources and unaccountable leadership. The NUSP could, contribute to creating a culture of accountability among project stakeholders and with

external actors, by ensuring that project decisions are transparent and justified, that project income is shared in a fair and transparent way, and that people in positions of power (relative to the project, eg the Field Supervisor or Rwot Ber leaders) are held accountable by those whose interests they represent.

6. Conclusion

Overall, the evaluation reinforced the assessment team's previous findings that the NUSP is having a small but generally positive impact in Lira District.

The greatest challenge the project has faced, has been the ongoing conflict that affected Otuke County. Now that the LRA threat is receding, the main challenge is the unpredictability of the LRA/GoU peace talks and of the likely levels of violence that Karamojong cattle rustlers can perpetrate in Otuke County. The context is set to remain fluid until these issues are resolved, and as people return fully or partially to their homes. The project will have to continue therefore to monitor particularly levels of violence, but also the general social and economic situation facing the project stakeholders, as this will influence the project.

A particular challenge for the project has been the safety of the women shea nut gatherers and to what extent the project was putting them at risk. The work undertaken in the past year to increase their safety, help them to take all possible precautions and support them to discuss these issues with each other and with professionals who could help them, has helped to mitigate this risk. As the security situation improves, this issue is transforming into one of general vulnerability to SGBV rather than one relating to the armed conflict only. Helping the gatherers to address these issues has to remain a key concern for the project to help them rebuild their lives post-conflict.

Some potential local-level conflicts may emerge as a result of the return process, such as land disputes or disputes over the ownership of and access to some of the shea trees. The project will have to remain mindful of these issues and support project stakeholders to help resolve them, together with the local leaders and other community members who are already supportive of the project. The issue of stopping the cutting of shea trees for charcoal and supporting tree planting is tied very closely to this.

At the same time, the project has started – and has the potential to continue - making a positive contribution to peacebuilding in the North. The project has already provided women with an income-generating activity that will likely have positive benefits for the whole family – and contribute in a small way to recovery in the North. The project has also started to strengthen social networks and build the skills of the women (through the women's association) that will help them cope with difficult circumstances and deal with issues affecting women, including domestic violence and HIV/AIDS. At the moment, the main obstacle to realising these benefits is developing an international export market for the shea butter. If this doesn't happen, there is a risk that the project will have raised the expectations of the gatherers who suffer from such extreme poverty, and consequently, to whom the success of the project is very important. But, already there are efforts to address this issue by encouraging the women to find more local markets for their nuts and expand their products.

The project can also contribute in a small way to creating a culture of accountability among project stakeholders and between them and external actors in their communities. This is important in starting to turn around some of the key drivers of

conflict in the North as well as the rest of the country, namely perceptions and reality of unaccountable leadership.

In more general terms, the NUSP illustrates the difficulties of implementing development projects in conflict-affected contexts and highlights some of the key issues that often emerge in these situations. Firstly, the end of political violence can often give birth to, or create the conditions for an increase in SGBV. As SGBV is not considered a mainstream political conflict, it is likely to be given less attention than other post conflict issues, and is often left to be dealt with as a purely 'social' issue. It is however, imperative that donors, police and government address SGBV as a priority post-conflict issue.

Secondly, the displacement of people as a result of political violence often creates the conditions for renewed communal conflicts around land to arise. It is essential that attention is given to this issue, and that steps are taken to mitigate the risk of local conflicts around land emerging, such as establishing conflict management committees made up of the government, police and community members.

Thirdly, particularly in Horn of Africa countries, resolving the issue of cattle raiding and pastoralist needs remains fundamental to addressing violent conflict and ensuring that the impact of development projects on conflict is positive.

In terms of security provision, the police play an important role in post-conflict societies, reclaiming their place in protecting the rule of law and providing safety and security alongside the military. To ensure that the police can effectively manage new emerging conflict issues like land disputes, SGBV and continuing violence from cattle rustling, it needs to adopt a community-based or democratic policing approach. At the same time local militias or defence units, often created as additional security providers during conflict, need to be brought under control and given alternative livelihood options. Experience across the globe has shown that, if not addressed, these groups often become generators of further violence after the political conflicts have ended.

Overall, supporting development programmes in conflict-affected contexts can have strong benefits, but can also face serious challenges. Ongoing violence puts staff and beneficiaries at risk, complicates programme planning and timing, and necessitates a high level of flexibility to adapt to conditions on the ground. In addition, any benefits from the project become exponentially more important due to the poverty and suffering conflict-affected people are already subjected to, requiring careful management and a lot of support. For the same reason, managing expectations can be quite challenging, and being aware of existing and shifting power dynamics – and how this relates to both the conflict drivers and the programme – is crucial. Although the space for implementing development programmes is very limited in conflict-affected contexts, with careful management, some clear benefits are possible. The difficulty lies in weighing up these benefits against any potential increase in risk to programme beneficiaries or unintended aggravation of conflict drivers. And that will remain the key challenge.

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