

Alleged Land Grabs and Governance: Exploring Mistrust and Trust in Northern Uganda – The Case of the Apaa Land Conflict

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Introduction

Rumours of land grabs by wealthy investors, well-connected political and military figures and government actors have been rife in northern Uganda since the late 1980s. The displacement of more than 90% of the Acholi population in camps for internally displaced people (IDP) between the mid-1990s and 2008, during the war between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda, is still seen by many as the beginning of an attempted land grab. Allocations of large areas of land in the post-war period, justified in the name of economic development, feed into a local paradigm of mistrust based on perceived oppression and exploitation by outsiders.

This paper examines the case of Apaa, a remote village on the fringes of the Acholi sub-region, and the scene of one of the innumerable land disputes afflicting northern Uganda since the return of the population from the camps. It looks at the recent evictions of people from Apaa by the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) to explore how trust and mistrust interplay in the governance of conflicts over large-scale land acquisitions.

The Apaa conflict involves the local people, the UWA, security forces, national government, local councils, investors, politicians and powerful individuals. In the view of the local people, the area around Apaa is customary land and part of Amuru District, whereas the UWA argues that it is gazetted (state-owned) land that belongs to East Madi Wildlife Reserve in Adjumani District. The parties to the conflict have tried to solve the problem by providing maps to establish the exact boundary between the two districts, and thus to ascertain whether Apaa village is located within East Madi Wildlife Reserve or outside the conservation area.

However, this paper argues that the demarcation of the boundary can only be a first step in resolving the conflict, which is equally about issues of social belonging and identity associated with the land, and about landownership, livelihood security, wildlife protection, and investment for the development of northern Uganda. The conflict challenges institutional capability, and the greed of – and trust or mistrust in – individual, politically connected actors who claim to speak in the name of the community of Apaa and who have brought ethnic differences between Madi and Acholi into play, after decades of harmonious relations, and who have been widening the extent of the disagreement. The paper points to historical and recent political, economic and social divisions in the north of Uganda and across the whole country which underlie the conflict, and it questions whether or not large-scale land cases may also be promoting new alliances based on newly appreciated common interests.

The paper is based on a review of the literature on land conflicts in northern Uganda, daily newspapers reporting the Apaa issue and some interviews. Part 1 looks at the meaning of land for the Acholi people and different types of conflict over land in post-war northern Uganda. Part 2 describes the Apaa land conflict by highlighting the multiple

and overlapping points of conflict raised by a range of different actors, the chronology of the conflict and attempts at conflict resolution. It further outlines the visible core problem of the disputed boundary and the underlying issues, i.e. whether to prioritise human livelihood security or protection of wildlife and investment for development, from the point of view of those involved, and looks at the growing ethnicisation of the conflict. Part 3 focuses on mistrust in the governance of the conflict by listening to local voices expressing perceived threats to their livelihood security and social belonging, which are discussed with reference to the concepts of risk, uncertainty and vulnerability and against the background of the political and economic framework conditions. Part 4 considers approaches and challenges to conflict resolution by reviewing the visible core problem, underlying causes and the effects of the conflict. In the conclusion the question is raised: Who benefits?

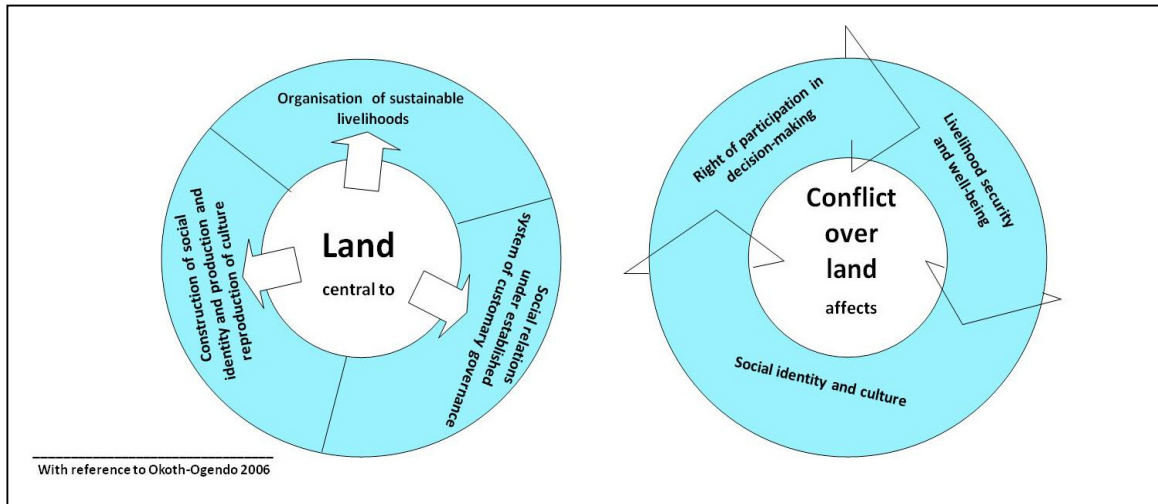
1. The Meaning of Land for the Acholi and Conflict Over Land in Post-War Northern Uganda

Northern Uganda experienced more than two decades of violent conflict between the LRA and the Government of Uganda, during which almost the entire Acholi population was displaced and forced to live in IDP camps. Since the LRA and the government entered into peace negotiations (2006-2008), the people of northern Uganda have benefited from what they call “relative peace”, and an estimated 1.8 million people or 92% of the IDPs have returned to their areas of origin while a minority has resettled elsewhere (Burke & Omiat Egaru 2011; IDMC 2012a; IRIN 2012; RLP 2007).

The return, however, has not been an easy process. It has been accompanied by numerous land conflicts that have not only put the major productive resource of the returning people at risk, but also challenged notions of social identity and cultural belonging associated with the land and the right to participate in decision-making.

For the Acholi and other people in Africa, land is “not simply a factor of production, but a multiplex social, cultural and political phenomenon” on which the production of social relations under an established system of customary governance and the construction of social identity and (re-)production of culture depend (Okoth-Ogendo, quoted in IFAD 2006: 5); or in the words of the Catholic Archbishop of Gulu Archdiocese, John Baptist Odama: “Land is our mother where we all get milk, food and other benefits. God gave the Acholi people the land which they must enjoy for productivity.” (Odama, quoted in Okumu 2012).

