

Laying Foundations for Post-conflict Recovery: The Role of Humanitarian Relief Aid in Northern Uganda

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The conflict between the Government of Uganda (GoU) and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has been the most brutal and violent of conflicts since independence that resulted in a massive humanitarian emergency. The effects of the conflict were immense and gruesome. Thousands of children were abducted and abused, or killed in battle. Many civilians were mutilated, maimed, raped and disabled. Nearly two million people were displaced into camps living in squalid and life-threatening conditions, dependent upon relief and with limited access to incomes and livelihoods. The camps became 'home' where they lived for more than five years and a large number of children were born and raised the camps where they hardly knew of life outside the camp. In August 2006, there was a signing of a cessation of hostilities agreement between the warring factions which resulted into improved security allowing the internally displaced people to return to their homes. Using the case of Northern Uganda, this paper examines the nature of aid that was provided during the conflict and explores how it has impacted on the recovery process. Data was collected from the internally displaced people while still in the camps and later when they had moved back to their home areas. The paper tries to explore how 'goal-oriented' humanitarianism manifests in situations of protracted displacement. The findings reveal that in theory there is a shift towards 'goal-oriented' humanitarianism but this is yet to be actualized in practice. Humanitarian relief is still focused on the minimalist aims of saving life with little focus on long-term development. Situations of protracted displacement call for more a robust and proactive approach to humanitarian response. It takes more than relief to achieve sustainable post-conflict recovery however the role that relief plays is crucial and needs to be re-worked. The key argument is that the way people are assisted during conflict situations will impact upon the recovery processes as this case demonstrates.