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Governing chronic poverty under inclusive liberalism: the case of the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund

Frederick Golooba-Mutebi
Sam Hickey

Makerere Institute of Social Research
Makerere University

MANCHESTER
1824
The University of Manchester

Institute for Development Policy and Management
University of Manchester

This working paper is part of the Government of Chronic Poverty series

What is Chronic Poverty?

The distinguishing feature of chronic poverty is extended duration in absolute poverty.

Therefore, chronically poor people always, or usually, live below a poverty line, which is normally defined in terms of a money indicator (e.g. consumption, income, etc.), but could also be defined in terms of wider or subjective aspects of deprivation.

This is different from the transitorily poor, who move in and out of poverty, or only occasionally fall below the poverty line.

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The Government of Chronic Poverty: from the politics of exclusion to the politics of citizenship?

The papers in this series have been undertaken as part of the 'Government of Chronic Poverty' project within the 'Adverse Incorporation and Social Exclusion' theme within the Chronic Poverty Research Centre. Amongst other things, this theme is concerned with the politics of efforts to tackle structural forms of chronic poverty.[1] Although each of the papers in this series engages with a different country context and policy issue, they all frame contemporary efforts to reduce chronic poverty as essentially *political* efforts to (re)govern the relationships between the trustees of development and poor citizens caught within processes of adverse incorporation and social exclusion. From this perspective they ask whether contemporary development interventions and actors, within what critics have termed the era of 'inclusive liberalism', necessarily depoliticise the task of reducing structural forms of poverty, or whether they are capable of empowering chronically poor people as rights-bearing citizens. While each paper makes clear that the answers to this question are highly contextualised, the synthesis paper seeks to draw out the comparative and broader implications of these studies for efforts to understand and challenge chronic poverty.

Abstract

The paradigm of 'inclusive liberalism' that currently characterises international development places a particular emphasis on the responsibility of communities to overcome the often structural problems of poverty and exclusion. Such approaches have become increasingly controversial: on the one hand, it is celebrated by optimists as the most empowering way forward for marginal citizens, and on the other, it is derided as an abrogation of responsibility by development trustees by sceptics. Uganda provides a particularly interesting context to explore these debates, not least because it has become a standard bearer for inclusive liberalism at the same time that regional inequalities within it have become increasingly apparent. Our investigation of the flagship response to deep impoverishment in its northern region, the World Bank-funded Northern Uganda Social Action Fund, offers greater support to the sceptical position, not least because of the ways in which the more pernicious tendencies within inclusive liberalism have converged with the contemporary politics of development in Uganda. This includes a tendency to blame the poorest for their own predicament and a failure to include the North within the regime's broader social contract.

Keywords: Politics, Uganda, inclusive liberalism, citizenship participation, social action funds.

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[1] See Hickey and du Toit (2007), 'Adverse incorporation, social exclusion and chronic poverty', CPRC working paper 81.

Acknowledgements

Dr. Golooba-Mutebi is a Political Scientist and Senior Research Fellow at the Makerere Institute of Social Research in Uganda. He was educated at Makerere University and the London School of Economics and Political Science. From 2001 to 2004 he was a Research Officer and Postdoctoral Fellow at the MRC/University Public Health and Health Transitions Unit (Agincourt), School of Public Health, University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg where he is an Honorary Senior Researcher. He is a Research Associate of the Crisis States Research Centre at London School of Economics and Political Science, and the Chronic Poverty Research Centre. He has conducted research in Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan and South Africa, and published articles, reports, and newspaper columns on politics, health, local government, poverty, refugees, and witchcraft.

Sam Hickey is Senior Lecturer in Development Studies at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Manchester. He is Thematic Co-ordinator of research into Adverse Incorporation and Social Exclusion within the CPRC and the editor of this series of working papers on 'The Government of Chronic Poverty'. His work focuses on the politics of development and has been published in several journals and also three co-edited volumes: *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation* (2004, with Giles Mohan, Zed), *Can NGOs Make a Difference?* (2007, with Tony Bebbington and Diana Mitlin, Zed) and *Rights-Based Approaches to Development* (2009, with Diana Mitlin, Kumarian,).

Email: fgmutebi@yahoo.com; sam.hickey@manchester.ac.uk

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> Despite the promising language, contemporary development interventions emphasising community, participation, and empowerment still have crucial limitations. …they pay astonishingly little attention to the character of ruling regimes, which they continue to treat as development partners desiring only the best for their citizens…(and)…these interventions continue to exclude structural sources of inequality from their technical domain and focus upon an incarcerated 'local' in which properly guided villagers are expected to improve their own conditions by their own efforts (Li, 2007: 275).