Figure 1: The Meaning of Land for the Acholi and Conflict Risks

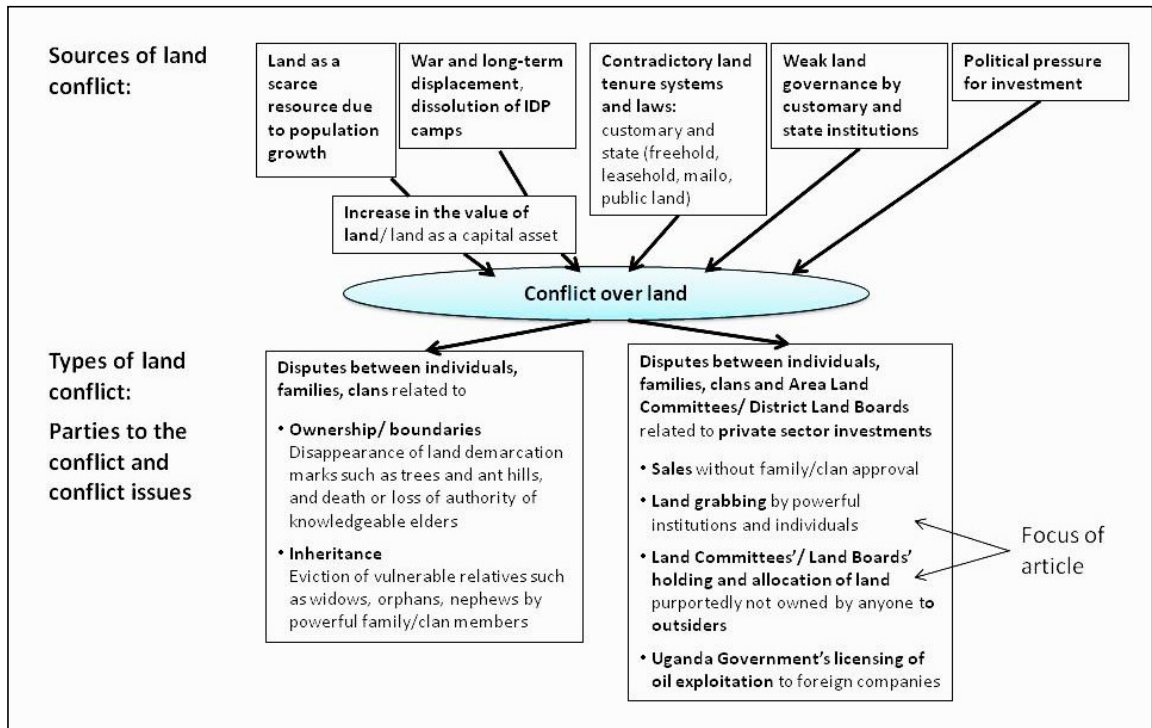


Conflicts over land in post-war northern Uganda are a consequence of people's long-term displacement in camps, during which boundary markers (such as ant hills, trees and stones) disappeared and knowledgeable elders either died or lost their authority. They are also caused by a significant increase in population over the last twenty years, which has made land a scarce resource, as well as political pressure for investment. The conflicts are rooted in contradictory customary and state land tenure systems and weak land governance.

Land in northern Uganda is held under customary tenure, which allows people to own pieces of land but not to sell them without clan or family approval. Customary tenure is, however, challenged by the state legal and judicial system of land administration that promotes freehold and leasehold tenure, but also recognises customary tenure. Statutory and customary land laws contain ambiguities. For instance, earlier laws gave people who occupied a piece of land for twelve or more years ownership rights over the land. During the LRA insurgency, this allowed some powerful individuals to gain rights over communal land. People also fear losing their land since most of them lack official land ownership documents. The government recently started to issue Certificates of Title of Customary Ownership, giving rights equal to freehold tenure, but a law confirming these rights has not yet been passed. (cf. IRIN 2012).

Different parties to land conflicts clash over different issues. Individuals, families and clans dispute boundaries, ownership and inheritance, and these disputes have greatly affected vulnerable people who are in a disadvantaged position in the Acholi patrilineal descent system such as widows, orphans and sisters' children. Other disputes over intended private sector investments involve individuals, families, clans, but also Area Land Committees and District Land Boards. Sources of conflict include sales taking place without family or clan approval, land grabbing by powerful individuals, and the holding and allocation of land by Area Land Committees and District Land Boards. Conflicts are also bound to arise in relation to the licensing of oil exploitation to foreign companies without a clear stance on the question of who owns underground resources. (cf. ARLPI 2009, 2010; Burke & Omiat Egaru 2011; Chelimo 2011; IFAD 2006; IRIN 2012; Mabikke 2011; McKibben & Bean 2010; Mugambwa 2007; Olanya n.d.; Rugadya 2008; Rugadya *et al.* 2008; Serwajja 2012; UN Habitat 2007).

Figure 2: Conflicts over Land in the Acholi Sub-region



Conflicts relating to large-scale land acquisition for investment have been particularly evident in Amuru District, which is located in the western part of the Acholi sub-region. The massive displacement of the local population into IDP camps from the mid-1990s until 2008 is still seen by many as part of a long-running attempt to grab the people's land – an attempt that is both deceitful and illegal, as spelled out in Samuel Mabikke's definition of land grabbing:

"... [t]he acquisition of land by a public, private enterprise, or individual in a manner that is illegal, fraudulent, or unfair taking advantage of existing power differences, corruption, and breakdown of law and order in the society." (Mabikke 2011: 15).

A case in point is the conflict between the people of Apaa and the UWA, the former claiming that the area around Apaa is customary land and part of Amuru District, while the latter argue that it is part of the East Madi Wildlife Reserve in Adjumani District. The reserve is presently managed by the UWA, Adjumani District and Lake Albert Safaris – a private-public partnership arrangement intended to enhance revenue generation. The UWA accuses the local people of encroaching on the reserve, poaching and destroying the natural habitat (Wacha 2011a, 2012a). Since 2010, people have been forcefully evicted from Apaa. These evictions are regarded as necessary by the authorities in order to protect the natural environment in the reserve and boost tourism in the area, thus driving forward development (Wacha 2012a, 2012b). The evictions have been met with fierce resistance by the local people and Acholi politicians who have accused the UWA and investors of attempting to grab their ancestral land (Okumu 2012; Wacha 2011a, 2012a). They have, however, emphasised that they are not opposed to investment and development, but want to be consulted by investors who they think should talk directly to the local people rather than going through state officials and the courts (Makumbi 2012a; Okumu 2012).

2. The Apaa Land Conflict

The conflict in Apaa is characterised by multiple and overlapping conflict patterns involving a range of different actors. It remained latent until 2010. In 2011 and 2012, however, positions became more and more confrontational, and the conflict has progressively been dealt with by use of violent means. Several attempts to resolve the conflict have failed to date.

