Wartime children's suffering and quests for therapy in northern Uganda

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Chapter One

Context and focus of the study

Introduction

This chapter's objective is to present the macro setting in which children in northern Uganda lived at the time of the study. The macro setting encompasses political and socio-economic context in which this study was conducted. The contextual issues addressed lead me to the statement of the problem, research questions, study objectives, and a problem analysis diagram. This study was conducted in the context of prolonged armed conflict, and to shed light about the war, I give a report describing its history, the events surrounding this civil war's persistence, and other unfolding issues including strategies to end the war through peace talks. While I address these issues, I also draw from empirical findings signifying the proximal realities of the war in northern Uganda. I privilege the voices of wartime people, including children, who have borne the brunt of this armed conflict. Privileging their voices means that the viewpoints of people who experienced the war in northern Uganda are given advantage over secondary data. My approach is to explore experience-near perspectives about the direct and indirect effects of the prolonged civil war through wartime people's narratives, for there is no better source of evidence about the implications of this civil war for those affected. Press reports, studies conducted in northern Uganda, and emergency aid reports function as secondary sources for this chapter's content.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section addresses the history of the civil war, how the state employed various strategies to bring it to an end without success, and existing ways to ensure the wellbeing of people in this conflict zone at the time of the study. This leads to the second section in which I present this study's problem statement, focussing on issues related to the provision of healthcare services to vulnerable children.

1.1. The war in northern Uganda

1.1.1. A brief history of the armed conflict

Armed conflict in northern Uganda began in 1986. After President Yoweri Museveni's regime ousted the then ruling military junta in the early 1980s, the defeated army retreated

to the northern Ugandan districts of Gulu[1], Kitgum, and Pader, districts occupied by the Acholi ethnic group. In an attempt to regain control of the state, the defeated state army reorganised and launched a new war under the umbrella name of the Ugandan People's Democratic Army (UPDA) in northern Uganda. The UPDA was partially crushed by military force, and some of its fighters were absorbed into the national army by then-called National Resistance Army (NRA). Remnants of the UPDA later reorganized under a young woman, Alice Auma, also called Alice Lakwena. Under her leadership, what was left of the UPDA transformed into a rebellious ideological movement that blended Christianity and Acholi traditions into what was called the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM). The HSM was, however, defeated by the NRA in Busoga sub-region, about 30km east of the capital Kampala, and Alice Lakwena fled to Kenya where she lived in the Ifo refugee camp until her death in January 2007[2]. However, her cousin[3], Joseph Kony, put in place another rebellious movement which he named the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). In its early stages, the LRA thrived on the cooperation of the Acholi ethnic group, whose members voluntarily joined the rebellion. It is also believed that most of the LRA's weapons were acquired from Sudan[4], a neighbouring state to the north that also provided training. At the time of this study, the LRA had for over two decades assumed different names and committed various atrocities with impunity in northern Uganda.

1.1.2. The Lord's Resistance Army guerrilla war tactics

Following unsuccessful military attacks in 1991 by the state against the LRA, the LRA made civilians its soft targets by abducting children, maiming and mutilating civilians, destroying properties and homesteads, and committing all sorts of horrendous war crimes, flouting national and international law. During that period, the people in the three districts of Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader were still living in their communities. In 1995 the scale of

1 In 2007, Gulu district was divided into two districts, namely Gulu district covering Gulu municipality, Achwa and Omoro counties and Amuru district covering Amuru, Nwoya and Kilak counties.

2 On 17 January 2007 Alice Lakwena died after a long illness in the Ifo refugee camp in north-eastern Kenya, after seventeen years in exile. The government minister of internal affairs, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, during a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Radio interview on 18 January 2007, for a morning broadcasting programme called Network of Africa, mentioned how the state wanted nothing to do with Lakwena. Yet two weeks later the state organised for Lakwena's burial, and on 3 February 2007 Lakwena was buried at her ancestral home at Latyen village in Bungatira sub-county, in Acwa County in Gulu district. The funeral was delayed until 17:30 that day since Mr Walter Ochora – the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) – had first to attend to President Museveni, who was on an official visit to Gulu that week. Lakwena's mother gave a speech thanking the ruling regime for caring for her family, and for forgiving and reconciling with them.

3 Conflicting reports exist concerning the filial relationship between Lakwena and Kony. Although a substantial proportion indicate that they were cousins, others assert that Kony is a nephew to Lakwena. Mourners at Lakwena's funeral interviewed about this issue only indicated distant filial relations with Kony.

4 The Ugandan government was bitter over a US$20,000 gift which the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army recently gave the LRA chief Joseph Kony as a good will gesture. Uganda fears Kony could use the money to rearm, plan, and launch more atrocities against Uganda (Matsiko 2006a).

the violence and the number of child abductions by the LRA increased. Human Rights Focus (HURIFO 2002) reported that 730 children were abducted in Pajule, over 250 in Puranga, 502 in Patongo, and over 600 from Atanga in Kitgum district.

Between 1993 and July 1996, 70 teachers were killed by the LRA in Kitgum district. In Gulu district in July 1996, 11 teachers and over 100 children were killed, 250 primary school children abducted, and 59 primary schools burnt down, leading to the closure of 136 out of 180 primary schools. On 25 July 1996, 23 girls were abducted from St Mary's College, and on 21 August 1996, 39 boys from Sir Samuel Baker School. On 10 October 1996, in an incident that has since galvanized public awareness of child abduction, 139 girls were abducted from St Mary's College Aboke, in Apac district (HURIFO 2002:16; Allen 2006: 51; De Temmerman 2001).

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has documented LRA attacks, abductions, willful killing of civilians, the burning and looting of villages and homes, and ambushes of vehicles. In 2002, the LRA was reported to have killed and injured hundreds of civilians in isolated villages, internally displaced persons' (IDP) camps, and Sudanese refugee camps. LRA attacks have also targeted humanitarian relief convoys transiting through northern Uganda to internally displaced civilians inside southern Sudan (HRW 2005:15-23). A United States State Department Report (2004:1) suggests that up to 12,000 people have been killed by rebel violence, and over 20,000 children abducted over the course of the war. These figures do not include deaths from conflict-related malnutrition and disease.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reports that children account for approximately three out of every four abductions, most of whom are between the ages of five and seventeen (UNICEF 1998: 4, 2005). They are generally abducted at night when the LRA raid villages, camps, schools, and churches. As a consequence, many children abandon their villages and families to seek refuge in neighbouring towns. Such displaced children suffer from malnutrition, death from easily preventable diseases, and have no access to basic education (Gardner 2004:24). A United Nations systems report (2004:24) also shows similar evidence when it argues that "in contravention of international conventions and national laws, primarily the Child Statute of 1996, children continue to be forced into rebel ranks with girls being used as sex slaves and 'wives'. Children commute nightly everyday from camps, a practice which has exposed them to various forms of violence".