> In an attempt to…support the North so that it can participate more in mainstream development, government decided to adopt the Social Action Fund…SAFs represent a paradigm shift from conventional development planning because they put communities at the forefront of planning and management of development interventions to improve their livelihoods (National Resistance Movement Party Manifesto, 2006: 92).

In her seminal account of the World Bank's efforts to improve human well-being in Indonesia, Li (2007) draws attention to the specific ways in which problems of poverty and exclusion are understood, managed and tackled within contemporary development thinking and practice. Arguing that poor people have been framed as central to both problem and solution, Li shows how participatory research techniques are employed by most development agencies to establish the grounds for intervention. She argues that such approaches tend to produce highly localised accounts of poverty and exclusion that inevitably segue into responses that rely heavily on community participation as a major part of the solution. As such, those least able to help themselves are rendered responsible for overcoming the often structural problems thrown up by uneven development via 'government by community' approaches (Rose, 2000).

In making her argument, Li joins a growing body of critics concerned with the advent of 'inclusive liberalism' or the 'third way' approach to development (e.g. Craig and Porter, 2006). Here, inclusive liberalism is defined as the direct successor to more red-blooded forms of neoliberalism, whereby a preference for market-based solutions remains paramount but is joined by recognition of the need to ameliorate the worst excesses and omissions of free market capitalism. Within its broader commitment to the liberalisation of goods and capital, inclusive liberalism seeks strategies of government that can help prepare individuals to cope with economic globalisation, improving their capacities and inclinations as economic citizens, while also offering protection through social policy and community-based support (e.g. Mahon, 2008). Although its origins are in certain industrialised countries, inclusive liberalism has travelled remarkably well, as evidenced by the ubiquitous presence of its key rhetorical tropes – inclusion, opportunity, empowerment, social capital, social protection, participation –

in a wide range of global and national policy discourses (see synthesis paper for this series). Governments throughout the global south have thus adopted the same rhetoric and associated practices of 'good government and poverty reduction' (Craig and Porter, 2006), including a strong procedural emphasis on consultations with citizens, decentralised forms of service delivery and community driven forms of development.

In his critique of such third way approaches to social policy in the United Kingdom, Amin (2005) identifies the highly ambitious outcomes that are expected of community-based approaches in overcoming problems of regional inequality and exclusion. In particular, he notes that communities are identified as the key mechanism through which empowered forms of citizenship will emerge to challenge the multiple dimensions of exclusion: political, social and economic. Here, community participation 'is expected to stimulate a sense of community, civic regard, civic energy, and active citizenship' (*ibid*: 616–17), mobilising previously indolent subjects into active doers and claimants. Under this rubric, the underlying causes of social breakdown are overlooked in preference for 'a normativity of cohesion as cure' (*ibid*: 616), whereby the problems of poverty and exclusion are defined not in terms of the broader political economy but as essentially local problems requiring local people to solve them. Here we see 'a redefinition of spatial inequality as a problem of local origin in need of entrepreneurial resolution' (*ibid*: 613), whereby even the material problems of poverty and exclusion can be solved through community-based economic activities. As our case-study of one effort to improve lives in northern Uganda shows, the same assumptions also closely underpin current approaches to problems of exclusion and poverty in the global south.

Indeed, Uganda provides a particularly interesting context within which to explore this broader move towards inclusive forms of liberalism. Recently described as 'a poster-child for liberal approaches to economic and social development in Africa', Uganda has undertaken reforms that amount to 'an essentially liberal agenda with an accompanying language of participation, democratisation and empowerment' (Jones, 2009:1). Some observers, particularly those international development agencies keen to have a success story to associate with, draw attention to Uganda's significant success in reducing overall levels of poverty during the period in which this apparently shared strategy was adopted (UBOS, 2003). More critical voices, meanwhile, increasingly recognise that this generalised success story has little purchase on the socio-economic or political realities encountered by most Ugandans in rural Uganda (e.g. Jones, 2009), particularly those living in the northern parts of the country where poverty levels remain double those experienced elsewhere in the country (Nandy, 2008). Indeed, the 'showcase-Uganda' narrative has run in parallel with Uganda's other main 'development' story regarding the lengthy civil conflict in the north, with a particular focus on the atrocities committed by the Lord's Resistance Army.