The following section first provides an overview of the issues and stakeholders involved in the conflict, the chronology of the conflict and attempts at conflict resolution. Subsequently, light is shed on the visible core problem, its underlying causes and its effects in the form of new disputes involving different parties to the conflict, including local people, politicians who claim to speak for them, and representatives of national government, local administration and investors.

2.1 Conflict Issues, Stakeholders, Chronology of the Conflict and Attempts at Conflict Resolution

The Apaa conflict is a border dispute between Adjumani and Amuru districts and a conflict over the administrative affiliation of Apaa to one or another of these districts. It is also a conflict over land ownership and human livelihood security versus protection of wildlife combined with investment for the development of post-war northern Uganda. Finally, it is a conflict over land as a productive resource and a social/cultural identity marker.

Stakeholders involved in the conflict comprise the community of Apaa; Acholi and Madi people; Adjumani and Amuru districts; Acholi and Madi parliamentarians and local politicians; the UWA and the Government of Uganda, particularly the Ministry of Land, Housing and Urban Development and the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Industry; security forces, namely UWA rangers, police (UPF) and army (UPDF) personnel; powerful individual actors; and investors.

The conflict started with the improving security situation and the first closures of IDP camps during the Juba Peace Talks in 2006-2008 (cf. IDMC 2012b; UNHCR 2007), when the people of northern Uganda began to return to their homes.

The progression from latent conflict to open confrontation and the progressive use of violent means as well as attempts to solve the conflict up until the end of September 2012 are summarised in the following table.

Table 1: Chronology of the Conflict and Attempts at Conflict Resolution

Latent conflict	2006 and early 2007	People from Parabongo, Pabbo, Atiak and Amuru IDP camps begin to settle in Apaa.
	May 2007	Adjumani and Amuru district leaders claim Apaa is part of East Madi Wildlife Reserve managed by the UWA in collaboration with Adjumani District, and order over 2,000 former IDPs “who illegally settle in the reserve” to leave. Residents refuse and insist that they have returned to their original land.
Confrontation and progressive use of violent means	2010	Game rangers from the UWA burn down over 170 huts in order to force people to leave Apaa.
	2011 – 2012	Forceful eviction exercises in Apaa by the UPDF, UPF and UWA, accompanied by arrests, destruction of huts, property and crops. Several thousand people are evicted (estimated numbers: 4,000-4,500 in May 2011; 6,000 in February/March 2012).
	August 2012	Start of the demarcation of the disputed border by surveyors of the Ministry of Land, Housing and Urban Development results in violent clashes between residents and security forces.
	2012	Increased tensions and violent clashes between individual Acholi and Madi in the border area of Adjumani and Amuru districts.
Conflict resolution efforts	2012	Unsuccessful attempts are made to resolve the conflict in 2012 through: the formation of a Cabinet sub-committee to look into the matter; a court ruling that puts an injunction on Apaa land and restrains the UWA from evicting residents; and dialogue.
	September 2012	During a community meeting in Pabbo sub-county, residents resolve that that they want to see President Museveni over the Apaa land conflict, since only his intervention could halt evictions and the claims of ownership by the government.
<p><u>Sources:</u> Acholi Times 2012; Ali 2012; CEFORD 2012; Eriku 2007; Lawino 2012b; Lokwiya 2011; Makumbi 2011, 2012b, 2012c; Naturinda 2012; Ojok 2012; Parliament of Uganda 2012a; RLP 2012: 3; Wacha 2011a, 2011c, 2012a, 2012b; and interview with Habib Abubakar, 8 March 2012.</p>		

2.2 The Visible Core Problem: Disputed District Border and Administrative Affiliation

The visible core problem of the Apaa conflict is the unclear boundary between Adjumani and Amuru districts. As a consequence, the administrative affiliation of Apaa to either Adjumani District or Amuru District is another debated issue.

Views of People from Apaa, Representatives of Amuru District Local Council and Acholi Parliamentarians

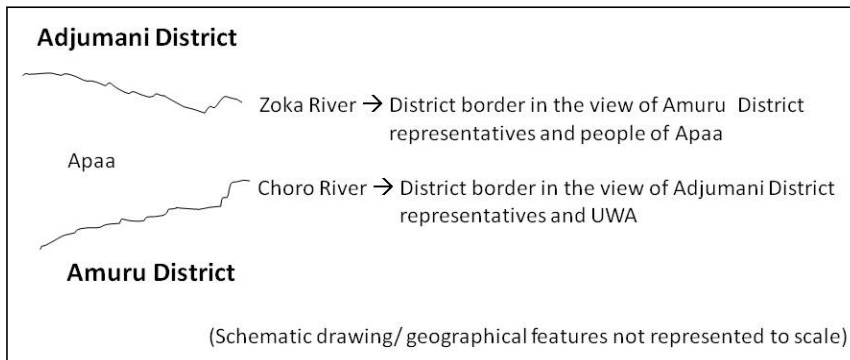
According to statements by people from Apaa, the MP for Kilak County in Amuru District, Gilbert Olanya, other Acholi MPs and some officials from Amuru District, the Zoka River marks the border between the two districts. In their view, the border was established in colonial times and stretches more than 15 miles away from Apaa (Lawino 2012b). Thus, in their view, Apaa is administratively affiliated to Amuru District. In support of their argument they say that the people of Apaa were counted during the last census as people of Amuru (then Gulu District) and voted for candidates of Amuru District, not Adjumani District in the 2011 elections (Amone 2011).

Views of Representatives of the National Government and Adjumani District Local Council

In the view of the Deputy Prime Minister and MP for Moyo Constituency, General Moses Ali (who is also Leader of Government Business in Parliament) and of the Assistant CAO of Adjumani District, Habib Abubakar, the border between the two districts – which is also the border of East Madi Wildlife Reserve, with Apaa being part of the reserve – has not changed since independence. Both emphasise that the border was drawn during colonial times. After independence, the government decided that the border should remain unchanged. This decision was adopted in Parliament in 1962 and confirmed by the 1995 Constitution. However, representatives of Amuru District would not accept the map from the Entebbe archives, claiming instead that the Zoka River marks the border. If this were the case, they argue, Apaa would be located in Amuru District, which is not correct. In their view, the Choro River marks the border. (Ali 2012; Interview with Habib Abubakar, 8 March 2012). General Ali accuses Gilbert Olanya, MP for Kilak County, and Christopher Ojera, LCIII Chairperson Pabbo, of having “redrawn (in their minds) the border between Amuru and Adjumani to be River Zoka” in order to claim Apaa as part of Amuru District (Ali 2012).

