DEVELOPMENT AID AS THIRD-PARTY INTERVENTION: A CASE STUDY OF THE UGANDA NATIONAL RESCUE FRONT II PEACE PROCESS

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Abstract

In 2002 Denmark and other donors supported the final phases of a successful peace process between the Government of Uganda and a rebel group in Uganda's West Nile region. This article presents this case as an example of a general trend that sees donors extending the scope of their activities to the interrelation between conflict resolution, poverty eradication and peacebuilding. Third party intervention in conflict areas has become the institutional ambition of development donors. Yet development actors give little attention to an obvious implication of these expanding ambitions: as striving conflict resolution practitioners they need to understand themselves as third party interventionists with an obligation to adapt development projects and programmes in ways that conceivably support the overall peace process. The rationale for integrating a peacebuilding paradigm into development assistance is to ensure that an agreement by conflicting parties to end violent conflict is followed by consolidating peace through equitable development. The earlier this perspective is added to peace negotiations the better. The participation of development actors in peace negotiations provides incentives for conflicting parties to reach a deal because assurances can be given that reconstruction and development will follow. Development actors need to respond by stronger and longer-term commitments to address the root causes of the conflict - even if this means that current institutional policies and operational practice need to be adjusted.

Introduction

Internationally it has gone virtually unnoticed that amid the continuing turmoil in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, southern Sudan and northern Uganda, the Government of Uganda on 24 December 2002 signed a comprehensive peace agreement with the Uganda National Rescue Front II (UNRF II). This rebel group hailed from Yumbe District in Uganda's West Nile region, the home area of Uganda's former dictator Idi Amin. The front's immediate history starts in the mid-1990s, but the insurgency has roots dating back to the overthrow of Idi Amin in 1979. A local peace process started in 1998, leading to an informal ceasefire in early 1999.

Denmark's human rights and democratisation programme in Uganda (HRDP) became involved in this peace process in 2001. The HRDP is part of a programme being run in Uganda by Danida, Denmark's official development aid agency. Initially it supported civil society and grassroots participation. This engagement evolved into supporting ceasefire and peace negotiations after the UNRF II forces had returned to Uganda from their bases

in southern Sudan in April 2002. Danida's role in the Uganda peace process illustrates a new trend of donors becoming involved in peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts – a set of roles that departs from existing practices and requires rethinking of the values and assumptions that underlie those practices.

Generally development actors, Danida included, go to some lengths to obfuscate *actual power relations* by describing *ideal relationships* in a discourse of 'partnership', 'participation' and 'national ownership', and – increasingly – of 'empowerment'. Development assistance typically prefers the use of integrative or persuasive power (Fisher 2001; Miall *et al* 2000; Cortright 1997). However, the 'muscle' of bilateral donors and international financial institutions is often brought to bear on aid-dependent countries like Uganda. The practice of international mediation in the political sphere [Track I] is increasingly complemented by intermediary activities of numerous actors at mid-level and the grassroots [Track II and III] in societies experiencing violent conflict (Fisher 2001:6). As illustrated in this case, donors exert influence on Track II and III actors through funding. Danida's HRDP was the first-line manager of such finances.

Development agencies are increasingly expanding their traditional areas of activity, expressing the ambition to make their aid relevant to conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding (Uvin 2002). Donors are explicitly extending the scope of their activities to the interrelation between poverty eradication and conflict resolution. Third party intervention in conflict areas has become the institutional ambition of development donors (whether invited or not), and development programmes increasingly will seek to play intermediary roles in complex conflicts. Despite these trends, surprisingly little conceptual attention has been given to an obvious implication of the expanding ambitions and roles of development aid actors: as their policy and practice move into conflict resolution, it becomes increasingly important to understand the practice of development from the 'third party intervention' theoretical perspective provided by the field of conflict resolution (Fisher 2001).

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This article presents a case study of how a bilateral donor tried to put into practice its ambition to play an intermediary role in conflict resolution. It applies a conflict resolution lens to the HRDP support for the UNRF II process. This includes understanding the HRDP as a donor mechanism in the context of options for coercive and non-coercive third party intervention. Associated with these typologies of power is a perspective on mediator roles in basic application of multi-track conflict resolution (Track I, II, and III). To understand the 'horizontal' and 'vertical' intervention dynamics that link community-level dynamics with top-level decision-makers, the grassroots, middle-level, and top leaders are placed in a 'pyramid' of conflict actors (Lederach 1997). The article seeks to shed light on the following questions:

- How were associated risks managed as the support moved from standard modalities (such as peace workshops for civil society) to uncharted territory, such as providing adequate offices to rebels and facilitating internal government processes)?

- Should donors working on conflict conceive of themselves as 'third party interventionists' as understood in conflict resolution theory? If so, what is the practical implication?

- After supporting a peace process, how do donors shift support to peacebuilding?