Even with the onset of peace in northern Uganda over the past few years, living conditions in the north compare unfavourably with those in most other parts of the country, as recognised

by government and independent researchers alike (e.g. MFPED, 2002, Nandy, 2008). Despite several earlier efforts to tackle problems of poverty and conflict in this region, this has meant that national elites in Uganda, along with international development trustees, have been forced to confront Uganda's own internal periphery. Here, Uganda's development trustees have sought to explain the apparent contradiction by blaming the north itself for this predicament, both in terms of conflict and violence.[2] This move is discussed in greater depth below but for now can be illustrated by the second quote that helped open this article. Here, the last election manifesto of the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) seeks to promote the Northern Ugandan Social Action Fund (NUSAF), a project jointly funded by the Ugandan government and the World Bank and which constitutes the main public action against poverty in the north under the NRM. Here, the responsibility for the north 'catching-up' with mainstream Uganda is left squarely with local communities in the north.[3] NUSAF mirrors the type of community-driven development project investigated by Li in Indonesia and which the World Bank and others have promoted widely elsewhere (Mansuri and Rao, 2005). The project seeks to close the development gap between the north and the rest of the country through handing control of development processes and resources directly to local community groups.

As with Li's study, this paper explores what she identifies as two significant mismatches that characterise this particular strategy of inclusive liberalism. The first is between the type of analysis used to inform the project and the deeper causes and characteristics of poverty and violence in the region. The second involves a disjuncture between the dominant modes of citizenship and public action promoted by the project on the one hand, and localised understandings of these on the other. In addition, we seek to go further than Li (2007: 27) who did not take her work beyond an analysis of project *intentionality* to evaluate the actual *effects* of the project on the underlying problems of poverty and violence in Indonesia. In taking this further step we seek to avoid the tendency to read-off the failure of development interventions from their stated intentions, something that Corbridge (2007) and others have warned against. In particular, 'it is very difficult to assume that the de-politicisation of development does indeed occur, or at least occur in an uncomplicated sense' (Chhotray, 2007: 1051).

The paper proceeds as follows: Section II discusses the politics of development in Uganda in terms of inclusive liberalism. Section III explores how the NUSAF project emerged in this context, particularly in relation to the particular understanding of poverty that dominates policy discussions and political discourse in Uganda. Section IV introduces our research

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[2] This mirrors the tendency of third way enthusiasts such as Anthony Giddens to try and explain away the deepening inequalities that have arisen under inclusive liberalism with reference to the internal failure of countries from the south to jump on board (Gledhill, 2001).

[3] Importantly, the same logic also informs not only the World Bank-Government of Uganda's plans for a new phase of NUSAF (World Bank, 2008) but also the Government's major Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for the North (GoU, 2007).

approach while Section V presents findings on the impact of the programme over its first phase (2002–08). Section VI discusses these findings in broader terms with reference to the debates set out above, and Section VII concludes and suggests some ways forward for thinking and acting around chronic poverty in northern Uganda.

2   The rise of inclusive liberalism in Uganda

Following the ascension to power of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) in 1986, it was by no means clear which type of development strategy Uganda would pursue to rebuild the economic and political institutions that had been severely damaged during the two preceding regimes. Although different in important respects, the regimes of both Idi Amin (1972–09) and Milton Obote's second term (1980–05), were both characterised by a disregard for the due process of governance and a general failure to promote either economic or social forms of development (Golooba-Mutebi, 2009). Having fought and won a civil war through one of Africa's more enlightened guerrilla struggles, the NRM came to power with an ambitious set of commitments to promote not only stability but also economic recovery and the re-establishment of constitutional politics. National consultations and participatory forms of democracy would directly involve citizens in discussions over both the constitution and the provision of public goods. Inspired by socialism, the NRM initially sought to develop trading ties with leftist governments. This experiment was short-lived; faced with rising inflation and a lack of foreign exchange the government had, by 1987, started to fall in line with the International Monetary Fund's neoliberal approach to reforming the economy. This did not proceed without a struggle; as one close observer at the time relates, the decision to privatise the parastatals taken in 1988 was only implemented in 1994–05 (Brett, 1996a). Nonetheless, Brett also notes that 'the NRM leadership was more concerned with compromise than ideology and rapidly made sufficient concessions to maintain external support' (*ibid*: 213). The relative speed of this concession to neoliberal reforms aimed at reducing the role of the state was influenced by the recent political history. Extensive periods of misrule and poor governance had led to high levels of public distrust in government intervention which was perceived as corrupt and inefficient. Importantly, it had also severely weakened the public sector interest groups that might oppose reform (Dijkstra and van Donge, 2001: 845). By the early 1990s, then, 'relationships between donors and government had become extremely cordial' (Brett, 1996: 213, also Golooba-Mutebi, 2009), and insiders pointed to a high degree of ownership of these economic reforms (Kasekende and Atingi-Ego, 1999).

