

Decentralized Local Governments as a Modality for Post-Conflict Recovery and Development: An Emerging Natural Experiment in Northern Uganda

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Abstract

This short note compares the main features and potential impact of five post-conflict interventions in Northern Uganda, including the Government of Uganda's own Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP), as well as donor projects funded by the World Bank, USAID and DfID. Each of these programs aims to promote peace and recovery in Northern Uganda through improved public services and infrastructure, economic development and livelihood opportunities, but each program relies on local governments in somewhat different ways and to different extents. This natural experiment allows us to assess the degree to which each program engages local governments in an effective manner and to what degree local governments serve as an effective public service delivery modality in a post-conflict situation.

Since the modalities under consideration are currently only at the beginning of their implementation phase, the requisite data for a comprehensive comparison of the different programs is not yet available. As such, the current note provides an initial situation analysis which, first, takes stock of the current development interventions in Northern Uganda, and second, lays the groundwork for a future comparative analysis of these post-conflict recovery and development interventions. The note also identifies that—despite attempts to harmonize the development programs—a number of gaps exist with respect to the policy analysis of the situation in North Uganda that none of the programs properly address.



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1. Introduction

One of the most difficult development challenges that has manifested itself during the first decade of the 21st century has been how to build an effective public sector in a failed state or a (post-)conflict environment. An increasing number of studies argue that—in the absence of an effective central government—decentralized local governments can play an important role in improving governance, ensuring public service delivery, and in enhancing the credibility of the nascent state.²

However, there is no one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to the role of local governments in failed states and (post-)conflict environments. A review of international experiences shows that the extent—and the manner—in which decentralization and local governments have contributed to post-conflict recovery varies greatly from country to country. In some post-conflict countries, a more decentralized structure forms a critical component of the political resolution of the conflict itself (e.g., Macedonia), whereas in other countries, decentralization is used as a tactical modality to deliver infrastructure or public services during the initial post-conflict period (e.g., the Local Development Fund in Cambodia). In contrast, in a third group of countries, the (post-)conflict period is dominated by a tendency toward increased centralization rather than decentralization (e.g., Afghanistan, Iraq).

This diversity of international experiences makes it difficult to arrive at consistent and empirically verifiable assertions about the role of local government in post-conflict recovery and development. A particularly important question for the international development community to answer, however, is whether—and possibly under what conditions—local governments have a comparative advantage as a modality for public service delivery, reconstruction, and recovery in a post-conflict situation, or whether

¹ Urban Institute Center on Development and Governance, 2100 M Street NW, Washington, DC 20037. The authors are grateful for comments provided by Chas Cadwell and Katie Mark on an earlier draft. The opinions expressed by the authors are solely their own, and do not reflect the opinions of the Urban Institute, or any other agency or organization.

² For instance, see Fox (2007) and Siegle and O'Mahony (2008).



alternative modalities—such as centralized delivery or the implementation of such activities through NGOs—form more effective mechanisms for rebuilding the public sector and achieving post-conflict recovery.

In this light, a natural experiment of sorts is emerging in the post-conflict environment of Northern Uganda. In the aftermath of the conflict in Northern Uganda, the Government of Uganda along with several of its donor partners are shifting from post-conflict humanitarian support to post-conflict recovery and development. Differences in the design of the various programs and interventions in support of post-conflict recovery in Northern Uganda allow for a structured comparison of the effectiveness, efficiency (cost effectiveness) and sustainability of decentralized interventions in support of Northern Uganda.

Specifically, this short note aims to compare the features and potential impact of five post-conflict interventions in Northern Uganda: the Government of Uganda's own Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP); the World Bank-supported Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) I and II; USAID'S Northern Uganda Development of Enhanced Local Government Infrastructure and Livelihoods (NUDEIL) Project; DfID's Northern Uganda Post-Conflict Recovery Programme (NUPCRP); and USAID's Strengthening Decentralization for Sustainability (SDS) Project.³

Each of these programs seeks to promote peace and recovery in Northern Uganda through improved public services and infrastructure, economic development and livelihood opportunities. However, these programs engage local governments in Northern Uganda in different ways and to different extents, and thereby allow us to assess the degree to which each program engages local governments as an effective public service delivery modality in a post-conflict situation. Two of the programs in particular (NUDEIL and SDS) reflect a significant departure from traditional USAID project design as they incorporate innovative elements that align these programs much more with the philosophy of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the subsequent Accra Agenda.⁴

³ It should be noted that USAID's Strengthening Decentralization for Sustainability (SDS) Project is envisioned to be a country-wide project and technically not a post-conflict program. However, project documents indicate that nine of the project districts are specifically supposed to be in the Northern Region. In Northern Uganda, SDS will be taking over from the ongoing USAID Northern Uganda Malaria, AIDS and TB project (NUMAT). Other nationwide decentralized infrastructure and service delivery modalities, such as the World Bank-supported Local Government Management and Service Delivery Project (LGMSGP) are left beyond the consideration of the current study.

⁴ The Paris Declaration (2005) commits donor and developing countries and institutions to continue and increase efforts in harmonization, alignment, and managing aid for results. The Accra Agenda for Action was drawn up in 2008 and builds on the commitments agreed in the Paris Declaration. The Accra Agenda seeks to strengthen the predictability of donor aid; promotes the use of country systems; advocates for the reduction in conditional aid; and seeks the untying of aid from country-specific procurement requirements.

