

# A LIFE OF FEAR AND FLIGHT

The Legacy of LRA Brutality in North-East  
Democratic Republic of the Congo



We fled Gilima in 2009, as the LRA started attacking there. From there we fled to Bangadi, but we were confronted with the same problem, as the LRA was attacking us. We fled from there to Niangara. Because of insecurity we fled to Baga. In an attack there, two of my children were killed, and one was kidnapped. He is still gone. Two family members of my husband were killed. We then fled to Dungu, where we arrived in July 2010.

On the way, we were abused too much by the soldiers. We were abused because the child of my brother does not understand Lingala, only Bazande. They were therefore claiming we were LRA spies! We had to pay too much for this. We lost most of our possessions.

Once in Dungu, we were first sleeping under a tree. Then someone offered his hut. It was too small with all the kids, we slept with twelve in one hut. We then got another offer, to sleep in a house at a church. The house was, however, collapsing and the owner chased us. He did not want us there. We then heard that some displaced had started a camp, and that we could get a plot there. When we had settled there, it turned out we had settled outside of the borders of the camp, and we were forced to leave. All the time, we could not dig and we had no access to food. We then found this site, where we have been staying ever since.

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The following report is commissioned by UNHCR & IDMC/NRC, and is based on field research conducted by Kristof Titeca (lead researcher) and Koen Vlassenroot from the Justice & Security Research Programme/Conflict Research Group, and Melanie Wissing (IDMC).

Cover photo: A woman telling the story of LRA's latest attacks in her village in Dungu territory, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). UNHCR/M. Hofer, March 2012

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In what amounts to one of the world's largest and longest-running displacement crises, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has displaced as many as 2.5 million people, either internally or across borders, in Uganda, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Central African Republic (CAR) over the last 30 years (UN SG, May 2013; IDMC, 2013). DRC's north-eastern Orientale province currently hosts the highest number, with an estimated 320,000 internally displaced people (IDPs).

This report aims to set the displacement caused by LRA within the broader context and operating environment in Orientale province, and to highlight the specific vulnerabilities of the populations affected by its violence. It also focuses on the challenges in terms of response, particularly in relation to long-term displacement and prospects for return and local integration.

LRA violence in the districts of Haut and Bas-Uélé has decreased in recent years, but the displacement caused by previous attacks and the fear of new ones remain high. There are similarities with displacement patterns elsewhere in DRC, including repeated and protracted displacement, but the history of LRA violence in Orientale province has created far higher levels of fear and psychosocial trauma than in other areas. This in turn appears to have led to the greater reluctance observed in the province's IDPs to return to their places of origin, or even to travel outside their places of refuge to farm land for food, despite the widespread food insecurity they suffer. This creates particular challenges in terms of response, especially in the long-term, and as displacement becomes more protracted new challenges will arise in IDPs' search for durable solutions. The underlying poverty and the limited provision of public services throughout the province are also a key challenge. They affect both host and displaced communities, and put considerable pressure on extremely scarce resources in areas with high influxes of IDPs. These pressures grow as displacement continues, particularly if the issues around IDPs' access to land and livelihoods are not properly addressed.

Displacement within Orientale province and arrivals from neighbouring provinces and countries have increased pressure on already scarce resources. As elsewhere in DRC, a lack of infrastructure and government capacity has hampered the provision of security and the delivery of an effective humanitarian response. IDPs face particular difficulty in accessing health care, education and land, in part the result of financial constraints but also because

of tensions with local communities over resources. Displacement tends to be protracted. More than 55 per cent of current IDPs have been displaced since 2008 or 2009 (IDMC interview Dungu, July 2013, figures on file with IDMC). Many have been displaced more than once, but accurate data on multiple displacement is limited.

Humanitarian aid has to date helped to ease some of those pressures, benefitting local populations as well as IDPs. There is a real risk that as LRA violence reduces, humanitarian assistance will continue to reduce with little engagement from state or development actors to fill the gap. The decrease in LRA violence must not be seen as an indication that those affected have fewer needs. Rather, long-term assistance must be tailored to meet the extensive needs of IDPs, former abductees and their hosts, on both an individual and community level. Particular attention should be given to mental health issues and their implications for reintegration, with a view to supporting sustainable steps towards recovery and bringing the province's IDPs, former abductees and host communities together.

# OVERVIEW

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) took up arms against the government of Uganda in the 1980s under the leadership of Joseph Kony. As early as the 1990s, its attacks spread into what was then southern Sudan, taking Uganda's "war in the north" beyond national borders to become a regional threat (Schomerus, 2008). The group has become notorious for carrying out mass atrocities against civilians. It has attacked and looted villages; killed, maimed and kidnapped residents; and abducted children to serve as porters, sex slaves and soldiers. In 2005, the LRA established its headquarters in the Garamba national park in the DRC. A joint offensive launched by the armed forces of Uganda, DRC and southern Sudanese authorities, with US support, failed to wipe out the LRA leadership in 2008, and in retaliation the movement carried out a series of brutal attacks against local populations in north-eastern DRC. Since then, the LRA's modus operandi has changed. It has split up into smaller groups and targets civilians not only in DRC but also in neighbouring CAR and what is now South Sudan.

