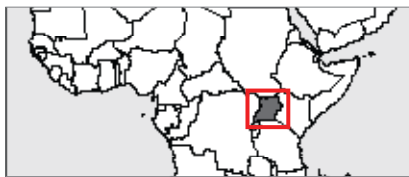# Case 11 Uganda Camp closure

Keywords

- Camp closure
- Environment
- Handover to national authorities
- Host community
- Local Governance Structures
- Phase-out

Displacement Data

Country: Uganda

Cause of displacement: Internal Civil Conflict

Conflict date: 1988-2006 Northern Uganda

People displaced: 1.8 million at peak (IDPs); 466,000 in Lango Sub-Region (2005 IDMC)

Project locations: Northern Uganda (Lira, Gulu, Kitgum, Pader Districts)

CCCM Cluster: Activated

Case study focus: Lango Sub-Region

In the Itubara camp Oyam, Uganda IDPs are knocking down homes before leaving. December 2007 / E. Denholm / UNHCR

Context

In 2005, the Cluster Approach was rolled out in Northern Uganda as a pilot project for Humanitarian Reform. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) started to displace populations in 1988; the displacement accelerated in the mid-90s, and peaked in 2005, leaving 1.8 million displaced (90% of the population). Following the signing of the 2006 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, security improved and the government lifted its restriction on freedom of movement, enabling the majority of IDPs to return home. The CCCM sector was initially rolled out as a branch of the Protection Cluster. CCCM was initiated just after the peak displacement and, after 6 months, shifted its focus to camp closure and phase-out activities.

The spontaneous return process commenced in the Lango Sub Region when approximately 466,000 IDPs, residing in 40 recognized camps, started to return home. Given that the population tended to reside within a 10 km radius of the camps, the process was initially pendular. Male family members were returning to their original homes to re-establish shelters and plant crops, while other family members remained in the camps to attend school and receive humanitarian assistance. The return process accelerated further as roads were rehabilitated, thatching grass matured and students completed their academic year.

The rapid return process caught the humanitarian community off guard. The host community wished to reclaim their land for agricultural purposes, but found it littered with derelict shelters, open pit latrines and infrastructure with no clear ownership. Protection risks also increased as empty huts were reported to be used by perpetrators of sexual violence, thieves, and criminals; children also used them as latrines which directly increased the potential for epidemics.

The CCCM Cluster was tasked to develop and pilot a camp phase-out and closure program, which was later used as the flagship model for the rest of Northern Uganda and is the basis for this case study.

Key features of the initiative

▪ **Criteria for closure:** Camp phase-out and closure activities were initiated after a government/humanitarian team, called the Camp Phase-out Committee (CPC) had assessed that 50% of the camp population had left.

▪ **Project leadership:** The project was conducted almost exclusively by national authorities in partnership with the CCCM Cluster. Project implementation was through three camp management implementing partners in conjunction with the host and beneficiary communities. Other clusters were involved as necessary to perform specialized rehabilitation, such as closing boreholes.

▪ **Attracting funding:** An initial pilot project was conducted in a single camp and a specific multi-donor field mission was organized, comparing a rehabilitated former camp to an untouched one. This illustrated the positive benefits of the initiative. This resulted in funding to rehabilitate the remaining 39 camps in the Lira District.

Actions Taken

▪ **Identification of camps selected for phase-out and closure:** A threshold of a 50% of population departure was used to raise the discussion on camp phase-out and closure. A mixed committee of national officials and humanitarian actors determined whether a camp should be officially closed and if phase-out activities should be initiated.

▪ **Camp-level participatory assessments, preparation and planning:** Using an age, gender, diversity, mainstreaming methodology, multiple meetings were conducted with representatives of host communities, local authorities and residual IDP population. This happened in consultation with the humanitarian community to identify gaps and priorities in site rehabilitation.

▪ **Primary camp clean-up:** Including knocking down partial and remaining shelters, disabling and backfilling pit latrines and garbage pits, and conducting overall cleaning and levelling of the site.

▪ **Secondary specific rehabilitation:** Additional activities were prioritized

Residents in the Itubarya camp conduct camp-phase out activities in preparation to return home. December 2007 / E. Denholm / UNHCR

by the host community, including infrastructure rehabilitation, tree planting, and erosion mitigation.

▪ **Official handover of NGO infrastructure to local authorities:** This included liaising with NGOs that had installed infrastructure and since left with no clear handover guidance.

Complementary projects

▪ **Viable community project:** A former strategically located camp that had the potential to become a commercial trading hub received additional funding to be transformed into a 'viable community' as an early recovery activity to support national Peace and Recovery Development Plans. This included livelihood activities and rehabilitation of market infrastructure.

▪ **Hut construction for persons with specific needs:** Vulnerable individu-

als without means to construct huts in return areas received additional support for shelter construction.