Given that these five programs all have very similar stated objectives, a future comparative analysis of the programs would seek answers to obvious questions: Has each of the programs delivered what they set out to deliver? Have these different programmatic interventions improved public services and contributed to stabilizing Northern Uganda? Have there been variations in the relative effectiveness (impact) of the programs? Similarly, were there differences in the relative cost effectiveness of the programs, the risks associated with each approach, their sustainability, and the political economy of the different modalities?

We hold no *a priori* convictions about what type of programmatic interventions might be more effective than others in the post-conflict environment of Northern Uganda, and thus this natural experiment allows us to test several hypotheses surrounding what types of interventions will work better than others. For instance, do programs that are more analogous to budget support fare better than more projectized interventions, or worse? Do programs that rely more heavily on districts' own processes achieve better outcomes? Do the preexisting characteristics of the different local governments (including demographic conditions, the quality of local administration, governance characteristics, and so on) have a systematic impact on outcomes across all donor modalities?

However, the modalities under consideration are currently only at the beginning of their implementation phase or even only at the end of the design phase, so the requisite data for a comprehensive comparison is not yet available. As such, the current note could be considered an initial or preliminary situation analysis which, first, provides an opportunity to take stock of the current development interventions in Northern Uganda, and second, lays the groundwork (and contributes to establishing a baseline) for a future comparative analysis of these post-conflict recovery and development interventions.

As these different post-conflict programs are implemented over the next few years, the emergence of this natural experiment provides us with an opportunity to learn about the effectiveness of local governments in a post-conflict situation, as well as an opportunity to learn about the effectiveness of donor-interventions in a post-conflict situation. Beyond the immediate conclusions that are drawn in the current paper, it is hoped that this natural experiment is revisited and re-analyzed in a few years' time as the requisite data become available to conduct a more complete impact analysis.

2. The Context: Decentralization in Uganda and Post-Conflict Recovery in Northern Uganda

In many ways, Uganda is a good case to study the role of decentralized local governments in public service delivery and recovery in a post-conflict environment. The country has a well-defined intergovernmental structure and its decentralization reforms have been well-studied and documented. At the same time, the advanced degree of decentralization outside Uganda's conflict-impacted areas may limit the direct

transferability of any lessons from the Uganda case to other post-conflict situations or failed-state scenarios.

2.1. An Overview of Decentralization in Uganda

The current decentralized governance structure in Uganda originated in the late 1980s as part of a broader effort to restore state credibility and deepen democracy following several years of political and economic turmoil (Okidi and Guloba 2006).⁵ As a result, local governments play an important role in governance and service delivery in Uganda today. Uganda's system of subnational governance is based on a district as the highest local government unit. There are currently 80 districts in Uganda.⁶ Below the district level are several additional levels of local governments and administrative units, with different local administrative and governance structures in rural areas versus urban areas.

Uganda's Local Government Act stipulates the functions and services for which district councils are responsible. These functions include, among others, primary and secondary education services, medical and health services, water supply, as well as local roads and infrastructure. Local governments are widely recognized as the primary providers of such basic public services. During the late 1990s, the provision of intergovernmental fiscal transfers to the local level for public service delivery and infrastructure increased considerably, especially with the introduction of the Poverty Action Fund (PAF).

While local governments in Uganda are widely recognized to play a key role in public service delivery, the local level has—up to now—not taken on an active role in promoting local economic growth and social protection despite these functions falling within the formal mandate of the local government level. The limited local role in these functional areas has largely been caused by the absence of fiscal space for local governments to pursue these functions. In response, donor-funded development programs have largely filled the void in these areas, albeit often working around—rather than through—local governments.

In recent years, however, policy support for decentralization from the national leadership and key donor partners has been somewhat weaker. For instance, the relative amount of government resources being directed to the local government level—particularly for operation and maintenance expenditures—has been declining. Likewise, a recent policy change that returns the authority to appoint local Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) to the central government level is also indicative of weakening support for decentralized local governments in Uganda.

2.2. Conflict and Post-Conflict Recovery in Northern Uganda

⁵ The emergence of Uganda's decentralized system of governance could itself be studied as a case of the emergence of a decentralized structure in a post-conflict environment. However, this is not the aim of the current paper.

⁶ The number of districts in Uganda has been increasing steadily in recent years (Green 2008).



For the past two decades, an insurgency by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has produced great suffering in Northern Uganda. The conflict has been characterized by systematic attacks against the civilian population and the abduction of children, resulting in the displacement of more than 1.8 million people (over 90 percent of the population of the conflict-affected areas in Northern Uganda) into refugee camps (USVPP 2009).

The conflict in Northern Uganda has several characteristics (International Crisis Group 2004). First, at its core, it is a power struggle between the Government of Uganda and the LRA. At the same time, the conflict reflects a fight between the predominantly Acholi LRA and the wider Acholi population, who bear the brunt of violence. Third, the conflict is fuelled by animosity between Uganda and Sudan, who support rebellions on each other's territory. Finally, the conflict in Northern Uganda is part of the wider North-South conflict that has marked Ugandan politics and society since independence. The conflict in Northern Uganda was seen as a serious blemish on the record of President Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM), which had otherwise brought relative stability to the country.