In what amounts to one of the world's largest and longest-running displacement crises, as many as 2.5 million people have been displaced by the LRA, either internally or across borders, in Uganda, South Sudan, DRC and CAR over the last 30 years (UN SG May 2013). As of June 2013, more than 440,000 people were believed to be living in displacement in the central African region as a result of LRA violence. Of these around 420,000 are IDPs, and 26,000 are refugees (OCHA, June 2013). DRC hosts 319,000 LRA-related IDPs, South Sudan 49,000 and CAR 21,000 (OCHA, June 2013). The areas affected by the LRA have a combined estimated population of around two million (OCHA, June 2012), meaning that more than 20 per cent are currently living as IDPs. Such high proportions are rarely seen in national displacement crises, and are comparable to some of the world's worst – as of end 2012, IDMC estimated internal displacement in Somalia to affect 12-15 per cent of the population, in DRC around 4 per cent of the population, in Colombia some 11 per cent of the population and in Syria at least 15 per cent of the population (IDMC, 2013).

The LRA operates in remote areas that generally have poor public services and little state presence, including in terms of security forces. This has facilitated the group's presence and activities across the region. Its political agenda is all but impossible to identify, and consecutive peace agreements have failed to take root.

The LRA's presence in north-eastern DRC has been concentrated in Haut-Uélé and Bas-Uélé districts, two of the four that make up Orientale province. Since 1996, the Congolese wars and political turmoil have further weakened governance and security provision, creating fertile ground for the proliferation of rebel movements, armed groups, poachers and cattle rustlers. More recently Orientale has also begun to receive refugees from the ongoing crisis in CAR. According to 2009 figures from the National Statistics Institute (INS), more than 75 per cent of Orientale province's population lives in poverty, compared with 70 per cent for DRC as a whole. The 2013 Human Development Report indicated that 87.7 per cent of the population are living in poverty country-wide, suggesting that the poverty rate in Orientale province might be even higher today (UNDP, March 2013). A study undertaken at the end of 2012 concluded that the majority of the province's population was suffering a chronic livelihood crisis and had urgent food and nutritional needs (WFP/ Government of DRC February 2013).

Displacement within Orientale province, and from neighbouring provinces and countries has increased pressure on already scarce resources. As elsewhere in DRC, a lack of infrastructure and government capacity has hampered the provision of security and the delivery of an effective humanitarian response. IDPs in particular face challenges in accessing health care, education and land, in part the result of financial constraints but also because of tensions with local communities over resources. Displacement tends to be protracted. More than 55 per cent of current IDPs having been displaced since 2008 or 2009 (IDMC field interview with OCHA, June 2013). Many have been displaced more than once, but accurate data on multiple displacement is limited.

As such displacement trends in Orientale province appear to mirror those elsewhere in DRC, with multiple and protracted displacement a common feature. That said, the particularly vicious nature of LRA violence, and the extreme fear and trauma it has generated, creates specific challenges both for those affected and those responding to their needs. The extent to which displacement is protracted is important in this sense. There are IDPs living in protracted displacement in other provinces, such as North and South Kivu, but a comparison of the number of new IDPs and returnees against cumulative figures suggests that displacement there is more fluid than in areas where the LRA has been active (IDMC, 2008-2013).

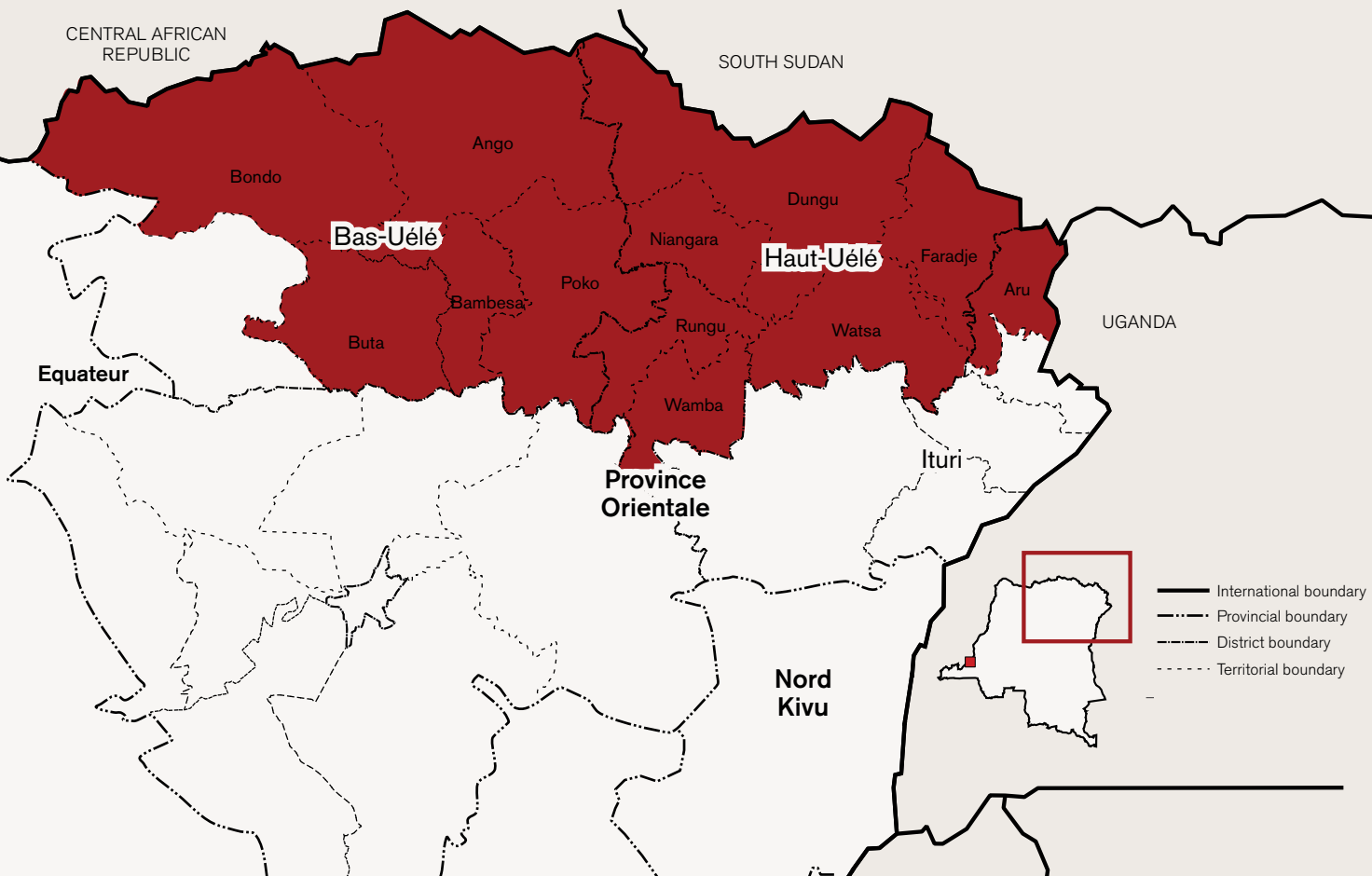
# METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