- Moreover, once violent conflict ends, do they have a comparative advantage in terms of improved development policy and practice that addresses root causes and engenders non-violent ways of dealing with conflict?

The article covers an 18-month period between November 2001 (when the HRDP conducted its first community workshop) and December 2002 (when the formal peace agreement was signed). The purpose is to better understand the opportunities, limitations and pitfalls of involvement by official development aid actors in conflict resolution processes, and to look at the implication for development policy and practice. During the period covered the author was advisor/manager of the HRDP and an employee of Denmark's development aid agency. The information used as a basis for this article comes from his personal and professional experience. Inevitably the perspective is partial, but every attempt has been made to provide a balanced reflection on the issues covered; the opinions expressed are not necessarily shared by other stakeholders.

Background to the Conflict

The UNRF II is a predominantly Muslim rebel group from Uganda's West Nile region, the home area of former Ugandan dictator Idi Amin. The group consists of former officers and soldiers of the Ugandan army during the Amin era and new recruits drawn from the ranks of the region's many disenfranchised youth. The majority are male members of the Aringa ethnic group.

After the overthrow of Idi Amin in 1979, the original UNRF emerged out of Amin's defeated army and has been fighting successive governments in Uganda. After shifting its allegiance several times, the UNRF allied itself with the National Resistance Movement shortly before the NRM came to power in 1986. The leadership of the original UNRF apparently reached a verbal understanding with the National Resistance Movement to incorporate some of the UNRF fighters in Uganda's national army (then called the National Resistance Army) and to provide demobilisation and resettlement support for the remaining forces. Instead, in July 1987 the majority of UNRF troops were unceremoniously disarmed and dismissed as they were awaiting resettlement.

From this nucleus of discontented former UNRF fighters the UNRF II emerged in 1997. Although disgruntlement about its treatment played a role, the UNRF II holds that the main factors for its formation were government persecution of former UNRF members and the attacks and looting in Aringa (now Yumbe District) by another rebel group, the West Nile Bank Front, which had been operating in West Nile since 1996 first attacks by the UNRF against Uganda government forces took place in August 1997. In 1998 the UNRF II, supported by Sudanese authorities, started operating from bases in southern Sudan.

Local and International Third-party Efforts

After the defeat of the West Nile Bank Front at the hands of the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF), early local peace initiatives were initiated in 1997 when elected local government officials convinced about 150 UNRF II members to surrender under a presidential pardon. It is a matter of contention between the government and the UNRF II what happened to this group, but it seems they were imprisoned. It is important to credit the role of informal social network mediation, especially by women and traditional

birth attendants (mainly from the Aringa ethnic group) who played key roles that yet are to be fully documented and appreciated (Bakoko 2004; Ojiambo-Ochieng 2002).

The UNRF II peace process was initiated in 1998 when the UPDF Army Council granted Aringa Obongi Peace Initiative Committee (AROPIC) the authority to initiate contacts with the UNRF II. Although it was a social network mediation group, AROPIC's members were mostly men and included senior military officers from Yumbe. They had been integrated into the national army, which since 1996 had been named the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF). AROPIC had easy access to the UPDF High Command

AROPIC brokered an informal ceasefire and from March 1999 about 400 armed UNRF II fighters were stationed in a camp about 30km outside Yumbe town. They received food and medicines from the UPDF. Not until 2001, when the process had reached an impasse, did international actors get involved.

The Centre for Conflict Resolution in Uganda had identified the need for sustained grassroots capacity building on conflict resolution and training on the rights of women in Yumbe. In December 2001, German Development Services, commonly known by its acronym DED, opened a project office in Yumbe town with international staff to support peace workshops and other capacity building. These activities were mainly for women organised under the community-based organisation, Participatory Rural Development for Action (PRAFORD).

On a parallel track in August 2001, AROPIC requested the HRDP to support its government-endorsed local peace initiative. Soon afterwards international third party involvement expanded to include the Donor Technical Group (DTG) on northern Uganda, Amnesty and Recovery from Conflict. Besides Denmark, the group included bilateral donors such as Ireland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States and a delegation of the European Commission and the World Bank. The United Nations was represented by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Danida was one of the initiators of this donor coordination forum that was set up in March 2001. It originally focused on the 18-year Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency in northern Uganda. When the UNRF II process accelerated in April 2002, the DTG became an important mechanism to focus donor attention on the opportunities for peace in Uganda's West Nile region.

Denmark's Human Rights Programme

A Change of Approach: From 'Working around Conflict' to 'Working on Conflict'

Uganda is one of 15 'programme countries' receiving official Danish development assistance of about US$42 million annually. These funds are provided mainly for sector programme support in regions of Uganda that are severely affected by conflict. This includes the Acholi sub-region in the north, devastated by the insurgency of the LRA, and the Karamoja sub-region in the east that is infested with small arms and the related threats to human security.