Although the peace process in Northern Uganda is incomplete, the violence and hostilities associated with the conflict have been sharply reduced in recent years. There have been no LRA attacks in Northern Uganda over the past two years, which has been the result of a combination of military successes by the Ugandan Peoples' Defense Forces (UPDF) as well as by political and diplomatic efforts to pursue a negotiated peace agreement. The Juba process—which was initiated in June 2006—produced five signed protocols in 21 months, designed to conclude the conflict and guarantee the disarmament and reintegration of the insurgents. Furthermore, newly elected representation at the local government level has enabled northern Ugandans to voice their needs and grievances, exercise governance and administration, and deliver services to the people, as opposition parties and independents won a majority of positions in the North in February 2006.

However, key points of contention—including Northern Ugandan grievances over marginalization by the central government, a genuine reconciliation process, and a credible disarmament incentive for the LRA—have not been resolved. As a result, LRA leader Joseph Kony has yet to sign the Final Peace Agreement (FPA), which resulted from the Juba Peace Process.

While the security situation on the ground has dramatically improved and efforts in the North are shifting from post-conflict stabilization and the return of IDPs to post-conflict recovery and development efforts, it is felt that until the grievances and feeling of marginalization of Northern Uganda's communities are genuinely addressed, conflict might reignite as a vehicle for the expression of northerners' frustrations. This provides a powerful incentive for the Government of Uganda and the international donor community to "get it right" when it comes to the phase of post-conflict recovery and development in Northern Uganda.

3. Five Models of Post-Conflict Recovery Relying on Local Governments in Northern Uganda

Given the regional nature of the conflict in Northern Uganda, and consistent with Uganda's decentralized architecture of the public sector, local governments are widely conceived to play an important role in the post-conflict recovery and development of Northern Uganda. Although NGOs—particularly NGOs funded by international agencies—often play an active role in post-conflict recovery, local officials in Northern Uganda have been vocal in their criticism of the operation of NGOs in Northern Uganda, which are generally seen as ineffective and unaccountable.

Box 1: Local chairman threatens to send NGOs packing.

Gulu District has threatened to terminate all NGOs that have not fulfilled their objectives. In an interview with the Daily Monitor last week, LC5 Chief Nobert Mao said, “We are opening a place for public information whereby an international agency will monitor the work plans for the local NGOs... Some of them have expatriates who are paid high salaries yet their qualifications do not suit their work.” He said many NGO employees were driving expensive cars yet their work was not being felt by the community.

Source: *Daily Monitor*, 23 March 2009: p.9.

In response to these concerns, the Government of Uganda's Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP) relies considerably on elected local governments in Northern Uganda to guide and implement the post-conflict recovery process. Several key donor modalities have been developed with the objective to support the post-conflict recovery process in the North; in accordance with the Paris Declaration, these programs are all more or less aligned with the PRDP. This section provides a descriptive summary for the PRDP as well as for each of the four main donor-funded post-conflict recovery modalities. Based on these summaries, the remainder of this note seeks to establish a foundation for assessing to what extent local governments have a comparative advantage as a public service delivery modality in a post-conflict situation, and how effective each of these programs is in integrating local government into their program design.

3.1. Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP)

The Government of Uganda (GoU) officially launched the Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP) in October 2007, and began its official implementation on July 1, 2008. The PRDP is a commitment by the GOU to stabilize and recover NU during the next three years through a set of coherent programs in one organizing framework. The PRDP is coordinated and led by the Office of the Prime

Minister (OPM), and is intended as a comprehensive planning framework rather than a project.

The overall goal of the PRDP is stabilization to regain and consolidate peace in the region and lay the foundations for the recovery and development of Northern Uganda. This goal is to be realized through four strategic objectives that are mutually reinforcing, namely (1) consolidating state authority; (2) rebuilding and empowering communities; (3) revitalizing the Northern economy; and (4) peace building and reconciliation. These objectives cover a broad range of interventions, ranging from the rehabilitation and construction of trunk roads and the strengthening of the police, prisons and the judiciary in Northern Uganda (all central government functions), to the resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and community empowerment and recovery activities, such as strengthening public service delivery in education, health, rural water as well as livelihood programs. A majority of PRDP funds are budgeted for these latter interventions, which are locally driven and are intended to be implemented through the local government level.

Although the initial resource ceilings for different PRDP objectives were determined in a centralized planning exercise (in which local government were asked for their needs), it is the intention that the PRDP resources are planned and budgeted as part of the regular annual budget cycle at the local level. As such, the prioritization of PRDP resources takes place as part of the development of each local government's District Development Plan. However, delays in the preparation of the PRDP indicative planning figures for 2009/10 meant that in addition to districts' regular indicative planning ceilings (which local governments receive as part of the Budget Circular), local governments in Northern Uganda were provided with separate indicative planning ceilings for these PRDP funds.

