

Working for development in fragile situations - reflections from Northern Uganda

1. Background

Many of PATC's members are working in fragile or post conflict situations and are constantly challenged on the special strategies this requires. To deepen and nuance some of these experiences, this learning visit has explored practical and developmental implications for Danish civil society organisations and their local partners working in two selected fragile and post-conflict settings. The visit has focussed on Gulu and Karamoja in Northern Uganda, both being examples of places in transition from conflict to more stabile conditions.

This learning visit has not been part of PATC monitoring or evaluation of individual projects or partners. However, a small assessment form has been filled during the visit for projects implemented with funds from the Project Fund (See Annex A).

2. Objective

The objective of the learning visit has been to **explore challenges faced and strategies applied by civil society organizations working in a post conflict area like Gulu and a fragile situation like Karamoja, both regions situated in Northern Uganda.**

More specifically the visit has focused on:

- Exploring if and how specific fragile situations influence the balance between service delivery, capacity development and advocacy in projects and programmes
- Exploring if and how strategies on conflict resolution and reconciliation are part of projects and programmes
- Exploring strategies for flexibility in acute crisis situations

- Exploring in which way working in fragile situations influences partnership relations (with Danish partners)

3. Summary of projects visited

- A) Red Cross Youth and Uganda Red Cross Society are implementing second phase of the project "Empowering youth – From hand-outs to hard work in post-conflict Northern Uganda" (DKK 2.994.097, 25 months). The project creates youth groups, empowering its participants through Life Planning Skills (LPS) sessions and training in livelihood and Income Generating Activities.
- B) Danish Ugandan Friendship Association and The Diocese of Northern Uganda/Mother's union are implementing second phase of the project "Gulu Rural Vocational Training and Network Development", (DKK 787.000, 2 years). The project aims to strengthen a Women's Development Center, enabling it to train vulnerable women in different vocational skills, as well as supporting the establishment of women groups in the communities as supportive networks, when the trained women go back home.
- C) Danish NGO Diálogos and NGO Kathes are implementing second phase of the project "Karamoja Traditional Healers and Health System Project" (DKK 2.006.600, 3 years). The project focuses on bridge building between traditional medicine and western medicine, and KATHES conducts trainings in various health related issues for groups of traditional healers and traditional birth attendants (TH/TBA) as well as women's groups. The training also includes issues like democracy, peace and reconciliation.
- D) ADRA Denmark and ADRA Uganda are implementing the programme "Action for Social Change" (DKK 22.000.000 over 3 years). The programme is training village groups in adult literacy, livelihood, health, sanitation, save and loaning principles as well as motivating them to share their knowledge with other people in the community and neighbouring villages. Furthermore School Management Committees and Parents/Teachers Associations are trained in order to fulfil their roles better.

4. Observations on thematic issues

Balance between service delivery, capacity building and advocacy in fragile situations.

In all of the four projects visited the needs for services were overwhelming. In Gulu, people are just returning from a life in protected refugee camps during the 22 year long conflict with the LRA. Physical structures (roads, buildings etc.) are weak or missing, and people are slowly rebuilding their lives from scratch. At the same time, there is a lot of conflict continuing, both due to many people's generally fragile mental condition after the war, and specifically in relation to persistent conflicts over land rights.

Specifically on "hard ware" service delivery

In the camps of Gulu as well as during hunger periods in Karamoja, people have been receiving emergency aid to an extent and for a length of time, which has promoted a level of dependency syndrome, with some expectations of outsiders providing food packages, seeds and many other basic necessities. At least, that's what I was told by most NGO people – in Denmark as well as in Uganda¹. Visiting the villages confirmed the picture given: The very minute people had the opportunity, they started asking for support – soap, bicycles, seeds, mobile phones etc.. However it wasn't only immediate needs. People also asked for more training, for more young people to benefit from the project.