The most lauded element of these reforms was the liberalisation of coffee markets, which gave smallholders market-prices for their goods during a boom in global coffee prices and which has been credited with being the main driver behind Uganda's impressive reduction in poverty during the 1990s (Dijkstra and van Donge, 2001). This apparent success allowed donors to claim Uganda as the jewel in their crown, an emblematic case for neoliberal reform

that also provided a degree of cover for the country's somewhat different approach to issues of political liberalisation. Here, the NRM promoted a system of 'no-party' democracy which entailed a mixture of representative democracy, whereby elections were held but political parties were banned from campaigning, and ostensibly more participatory forms of democracy were institutionalised through a decentralised system of governance which reached right down to village levels (Kasfir, 1998; Golooba-Mutebi, 2006). Several observers have emphasised the role that no-party democracy played in allowing the NRM to push through an ambitious series of reforms in the absence of competing political agendas (Morrissey and Verschoor, 2003; Hickey, 2005, Piron with Norton, 2004). Importantly, this went beyond the strictly neoliberal agenda of the 1980s and early 1990s and segued into the eras of political conditionality and then poverty reduction.

It is this combined moment, which observers point to as 'Good Governance and Poverty Reduction' (Craig and Porter, 2006), that provides the specific character of inclusive liberalism, and which converged closely with the political project of the NRM. The key example of this is the focus on decentralisation, which Uganda adopted alongside the wider battery of new public management reforms promoted within the good governance agenda (Harrison, 2001, Craig and Porter, 2003). Although Uganda's ambitious programme of decentralisation fitted very well with donor preferences and received a great deal of international support, it was also clearly located within the regime's own political trajectory from resistance movement to political power. Museveni had relied heavily on local resistance councils as the basis for generating both political order and political support during the guerrilla struggle, and it was these councils that would provide the basis for the Decentralisation Act of 1993, and offer the key mechanism for re-ordering of state-society relations in the post-conflict era (Regan, 1998). Somewhat similarly, a growing focus of international development on poverty over the mid-late 1990s found a strong resonance with the regime's stated commitment to development as part of its nation-building project (Piron with Norton, 2004). Here, Uganda's adoption of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) placed it at the forefront of the 'poverty reduction strategy paper' experiment. Again, participatory approaches were central to this, with Uganda not simply adopting the 'voices of the poor' approach to poverty analysis but institutionalising it as the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Process (UPPAP) within the powerful Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.

Although this trajectory was underpinned by generally good relations between the government and donor community, this harmony was threatened during the early 2000s as successive corruption scandals and the regime's reluctance to allow oppositional political activity caused increasing consternation amongst some international donors. The regime's eventual acceptance of multiparty elections, which were re-introduced in 2006, was not only due to the growing level of internal pressure but perhaps more directly to what President Museveni referred to in 2003 as the 'intolerable pressure' placed on the government by

donors now willing to withdraw aid if change was not forthcoming (Golooba-Mutebi, 2009).[4] However, it remains clear that the project of inclusive liberalism has converged closely with the national politics of development in Uganda. This process has been enabled in a context which has been aptly described as a 'post-conditionality' state (Harrison, 2001), whereby the development ideologies and strategies of government and donors have often become so entwined that it makes little sense to separate out 'internal' and 'external' actors. One of the most recurring tendencies here has been the emphasis on participatory approaches to 'good governance and poverty reduction'; indeed, according to one nationwide survey on political attitudes, 'Uganda has a participant political culture' (Bratton *et al.,* 2000: 3). The next section explores the implications of this for poverty reduction through a case-study of a joint World Bank-Government of Uganda project that adopted a participatory, community-driven approach to development in the north.

3 Responding to chronic poverty in Northern Uganda: the case of NUSAF

3.1 Framing chronic poverty in northern Uganda

As suggested in the opening section, the frontiers of inclusive liberalism in Uganda appear to come to an abrupt end north of the Nile River. Conflict-affected northern Uganda has benefited little from Uganda's impressive rates of both economic growth and poverty reduction over the past two decades. While poverty levels in Uganda declined overall from 56 percent to 34 percent between 1992 and 1999, the north experienced a much smaller drop from 72 percent to 64 percent (UBOS, 2003). More recent research draws particular attention to the persistence and longevity of poverty in the north. For example, 57 percent of those living in the north are estimated to be *chronically* poor compared to a national average of 34 percent, with residents of the north more than ten times as likely to be chronically poor as their fellow citizens in the Central region (Nandy, 2008: 62-3; CPRC-Uganda, 2005). Indeed, the north records the worst figures across any dimension of poverty; it had the lowest score of any region on the human development index, with a rating of 0.418 (2003) and 0.499 (2006) compared to the central region with 0.547 and 0.637 respectively (UNDP, 2007).