The PRDP had somewhat of a false start during 2008/09. Despite its best intentions, in practice, the PRDP started taking on some features of a centralized project.⁷ While some government spending in NU was attributed to PRDP in 2008/09, these resources were largely taken from the unallocated reserve in the budget. In other cases, existing funding streams (such as local government grants) were argued to be funding PRDP activities. As such, it was impossible to disentangle how much was being spent on distinct PRDP activities. Another dimension that has been marring PRDP's initial implementation is the definition of the North: for political reasons, PRDP defines Northern Uganda to include 40 districts in the north and east of the country, well beyond the areas that were (directly or indirectly) affected by the LRA conflict.

To prevent any confusion, the Government made an effort to kick off PRDP anew on July 1, 2009. The government has pledged to fund 30 percent of PRDP from own resources, and is counting on its development partners to contribute the remaining 70 percent. All

⁷ For instance, the Local Government Enhancement Programme (under Strategic Objective largely consisted of providing supplementary funding for hiring local government staff on an emergency basis at private sector salaries. Although the details of this program are yet to be worked out, it was envisioned to be run in a centralized rather than decentralized fashion.

PRDP spending is supposed to be in addition to existing program funding. The GOU anticipates spending approximately UGX 30 billion in Year 1 (2009/10) on centralized strategic objectives (for instance, strengthening of the police and security apparatus under Strategic Objective 1), whereas the majority of PRDP resources are to be provided to local governments in a decentralized manner (approximately UGX 84 billions). This approach is consistent with Uganda's overall decentralization strategy, and recognizes that improving local economic conditions and improving key public services is best done at the local government level.

The Ministry of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development (MOFPED) worked with OPM to include these decentralized PRDP resources as 'top-up' amounts within the regular local government grant structure, rather than introducing duplicative funding streams to the local level. For instance, PRDP funds for primary education (which falls under Strategic Objective 2: rebuilding and community empowerment) will be funneled to the local level as a top-up amount of the School Facilities Grant (the existing development grant provided to the local level for the construction of classrooms and other education infrastructure). This approach allows the central government budget to identify the additional PRDP resources provided for each purpose for each district, although the money would actually flow (and subsequently be accounted for both centrally and locally) using existing accounts and financial management procedures.

3.2. Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF)

Whereas PRDP is structured to work closely within the existing intergovernmental system and local government systems, not all donor-funded recovery and development programs in Northern Uganda have consistently pursued that same vision. For instance, the World Bank-funded Northern Uganda Social Action Fund Project (NUSAF) aimed to empower communities in Northern Uganda by enhancing their capacity to systematically identify, prioritize, and plan for their needs and implement sustainable development initiatives that improve socio-economic services and opportunities. In doing so, during its first phase (2003–2009), NUSAF largely operated like a traditional social action fund, whereby NUSAF dealt directly with community organizations, civil society organizations and NGOs in Northern Uganda, thereby largely circumventing the local government level.⁸

Indeed, one of the criticisms of NUSAF has been that while many of the activities pursued under the program have fallen within the realm of local government responsibilities (such as the construction of classrooms, health clinics and other public infrastructure), NUSAF implemented these activities in a manner that was often duplicative and largely operated parallel to the local government system. In several instances, this resulted in the development of new infrastructure under NUSAF without ensuring the availability of the recurrent expenditures needed to operate and maintain these facilities.

⁸ It should be noted that NUSAF was in fact initiated prior to the end of the active conflict in NU, and therefore faced considerable greater constraints than the later programs.

In response to this concern, the second five-year phase of the program (2009–2014) has been substantially re-designed to operate as much as possible through the local government system. For instance, the planning of community-based activities under NUSAF 2 will be fully integrated into each district's planning cycle, as the district's Chief Administration Officer (supported by the Community Development Officer, CDO), will be responsible for the implementation of NUSAF II activities at the district level. Likewise, the Project Appraisal Document envisages the financial resources for community-driven projects under the second phase of NUSAF to be managed by the District's Chief Financial Officer and flow through local government accounts.

Thus while NUSAF 2 will retain a separate organization structure at the central level, the second phase of the program improves considerably on NUSAF 1, as activities will now be aligned with district plans. Rather than largely operating completely in parallel to the local planning and financing systems, if implemented as envisioned, NUSAF 2 will essentially create another funding stream for districts within the existing local government finance framework, albeit with a particular set of rules and procedures around how the funds are to be spent at the community level.

3.3. DfID's Northern Uganda Post-Conflict Recovery Programme (NUPCRP)

In accordance with the UK's commitment to ownership and alignment reflected in the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda, DfID's Northern Uganda Post-Conflict Recovery Programme (NUPCRP) was designed during 2009 to rely as much as possible on host country mechanisms. As such, the design of PCRCP aims to support post-conflict recovery and development in Northern Uganda (including public service delivery, infrastructure development, social development and reconciliation) largely through ring-fenced budget support for the Government of Uganda's PRDP. Thus rather than creating a separate funding flow to the local government level with its own processes and procedures (as envisioned under NUSAF 2), the bulk of the funding for PCRCP will provide top-up funding for the decentralized elements of the PRDP.

By adopting a ring-fenced budget support approach, DfID will rely almost exclusively on the Government's established policies, processes and procedures, preventing the need to establish separate processes at either the central or local government levels. In fact, other than verifying that the resources provided to the local governments in Northern Uganda under PRDP increase fully in proportion to the support provided by DfID, the program otherwise intends to fully rely on existing planning, budgeting, financial management and monitoring processes to make sure the resources are spent in accordance with PRDP.

