



Refugee Law Project

*School of Law, Makerere University
A Centre for Justice and Forced Migrants*



Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity (ACCS)

Situational Brief:

“Impact of Floods in Acholi-Sub-region and the Implications for Post-conflict Recovery”

September 5, 2012

INTRODUCTION

On Sunday, 19th August 2012, NTV Uganda ran a news feature revealing the flood devastation affecting Agago district, with Parabongo sub-county being the most affected. This aired hardly a month after a similar story was shown about Kitgum regarding the same issue—floods. Parts of Teso, Lango, Acholi, and Karamoja sub regions perennially suffer from the similar challenge. A team of researchers from Refugee Law Project under its Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity (ACCS), visited the affected parts of the Acholi sub-region to assess the extent of the damage, impact on recovery and measures for mitigating impact on the affected populations.

This briefing paper presents preliminary findings and analysis pertaining to the recent floods within Acholi sub-region. It highlights immediate impacts and predicts future implications for post conflict recovery trends in some parts of Northern Uganda. The rapid assessment surveyed seventeen (17) sub counties in the four districts of: Agago, Pader, Kitgum and Lamwo, from 24 – 31 August 2012. These districts and sub-counties were the most affected even though the torrential rain continues through the Acholi sub-region and more districts may experience flooding. The research team used a combination of thirty-eight (38) in-depth individual interviews and nine (09) focus group discussions with Local government officials and members of the affected communities. While a rapid assessment cannot make a definitive statement on the situation, this briefing sheds light on the dynamics surrounding floods, in order to better understand the extent of the flooding, and to identify critical community needs and assess areas of potential interventions by different stakeholders.

Key questions investigated include the effects on socio-economic development; access to markets, education and health facilities; and the overall effects on post conflict recovery trend in the sub-region.

Key Findings:

The assessment reveals that several reconstruction programs such as National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) and other projects under the Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) have been negatively affected.

Summary of negative effect:

- Flooding and destruction of several gardens facilitated under PRDP and other programs;
- Damage to homesteads, and water and sanitation facilities;
- Sinking of a number of latrines in homes and public institutions;
- The contamination of numerous water points;
- Damage to roads that connect communities to vital markets, health facilities, and neighbouring communities, rendering them nearly impassable;
- Displacing a majority of people to either distant relatives in other less or non-affected villages or nearby trading centres.

Additionally, floods have negatively affected agricultural activities. Post-harvest loss has been estimated at over 20%—slightly above 13% (the acceptable percentage)—as many fail to harvest and dry their crops. Earlier growth and potential for economic revitalisation of these areas and populations based on predicted harvest has been reversed, with many now living in squalid conditions characterised by poor, humid and damp shelters, poor hygiene, damaged feeder roads, near complete absence of health and sanitation facilities, lack of access to markets and potential food-insecurity. The situation remains extremely tenuous and is marked by increasing desperation whilst more suffering is anticipated. Many respondent predicted wide spread food insecurity to follow in the dry seasons into next planting season.

The perennial flooding is therefore a key conflict driver within the affected areas as the affected communities have to cope with neighbouring households displaced and searching for shelter, grazing land, food items, land for cultivation and source of livelihood generally. This comes in a context of growing conflicts over the same means of production and scarce sources of livelihood.

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Several programmes have been implemented in northern Uganda under PRDP I to aid post-conflict recovery. Most critical intervention was infrastructural improvement and revitalisation of the economy. However, despite tangible gains made in these areas, several factors continue to beset progress towards sustainable peace and full recovery. The post armed conflict era has witnessed several new conflict dynamics and emerging conflict drivers all of which adversely affect realisation of the overall PRDP objectives. The perennial flooding in some parts of the PRDP sub-regions is one such factor. The floods have destroyed houses, crops, animals, roads, bridges, health centres, schools, granaries, bee hives, fruit gardens, grazing land, and caused several losses of lives. The most affected areas have been Acholi, Karamoja, Teso sub-regions and parts of Lango. The recent wave of floods engulfing the region as reported by NTV, Uganda and other media houses revealed only part of the devastations, especially in Agago. Our assessment revealed that alongside Parabongo sub-county other sub-counties were grossly affected and other districts within the sub-region are struggling with the continuing flooding.