In the opinion of the Assistant CAO of Adjumani District, the view that Apaa is administratively affiliated to Amuru District is based on a misinterpretation that is rooted in the times of the LRA insurgency and the displacement camps. According to him, at that time Acholi people lived in IDP camps on the Adjumani side of the border, including a camp in Zoka Game Reserve, which is located inside East Madi Wildlife Reserve. After the camps were phased out, some people – mainly Acholi, but also a few Madi – remained in the reserve. Their claim that “this is our land” and that Apaa is part of Amuru District originates from services (health, schools, etc.) delivered by Amuru District during the time of the camps. Adjumani District had difficulties reaching Apaa owing to impenetrable forests, rivers and streams, and lack of bridges. Also, the insurgency stopped Adjumani District from opening a road to the border. (Interview with Habib Abubakar, 8 March 2012).

Figure 3: Different Views on the Demarcation of the Disputed Segment of the Amuru-Adjumani Districts Border



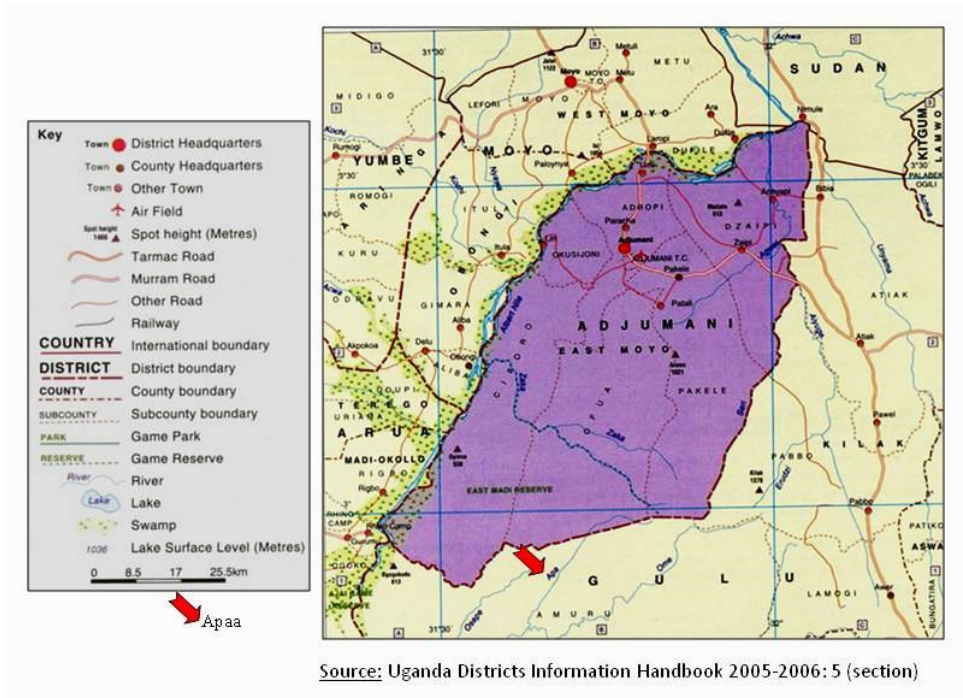
Maps Indicating the Location of Apaa

Apa'a village consists of numerous homesteads spread along a river of the same name.

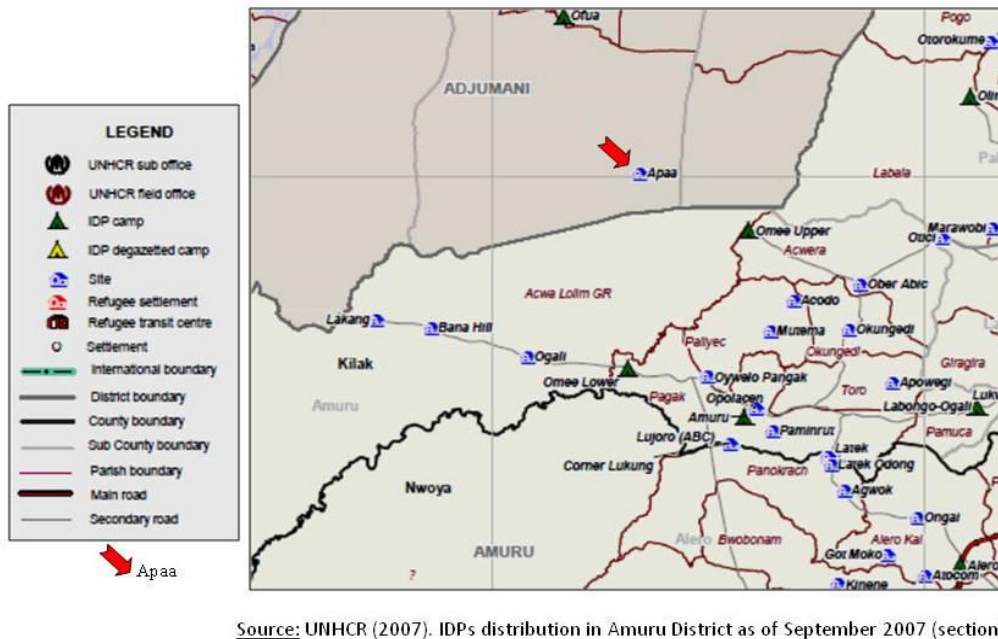
Maps indicating the location of Apaa are unclear, as demonstrated by two examples. In 2005/06, the Ugandan government located the main section of Apaa River in Amuru sub-county, Kilak County, at that time still part of Gulu District, and a small section of the river in Adjumani District (Uganda Districts Information Handbook 2005-2006: 5), whereas, in 2007, the UN Refugee Agency located the 'site' Apaa (a food distribution point) well inside Adjumani District and quite far from the district boundary shown on the map (UNHCR 2007).

A resident of Apaa who was asked about these inconsistencies explained that "our boundaries have always followed natural features; therefore it is Apaa River that demarcates the border [of the contested segment], and consequently Apaa is part of Amuru District" (Interview with resident of Apaa, 15 February 2013). The Deputy Prime Minister General Moses Ali, who confirms that the boundary "is characterized by natural features", however emphasises that the section of the border in question does not follow a river, but "goes on land for 28-kms" until it reaches Seri River (Ali 2012).