The obvious dilemma that struck me in Gulu as well as in Karamoja was this: Places where people are most in need (and therefore at times have been provided food and other emergency services), are also the places at highest risk of becoming dependant of aid, and developing a mentality change expecting free aid to come. In such settings, the effect of services provided should be carefully considered. Working in fragile situations, the Project Fund Guidelines open up for the possibility of delivering more services, than would normally be accepted. Though, from the projects and settings visited, it still seems like an important point, to carefully limit the provision of necessary services, unless they are very strategic, in order not to strengthen peoples dependency and expectations of aid coming from outside.

¹ Except for the international coordinator of Danish Red cross Youth, who specifically stated, that in his opinion, this was more of a prejudice than a fact

Specifically on strategic services and capacity building

However, strategic services, that involves capacity building as for example the girls learning tailoring, the training in Planning Skills (like URCS) and the organisation of local community groups all seem like relevant strategies for addressing these challenges. Nevertheless, as much as the purposes of these interventions are capacity building and advocacy in a long term perspective, the projects still have to offer something immediate and useful for the participants, in order for them to stick with the groups. For URC/URCS it is training in incoming generating activities motivating the youth to start small businesses together, for ADRA as well as DUFA/WDC it was savings and loans schemes, as well as specific income generating skills, which really motivated people to keep on coming and from which a lot of the other common activities emanated. KATHES combined their trainings with a soda and a meal for the participants which definitely contributed to the motivation of the participants. Still, the groups were also meeting on their own without the presence of KATHES.

Specifically on advocacy

At the same time, all four projects have elements of advocacy. In the Project Fund Guidelines this is a component which in most cases of fragile situations is seen as a very long term objective only to be dealt with, when there has been considerable progress in basic services for the immediate beneficiaries. However, the projects visited have indicated otherwise.

URCS/URK are organising youth groups through life planning skills sessions. Part of the objective with this work is also to change local communities' current view on youth as idle, troublesome and maybe even "agents of evil" due to many of them being former LRA soldiers. As part of the LPS training the groups do drama and music sessions in the communities focussing on issues such as gender based violence, hiv/aids, health etc,. Furthermore the groups are involved in the overall Red Cross organisational structure urging them to follow the four pillars of the Red Cross principles, one of them being voluntary community services. Several of the groups have therefore performed all sorts of help for their villages, i.e. working on a road, helping at funerals, maintaining vegetable gardens for the elders etc. All these activities contribute to changing the mentality of the youth as well as their status in their local communities.

The ADRA groups in Karamoja are apparently also able to do advocacy in the form of awareness raising within their own community as well as neighbouring communities. Some groups dedicate approximately one day a week to go out and do songs and other performance informing of, what they've learned in the group (savings, consequences of cattle raid, consequences of drinking etc.). Furthermore many of the groups have actually achieved to get some actual results from the district. The group I visited had for example convinced the district authorities to build a new road for them.

The DIÁLOGOS/KATHES project in Moroto has very strong links with local authorities following the project with great interest, not least since they are able to see the actual difference in number of women referred from TH/TBA's to the health clinics. There are many indications that the strategy used by KATHES has the potential of being adopted by the district authorities in time.

DUFA/WDC is a smaller project without any specific advocacy component currently. However through the groups the women are envisaged to become role models in their communities, sharing their new technical and other skills with other women.

Looking at these examples, it seems plausible that even groups in very fragile settings are able to carry out meaningful local advocacy activities. The question of course is what will happen to these activities, when the project is over? People might continue to meet due to their savings, but will they continue conducting awareness raising activities?

Services and ownership

Finally – a few stories from the field: Karamoja has been target for a lot of service delivery due to the harsh conditions in the area. KATHES, however had examples of boreholes provided, which were not repaired by villagers when broken, because "the borehole belongs to CARE, the government, Danida etc...". They also had examples of latrines and even a maternity ward not being used, because people didn't feel, it belonged to them (in the case of the maternity ward also due to an uncertainty towards what such a place actually was). This only underlines the importance of local ownership, stressing that the normal considerations on ownership and sustainability when delivering services apply for fragile situations as well. From a Danish perspective, this can seem like an obvious conclusion, but

confronting the poverty on the ground, the well considered and well proven reasons for not providing immediate services tend to fade into the background.