▪ **Consolidation** – Residual families unable or unwilling to return and unable to rent land in the former camps were relocated to shelters within a consolidated area. The original landowners awaited solutions that would return their land and better ensure their protection.

Challenges

▪ **Late arrival of CCCM sector partners and late activation of the cluster:** Return movements were already underway when the CCCM Cluster lead agency and three CM partners initiated their program, creating a reactive rather than proactive response. The late arrival also caused considerable challenges with regards to respecting standards,

A group of displaced people with special needs have received support through a UNHCR shelter programme October 2008 / M.Odokonyero / UNHCR

scattered burial plots, and coherence of handing over infrastructure constructed by NGOs that had left.

▪ **Initial lack of national policy on phase-out and closure:** Lack of clear national-level guidance proved challenging as the operation needed to be explained, clarified and negotiated with local authorities.

▪ **Weak links with early recovery:** There were insufficient and poorly timed linkages made to development activities to support urbanization trends for those IDPs who had no intention of returning to areas of origin.

▪ **Compensation mechanisms changed mid project:** Initially a food-for-work scheme in collaboration with a food agency was negotiated to compensate for the manual labor involved in the decommissioning of huts and latrines. A new flooding emergency required alternative resources and subsequently caused challenges in approving equivalent cash values.

▪ **Sustainability of durable solutions for locally integrated persons with specific needs:** Continued support to persons with specific needs remaining in former camps was questionable in the long term, in particular hosts revoked their right to remain in the future. Monitoring this situation could only continue while funding allowed.

▪ **Unique infrastructure challenges:** Each camp faced unique challenges, such as infrastructure at risk of collapse, large concrete pit latrines requiring demolition and removal, etc. These posed risks and needed to be addressed individually, yet were not identified by the community for rehabilitative action.

Key Successes

▪ **Funding was raised** to successfully phase out and close all camps in the Lango Sub Region by the end of 2008.

▪ **Development of national camp phase-out guidelines:** After the success of the Lango Camp Closure exercise, the Office of the Prime Minister, with the support of the

CCCM Cluster, issued national level official instructions on camp phase-out and closure to guide camp closure and rehabilitation in other districts in Northern Uganda. Having a national level guidance greatly simplified dialogue with local leaders in the rest of Northern Uganda.

▪ **Adoption of the Lango model in the rest of Northern Uganda:** The cluster was actively involved in the definition of camp phase-out guidelines, drawing on the experiences of the Lango model. These guidelines and related tools (e.g. hut demolition guidelines, camp phase-out assessment guiding tool, guidelines for camp cleaning activities) were then further developed and adopted in cooperation with individual districts.

▪ **Handover of camp closure activities to national authorities:** With accelerated return by the end of 2008, the CCCM Cluster merged again with the Protection Cluster. Camp closure and phase-out activities were formally handed over to government-led technical camp phase-out committees.

Returned IDPs, waiting while a UN team carries out an early recovery assessment. 2006 / H. Coussidis / UNHCR

Lessons

- **Develop national, regional, and camp level camp phase-out and closure strategies at the beginning of the camp management cycle**: Identifying which government bodies and humanitarian agencies led the camp closure and phase-out processes, and who was responsible for what, where, and when. The process of developing and updating these strategies was as important as the documents themselves and needs to be prioritized as early as possible.

- Agencies with overall responsibilities for camps needed to conduct activities to simplify eventual camp closure and rehabilitation throughout the camp management cycle, especially:

  - **Mainstreaming environmental management** with an emphasis on timely management of erosion, gulley formation, deforestation and the disposal of batteries and hazardous material;

  - **Ensuring infrastructure ownership** and eventual **handover arrangements** are established;

  - **Demarcating specific public areas** for burial plots as soon as possible.

- **Advocate for early and clear national policies** on camps situated on private land, criteria for return, and potential compensation to landowners. Establishing this early provides clear guidance, and avoids forced evictions.

- **Signal a shift in leadership from humanitarian actors to local governance structures**. A formal planned event indicating the change in responsibility back to local authorities avoided confusion and sent a clear message with regards to the end of emergency programming.

- **Advocate for other clusters to have contingency funding for closure activities**. In Lango, the majority of phase-out activities were performed through funding sourced directly by the CCCM Cluster lead agency; CCCM needed to advocate for additional support from other clusters early on, in order to not be left as the last cluster responsible for all sectors in the camps.

Formerly displaced children attend class underneath a tree, as classroom spacing is inadequate and has remained a key challenge. May 2008 / M. Odokonyero / UNHCR

European Commission

CAMP COORDINATION AND CAMP MANAGEMENT

The overall goal of the CCCM Cluster is to improve living conditions of displaced persons. It does this by facilitating the effective provision of protection and services in camps and camp-like settings, advocating for durable solutions and ensuring organized closure and phase-out of camps.