A people dispossessed: the plight of civilians in areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo affected by the Lord’s Resistance Army

Research report
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Cover: Buildings abandoned and destroyed during the civil war in Dungu. © Tom Bradley
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Executive summary and recommendations

In Haut-Uélé and Bas-Uélé districts in the far northeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), daily life is dominated by chronic insecurity in the form of continuing attacks by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), confrontation with a growing number of Mbororo cattle herders and banditry. Most people outside Dungu town are traumatised by past horrors and fearful of the LRA’s future intentions. None of these security threats draw much response from state or international authorities.

In addition to failing to meet basic physical protection needs of the people, the government and international community have also failed to protect the people’s ability to fish, farm, hunt and trade, all of which require free movement. Thus, the large majority of inhabitants have lost their dignity, their freedom and their ability to earn income. These conditions were initially created by the LRA, but were then exacerbated by the arrival of the Mbororo and inadequate responses from both the government and international community.

Civilians consulted during the research expressed feelings of abandonment by state authorities and considerable dismay at the departure of so many of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies that had helped fill the void in service delivery created by government dysfunction. In Dungu, an employment boom brought on by the arrival of these NGOs has now gone bust, leaving a legacy of unemployment and inflation.

While there have been important improvements in perceived security, chiefly as a result of improved military efficiency of the African Union Regional Task Force for the LRA (AU-RTF), better application of defection strategies, improved early warning and better communications, the belief that the LRA maintains a dangerous level of operational initiative is widely shared among...
communities. Security may have improved but people do not feel safe. Though defeat of the LRA is unlikely to let local residents move about completely without fear, most respondents saw it as a necessary precondition to begin the process of recovery.

The combined effect of continuing insecurity across most of the outlying parts of the province and occupation of large swathes of land by relatively powerful Mbororo herders (who have so far been able to fend off the LRA) has created siege-like conditions, trapping displaced peoples in situations of enforced poverty. Though there is little accurate information available on the actual scale of the Mbororo problem, rumour and malicious gossip run rampant, fuelling high levels of frustration and strong feelings of injustice. Given that these kinds of sentiments in both South Sudan and the Central African Republic (CAR) have led to social and political unrest, there are grounds for serious concern for the possible consequences in the DRC.

In broader historical perspective, the current situation can be seen as the tragic result of an attempt by the Congolese government to impose centrally administered protection services without the necessary capacities or resources. After decades neglecting the far north east of the country, it made an emergency response to the LRA crisis but did not have the administrative or security tools at its disposal to make a good job of it.

The brief period of international intervention on behalf of LRA victims provided temporary relief to some, but has not altered the background dysfunctions within the Congolese political and social systems. Nor did it address core vulnerabilities associated with a mode of survival dependent on dispersed living patterns.

Any effort to improve civilian protection must begin with a holistic conception of protection, one that aims to provide physical security, the freedom to pursue self-sustaining livelihoods and political agency. Grounded in this conception and a full understanding of the conditions on the ground, policymakers should prioritise the following set of measures.

**Key recommendations:**

1. To protect civilians from violent attack and give them the freedom of movement to pursue traditional livelihoods, security sector actors (the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC), the UN Stabilization Mission in DRC (MONUSCO) and the African Union Regional Task Force (AU-RTF)) should adapt their operations to the needs of local inhabitants and respond vigorously and consistently to LRA sightings and incidents.

2. To address the Mbororo problem, the interior and defence ministries in close collaboration with the governor of Orientale Province, local leaders, Mbororo representatives and relevant international actors including the AU should begin to develop a comprehensive policy on the Mbororo issue by initiating a thorough investigation of the causes of tension between local inhabitants and herders in the Uélés.

3. To strengthen local governance and the role of local communities in their own protection, local state, traditional and religious leaders should together:
   a. Strengthen systems to gather information on security incidents and conflict issues and use it to support advocacy efforts.
   b. Foster public participation in community dialogue on conflict issues including the LRA, Mbororo, displacement, land and good governance.

4. To augment development efforts in the LRA affected areas, donors should put out calls for international NGOs to provide development services in these areas and support church-based development programming.
1. Introduction

This report analyses the challenge of protecting civilians in the LRA affected areas of the DRC and proposes concrete ways to enhance current efforts. It forms part of a wider research project that seeks to address shortfalls in understanding of and responses to both civilian protection and the need to reintegrate former members of the LRA into their communities. These complex challenges have arisen from the unique and sad story of the LRA.

Conflict background

The LRA emerged in the late 1980s as an armed uprising in northern Uganda that sought to overthrow the government of President Yoweri Museveni. Joseph Kony had taken control of a resistance movement consisting mainly of his own Acholi people. But the group’s brutal terror tactics lost it popular support and Kony increasingly relied on rule by force and by promulgating the belief that he could channel the power of the spirits. Following military setbacks and the loss of its major sponsor, the Sudanese government in Khartoum, the LRA entered into talks with Museveni’s government. During the Juba talks, 2006 - 2008, Kony kept camp in Garamba National Park in the DRC. After two years, Kony failed to sign a final agreement, the talks collapsed and Museveni reverted to military action.