This high degree of integration provides potential benefits as well as potential risks. On the positive side, in addition to the inherent benefits of having stronger government ownership and being more sustainable, this project approach is likely to be much more cost-efficient than a parallel funding stream, as both project management costs as well as compliance costs are minimized. On the negative side, the risks of the approach are two-

fold. First, it is possible—albeit unlikely—that the central government will divert the ring-fenced budget support for other purposes. This, of course, is easily monitored. Second, it is possible—in fact, likely—that some of the PRDP resources provided to the local government level will ultimately not be used for their intended purpose. However, although the local financial controls in Northern Uganda are imperfect, there are numerous internal and external safeguards in place that make it likely that the large majority of local government finances will be spent as intended.

Given DfID’s preference for integration of its development assistance with host-country programs and its tolerance for risk—as long as the expected risk can be justified in terms of enhanced impact—it was deemed that the costs that would be imposed by setting up a parallel funding modality with duplicative controls exceeded the benefits of doing so.

3.4. NUDEIL

The Northern Uganda Development of Enhanced Local Government Infrastructure and Livelihoods (NUDEIL) is USAID’s current programmatic effort to revitalize northern Uganda and catalyze a return to peace and stability. NUDEIL will finance the rehabilitation and reconstruction of basic economic and social infrastructure (roads, water points, schools, and clinics) through the Government of Uganda in target districts areas using labor-intensive, job-creating methodology. NUDEIL will further work to build capacity of district governments to plan, implement, and manage infrastructure programs.

Unlike traditional USAID local development programs, NUDEIL will provide sector program assistance, which allows USAID resources to be deposited directly into project accounts managed by local governments. The small infrastructure projects to be completed under NUDEIL will be planned, designed and carried out by the district governments in the context of the PRDP. Districts should prepare and tender bundles of community infrastructure that should include community and district roads; water points; infrastructure support to schools; and health clinics. Leadership by local government officials, particularly the Office of the District Chairman and the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) is seen to play an important role in ensuring program success and coordination, since the implementation of NUDEIL projects will take place through the District Engineering and Public Works, Financial Management, and Planning Offices.

Although a USAID contractor will assist the selected local governments to develop and tender the project bundle and monitor compliance with the necessary planning, procurement and financial management regulations, in principle, the planning, procurement and financing of the local infrastructure should follow Uganda’s local procurement regulations rather than USAID-specific regulations.

3.5. Uganda SDS



The final project modality reviewed in this study that will support development and public service delivery in Northern Uganda is USAID's upcoming Uganda Sustainable Decentralization Support (SDS) project. Although the SDS Project is a country-wide project and not limited to Northern Uganda, project documents indicate that nine of the initial 45 project districts are specifically supposed to be in the Northern Region.

While its programmatic objectives are slightly broader than the Northern Uganda programs, SDS seeks to considerably strengthen the role that local governments play in coordinating and overseeing the delivery of services provided by NGOs, particularly in the health sector. As such, SDS is a response to the common local complaint that internationally-funded NGOs lack appropriate accountability mechanisms at the local level and the concern that NGOs—even though they deliver services that are the functional responsibility of the local level—tend to work around the local government rather than with or through them.

In essence, SDS is an attempt to re-route USAID-funded district-based technical assistance consistent with Uganda's decentralization policies. While currently a number of USAID-funded technical assistance partners are engaged in providing support in the fight against malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, this support is provided in a more or less centralized manner through NGOs and other implementing partners. The ambition of SDS is to strengthen the role of local governments in planning, coordinating and managing the health services that are being implemented by USAID-funded technical assistance partners, by routing the resources that fund these district-level activities through the local government level.

Under SDS, USAID will engage a contractor who will act on behalf of USAID and the USAID-funded district-based technical assistance partners to provide financing and technical assistance in the areas of local government management systems to local governments at district levels and below. The contractor will issue grants, assist districts in managing these funds (and all other resources entering the district) within existing local government guidelines, and ensure that expenditures (particularly those related to USAID contributions) are properly documented. The contractor will facilitate the efforts of USAID-funded NGOs and implementing partners in planning and managing their health programs and services in conjunction with district and sub-county managers. The contractor is further expected to establish procedures for measuring and documenting the outputs and results of the SDS Project.

4. Assessing the Impact of the Different Approaches

As noted at the outset of this paper, the simultaneous implementation of five different post-conflict recovery and development programs in Northern Uganda provides a natural experiment of sorts which offers an opportunity to learn about the aid effectiveness of different post-conflict interventions. In addition, by analyzing the impact of these various programs, this natural experiment also provide us with a broader opportunity to improve

our understanding of the effectiveness of local governments in a post-conflict situation. Since many of these programs are at their inception stage right now, this paper allows us to think ahead about the measures and the data that we would like to have in three to five years from now to assess the comparative impact of the different approaches.

An ex-post assessment of the different programmatic approaches described above would likely seek to consider the effectiveness of each project in achieving its respective objectives; the cost effectiveness of each of the programs; as well as the sustainability and the political economy of the different modalities. A question to be addressed up front would be how each of these criteria should be measured, and what benchmarks should be used to measure progress against?

