

The Voice of Peace

News and views from areas affected by the Lord's Resistance Army in Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan and Uganda

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Women's peace initiatives in South Sudan, DRC and CAR – working together to make voice heard

For over 20 years, South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have suffered various conflicts and women, in particular, have experienced many human rights abuses. In LRA affected areas there is a need to protect women and children from abduction because they are the most vulnerable parts of their communities, as highlighted by UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

Experience shows that, when they try to return home after escaping LRA captivity, many abducted women and children are rejected by their families and their communities. Women are also denied opportunities to work, such as in government institutions that could improve their economic status and livelihood. The organisations that contribute to *The Voice of Peace* are working to try and improve these issues. In 2011 there was an exchange visit between women leaders from DRC, South Sudan and CAR to share experiences with women living in LRA-affected areas in Northern Uganda. After this, the women involved created initiatives in their own communities to

empower other women, such as forming women's groups and registering their associations. These groups are also conducting counselling, trauma healing and reconciliation for returnees and their families. They share experiences and document the impact of the conflict on women and children for advocacy purposes, as well as raising awareness to both women and men on the importance of UN Resolution 1325.

Some groups are also supporting agricultural activities, including setting up women's cooperatives, training on Income Generating Activities (IGA) and training for women leaders on management and book keeping. As a result, affected women and children are in a stronger position and better placed to resolve family and community conflicts.

Some women groups have moved further to advocate through media; participating in radio talk shows to highlight the work of their associations and the roles they are playing in the community.

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Editorial-Opinion: Father Ernest Sugule, Editor in Chief, VoP



Issue 7 zooms in on the cross-border peacebuilding work of the local organizations that contribute to the Voice of Peace

The *Voice of Peace* is the result of the contributions and collaboration of various local and regional organizations that are members of the Regional Civil Society Task Force in the LRA affected region. Issue 7 zooms in on the cross-border peacebuilding work of these local organizations – tracing how they were formed and how they work together.

Through initiatives like local protection committees, conflicts have been resolved, differentiation between LRA attacks and criminal groups has been made, and some criminal groups dismantled. This brings a community-level approach to conflict resolution, which is vital to promote local engagement in peace and prevent future outbreaks of violence.

Reintegration therapy has brought together returnees and defectors, their families and host communities to heal their wounds and move forward together towards reconciliation and a shared future.

However, more holistic and coordinated reintegration is needed, and all stakeholders in conflict resolution should join hands together and plan for peaceful co-existence. The participation of local women in peace and policy processes is proving successful and many women have been empowered and are able to contribute to local peacebuilding initiatives.

Welcome to this 7th issue – I encourage you to read on for more on these stories.

Local protection committees: community level approaches to conflict resolution

Reacting to LRA attacks in the DRC, in 2009 local communities in Haut and Bas Uélé districts formed self-defense groups. The Congolese army, fearing that these self-defense groups might turn into local militia like they had elsewhere, disbanded them. This left people vulnerable to LRA attacks and with only one option available – fleeing when attacks occurred. Many people became internally displaced (IDPs) furthering conflicts over land and other natural resources in an already fragile area. Responding to this situation, it was necessary to create local protection committees.

The committees are composed of representatives from community leaders, religious leaders, and leaders of women and youth associations. The main function of these local committees is to document security information and travel movements of the community, carry out local advocacy, raise early warnings, map updates on LRA activities, and try to mediate peacefully the various local conflicts over issues such as land, natural resources and inter-communal tensions.

The local protection committees are trained by SAIPED. As a result the members of the committees have been able to differentiate between LRA attacks and other criminal actors. This allows them to recognize the patterns of LRA attacks so that they can take measures to avoid them and protect themselves. They can then also identify which are criminal attacks and alert the security forces. This has encouraged the peaceful resettlement of IDPs back to their villages.

The committees have also been able to organize the local population to be trained by SAIPED on conflict resolution, peaceful cohabitation, land conflict resolution and Congolese laws on land.

