



Findings

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The Northern Uganda Social Action Fund: Community Reconciliation and Conflict Management empower communities in a post-conflict setting

Development efforts in Northern Uganda have been stifled by both local and international cross-border conflicts, as well as inter and intra-tribal conflicts for the last two decades. The five year, US\$100 million, Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF), being implemented since 2003, is meant to assist government in its efforts to tackle poverty and bring about development that utilizes and builds on community value systems (which are particularly strong in the family, clan and cattle rearing culture found in Northern Uganda). As part of the broader efforts to reconstruct Northern Uganda, NUSAF, as a project, and through direct grants to communities, is intended to: overcome underdevelopment through community action, leadership development, resource mobilization, strengthening the ongoing reconciliation processes in the region, and make it possible for communities to articulate and prioritize their specific needs and manage processes and outcomes, thereby enhancing good governance for peace and development. Community Reconciliation and Conflict Management, improved transparency and account-

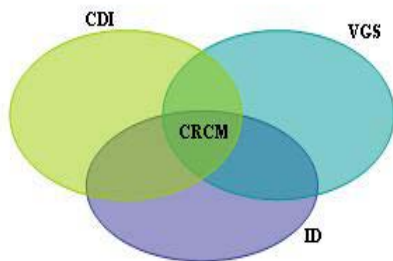
ability have been at the center of these processes, leading to: (i) better leadership at all levels, especially the community level. The project has four components; (i) Community Reconciliation and Conflict Management (CRCM), (ii) Community Driven Initiatives (CDI), (iii) Vulnerable Groups Support (VGS) and (iv) Institutional Development (ID). This article focuses largely on the role of community reconciliation and conflict management processes in the implementation of the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund.

Community Reconciliation and Conflict Management (CRCM)

CRCM is a community-driven initiative that creates an enabling environment for sustainable development by enhancing the capacity of communities to identify and successfully apply approaches that achieve peaceful coexistence and reconciliation based on community needs and value systems. The idea is that sustainable investments in a post-conflict environment, require reconciled communities, peace promotion and the minimiz-

ing of potential or/and latent conflicts. CRCM initiatives, therefore, are aimed at providing support to traditional and non traditional approaches to peace building and conflict management. Traditional approaches supported by the CRCM component include supporting: clan leaders and chiefs to hold community reconciliation meetings; inter-tribal dialogue including visits to other districts; cleansing of reporters and returnees; counseling and psycho-social support to returnees, ex-abductees, “gun drop outs” and the receiving communities. Non traditional methods include participatory rural appraisals (PRA’s) to enhance community dialogue and facilitate social capital resuscitation, sports and drama for the youth especially promoted by traditional and local authorities, religious leaders, and CSOs operating at all levels. These players are provided with skills and resources to enable them promote healing and recovery.

Diagrammatic Representation of the CRCM Component



While originally designed as a pilot/entry point to other project components in the three sub-regions of Northern Uganda (West Nile, Acholi and Karamoja) using mainly traditional mechanisms, CRCM activities are now popular in all sub-regions of Northern

Uganda, sometimes as stand alone sub-projects. As a complementary activity, communities accessing other project interventions benefit from CRCM as value addition interventions necessary to enable them overcome constraining factors caused by an underlying conflict. As a stand alone activity, CRCM supports activities that help individuals and communities move through the transition from conflicts to sustainable peace and take the communities through the process of healing and recovery.

Results so far:

Three indicators of measuring progress and success were identified during the October 2005 Rapid Results Initiative for CRCM including; (i) monthly Community Sub-project Management Committee (CPMC) reporting to communities, (ii) Civic Engagement and (iii) supporting traditional institutions.

Monthly CPMC reporting to communities: Out of the total 4,900 CPMC implementing NUSAF-funded sub-projects in June 2006, it is estimated that 30 % have met this requirement, while others have done their progress reports on a quarterly basis. The main success has been the successful integration of CPMC activities into regular reporting at the community level, with some evidence of improved transparency at community level. There have been challenges: (i) poor CPMC cohesion among its members, especially where geography leads to problems with logistics; and (ii) slow progress in the roll-out of Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation (PM&E) practices. Participatory M&E including a_community score card

approach has been recommended as part of the M&E process. When implemented, it will strengthen the regular reporting by CPMCs to communities, thereby improving transparency and accountability at community level.

Civic engagement: Out of an estimated 500 Civic Organizations that needed to be mobilized, 96 have been successfully brought on board to actively participate in the program, especially as community mediators. Many of these CSOs have become active in supporting District Technical Planning Committees (DTPCs) in their work (appraisal, training, monitoring, etc.) in activities funded through NUSAF; showing a steady improvement in the quality of support provided. The main challenges have been (a) resistance by some CSOs wishing for NUSAF to finance plans developed without community involvement, (b) low capacities compounded by the narrow mandates of some of the CSOs who are unable to respond to the broad range of concerns raised by communities.