As an initial foray into such an assessment, Table 1 provides a tentative framework for assessing the different programs, covering both each of the programs' main design features, as well as an assessment of the effectiveness of the different programs. The proposed comparative framework considers both the variations in the design of the different programs as well as the impact made by the different programs, in an effort to establish why different programs may have been more effective than others.

Of course, as the different programs operate in different districts in the wider North, each of the programs will operate across districts that are facing different starting points with regard to local administration, governance, finance, and service delivery, but also face differences in demographics, geography and different degrees of residual tension and stability. These factors should be taken into account in a comparative assessment.

Table 1: Tentative Framework for Assessing the Different Post-Conflict Recovery and Development Programs in Northern Uganda					
	PRDP	NUSAF	NUPCRP	NUDEIL	Ug. SDS
Program design features					
Specific program objectives					
Institutional arrangement at the central level					
Funding flow into local government account					
Harmonized and participatory local planning process					
Harmonized procurement and implementation					
Additional inspection, monitoring and follow-up					
Technical support provided to the local level					
Program assessment					
Effectiveness in producing outputs					
Effectiveness in producing outcomes					
Effectiveness in improving admin and governance					
Effectiveness in achieving peace, stability and post-conflict recovery					
Cost effectiveness (efficiency) of the programs					
Assessment of the political economy / sustainability					

Assessing the projects' effectiveness in producing infrastructure and service delivery outputs

The most obvious thing one would like to measure in an assessment is the effectiveness of each project in achieving its respective objectives. The easiest measure of program success is to quantify whether each of the projects were successful at producing physical infrastructure and achieving their service delivery outputs.

To the degree that the expected number of outputs to be produced can be defined upfront (e.g., 300 classrooms, 100 teacher houses, and 50 clinics), one could express the effectiveness of the program as the realization rate for each infrastructure class by comparing the actual number of outputs produced as a share of the planned number of outputs. Alternatively, one could define the realization rate as the percentage of program resources that was actually spent on funding outputs, specified as the share of the planned funding for this purpose. The latter approach may prove to be more flexible to the degree that the exact nature and type of infrastructure projects and service delivery outputs are defined from year to year by local government officials as part of their annual budget process.

A greater challenge is to measure whether the program outputs were translated into service delivery outcomes. Did gross school enrolment rise as a result of the program interventions? Did inoculation rates increase and did the burden of disease decrease? Was access to drinking water improved? Not only are these outcomes harder to measure as part of a program review, it is also harder to attribute improvements in public service delivery outcomes to specific programmatic interventions. Nonetheless, doing so will be extremely important in the context of Northern Uganda's post-conflict recovery efforts. For instance, a substantial amount of emphasis is placed in the PRDP plans on the construction of staff housing and teacher houses in order to increase staffing levels in the North. However, it is quite unclear whether this is an effective (and if so, efficient) approach to improving staffing levels and improving public service delivery. As such, analysis of the link between outputs and outcomes is a critical element to making sure that the different development programs are effective in attaining their stated objectives. It should be noted that while this dimension tends to be largely overlooked in program evaluations, a comparative study of the different post-conflict recovery programs is much better positioned to analyze and address this issues.

Assessing the projects' effectiveness in achieving public administration and governance objectives

Each of the post-conflict recovery and development programs for Northern Uganda presents a mix of objectives: in addition to infrastructure and service delivery objectives, to varying degrees, each program also seeks to achieve improved public administration and governance outcomes. As such, in addition to measuring the projects' relative effectiveness in producing infrastructure and service delivery outputs, it will be necessary to assess the degree to which the projects were effective in achieving their public administration and governance objectives.

The measurement of the quality of local public administration and local governance is more qualitative than quantitative by its very nature. An assessment of the impact of project support and the various project activities on the quality of local governance and administration should ask questions such as: did the project develop its infrastructure and service delivery plans in a participatory manner? Did the project strengthen the planning, budgeting, procurement and/or financial management capacity of the partner local governments?

One possible available measure of local government administration and local government quality across all districts in Uganda is the annual performance assessment conducted by the Ministry of Local Government. This performance assessment annually scores local governments on a wide variety of administrative and governance practices and could serve as a baseline for measuring improvements in local governance and local administration.

Assessing the cost effectiveness (efficiency) of the project outcomes

The current natural experiment in Northern Uganda should be able to give us insights into the cost effectiveness with which local governments are able to deliver public infrastructure and public services. In other words, an assessment of the various programs should be able to reveal whether the cost of putting in place public infrastructure or delivering public services varies—either slightly or considerably—between the different program modalities. It would be difficult to determine such variations in cost-effectiveness unless a comparative approach were taken, comparing the various different project modalities. In addition, it would be desirable to compare the cost effectiveness of the various programs with the current cost patterns—prior to the introduction of the various programs. For instance, is the second phase of NUSAF able to procure infrastructure outputs more cheaply than under the first phase of the program? Likewise, it would be interesting to know whether the efficiency of USAID’s health implementation partners improved as a result of increased local government involvement and oversight. Properly answering these questions will require baseline information on the current efficiency of local government operations, as well as the efficiency of the pre-cursor project modalities.