In December 2008, the Ugandan army with support from the DRC, South Sudan and the United States (US) launched a poorly coordinated air and ground assault on the LRA's camps in Garamba Park. It was supposed to be the final blow. Kony survived and the LRA launched a set of coordinated attacks against civilians in Haut-Uélé and Bas-Uélé districts of Orientale Province that set a new standard of savagery. Over a period of two weeks, the LRA killed more than 865 people and abducted at least 160 children, as well as a number of adults.1 The Christmas Massacres, as they came to be known, signalled the beginning of a wave of terror attacks against the civilian population of north eastern DRC, South Sudan and southern CAR that have so far resulted in over 2,300 deaths and approximately 4,900 abductions. Nearly half of those abducted are still missing.2

The Ugandan army, with logistical and intelligence support from the US, has kept up military pressure on LRA groups and used various methods including radio programmes and flyer drops to persuade fighters and abductees to surrender. In late 2011 the AU launched a Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord’s Resistance Army (RCI-LRA) with the endorsement and participation of Uganda, the DRC, the CAR and South Sudan. The Regional Task Force (RTF), composed of troops from all four countries, was meant to increase coordination and unity of effort. In reality, the AU has provided greater legitimacy and diplomatic cover for a still predominantly Ugandan military operation with strong US backing.

Protection and reintegration: shortfalls in understanding and delivery

Though the LRA’s core of Ugandan commanders has been whittled down and Kony's ability to control his scattered troops diminished, LRA fighters continue to attack civilians in their homes, in the forest and on roads between villages. National governments, armies and international security forces have consistently failed to provide sufficient protection for inhabitants of all three affected countries. In addition to the fear of attack, local communities face the legacy of the LRA’s past atrocities. While fighters and abductees who have managed to escape try to return to normal life, their communities must also adapt to living with those who may have committed atrocities.

Manifest shortfalls in the efforts of local, national and international actors to protect civilians and reintegrate former LRA into their communities prompted Conciliation Resources to commission a two-stranded research project. The result is two complementary reports. The first seeks to understand the protection challenges in LRA affected areas of the DRC and propose ways to enhance current measures. The second analyses the factors that favour and inhibit the return and reintegration of former LRA in the DRC and South Sudan and proposes concrete ways stakeholders can facilitate the process.

2. See the LRA Crisis Tracker [www.lracrisistracker.com/#analysis], accessed on 10 June 2014.
2. Methodology

The research for this report was conducted from 1 December 2013 to 28 February 2014. The initial phase included a workshop held in Kampala in late January 2014. Participants came from local communities most directly affected by LRA attacks (Faradje and Dungu in the DRC; Yambio, Ezo and Tambura in South Sudan; Obo, Mboki and Zemio in the CAR), the AU-RTF, Congolese army, UN agencies and international NGOs.

This was followed by field research (30 January-16 February) conducted in Aru, Faradje, Djabir, Dungu and Ngilima in the DRC during which a number of focus group discussions, workshops and interviews were held with community members and leaders, religious leaders, representatives from all major agencies, security sector leaders and returnees from the LRA. The research included an impromptu meeting with Mbororo herders. It concluded with a community dialogue in Dungu attended by representatives of Community Peace and Justice Committees (CPJC) from across the province as well as security sector and local government authorities.

3. Chronic security threats

The vast majority of interviewees indicated that, while they feel safer now in their homes than they did in 2013, they still do not feel safe travelling away from population centres, particularly to farm, hunt, fish or trade. Reasons offered for this generalised sense of insecurity centred on two issues: the LRA and Mbororo cattle herders. The LRA were said to pose the most significant threat to life and limb while the Mbororo were considered a threat to livelihood and property. While there has been a significant national and international response to the LRA threat, there has been no corresponding response to the Mbororo.

3. The Catholic Church has established Community Peace and Justice Committees across the region to enhance dialogue among local actors and victims of violence.
A. The LRA: still dangerous

The LRA has been, and remains, the most significant challenge to physical security in the region it affects. The core elements of this challenge remain the sheer practical difficulty of protecting isolated small groups of civilians dispersed across a large swathe of remote terrain against a force that is adept at hiding, moving quickly and mounting surprise attacks at times and places of its choosing. There are simply too many places to guard and too much ground to cover, much of it too difficult to reach quickly.

Large-scale raids by the LRA during which fighters mutilated, raped, abducted children and murdered reduced over 2013 and early 2014. Indeed, LRA activity has dropped significantly, but continuing small-scale attacks in both Garamba National Park and more recently, Bas-Uélé district to the west indicate a persistent LRA presence that most local residents find deeply distressing.

The historically brutal character and unpredictability of LRA attacks have created high levels of fear throughout the region, in large part because the people affected were, and remain, unprotected. While the number and scale of attacks has diminished in the last two years the terror remains, in part as a result of a new wave of attacks in early 2014.

Over the past year, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish LRA raids from those of other armed groups and individuals. Most attacks have focussed on collecting supplies of food and equipment, usually by robbing small traders trying to move supplies to market by bicycle, but also by raiding isolated homesteads and hunting parties. Criminal bands, poachers or rogue elements of the Congolese army may have committed roughly 30 per cent of these attacks.

The distinction between LRA and criminals may itself be a false one. There is a large discrepancy between the number of people abducted by the LRA in the region (approximately 4,900) and the number who are known to have returned (approximately 2,300). This combined with evidence of other unidentified armed groups in the region suggests the LRA problem may be morphing into one of generalised criminality driven by poverty, alienation and a large number of people with direct experience of LRA methods. It is entirely possible bandits are now copying the LRA and that some former captives might be among them.