It is important to note that the northern Ugandan insurgency intermittently spread to the north-eastern districts of Apac, Lira, Soroti, and Kumi. This phenomenon was not only viewed as an LRA expansion of its scope of attacks, but was also reinterpreted as an attack by the Acholi (read LRA) against the Lango, Iteso, and other ethnic groups occupying these districts. As a consequence, intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic tensions occurred both in the Acholi sub-region and in the neighbouring districts. For example, after an alleged massacre in Lira district by the LRA in 2005, the state owned paper, The New Vision, reported an uprising of the Lango ethnic group against the civilian Acholi people who had fled to Lira due to insurgency. Among the Acholi, ex-combatants reintegrated as innocent victims of war-crime, experienced rejection, slander, and exclusion. In an interview by De Temmerman & Ochowum (2006:50-51) with Kony's mother, she disclosed how the family was worried that people would seek revenge on them over Kony's atrocities, yet professed that they had nothing to do with it.

In sum, evidence points to the LRA committing numerous war crimes against civilian populations, not only in the Acholi sub-region, but also among neighbouring ethnic groups. The LRA's tactic of abducting children and recruiting them in guerrilla warfare made wartime children particularly vulnerable. Meanwhile, as I will show, the state failed in one of its major obligations to protect its citizens in northern Uganda, and evidence suggests that it played conflicting roles in this prolonged armed conflict.

1.1.3. Conflicting roles played by the state in its attempts to pacify northern Uganda

The state was under pressure to protect people during wartime, and bring the armed rebellion to an end by national and international civic groups. At the start of the conflict the state underestimated its adversary's capacity. This was implicit in the president's speeches, where he referred to the rebels in the north as 'groups of bandits'[5], 'thugs', and 'jiggers in the foot', among others[6]. Following the attacks in the USA on September 11 2001, the LRA was added to the USA's list of terrorist organisations (Allen 2006:51). The word 'terrorist' was adopted in President Museveni's rhetoric; for example,

[5] In 1994 the LRA intensified their onslaught against the Acholi, maiming and murdering innocent civilians. Museveni, for the first time in ten years, openly spoke about the reason why the 'bandits' had not been wiped out. He explained that Kony was still alive because the NRA had poor command. To remedy the situation, Museveni appointed his brother, then Major General Salim Saleh, to take charge of military operations against the LRA in northern Uganda. With the appointment of Saleh, Museveni bragged that he had finally found the cure for the LRA scourge and that Joseph Kony would be history. But the LRA continued to wreak havoc for several more years while President Museveni blamed Sudan and the international community (Gyezaho 2006:20).

[6] See press conferences broadcasted on Uganda Television's (UTV) series Presidential Press Unit (PPU), April 1996 – September 1998. The UTV was later renamed Uganda Broadcasting Corporation (UBC).

in presidential press conferences and articles Museveni consistently referred to the LRA as terrorists and killers, and said that their activities constituted terrorism[7].

In 1991[8], the state launched a military offensive against the LRA, but retreated shortly afterwards, citing the difficulty of fighting a less organized group. In 1994 the state, under pressure from civic and religious leaders in northern Uganda, and in an attempt to protect people in the north from wartime dangers, drafted a plan to settle people in 'protected villages' – also called internally displaced persons' (IDP) camps – to enable the NRA to pursue the LRA without hindrance. This plan was implemented officially in 1996. Available information suggests, however, that although the decision to create camps was officially announced by President Museveni on 27 September 1996 to members of parliament and Foreign Affairs, in as early as August 1994 the NRA was already attacking villages and ordering people to move to trading centres (HURIFO 2002:26). There were varied forms of resistance to this since people were not certain of the state's intentions, and subsequently the state army employed militaristic ways to 'scare' Acholi people away from their villages and livelihoods. In this process, vast numbers of properties, lives, and social networks were damaged. In interviews with one medical doctor in northern Uganda, I asked how the camps were created and he elaborated as follows:

> I have known the suffering caused to Acholi people since this war started in 1986. As early as 1994, the NRA maltreated the people to unimaginable levels. There were sporadic bombings of the villages, killings and mutilations of people who showed any signs of resistance. People were literally smoked out of their huts. Hungry people herded in camps who traced their homes to look for food found their food stores, huts and gardens destroyed. The NRA was waiting for them there to attack and send them back to the camps. People went through numerous traumatising experiences so that it will be difficult to send them back to their places of origin, that is, their own villages.

Children's narratives in two workshops I conducted in 2005 showed how in 1994, at Awach camp, the NRA burnt their huts and shot at and beat those who resisted leaving their villages to move to camps. Fifty-two children in my study illustrated diagrammatically how huts were burnt by the NRA and how people fled with hastily gathered household items while the armed state soldiers ran after them or ordered them to move. In the 1995 Constitution, the Ugandan Government's army changed its name from the National

[7] See articles to the press and press conferences by President Museveni, including one on 4 May 2006 entitled "The truth about the LRA" (The Sunday Vision, 7 May 2006: Museveni Special: 5).

[8] In a press conference on 4 May 2006, President Museveni gave conflicting information about the role of the state in the conflict, including the statement that as early as August 1986 the UPDF – then called the National Resistance Army (NRA) – had already launched its attack at Bibia on the LRA. Also compare with "The truth about LRA" (The Sunday Vision, 7 May 2006: Museveni Special: 5).

Resistance Army (NRA) to the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF). The changes in nomenclature and responsibilities of the UPDF can be found in The Constitution (1995), article 208 and clauses 1- 4. While this army was supposed to protect civilians from attacks by the LRA and promote their wellbeing, the contrary often happened. The Government of Uganda has admitted that it was recruiting former abductees and returning them to the battlefield as state combatants. Approximately 800 were recruited, hundreds of whom were believed to be below eighteen years of age (BBC News 2005), in spite of the fact that recruiting children in combat contravenes international and national laws against exposing children to the dangers of armed conflict.

More reports suggest rights violations by the Ugandan military against civilian populations, including arbitrary arrests and beatings of internally displaced persons[9] suspected of collaboration with the LRA (IGG 2005:11). In an interview with the one camp leader, he disclosed how the UPDF gave the people in one sub-county a seven day ultimatum, and in Awach village three days to move to camps or 'protected villages', threatening to treat those who resisted as rebels. Rural communities were brutally uprooted from their homes and lands by the government, in an operation marked by the systematic bombing of villages, and the burning of homes, grain stores, and crops (HRW 2005:24-36). Yet crimes committed against civilians were rarely prosecuted, and even when UPDF abuses were investigated the process was often kept internal, giving the army an appearance of impunity. The state army also consistently rejected allegations of such abuses and stated that it only shelled rural areas where it suspected the LRA to be present (HURIFO 2002; HRW 2005). However, a number of people who ventured back shortly after leaving their villages found them burnt down. In an assessment of how the twenty-four camps in Gulu were created in 2001, people in places like Pabbo, Opit, Anaka, Cwero, and Unyama narrated to me how they had their villages shelled and even bombarded by helicopters. "In a good number of cases, NRA soldiers just stormed villages – often at dawn – without any previous warning, telling people to move immediately, even beating them" (Rodriguez 2006:34). The tension which people experienced was unbearable:

> We were beaten by government troops, who accused us of being [LRA] rebel collaborators and

9 Internally displaced persons (IDPs), as opposed to refugees, are people who flee from their original homesteads due to disasters, including armed conflict. Nevertheless, they stay within the borders of their countries. For instance, Acholi people fled their villages to settle in camps or so-called protected villages within Uganda. In contrast, people who flee to neighbouring countries become refugees. For example, a substantial proportion of people from southern Sudan crossed to Uganda when this region faced insurgency, and the people of southern Sudan became refugees in Uganda.

told us to go to the trading centre. On the other hand, rebels would also come and threaten to kill us unless we moved deeper inside the bush. (Interview with a camp leader December 2005).