However, Denmark's rationale for focusing development assistance in these regions was not that they were affected by violent conflict: *it was because they had worse poverty and human development profiles than other parts of Uganda* (Danida 1996, 2000). Overall, the incidence of poverty in Uganda is estimated to have fallen from 56%in 1992 to 44%% in 1997/98 and to 35 % in 2000. But regional inequality increased significantly because poverty

reduction efforts have been least effective in the troublespots of northern and eastern Uganda where the share of the population officially living poverty was 58.8 % and 54.3 % respectively (Government of Uganda 2000).

Whatever the donors' rationale for providing assistance, the fundamental challenge for development in Uganda remains that large parts of the country are ungovernable because they are affected by different types of violent conflict. Some of these conflicts, like the one in Karamoja, affect *human* security and impede development. Others, such as that involving the LRA, not only impede development, but also have an impact on *national* security, and have reached the proportions of a humanitarian crisis.

Like other countries, Denmark is finding it difficult to conceive interactions of its official development aid programmes with conflict and violence (Uvin 2002). In 2001 Denmark's country programme was a good example of *working around conflict* (see Box). For example, implementation of road sector support was shifted to districts not affected by conflict. A revised Danish policy that prioritises *working on conflict* was adopted in 2003, but attempts to change the practice of Danish development aid accordingly have just begun.

> Broadly speaking, there are three different donor approaches to conflict, each with its own set of assumptions and associated strategies:
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> **working around conflict** – which treats conflict as an impediment or negative externality that is to be avoided;
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> **working in conflict** – which recognises the links between programmes and conflict and tries to minimise conflict-related risks, so that aid 'does no harm'; and
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> **working on conflict** – which is a conscious attempt to design programmes in such a way that they 'do good' (Goodhand 2001).

Linkages in theory between conflict, human rights and development provide some conceptual underpinnings in the search for practical linkages. The relationship between human rights and conflict has two dimensions (Parlevliet 2001): first, the evident link between violent conflict and gross human rights violations; second, the denial of basic rights as an integral aspect of what constitutes poverty (Frankovits & Earle 2000:7 in Uvin 2004:130). Even in the absence of violent conflict it is relevant to understand 'poverty' as a condition of 'structural conflict' (Uvin 1998). It follows that development assistance should be conceived as a potential instrument for structural conflict mitigation and prevention (Sida 2003).

When the HRDP was designed there already was some operational space in Danida allowing development practitioners to translate policy intentions in different ways (Danida 2000a, 2000b). Although not conceived to be so, the HRDP was a pilot project that sought to operationalise a rights-based approach to development at a time when its mother organisation had not made that shift of development paradigm. It still has not (Danida 2000c). A rights-based approach focuses on changes practised in the Third World without apparent consideration of how aid agencies work at home or how mechanisms making the development agency accountable to the people it affects with its external aid should be made operational (Uvin 2004: 127-130). Whatever the challenges to developing a rights-based approach, meaningful participation and a commitment by the development actor to respect the direction and priorities emerging from participatory processes should be a minimum standard. It was in an attempt to live up to this principle that the HRDP felt

obliged to respond when the priority request came from the civil society groups consulted to get involved in local peace work in Yumbe instead of pursuing the programme's own priority of providing general human rights and democratisation support.

Elements and Rationale of HRDP Support

The HRDP involvement in the UNRF II peace process had three elements: support for community peace initiatives; involvement in ceasefire and negotiations; and, from 2003 onwards, peace agreement implementation. This section reflects on the first two elements.

Community Peace Initiatives

Support to district networks of civil society organisations is a core component of the HRDP. In early 2001 the programme initiated a participatory process in Yumbe on 'how to work with civil society on human rights and democratisation'. In response, the Aringa-Obongi Peace Initiative Committee approached the HRDP with a request to support civil society and local government in its peace initiative. The peace committee's view was that community and civil society involvement was a crucial but missing element in the peace process that by 2001 was moribund. The HRDP management considered this an appropriate entry point with a view use the 'opportunity offered' to promote broader participation in local democracy building processes. To put it plainly, the HRDP did not foresee, and for that matter was not prepared for, the contingency that a follow-up to supporting local workshops on peace might well be a mediation or facilitation role in peace negotiations. In hindsight the programme was more focused on potentially relevant 'events' [i.e. workshops] and less prepared for a process-oriented involvement in a peace process and the necessary follow-up conflict transformation support. Looking ahead, development programmes that get involved should definitely allow for the contingency that routine and limited support to local peace workshops could evolve into more hands-on third party involvement — if one says 'A' there is a moral obligation to prepare for 'B'.

AROPIC organised the workshop and the chief political commissar of the UPDF, who since 1998 had been in charge of the peace initiative on the government's side, attended. This provided a new level of legitimacy and enabled the HRDP become a 'third party' between the community initiative and the highest level of government decision-making. Follow-up support in November and December 2001 included a workshop at district level and eight others at sub-county level for district leaders, traditional leaders and active UNRF II rebels. In all 2,199 people participated, but women where woefully under-represented.