This study aims to set the displacement caused by the LRA within the broader context and operating environment for humanitarian actors in Orientale province, and to highlight the specific vulnerabilities of the populations affected by its violence. It also focuses on the challenges in terms of response, particularly in relation to long-term displacement and prospects for return and local integration. Many perspectives are mentioned in the study – such as the needs of host communities, and underlying governance and rule of law issues – but assessing the full extent of these issues was beyond its scope.

Data tracking for both displacement and violence is not always consistent across organisations and locations, and access constraints stemming both from insecurity and logistics complicate the situation further. As such, direct comparisons can be difficult, but for the purposes of this study the focus has been on global trend analysis based on the multiple data sources available.

The study is based on field research undertaken in Haut-Uélé district in July 2013. The main site was the town of Dungu, but additional research was carried out in Faradje, Aba, Ngilima and connecting areas. Around 50 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a variety of sources, including IDPs, former LRA abductees, civil society and humanitarian organisations and members of the wider population. Fifteen focus groups with IDPs were held, and the study also draws on longer-term qualitative research by the lead researcher, and IDMC's ongoing work.

## LRA AFFECTED AREAS IN PROVINCE ORIENTALE



# I. DISPLACEMENT IN ORIENTALE PROVINCE: THE LRA EFFECT

As of June 2013, there were 351,000 IDPs in Orientale province (OCHA, July 2013), of whom around 320,000 were displaced by LRA violence. A further 15,000 people have sought refuge in South Sudan and 3,800 in CAR (UNHCR/OCHA, June 2013). It is estimated that Haut-Uélé district currently hosts 262,000 IDPs, Bas-Uélé around 40,000 and Ituri around 24,000 (IDMC interview Dungu, July 2013, figures on file with IDMC). Orientale province also hosts 6,500 refugees from LRA violence in CAR.

## I.I LRA VIOLENCE IN ORIENTALE PROVINCE

The LRA's activities in Orientale province have affected the local population, including IDPs and the communities that receive them, in three main ways: direct attacks involving killings, mutilations and other extreme violence; the threat of abduction; and forced displacement. Some individuals may have been both abducted and displaced, and communities at threat of attack themselves may be host to IDPs.

### EXTREME VIOLENCE

LRA violence in north-eastern DRC began in response to the 2008 military offensive which failed to wipe out the group's leadership. Prior to the offensive, the group had maintained a non-violent presence in Orientale province for almost three years, but in 2008 and 2009 it carried out a number of mass atrocities. This included the infamous Christmas massacres where, over about two weeks, 865 people were hacked to death in the Doruma, Duru and Faradje areas of Haut-Uélé district (HRW, February 2009):

*"The terror of the LRA changed everything. We did not know anything of that kind, or that such cruelties were possible"*

(interview, religious leader, Dungu, June 2013).

The few weeks spanning December 2008 and into January 2009 was undoubtedly the most brutal period of LRA violence in Orientale Province, and as many as 1,721 people were killed and more than 1,600 abducted in extremely violent attacks (OCHA, LRA Matrix, July 2013).

*"One of them took the knife to cut my lips. The chief refused. They took the scissors. The chief refused. Razor blade, he approved with a nod. That is when they cut my lips while insulting me"*

Josiane, Dungu, June 2013

People witnessed family and community members killed in the cruellest of ways.

*"The other LRA soldier who stayed behind with my big brother started stabbing him with a penknife all over his body. My brother was stabbed in the head, the eyes. He then hit him with a hammer. At the end, he cut off his head with a machete"*

Vumiliya, Dungu, June 2013

Attacks continued throughout 2009. In December more than 300 civilians were killed and 250 abducted in Makombo region alone (HRW, March 2010). The last large-scale massacre took place on 22 February 2010 in the village of Kpanga, where as many as 102 civilians were killed (MONUSCO, 2010).





Mari was abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army, LRA, outside Niangara, where she was left for dead by them after they cut off her lips and her ears. Her children are being looked after by family close by. Photo: Marcus Bleasdale/VII



A Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) soldier. Photo: Sam Farmar



## ABDUCTION

The LRA has changed tactics in recent years. Since 2011, the number of incidents has dropped by as much as 70 per cent (MONUSCO's Joint Information and Operations Cell, July 2013), and the coordinated large scale attacks of 2008 and 2009 have been replaced by looting and short-term abductions. The LRA has consistently used abduction as a resourcing tool, and the tactic causes trauma and fear similar to that provoked by extreme violence. People are mainly abducted to transport loot or identify strategic places such as military installations or sources of food. This appears to be motivated both by a struggle to survive – many rebels are simply hungry – and by a desire to keep a low profile in the face of increased international attention.