Official policy documents recognise that the human security situation has been a central factor here. The conflict between the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) and the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF), which was fought with varying levels of intensity between 1987 and 2007, has been a major factor in determining the level and character of deprivation in

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[4] However, the acceptance of multipartyism was countered by a Presidential move to abolish the constitutional two-term limit on those holding executive power.

northern Uganda. High levels of displacement and restrictions on mobility have caused major disruption to people's livelihoods (MFPED, 2002), although displacement itself seems to have had little direct impact on the income-status of the poorest groups (Ssewanyana *et al.,* 2007). Investments in social and physical infrastructure have been limited, leaving both poorly developed. In institutional terms, the system of local government is far less well established in the conflict-affected north, particularly below district level. According to the second Ugandan Participatory Poverty Assessment, which included a case-study of the northern district of Kitgum, people here see poverty as 'a situation of perpetual need for daily necessities of life and a feeling of powerlessness, and also lack of basic physical infrastructure and services, productive assets and social harmony with the community' (UPPAP, 2002: 7).

3.2   Towards NUSAF

The official forms of poverty knowledge cited above have significant traction within Uganda's national policy processes, and play a key role in rendering problems of poverty legible for government (Scott, 1998). Much of this data is processed within the Poverty Monitoring and Analysis Unit which sits within the powerful Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and has been closely involved in the production of Uganda's much-lauded Poverty Eradication Action Plans (PEAP).[5] Indeed, interviews carried out with key policy actors at around the same time that NUSAF was first announced suggest that these forms of poverty knowledge had helped catalyse a growing recognition amongst development trustees in Uganda that some people and parts of the country, particularly the north, had been 'left behind' (Hickey, 2005: 1001). Importantly, there was also a strong sense that previous efforts to promote peace, development and reconstruction in Northern Uganda had failed and were in need of renewal.[6] It was in this context that NUSAF was announced amidst much official fanfare in 2002 as the main poverty reduction initiative for the north. The state-owned newspaper reported that 'The Government has unveiled its strategic master plan on health, security, education, food and other areas of intervention to end the suffering in the insurgency-riddled northern Uganda', and, coining a significant phrase, that 'The Government has initiated a US$100m project to ensure that the north *catches up* with the rest of the country in the development process' (New Vision, 2002a).

The discourse of 'catching-up' was a significant one, and relates closely to the forms of poverty knowledge that inform policy-making in Uganda, namely household survey data and

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[5] The PMAU was re-launched as the Budgetary Monitoring and Accountancy Unit in 2008, and that the latest new iteration of the PEAP will be named the National Development Plan.

[6] There is no space here to describe the full history of development efforts in the North (see Brett, 1996a; Robinson, 2005). However, it does seem clear that NUSAF was a response to the perceived failure of the top-down approach of its immediate predecessor Northern Uganda Reconstruction Programme, and an effort to emulate the perceived success of the more bottom-up Community Action Programme (Robinson, 2005).

participatory poverty assessments. Importantly, these influential forms of poverty data discussed above have been criticised by some as leading to an emphasis in both analysis and policy on the characteristics and correlates of poverty rather than on the underlying causes (Green and Hulme, 2005). Indeed, planning for a response to poverty in the north was further informed by two specific surveys that directly mirrored these broader forms of poverty knowledge: the quantitative Northern Uganda Survey and a qualitative Community Needs Assessment, neither of which sought a deeper analysis of the underlying causes of poverty and violence in the region. The 'main objective of the Northern Uganda Survey was to collect high quality and timely data on demographic and socio-economic characteristics of household populations' (Ssewenyana *et al.,* 2007: 5), thus reflecting the localised, methodological individualism that characterises mainstream approaches to poverty analysis (Mosse 2007). The Community Needs Assessment, meanwhile, was intended mainly to test the ground for the community-based approach that the World Bank in particular was keen to adopt in its response in the North (Robinson, 2005). As Li (2007: 234) notes, 'To govern through community techniques requires that community be rendered technically legible…through specialised techniques', and since the 1980s the predominant technique for achieving this has been participatory research methods. Here, as with the World Bank programme in Indonesia that Li explores, a participatory community-needs assessment was undertaken in all 18 districts to be targeted by the programme, and, likewise, this exercise included very little analysis of the underlying causes of either poverty or conflict (Robinson, 2005: 14). Rather, poverty in the north is blamed largely on the effects of insurgency and the war, with little appreciation of the older and deeper roots of poverty in this region, or of the underlying causes of the conflict itself.[7] The assessment (inevitably) emphasises internal problems rather than those that involve wider inequalities between the north and the rest of the country, despite long-standing research that draws attention to the problems that the north has suffered with regards its adverse incorporation into the politics and political economy of development in Uganda over a prolonged period (an issue we return to below).