Strategies for conflict resolution and reconciliation

In both Gulu and Karamoja strategies for conflict resolution and reconciliation were not only pertinent but absolutely necessary. In Gulu the need was especially in relation to processing of trauma but also reconciliation among former child soldiers and their families and communities. For the URCS conflict resolution is part of LPS, but on a personal level. Participants go through sessions on how to learn to live with oneself, and how to learn to live with others. Furthermore URK has in this phase of the project seen the need to develop a special psycho-social annex dealing with consequences of war and conflict – for individuals as well as communities. The whole concept of LPS is about taking responsibility for one's own life no matter the circumstances.

WDC/DUFA haven't had any specific strategies for conflict resolution in the first phase of the project, but in this current phase, there is included support from a local counselor, who can talk to the women, almost all of them having to deal with traumatic experiences. During my visit also the teachers expressed frustration and a need for support in how to handle the women (many of them quite young girls) who often reacted very aggressively and vigorously in and outside of the classroom. As one of the teachers expressed it: "Many of the young people have so much anger inside them due to the war, and they don't know how to handle it". Visiting the two projects, and talking two people in general about the post conflict situation in Gulu, it became quite obvious, that it isn't really an option, *not* to deal with the trauma of a whole population. Everyone has been affected by the war and has to deal with the consequences, and it affects their lives in many ways, which can't be ignored.

In Karamoja, conflict resolution was very pertinent as well with former and ongoing cattle raids, still affecting life in the communities. KATHES/Diálogos' project has as its primary objective to build and strengthen the relation between traditional healers and birth attendants and the official health system. However as part of the activities KATHES talks to a number of women's groups on various issues, among these addressing the issue of causes and consequences of raids and conflict. Through the sessions, the women explore all the negative influences raid and conflict have on their everyday lives, and KATHES encourages them to talk to their

husbands and fellow community members about it. Furthermore KATHES arranges joint meetings among the groups they are working with, in this way encouraging friendships between communities preventing further conflict to arise. In Karamoja with a high conflict potential these kind of activities are just as important to people's survival and general well being, as it is informing about hiv/aids or general health issues.

ADRA has experienced quite big changes in the participants after starting their project, especially due to savings and loans schemes introduced in community groups. Several members of community groups have expressed their changed lives, especially due to the saving schemes. The possibility of saving some funds has made some of the men stop raiding, *buying* their cows instead. Their participation in the group has helped scaling down the conflict both through savings, and through discussing the many negative consequences of raids².

Strategies for flexibility

Implementing projects in Gulu - being a post-conflict setting – apparently doesn't require any specific flexibility different from what would be expected elsewhere. However specific strategies are required as mentioned earlier, concerning especially processing of trauma, psycho-social annex to life planning skills, and special skills for teachers having to deal with traumatized students.

In Karamoja still being affected by raids and conflict, the picture is a bit different. Here risk of being attacked or ending up caught in a raid has to be monitored on a daily basis. Organisations have to plan their visits due to where the safety situation is all right and reschedule if they hear about incidences of violence. For KATHES a consequence has been, that they have given up including some of the most remote areas in the project. They are however still monitoring the situation to see, when it will be possible to include them again. The dilemma is that the most remote communities often are the most vulnerable to raids as well as the ones most in need for project support. Besides armed conflict KATHES' project implementation is challenged by women being away looking for food in dry periods, and communities being inaccessible during rainy season.

² At least that's what the men told me, when asked. I slight doubt somehow persist in order to understand, that this is all it takes to change the old and strong traditions of being a real Karimojong warrior, meaning of man who can steal a lot of cattle, and eventually will die a heroic death in battle.

For ADRA in Karamoja risk is handled by always having armed escort, when they go outside the town or in between districts. The community facilitators having most of the day-to-day contact with the groups are still going on motorbikes, but staying within a limited range from the town centre. Still of course also ADRA has the practice of staying away from areas with recent raids and killings.