B. The Mbororo: conflicting interests

The term ‘Mbororo’ is used to refer to cattle herders belonging to the Fulani group of nomadic peoples with historical roots in the Saharan region. In response to increasing population density and desertification, they have slowly migrated along major river systems throughout west and central Africa. Thanks to their sparse population and excellent pasturage, Haut-Uélé and Bas-Uélé districts of the DRC are ideal for cattle. Mbororo groups initially tried to exploit these conditions in the 1980s but were immediately repelled by the army. Since the 1990s, though, new waves of migration have seen seasonal increases in the number of Mbororo in the Uélés.

Local inhabitants have a list of complaints against the Mbororo. They say armed herders act aggressively when encountered in the bush, and that they forbid villagers to hunt near their herds since the bush fires hunters light to stampede their prey also scare away the cattle. They say Mbororo also forbid fishing where they intend to water their herds and beekeeping. Mbororo are also said to graze cattle without regard for crops; contaminate local communities’ water sources; burn large areas of land without regard to houses or crops; and use their purchasing power to impose prices for goods at local markets. A number of interviewees said that shortly after the passage

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5. See letter from civil society groups to Martin Kobler, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (SRSG) in Congo and head of the UN peacekeeping mission there (MONUSCO), 13 March 2014: www.c-r.org/protecting-civilians-LRA-abductions
6. See the LRA Crisis Tracker (www.lracrisistracker.com/#analysis), accessed on 10 June 2014.
8. It is difficult to determine whether the complaints are based on actual experience or just repeated anecdotes that have taken on the status of collective belief. Nevertheless the beliefs are widely shared.
of Mbororo through an area the LRA often followed. Whether by design or coincidence, the correlation of presence is enough to upset exposed and unprotected communities.

The situation is further complicated by a misunderstanding regarding the international status of the Mbororo. For some as yet obscure reason, local respondents thought that the Mbororo enjoy special status as climate change refugees. This is in fact a distortion based on misinterpretation of a UN and Human Rights Watch led intervention to stop a *refoulement* (forced repatriation) of Mbororo attempted by the Congolese army in 2008. Nevertheless, respondents expressed their feelings of injustice in very strong terms and many claimed that they could not return to their traditional areas of residence because of Mbororo presence.

Allegedly, the Mbororo were granted access to grazing by leaders of the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (*Mouvement de libération du Congo, MLC*) in early 2000. Since that time the Mbororo have extended their grazing range to cover a swathe of the DRC extending from Ango, near the border with the CAR, to Ngilima, eastwards to the edge of Garamba National Park and north to the border with South Sudan near Duru and Bangadi. Their number is unknown, though a census conducted by the Congolese government in 2008 estimated 7,000 herders, with families, and approximately 100,000 head of cattle. The numbers of cattle and herders are thought to have increased considerably since that time.

Local residents report that Mbororo behave well when coming to markets or to population centers.

10. Peace Committee meeting, Dungu, 10 February 2014.

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11. The infamous Jean-Pierre Bemba led the MLC in opposition to factions led by those now in government. As such, it would have had no legitimacy in the eyes of local leaders. The fact that the MLC based itself in this region might explain some of the current reluctance in Kinshasa to take stronger action against the LRA.

12. Estimate provided by the Acting Commander of the FARDC’s Operation Rudia II. Spittaels and Hilgert (2010) make similar estimates.

centres but they are less civil when encountered in the bush. They say they are armed and that one particular sub-group, known as the Ouda, are very well armed and fierce. Though there is more rumour than fact underpinning allegations of Mbororo behaviour, it is clear that their presence is a cause of considerable tension that is not being addressed.

While there are many unconfirmed reports that at least some national leaders and one local traditional chief have granted Mbororo grazing privileges in exchange for a share of the profits, it was possible to confirm at least one case in which Congolese soldiers were protecting a cattle market and collecting entrance fees from prospective buyers. Congolese businessmen and army officers were among the buyers.

A rough estimate of the monetary value of cattle herding suggests that the Mbororo have significant wealth to be ‘taxed’. Cattle sold for meat tend to be those considered weak or less valuable by their owners. The average price for one cow for butchering is about 250 US dollars. Using this price, the herd of 100,000 head of cattle (a low estimate) would have a total value of 25,000,000 US dollars. However, breeding stock can be worth up to 600 US dollars per head. In addition, milk production generates revenues that, at the very least, cover some of the daily expenses of herders and their families.

At a conservative estimate, using an inflated loss factor, herd sizes increase at a rate of 25 per cent per year, thus generating an estimated potential profit of slightly more than 6,000,000 US dollars per year. If only the undesirable cattle were sold and cattle were kept for breeding, allowing for a 25 per cent annual increase of the original estimated herd from 2008, there could be a herd of approximately one quarter of a million head in the Uélés in 2014. This could represent a monetary value as high as 100,000,000 US dollars.

This resource is owned and exploited by patrons spread across West Africa who employ herders in the DRC through a profit sharing system.