Map 1: Location of Apaa River According to Uganda District Information Handbook Map 2005



Map 2: Location of Apaa Site According to UNHCR IDP Distribution Map 2007



2.3 Underlying Causes: Contested Land Ownership, and Prioritisation of Human Livelihood Security versus Protection of Wildlife combined with Investment for the Development of Post-War Northern Uganda

Both people from Apaa and the UWA claim ownership over the area. The people of Apaa put emphasis on the need to access land as the key to securing their livelihoods, which in the rural areas of the Acholi sub-region largely depend on subsistence agriculture. In contrast, representatives of the UWA and Adjumani District focus on the protection of wildlife and investment in tourism as a major catalyst for the development of the region.

Land Ownership

Views of People from Apaa, the LCI of Apaa and the MP for Kilak County, Amuru District

In the view of people from Apaa, the land is customary land, which has always belonged to them and their ancestors (Lawino 2012b; Makumbi 2012c; and interviews with residents of Apaa, 2 November 2012 and 15 February 2013).

According to the LCI of Apaa, Justine Okot, local people were relocated from the area in the colonial period because of tsetse fly infestation, and returned in the 1970s during Idi Amin's regime, before gradually leaving again in the course of the LRA insurgency, when the Ugandan government forced them into IDP camps (Wacha 2012b). He emphasises that the recently evicted people are able to trace their residency in the area back to 1973 (Lokwiya 2011). The MP for Kilak County, Gilbert Olanya, explains that a previously existing game reserve was de-gazetted several years ago, allowing for the people to return (Wacha 2012a, 2012b).

Some local people said that in 2002 they began to hear rumours that their land would be claimed by the UWA. When the camps were dissolved and people were told to return to their homes, they came back to Apaa. At first, they did not hear complaints from the UWA, but were later puzzled by the evictions (Lokwiya 2011; Makumbi 2012c; Wacha 2012b).

Views of Representatives of the National Government, UWA and Adjumani District and Amuru District Local Councils

The Deputy Prime Minister, General Moses Ali, objects to the view that a previously existing game reserve – which was de-gazetted, thus allowing the people to return – included the area of Apaa. According to him, this reserve – the Kilak Hunting Area and Aswa/Lorim Game Reserve degazetted in 1972 by the Amin government (cf. Serwajja 2012: 16f.) – was located in the area of present-day Amuru District, not Adjumani District (Ali 2012).

According to General Moses Ali and representatives of the UWA, Apaa belongs to East Madi Wildlife Reserve, which covers 825 square kilometers and is entirely located in Adjumani District (Ali 2012; Lawino 2012b; Makumbi 2011, 2012c). This opinion is shared by Milton Odongo, the former RDC of Amuru District, who during the first large-scale eviction of more than 4,000 people by the UPDF and UWA in 2011 insisted that the area is “part of a reserve that is not even in Amuru but Adjumani District”, but “during the war people moved to areas (such as Apaa) that were demarcated as IDP camps” (Milton Odongo, quoted in Makumbi 2011).

According to the Deputy Prime Minister, General Moses Ali, the Assistant CAO of Adjumani District, Habib Abubakar, and UWA representatives, the area was designated a wildlife reserve in 2002 by the Seventh Parliament of Uganda and gazetted by the Ministry

of Trade, Tourism and Industry in the same year – after consultations with Madi elders that began a long time before the LRA insurgency. It thus ceased to be land where people could settle (Ali 2012; Makumbi 2011, 2012c; Wacha 2012b; and interview with Habib Abubakar, 8 March 2012). In the General’s view, encroachment and the dispute over the East Madi Wildlife Reserve boundary started in 2006 when IDPs were supposed to go back to their respective areas, but instead moved to the reserve. First attempts to survey and demarcate the border were met with resistance from local communities and political leaders from Amuru and “workers were chased and threatened with death” (Ali 2012).

Prioritisation of Human Livelihood Security versus Protection of Wildlife Combined with Investment for Development of Post-war Northern Uganda

Views of People from Apaa, Acholi Politicians and Religious and Cultural Leaders

According to statements by people from Apaa, the residents are not willing to leave because they have no alternative land to move to where they can cultivate crops (Wacha 2011b, 2012b; and interviews with residents of Apaa, 2 November 2012). They stress that the continuing eviction has already seriously affected food production and threatened livelihood security (RLP 2012: 2).

They further argue that the people of Apaa think that the UWA and investors are using the government to grab their ancestral land; and that the evictions are being carried out because the UWA has already sold the area to an investor (Okumu 2012; Wacha 2011a, 2012a; and interviews with Apaa residents, 2 November 2012).

Acholi politicians, religious and cultural leaders and local people emphasise that they are not against investment and development of the area. However, investors should talk directly to them instead of using their connections to government or resorting to the courts (Makumbi 2012a; Okumu 2012).

Views of Representatives of Adjumani District Local Council, the UWA, UPF and the South African Investor

The Assistant CAO of Adjumani District emphasises that the East Madi Wildlife Reserve and Zoka Forest Reserve inside it are gazetted land, “which means government land for specific purposes – in this case: to preserve natural habitats, not human habitation. This is based on laws.” (Interview with Habib Abubakar, 8 March 2012).

UWA representatives accuse the local people of encroaching on East Madi Wildlife Reserve, poaching and destroying the natural habitat (Wacha 2011a, 2012a): “UWA is only working under the law in protecting the integrity of the wildlife reserve from encroachers as provided in the Uganda Wildlife Act 2000” (UWA Conservation Area Manager Mr. Tom Okello, quoted in Makumbi 2011).

According to Grace Turyagumanawe, Assistant Inspector of Police, the eviction is part of a national plan to protect wildlife and wildlife reserves, to boost the tourism sector and an influx of foreign exchange, thus driving forward development (Wacha 2012a, 2012b). UWA representatives highlight the fact that the reserve is presently managed under a tripartite arrangement by the UWA, Adjumani District and Lake Albert Safaris – a private-public partnership arrangement intended to enhance revenue generation (Wacha 2011a, 2012a). Bruce Martin from Lake Albert Safaris received a concession for sports hunting as early as 2005 (Lawino 2012b). His activities were advertised as follows in 2010 by the Hunting Report, a web journal for big game hunters and trophy collectors:

“In Uganda Bruce Martin of Lake Albert Safaris has finally been awarded the East Madi Wildlife Reserve. This concession encompasses 900-square-kilometers of unspoiled bush along the Nile River. As a reserve, there are no villages in the concession. Martin is offering hunts for Nile buffalo and plains game, including East African defassa waterbuck and Jackson's hartebeest. Agent Steve Kobrine says they will have the quota by the Safari Club convention.” (Hunting Report 2010).