Effects on partnership relations

For most projects visited the question on how working in a fragile situation affected the partnership, did not give rise to a lot of comments. However, some points were mentioned:

- There is a great need for flexibility in the planning and especially in the implementation of the projects, requiring a certain level of understanding from the Danish partner. Project implementation does not always follow the project document due to many of the challenges mentioned above. However, that is not dramatically different from the situation many other partnerships face.
- Negotiations on how much budget should go to safety measures can be delicate. The local partner is on the ground, and knows the situation. At the same time, safety measures can easily evolve into an industry itself, involving expensive equipment and extra personnel. And who is to judge, when the situation is stable enough to scale down again?
- Working in fragile situations can sometimes challenge the ideal of long participatory processes, because the wish for quick results can be tempting.
- Finally some of these situations can be resource demanding in other ways. Remote insecure areas are normally only accessed by few service providers without a lot of competition. This combined with a high presence of international NGO's make prices go high³. This has to be accounted for, when partners are preparing an application.

5. Main findings

Balance between services, capacity building, and advocacy

The Project Fund guidelines (as well as the Civil Society Strategy) opens up for flexibility in various forms when working in fragile situations, one of them being the

³ Somebody once told me, that you could get one of the most expensive pizzas in the world in the remote town of Juba in southern Sudan (might not be true, but the story illustrates the point of high prices in fragile situations).

possibility of delivering more services, than would normally have been approved. The cases from Northern Uganda however stresses the point, that no matter how fragile a situation is, the problematic consequences of delivering “hard ware” services (food, boreholes, latrines etc) are just as present here as everywhere else. The *strategic* perspective of delivering service is still highly relevant for the effort to be sustainable. Even in situations like Karamoja where people are actually starving and dying in periods of drought, careful considerations should be made whether humanitarian aid is partially keeping and sustaining people living in a place where living conditions might be too harsh to survive – unless you really struggle. That does not mean that humanitarian aid is not relevant in acute crisis situations, but the case of Karamoja having had food packages on and off for the last 55 years calls for more long term solutions, possibilities being urging people to change lifestyle, means of income or even geographical location. The same risks of creating dependency and a lack of local ownership for the things provided exist in these situations, just as in any other setting.

At the same time the need for supporting people in claiming their rights from local authorities is just as great here as elsewhere, both Gulu and Karamoja being examples of places with a lack of attention from national authorities for long periods of time.

In this respect provision of more “software” services such as Life Planning Skills trainings, IGA trainings, VSLA groups, health groups etc. are still highly relevant, as long as they have a strategic end in organising and empowering people to act on and change their own lives within the given context.

Strategies for conflict resolution and reconciliation

Conflict resolution and reconciliation will very often be relevant components when working in a fragile situation. In addition activities focussing on processing of trauma and psycho-social consequences of war and conflict have in the Northern Uganda cases proven crucial. For especially the Gulu projects this has been an issue, the implementing organisations have felt the necessity to incorporate in the second phase of their project. Both of the projects at the same time admitting the difficulty with dealing with these issues.

An issue I didn't discuss with the local partners but which might complement the efforts already done would be to integrate local traditions and rituals for coming to

terms with violent experiences. In Gulu I was told of a traditional practice called "Mato Oput", where people sit together and drink a bitter drink, in order to reconcile and leave their bad experiences behind. In some cases this could be relevant practices to embrace as part of a number of possible strategies.

Strategies for flexibility

There is no doubt, that different forms of flexibility is required when working in fragile situations – not least due to safety measures. Furthermore one programme officer in Denmark called for more options to include humanitarian aid in a Civil Society Project when needed, while some of these situations can easily "flip" from being "post-conflict" to "conflict", or a relative stable year can turn into drought or even flooding, demanding for acute humanitarian responses from people and organisations who are already on the ground (doing civil society projects). This request seems to tap into other ongoing initiatives, the most recent being the Danish minister for development in cooperation with the EU commissioner for development launching a new initiative called SHARE aiming at better coherence between humanitarian aid and more long term development aid.

Challenges for Partnership relations

Working in partnership in fragile situations calls for both flexibility and thorough understanding of the local context. This can possibly require acute changes in strategy, involve delicate negotiations on the need for extra resources for safety measures as well as causing delay in project implementation due to unforeseen conflicts/raids/ etc. However these challenges are not qualitatively different from challenges met in many other partnerships, only potentially on a larger scale.