Neither the owners nor the herders have an interest in investing anything more than is absolutely necessary to protect their herds. The most significant challenge for herders is to find fresh grazing and, since the advent of new veterinary medicines that protect cows from tropical disease, to protect them from rustlers and predators. The DRC offers virgin territory with few rustlers or predators and herds appear to have flourished, along with profits. It is almost inconceivable that the value of this resource has escaped the notice of senior officials and those in positions to offer either grazing rights or protection.

One of the main challenges with respect to the presence of Mbororo herds in the Uélés is collecting sufficient data to confirm the scale and scope of the problem. Anecdotal reports testifying to competition for land, water and hunting/fishing access abound but do not give a clear enough picture of how Mbororo presence plays out on the ground. However, the fact that the existing system of land tenure is based on traditional usage and that it appears possible for either traditional leaders or national authorities (military and/or civilian) to grant property rights to herders without regard to tradition, creates a condition of severe vulnerability for the local civil population. This situation also offers tempting possibilities for the sale of protection services to any agency capable of interposing themselves between an angry population and cattle herds vulnerable to poison, fire or direct attack.

4. Inadequate protection responses

Efforts to protect civilians in LRA affected areas have proven inadequate for several reasons. At the fundamental level of understanding, international actors and the armies leading counter-LRA strategies have conceived protection too narrowly as protection from violence. In addition, by opting for a military strategy based on ‘search and destroy’ tactics, they have failed to deter LRA attacks against civilians. The strategy is ill-suited to the LRA threat as it leaves fighters free to move and attack at will. In Congo, the state has lacked the will and/or capacity to provide economic opportunities or essential social services that fall within a broader conception of protection. Civil society actors, both local and international, have stepped up to fill some of the gap. They have had considerable impact through advocacy, but work at the community level has

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14. Mbororo herders cited the Ouda as the main cause of strife. Interview with Mbororo herders, between Dungu and Ngiliima, 11 February 2014.
16. Interview with Mbororo herder, between Dungu and Ngiliima, 11 February 2014.
not connected with security sector protection activities. Finally, international humanitarian agencies and NGOs provided a burst of immediate relief to affected communities but their long-term impact appears negligible.

A. Protection too narrowly conceived

The challenge of protecting civilians in the DRC, the CAR and South Sudan is complicated by a muddled conceptual arena. No consensus has emerged among international agencies concerning actions, responsibilities and interventions associated with the word ‘protection’. The main actors responding to the LRA problem, the military in particular, have thus been able to sidestep many of the challenges faced by communities living in the LRA affected areas.

For some, particularly those in the security sector, civilian protection is narrowly focused on providing physical protection from violence. This narrow understanding has been taken up by the concept of ‘responsibility to protect’ (R2P) used to justify international interventions. R2P is focused on the emergency provision of protection to civilians threatened by certain forms of violent conflict. The primary actors in R2P-mandated intervention are thus likely to be from the security sector, operating in support of active international diplomacy.

For others, the notion of protection includes remedial activities to foster a viable context for peaceful civilian life, such as assisting in the development of a functioning legal system (following the notion that effective laws, policing and judiciary can deter most kinds of violent crimes) or developing long-term reintegration programmes for former combatants. Since the late 1990s the UN has included protection of civilian (POC) responsibilities in the mandates of several peacekeeping missions, including MONUSCO.

POC doctrine construes the problem of protection more broadly than R2P and aims at a wide spectrum of activities that might be considered as part of the humanitarian, political, social, economic and judicial infrastructure of states. This broad interpretation is sometimes
called a ‘human security’ approach and opens the field of intervention to a much broader set of actors including the main UN agencies and a large number of NGOs. 17

In the case of the LRA, the international actors and African governments leading the counter-LRA response have treated the LRA as a threat to the physical security of civilians living in its area of operations.

When the AU or the armies of the affected countries talk of protection they mean protection from physical violence in the narrow sense. While many have acknowledged that the LRA’s survival in this cross-border zone is due in part to the lack of state presence, they have not sought to protect civilians in the broader more holistic sense. To do so would push the finish line further away, something for which there is little political appetite.

The strategy of the Ugandan army during Operation Lightning Thunder and of the AU Regional Task Force is based on the assumption that civilians will be protected (understood narrowly as protection from physical violence) by affected states, while RTF units engage in search and capture operations in an attempt to defeat the LRA and thus, they hope, end the problem once and for all.

Neither the effectiveness of host states in regards to civilian protection (even in the narrow sense) nor the military effectiveness of the RTF can be taken for granted. Neither has worked as hoped.

B. Ill-suited security sector strategies

The Congolese government for many years neglected the LRA affected areas, preoccupied as it was by a range of pressing problems in the Kivus. In 2007, the UN mission (MONUC) pressed the Congolese government to deploy troops to the region to protect civilians from the LRA. The FARDC deployed throughout the LRA affected region and, in 2008, MONUC deployed forces to Dungu in support. One of the first actions by the army was to disarm local self-defence groups, which for many years had been the only effective security force available.

Given the limited resources available, MONUSCO (MONUC’s successor)18 and the Congolese army developed a strategy in which UN forces sought to provide local defence to Dungu, Faradje and Ngilima and logistics support to some nine battalions of FARDC which were to guard other population centres and conduct active operations against the LRA. This approach, based on presence rather than trying to deter attacks by aggressive response to LRA incidents, is ineffective since the LRA consistently choose to avoid military installations and to attack undefended civilian targets.19

In early 2014, respondents across the region publicly reported some level of confidence in the army with respect to their ability to counter the LRA, though more private conversations were less positive. It remains the case that FARDC leaders downplay the risks posed by the LRA and respond inconsistently to reports of attacks.