There was a considerable drop in the number of attacks in 2012 compared with 2011, and the trend appears to be continuing in 2013. Reflecting the broader picture, abductions in Orientale province tend to be short-term. Data shows that as early as 2009 around 85 per cent of people spent less than seven days in LRA captivity (Oxfam Québec and UNHCR, 2010). This does not mean, however, that there have been no long-term abductions. Several cases have been reported, particularly in the early days of the group's activity in DRC.

Abductions have been widely perceived as targeting children, but data from Orientale province shows that between 2008 and mid-2013 almost twice as many adults were abducted (OCHA, LRA Matrix, July 2013). That said, during the second half of 2008 the LRA specifically targeted schools to abduct children (HRW, February 2009). Many suffered extremely traumatic experiences in addition to the abduction itself, particularly during the earlier years of LRA violence.

*“They first tied the person up, and then they asked me to kill him with a large wooden stick. It was a Congolese Zande boy. I saw 10 people killed like this, girls and boys. Each time they were killed by other children who had been abducted. They chose the victims randomly and then would give us the order: ‘Take your bat. Kill this animal!’”*

(HRW interview with former abductee, Niangara, February 2010).

## DISPLACEMENT

Displacement patterns in Orientale province largely mirror the patterns in violence. The first waves of massive displacement began in September 2008, when the first large-scale LRA attacks started. After the Christmas massacres of December 2008, more than 55,000 people fled their homes. Displacement continued throughout 2009 and as the number of attacks, killings and abductions increased, the number of IDPs tripled.

Ongoing attacks on different locations meant displacement became a continuous and dynamic process, with many IDPs displaced three or four times. This has prolonged and increased the vulnerability of both IDPs and host communities. IDPs were forced to abandon their already limited assets in terms of land, shelter and material possessions and restart their economic activities each time they fled, putting ever greater stress on host community resources. In the words of one humanitarian worker in Dungu, IDPs in Orientale province are in a state of “permanent vulnerability”, further increasing their need for humanitarian assistance.

This multiple displacement has several causes. In some cases, IDPs’ places of refuge also come under LRA attack.

*“When the LRA started attacking Duru in 2008, we fled our homes. We then went to Kpaika, where we stayed for a year, until we were attacked there. We then went to a place 55km away. When attacks and harassment started there again in 2012, we left for Dungu. We are here until today”*

(Interview, IDP, Dungu, July 2013)

In other cases, renewed LRA attacks and general insecurity have led to “failed returns”, in which IDPs who had gone back to their places of origin were forced to flee again. Many of those who returned to their homes along the Dungu-Duru axis in February 2009 following the deployment of the Congolese army and the UN peacekeeping mission in DRC (MONUSCO) were forced to flee again after renewed attacks on their villages.

When the LRA stopped its large-scale attacks around mid-2010, large-scale displacement ceased too. It is striking, however, that while the level of violence has clearly decreased, there has been no proportionate drop in the overall number of IDPs. Field interviews suggest this is primarily because fear is still prevalent among the populations in the area, which feeds a real reluctance to return. Fear is heightened by continual trickles of new displacement in response to rumours of LRA’s presence and

small-scale violence that may or may not be perpetrated by the group. The level of fear is such that the sighting of other armed groups or even the sound of gunshots have led to the displacement of a large groups of people on the basis that it might be LRA.<sup>1</sup>

The extent of the dread that the LRA has instilled is also reflected in feelings about Kony himself and does not only cause people to flee, but also prolongs IDPs’ displacement.

*“Most of us want to go back, but we don’t dare as long as Kony is not arrested, or they have not come out of the bush. We don’t want to go through the experience of displacing ourselves again”*  
(President of the Displacement Committee, Dungu, July 2013).

### I.II OTHER DRIVERS OF DISPLACEMENT IN LRA-AFFECTED AREAS OF ORIENTALE

The LRA is the main driver of displacement in Orientale province, but other groups have also taken advantage of the “LRA myth” to prey on the local population. The focus on the LRA is such that it is extremely difficult to separate its violence from that perpetrated by others, and this is evident in the reporting of violent incidents, the majority of which refers to “presumed” LRA violence (Titeca, May 2013). It follows that it is equally difficult to distinguish between displacement caused by LRA activity and that caused by other violence. This in turn serves to perpetuate the perception of an LRA presence, when in fact displacement may have been the result of poaching, attacks by armed bandits, clashes with armed Mbororo pastoralists or even, as is often the case, looting and harassment by the army.

The presence of the Congolese army has to a certain extent served as a deterrent to LRA attacks and as such serves a protection purpose, but individual soldiers at times constitute a significant source of insecurity and actually cause displacement.

<sup>1</sup> This has for example happened with the activities of armed poachers in Faradje.

*“We were in [locality 1]. The LRA started attacking us from February 2009 onwards, up to around April. They killed around six civilians, and two soldiers. The soldiers arrived in February 2009. We were not planning on fleeing. But the harassment of the soldiers was too much. There was too much looting, extortion and harassment towards our women. We moved in February 2010 to [locality 2]. The soldiers, however, noticed that the population had displaced itself, and they also came to [locality 2]. The same problem repeated itself there ... Six women were taken by force by them. There is not much you can do about this. If you try, the soldiers threaten you. We therefore also left”*

(Focus group discussion, IDP site, Dungu, July 2013)

There have also been reports of the army deliberately using violence to displace people, ostensibly in order to corral them and so facilitate protection (interview, religious leader, Dungu, July 2013; Oxfam Québec and UNHCR, 2010). In another case, the army withdrew from a village they had been protecting, leaving the local population vulnerable to LRA attacks. The villagers felt they had no option but to leave.