Still, by March 2002, the HRDP had withdrawn from direct involvement in civil society peace initiatives in Yumbe. The HRDP was made up of four professional staff in a liaison office attached to the Royal Danish Embassy in Kampala. The embassy took political and overall strategic decisions and had concluded that the HRDP had no comparative advantage over DED's peace project thathad a full-time internationally staffed project office in Yumbe.

Ceasefire and Negotiations

Unexpectedly, around April 19 2002 the UNRF II returned in full force from Sudan and set up camp near Yumbe town, fully armed and willing to negotiate, but without adequate food supplies. As will be elaborated below, the shift in the willingness of UNRF II to

negotiate should be attributed to the fact the military situation changed after it lost support of the Sudan government. State House remained in the driving seat, but the Ministry of Internal Affairs firmly took charge of the political process with the donors.

With the new turn of events, Danida now had a comparative advantage. Its human rights programme had gained a degree of grassroots credibility through support to local peace initiatives. Links with credible partner NGOs provided local knowledge and a presence on the ground in Yumbe. The same NGOs had the financial management capacity that made funding technically possible.

Crucially, the HRDP had gained access to, and some degree of trust from, senior government policy and security levels. Where earlier it had worked with government consent, the government now *requested* HRDP was to support the district level process. It also asked the programme to conduct liaison with the wider donor community.

The challenge was to link district-level peace dynamics with high-level government and donor-level decision-making. Danida made a strategic choice to work through the Donor Technical Group. It recognised that it would be too risky to attempt to 'go it alone'. Moreover, support for peace processes requires harmonising political agendas and effective intra-donor coordination. Besides its other merits, the UNRF II process was hailed by donors for 'trail-blazing' international involvement in resolving the LRA crisis. Technically agreement was reached on a division of roles between 'dynamic and conflict-responsive financial disbursements' by in-country bilateral donors, and less flexible funding streams requiring longer preparation from the World Bank in particular, the World Bank.

In a breakthrough in October 2002 the UNRF II high command came to Kampala to witness the signing of a US$700,000 support project for the Amnesty Commission. This support for resettlement of ex-UNRF II combatants was made available by a consortium of bilateral DTG donors. It provided an incentive to the UNRF II at a critical time. The peace agreement was finally signed on Christmas Eve 2002, but not before a significantly more forceful government approach had changed the parameters for negotiations.

Critical Factors in Confidence-building and Negotiations

Snapshot of Conflict Dynamics and Initial Confidence-building Measures

Analysing conflict dynamics through the lens of development programming will fall naïvely short if changing security dynamics are ignored. While the HRDP was involved in the UNRF II peace process in 2001-2002 there were two shifts in the military situation. The first was in early 2002 and the second in December 2002 when UPDF military action against the UNRF II was barely averted.

In April 2002 the UNRF II was running out of military options. Its return to Uganda coincided with Sudan agreeing to allow major Ugandan military operations inside Sudan. This was in part a response to considerable pressure from the United States after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 that also prompted Sudan to withdraw support and bases from Ugandan rebels. The peace workshops in Yumbe district funded by the HRDP in November and December 2001 were perhaps an inducement for the UNRF II to negotiate because they created new momentum and some optimism. However, the changed military situation in Sudan was probably more decisive for the timing of the unilateral steps that the UNRF II took when it returned to Uganda in April 2002. There were a number of

tactical advantages for the UNRF II to return voluntarily to Uganda earlier rather than later under military pressure from Sudan. One such advantage was presumably that an orderly exodus from Sudan would enable the UNRF II to keep its force intact and to bring in the weapons that were its strongest asset in the negotiations.

The prevailing assessment in the government and the UPDF was that the UNRF II did not pose an immediate military risk. After all, an informal ceasefire had been respected since 1998. Taking the Sudan factor into account, negotiations with a force which had run out of options would probably be swiftly concluded. When the UNRF II returned to Uganda in April 2002 it was met with incentives for peace- and trust-building. Demands for a camp, food and other supplies were met at short notice through a combination of government and donor funds and thanks to a very quick response from the World Food Programme. Within days of its arrival the UNRF II high command addressed a public meeting it had asked for. HRDP funded the meeting and brokered the handing over of UNRF II child soldiers to UNICEF.

These mutual confidence-building measures sent important signals:

1. The UNRF II was treated with a degree of dignity and was allowed to present its return as a gesture for peace while underplaying the military dynamics at the time;

2. It looked as if the government would achieve its goal of pacification through negotiations and it was seen to be serious about negotiating with genuine negotiation partners (by implication it was not the government but the LRA that made successful negotiations elusive in Acholi);

3. The DTG and HRDP and could play a constructive Track II role by supporting local NGOs and engaging the UNRF II in training and in a series of workshops on conflict resolution, Uganda's development programmes, and the countries decentralised system of government.