Advocacy efforts in response to mass atrocities led to the deployment in 2011 of the AU-RTF. It was meant to bring national contingents from each of the affected countries into a regional force whose main function was to find and eliminate LRA elements. The war of attrition they have conducted, involving active pursuit of LRA forces and increasingly effective intelligence gathering and defection strategies, has slowly reduced LRA strike capacity and inhibited their ability to communicate and survive but, so far, has failed to deliver an adequate level of civilian protection or a decisive military success.20

With less than half of the number of troops pledged in the initial mandate and with many of those bled away by operations in South Sudan and the CAR, the AU-RTF operates at a much lower level of effectiveness than anticipated. The RTF was to have received contributions of roughly 1,000 soldiers each from the DRC, South Sudan and the CAR to add to the roughly 2,000 Ugandan troops that were to form the main body of the force. As things now stand, the CAR


has no troops to contribute, South Sudan has redeployed all its troops to fight in its civil war, the DRC has only contributed 500 troops and the Ugandan military has redeployed an unknown portion of its contingent to support the South Sudanese government.  

Three years after the start of AU-RTF operations, the LRA continues to threaten the security of civilians across its area of operations, suggesting that the AU-RTF approach is deeply flawed. Though the ultimate objective of the military strategy is the final elimination of the LRA, the lack of attention to the risks incurred by unprotected civilians over the course of a long and inclusive military campaign is neither fair to them nor consistent with either R2P or POC doctrine.

One of the most significant impacts of the LRA and their imitators has been to discourage traditional farming and survival strategies, which require free movement through the forests. Yet nothing in the counter-LRA security sector intervention addresses this problem or the problem of general insecurity from non-LRA sources. Indeed, at no point have any of the assorted security forces in the region attempted to develop strategies specifically designed to address the broader civilian protection challenges implied in POC doctrine.

C. The invisible state

According to either the R2P or POC concepts touched on above, the Congolese state should have a broad range of responsibilities in response to the multiple risks posed by the LRA, other unidentified bandits and the Mbororo. These should include measures to provide physical protection, deterrence and social services enhanced to cope with the loss of life and livelihoods associated with insecurity. Except for the presence of a poorly disciplined, and at times predatory, national army there is simply little sign of any positive government presence and nothing but vague promises of a definitive policy regarding the Mbororo. Both Bas-Uélé and Haut-Uélé could be considered backwaters even against the background of generalised absence of state authorities that characterise much of the DRC.

Whether this condition is a result of lack of political will or lack of capacity, or perhaps some combination of the two, is a matter for speculation but it remains clear that the state, per se, is largely invisible in Orientale Province. There was some level of hope expressed, particularly in Aru, about the election of a new state governor, Jean Bamanisa Saidi. Those inhabiting areas directly affected by the LRA were somewhat less optimistic, preferring “to wait and see.”

Such police forces as there are remain scattered, ill supported and poorly paid. They have a poor record of responding to complaints though there are some posts that appear to be reasonably well run. Except for the border post at Aru, where there are some visible improvements to buildings and some donated police vehicles available, most state and provincial authorities operate in buildings whose advanced state of dilapidation has only occasionally been rescued by UN or humanitarian agency assistance. Government buildings in Faradje destroyed six years ago during the Christmas Massacres have still not been repaired. Schools and health centres are largely reliant on direct payment for services. Economic activity, on the whole, is lacklustre and there is so far little sign of the energetic government engagement that would be needed to mobilise a full-scale economic recovery. The provincial capital, Isiro, is isolated from the eastern part of the province and most of the traditional trade in the region is carried out across international borders rather than internally. Recent improvements to the road network by MONUSCO and to the telephone communications system by USAID have helped open up the region but there is still little commercial trade. Palm oil and rice are produced in artisanal quantities sufficient to support some small-scale exchanges towards the Ugandan border and locals in some areas complain of illegal exploitation of wood products facilitated by better roads. The Kibali gold mine is the most significant employer in the region but there is no sign that revenue from this feeds into local state coffers or any government service.


22. The Police Commissioner at Aru receives a salary of 60 US dollars a month after more than 50 years of service. Interview with Police Commissioner, Aru, 31 January 2014.

23. In every interview respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of both police and military forces.

24. Peace Committee workshop, Dungu, 10 February 2014.
D. Civil society contributions

In much of the LRA affected region, civil society based early detection and warning of LRA movements have improved greatly. This system, based on high frequency (HF) radio transmitters set up through a partnership between NGOs, the Church and community groups, meets part of the requirement for protection. But with the possible exception of parts of the CAR, where US military elements and the Ugandan army (UPDF) are deployed, and those parts of South Sudan patrolled by local defence units, warnings do not connect directly to a security sector response. To apply a civilian analogy, there is a system in place to detect and share information about criminals but no police force to call when the criminals strike. Where there has been a response, it has so far been too late to act as a credible deterrent against further attacks on other target settlements, except in South Sudan.25

Interviews with several traditional chiefs and focus group discussions with a broader set of community members suggest that there are still viable non-state networks of communication and dialogue that act as a bulwark of community protection insofar as they enable community dialogue. While testimonies collected in the field suggest that this is a worthwhile effort, greatly appreciated by community members and tolerated by government, it has limited traction on security issues.