On one of the rare occasions when the now-retired General Salim Saleh gave an explanation of the 'protected villages', he indicated that the army had acted on its own in creating the camps because "it suspected bureaucracy and politicking over the issue" (The Monitor, 26 October 1997:9). In Pabbo camp, former Deputy 4 - Division Commander, Lieutenant Colonel, said in an address at the trading centre that "all rural areas should be left for the UPDF to finish the rebels in a matter of months" (Rodriguez 2006:34). UPDF army officers frequently told people that staying in the camps would be a temporary arrangement that would last only a few months, and was intended to protect their safety. However, in 2005 – when this study was conducted – the state's temporary solution of settling people in camps had already lasted twelve years, and had proved an indefinite strategy[10], [11], and in reality civilians were often attacked, injured, and sometimes abducted in these camps, even by the state army. Records show that in Opit camp between 1996 and 2001 there were eighteen attacks on IDPs (HURIFO 2002:16; Rodriguez 2006:34). Another problem, particularly in camps such as Pabbo, Alero, Cwero, and Awac, was that the state soldiers were based in the middle of the camps instead of at the periphery. This, in effect, exposed civilians to rebel attacks targeting the state army detaches.

Figures suggest that up to two million people in the eastern, northern, and north-eastern Ugandan districts of Kitgum, Gulu, Pader, Apac, Lira, Soroti, and Katakwi were displaced (UN 2004[12]; UN OCHA , 2001, 2004, 2005, UNICEF 1998:4).

The World Food Programme (2003) estimated that 800,000[13] persons had been

[10] The state, at the beginning of March 2006, embarked on the resettlement and decongestion of displaced persons. In Acholi sub-region, the state opted for decongestion as an appropriate activity, whereby a camp of 30,000 people was split into several camps of 10,000 people each. As to whether these places where the displaced persons were relocated were safe is a debatable issue. The general view is that war-affected people were still exposed to rebel attacks since the state had not yet dealt effectively with the LRA - the core problem.

[11] Eighteen new sites had been identified to decongest internally displaced persons' camps in Pader district, the then acting RDC Christopher Omara said. Omara cited challenges in these new camps, including lack of social amenities and insecurity due to the presence of LRA remnants. Residents of the newly created Paula internally displaced people's camp in Pajule, Pader district, appealed to donor agencies to establish social amenities in the camps. The then sub-county LC3 chairman Alphonse Omona said the camp lacked water, schools, and a health centre ("IDPs ask" in The New Vision, 17 May 2006: Northern: 9).

[12] UN systems (2004:34) report that 25,000 children were forced to enrol as soldiers, and girls as sex slaves. By observation at the World Vision Centre for Formerly Abducted Children, there were also former female ex-combatants – a phenomenon rarely discussed since girls are viewed within their feminine gender roles as wives and caregivers.

[13] Different sources give different figures for displaced persons in the three northern Ugandan districts, ranging from 800,000 to two million people. As to whether accurate figures are quoted was a problematic issue since the state 'screened' all statistics and survey results generated to show the total number of displaced persons. Since the WFP was working closely with the state, it is likely that a relatively lower figure has been given. The state used 'controlled information' to justify its non-declaration of the northern region as a disaster area. It was presumed that when figures which portrayed the reality of the war and suffering were published, this would not only lead to public outcry, but would also put the state under pressure to restore normality in Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader. Other NGOs such as the concerned parents association were known to quote a figure of up to two million displaced persons. When some institutions cited high figures, this prompted criticism, stating that they inflated figures in order to justify their enormous budgets and expenditures. My rough estimate, made through additions of the number of people in different camps, is that the total number of displaced persons in the three districts could amount to 1.6 million people in 2004.

internally displaced to camps due to armed conflict in the districts of Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader in northern Uganda, the majority women and children. In May 2001 the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) released a report suggesting that out of the 583,992 IDPs in northern Uganda, Gulu district – the location for this study – hosted the highest proportion with a total of 356,424 since 1994 (accounting for over 90% of this district's total population, estimated at 528,800 people in 2004-2005). HURIFO (2002) estimated that about forty-three protected villages or camps had been formed over the prolonged period of insurgency. Even in protected villages, as stated above, IDPs were exposed to multiple dangers of armed conflict including child abductions, infectious disease epidemics, and abject poverty, and there were high levels of malnutrition in the three districts. For example, prior to the civil war Gulu district – which lies at a distance of about 330Km from Uganda's capital city Kampala – was popularly known as the 'food basket' of Uganda, as various parts of the country, including Kampala, relied on Gulu's substantial food supply. However, through displacement and settlement in so-called protected villages, people were reduced to dependents on intermittent food rations from the World Food Programme. One child who extensively participated in this study frequently narrated the experience of his seven year-old sister Ajok in this way: "After spending many weeks without food, she became so thin, weak and the skin became folded like for a very old person". Malnutrition was a common problem, not only in displaced primary schools and resource poor person's suburbs within Gulu municipality, but also in camps where war-affected poor people resided.

Furthermore, a report by UNICEF (2005) suggested that over 50% of the women in Pabbo camp had been exposed to forms of gender-based violence, the most common form having been rape. The state army was identified as the main perpetrator. In April 2006 the state owned newspaper, The New Vision, reported the following:

> The High Court in Arua had directed the Government to pay 82 million shillings[14][35,652 Euros] to two displaced women who were raped by UPDF soldiers in Awer displaced persons camp in Gulu district in 2004. One of the victims was infected with HIV and another got pregnant. The two Acholi girls told the court that two armed soldiers deployed to guard the camp waylaid them along a bushy path and raped them. The soldiers had threatened to shoot the victims had they not succumbed to their demands. The girl who conceived was paid thirty two millions, while the one infected with HIV would get fifty millions. However, one official of Gulu based Human Rights Focus criticized the awards as paltry compared to the gravity of the case and its impact on the victims (Mafabi 2006:21).

14 At the time of this study, the exchange rate was that one euro was equivalent to 2.300 Uganda shillings.

1.1.4. Uncertainty about the end of hostilities

The Government of Uganda had to prove to guests of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), held in November 2007 in Kampala, that there is peace in the country. The change in President Museveni's stance about how to deal with the LRA, reinforced by announcing unconditional amnesty to the top LRA commanders and accepting peace talks with the LRA in early to mid 2007, should be interpreted in the light of this meeting.

The Juba peace talks commenced in May 2006, mediated by Riek Machar, the vice president of South Sudan[15]. It is estimated that more than seven billion Shillings (304,347 Euros) was spent during the first year of this mission for allowances, travel costs (such as chartering the private Russian airline Antanov for delegates from Entebbe to Juba), and transporting the relatives – including 'rescued wives' of the LRA commanders – for a visit[16],[17]. It is important to note that the initiative for peace talks and referring the LRA for prosecution by ICC were done also after a great deal of activism, from civil society groups such as Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), NGOs and concerned politicians for amnesty. The Amnesty Act was passed into Ugandan law in November 1999 and was enacted in January 2000. The Act provides for amnesty procedures for all rebels in Uganda, not only the LRA. Nonetheless, President Museveni remained unwilling to accept that the Act should apply to LRA commanders. President Museveni even indicated to the prosecutor his intention to amend the amnesty so as to exclude the leadership of the LRA, ensuring that those bearing the greatest responsibility for the crimes against humanity committed in northern Uganda are brought to justice (see Allen 2006: 82).