The efficiency question should also address whether—or to what degree—the different local government recovery and development modalities were indeed successful in relying on existing, ‘regular’ local government processes and procedures for planning, procurement, and financial management, or to what degree a burden was placed on local government administrations by requirements to use additional or duplicative administrative processes and procedures.

If the comparative analysis finds that the cost of providing public infrastructure or public services varies systematically between different decentralized post-conflict projects, further analysis should be needed to determine the cause of these cost differences. Potential causes of cost variations could be benign—such as variations in the quality of the outputs—or they could reflect inefficiencies in the procurement or administration of

some of the programs. In the latter case, it would be quintessential to isolate the administrative and governance factors that are driving the inefficiencies.

Any cost analysis should take into account the mix and the different types of outputs that local governments are expected to produce under the different programs. The cost of delivering infrastructure and public services is not independent of other project objectives. For instance, higher costs might be incurred in the provision of public infrastructure if a secondary program objective was to use labor-intensive service delivery approaches. Not only should such considerations be taken into account in an ex-post assessment, but ideally, the relative costs of different objectives should be quantified and weighed at the outset of the programs.

Also, it has been argued that local governments in Uganda might be better at performing certain functions compared to others. For instance, it could be argued that local governments have more experience at procuring basic infrastructure and delivering key public services, when compared to tasks with which they have less experience and require a more advance analytical, technical or policy mindset, such as promoting livelihoods and social development, promoting local economic development, or prioritizing, coordinating, and operationalizing targeted health service delivery projects.

Finally, a valid question to answer as part of comprehensive comparative assessment is which project approach—if any—is most efficient in terms of aid effectiveness. Indeed, an assessment of the different projects should be able to determine whether there are cost differences or administrative inefficiencies in the management of the different programs. Are there substantial cost differences in project overhead costs, or in the way with which the projects are managed centrally? Do different project management structures incur different costs, risks and benefits in terms of the central management of each approach or in terms of central-local structures?

Assessing the political economy and sustainability of the different modalities

Beyond the effectiveness and efficiency of the different recovery and development modalities, one important element of program success is sustainability, local ownership and political support. In fact, one of the key reasons to emphasize the role of local governments in Northern Uganda's recovery is to strengthen the role of locally elected officials in the region in responding to the needs of the populace. Previous aid modalities that relied on NGOs and other implanting partners—including support for the delivery of public services in agriculture, health and other areas of public policy—were keenly felt to work *around* local governments rather than with or through local governments. Therefore, these centralized aid programs ended up contributing to tensions between the center and the locally elected officials, rather than contributing to the resolution of tensions.

Therefore, in assessing the political economy and sustainability of the different modalities, it will be quintessential to determine whether the different programs were able to achieve ownership and support at the local government level in Northern Uganda.



Local ownership and support should not just be measured by the involvement of the local (but centrally appointed) Chief Administrative Officer, Planning Officer, or other local government officials who serve as interlocutors. Instead, the notion of local support should be expanded to consider whether local politicians (as the elected representatives of the locality) as well as local community organizations and other local stakeholders have seen a positive impact within local communities from the additional financial support and the administrative reforms introduced under these programs.

A second element in assessing the political economy and sustainability of the different modalities is the central government level. Even though these programs are focused on the local government level in Northern Uganda, support from the central government is needed to sustain them in the long run. Some of the programs will have stronger support at the central government level from institutions such as the Office of the Prime Minister (PRDP), while other program modalities may be in a strong position to promote the continuation of their program at the central government level and may be able to garner political support for this (e.g., NUSAF 2). The leaner the program's involvement is at the central government level, the more difficult it might become to win support for the long-term continuation of the program, unless the local government stakeholders are effectively organized to lobby for ongoing support for these programs with central government decisionmakers.

A final element of long-term ownership, sustainability, and effectiveness that should be considered in an overall assessment of the effectiveness of the decentralized local governments as a post-conflict recovery and development mechanism in Northern Uganda is to analyze the link between these post-conflict recovery and development programs and other government funding streams. For instance, did, as a result of the increase in resources provided to Northern Uganda through these modalities, the Government of Uganda reduce its own development spending in Northern Uganda? Did these programs lead to other adverse impacts, such as a reduction in own source revenue efforts or an increase in the responsiveness of local officials to central political interests (since the funding for these programs comes from the central level). Were local officials successful in having additional staff establishments approved by the central government for the new public service delivery infrastructure that was built, and were local governments able to fill these positions? Likewise, does the central government transfer system provide an adequate level of O&M resources—and an adequate level of expenditure discretion—to operate and maintain the newly constructed infrastructure in a sustainable manner?

5. Conclusions and the Way Forward

This short technical note has presented five development programs intended to support the post-conflict recovery and development process in Northern Uganda. Each of these five programs is generally well-designed and quite progressive and innovative in its application of best practices. Although the programs have different degrees of emphasis



on different elements of recovery and development in the region (i.e., placing a different degree of emphasis on infrastructure development, service delivery, livelihoods and social protection, and so on), there are considerable similarities in the programs' objectives. Importantly, each program recognizes that a centralized response would neither be appropriate or acceptable in the post-conflict environment in the North, nor would it be an effective development approach. As a result, each of the five programs reviewed aims to work with and through the local government level in Northern Uganda.