Though helpful in promoting and developing defection strategies that have reduced LRA numbers, community action has not led to improvements in security sector response or to the opening of political space for the establishment of self-defence groups.

Traditional chiefs could make a substantial contribution to the security of their communities if they were engaged and facilitated in tasks such as collecting community level incident reports involving the LRA, Mbororo or other sources of insecurity. This would at least provide communities with reliable data on which to base advocacy for stronger protection measures.

25. The Arrow Boy self-defence units of South Sudan remain controversial but seem to have had a decisive deterrent effect on the LRA.
Operating quietly in the background and taking a long-term approach, one finds the Church. The Catholic and Anglican dioceses are particularly well entrenched within their communities and have organised networks of peace and justice committees that have become a useful vehicle for communities to develop local strategies to deal with protection challenges. They collaborate well with Invisible Children’s early warning and community broadcast radio systems, which in most cases are the only reliable sources of information about LRA or other attacks. The Church is particularly well placed to deal with post-incident stress of various kinds and is able to speak from within the shared narrative experience of the region.

The advocacy of civil society leaders, local organisations, international groups such as Human Rights Watch and a cluster of UN agencies and NGOs has in large part stimulated and maintained the international attention given to the LRA problem. Early attempts by local civil society organisations to find international support for radio messaging directed at LRA fighters ran into stiff opposition from advocates of a military solution, who wanted a clear field of action, after the failure of the Juba peace process.

The military strategy that eventually evolved was conditioned by resource limitations, military technical issues and the limited ability of diplomats to secure commitments from potential troop contributing nations. Religious leaders in Northern Uganda, the DRC, the CAR and South Sudan played a leadership role throughout the period of military preparations, eventually persuading diplomats and key government leaders that a radio messaging system and attempts to encourage defections could complement military approaches and decrease risks to civilians.

E. Fleeting humanitarian aid

The Christmas Massacres of 2008 and 2009 caught the attention of the world and drew a number of emergency agencies to the scene. Once a security umbrella of sorts had been established by MONUC/MONUSCO and the Congolese army, Dungu became the centre of emergency interventions with, at one point in 2010, several dozen UN agencies and NGOs based there. Though a precise evaluation of the effect of these interventions is beyond the scope of this research, it is rather clear that the long-term effect has been negligible. Some interventions focussed on relief to the displaced may have reduced casualty rates considerably for their duration insofar as they enabled people to survive in relative safety. Similar interventions in the fields of emergency health and education provided some temporary relief but have not resulted in long-term improvements in either system.

Significantly, most interventions suggest a shared blindness to the effect of displacement on the capacity for income earning that is needed to fund both education and health without international inputs. These social services are essential pieces of an adequate condition of human security. The fact that the importance of these activities seems to have been neglected throughout the period of emergency intervention, except for some token vocational training, suggests either ignorance or some level of dysfunction on the part of the NGOs.

It might also be understood as an indication of the disorderly free-for-all effect of separate NGOs following their own mandates without the benefit of some overarching analysis or guiding strategy. Taking a POC or R2P perspective at the outset might have ameliorated the result, though the task of building the robust local economy implied by a human security interpretation of either concept would have been daunting in this context.

As the number and scale of LRA attacks have reduced, emergency assistance has come to an end. However, the presence of so many agency offices in Dungu provided employment to a number of Congolese citizens, who now find themselves unemployed and ill-equipped or unwilling to return to a life of subsistence agriculture. While some of these encountered during interviews were cynical about their experiences, most were quite positive and wanting to find ways to continue to contribute to the development of their region. There is a pool of reasonably well-qualified workers in Dungu who could be engaged in future programmes.

One other significant effect of emergency assistance is the repair and maintenance of part of the road network in the Uélés and the establishment of mobile phone network coverage across much of the LRA affected region. The former is an effect of the government’s Stabilisation and Reconstruction Plan for Eastern Congo (STAREC) while the
latter is a direct result of Human Rights Watch and Invisible Children’s lobbying of USAID, which then supported Vodacom.

These are very recent improvements and it remains to be seen what effect they will have on the whole human security envelope within the region. It seems unlikely that road repairs will stand up to wear and tear through the next few rainy seasons without functioning taxation and government road services departments. In the short-term, traders are bringing in merchandise and looking for items of value to carry out to markets. So far, the main commodities available are wood and palm oil. These are unlikely to generate sufficient revenues to cover the cost of road maintenance once MONUSCO leaves.

5. A way of life overturned

Recent interviews suggest that the LRA’s arrival upset a way of life that had evolved over centuries. The dense forest in this region has lent itself to civilian protection strategies based on dispersal and concealment. The forest also provides ample hunting and fishing opportunities. Poor soils and low population density favour slash and burn agriculture, in which small plots were cleared, farmed for a few years and then abandoned as productivity fell. In chronically unsettled security conditions, in which slave raiders, colonial forced labour policies, punitive taxation and politically motivated military forces targeted population centres, residents found little incentive to invest in more settled ways of life.