This discursive framing of the problem closely informs the mode of the resulting intervention. Here, the project literature emphasises the role of NUSAF in helping to close the 'development gap' between the north and the rest of the country, and of getting the north to 'catch-up' (NUSAF Operational Manual 2002), primarily via the agency of local communities.[8] The aim of NUSAF is to increase the assets available to local people and improve their aptitude for development rather than addressing wider problems within the political

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[7] In the case of the KDP in Indonesia, Li (2007: 234) notes how the use of PRA 'screened out prices, laws, and militaries. If these forces appeared at all, it was in the surreal and disembodied form of arrows pointing in from the edges of the village maps or diagrams taped to the walls of meeting halls after a participatory planning meeting. They could not take centre stage. Instead, PRA directed people to turn to their own communities to solve their problems, presumed to be pre-eminently local in origin'.

[8] As Li (2007: 247) notes, 'the mode of analysis undertaken – community-based – is tightly linked to the kinds of solutions they anticipated…improved well-being was within the grasp of responsible communities that made appropriate choices'.

economy.[9] The World Bank, the project's main donor, framed NUSAF as a means of integrating northern Uganda with the rest of the country:

> Through NUSAF, vulnerable groups will be mobilised to join mainstream development processes based on community accountability and improved governance. The process of over-coming underdevelopment through community action, leadership development and resource mobilisation will strengthen the on-going peace processes in the region. The proposed NUSAF will be part of Government's efforts to ensure that the North is able to 'catch-up' with the rest of the country in the development processes (World Bank, 2002).

The dynamics here were similar to those associated with the World Bank's social development programme in Indonesia, not only in terms of the failure to account for the underlying causes of the problems, but also in the way that 'the mode of analysis undertaken – community-based – is tightly linked to the kinds of solutions they anticipated…improved well-being was within the grasp of responsible communities that made appropriate choices' (Li, 2007:247). Here, the aim of NUSAF is to increase the assets available to local people and improve their aptitude for development rather than addressing wider problems within the political economy. As more generally, 'experts tasked with improvement exclude the structure of political-economic relations from their diagnoses and prescriptions. They focus more on the capacities of the poor than on the practices through which one social group impoverishes another' (Li, 2007: 7).

This residualist approach to understanding poverty, which frames the problem as one largely caused by factors internal to poor people and places rather than in terms of their relationship to broader structures and formations, constitutes a significant misrepresentation of poverty in northern Uganda. Here, the depth and severity of poverty in the north is closely lined to the region's 'adverse incorporation' into the politics of state formation and capitalist development in Uganda over a prolonged period of time.[10] Most serious accounts of the north's predicament start with the decision by the British colonial administration to exclude the north from the dominant plantation economy in favour of using it as pool of reserve labour (e.g. Atkinson, 1994). This had a major impact on the region's long-term development prospects, preventing it from engaging in the most profitable accumulation strategies and institutionalising outwards migration as a key livelihood strategy. Moreover, the political dimension to north-south relations has been particularly critical here. Recent ethnographic research amongst northerners revealed that, 'In their everyday life, these young people [from the north] felt excluded from Ugandan citizenship' (Finnstrom, 2003: 142-3). However, the

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[9] As discussed below, the approach to poverty here is distinct from an alternative analysis of poverty that tends to emphasise the importance of how poor people and places are related to wider processes of development, in ways that tend to keep them poor (Bernstein, 1992; Townsend, 1993; Hickey and du Toit, 2007).

[10] See the Hickey and du Toit (2007) for a review of the critical differences between 'residual' and 'relational' approaches to poverty analysis, and a fuller discussion of the term 'adverse incorporation'.

language of 'exclusion' here cannot quite do justice to the particular ways in which northern Ugandans have been incorporated as citizens under both colonial and post-colonial regimes. Lacking significant economic opportunities within the north, the main livelihood strategy other than economic migration was entrance into the security forces. Seen by the British and many Ugandans as inherently warlike, northerners were disproportionately recruited into the army, police force and prison service, while remaining significantly under-represented within both more 'civilised' and leading parts of public service. This trend continued after independence, and through their central role in the coercive apparatus under successive colonial and post-colonial regimes 'The Acholi became victims but also agents in the formation of Uganda' (Finnstrom, 2003: 91). Here, 'citizenship' came to be realised by northerners in hierarchical and disempowering forms.

A fuller discussion of the ways in which north-south relations have shaped the experience of poverty and violence in northern Uganda is beyond the scope of this paper.[11] Here, we simply note that the character of the north's relationships with the wider economy and polity in Uganda shares the same features of those most intractable forms of relational poverty described by Mosse (2007) in terms of multiple cultural, political and economic disadvantages. Despite well-known research on this, the task of tackling such deeply-entrenched problems of poverty and violence was left, under NUSAF, to local responses rather than wider interventions to resolve the underlying problems at the level of governance and the political economy.