Traditional institutions strengthened: It was expected that 6 such institutions would be supported, and 3 have so far produced plans that can be funded. These institutions are holding regular monthly meetings and have shown great willingness to involve communities in their day-to-day activities. The main challenges noted are (a) low technical capacities and inability to access this technical capacity, and (b) growing fragmentation of traditional institutions in response to various pressures.

One can argue that through the CRCM initiatives, the organizational integrity of traditional institutions, especially in the Acholi sub-region is beginning to be strengthened, enabling them to start influencing local government structures to deliver services to the needy and to promote positive synergies between the state, civil society and the poor. CRCM is beginning to prove critical for effective and sustainable community cohesion and participation. By March 2006, the component had funded 548 CRCM sub-projects that have promoted social interaction and cohesion. The sub-projects have also been geared towards strengthening community interaction, consensus building and enhancement of social capital. Communities, via monthly public accountability meetings, have been empowered, thus strengthening the communities' sense of ownership of the interventions and the need to demand for better services. By contributing to community harmony, the CRCM initiatives have contributed to achieving of results of other components (community driven initiative, vulnerable group support and institutional development) as outlined in sections (ii) and (iii) below.

There are sustainability concerns regarding the CRCM strategy. Many institutions have emerged to complement traditional ones, and it is not clear how the current CRCM strategy can be adapted to accommodate these new institutions. Discussions are going on over how some Traditional Authorities can be assisted to develop Community Foundations that can give these institutions an opportunity to tap into various

sources for funds while increasing their sustainability.

ii). Community Development Initiatives Unit (CDI)

Poverty, feelings of marginalization, poor service delivery and inequity are some of the factors that fuel conflict. CDI attempts to address these issues through community empowerment and improving access to services. This component is meant to support small-scale community driven initiatives that improve accessibility to socio-economic services and enhance the capacities of the communities and other stakeholders involved in the process. By March 2006, the component had completed 263 borehole sub-projects that serve over 15,780 households (or 78,900 people); completed 32 pit latrine blocks that serve 1,152 households (or 5,760 people); completed 321 sub-projects in the education sector that benefit 6,966 pupils directly and 34,830 family members indirectly; and completed 37 health sector facilities (27 health centers and 10 medical staff houses) that have the potential to directly serve approximately 195,000 people.

iii). Vulnerable Groups Support Unit (VGS)

Reconciling and re-integrating: (i) returnees, (ii) ex-combatants, (iii) "gundrop outs" etc. gainfully into their communities is a way of reducing conflict. This component is meant to use targeted interventions in a participatory, equitable and sustainable manner to reduce vulnerability among the disadvantaged members of the community. This is being achieved by support-

ing vulnerable groups, local authorities, civil society organizations and other institutions that directly work with Vulnerable Groups (VGS) to develop interventions that contribute to improvements in the livelihood of these communities. By March 2006, the project had funded 2,633 VGS sub-projects that serve approximately 108,982 direct beneficiaries. These sub-projects include: 1,992 in income generation; 355 in time- and labor-saving technologies; 92 in vocation skills training; 161 in family support; and 33 in counseling projects. By category, beneficiaries include 5,277 orphans, 1,724 foster parents, 45,307 youths, 5,216 female headed households, 31,318 Internally Displaced People (IDPs), 4,931 elderly, 2,242 People with Disabilities (PWD), 6,865 HIV/AIDS infected or affected persons and 2,370 formerly abducted children.

iv). Institutional Development (ID) - supporting Local Government

NUSAF was designed and is being implemented within the decentralized local government framework. Local Governments are in charge of facilitating project implementation processes, undertaking field and desk appraisals and sub-project approvals. Communities are responsible for identifying, prioritizing planning and implementing sustainable development initiatives, while civil society, traditional institutions and the private sector are responsible for supporting the appropriate agencies i.e. either local governments or communities. This arrangement requires local governments not only to provide technical support to communities, but also to be

more accommodating to civil society, traditional institutions and private sector, and to involve them in project implementation activities. It also requires that all stakeholders understand and implement their roles and responsibilities within the project guidelines. Though, initially not well understood and appreciated by various stakeholders, the approach has started bearing fruits. Not only are communities being empowered but also their supporting agencies. This Public-Private Partnership Approach also contributing to the potential for deepening decentralization. Though slowly, Local Governments are appreciating the role of NGOs and CBOs in project implementation and communities have begun to slowly appreciate the role of the Local Government technical staff. Overall, one may argue that in terms of institutional strengthening, the project is demonstrating that it is possible to make Local Governments responsive to community demands.