After the ceasefire

On 15 June 2002 a formal ceasefire agreement was signed, but it took longer than anticipated to start formal peace negotiations. The government saw the UNRF II mainly as a military group without a serious political agenda. From that perspective the immediate political risk of a persuasive approach to the peace process was that it would allow the UNRF II to prolong the negotiations and craft a new political agenda on top of old military grievances. The government was concerned that the UNRF II would leverage the involvement of the international community – at gunpoint, so to speak – to become a political force aligned with the Reform Agenda and other political opposition forces in Uganda. This scenario started to play out after the formal ceasefire of June 2002. This was partly due to the surfacing of a UNRF II 'political wing'. 'Talks-about-talks' became more tense because some in the political wing, who had not been involved in

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the formal ceasefire agreement, wanted to backtrack. The risk grew that the HRDP would be co-opted in one agenda or another. As its neutrality was at stake, it became more difficult for the HRDP to effectively promote Track II involvement because the government was having doubts about the third-party role HRDP was playing.

It took the UNRF II a long time to formulate an agenda for the peace talks. The initial

HRDP assessment was that this was caused by a lack of capacity to negotiate. It followed that in order for peace process to proceed, the UNRF II should be trained in negotiation skills and exposed to examples of successful peace negotiations. During training and facilitation in June and July 2002, the UNRF II used the HRDP offices extensively with the tacit acceptance of the government to work on its agenda for the peace talks. As the newly arrived UNRF II political wing became more assertive, there was growing concern in the government that the 'provide incentives' approach was backfiring. In the government's view it emboldened the UNRF II to craft a new political agenda. This seemed to be confirmed when the agenda that the UNRF II submitted turned out to be highly compatible with the agendas of the main political opposition groups active inside and outside Uganda. Triangulated sources confirmed that opposition political contacts promoting a 'new agenda' for the UNRF II were indeed active during this period. The government inferred that the assertiveness of the UNRF II was partly due to an excess of skills enhancement and reassurance from the DTG and HRDP.

Concurrently, a rift became apparent between a faction in the UNRF II that wanted to negotiate in earnest to end the insurgency and a faction that was procrastinating to keep open the option of a return to military action. It was against this background that the official signing of the Amnesty Commission's US$700,000 demobilisation and resettlement project became a crucial confidence-building measure. The UNRF II high command had planned to boycott the ceremony. The HRDP made it clear that if this occurred it would withdraw from the process. The UNRF II leadership eventually came to Kampala to witness the signing and confidence in the peace process increased. For the UNRF II this meant that, temporarily at least, the faction that wanted to end the military phase of the conflict prevailed.

Subsequently, internal divisions emerged again and led to a deterioration of relations between the government interlocutors and their UNRF II counterparts. One high-profile incident involved the manhandling at gunpoint of the senior UPDF officer in charge of the peace process. During this period, when the situation became politically very sensitive, the Irish Embassy played a key political role that went beyond the technical involvement of HRDP and the DTG. To find a 'technical way' forward the idea was conceived to bring on board the Uganda Centre for Conflict Resolution and organise an a extended joint 'preparation workshop' in the negotiation process, bringing together government, UPDF and UNRF II actors in order to promote a common understanding of conflict resolution and negotiation. Although this was the stated purpose of the event, the underlying agenda was to support an intensive confidence- and trust-building exercise in an attempt to save the negotiations.

The Negotiations Phase

These negotiation dynamics should be seen in light of a second major change in the military/security situation: Uganda's military campaign in southern Sudan was not going as planned; the LRA was not vanquished in a short, focused military action, but instead moved back to northern Uganda which again became a battleground; Ugandan anti-government insurgents were rallying in the Democratic Republic of Congo; and there were strong indications that there were contacts between elements of the UNRF II and armed groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Ugandan President Museveni issued an ultimatum in late November 2003 demanding that the UNRF II hand over its weapons without further delay. It appeared the peace talks had collapsed. The UPDF was deploying soldiers, armoured vehicles and tanks to enforce the ultimatum. In a last-minute attempt to avert a UPDF attack on the UNRF II camp in Yumbe district, meetings were held between

a government delegation chaired by Lt Gen. Salim Saleh, the President's brother, and the UNRF II leadership. It was at this critical juncture that the UNRF II's internal differences were decided, when the leading 'hard-line' protagonist was relieved of all his responsibilities (UNRF II 2004:18).

The 'military deal' - the handing over of weapons - was settled during these talks, leaving easier issues to the subsequent peace negotiations. The possibility of 'the joint preparation workshop' that had been floated by Ireland and the HRDP was raised as an acceptable (and face-saving) next step.