However, the local protection committees face various challenges. At the moment they are able to deal with low level disputes, but they cannot effectively reduce land conflicts between communities, IDPs and returnees, the local protection committees need to be able to implement large-scale community level programs such as communal farming. This will add to greater community cohesion, mutual understanding and peaceful resettlement of displaced populations.

The other challenge is the lack of adequate capacity of local leaders in traditional justice, transitional justice, human rights and women's rights. Local people understand the context of the various local conflicts – by providing them with training and boosting their expertise they can assist and improve external intervention. For example, they could do mediation outside office hours and in a more informal setting.

The experience of the local protection committees in DRC highlights the importance of supporting a local understanding of conflict dynamics and local approaches to resolving them. Conflict resolution and mediation can be more effective when done in an informal way and in partnership with local customs.

(Pictured below)
Local protection committee of Limay undergoing training in land conflict mediation

"Conflict resolution and mediation can be more effective when done in an informal way and in partnership with local customs"



Situation Report July–Sept 2013: LRA still active in CAR and DRC

DRC: LRA areas in DRC are still plagued by insecurity but the priority of the government and MONUSCO has been the various rebellions in North Kivu, especially the M23. The national government has deployed most of its military to North Kivu leaving a security vacuum in other areas. The Congolese army, FARDC, has regained control over some territories in North Kivu although civilians have also suffered through the M23 conflict, as the recent killing of 5 people in Goma and 17 wounded testify.

500 FARDC participating in the AU-Regional Task Force (AU-RTF) to combat the LRA have undertaken some preparatory training in the past months and should be ready soon to deploy to engage with LRA in the Garamba National Park. However, this AU-RTF is still facing severe logistic constraints such as lack of vehicles, helicopter, communication means, just to name a few.

At the local level, FARDC was able to dismantle a group of criminals in Kana, a village situated on 25 km east of Bangadi who looted, wounded and even killed people.

However in carrying out this operation FARDC has arrested innocent people as well, whom the criminal group in revenge has falsely accused.

There is another new development of violence among local people due to ongoing conflict and the breakdown of the rule of law. Formerly abducted adults who have not gone through trauma healing are becoming a danger to society. There is a need to address this issue urgently. Various conflicts are re-emerging as a result of constant displacements, limited access to land, and dispute over natural resources.

LRA activities have been reduced in the past three months to looting and kidnapping for transportation. This happens mostly around Garamba National Park and the Bangadi-Ngilima-Niangara region. For instance, in the past three months eight lootings have taken place, mostly in people's farms or on the road while people go to the market or come from the market.

The other development is that on 27th of July 2013 "Maj" Thomas Okello Odano, who was one of the notorious LRA commanders operating within the DRC, was killed by local hunters west of the Garamba National Park. During a debriefing of his wife, who defected and reported to Nzara in South Sudan, she stated that after the death of "Maj" Odano, LRA "Maj" Obol assumed the command of LRA element that was in Odano's group.

The defection program aired by various partners is also starting to bear fruit. During July alone, three people defected from LRA: one South Sudanese and two Ugandans.

CAR: CAR is facing fierce challenges in terms of civilian protection, security and humanitarian assistance. The country is on the verge of collapse if nothing is done to reverse the current situation. The recent disbanding of the Seleka coalition and the sacking of senior officials has made the situation worse with armed groups still loyal to former President Bozize causing havoc.

People living in Bangui are under constant fear of arbitrary arrest and detention, sexual violence, torture, targeted killings, recruitment of children and attacks. The current government has difficulty in establishing order, security and protection in the capital city of Bangui let alone the rest of the country. There is widespread impunity and civilians are paying the price as courts and prisons have been destroyed. There are over 1 million internally displaced people with over 60,000 children on the verge of suffering from malnourishment. The country is collapsing if the international community and African Union don't do anything immediately.