The army has also on occasions prevented people from fleeing LRA violence, in part on the basis that they were easier to protect in their villages. Locals also felt, however, that it was part of a containment strategy to limit the LRA from spreading into new areas. In June 2009, the local and displaced population tried to flee LRA attacks in Bangadi, but according to IDPs and a number of humanitarian workers, the army “systematically stopped the population from fleeing, and forbade them from doing so” (interview, humanitarian worker, Dungu, July 2013). As a result, “some tried to flee through the bush, where they were attacked or captured by the LRA” (Interview civil society representative, Dungu, July 2013). Similar incidents have been reported elsewhere<sup>2</sup>.

There have also been cases in which people were displaced by Mbororo pastoralists, nomadic cattle herders who have been present in both Bas and Haut-Uélé district since 2005 (African Union Peace and Security Council, April 2008). Local people consider them a major nuisance and have at times accused them of collaborating with the LRA. The destruction of crops by Mbororo cattle has

<sup>2</sup> Such as the displacement sites Linakofo and Bamukandi.

made already high levels of food insecurity worse, and has been the main cause of displacement relating to the Mbororo to date. Some IDPs express fear of the Mbororo as well as the LRA.

*“We do not only fear the LRA, but also the Mbororo. In the beginning, the LRA did not do anything. They only started doing this later. We fear that the same might happen with the Mbororo”*

(Interview, IDP, Ngilima, July 2013)

In some cases, such fears have prevented IDPs from returning to their homes.

Soldiers, armed bandits and poachers from South Sudan, CAR and Libya have also started to engage in what were considered “traditional” LRA activities such as abductions, further blurring the distinction between perpetrators and likely feeding popular perception of an LRA threat. Some even disguise themselves as LRA fighters in order to avoid the blame for their activities (Oxfam Québec and UNHCR, 2010).

## II. COLLECTIVE TRAUMA AND CHALLENGES TO RESPONSE

The impact of the LRA's ruthless violence has been felt, to varying degrees, across the entire population in affected areas: IDPs, many of whom may have experienced physical violence; other survivors of attacks and abductions; and host communities, which have to share their resources and are often at risk of attack themselves. The vulnerabilities of these populations are complex and interrelated. They are also linked to the trauma<sup>3</sup> that stems from exposure to brutal violence and/or abduction, the experience of flight and life in displacement.

### III.1 COMPLEX AND INTER-RELATED VULNERABILITIES

The consequences of LRA violence are devastating for the communities affected. Gruesome attacks lead to the death of family and community members, the abduction of men, women and children, and deliberate mutilations and injuries. These traumatising experiences are both a direct and indirect cause of vulnerabilities. Female-headed households are left poorer and unprotected following the death or abduction of a husband and father, and this in turn leads to complex shifts in social structures and cohesion – as does the experience of displacement itself.

#### PSYCHOSOCIAL DYNAMICS

Field interviews suggest that psychosocial problems, while not necessarily the most visible, are one of the primary issues affecting IDPs in general and former abductees in particular. Interviewees repeatedly referred to the brutality of the violence, citing flashbacks, nightmares and the fear it had instilled in them.

There is little extensive research into the psychosocial and post-traumatic stress issues affecting IDPs and former abductees in Orientale province. Field interviews, however, suggest that for many, their memories of attacks

<sup>3</sup> Local respondents used the term “traumatised”, hence our use of the term “trauma”. As such, it is not a psychosocial diagnosis, but rather an expression by interviewees of how their experiences have affected them.

stretching back as far as 2008 continue to disturb them to the extent that many have changed their behaviour. At the height of LRA violence between 2008 and 2010, many IDPs refused to sleep in their homes for fear of attack. Many would sleep with their clothes on so as to be able to flee at a moment's notice. Today, many are still too afraid to travel long distances to fetch water or farm alone, and prefer to walk and work in groups. Others fear leaving their displacement sites or urban centres at all, which prevents them from accessing land or other livelihood opportunities.

Former abductees in both displaced and host communities face complex challenges. Many suffered truly dreadful experiences, and continue to have problems as a result. For many, talking about their time with the LRA is very difficult, and the degree of trauma felt is not necessarily linked to the duration of their abduction.

LRA violence and displacement has had considerable impact on family life and structures. The disproportionate targeting of men for killing and abduction, and the subsequent changes to livelihood options have resulted in shifting household dynamics. Men traditionally provide for their families' needs, while women take care of the children and support their husbands in providing for the family. The majority of the respondents in our research, both men and women, said that increased financial pressure, including a growing inability to feed their families, has changed the traditional dynamic, and that women were forced to take greater responsibility. Some women saw this as empowering as they became *de facto* heads of households. However, it also meant that they were less likely to return to places of origin due to heightened vulnerability in the absence of a male protector. Men, meanwhile, have been left feeling disempowered and this has reportedly contributing to their drinking much more heavily. As one man said, it is “*the heavy charges of the family which forces us into drinking, and the general hopelessness of our life*” (focus group discussion, Ngilima, July 2013). According to some respondents, this pressure and change in roles has also broken families up as divorce and domestic violence rates increase.



*"The images of the attacks are on endless repeat in my head"*

*"They had also abducted another person, who they executed right in front of me. These images keep coming back in my head. I am not calm because of this"*

*"We are no longer quiet in our head"*

*"I think these stories are not yet finished. I'm still frightened"*

Quotes taken from interviews with IDPs, Dungu, July 2013.

Mihidie was shot by the LRA when he was transporting goods on a bike from the market. Photo: Marcus Bleasdale/VII



A view of the damage after the attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels on the central store at the Nagero airstrip, north-eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. REUTERS/Stephane Carre, 2009.