The HRDP declined formal requests to have 'a presence' during the peace negotiations. This was a hard decision that *inter alia* was based on the assessment that the most difficult issue (weapons) had been settled (clearly an example of the government's 'muscle') and that 'presence' was too unclear and not necessarily constructive as an agreed role. Instead, Danida and the Irish Embassy funded the 'joint preparatory workshop' and promoted the involvement of Amnesty Commission and the Ugandan Centre for Conflict Resolution. The peace agreement reached on Christmas Eve 2002 was thus a wholly national affair.

Development Assistance as Third-party Intervention

Perhaps the most important lesson learned from the UNRF II process is that development actors urgently need to understand themselves as third-party interventionists to make aid programmes more flexible and relevant in peace processes. On the one hand, one could accept as part of the process the development enterprise's largely illusory language of partnership and national ownership because it so blatantly obscures real power relations between donor and recipient countries. Official development aid is, despite its egalitarian rhetoric, an instrument in the 'carrot-and-stick' toolbox of international policy and cooperation (Cortright 1997:xii). On the other hand, such development aid can achieve a relevant strategic positioning of aid programmes in conflict areas and the prudent management of the roles development actors seek to play in peace processes and conflict transformation.

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Persuasive power and a mixture of mediator roles to work with middle-rank donor and government officials and NGOs (Track II) and grassroots level players (Track III) was exactly what Denmark's human rights programme could leverage when the opportunity was offered. It was protected by one of Uganda's major bilateral donors. The limitations of the persuasive power of development actors became evident as the peace negotiations were approaching diplomatic and national security levels (Track I).

One trend is that development actors want to do more and better conflict resolution. But resolving conflict involves making trade-offs on human rights. A key dilemma for development actors supporting compromise acceptable to conflicting parties is the concurrent sacrificing of the advocacy-oriented human rights paradigm that would reject amnesty for rebels – an increasingly central normative underpinning of development assistance. This dilemma requires careful consideration of the respective roles and, at times, incompatible postures of human rights and conflict resolution practitioners (Parlevliet

2001). As the arena of operations gets crowded, the challenge to achieve coherent third party intervention across disciplines grows. It is paramount that development actors – including human rights advocates – reflect on and strategise the responsibilities, opportunities and limitations of their roles on the interface of development, human rights, democratisation and conflict resolution.

Third party intervention theory adds to the development discourse typologies a spectrum from 'non-coercive' to 'coercive' third party intervention (Miall *et al* 2000). This includes 'conciliation', 'consultation' and 'pure mediation' as well as 'power mediation, arbitration and peacekeeping' (Fisher 2001). Increasingly donor countries add 'peacemaking' and 'peace enforcement' to this range. Along this line, they are rethinking the role of development assistance: it becomes an instrument for 'peacebuilding'.

This typology is suitably complemented by Mitchell's (2003) detailed breakdown of core mediator roles and tasks as related to the pre-negotiation, negotiation and post-agreement phases of third party intervention. Where development aid is used in conflict resolution, development actors play the roles of 'reassurer', 'enskiller' 'facilitator' and 'enhancer'. In addition to the post-agreement roles that Mitchell (2003) identifies ('verifyer', 'implementer' and 'reconciler'), development agencies in so-called post-conflict situations may seek to play roles as 'peacebuilders', 'partners', 'equalisers' and 'democratisers'.

Reflection on one's own role is a key to accountability of development actors in any kind of conflict resolution effort. It is also crucial to make the step from 'lessons learned' to 'lessons applied'. One of the reasons for the dearth of documentation of such efforts could be that an honest documentation of such donor intermediary roles – warts and all – would depart from the balanced image that many third party interventionists would want to project.

As manager of the HRDP at the time, I would like to claim that every step of the involvement in the third party involvement process described was based on balanced strategic considerations, that every outcome was foreseen, and that every next move was anticipated. The reality, however, is that most of the HRDP's – and by extension, Danida's – involvement in the UNRF II peace process was 'learning by doing' in an effort to stay on the 'right road' (Anderson and Olson 2003:5): The HRDP did not have a written and systematic analysis of the UNRF II conflict (as best practice would dictate); nor had programme staff fully considered the range of conflict management strategies that could guide their decisions. This, however, does not mean that actions were not strategically considered, or that the staff did not have relevant skills. Equally, while there was no explicit instruction from the Danish Embassy in Kampala to get more proactively involved in the UNRF II conflict, this does not mean that the process was not supported at policy level.

None of the ideas, goodwill and models for conflict resolution suggested by the HRDP would have had much impact without Danida's willingness and ability to back suggestions with timely funding.