2.4 Effects of the Conflict causing New Conflicts over the Productive Resource Land and Social and Cultural Identity Related to Land

During the time of encampment, Acholi and Madi people had settled together peacefully in the disputed area and afterwards united in resisting the evictions (Interview with Habib Abubakar, 8 March 2012; and interview with resident of Apaa, 15 February 2013). However, during 2012, the Apaa conflict became increasingly ethnicised, which resulted in violent clashes between individual Acholi and Madi.

During a parliamentary debate on 8 February 2012, the MP for Kilak County in Amuru District accused the Madi community of “crossing the boundary coming to Amuru” and referred to an incident on 27 January 2012, when Madi from Adjumani District armed with spears, arrows, bows and pangas came to Apaa and told the Acholi “to leave our land”. This incident was confirmed by the Minister of Security (Parliament of Uganda 2012a). Three days later, armed Acholi from Amuru District injured five Madi residents and destroyed property in Zoka Parish, Itirikwa sub-county, Adjumani District. The Acholi intruders said that the Madi were settling on Acholi land, insisting that Zoka parish was part of Amuru District, not Adjumani District, with the Zoka River as the district boundary, not Choro River as the Madi claimed (CEFORD 2012; Interview with Habib Abubakar, 8 March 2012).

According to members of the Acholi Parliamentary Group, General Moses Ali, Deputy Prime Minister and MP for Moyo Constituency, was inciting “tribal wars” by mobilising Madi from Adjumani District and sending them to Amuru District with spears, arrows, and bows to grab land. The General denied the accusation. (Ali 2012; Naturinda 2012; Parliament of Uganda 2012a, 2012b). The cabinet discussed the matter and delegated the General to form a Cabinet sub-committee to investigate the matter. He called a meeting and invited the Acholi MPs. However, they did not attend, arguing that the head of the committee was a party to the conflict and thus could not act as an arbitrator (Naturinda 2012).

Following the beginning of demarcation of the disputed Adjumani-Amuru border in August 2012 by government surveyors, who were accompanied by officials from Adjumani District, ethnic tensions spread across the border into the adjacent Nwoya District (Acholi sub-region), where over 2,000 Madi and Jonam residents from West-Nile had settled in the sub-counties of Purongo, Anaka and Alero. Representatives of the Madi and Jonam settlers asked the officials to halt the evictions, because they were afraid of being chased away by Acholi who accused them of having settled on Acholi-owned land illegally since 2006, when the government had announced the voluntary return and resettlement of displaced people in the war-affected areas. Some of them were also suspected of having been brought to the area by NRM politicians to vote for them in the 2011 general elections (Makumbi 2012b).

3. Mistrust in the Governance of the Conflict

The people of Apaa deeply mistrust the governance of the conflict over large-scale land acquisition by outsiders which, in their view, threatens their livelihoods and the source of their sense of belonging and identity. Uncertainty, fear, suspicion and bitter grievances related to the past underpin their evaluation of actual dangers and perceived risks, and their strategies for counteracting the current developments.

In the following section, we hear the voices of people from Apaa and the positions of individuals who claim to speak for them, including those who represent the people's interests and others who mainly use the conflict to win political support. It also scrutinises unsafe political and economic frameworks that make the people of Apaa extremely vulnerable and allow the exploitation of their economic and social distress for political purposes, including lack of transparency on the part of government concerning the development of the region and an information deficit concerning people's rights.

3.1 Perceptions of the Threat to Livelihood Security and Social Belonging

Land as a Source of Well-being Related to the Fulfilment of Basic and Culture-specific Needs

The following scenario demonstrates the meaning of land for the people of Apaa – who depend on the land for livelihood security, the construction of social identity and reproduction of culture – and their fear of losing their land due to large-scale land acquisition by outsiders.

In August 2012, after residents of Apaa attacked and frightened away government surveyors from the Ministry of Land, Housing and Urban Development who had started to demarcate what they claimed to be the border between Adjumani and Amuru districts, they reportedly chanted a song that recalled the Acholi's quest for protection of their land by responsible leaders during the NRA's attack on Acholiland in 1986:

“Okello iweko ngom ki anga ... bedo awobe tek, iweko ngom ki anga? Wii-yeee!”
literary meaning ‘to whom will you abandon this land’. (Lawino 2012b) [Literal translation: ‘Okello, to whom have you left the land ... being a (male) youth is difficult, to whom have you left (the right to) the land?’].

Uncertainty, Fear and Worrying

Loss of large tracts of land to outsiders poses a severe threat to the well-being of the people of Apaa in relation to their livelihood security and social and cultural needs.

An essential component of well-being is feeling secure. The anticipation of losses leads to uncertainty – “a lack of assurance or conviction”, fear – “a feeling of agitation and anxiety caused by the presence or imminence of danger”, and worrying about the future (cf. Casimir 2008: 26ff.; definition of terms: The Free Dictionary 2012).

The following statements by people from Apaa after the 2011 evictions, as quoted by Wacha (2011a, 2011b), reflect their feelings of uncertainty, fear and worrying:

“Wilson Acuma ... explains that a team of soldiers stormed their village ... and ordered them to demolish their own houses and flee from the area. ... He ... is afraid that his family will starve after the soldiers destroyed his harvest and the food supplies ...” (Wacha 2011a).

“Norak Acayo, a mother of four says that they were excited to use the present rains to cultivate crops and overturn the dependency life they once had in the camp but fears that their dreams may be dashed with the interference by UWA.” (Wacha 2011b).

Mistrust and Suspicion

Expressions of uncertainty, fear and worrying by the people of Apaa are deeply rooted in mistrust – the “lack of trust or confidence, as in a person's motives, arising from suspicion” (The Free Dictionary 2012) – over the governance of conflicts about large-scale land acquisition. This mistrust is expressed in various ways, as demonstrated by the following extracts from Acholi newspaper commentaries. There is a suspicion that the government is behind land conflicts in the Acholi sub-region in order to grab land for investors, and there are accusations of bad governance, selfish interests and a hidden agenda.

“Legislators ... have condemned the Ugandan government of inciting and fuelling land conflicts ... as part of a long-term strategy to grab land for investment, citing the most recent clashes in ... Apaa and Lakang in Amuru district in northern Uganda.” (Okumu 2012).

“... the government’s desire to see thousands of hectares of land given to investors ... is completely ignorant of any human feeling and is determined to reduce hundreds of thousands of families into landless communities. ... [A] court order restraining occupation or haphazard re-drawing of boundaries is completely being ignored ...” (Acholi Times, 27 August 2012).