Later, as the post-colonial state slowly collapsed under the weight of corrupt and inefficient administration, dispersion enabled inhabitants of the region to keep a low profile and to survive without roads or connection to the outside world. Wet conditions through much of the year discouraged herding as, prior to the development of new veterinary medicines, cattle did not thrive. Except during the relatively brief late colonial period, during which coffee plantations and commercial rice production flourished, the general mode of existence could be described as an impoverished slash and burn agronomy supplemented by fishing and hunting, all of which worked for a dispersed, low density population.

One of the consequences of such a dispersed and impoverished mode of existence is that it fails to provide the minimal requirements for active engagement in a democratic political process. Without sufficient economic power, citizens do not have the financial resources to travel, to come together to discuss and debate policy or to establish, through dialogue among themselves, consensus on fundamental issues of justice.

Without some formally recognised system of land ownership, residents have no solid basis to make proprietorial claims over lands needed for agriculture, fishing or hunting. Nor do they have a hope of holding elected officials to account without the money needed to pay for access to courts or to the communications systems needed to advocate in their own collective interests. This is particularly true in a country as vast and disrupted by poor communications as the DRC, even discounting its endemic political dysfunctions.

While local inhabitants have adopted this particular pattern of existence to survive historical threats, it constitutes a nearly perfect operating environment for small groups of armed insurgents with no ties to the community and no need to fit into traditional value systems. It is perfect for the LRA and their imitators. It has also created ideal conditions for dispossession of lands at the hands of cattle herders and corrupt officials.

In contrast to previous threats, the LRA emptied much of the countryside as inhabitants fled to population centres in search of protection. Displacement figures do not, by themselves, convey the severity of effect. We also need to understand how displacement has affected traditional modes of existence. Displacement led to increasing concentrations of population across the province and effectively disabled the economic system that had been in place for years.

Both host communities and the displaced now find that hunting and fishing no longer generate adequate amounts of protein and that traditional farming practices are very difficult. The whole population suffers as those already living in towns and villages must now share access to land and hunting and fishing areas with displaced populations. Without sufficient space to generate small surpluses from rudimentary agriculture, residents’ ability to raise money to cover school fees and medical expenses has been severely inhibited.

The peoples of the Uélés are caught in an historical trap. Their traditional mode of life has been shown to provide inadequate...
protection against forces such as the LRA. Moreover, the arrival of the LRA brought the FARDC, who, for reasons of state, felt obliged to disarm local militias who might have provided some level of civil protection against the LRA and other armed elements. Having lost the capacity and political space needed to protect themselves, inhabitants of the region must rely on national authorities to meet their protection needs.

There is an implied social contract in operation here but the problem is that the national authorities either cannot or will not rise to the challenge the contract implies. Moreover, even if the state were able to assure physical security against the LRA, it could only establish minimal conditions of safety sufficient to support a return to a minimal subsistence economy. Without the development of other security and administrative capacities sufficient to meet the challenges of banditry and Mbororo presence, this would leave the vast majority of residents in the Uélés in their present condition of economic and political disempowerment – virtually unprotected.

6. How to improve civilian protection

Providing greater protection to civilians in the Uélés is no mean feat. It will require all protection actors first and foremost to build consensus around a common understanding of protection that embraces a human security interpretation of the term. Grounded in this consensus, politicians, local and foreign security sector actors, civil society leaders and international agencies and NGOs will need to work together to increase protection from violent attack, encourage voluntary return from the LRA, expand freedom of movement, mitigate the Mbororo problem and land conflicts, enhance information gathering and advocacy efforts and support local economies. The following recommendations envision a way for the people of the Uélés to take an active role in ensuring their own security and to live safer and more dignified lives.

Rethink civilian protection

All actors working to end the LRA threat and build peace in the LRA affected areas should prioritise the protection of civilians and adopt an understanding of this objective that comprises protection from physical attack, ensuring freedom of movement, the provision of basic social services and the creation of economic opportunities.

To ensure that this human security understanding of protection informs operations on the ground, the AU should review the legal foundation of the AU Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the LRA (RCI-LRA) and mandate the RTF to protect civilians, explicitly including this human security understanding of protection.

Strengthen protection from attack and enable freedom of movement

Security sector actors retain primary responsibility for protecting civilians from violent attack by the LRA and other armed groups. The AU-RTF (principally Ugandan soldiers in the CAR and South Sudan and Congolese troops in Congo) still has a critical role to play since any relaxation of its current effort may provide breathing room to the LRA and could allow it to renew large-scale attacks. Likewise Congolese army units deployed across the LRA affected area but not included in the AU initiative have the potential to significantly increase civilian security.

Finally, civilians themselves can and should increase their contribution to protection efforts. Though recent history disinclines the Congolese government to trust its people with weapons, local defence militias are arguably better suited to respond to the LRA than the FARDC. The substitution of local defence militias for a weak national army has stripped local communities of ownership of their own security without providing a sufficiently robust alternative protection system.

To better protect civilians from violent attack:

1. AU members (Uganda, the DRC and South Sudan) should honour their commitments to contribute, equip and adequately supply troops to the AU-RTF.
2. The EU should provide a more generous support package to the AU-RTF.
3. MONUSCO and the Congolese army, instead of maintaining static positions, should adapt their patrols to the needs of local inhabitants and pursue LRA groups following sightings and incidents.
4. The Congolese government, with support from MONUSCO and international donors,
should ensure that FARDC elements in the LRA affected areas are paid and supplied on time.