LRA affected areas have been calm in the past three months however, and the AU counter-LRA initiative has stopped its operations in CAR due to the Seleka government's lack of interest. There is movement of LRA forces currently from CAR to DRC – from 3rd of July a large number of unidentified LRA group was seen in CAR 85 km in the north of Zemio travelling to DRC. The group was spotted by a hunter before noon who then immediately reported to a nearby village who alerted the UPDF. After investigation, UPDF forces confirmed that there were a large number of individuals, possibly LRA, traveling in the area to DRC.

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Regional Situation Report ...continued from page 3

	DRC			CAR			S Sudan			Uganda			Total
2013	Ju	Au	Se	Ju	Au	Se	Ju	Au	Se	Ju	Au	Se	
Attacks	10	7	0	6	8	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	35
Abductees	10	0	0	12	14	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	47
Killed	3	0	0	3	4	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
Newly displaced	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Returnees/rescued	3	2	0	0	6	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	15

“Combining traditional practices like Mato Oput with national and legal approaches to reconciliation is an important factor in healing divides. This approach would help to reach all socio-political levels in the appropriate manner in a comprehensive approach to reconciliation”

Uganda: Northern Uganda is facing new problems; alcoholism, drug abuse, a breakdown of the social fabric and land violence, which are all affecting communities. Psychological needs of the LRA affected people were not addressed as the war came to an end in Uganda, leaving a still deeply divided society.

The Acholi reconciliation ceremony *Mato Oput* is the ritual climax of an Acholi justice process for bringing reconciliation between the two people. The Acholi believe that deep social rifts are caused by killings and require elaborate reconciliation mechanisms to restore broken relationships.

Mato Oput is performed by traditional chiefs after a mediated process and has succeeded in bringing together two families and clans. The offender accepts responsibility, asks for forgiveness and must make reparation to the victims. The perpetrator and the victim's family then share the root drink from a calabash, to recall and bury the bitterness of the soured relations. Another Acholi ritual, *gomo tong* – the bending of spears – symbolizes the ending of hostilities between groups and is also preceded by discussion and truth-telling.

Combining traditional practices like *Mato Oput* with national and legal approaches

to reconciliation is an important factor in healing divides. This approach would help to reach all socio-political levels in the appropriate manner in a comprehensive approach to reconciliation.

South Sudan: In the Republic of South Sudan, Western Equatoria State, in the Counties of Maridi, Ibba, Yambio, Nzara, Ezo, Tambura and Nagero, there has been relative peace since the beginning of the year 2013. There are no registered number of attacks and killings reported since the beginning of this year.

In July 2013, four people – two women and two male children – were rescued from LRA by the home guards at the DRC border. The security situation is relatively good with a few concerns of the reappearance of the *Ambororo* at Akpa Boma in Tambura County.

Elsewhere in the country – away from the area immediately affected by the LRA – insecurity persists, with problems like cattle rustling in Jonglei, Unity, Warrap and Lakes States disrupting everyday life. There have been some clashes in Pibor County in Jonglei state, which has resulted in 200 killed between Lou Nuer and Murle. Talks are underway on the cooperation agreement between Khartoum and Juba.



Newsflash Sister Angélique Namaika awarded UNHCR prize

As this newsletter was going to press we were delighted to hear that Sister Angélique Namaika (*pictured left*) – a long-standing friend of peace efforts in the region, founder member of ROFU women's group in DRC and a welcome partner in the Regional Civil Society Task Force – is to receive this year's UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award.

Sister Angélique works in the remote north-east region of DRC with survivors of displacement and abuse resulting from the LRA conflict; through her Centre for Reintegration and Development she's helped thousands of people. We warmly congratulate Sister Angélique as a highly deserving award recipient.

Radio talk shows raise the profile of *Voice of Peace* messages

Radio plays a major role in various aspects of everyday life, especially in rural areas. To reach communities in the most effective way the *Voice of Peace* has integrated radio as one of the tools to disseminate vital information on how to cope with and respond to the LRA conflict.