3.3   NUSAF in action

NUSAF aimed to target the most vulnerable groups in the north, particularly internally displaced people, returned abductees, female-headed households, orphans, people with disabilities and people living with AIDS. Its overall objective was to:

> …empower communities in 18 districts of Northern Uganda to enhance their capacity to systematically identify, prioritise, and plan for their needs and implement sustainable development initiatives that improve socio-economic services and opportunities thereby contributing to improved livelihoods by placing money in the hands of the communities (World Bank, 2002).

The project has four components: (1) Community driven initiatives (CDI), involving the development of local infrastructure; (2) Vulnerable Group Support (VGS), essentially through microfinance but also through the provision of other assets such as livestock; (3) Community Reconciliation and Conflict Management (CRCM) and (4) Institutional capacity-building, particularly for local groups but also traditional leaders (a further component, the Youth

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[11] See Allen (2006a) for a review of the recent literature in this field, and Southall (1998) for a more historical perspective.

Opportunity Project, was incorporated later). The CDI component commanded around 70 percent of the budget with the other three accounting for 17 percent, two percent and eight percent respectively. NUSAF was originally funded at the level of $133.5 million, with $100mn coming from the World Bank, $13.5mn from the Government of Uganda and $20mn to be raised locally.

In terms of modality, NUSAF reflected the approach of many social action funds in emphasising the role of community-led, demand-driven, development and the establishment of parallel structures for project management beyond the aegis of the state. Under the CDI and VGS pillars, 'communities' were encouraged to come together in groups, identify and prioritise their needs through facilitators (individuals or local organisations) and then submit project proposals. Grants would be provided directly to these groups which would then take on responsibility for managing the funds within community-level institutions. Beneficiary groups whose members could neither read nor write were encouraged to work through implementing agents whose role was to offer support with complex tasks such as writing cheques. Local government involvement would be limited to a monitoring and supervision role, with local district councils receiving an eight percent allocation of the overall funds available for that district to be used as a general 'operational fund'. Sector specialists were invited to check on proposals, monitor progress throughout each stage of the work, and offer technical advice.

Despite Uganda's success at 'mainstreaming the poverty agenda' in national policy processes via the PEAP and its relatively extensive system of decentralised governance, NUSAF was not integrated into either, with line ministries and government both rejected as the main channel for the project (Robinson, 2005: 17). This was opposed by many at the time, with bilateral donors voicing strong concerns and advocating for NUSAF to be linked to the ongoing Local Government Development Programme (Brock *et al.,* 2002). Importantly, these critics stated that NUSAF should not be seen as a substitute for the political action required to tackle the underlying causes of poverty in northern Uganda (Robinson, 2005: 13).

The final point to stress about NUSAF's origins is with regards to its links to the politics of patronage that critics argue has been a growing feature in Uganda over the past decade. Indeed, the politicised character of NUSAF has been apparent from the outset, with some observers describing it as a 'contentious and politically sensitive programme' (Brock *et al.,* 2002: 14). Fears that such an intervention would inevitably become captured in the politics of patronage that emerged more strongly in Uganda during the late 1990s (Tangri and Mwenda, 2001) seemed to be confirmed early on when the target districts defined as being of the 'north' were extended to include several districts from the east, largely because the Minister responsible for designing the project wanted to ensure that his home area was included (Brock *et al.,* 2002: 15). Indeed, initial studies of NUSAF simply accepted this shift to suggest a de facto redrawing of boundaries of what constituted northern Uganda (Robinson, 2005, fn.1). Here, NUSAF becomes involved in a re-morphing of the political geography of the

north, in ways that help render obscure the politics of what is happening around government relations with the 'original' north, and suggest once again the malleability of 'the north' in the hands of various external forces. There was also a strong sense that this programme would be more likely to become a conduit for patronage than poverty reduction because of its location within the Prime Minister's Office, an office that lacks constitutional status and is marginal to the key poverty reduction effort in Uganda. We return to these concerns in our findings in Section V.

4   Investigating the politics of NUSAF: the method

Little independent research has been carried out on the impacts of NUSAF, and our own research makes no claim to offer a full-scale evaluation of the project.[12] Rather, it constitutes a qualitative insight into how the process unfolded over its five-year lifespan based on interviews with all key actors involved in NUSAF, including leaders and members of beneficiary groups, project facilitators, civil servants, local chiefs, elected local leaders, leaders of local civil society organisations and NUSAF officials at both local and national levels. Following Corbridge *et al.,* (2005), our concern was with the ways in which anti-poverty interventions might re-govern relationships between the state and citizens in a fashion that allows each to have different sightings of the other. The intention, then, was to move, at least in some way, beyond a study of the government of poverty, whereby the focus is simply on what development trustees *intend* to achieve through their projects of governmentality (cf. Li, 2007: 27), towards at least some sense of the *effects* of these efforts.