5. Security sector actors should cooperate fully with efforts to encourage defections from the LRA, including working closely with local communities in the creation of safe defection sites.

6. Local authorities and the Congolese army should engage and support traditional leaders to play more active and focussed roles in civilian protection, particularly by collecting information on security incidents.

7. The Congolese government should carefully consider local communities’ calls for permission to establish civilian defence units.

Address the Mbororo problem and land conflicts
Disputes over land ownership and access to land are widespread due to ongoing displacement and return. They are particularly acute with respect to the Mbororo due to the tensions between cattle keepers and crop farmers. At the same time some local authorities and FARDC seek to benefit financially from the presence of Mbororo cattle. These interconnected problems need more investigation but could be reduced by the following steps.

1. To help resolve land conflicts including those involving Mbororo herders and displaced people, the government should:
   a. Formalise land tenure to establish clear property rights.
   b. Encourage provincial and local state authorities to work with traditional and community leaders to address problems stemming from displacement and help communities adapt land use customs.
   c. Reassure citizens that the state will respect and protect their traditional land use rights.

2. The Interior and Defence Ministries in close collaboration with the governor of Orientale Province, local leaders, Mbororo representatives and relevant international actors including the AU should begin to develop a comprehensive policy on the Mbororo issue by initiating a thorough investigation of the causes of tension between local inhabitants and herders in the Uélés.

3. The Ministry of Defence and military leadership should give clear guidance to FARDC units deployed in the Uélés on their roles and responsibilities regarding the Mbororo.

4. Civil society should work with the Congolese government to research, develop and publicise a clear national policy with respect to the Mbororo so that all parties know their rights and obligations to each other and the FARDC has a clearly defined role.

Galvanise local leadership and encourage community dialogue
The most promising way for civilians to improve their own protection is to gather information regarding insecurity and conflict issues including the LRA, Mbororo and displacement, take part in public discussions and engage political and security actors on these issues. Local traditional and religious leaders with positions of authority in communities have a particularly important role to play encouraging public participation and championing community priorities with state authorities and security actors.

1. Local authorities and civil society actors should develop mechanisms for constructive community dialogue on issues related to peace, justice, land use and good governance.

2. Local authorities should work with community leaders to help conflicting parties, including local residents, displaced people, returnees, Mbororo herders, security sector actors, to reach mutually acceptable agreements on points of friction.

Enhance information gathering and advocacy
Understanding LRA behaviour, the effects of displacement, the Mbororo issue and the economic and social effects of insecurity require more focussed information collection, analysis and dissemination. Fairly effective lines of communication through churches, civil society organisations and traditional authorities offer an opportunity for better data gathering. This data is essential to inform more effective responses and valuable for local communities and international NGOs as an advocacy tool.

Advocates need to target their advocacy efforts at multiple levels in favour of more effective action: towards the media in donor countries and the region; to individual governments.
themselves in the region and international donor governments; and to local communities in the affected areas, in order to encourage them to raise the issues with their elected representatives at local and national levels. More effective storytelling may achieve what diplomacy cannot. To enhance data gathering and advocacy efforts:

1. International donors and NGOs should work to develop the capacities of local state and traditional leaders to monitor security incidents and collect relevant data.

2. Local civil society and international NGOs should:
   a. Continue to state the case for improved civilian protection to the Congolese government and international bodies such as the AU and the UN Security Council.
   b. Find and collaborate with interested journalists.
   c. Develop with local communities a set of story lines that can be told by local voices.
   d. Identify advocacy targets and support advocacy strategies in selected donor countries.
   e. Develop media products for internet distribution.

Reactivate emergency relief and development

The fear generated by LRA atrocities and frequent attacks by other armed groups continues to disrupt normal life, creates acute humanitarian needs and deepens the challenge of long-term development. Overcoming these major challenges will require the following measures:

1. Donor governments should put out calls for international NGOs to reactivate emergency services in LRA affected areas.

2. Donor governments and international NGOs should continue to support religious leaders and church-based development programming.

3. Donor governments and international NGOs should make use of the pool of reasonably well-qualified citizens in Dungu to enhance development activities.
Bibliography


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Acronyms

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAR</td>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPJC</td>
<td>Community Peace and Justice Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>DDRRR</td>
<td>Disarmament Demobilisation Repatriation Resettlement and Reintegration</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
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<tr>
<td>FARDC</td>
<td>Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo <em>(Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>LRA</td>
<td>Lord’s Resistance Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLC</td>
<td>Movement for the Liberation of Congo <em>(Mouvement de libération du Congo)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>MONUC</td>
<td>United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
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<tr>
<td>MONUSCO</td>
<td>United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>POC</td>
<td>Protection of Civilians [doctrine]</td>
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<tr>
<td>R2P</td>
<td>Responsibility to Protect</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCI-LRA</td>
<td>Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord’s Resistance Army</td>
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<td>RTF</td>
<td>Regional Task Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>STAREC</td>
<td>Stabilisation and Reconstruction Plan for Eastern Congo</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>UPDF</td>
<td>Ugandan People’s Defence Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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