According to the 2002 census, Agago district has a population of **258,157**, with 16 lower local government units out of which 6 are badly affected, with an estimated **5,167 households** seriously affected. **Women and children** are said to be the most affected category of people, about **5167** and **8500** affected respectively. **2 deaths** have been recorded, all of which are children who were washed away by water.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Disasters caused by floods are not a new phenomenon in Uganda. In 2007, extensive flooding and waterlogging in eastern and northern Uganda compelled the humanitarian community and the Government of Uganda to respond to critical community needs triggered by unusually heavy rainfalls. Occasionally, floods have affected the implementation of PRDP I in eastern and northern areas of Uganda, particularly in Teso, Bugisu, Sebei, Lango, Acholi, West Nile and Karamoja sub-regions.

In the Acholi sub-region, floods started in July 2012 and worsened in early August 2012. Since then, ongoing rains have continued to exacerbate the situation. It is clear, that the zones mostly affected by floods and waterlogging are lowlands, which are, swampy, and poorly drained. As much as flood-prone areas have been identified, the changing climatic and weather pattern has seen new areas experiencing flooding. Agago is one such area that many respondents said it used to experience drought rather than floods. James Olweny (NAADS Coordinator, Parabongo, Agago) said:

We normally experience drought and not floods. Last year we had a problem of drought here and now people are surprised, its floods.

Overall, about **3000** former internally displaced persons (IDPs) are homeless due to floods, and Agago is currently the most affected district. Approximately **500 huts** and over **20,000 acres** of crops were destroyed. Flooding has damaged nearly **three quarters** of roads, making them nearly impassable.

CONSEQUENCES OF FLOODS AND WATERLOGGING:

Infrastructural Damage

Roads, bridges and culverts were blocked and washed away. Whereas, the most affected roads in some areas were community access roads, that cannot withstand heavy rain, in other parts, central government roads were the worst affected. About **9 main roads** and **75 feeder roads** have been damaged in the districts of Agago, Pader, Kitgum and Lamwo. The main roads destroyed include: Kalongo—Paimol—Namokora Road,



Damaged culvert on Kalongo—Pader Road

Kalongo—Patongo Road, Kalongo—Kitgum Road, Kalongo—Pader Road, Lamwo—Potika—Padibe Road and Akilok—Locom Road. Similarly, Soroti—Kumi Road in Teso is affected as, the Awoja Bridge is submerged.

Bridges leading to vital commercial centres, like Kalongo market, were greatly affected, prominent examples being; **Kalego Bridge** (connecting Kalongo to Parabongo), **Okuru Bridge** (connecting Parabongo to Paimol) and **Awoja Bridge** (connecting Soroti, Kumi, Lira and Gulu). Bridge damage has impaired commerce, as well as the free movement of people from one area to the other. It was noted that, the flooding has created a weak connection between Pader and Agago districts and other parts of the region. Likewise, there is no direct road from Kalongo via Agago to Patongo, Pader, Pajule, Gulu and Kampala. Generally, effective service delivery has been prominently affected since accessing the different parts within districts and beyond remains a challenge. Equally, tourism has been hindered; in early August, tourists heading to Kidepo National Park via Kalongo were forced to reverse their travel route. Notable culverts damaged include; Auch (connecting Pader to Agago) and Lemu (connecting Lamwo district headquarters to Awino Olwi).

Food Security

Leaders and members of affected communities expressed grave concerns about the likelihood of food insecurity. Nearly 90% of the affected households will experience food insecurity in the coming month(s). As of August, certain families have already been experiencing hunger, with barely anything to eat. Locally, supply and demand will effectively reduce the purchasing power, since prices and transport fares are bound to increase. Additionally, continued rains may trigger food shortage, inducing long-term famine and massive starvation, and potentially rendering more than a half of the affected population food insecure.

Numerous gardens were destroyed and several fields remain unreachable, thus, disrupting harvests and post-harvest handling. The most affected crops include: ground nuts, millet, sorghum, beans, simsim, cassava, sunflowers, rice and cabbages. Most crops have rotted in the field, while the harvested crops could not be dried (for preservation).