At the time of this study, former LRA fighters who had been granted amnesty reported to local radio stations in Gulu where they were interviewed about what had happened to them in captivity. They were frequently instructed to call on their friends still involved in active rebellion with the LRA to return home. By mid-2004, over five thousand adult former LRA fighters had surrendered and applied for amnesty (Allen 2006:75). The

15 The New Vision reported the peace talks' delegation's return from Juba to Kampala on 24 July 2006, prior to reaching any comprehensive decisions to end hostilities.

16 The weekly observer newspaper issue of 20-27 July 2006 had a major headline reading "Kony's wife was forced to go and visit him by the peace talks team". The story suggested that the now rehabilitated former child soldier did not want to re-unite with her 'former husband Joseph Kony'. Other press photos showed happy reunifications between 'former wives of LRA commanders with their husbands'.

17 Matsiko, G., & Harera, J. (2007) "Juba talks closed, says LRA". In The Sunday Monitor, 21 January 2007:1. The main reason proposed for not reporting to Juba for peace talks after six months of negotiations was that Vincent Otti – the deputy leader of the LRA/M – did not want Dr Riek Machar as mediator, and that peace talks in Sudan were closed forever. The LRA leader suggested a change of venue to Nairobi or South Africa. Kenya, in response, made it explicit that the LRA was unwelcome, and since South Africa was the main arms supplier to Uganda, it was unlikely that it would agree to host the peace talks.

LRA top commander, Joseph Kony responded to the radio announcements by prohibiting his followers from listening to any radio programmes. Against this backdrop, some legal analysts suggested that the entire Juba peace talks process was illegal, and the President of Uganda could not grant amnesty to the LRA leadership in light of the case about LRA war crimes in northern Uganda brought to the International Criminal Court[18].

In the past, the state had initiated peace talks on several occasions, including in 1993 when a government delegation headed by the then Minister of State for the pacification of the north, resident in Gulu – Mrs Betty Bigombe – met LRA leader Joseph Kony and his top commanders in Pagik, Gulu district. Some people I interviewed also cited meetings in the deserted hills of Kitgum. In February 1994, however, peace talks collapsed after General Museveni gave LRA leaders a seven day ultimatum to lay down their arms and surrender or be flushed out of the bush[19].

In 1996 the government set up a parliamentary committee to probe the northern conflict. In early 2005, with aid from the American people through the Northern Uganda Peace Initiative (NUPI), platforms for peace talks both with the LRA and the Sudanese Head of State were organised. However, concrete results in terms of the complete cessation of hostilities remained to be seen. In May 2006 the Vice President of Sudan (also the President of Southern Sudan at the time of this study)[20] contacted President Museveni on behalf of the LRA chief Joseph Kony, requesting peace talks.

The various peace talks were frequently reinforced with different military offensives, code named in early 1991 as 'cordon and search operation'; other operations included Operation North, led by the then Divisional Commander Major General David Tinyefunza in 2002, Operation Iron Fist offensive[21], and in 2006 Operation Mop-up[22], among others,

18 Lomo (2006) argued that since the people of Uganda are sovereign and have the right to decide on any matter that concerns them – including the complex conflict in the northern part of the country – if they wished for peace talks, or if they decided that those who had violated their human rights should be dealt with in accordance with their traditions, their decision should be respected. Therefore, the ICC imposition demanding that the four LRA top commanders be punished was in itself an act of impunity, an insult, and a violation of people's right to self determination.

19 See related information in HURIFO (2002) and Tamale (1995).

20 President Museveni announced on 16 May 2006 that Uganda and South Sudan had given LRA leader Joseph Kony until July 2006 to end hostilities. Mr Museveni reached this agreement with the President of South Sudan, Mr Salva Kiir, to give Kony a last chance during the 13 May 2006 meeting in Kampala. Museveni told the British Overseas Development Minister, Mr Hillary Benn, that "if Kony does not take the latest peace offer", Kiir and Museveni had agreed that the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) would jointly deal with him. Ibid

21 Unlike other offensives which were within Ugandan national borders, Operation Iron Fist had unlimited access into southern Sudan and support from the United States Government, as Sudan had been identified as a terrorist state because it was a popular military base for the LRA.

22 The 601 Brigade Commander, Major Joseph Balikudembe, one of the commanders of 'Operation Mop-up' in Pader, told journalists that thirty LRA rebels had been killed in Pader in April 2006. According to this report, three army commanders including David Lakwo, Bosco Ocaya Latela, and Jon Opio, were killed (Apunyo 2006). With sporadic fights in Pader, there was resistance for people in camps to be moved to other smaller camps in the decongestion process.

all with limited success. Thus, at the time of this study, the people in the northern Ugandan districts of Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader lived in fetid, crowded camps and relying on aid from humanitarian agencies. Some of the humanitarian agencies include World Food Programme, UNICEF, World Vision, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Médicines Sans Frontiers (MSF) also called doctors without borders, and other numerous international and local non-governmental organizations. However, the 'protection' of the Acholi people given by the state as spelt out in The Constitution 1995 article (III) and clauses (i-v) about the national unity and stability at the time of this study is a debatable issue.

1.1.5. Enormous state expenditures in defence budgets

Since 1995 the state consistently allocated over fifty percent of the annual national budget to the Ministry of Defence, generally diverting finances from other ministries and from donations for other purposes. High defence budgets and expenditures were persistently justified by the state by arguing that "it urgently needs funds to facilitate its attempts to bring the war in northern Uganda to an end"[23]. For example, 42 million dollars was spent in 1992 for defence, which grew to 200 million dollars in 2004[24]. A substantial proportion of this income was used to purchase war weapons; for example, in 1998 the state spent over 27 billion Shillings in the purchase of junk fighter planes from Russia which were in poor mechanical condition, and which they were unable to repair. Reports show that a retired army general obtained a 2.4 million US Dollar 'commission' from the helicopter traders for a 15 million Dollar deal meant for *sound* military helicopters (The Monitor, 7 May 2006:6). Yet this debacle did not deter the state from purchasing more weapons, and its continued efforts to stock ammunitions – characterised by their high complexity and enormous quantities – has been evident since 2004 in the spectacular national day celebrations graced with deathful weapons, some of which were displayed for public viewing. In connection to the foregoing about high state expenditures in defence,

[23] Mwenda (2006) "Are the NRM and LRA in an unholy alliance?" In The Sunday Monitor, 7 May 2006: Opinion: 6. The author argued that the war in northern Uganda had been used as an excuse for the ever-increasing defence budget, and the basis for acrimonious fights between Museveni's government and its international creditors.

[24] Ibid. Moreover, the real outcome of increased defence spending was the creation of many corrupt opportunities for graft, such as the purchase of junk military equipment, expired food rations, undersize uniforms, one foot/one size boots, plus filling the army with 'ghost soldiers' who by 18 October 2003 totalled more than half of the actual number of soldiers. Ghost soldiers are names in monthly payrolls but with false claimants. The March 2006 treason trial, where the government of Uganda formed an alliance with the murderous LRA former commanders, to legitimise charges against about 30 detainees on charges of failed coup against the ruling regime was the penultimate manifestation of the regime's objective to claim legitimacy from a tormented society. This could be explained by the use of 'retired LRA commanders' such as Sam Kolo and Brigadier Kenneth Banya in Museveni's campaigns in pursuit of a third term in the conflict-stricken northern Uganda.

in the budget presented to the parliament on 8 June 2005, the executive branch allocated a substantial amount of US$ 200 million to defence spending. The latter prompted donor protest against the high level of military funding (see Akwapt 2005).