SAIPED and ARLPI set up radio programs to share the *Voice of Peace* in local languages. These radio talk shows are aired by SAIPED on BOMOKO community radio, located in the centre of the town of Dungu on Mondays from 6h30 to 7H00 pm with a replay on Wednesday from 10:30am to 1100am while TANGAZENI Kristu [RTKA] airs the shows on Tuesdays from 5:15 p.m. to 5:45 p.m. with a replay on Friday 5:15 to 5:45 p.m.

ARLPI airs their shows on radio Rupiny every three months when the *Voice of Peace* has been published. Peter Okwir, the Project Officer working for ARPI further notes that there are plans to take the shows to other districts in Acholi land so as to give the VOP a wider listenership.

The main objective of the radio programs is to encourage peaceful community coexistence. It provides a forum for people to share their concerns about ex-LRA members returning to their communities, and encourages reintegration and reconciliation between returnees and communities.

This program also aims to inform the public on the security situation in the region and in key LRA conflict zones, and of protection mechanisms against LRA incursions.

Articles on defection mechanisms, rehabilitation and community reintegration also provide crucial information and an incentive to those longing to leave the LRA – after all, in

responding to the conflict, it mustn't be forgotten that many of those caught up as fighters are involved against their will: they are often victims of the conflict too.

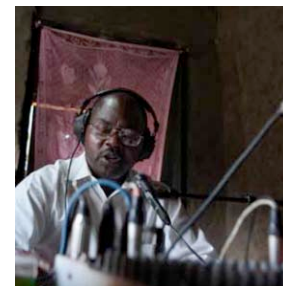
The *Voice of Peace* radio talk shows also explore some of the ways to prevent the most common conflicts in the community, such as land disputes, and translate the laws of the country into local languages. In doing so the talk shows aim to cover broad social issues, although there are some programs specifically geared towards encouraging LRA abductees to defect and return home.

Peter Okwir notes that whenever the shows are aired, they receive no less than 10 in-studio phone calls with very inquisitive callers; this is reiterated by his DRC counterpart, Father Ernest who confirms that phone calls and SMS texts are a common occurrence during the shows. This highlights the importance of the *Voice of Peace* talk shows as well as its wide appeal across the region.

Nevertheless some challenges remain. Fr. Ernest says, "The budget allocated for the program is not enough. Far more air time is required for the shows yet the budget only provides for 30 minutes per show. This leaves very little time for listeners to air out their views. In terms of logistics, the radio program would benefit from a digital voice recorder so it could go to communities and get their perspectives directly."

Okwir of ARLPI states "bureaucracy can be a major stumbling block to my work. Getting information from some key stakeholders, especially officials at various levels, is very hard and requires a lot of strenuous measures that can be time consuming."

Amidst all these challenges, the *Voice of Peace* radio shows have been a vital avenue for different stakeholders to voice their views in the struggle to respond adequately to the effects of the LRA conflict.



"Radio plays a major role in various aspects of everyday life, especially in rural areas. The Voice of Peace has integrated radio as one of the tools to disseminate vital information on the LRA conflict"

The importance of border communities working together for peace

The LRA was forced out of Northern Uganda in 2006 and moved into South Sudan to avoid attacks from the UPDF. In relocating, the LRA simply continued to prey on the local population. Continuous attacks increased tension between the communities living along the two borders. Regular meetings between the cross-border peace actors are slowly diffusing tensions and fostering collaboration.

“Direct communication and discussion helped the border communities to develop trust with each other, and that in turn helped to eradicate some stereotypes”

In 2009 the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) carried out research in Lukung and Atiak sub counties, Northern Uganda, and Nimule, Eastern Equatorial South Sudan, and published a report that identified threats of cross-border conflicts between the two countries. It was noted that there was random detention of Ugandan citizens (on the Sudanese side) and that stigmatisation of Ugandan businesspeople was increasing. On both sides, killings allegedly took place as well.

A series of meetings were held since 2010 to share these experiences of LRA attacks, come up with a collaborative assessment, and diffuse the tensions between the communities living at the shared border.