A flooded garden in Pakor Parish, Agago district

Shelter and Non-food Items

The traditional mud-brick architecture, common in the areas surveyed, is largely susceptible to damage by the wet conditions prevalent during flooding, and as such many people's shelters were destroyed. Families whose shelters were destroyed currently live in debilitating conditions, even sleeping in 'heaps of grass' and 'rocks'. For those who have abandoned their huts, some in a satellite-camp in **Atura**, are sharing one small hut (between **2-4 families**). People are also forced to cook outdoors and resort to drying their harvest on rocks and wet surfaces. Shelter kits containing tarpaulins, buckets, mosquito nets, blankets and tents are a necessity.



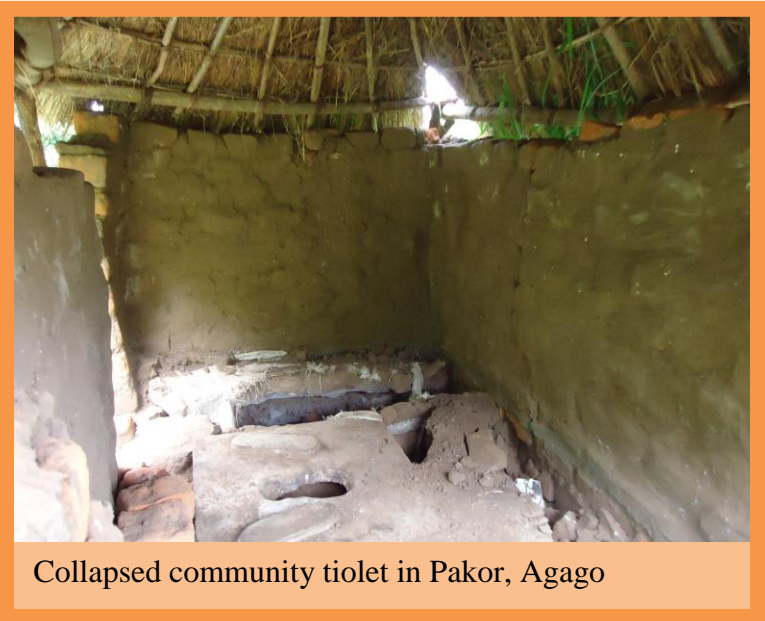
Submerged hut in Kitgum town

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

Several toilets and sanitary facilities within the community and other institutions sank due to floods. About **1,466** toilets were reportedly destroyed in Agago district alone. Poor hygienic conditions have arisen from destroyed sanitary facilities and stressed contaminated clean water points, which poses a huge threat of outbreak of waterborne or faecal-oral diseases like cholera, dysentery and worm infections. Additionally, rubbish deposited by running water in market areas like Malaba in Kitgum is a significant health hazard.

Health and nutrition

Key medical amenities that were established are now inaccessible. Hospitals such as Kalongo and health centres like Kabala HC II and Pakor HC II in Parabongo Sub County are cut-off from large portions of the community. Pader, for example, has no main hospital and relies on Kalongo hospital and Kitgum hospital, yet the roads to both are virtually impassable. Already, sections of the affected populace are experiencing different illnesses such as cold, diarrheal, pneumonia and headache arising from the dump and humid living conditions. In the case of disease outbreak, access to medical services may be a challenge, which could possibly result in the loss of many lives. Limited food availability may result in severe malnutrition and its associated effects.



Collapsed community toilet in Pakor, Agago

Education

As schools prepare for third-term, the opening of a number of primary and secondary schools will be disrupted. If heavy rains persist, almost 85% of the schools in flood-prone areas will be difficult to access, leading to an increase in school dropouts and a decline in performance, thus, threatening the progress of education in the region. In Parabongo sub-county in Agago district for instance, 8 schools (Pakor P.7, Kabaala P.7, Dungu P.7, Karumu P.7, Aleda P.7, Ladigo P.7, Aywee garagara and Papera P.7) are inaccessible. Lokom P/S and Locom P/S in Orom, Kitgum district are also largely cut-off. In Kitgum, Pager bridge (connecting the northern side and southern part) when flooded, cuts-off access to schools in the town council by pupils and students coming from the neighbouring areas.