President Museveni often used the national day celebration ceremonies to warn the state's enemies, including the LRA, about impending violent attack[25]. On such occasions, he would promise peace to the people in the war torn northern region, and the speeches also involved castigating and silencing opposition groups. As already mentioned, however, the state's use of arms to bring to an end the northern Uganda war had been going on intermittently for as long as the conflict itself – twenty years at the time of this study – and people lived in the camps in uncertainty and persistent fear of attack by both the state army and the LRA. Civic groups, on the contrary, including the Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative, instead constantly called for a peaceful means of conflict resolution through peace talks.

It is highly unlikely that for a problem of armed conflict, 'the merchants of weapons of death'[26] will expeditiously act to end the war. Evidence suggests that the LRA had a constant supply of arms from Sudan, who justified its actions by asserting that Uganda supported its enemies in a similar way: the Sudanese opposition group – largely activists fighting for an independent southern Sudanese state. For example, Allen (2006:49, 51) reports that "with Sudanese support, the LRA was able to launch some of its most ferocious attacks. One of the worst single incidents occurred in May 1995, when the LRA burned scores of homes and killed almost three hundred people in Atiak, a trading centre just south of a large army barracks". On this occasion, the government soldiers failed to respond until the rebels had already withdrawn. And by observation, the Sudanese fighters had, until 2005, stations and fighting bases in the north-western Ugandan districts of Arua and Yumbe.

Those who were trading weapons to Uganda, such as South Africa, Russia, and the United States of America, were largely silent concerning efforts to end the northern

[25] On 26 January 2007, at a national day celebration, the President broadened his scope to also warn the press about misinforming the public with sensational political stories.

[26] There is a vast arsenal of Abdomat Kalashnikovs model 1947 (AK-47) from the Soviet Union, which is the most popular among African warriors; indeed it is the world's most popular rifle. It is a weapon all fighters love: a simple nine-pound amalgamation of forged steel and plywood, it does not break, jam, or overheat. It will shoot whether it is covered in mud or filled with sand. It is so easy, even a child can use it; and children – not only in northern Uganda – do. The AK-47 is Russia's biggest export. [See Tendo (2006) "Lord of war: Painful truths brought closer to home". In The Daily Monitor, 1 March 2006:31].

Uganda war. When the by then President Thambo Mbeki[27] of South Africa visited Uganda in January 2006, he did not criticise or condemn the killing and maiming of civilians in the north of the country, whether by the state army or by the LRA. He instead praised the Head of State and all the institutions in place for their good governance and rule of law. A few months after President Mbeki's visit, it was reported in The Daily Monitor that:

> …the UPDF procured 30 combat vehicles to end the lingering insurgency in northern and north-eastern Uganda. Part of the consignment from South Africa began arriving at a depot belonging to Maersk shipping firm in an industrial area in Kampala on 2 May 2006. The acting military and defence spokesman, Major Felix Kulayigye, declined to give details on the military vehicles. The 10-tyre trucks painted with Ugandan military colours excited workers and by passers in Kampala's busy 5th Street industrial area as they were hauled into Maersk depot. Military cooperation between South Africa and Uganda had been growing in the past few years. A military source said apart from the military transport vehicles, South Africa had been Uganda's key arms supplier. Private South African companies further supplied UPDF with non-lethal items like dry rations and clothing[28](Matsiko 2006b).

Whereas there was a high representation of humanitarian aid agencies whose main objective is to ensure the wellbeing of people in conflict zones, there had been a limited focus addressing the core issue – namely a deliberate effort to end the armed conflict. In extensive interaction with various aid workers, both local and international, a clear message was communicated to me: that NGOs were non-political, non-partisan, and not directly mandated to address the core problem. *"*The war itself should be addressed by Ugandans themselves", argued one international aid worker who had lived and worked in Gulu for about fifteen years during the time of interview. This assertion was contrary to the perspectives of locals, including children, who had lost trust in state intervention and were looking to the West or the international community to expeditiously act to end the northern Uganda conflict.

1.1.6. State invitation of the International Criminal Court

In July 2005, President Museveni invited the International Criminal Court (ICC)[29] to prosecute five senior LRA commanders: Commander-in-Chief Joseph Kony, his deputy

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[27] In a subtle bid to show more than just diplomatic relations, President Thambo Mbeki was among the first persons to confirm his attendance of the swearing in of President Yoweri Museveni. He was among only six African heads of state to attend this ceremony, scheduled for 12 May 2006. Barely a week preceding this ceremony press reports indicated the 'arrival of 10-tire vehicles from South Africa – to facilitate the UPDF's role in fighting the LRA in northern Uganda' (The Daily Monitor, 8 May 2006).

[28] [See Matsiko (2006b). "UPDF acquires combat vehicles". In The Daily Monitor, 4 May 2006:5].

[29] The visit to the war-torn north by Jan Egeland in January 2006 also served to reiterate the UN and international community's position that Joseph Kony and the LRA army were criminals who have caused untold suffering to the people of northern Uganda, and that he and his LRA top commanders, including Vincent Otti, should be arrested and prosecuted.

Vincent Otti, LRA army commanders Dominic Ongwen and Okot Odhiambo, and a junior commander Raska Lukwiya (though at the time of writing this thesis, Lukwiya had been murdered by the UPDF and Vincent Otti was murdered by Joseph Kony in December 2007). In February 2006, the ICC announced that the prison for the LRA commanders in The Hague had been prepared.

> The ICC on 13 October 2005 unsealed the warrants of arrest for five senior leaders of the LRA saying there were reasonable grounds to believe that they committed crimes against humanity and war crimes in Uganda since July 2002[30]. Kony was indicted on 33 counts of murder, rape, enslavement, inhumane acts of inflicting serious bodily injury and suffering. He was also wanted to answer for the cruel treatment of civilians intentionally directing an attack against a civilian population, pillaging, inducing rape and forced enlistment of children. Otti has 32 counts to answer, while Okot Odhiambo has 10, Ongwen seven and Lukwiya four[31](Muyita & Bogere 2006).

In sum, multiple reasons could be proposed to explain why the civil war in northern Uganda had lasted twenty years at the time of this study. Multiple reasons include – but are not limited to – the state's reluctance to address the armed conflict while it was in its early stage; the state's preference for gunfire exchange at the warfront, which it attempted on numerous occasions with limited success; and the influence of traders of ammunitions to Uganda. Consequently, the prolonged civil war exposed the Acholi people to extreme events, vulnerabilities, and suffering. In this context of armed conflict, the state implemented many development programmes to which I now turn.

1.1.7. Development programmes implemented during civil war

There were various initiatives by the government of Uganda in collaboration with donor agencies like the World Bank and the European Union to promote development in northern Uganda at the time of this study. The initiatives included the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF hereon), the Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Programme (NURP hereafter) and the Joint Country Coordination and Monitoring Committee on northern Uganda (JCCMC for short). The JCCMC was a culmination of an inter-ministerial meeting that was held in Geneva on March 20 to discuss proposals by the government for a joint mechanism to coordinate the emergency humanitarian intervention in northern Uganda.