Recommendations

With the always latent risk of over-generalizing from a few cases, I still want to put forward a few recommendations, when working in fragile situations:

- Keeping focus on the importance of services being *strategic*, even in fragile situations. As part of this maintaining very careful considerations on the sustainability of the project.
- Consider the relevance of incorporating components of conflict resolution and reconciliation *as well as* components of processing trauma and psycho-social consequences of war

- Incorporate flexibility in planned implementation *as a main condition* for the project –not only as a possible risk
- Be prepared to budget with extra resources for security measures, but also to monitor the situation continuously as risk scenarios can quickly change.
- Consider useful ways of supporting the current trend of smoothing the transition from humanitarian interventions to long term development aid – not least keeping in mind the potential risks of “hard ware” service delivery.

Dissemination

The experiences from this visit will be shared:

- To the organisations involved in Denmark as well as in Uganda through dissemination of this report
- To PATC members through:
 - A meeting with the Uganda network
 - Posting of the report on the PATC webpage
 - Incorporating findings into trainings and counselling session
- To PATC colleagues through a presentation of findings
- To external stakeholders by dissemination of the report

Annexes

- A) People met and itinerary
- B) Monitoring formats for projects visited funded by the Project Fund
- C) Blog postings from the trip. See <http://rejser.prngo.dk/category/uganda/>

Annex A – Itinerary and People Met

Date	Organisation	People met
28/2 Tuesday	URCS	<p><u>Kampala:</u> Mr. Byaruhanga T. Levi Assistant Director for Youth, Vounteer Managemnt and membership Development</p> <p><u>Gulu:</u> Mr. Simon Peter Anyanzo Lenin Regional Programme Manager</p> <p>Mr. Deo Mukii Assistant Programme Manager Youth & Volunteer Management</p>
29/2 Wednesday	URCS	<p><u>Field visit Apac:</u> Mr. Kupajo Hillary Assistant Program Manager Disaster Manager/Branch Manager</p> <p>Mr. Opio Samuel Focal Person-LPS Apac</p> <p>Parents and community leaders from the Community Ibuje</p>
1/3 Thursday	URCS	<p>Task Force members from Apac District</p> <p>Youth group members, currently studying at Oilili Vocational Center</p> <p>Principal and staff from Oilili Vocational Center</p> <p>Branch Governing board Chairman, Apac district</p>
2/3 Friday	Women Development Center (DNU)	<p>Reverend Willy Akena Project Coordinator</p> <p>Mrs. Lucy Apiyo Principal of the Womens Development Center</p> <p>Bishop Johnson Gakumba Overall responsible for the project through his position of highest ranking person at the Diocese of Northern Uganda.</p>

Report on Learning visit, 27.02.12 – 09.03.12, Maria Molde

		<p>President, vicepresident, and coordinator (“Worker”) for Mothers’ Union</p> <p>WDC teachers and staff</p> <p>Current students at WDC</p>
3/3 Saturday	Women Development Center	Former WDC students in three different communities
4/3 Sunday		DAY OFF
5/3 Monday	NGO KATHES	<p>Ms. Logiel Anni Project Manager</p> <p>Ms. Atyang Stella Project administrator</p> <p>Mr. Okengo John Francis Olee Project Anthropologist</p>
6/3 Tuesday	NGO KATHES	<p>Women’s group in the district</p> <p>Aol Mark Musooka KATHES Board Chair man/ Moroto District Chair man</p>
7/3 Wednesday	ADRA Uganda	<p>Mr. Martin Rutazigwa Programme Manager</p> <p>Moses Owiny Harriet Akech Tosquine Ventorina Logiel Facilitators</p> <p>Victoria Namukwaya M&E Coordinator</p> <p>Pascal Loongo Media coordinator</p> <p>Moses Okori Advocay coordinator</p>
8/3 Thursday	ADRA Uganda	<p>3 community groups in Kaabong district</p> <p>PTA and School Management Committee members</p> <p>Weaving workshop from community group</p>