Resettlement and Displacement

Noting the impact on returnees, part of this vulnerable population was re-displaced by the floods. If their needs are not addressed in a timely manner, more risk being re-displaced to IDP camps, especially in flood prone areas such as: Wol and Adilang in Agago district; Atanga and Latanya in Pader district; Orom, Omiya Anyima, Namokora, Mucwini in Kitgum district and; Potika and



A family rescued from their fallen hut in Parabongo

Paluga in Lamwo district. Returning to camps could instigate an increase in land disputes, as vacant land invites encroachment and illegal land grabbing. Odoch Richard Poromoi (Asst. CAO, Agago) said:

People have returned and resettled down in the villages, started growing and even expected a bumper harvest. Many of them had started rebuilding themselves, but now again they are displaced. Meaning

constructing new houses and replanting, how many houses will they have to build now every year if it continues like this?

Trade and Business

Access to markets such as Wol, Lomoi, Namokora, Kalongo, Malaba and Potika markets is uncertain. For example, traders and businessmen from as far as Lira, Apac and Abim cannot engage in commerce with these areas. This has decreased household income generated from the sale of produce as well as other local revenue raised from the markets. Currently, a few vehicles are going through these routes, resulting in overloading, delaying movement and increasing the risk of road accidents for traders, businessmen and other road users.

Response to Nodding Syndrome

In Pader and Kitgum, responding to the problems associated with Nodding Syndrome has been a main focus. However, the floods have hindered these efforts and limited access to the Nodding Syndrome patients—Ambulances cannot reach out to some communities, and others can hardly move to the established treatment centres in Pader and Kitgum.

Family Peace and Stability

Participants in some areas reported that some men have moved to neighbouring areas, leaving behind women and children in their families. Living standards are greatly reduced, leaving some people highly vulnerable to post-traumatic stress.

RESPONSE TO-DATE

District authorities have not yet been able to quantify the full impact of the floods, let alone to map-out all the affected areas. Agago district has compiled data from affected households, but Kitgum, Pader and Lamwo seem occupied with other post-conflict reconstruction challenges and competing priorities. Most emergency relief organisations previously phased out their programmes, perhaps accounting for the absence of adequate tangible responses to these crises. In some places, local leaders have sensitised the community on the implications of floods and their associated challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO OPM & CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

- Dispatch immediate relief items like medicines and disinfectant for affected sub-regions to prevent disease outbreak.
- Repair the bridges and/culverts connecting communities main markets, hospitals, schools and towns to improve accessibility;
- Provide agricultural inputs and farm implements to enable replanting;
- Establish and strengthen the meteorological and weather forecast systems in different districts for effective early warning

TO HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES

- Conduct a comprehensive mapping of flood-prone areas for early warning and timely response;
- Create emergency assistance programs to address immediate humanitarian needs;
- Provide food aid for affected households, most of whom already face food insecurity;
- Support the reconstruction of community access roads
- Provide emergency relief kits or non-food items like mosquito nets, tarpaulins, tents, buckets and blankets;
- Provide agricultural inputs and farm implements such as; ox ploughs, fast growing and quick-maturing seeds, cassava stems, potato vines and insecticides, to help re-establish livelihood capacity;



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- Support public health outreaches and services to alert the population of potential health risks;
- Provide sanitary facilities such as mobile echo-san or mount-latrines;
- Invest in clean water access in affected areas through disinfecting water sources contaminated by flood water.

TO THE PRDP DISTRICT LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

- Conduct a comprehensive impact assessment and determine the exact intervention needs in each district;
- Liaise with development partners to map-out all flood-prone areas for purposes of early warning and effective response in cases of future disaster;
- Refine the contingency response plan to satisfactorily address such crises;
- Conduct widespread community sensitisation, particularly on public health issues and communal land use for grazing and other seasonal cultivations by flood affected communities.

About Refugee Law Project: a Centre for Justice and Forced Migrants

The Refugee Law Project (RLP) is a Community Outreach Project of the School of Law, Makerere University. It seeks to ensure fundamental human rights for all, including; asylum seekers, refugees, and internally displaced persons within Uganda. RLP envision a country that treats all people within its borders with the same standards of respect and social justice

About Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity (ACCS)

The Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity (ACCS) is a three member consortium that brings together, Refugee Law Project, International Alert and Saferworld. The overall aim of ACCS is assisting DFID and partners in strengthening the potential of the PCDP and recovery process to address the causes of conflict and contribute to sustainable peace and stability. Under ACCS, RLP is leading on contextual analysis of the overall recovery process (focusing on conflict indicators, issues and dynamics), and early warning as and when necessary.

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