[30] Even as early as 1986, fighters with the LRA were committing crimes. Noticeably, the ICC could only use evidence of crimes committed by LRA top commanders in July 2002, since ICC jurisdiction only came into effect on 1 July 2002.

[31] Muyita & Bogere (2006) "Besigye team reject Kony state witness", in The Daily Monitor, 5 May 2006:1-2.

NUSAF was a World Bank and government of Uganda funded project intended for the communities in the northern Uganda sub-region to catch-up with the rest of the country in development terms. It aimed at assisting Local Governments tackle poverty and foster development through participatory community efforts under decentralisation framework. The overall objective of the project was to empower communities by enhancing their capacities to systematically identify, prioritise and plan their needs; and implement sustainable development initiatives that improve socio-economic services and opportunities. Through direct financing mechanisms, NUSAF made funds available to communities for sub-project activities, and helped in improving livelihoods. NUSAF had beneficiaries in 18 northern Uganda districts including Gulu, Kitgum and Pader. In Gulu district, an amount worth 216,528,824 shillings (94,143 euros) were released on 17th May 2006 by NUSAF for 39 projects. The projects were for ox-plough cultivation, bee keeping, piggery, displaced community poultry, restocking, orphans and widows and fish farming. The most expensive project was worth eight million shillings (3,478 euros) and the lowest cost 2 million shillings (870 Euros). Evidence suggests that while displaced persons positively responded to NUSAF's invitation for applications for projects to be funded, only a few people managed to access funding due to World Bank requirements that revolved around the themes of peace building, traditional ways of conflict resolution and bee keeping. For example, in Kitgum, there were over 2,000 applications while only 900 were approved. Still, out of the 900, only 407 had received funding from NUSAF in 2007. It was not possible to establish the ultimate criteria NUSAF based upon to avail funds to its clients. This is because some of the beneficiaries were the elite who lived in Kampala and had no intentions of making investments in northern Uganda following the guidelines set by the World Bank.

One of the donors to NURP was the European Union who allocated 20 million Euros to improve the living conditions of people in conflict affected areas in the north, in addition to rehabilitating social infrastructure, economic recovery, strengthening local governance, law and order (The New Vision April 14, 2006: 7 & The Daily Monitor April 13, 2006: 5). Mostly, people interviewed cited how tedious it was to keep travelling to district offices for the funds until they gave up trying. One spokeswoman for Kitgum cultural leaders I interviewed, complained about funds which were difficult to access thus: "People [affected by war] do not touch that money; it doesn't change the income of

the people." Although members in district committees for implementation of NUSAF and NURP I interviewed often argued that people were already moving to their villages – as a prerequisite to access the development funds, by observation in places like Unyama, Pabbo, Pagak the people still lived in displaced persons camps. The then, LC 5 chairmen of Pader, Kitgum and Lira said they had only read about NUSAF and NURP exercise and funds in newspapers. In addition press reports indicated a lack of enough iron sheets to hand out to returning IDPs. In Pader alone for an estimated 77,000 households, the district received only 10,000 iron sheets (Muhumuza 2006:13). Various interviews with district officials in Gulu district who preferred anonymity revealed how 'the war in the north has kept the Ugandan soldiers in the UPDF busy and they had benefited economically'. And indeed it was possible to observe that certain senior officers in the army became relatively wealthy from the situation of the armed conflict - also during administration of funds availed by donors who attempted to rehabilitate the social and economic condition of northern Uganda.

One of the expected outputs of the JCCMC on northern Uganda was the implementation of decongestion programme for IDPs from the camp populations of 10,000-60,000 to camps of 1,000 – 3,000 people to make them more manageable and improve service delivery. The JCCMC's objective was also to facilitate humanitarian services, reconcile people and help them return and integrate into society. In one of the follow up visits to Gulu district in December 2006, I observed that camps like Pabbo, Pagak, Alero had been split into smaller camps. The newly created camps were spacious and supplied with many ecotoilets. The new camps however lacked healthcare facilities, schools and bore holes for clean water. A few people I talked to appreciated the innovation, but there were complaints about the lack of the amenities and waste of land. Some respondents who preferred to live in 'old Pabbo' camp despite its poor sanitation cited the presence of the health centre and a school - and narrated how people who moved to new camps had to deal with the challenge of travelling long distances to access the services at the health centre located at the old Pabbo camp. One land owner in Pagak I interviewed was not happy with the government's initiative to settle people in his property despite his resistance. Whereas one of the strategies for developing northern Uganda was decongestion, one of the top officials at the Gulu district NGO forum argued that people instead wanted to be resettled and not to be decongested. "Creating smaller camps would

only perpetuate their encampment", he argued during interviews. Moreover, there was a general distrust of the decongestion exercise since as already mentioned in this chapter, whereas the original plan was to settle people in camps for 2-3 months, at the time of this study, the temporary solution was over 10 years old. The latter phenomenon generally instilled in people to be decongested a belief that the process might be a permanent one. In the next section, I will highlight a few of the dangers of living in a context of armed conflict, focussing in particular on the domain of health.

1.1.8. Wartime people's vulnerability and exposure to health dangers

A survey by MSF-Holland (2004a) found that the main causes of reported morbidity were malaria/fever (47 per cent), respiratory diseases (21 per cent), and diarrhoeal diseases (21 per cent) - all closely associated with the living environment. Malaria was the main reported cause of death followed by diarrhoea. Further, a MSF-Holland survey on mental health in Pader town found that 79 per cent of people had witnessed killing and 5 per cent had been forced to physically harm someone; 62 per cent of the women interviewed thought about committing suicide (MSF-Holland 2004b).

Findings in a July 2005 study by the World Health Organisation in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts demonstrated a Crude Mortality Rate (CMR) for all IDPs to be 1.54, and the under-five CMR was 3.18. Figures were worst in Pader district, which had a CMR of 1.86 and an under-five CMR of 4.24. In a Sydney Peace Prize lecture, *Saving our Children from the Scourge of War*, in November 2005, Olara-Otunnu, the former UN Under Secretary General and special representative for children in armed conflict (Olara-Otunnu 2006:15), disclosed how in Uganda for over ten years a population of almost two million people had been herded like animals into 200 concentration camps. He commented upon the abominable living conditions, defined by staggering levels of squalor, disease, death, humiliation and despair, appalling sanitation and hygiene, and massive overcrowding and malnutrition.

Since the process of settling people in camps was haphazardly done, no advance plans were made for the tens of thousands of displaced persons in terms of putting in place healthcare facilities, sanitation, food, or proper shelter. The appalling living conditions in the camps and villages provide opportunistic factors for epidemics of infectious diseases, including sexually transmitted diseases, as well as a high prevalence of mental

health problems (Olara-Otunnu 2006; HRW 2005:63). Epidemics of infectious diseases affecting the population of northern Uganda in 2000-2005[32] included ebola, scabies, and cholera (District Directorate of Health Services-Gulu 2005, 2006). From August to December 2005 alone over one thousand cases of cholera were recorded by the district emergency health team (DDHS-Gulu Report 2006:4). Although epidemiological data on age-related morbidity and mortality are lacking, wartime children were especially vulnerable to these epidemics and other major killer diseases such as malaria, diarrhoea, acute respiratory illnesses, and anaemia (UNICEF 1998:11, 2003; MSF-Holland 2004a).