According to the ARLPI members, the exchange visit and the meetings successfully reduced tensions due to several reasons:

The level of communication between the border communities became much greater after the meeting. Cross-border meetings that brought people together eventually helped to solve the emerging conflicts. Direct communication and discussion helped the border communities to develop trust with each other, and that in turn helped to eradicate some stereotypes such as the perception that Ugandan Acholi are LRA (*tongo tongo*).

Although the shared-border communities now recognise the importance of working together to resolve their own conflicts significant challenges remain, such as unclear national border boundaries and associated issues of disputes over land in borderland areas.

To resolve these issues the communities need to work with the two governments to find ways of effectively demarcating and protecting the border as well as effectively managing the issue of land.

Regional Civil Society Task Force ‘speak one language’ on tackling the LRA

In reaction to the LRA’s wide area of operations the members of the civil society, religious and cultural leaders in the affected region’s four countries came together and decided to form a task force group organising meetings discussing LRA activities. This task force has been called the Regional Civil Society Task Force (RCSTF) and its aim is to share information, brainstorm and design solutions of how the LRA war can be brought to an end.

“Discussions and debate have helped develop a common understanding about the LRA conflict and its dynamics in the region”

The RCSTF’s participants have been meeting once a year since 2011 in different affected countries. During each meeting, common regional as well as country-specific action points are developed and members are expected to work on them and report their achievements, challenges and lesson learnt in the next session. The most recent meeting in Bangui, CAR, in September 2012, concluded that the Ugandan priorities are to develop a public database and archives, which “take into account what has been done in the past by the eye witnesses”. The regional action points were to establish contact with the LRA, further encourage defections, and increase advocacy

In terms of achievements, despite diverging perceptions as to why the LRA are in their different countries, the participants have agreed to work together through the RCSTF to affect a shared desire for positive change. Discussions and debate have helped develop a common understanding about the LRA conflict and its dynamics in the region.

The RCSTF also helps the stakeholders to ‘speak one language’ and come to the conclusion, unlike before, that peaceful means should also be used to end the LRA war – for example, encouraging defections through the use of media, promoting amnesty for defectors and establishing effective means of integrating former combatants into their respective societies.

Members of the RCSTF share this information with their own communities, helping to change community attitudes towards returnees. This has sensitised communities to returnees’ issues and has helped the authorities and communities to be more welcoming to defectors, resulting in an increased overall number of defections.

Reintegration therapy (trauma healing) and inter-church peace committees

LRA atrocities of abducting or killing innocent people, including women and children, and looting or destroying property have had both a physical and emotional effect on communities. Conflict has shattered people's sense of security, making them feel vulnerable and fearful, and many people have developed serious trauma as a result of long-term insecurity.

The effects have included increased alcohol and drug addiction, social violence, depression and mental illness. Former LRA abductees have experienced severe psychological and emotional problems, adding to feelings of shame and fear when they want to return to their communities. Communities in turn have been suspicious and mistrustful of returnees, and were aggressive towards them.

Trauma healing reintegration program

The Inter Church Peace Committee (ICPC) supported by the South Sudan government, was started in 2009 to raise national government awareness of LRA atrocities.

In 2012 the ICPC began working to support the reconciliation and reintegration of LRA returnees and defectors back into their communities through holding workshops. There are different sessions targeting different participants to promote peaceful co-existence with the community. These include trauma healing and peace building workshops for LRA returnees, defectors and their family members, and for communities living at the safe reporting sites (near the borders with DRC), and engaging the government in peace building.

There have been a number of positive results of these workshops, such as: LRA defectors joining the Peace Committee; LRA defectors engaging in economic activities with their parents and host communities to further promote reintegration; and the formation of community defection committees at selected safe reporting sites. The Sudanese Army (SPLA), traditional Chiefs of the area, government representatives, youth, church personnel, the Ugandan army (UPDF), home-guards, and hunters are involved in some of these processes.