## LAND AND LIVELIHOODS

The majority of IDPs in Haut and Bas-Uélé districts are from the Zandé ethnic group, who traditionally make their living from farming, hunting and fishing. This makes access to arable land and hunting and fishing grounds crucial to their livelihoods and economic independence.

Most IDPs, however, have fled towards urban areas. Dungu's population – estimated in 2008 at around 56,000 people - has increased by more than 50 per cent with the influx of around 30,000 IDPs. The local population typically travels to the edge of town, or a few kilometres away at most, to access their farmland. There was already pressure on fertile areas before the arrival of the IDPs, and LRA violence and displacement have increased the population density and the number of people wanting to farm. The violence has also reduced the amount of safely accessible land.

Host communities and IDPs alike are reluctant to travel far outside urban areas to farm for fear of LRA attacks. As such, land has become a primary source of tension. Local communities suffering from considerable poverty themselves have in many cases severely restricted IDPs' access to land. They also only allow the IDPs to plant annual crops that are ready to harvest relatively quickly,

rather than perennials such as coffee, banana and manioc from which IDPs might generate a better income.

*“When you want to plant something for a long time, the locals see it as if you want to grab their land”*

(Interview, IDP, July 2013).

The scarcity of fertile land has meant that some IDPs have even been forced off plots allocated to them by local authorities, particularly if they prove to produce high yields. Similar stories were heard in which IDPs were given shelter in their places of refuge, only to find that they were then asked or forced to move on.

Some IDPs have access to land within their displacement sites, but plots tend to be too small and infertile to meet their livelihood needs. A few IDPs pay members of the host population for access to land, either in cash or by turning over part of their harvest. The plots they receive, however, can be anything from five to 40km away, increasing the risk of attacks, abductions and killings. Because they are so far away, some IDPs stay and work their plots for days or even weeks at a time before returning to town, despite the increased fear of attack.



*“We don’t want to live there because we are still afraid, and it still is unsafe”*

(Interview, IDP, Dungu, July 2013)

Many have turned to daily labour as an alternative, but this comes with its own risks. It tends to be short-term, poorly paid and with little recourse to settle disputes with employers who in some cases have failed to pay for work done. IDPs can expect to earn between \$0.70 and \$2.70 a day as a day-labourer, with women paid less than men, and such amounts are not enough to sustain a family.

### **ACCESS TO SERVICES**

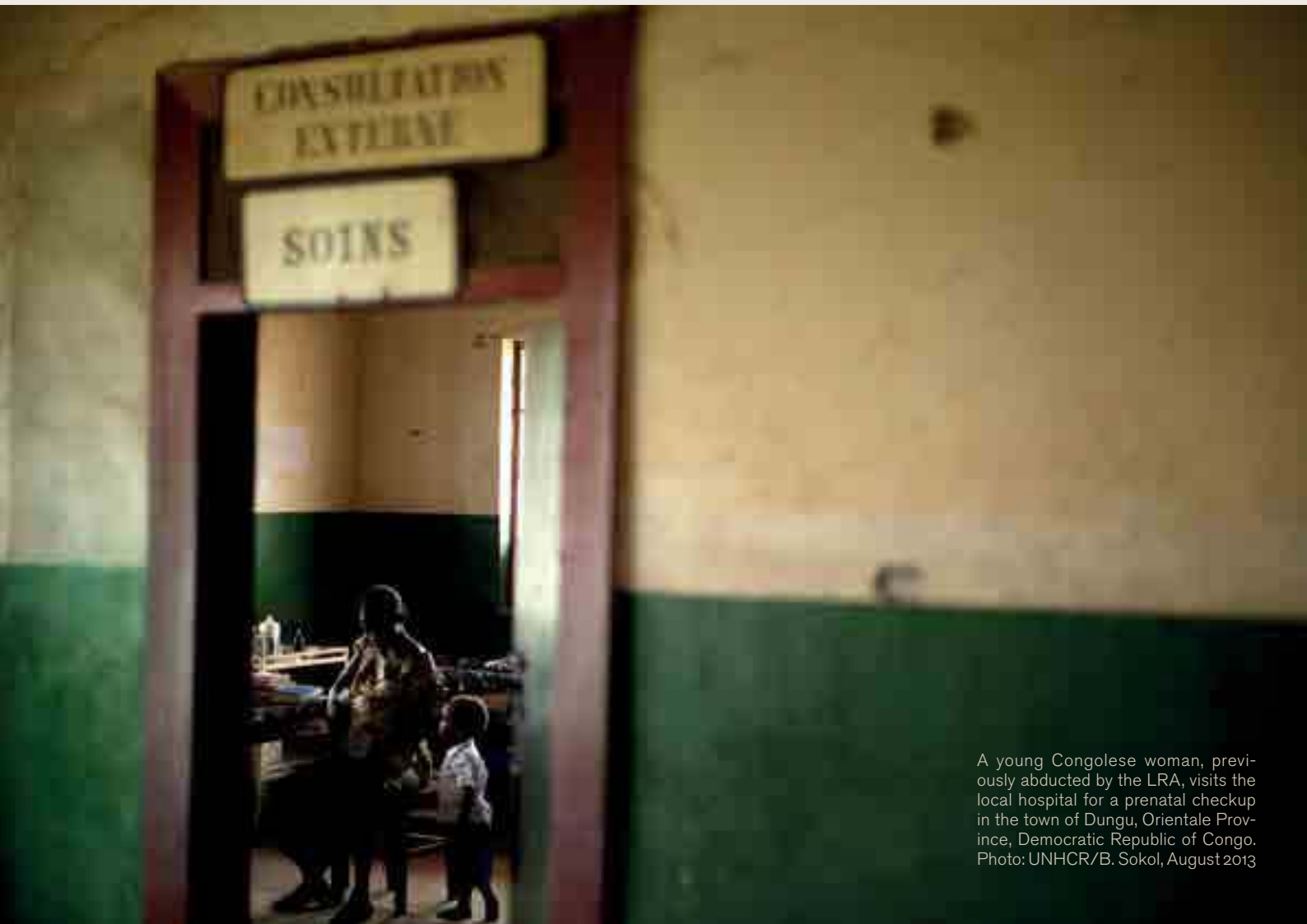
LRA-affected areas have historically suffered from underdevelopment. The state has been practically absent since the 1980s, and there is a lack of hospitals, schools, health centres and water infrastructure. The LRA often targeted the little basic infrastructure that did exist in its early attacks. Key professionals were also killed and abducted, and others fled the insecurity, significantly reducing both human and physical capacity.