1.1.9. Collapse of the healthcare system as a result of war

The asymmetrical allocation of funds to the Ministry of Defence contributed to the poor facilitation in the healthcare sector, especially neglect in the maintenance and equipping of hospitals and healthcare centres. For instance, the dilapidated Gulu Regional Referral Hospital (GRRH hereon) was last renovated in 1946 and therefore its structures were in appalling condition at the time of this study.

Further, there was poor remuneration of healthcare professionals; and the very ammunitions purchased by the government were used to destroy the few existing healthcare structures and systems in northern Uganda. The situation of insecurity caused an exodus of professional healthcare givers to safer regions of the world; the few who remained frequently resorted to private practice and thereby reinforced a market-oriented focus in the healthcare system. With the phenomena of poorly maintained formal healthcare systems, few professional health workers, non-existent health services in some areas, and a market-oriented healthcare system, a substantial proportion of persons including wartime children subsequently managed common illnesses themselves, which is the focus of investigation for this study.

As I will show in the problem analysis diagram below, the meso level layer describes what armed conflict and commoditisation of healthcare means to wartime persons in northern Uganda. For example, people were displaced from their homes and livelihoods and settled in protected villages or camps, and there were hardly any formal healthcare structures in a substantial proportion of IDP camps. In the context of medical pluralism, wartime persons managed common illnesses themselves, whether through the use of

[32] See The New Vision April 26, 2006 report about the cholera epidemic in Agoro camp in Kitgum district. Health officials attributed the epidemic to the poor sanitary conditions in the camp.

pharmaceuticals or herbal remedies. In addition, wartime people employed various coping strategies to alleviate their suffering. The management of illnesses by sufferers themselves is also directly linked to Uganda's adoption of Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) since the mid 1980s. One major effect of SAPs was the liberalisation of trade; in the domain of health, SAPs facilitated multinational pharmaceutical companies' supply of pharmaceuticals as commodities. In Uganda all types of pharmaceuticals could be purchased without prior consultation with professional healthcare givers at the time of this study. And with the limited abilities and ineffectiveness of state structures like the National Drug Authority and the Uganda Revenue Authority, many pharmaceuticals of varied qualities could be found in Ugandan markets. The amount of money which an individual had determined the quality and quantity of pharmaceuticals accessed (see Adome et al. 1996; Adome et al. 2000; Whyte & Birungi 2000).

Meanwhile, as I will discuss in subsequent chapters, as a result of war and the collapse of healthcare systems, the humanitarian crisis in the north of the country attracted numerous Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Records of registered NGOs and community based organisations (CBOs) in Gulu district in 2006 show a total of 263 local, national, and international institutions in place, with the primary mandates of alleviating suffering in conflict zones (Gulu district NGO Forum 2006). NGO interventions by institutions including World Vision, UNICEF, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Africa Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF), Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO), World Food Programme (WFP), Medicines sans Frontiers (MSF), Save the Children in Uganda (SCiU), Noah's Ark, and Caritas – to mention but a few examples – had major project elements focusing on providing psychosocial support to people in conflict zones, which included sensitization seminars, counselling, and institutions were created to provide accommodation and rehabilitation services for people suffering from war trauma.

1.2. Focus of the study

1.2.1. Statement of the problem

The World Health Organisation (1997:1-93) stipulates that school health programmes should include the topics of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, violence

and injury, unintended pregnancy and poor reproductive health, helminth infection, poor nutrition and food safety, poor sanitation and water control, lack of immunisation, poor oral health, malaria, respiratory infections, psychological problems, alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug abuse. According to the World Bank and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF 1995; WB 1993:33-35), an essential public health package for school health programmes should treat worm infection and micro nutrient deficiency, and provide health education. Underlying this focus is the general idea that children above five years will have developed significant immunity for communicable diseases (Jamison 1999:13; MOH 1999a, 2000; WHO 2000a:27).

In Uganda, school health programmes target children above five mainly for de-worming and oral hygiene, and girls of child-bearing age for vaccination against tetanus (MOH 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001a). In wartime northern Uganda, health services were mainly provided through the national health policy drafted by the Ministry of Health (MOH), and there was a huge gap between these services and the health needs of wartime children, especially those living in child-headed households. Firstly, the MOH's main policy focus concerning children was on the healthcare needs of children below five years of age. Although malaria is acknowledged as an area of concern for older children, in implemented programmes the focus on children above five years is limited to the areas mentioned above. Whereas article 34(5) of the Ugandan Constitution (1995) defines children as individuals below sixteen years, children above five may, only under special circumstances, be allowed consultation in paediatric units, which largely have programmes for under-fives. Therefore, children above five years have to access adult healthcare provisions, where their vulnerability for infectious diseases and other forms of suffering is not recognised, let alone specifically addressed. Secondly, the general trend in MOH policy is to target adults, especially mothers, in their traditional gender role of healthcare providers.

This conventional view of adults as caretakers tends to obscure children's own roles and contributions regarding their healthcare. The paradigm not only dominates popular perceptions in the case of childhood illness, but has also influenced most research about children (Christensen 1990). This dominant discourse about illness management – situating children in a marginal position and defining them as incompetent and passive, while adults are seen as competent, active, and in charge of healthcare (MOH 1999a,

2000, 2001a; UNICEF 1998, 2003; WHO 2000a, 2000b) – contributes to an adult-centred approach in healthcare. However, the researcher's fieldwork among children in a primary boarding school in Uganda (Akello 2003) confirmed that children of primary school age were involved in self-diagnosis, self-medication, therapy choice, and illness management, and may act as care-givers themselves. Similar findings were reported in Kenya (Maende & Prince 2000:162; see also Geissler et al. 2000:17-34). These findings show that for assessing children's needs, the perspectives of children themselves are necessary, for the worlds of children and adults do not fully overlap and children's voices are needed for a comprehensive account of their experiences and strategies. However, official healthcare policies and providers do not recognise children's agency in needs assessment or as healthcare seekers. Consequently, the MOH does not meet the health needs of the most vulnerable groups among its target population: children above five years old who are not under adult care, such as children in child-headed households in IDP camps and villages. Humanitarian agencies do not meet these needs either. I will address this issue in subsequent chapters.

This study sought to investigate how wartime children confront their suffering. While addressing this, I took into account that children are not a homogeneous group, but differ in their perspectives, experiences, needs, and strategies according to age and gender (Akello et al. 2006: 229; MOH 2005; Richters 1994; Scheper-Hughes 1994). One also has to take into account that, like in the rest of Uganda, the healthcare system in IDP camps and villages is pluralistic, consisting of a biomedical, folk, and lay sector (Kleinman 1980:53-60). Furthermore, the medical domain is characterized by commoditization through the activities of profit-oriented healthcare providers and pharmaceutical companies (UDHS 2000; Whyte 1998; Whyte & Birungi 2000), where therapies, both biomedical and indigenous, are readily accessible in the market without prior consultation with health professionals (Adome et al. 1996; Akello et al. 2007:74; Whyte & Birungi 2000). It is within this system that children's search for therapy takes place.