Successes

The first workshop took place in July 2012 in Nzara County. The peace committees have since undertaken trauma-healing workshops in 5 communities with nearly 300 women and over 100 men, with individual counseling for 4 men and 66 women who have been severely traumatised. These support activities have contributed greatly to building peace in the community, reconciling LRA defectors, their families and host communities, and led to reports of decreased violence in communities. By their own initiative, some returnees have been able to get employment with NGOs while others are able to run their private business, thus earning their own income. The workshops have also enabled communities at the safe reporting sites to accept LRA defectors.

Government authorities, traditional leaders and community members have been brought into and support the process. Every month the senior government leaders, elders, home-guards and hunters are willing to share with the ICPC updates on security and LRA activities in their areas. The initiative is widely recognised by other NGOs including Resolve and Pax-Christi. American military advisors based in Nzara have also requested that the ICPC facilitate trauma-healing workshops at the three safe reporting sites. Clearly there is support at the local and international level for these kinds of activities as they have a tangible effect on the ground.

Major challenges

There is a high demand for trauma healing workshops from LRA defectors and the traumatised community, but there are very few qualified trained therapists and a lack of resources to meet the demand for workshops. There is also a high demand for individual counselling during and after the workshops. Also, trauma can often reoccur as returnees fear recapture when the LRA is in the area, and this needs special and individual attention. Trauma healing is not accompanied by holistic reintegration and resettlement programs for LRA returnees and defectors into the community, e.g. economic support, skills training, job opportunities.

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"There is a high demand for trauma healing workshops from LRA defectors and the traumatised community, but there are very few qualified trained therapists and a lack of resources to meet the demand for workshops..."

Got information to share?
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About our network...

SAIPED – *Solidarité et Assistance Intégrale aux Personnes Démunies*, DRC

CDJPR-ARU – *Commission Diocésaine de Justice, Paix et Réconciliation*, DRC

CR – Conciliation Resources is an independent UK organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence, and active on the LRA conflict since 1997.

FAP – *Femme Action Plus*/CAR

For example, land is allocated temporarily to returnees with restrictions on how much they can cultivate it. As a consequence they cannot adequately provide for themselves. Many struggle to adjust to their reduced means – during a workshop in Nzara in July 2012 one participant commented, “Life in the bush was better than coming back home.”

There is no sustained financial support for the program, and each workshop may be funded by a different source creating an *ad hoc* and uncoordinated approach. Trauma healing requires a peaceful space to allow proper reflection. At present there is no such place, and the workshops occur in public open spaces, which lack the required privacy. Patient confidentiality is a real challenge in these circumstances.

Conclusion

Those who have been at war for so long are wounded psychologically, physically and spiritually. To live peacefully, they need proper rehabilitation, reintegration and reconciliation.

The ICPC trauma healing workshops have played an important part in this process, by bringing together returnees and defectors, their families and host communities to heal their wounds and move forward together towards reconciliation and a shared future. However, more holistic and coordinated reintegration is needed: all stakeholders in conflict resolution should join hands together and plan for ways to support the promotion of peaceful co-existence.

Women's peace initiatives

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The women's advocacy activities include communicating information on how to receive and accept LRA returnees into the family and the community, of women's successful involvement in small-scale business as a means to become self-reliant, and initiatives to raise awareness of gender-based violence.

Despite the efforts of these women leaders in their respective countries, there are challenges that hinder women's participation in conflict resolution and decision-making.

Issues such as illiteracy, cultural barriers and forced marriages are still holding women back and leaving them vulnerable, especially in rural areas. Therefore women are advocating for education and

vocational training for women and child returnees.

Both men and women have to work together and encourage the participation of women in peace processes, especially as continuing stereotypes of women's expected roles in society are being used to prevent them becoming leaders.

The participation of women in peace and policy processes can be successful if the encouragement and involvement comes from both men and women. Most importantly, empowering women to reinforce their abilities and strengths will greatly contribute to local peace building initiatives.



SAIPED-RDC



FEMME ACTION PLUS

(FAP)