Speeding up implementation – the Rapid Results Initiative (RRI)

While the results of the project are now promising, implementation, start-up and rolling out was not easy. Design was preceded by a community needs assessment and a thorough stakeholder consultative process, the new staff hired to implement the project were not familiar with a multi-sectoral operation. Development communication that was meant to trigger demand from communities did not effectively take off. The initial engagement of the project management unit with local governments was not effective, triggering a lot of anxiety from the leaders. A

mixture of inaccurate reporting and occasional facts hit the news on a regular basis. In response, IDA mounted a development communication mission in May 2004 that agreed with government on a Rapid Results Approach¹ to rolling out the project.

The RRI was preceded by a workshop involving Local Council V, Chairpersons (LCV), Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs), District Planners (DP), NUSAF District Technical Officers (NDTOs), District Information Officers (DIO), the Northern Uganda Management Unit (NUMU), NGOs and IDA. Workshop participants identified challenges to project roll-out. These included: the slow take-off of community mobilization; poor involvement of NGOs and CSOs; slow identification and involvement of community facilitators; poor roll-out of development communication to trigger community demand; inadequate distribution of sub-interest forms and other project materials and lack of clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the elected leaders. Based on the identified challenges, the target of RRI was then agreed upon; i.e. to mobilize communities to generate 1214 sub-projects to funding levels within 55 days following the sub-project cycle procedures. The rapid results team of each district included : (i) the LCV Chairperson, (ii) Chief Administrative Officer , (iii) NUSAF District Technical Officer, and District Information Officer . Each district team based its planning on the number of PRA teams they could mobilize. A capacitation resource envelope was also agreed upon. The role of the elected leaders, both during the RRI and the entire project period was reviewed and re-

emphasized. The date for reviewing progress was agreed upon and a press release prepared and issued. Within 55 days, more than 1,214 sub-projects had been forwarded to the Management Unit for funding and the process of learning by doing had taken root. While the project roll-out had started, a number of lessons were learnt.

- The momentum of the RRI needs to be maintained. IDA has used subsequent implementation support missions to review results achieved by each districts in an open forum (workshop) and to make recommendations that enhance implementation.
- More political support was required from the Local Governments rather than from the center. Local Council Chairpersons were assigned responsibility for overall oversight of the results.
- The Rapid Results Approach has also been useful in boosting the implementation of components that tend to lag behind others.

¹ A Rapid Results Approach is a set of management tools, processes and skills that help leaders in organizations use a series of short-term projects to translate long-term goals into concrete action, results and impact. The engine of this approach is the rapid results initiative – a 100-day stretch agenda designed to unleash the capacity and creativity of teams in pursuit of a strategically critical goal that delivers a result and ties strategically to a long-term plan. Each RRI becomes a vehicle for achievement, learning and advancement of long-term goals. Teams start by developing the areas they want to impact and develop capacity as they go – in the context of the 100-day result. The approach emphasizes that implementation and learning by doing are integral parts of the policy development process and the means to assess the capacity for, and the political will to, undertaking larger policy reforms through achieving tangible results.

Collaboration with Other operations

While NUSAF is at the moment the single biggest operation in Northern Uganda, the Project Managers recognized the need to work and collaborate with other actors in the project area. Collaboration is meant to harmonize implementation procedures, leverage on resources, thus covering a wider area and increasing results on the ground. Accordingly, NUSAF has signed collaborative protocols with the following.

- **The Uganda AIDS Control Project** to support People Living with HIV/AIDS . With the near-completion of the UAC Project, NUSAF has taken over the funding of HIV/AIDS infected and affected persons in the region and adopted the successful operational modalities of UACP. More than 250 communities have already been financed through this arrangement.

- **National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) and the World Food Program.** To date, most of the community sub-projects under VGS/CRCM are of a productive nature and are agricultural/crop-, livestock- or fisheries-related. The majority of VGS sub-projects are in livestock production followed by crop production. Collaboration with NAADS and WFP is seen to be critical to facilitating the selection processes for enterprises and technology for demonstration and adoption that often require considerable technical inputs.

- **The Amnesty Commission:** The Amnesty Commission, among other things, is responsible for the reintegration of former LRA combatants into civilian life. NUSAF considers these a special category of vulnerable people, requiring special handling and treatment. This collaboration ensures that the ex-rebels receive amnesty certificates and additional reintegration support over and above what the Commission provides.

Conclusion and Challenges

The project is on track, although still faced with some challenges including: (i) the overwhelming demand for sub-projects from communities, (ii) the need to strengthen monitoring and supervision by district technical staff and lower-level local government staff, (iii) the challenging political climate and in- and out-of-conflict environment in Northern Uganda.

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