1.2.2. Main question and research goal

Given the situation described above, this study's main question was: how do children of primary school age confront the common illnesses they identify in the contexts of war, the limited focus in healthcare planning, lack of state services, and various intervention agencies' approaches in ensuring well-being of people in conflict zones? In short, given wartime children's suffering, what are their healthcare needs, strategies, and coping mechanisms?

It was this study's goal that empirical findings provide a premise to guide the improvement of healthcare service provision, not only to wartime children but also to children above five years in general, in a way that meets their 'right to health'[33], thereby taking children's own agency as well as their specific needs into account. In particular, the study focussed on the health and healthcare needs as seen from the perspective of the children themselves. Based on primary school age wartime children's own perspectives on health and healthcare, this study has urged for the adjustment of existing school health programmes and emergency interventions in conflict zones. The focus on children of ages 8-16 years is guided by the assertion that from age eight onwards, children's thinking becomes logical and children can interpret changes in their bodily experiences and act upon them (Hartzema 1996:353-375).

1.2.3. Research questions

- What are the common illnesses that wartime children between eight and sixteen[34] years old experience?
- How do these children know that they are ill and how do they determine the severity of their illness experiences?
- How do children situate themselves in the adult-centred healthcare system?
- Where do the children get medicines?
- What factors influence wartime children's access to, and use of, medicines?
- What other strategies do children employ to deal with the different illness experiences?

[33] Article 24 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child explicates the child's right to access health services of the highest possible quality.

[34] The Ugandan Constitution of 1995 was revised in 2005 to give 'children' an age limit of 16 years from the previoulsy 18 years, [see article 34(5)] which states that children shall be persons under sixteen years. The age of sixteen is consistent with international legal documents such as the UN Convention and International Criminal Court legal documents in defining children. Therefore, to ensure relative international uniformity in reference to children, this study focussed on individuals aged 8-16 years. One has to realise however, that the notion of childhood is context specific and shifts according to whether an individual has gone through some 'rites de passage' or become parents themselves.

- Do boys and girls experience and treat illness differently? If so, why?
- How does the market-orientedness of the healthcare system influence children's illness experiences and quests for therapy?
- What are the structural arrangements and policy issues influencing children's access to therapies within a pluralistic healthcare context?
- What are wartime children's perspectives concerning appropriate healthcare?
- What are wartime children's priorities and needs in healthcare?

Figure 1

1.2.4. Problem analysis diagram: A multilevel perspective for wartime children's suffering and quests for therapy

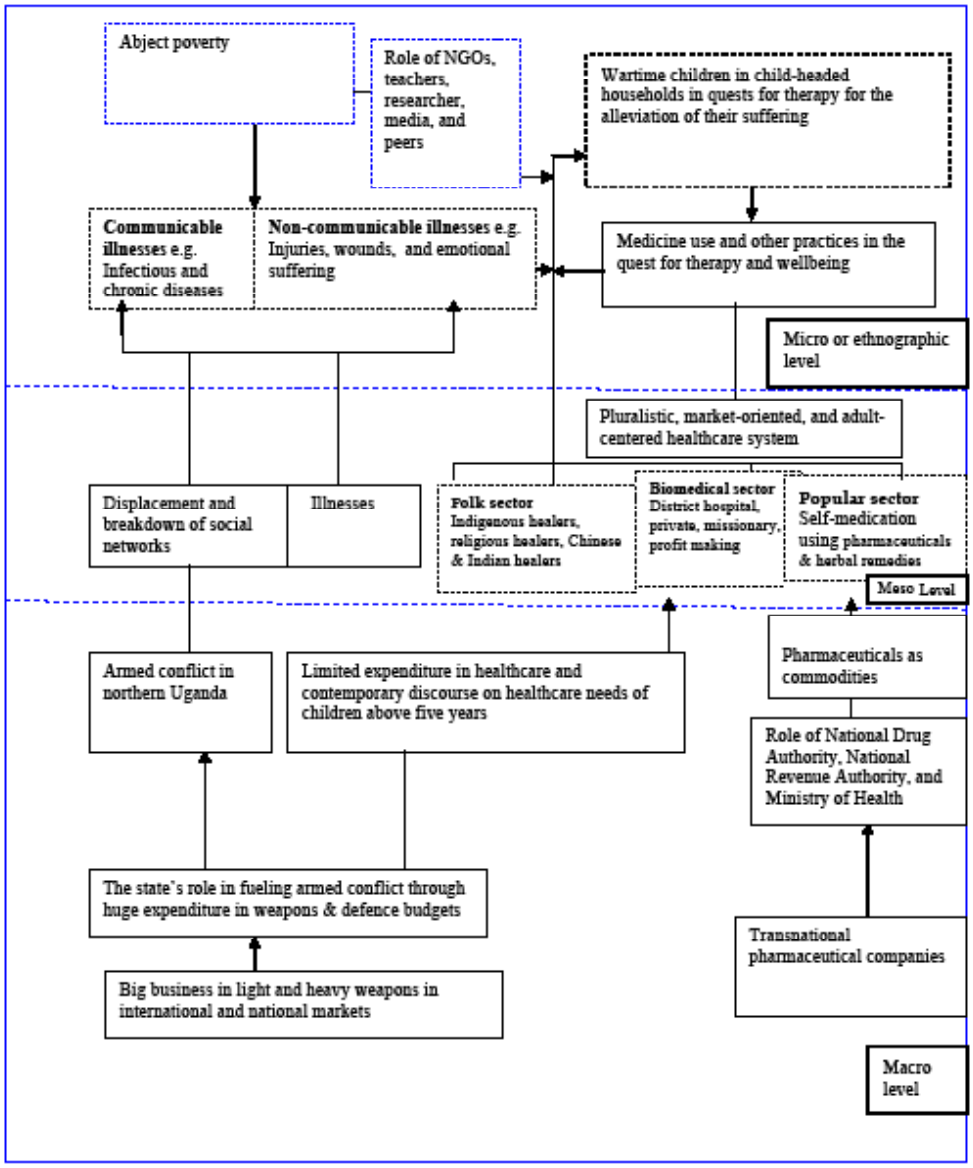

Figure 1 is a diagrammatic representation of the central logics in this study. The multi-levelled nature of this study is represented as three layers: micro, meso, and macro. It is important to note that, as shown in the illustration, the layers have only semi-permeable boundaries, which illustrates the direct links and influences each factor has on others, how one factor may present itself in more than one layer, and also that these factors are shaped by local context.

The basic ethnographic level is at the micro layer, where investigation into children's illness experiences, needs, priorities, and quests for therapy was done. At this level are direct influencing factors linked to children's illness and wellbeing, including living in abject poverty and misery, living in child-headed households, the roles of humanitarian agencies, the researcher, factors influencing access to therapies, and other coping mechanisms.

The factors included at the meso layer include the displacement of people in northern Uganda from their livelihoods, a market-oriented, adult centred and pluralistic healthcare system, and the breakdown of social networks due to the prolonged civil war.

At the macro layer are the direct impacts of armed conflict and subsequent displacement, asymmetrical expenditure in arms, and limited allocation of funds to healthcare and other sectors from which social benefits might accrue. In this layer is also the contemporary discourse about healthcare needs of children above five years, ineffectiveness of state structures, including the National Drug Authority (NDA) and the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA), which aim to regulate incoming commodities into Uganda.