“By using Adjumani District and East Madi Game Reserve (Uganda Wildlife Authority), the government’s contentious claims to bits of Amuru back the view that something sinister is happening. It is also curious that the government is not responding sensibly to appeals and pleas from residents and their leaders that the issue of land is sensitive and needs to be taken slowly and cautiously. ... Clearly those in government are excited about something. We don’t believe it is only for ‘investment opportunities’ or for Madhvani’s sake, or for tourism; could it be because of what lies beneath Amuru’s land? Because in Amuru sits one of the largest oil deposits in the region.” (Acholi Times, 27 August 2012).

Risk Evaluation

Risk evaluation – a precondition for strategies to counteract threatening situations that is determined by uncertainty, fear and worrying – is based on an appraisal of the current situation, past experience, specific emotions, culture-specific values, norms and wants, and is often shaped by mistrust and suspicion (Casimir 2008: 27f., 31) In the context of the Apaa land conflict, risk evaluation is embedded in a widespread paradigm of oppression and exploitation of the people of northern Uganda.

The corresponding discourse evokes distressing past experiences that call for lessons to be learnt in order to prevent further marginalisation. This discourse includes, most notably, the notion of the north-south divide, which is rooted in the colonial past, when the people of the central regions were made the beneficiaries of economic and educational opportunities and were integrated into the colonial administration, whereas the northerners were regarded as a fierce people and were largely recruited into the uniformed services or used as unskilled labour. This divide is seen to have solidified after

independence, resulting in politics based on ethnicity and insufficient national integration (Kasozi 1999) and further disadvantaging the people of the north during the LRA insurgency. The politics of encampment undermined their subsistence base, led to severe poverty and provided the opportunity for land grabbing (cf. CSOPNU 2004; HURIPPEC 2003; Lenhart 2005, 2006, 2012; Lucima Okello 2002; RLP 2004).

On the basis of these perceptions, a negative future scenario is imagined, as shown by the following statements by Acholi politicians and an Acholi newspaper commentator.

“The government has always undermined Acholi customary land law since it has an ulterior motive to cause chaos in the region.” (Betty Aol Ocan, Women MP for Gulu, quoted in Okumu 2012).

“Hon. Ronald Reagan Okumu ... called the communities to guard their land jealously or else become landless slaves employed to work on what used to be their land”. (Okumu 2012, with reference to a statement by the MP for Aswa County, Gulu District).

“Without a unified Acholi voice on land, the government will never respect the people’s views, the court injunctions issued and other attempts at finding a resolution to the land conflicts. Acholi will one day wake up slaves labouring for ‘new masters’ upon their own land.” (Acholi Times, 27 August 2012).

Coping Strategies

Uncertainty and fear determine the coping strategies adopted in the face of actual dangers and perceived risks (Casimir 2008: 28). In the case of Apaa, strategies proposed by Acholi religious and political leaders and newspaper commentators to counteract the threat of large-scale land acquisition by outsiders include appeals to government not to ignore the local people’s voices, protection of the people by Acholi leaders, and the threat of resorting to violent means:

“If somebody from outside Acholi region wants land, they should sit down with the stakeholders [local people] and agree on the terms.” (Catholic Archbishop for Gulu Diocese, John Baptist Odama, quoted in Okumu 2012).

“The Uganda government is taking this opportunity [talking to investors]; our people are so poor that if we do not protect them, government will take their land.” (Betty Aol Ocan, Women MP for Gulu, quoted in Okumu 2012).

“The people in Acholi are struggling to prevent a volatile situation from exploding into a new episode of civil strife. Because since the beginning of the return to former villages from internment camps, the evidence does not show government goodwill.” (Acholi Times, 27 August 2012).

“... that (ignorance of a court ruling) is forcing local leaders to resort to physical means to defend their land and heritage.” (Acholi Times, 27 August 2012).

“The controversy and lack of interest by the government is threatening to pose insecurity in the area. Already, the local leaders have warned of bloodshed. Justin Okot, the chairman of Apaa village warned that he would mobilize the villagers against the gunmen destroying their homes and property.” (Wacha 2011b).

"We shall mobilize our people to fight for our land. Land is the only asset remaining for us, the Acholi. We shall guard it jealously." (Gilbert Olanya, MP for Kilak, Amuru District, quoted in IRIN 2012).

3.2 Political and Economic Framework Conditions and Vulnerability

Since the people of Apaa have been confronted with development propositions by government, the UWA, economists and powerful individuals, the dangers and risks have become hard for them to assess, making them extremely vulnerable.

Vulnerability depends on political, social and economic environments that structure safe or unsafe conditions, including the political use of the assumption that being exposed to dangers and risks is inevitable. With declining information about threatening situations, uncertainty and insecurity grow; people are not in a position to understand the functioning of new systems to which they are exposed or to develop adequate coping strategies. (Casimir 2008: 30, 33f.).

Lack of clarity and transparency on the part of government regarding its intentions towards land in the Acholi sub-region and local people's lack of information about land rights and land law have contributed to increased vulnerability and tensions (Rugadya *et al.* 2008, iii).

Rugadya *et al.* already noted during the early period of IDP camp phase-out that

"... a high level of distrust of the Central Government's intentions toward Acholi land exists and has persisted, giving rise to a substantial level of tension that has a high chance of erupting into violence ..., the situation is further fuelled by politics driven by feelings and emotions that have shaped and defined the articulation between Government and Acholi people's views over land and natural resources tenure. It is felt that the government, the army and rich people have taken a lot of interest in land without clearly elaborating their motives or intentions ... Government, especially the Executive is openly and vigorously backing the pursuit of land by investors for large-scale commercial interests, an opportunity that speculators and grabbers are manipulating for individual gains and benefits." (Rugadya *et al.* 2008, vi).

Similarly, Okoth-Ogendo questions the role of the state in land relations in Africa:

"First, there is abundant evidence that the state has proved to be not only a poor trustee of public land resources but also a very bad manager. The widespread complaints about the 'grabbing' of public land throughout the region are a serious indictment of the ability of the state to protect public trust over land. Further, the widespread neglect of land and environmental management regulations is a clear indication either of lack of capacity and resources or sheer unwillingness to take effective enforcement measures." (Okoth-Ogendo, quoted in IFAD 2006: 8).