Although these programs are at the early stages of implementation, a few tentative conclusions can already be drawn about the situation in Northern Uganda, and the potential effectiveness of the portfolio of programs in Northern Uganda.

The situation reflects the strengths and weaknesses of donor harmonization. The first conclusion that we can draw with regard to the programmatic response in Northern Uganda is that the situation reflects both the strengths as well as the weaknesses of donor harmonization. In itself, the portfolio of post-recovery development programs in the North reflects a set of development modalities that are integrated and harmonized with the Government's Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP) in a way that is compliant with Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda.

Especially to the degree that the programs included in the current review are successors to earlier, more centralized or projectized programs (e.g., NUSAF and to some extent, Uganda SDS), we see a major shift towards aid harmonization of the portfolio in Northern Uganda. This may not only be evidence of the success of advocates of the Accra Agenda in itself, but may equally reflect the recognition of the problems encountered with the previous—more centralized—programmatic approaches, the importance of pursuing a decentralized approach in Northern Uganda, and consensus on the potential contribution of local governments to post-conflict recovery and development.

Unfortunately, despite the increased adherence to the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda, there appears to be considerable duplication in the portfolio of donor responses in Northern Uganda. Rather than having a single PRDP implemented by the Government of Uganda (and financially supported by various development partners), we witness four additional distinct donor programs. While each of these programs are aligned with the PRDP, only one of them (NUPCRP) has the ambition to almost exclusively work through (earmarked) general budget support.

A comparative assessment of the initiative is highly desirable. As noted, the post-conflict recovery and development programs for Northern Uganda generally reflect best practices and appear to be well-designed. However, it is not necessarily a foregone conclusion that all of these programs will achieve their stated objectives in an effective and efficient manner, although there is little doubt that much can be learned from a comparative analysis of these programs' experiences. Therefore, we believe that it would be highly desirable to use this natural experiment and revisit these programs regularly

over the next five years to assess the effectiveness of each of these programs on improving local governance, administration, public service delivery, livelihood, and local economic development in the post-conflict situation of Northern Uganda. The preliminary framework outlined in the previous section should be helpful in guiding the development of a baseline for future assessment of conditions in Northern Uganda, and the impact that the various development programs have on the situation in the North.

While virtually all stakeholders in Uganda (including the government, its development partners, as well as the development community at large) stand to gain from such a comparative analysis, there is currently no specific modality available to pursue such a comparative assessment. Nonetheless, there are a variety of modalities that are well-placed to support such an assessment. These mechanisms include the Uganda SDS project; external assistance provided in support of Uganda's public finance management reform process (PFMRP), or direct support from one or more of the bilateral donors organized in the Northern Uganda donor working group.

Broader decentralization questions seem to fall through the cracks. A final concern related to the programmatic approach followed by the government and the donor community in Northern Uganda is that none of the programs is able to see the “big picture” of the intersection between decentralization on one hand, and recovery and development in Northern Uganda on the other hand. Although the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) might have the ambition to monitor the funding flows going into North Uganda under PRDP, OPM is technically not in a good position (and its institutional incentives are weak) to take the lead on such an initiative. In fact, such an effort should go beyond decentralized local governance issues in Northern Uganda.

In some sense, the focus on decentralization in Northern Uganda somewhat bucks the trend on support for decentralization in Uganda. Overall, the prominence of the decentralization agenda in the country seems to be somewhat on the decline. Despite extensive donor support provided to the Government of Uganda over the past 15 years, there is little in the way of ongoing monitoring and analysis of the local government (finance) system in Uganda. For instance, when it comes to the financing of local governments, there is no regularly published annual government document that analyzes the share of the public sector's resources that go to the local government level, or that analyzes whether budget resources allocated to the local government level are distributed in accordance with the official allocation formulas. In the absence of a quantitative analysis of intergovernmental disparities in the country, the Government of Uganda is pursuing its North Uganda strategy without a clear quantification of the degree of variance between the needs in Northern Uganda versus the rest of the country, without solid information about the relative share of resources already being made available to the North through regular budget modalities.

Although the individual project mechanisms will most likely have project-specific monitoring and evaluation components and mid-term reviews, some of these broader policy issues at the intersection between decentralized local governance and post-conflict

recovery may fall between the cracks. For instance, while considerable efforts are made under each of the programs to improve service delivery by improving public infrastructure, such as classrooms and teacher houses, service delivery improvements are unlikely to result unless specific complementary efforts are made to improve local government staffing and increased operations and maintenance expenditures. Likewise, the degree to which local governments do not have adequate fiscal discretion is an important policy element easily overlooked by the various programs in Northern Uganda.

It is unclear which institution is best positioned to address such “big picture” issues related to intergovernmental finance, local government administration and local governance. While these issues are particularly relevant to Northern Uganda, many of these topics have a broader relevance to the rest of the country. Although many of the data inputs required for such analyses are available from existing government systems, these data resources are often not made public and not used for policy analysis. As such, we advocate for regular (annual) publication of key local government data (on local administration, governance, finance, and service delivery) along with more systematic analysis of such data. Although such work could be supported by one or more development partners, in line with the philosophy of host-country integration and ownership, such an initiative should truly be led by the Government of Uganda, possibly through the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Planning, Finance, and Economic Development (MOFPED), or through the Local Government Finance Commission (LGFC).

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