Any participatory or community-driven development programme has the ambition to link grassroots priorities (horizontal dynamics) with higher levels of decision-making on funding (vertical dynamics). Formalised procedures, checks and balances and lengthy response times are the norm in 'standard development practice'. This is just not good enough in peace processes when windows for action open and close quickly. None of the ideas, goodwill and models for conflict resolution suggested by the HRDP would have had much impact without Danida's willingness and ability to back suggestions

with timely funding. In this respect, the HRDP mechanism allowed Danida to play a very effective mediation role of process *enhancer* (Mitchell 2003; Darby & MacGinty 2003). Initially only Danida seemed to have the funding flexibility, the decentralised decision-making authority and the will that could back good ideas with expedient release of funds to manage the delicate process. Later Ireland would play a similar – but more political – role, especially during the negotiation phase. Evidently the practice of 'putting your money where your mouth is' greatly contributed to the credibility of Danida's involvement.

What was brought into play was the significant flexibility inherent in the HRDP programme design: its budget was structured to allow resources to be allocated responsively. The responsiveness of the programme was further improved through its close proximity to the Danish Embassy and the delegated funding approval authority vested in the HRDP. It is important that Danida (and other development actors) realise the necessity of these structural, organisational and procedural factors as they are most amenable to replication and application elsewhere. Process orientation in conflict resolution can only be maintained if funds can flow expediently. The devil is in the administrative details that determine the time it takes to move from a relevant idea to approval and disbursement of donor funding. Pre-positioning third party intervention warrants far more attention from development actors; they should pay close attention to these seemingly mundane details.

In donor circles and under the umbrella of the DTG the HRDP's *de facto* role alternated between that of 'focal point' and 'technical secretariat' in the UNRF II peace process. Its role was to function as an informational and operational hub. This was neither planned for nor sought as is often the case with more formalised – and often competing – third party coordination structures in conflict situations.

> Step by step the HRDP grew into the role of de facto mediator because of a 'positive feedback loop' in which the programme incrementally gained the trust of grassroots and government actors, as well as the UNRF II leadership.

Step by step the HRDP grew into the role of de facto mediator because of a 'positive feedback loop' in which the programme incrementally gained the trust of grassroots and government actors, as well as the UNRF II leadership. Importantly, while taking the initiative when it decided it was necessary, the HRDP never imposed itself on the conflict actors. It worked within a typical Track II pathway but construed this to include different mediation roles (Mitchell 2003). This literally included 'providing good offices' and 'envisioning' ways forward on trust-building measures, as well as 'camouflaging' workshops as neutral ground for 'convening' conflicting parties. During the pre-negotiation process the HRDP mediation role included that of 'reassurer' (in particular the UNRF II needed the reassurance they perceived stemming from 'the involvement of the international community').

As described, the high-risk mediation role of 'enskiller' required careful management. On the one hand, UNRF II had little capacity to prepare and conduct negotiations and this led to many delays. On the other hand, government actors were always wary that allowing the UNRF II to be trained in conflict management and negotiation skills would strengthen the UNRF II to a point that it would lead to protracted negotiations.

Although at times there were calls from the UNRF II for 'formal' international mediation (i.e. Track I third party involvement), at no time did the government request formal third party mediation. Its position was that constructive engagement, facilitation and financial support from the international community were welcome. It should not be forgotten that the peace process between the UNRF II and the government had already reached the stage

of an informal ceasefire that had lasted for three or four years before the international involvement (including that of Danida) started.

It was a potential win-win situation for the government, the UNRF II and donors. Particularly for the HRDP, the critical factors that contributed to confidence-building were that:

1. The HRDP never tried to lead the process and kept within the government's overall game plan. In mediation terms it stuck to integrative use of power and influence, not challenging sovereignty. Clearly this was possible only because civilian and very influential military personalities continued to favour a negotiated settlement;

2. Funds were made available in a flexible and timely manner. The HRDP played an effective 'enhancer' role as far as both the government/UPDF and the UNRF II were concerned, and the programme delivered on process facilitation);

3. The HRDP used the goodwill it created with government actors to promote measures that prepared for meaningful negotiations and created more space to play an 'enskiller' role for the UNRF II. This entailed conflict resolution and training in Uganda's development policy for all UNRF II officers during the formal ceasefire, life skills training combined with basic facilitation to articulate negotiation positions, and access to computers;

4. The DTG, through the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Amnesty Commission, put in place an incentive framework to provide a credible transitional safety net for UNRF II fighters (the Yumbe Special Project). This way the early, rather improvised work on the UNRF II conflict was placed in a more standard operating mode befitting a development assistance agency.

When the UPDF's threat analysis in November 2002 concluded it was time to use military force, the investment that development actors had made in third-party invention became a crucial factor to keep the peace process on track and avoid a reversal to violent conflict. That said, the realisation of the peace agreement was achieved by Ugandans.

Conclusion

In hindsight, Danida's rationale for getting involved in the UNRF II peace process was limited. It was based on the general assumption that supporting civil society in local conflict resolution is a positive contribution to a local peace process. But international third party intervention was neither the prime motor nor the initiator of the process. Along different tracks social network mediation (Fisher 2001) through grassroots women's organisations and mostly male military personnel had since 1998 contributed much to preparing the ground.