Churches have played an important role in assisting and protecting local populations. They have also consistently denounced the LRA, even when the government and the army have denied its presence. As a result they have

been directly targeted for attack, as was the case in the Christmas massacres.

The influx of IDPs has placed additional pressure on already weak infrastructure, and displaced communities generally have more difficulties in accessing education and health services than their hosts. This is primarily because IDPs tend to be less able to pay for them. Medical costs are a major issue, and many IDPs can simply not afford to go to hospital. Malaria treatment for example costs at least \$5. Medical INGOs initially provided free medical support, but they are gradually pulling out now the situation is no longer considered an emergency. Education is another major problem. Many IDPs are unable to pay school fees across a whole year, so their children are not able to finish their courses. It is estimated that around 50 per cent of displaced school-age children in Dungu are not in education (interview, UNICEF representative, Dungu, July 2013). In some displacement sites, only around 20 per cent of children attend school, and in one site the figure was just seven per cent.

IDPs also cite discrimination in accessing services. Displaced children are more likely to be excluded from schools as teachers know the parents have limited financial means and, unlike the local population, little or no access to credit. The same applies to health centres, where IDPs are turned away if they are unable to pay up front.



A young Congolese woman, previously abducted by the LRA, visits the local hospital for a prenatal checkup in the town of Dungu, Orientale Province, Democratic Republic of Congo. Photo: UNHCR/B. Sokol, August 2013



## MARGINALISATION AND EXCLUSION

Many IDPs and former abductees cite tensions with local communities as a key concern. For former abductees, this includes stigmatisation and harassment, if not outright rejection. They are targets for insults and are called names such as “LRA” or “son of LRA”.

Stigmatisation is a particular problem for female abductees who escape from the LRA with children. A number of locals said they were uncomfortable living with children born of rebel fathers when their own family members had been killed or abducted by LRA fighters. In some cases, locals tried to attack such children (similar findings in Discover the Journey (DTJ) and Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI), 2012). Such stigmatisation can provoke an aggressive reaction in former abductees.

International humanitarian organisations have run awareness campaigns that have helped to improve the situation, but difficulties remain.

IDPs' problems are broader. In addition to obstacles in accessing land and services, they face deliberate discrimination and harassment. Some locals do not allow IDPs to collect firewood or fell trees in their area, and in some cases they are even prevented from using water pumps. IDPs who have sought the intervention of local authorities feel the decisions taken were biased in favour of the local population.


The army and other security forces have also harassed IDPs, who are particularly vulnerable to such behaviour as military bases were established in the immediate vicinity of displacement sites, ostensibly for protection purposes. They are also more likely than locals to face harassment at military roadblocks, as they tend to have to travel further to access land. In 2010, there were 52 fixed roadblocks and many ad hoc checkpoints in Haut-Uélé districts, and at each one travellers have to pay anything from \$0.10 to \$2.00, or hand over some of their produce (Oxfam Québec and UNHCR, 2010).

The distribution of humanitarian aid has on occasion prompted competition between IDPs and host populations, creating tensions and contributing to the marginalisation and exclusion of the displaced. A recent shift by humanitarian actors to support the most vulnerable in both IDP and host communities, and no longer IDPs alone, has led some IDPs to see their hosts as attempting to steal their aid. In 2011, a displaced woman and child were attacked at a distribution point in the Uye neighbourhood of Dungu, which led to the death of the child. Aid distributions in 2011 were at one point suspended in Dungu following the attack for fear of sparking further physical confrontation.

*“Sometimes people threaten me and tell me ‘you come from the bush, you have done this and that’. This makes me so angry, I could fight this person”*  
(Former abductee, Dungu, July 2013)

Monique\* was abducted by the LRA when she was only 14 and had to stay in captivity with the rebels for 8 months. She had a child as a result of a forced relationship while in captivity.  
Photo: Anne Ackerman for NRC/ Perspective

\*Name changed for protection purposes



Internally displaced people flee south after a rebel attack on Bule and Fataki, Ituri province. Photo: Marcus Bleasdale/VII

## II.II PROTRACTED DISPLACEMENT AND DURABLE SOLUTIONS

Such tensions have a major impact on IDPs' ability to plan for the future and regain their independence. The fear of renewed LRA attacks and displacement is the dominant factor preventing IDPs from returning to their places of origin, but at the same time they face considerable challenges in re-establishing their livelihoods in their places of displacement despite, in some cases, many years of trying.

### STAY, OR GO HOME?

IDPs face difficult choices. Displacement sites offer a degree of security, but living conditions are often harsh. In their home areas, by contrast, IDPs face the fear of future LRA attacks but also the prospect of a more sustainable livelihood. IDPs are left with a choice between access to land - and with it food, an income and some degree of independence and dignity - on the one hand, and security on the other. The longer they remain displaced, the greater the risk that tensions with host communities will arise. In such circumstances, only a minority have chosen

to go back to places where they can access land (IDP, Dungu, July 2013). The vast majority prefer to stay put.