Thus, the official claim that the development of northern Uganda is a matter of urgency and wildlife protection in the area of Apaa is an opportunity for investment in the growing tourism sector – with reference to formal institutional definitions of development and environmental protection – rather seeks to legitimise the interests of the politically and economically powerful than to find a solution that recognises the needs of all parties involved. Even the claim of protecting endangered species is debatable given the South African investor's interest in big game hunting.

Preparatory decisions were made without consulting the community of land users or integrating them into the planning process. Thus, the responsible institutions and individuals appear at least implicitly opposed to all those who are concerned with the well-being of present and future generations. Yet it is clear that: “Conservation is about people as much as it is about species or ecosystems.” (Casimir 2008: 42).

Such a situation can be found in many states in which tourism has become a focus of development activities and major source of revenue.

“So more often than not we have the preposterous situation in which communities ... are shunted out of their homes and habitats, while state agencies, conservationists (and sometimes scientists) gain access to these and invite tourists to come and visit for a fee. Occasionally nominal monetary compensation or resettlement outside the park may be offered in return for such an expulsion. But usually, park planning does not include access to viable resources, let alone employment opportunities for the evicted – not even as forest rangers or guides. ... Finally, despite lip-service being paid to the crucial importance of local environmental knowledge regarding flora and fauna – which could be very fruitfully incorporated into conservation measures – few steps are taken to tap this specialised knowledge through these communities. Instead, ‘specialists’ are brought in to study the problems and make recommendations ... that often end up in the complete negation, if not criminalisation, of local communities.” (Casimir 2008: 20f.).

4. Approaches and Challenges to Conflict Resolution

The Apaa land conflict continues to date. The exact position of the border between Adjumani and Amuru districts and the administrative affiliation of Apaa are still not clear. Land ownership and prioritisation of human livelihood security or wildlife protection and investment for the development of post-war northern Uganda remain a matter of debate. And, more recently, the issue of social and cultural identity related to land has further fuelled the conflict. The consequences of the conflict – fear, suspicion, killings, human rights violations and unfair representation of the local people in matters concerning their present and future – are apparent, whereas the underlying causes are less tangible and appear to be driven to some extent by the hidden motives of particular actors.

The visible core problem of the conflict – the unclear boundary demarcation between Adjumani and Amuru districts – could be resolved if an exact definition of the boundary were agreed upon. This is a precondition for conflict resolution and could be its starting point insofar as it would make clear which district Apaa is located in and whether it falls under the administrative responsibility of Adjumani District or Amuru District. This would further confirm that it is either part of East Madi Wildlife Reserve or that it lies outside the reserve in the area of Kilak Hunting Area and Aswa/Lorim Game Reserve, degazetted in 1972 by the Amin government (cf. Serwajja 2012: 16f.). It would also shed light on whether the evictions of the people of Apaa were lawful or not.

However, the underlying causes of the conflict need to be addressed as well. The first issue is that of landownership and calls for a comprehensive framework for land use under customary, freehold and leasehold tenure and in national development. Although a National Land Policy Working Group was set up in 2011 to develop such a framework, its endeavours have not yet resulted in any legislation (cf. IRIN 2012). This is urgently needed.

Secondly, there is the allocation of large tracts of land to the UWA and a South African investor. This has increased the fear of land grabbing among the people of Apaa whose livelihood security depends on the land and who seem to have lost all faith in the institutions of the state. Their fear has further been fuelled and to some extent exploited by local politicians for their own interests. The sincerity of the responsible authorities' claim that the designated wildlife reserve will contribute to improving wildlife protection in the contested area can be questioned, given the concession for big game hunting that has been awarded to the South African investor. The assertion that the private-public partnership arrangement will drive forward development in the region by investment in the growing tourism sector leaves unanswered the question of whether the envisioned development will benefit the local people or the politically and economically powerful, since the residents of Apaa were neither consulted nor targeted as potential beneficiaries. Thus, the supposedly conflicting goals of secure access to productive land by the local people, economic growth and preservation of nature need to be reconciled.

Finally, the increasing ethnicisation of the conflict in Apaa, i.e. dividing the people of the area into categories of "us" and "them" (Acholi versus Madi), and its culturalisation, i.e. reducing economic and political matters and concerns to social and cultural affiliation, are alarming trends. This local development underpins and reinforces general patterns of Ugandan politics and enforcement of economic interests, which have been features of the political landscape of the country since colonial times. As a result, conflicts between different parts of the population have usually been portrayed as unbridgeable "culture conflicts" determined by supposed fixed ethnic and cultural attributes (cf. Goethe-Institut 2012). Failure to act against this development, which ignores the social, political and economic causes of the conflict, reveals insufficient national integration as a result of weak institutions of governance.

5. Résumé: Who Benefits?

The first of the UN's Millennium Development Goals is the eradication of poverty and hunger. However, the questions arise: what opportunities are given to poor people to take part in development, and what kind of development is envisioned?

IFAD (2008) highlights the importance of access to land and tenure security for enabling poor rural people to overcome poverty:

"Secure access to productive land is critical to the millions of poor people living in rural areas and depending on agriculture, livestock or forests for their livelihood. It reduces their vulnerability to hunger and poverty; influences their capacity to invest in their productive activities and in the sustainable management of their resources; enhances their prospects for better livelihoods; and helps them develop more equitable relations with the rest of their society, thus contributing to justice, peace and sustainable development." (IFAD 2008: 4).

Examples from various countries of the South have demonstrated how large-scale land allocations to transnational corporations have thrown local subsistence producers – who could previously meet the needs of their families – off the land, resulting in their impoverishment (Thomas 2005: 665). This can be attributed to the currently dominant neo-liberal economic policies that focus on development defined as economic growth within a free global market place and the restructuring of national economies to provide an enabling environment for investment, which have contributed to the increasing wealth of the West

and Southern elites, whereas the poor majority has become even poorer. (Thomas 2005: 646, 651-656).

An alternative approach to development would allow people to provide for their material needs by subsistence production and/or cash transactions in an environment conducive to human well-being conceived both in material as well as non-material and community terms. This kind of development takes into consideration basic and cultural needs, comes from within a society, is self-reliant in terms of natural and cultural resources, ecologically sound and based on structural transformations of economy, society, gender and power relations. (Thomas 2005: 648, 657). At the heart of this alternative conception of development are democracy, human rights and local control and empowerment.

Abbreviations

CAO	Chief Administration Officer
IDP	Internally Displaced People
LC	Local Chairman/Chairperson
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MP	Member of Parliament
NRA	National Resistance Army
NRM	National Resistance Movement
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force
UPF	Uganda Police Force
UWA	Uganda Wildlife Authority

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