The withdrawal of Sudanese support to the UNRF II after 11 September 2001 was a decisive factor prompting the UNRF II to negotiate with more vigour. The government had for a long time prioritised persuasive approaches to resolving the conflict, but this was based on an assessment that the UNRF II had a limited political agenda and militarily was a containable risk. The government endorsed local mediators and provided initial finance for their mediation and social mobilisation efforts. During an informal ceasefire for three years the government condoned and contributed to the upkeep of 400 armed UNRF II fighters in a demilitarised zone in Yumbe district.

From the outset the government set the parameters for the mediation roles that international third party intervention could play. It was firmly in the lead and donor involvement never moved beyond a Track II type 'consultation mode' (Fisher 2001). It is important to realise

that the international community, including donor and NGO development actors, had no hand in the government's initial approach or in bringing about the conditions that allowed for the international third party roles in the process (enhancing, enskilling, reassuring and liaising). However, international third party involvement, through informal consultations, policy harmonisation and technical coordination became an important ingredient that moved the peace process towards a formal peace agreement.

From a national and grassroots perspective, it was perhaps fortunate that there was a degree of openness in the institutional thinking and coordination of in-country international development actors. The HRDP was fortunate to have flexible funding and decentralised technical decision-making procedures in place when it needed them. Despite their ambition and rhetoric, development actors generally are not geared towards this type of quick response. Development actors at the time did not see the urgent need to understand themselves as *third party interventionists* in the UNRF II peace process.

Conflict resolution theory and practice have important contributions to make to the outlook and conceptual framework guiding development aid interventions. Power plays, whether persuasive or coercive, are part of mainstream development practice. As donors become 'wannabe' actors in peacemaking, they and their field staff should in assessing be honest and explicit about the power they apply. With proper humility they need to be nuanced and explicit about the opportunities and limitations of the roles they can play.

On the one hand, tapping into the potential of development assistance to work on conflict requires changing a risk-averse approach that instinctively will seek to work around conflict; on the other hand, the risk is that development practice will blunder into local peace processes by applying old remedies through a system geared towards longer-term changes. Development actors therefore need to assuage their institutional ambitions to become players in conflict resolution and take account of the more sensitive and reflective concepts that mediators have long used to inform their third party involvement

The compartmentalisation of donor countries' foreign policy, military, humanitarian and development aid administration would need to be further reduced. Donors need to be more flexible in administering aid programmes if they are to be relevant in peace processes. Process orientation in conflict resolution can be maintained only if funds can flow expediently. In development parlance, this is an 'actionable' issue: the structural, organisational and procedural factors that helped to sustain the peace process are most amenable to replication and application elsewhere.

As this case study shows, when the opportunity comes their way, development actors should be prepared for a hands-on third party role in peace processes. But others can also do this. Development assistance itself should be understood as being instrumental to moving beyond violent conflict by reinforcing national processes that lead to social and economic development, reduced structural conflict and stronger channels and mechanisms for non-violent conflict resolution. The key competence and role of development actors is their ability to create conditions for sustaining and consolidating peace – by providing incentives for conflicting parties to reach a deal because support for reconstruction and development will follow. The earlier this perspective is added to peace negotiations the better. The rationale for integrating a peacebuilding paradigm into development assistanceto consolidate peace must be buttressed with recognition for a need for equitable development. Development actors will need to respond by stronger and longer-term commitment to address the root causes of the conflict – even if this means that current institutional policies and operational practice need to be adjusted.

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Endnotes

[1] The poverty datum line used in Uganda is based on the cost of meeting calorie needs from the food basket of the poorest half of the population, with some allowance for non-food needs (USAID 2004).

[2] In July 2004 the United Nations estimated that there were 1.5 million displaced people, according to a report of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), available at www.reliefweb.net. Jan Egeland, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, in November 2003 talked about the situation as 'worse than any other forgotten and neglected crisis in the world at the moment' (IRIN 12 November 2003).

[3] http://www.um.dk/en

[4] Under a special protocol signed in March 2002, Sudan allowed the UPDF to launch an offensive against the LRA inside Sudan

5 The Centre for Conflict Resolution (CECORE) is a non-profit NGO based in Kampala, and with programmes in the Great Lakes Region and the Greater Horn of Africa Region, other parts of Africa and in the Asia/Pacific region, and presents itself as 'an initiative of Ugandan people working to seek alternative and creative means of preventing, managing and resolving conflicts' (www.cecore.org).

[6] The author had several telephone conversations with government delegates and UNRF II representatives during the talks to give assurances for funding of the peace negotiations, in close consultation with the Irish Embassy.

[7] The full range of roles Mitchell (2003:84) distinguishes are: **pre-negotiation** - explorer, reassurer, decoupler, unifier, enskiller, convener; **during negotiations** - facilitator, envisioner, enhancer, guarantor, legitimiser; **post-agreement** - verifier, implementer, reconciler.

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