Previous displacements play a role in IDPs' decision to stay in Dungu. Many were originally displaced during the invasion of Haut-Uélé district by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in 1998. They fled to Dungu, from where they were displaced again, this time by the LRA. At this point, most returned to their places of origin, but some decided to stay in Dungu.

*"If I had stayed in Dungu in 1998, after we were chased by the SPLA, I would have made some progress by now. If I look at the people who stayed, they have a house and some land. And what do I have? Nothing. I have to start all over again"*

(IDP, Dungu, July 2013)

The shortage or complete lack of public services in their home areas is a further barrier to return. Access to clean water, health services and education play an important role for those who decide to stay in their places of displacement. Even if they are unable to pay for the services, the simple knowledge that they are available is significant.



*“Here in town we have the opportunity to teach our children, and we have access to health services. There is everything that you need if you have some money. Our rights are not being violated so much here”* (IDP, Dungu, July 2013)

### **CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE**

IDPs, former abductees and host communities face many challenges to their recovery from the effects of LRA violence and displacement. This is particularly true for IDPs for whom the memory of LRA atrocities and the fear of future attacks prevent many not only from returning home, but also from getting on with their lives in displacement.

One man interviewed at a displacement site no longer dared to leave the camp. He had been displaced three times, twice by LRA attacks and once by the army. His wife was killed in one of the attacks, he had no access to land and he could no longer hunt, making him completely dependent on external assistance. He was abducted for five days just before he arrived at the site. As a result, he said, he preferred *“to sit at home, rather than to go and risk myself by going outside ... Life has been too hard, and*

*I can't handle this any longer”* (former abductee, Dungu July 2013).

Such resignation is consistent with IDMC's research into the experiences of those repeatedly displaced in other parts of DRC. Interviewees cite lower levels of aspiration and motivation each time they are forced to flee, not to mention decreasing material and financial resources.

IDPs' inability to access land is the factor that most clearly distinguishes them from host communities in terms of vulnerabilities, as the latter have better access to land. This helps them in terms of food security and generates much-needed cash, which in turn allows them to access other essential services. If IDPs are to achieve durable solutions, they too need better access to such services, whether they choose to return or integrate locally. An improvement in relations with both local communities and local authorities would help to ensure that IDPs were treated on the same basis as the local population.

### III. CONCLUSIONS: LOW-LEVEL VIOLENCE, HIGH-LEVEL FEAR

LRA violence in Haut and Bas-Uélé districts has decreased in recent years, but the displacement caused by previous attacks and the fear of new ones remains high. IDPs, host communities and former abductees face multiple challenges stemming from past violence, their fears for the future and the impact of displacement. There are similarities with displacement patterns elsewhere in DRC, including repeated and protracted displacement and tensions over access to land, but the history of LRA violence in Orientale province has created far higher levels of fear and apparent trauma than in other areas. This in turn appears to lead to the greater reluctance observed in the province's IDPs to return to their places of origin or even travel outside their places of refuge to farm land for food, despite the widespread food insecurity they suffer. This creates particular challenges in terms of response, especially in the long-term, and as displacement becomes more protracted new challenges will arise in IDPs' search for durable solutions.

Underlying poverty and the limited provision of public services throughout the province is another key challenge. It affects both host communities and IDPs, and puts considerable pressure on extremely scarce resources in areas with high influxes of IDPs. These pressures grow as displacement continues, particularly if the issues around IDPs' access to land and livelihoods are not properly addressed. Competition over land risks making food insecurity worse for IDPs and host communities alike. Greater efforts must be made to improve relations between the local and displaced populations. Negotiations over access to land should not only take place among higher-level authorities, but should include lower-level traditional officials.

Agricultural assistance has been provided to vulnerable groups, but to date it has mainly involved short-term interventions. There is a need for long-term, sustainable

practices of a more developmental nature in which, for example, people are helped to cultivate more productively on less fertile soil and on less land. Such interventions should not only target IDPs but also the wider population in recognition of the challenges shared by host communities.

The end of the emergency response phase should signal an improvement in IDPs' resilience, but as demonstrated by the withdrawal of some free services to date provided by international NGOs, evidence suggests that many become more vulnerable at this stage. As the reduction in LRA violence in Orientale province continues, the level of humanitarian assistance provided is likely to continue to fall, but our field research suggests that that humanitarian support to date has helped form a buffer in the face of chronic poverty and gaps in service delivery. It also indicates a need for specialised support to ensure communities can move forward. The decrease in LRA violence must not be seen as an indication that those affected have fewer needs. Rather, long-term assistance must be tailored to meet the extensive needs of IDPs, former abductees and their hosts, on both an individual and community level. The emphasis should be on sustainability through community-based approaches.

Evidence gleaned from Ugandan communities affected by LRA violence suggests that community-based responses to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can have positive effects not only on PTSD but also on wider mental health issues. They can also promote the reintegration of communities affected by trauma. Specialised analysis is required to determine the prevalence of PTSD and other conditions in Orientale province, and to establish how such an approach might support sustainable steps towards recovery and bring the province's IDPs, former abductees and host communities together.



Mbolikia's husband was killed by the Lord's Resistance Army, LRA, after he was forced to be a porter. She was left with six-month-old baby and now lives with her big sister. Photo: Marcus Bleasdale/VII

## **ABOUT IDMC**

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) is a world leader in the monitoring and analysis of the causes, effects and responses to internal displacement. For the millions worldwide forced to flee within their own country as a consequence of conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations, and natural hazards, IDMC advocates for better responses to internally displaced people, while promoting respect for their human rights.

IDMC is part of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

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