The field research involved a total of 145 in-depth individual and focus-group interviews in three different districts in northern Uganda, carried out from May to October 2008 just as the project was ending. Of these, 72 were conducted in Nebbi District, 39 in Gulu, and 40 in Pader. Nebbi falls within the West Nile sub-region of northern Uganda that is predominantly associated with the Alur people while Gulu and Pader form two of the three districts known as Acholiland. Each of the three districts has been affected by the 20-year civil war which devastated much of northern Uganda. Although Nebbi did not experience direct fighting between the national army and insurgents, it was badly affected in terms of disruption to the movement of goods and people with severe impacts on economic activity and local livelihoods. In Pader and Gulu, fighting displaced thousands of people who were subsequently forced to live in internally displaced people's camps. Within each district, we

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[12] When designing this research, we were aware that a major official evaluation was being planned involving the Government of Uganda, World Bank and researchers from Cornell University. This evaluation was due to be completed in early 2009 and will inform plans for Phase II of NUSAF.

selected one sub-county within three different counties to focus on.[13] Of the three sub-counties, one was urban, which is usually the major town in the area, another peri-urban, while the third was located in a more remote rural area. This was intended to capture variations with regard to potentially influential factors such as geographical proximity to the district headquarters where applications for funding were vetted and the relative ease of information flows. The interviews and focus group discussions covered a wide range of topics, particularly the success and failure of particular initiatives and processes, the programme's impact on citizenship status, rights and empowerment, and the encounters of citizens with state officials and elected leaders throughout the programme. Finally, the research focused on the two main components of NUSAF, namely VGS and CDI, with only subsidiary data gathered on the YOP and CRCM components, and it is these dimensions of analysis that frame our discussion here.

5 NUSAF and the politics of poverty reduction on the ground

5.1 Becoming responsible, entrepreneurial and participatory: citizenship formation the NUSAF way

NUSAF typifies the reliance within inclusive liberalism on communities becoming the crucible of citizenship formation in all its multiple dimensions.[14] In terms of the social aspect of citizenship, the requirement to work co-operatively in groups would increase rates of local participation and strengthen the 'horizontal' relations of citizenship (Kabeer, 2004), thus promoting higher levels of social cohesion. At the same time, and with particular reference to the VGS component of the project, NUSAF would promote economic forms of citizenship by encouraging people to become more entrepreneurial, economically-active and self-reliant, both through their collective enterprise and via the in-flow of productive assets such as finance and livestock. Finally, the demand-driven character of NUSAF would help develop the political dimensions of citizenship, improving the capacity of local people to make claims against development trustees and increasing the positive sightings that state functionaries and citizens would have of each other. However, our research into the VGS component of the project suggests that NUSAF has tended to fall short of these ambitious outcomes. We deal first with efforts to promote social and economic forms of citizenship via community-driven development before turning to the political dimension in the next sub-section.

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[13] This is an administrative unit that forms part of Uganda's five-tier local government system. The tiers, in ascending order, are village, parish, sub-county, county and district. For purposes of delivery and supervision of services only three tiers are involved: the village, sub-county and district, and so NUSAF funding was directed first of all at districts and then down the tiers to the sub-county and village level where the projects were implemented.

[14] See the reference in Section I to Ash Amin's critique of third way approaches to building multiple forms of citizenship through community action.

The following quotes are typical of the responses we received from key stakeholders regarding the contribution of VGS:

> The idea was to empower vulnerable people but it has not lived up to what it was supposed to do. Beneficiaries did not manage the funding well. Projects were not well researched. People went into rearing chickens, goats, and pigs, without knowing how to look after them. There was a lot of conflict, leading to failure. In some cases, people were walking off with animals and in others group leaders defrauded their members (*Local government official, Gulu*).

> With VGS, almost all of them have collapsed. There are signposts showing where these sub-projects are, but if you reach there you will find empty structures. Members have mismanaged these groups (and) many animals have died. So in this case NUSAF has caused social conflict rather than reducing or eradicating poverty. It has created enmity among group members due to corruption (*Parish Chief, Nebbi*).

In Nebbi District, nearly 60 percent of our 72 respondents stated that VGS projects had generally failed in their area. In terms of social cohesion, many noted that conflict had regularly broken out over the distribution of assets within VGS projects. Where livestock was involved, animals were occasionally poisoned, either by group members dissatisfied with the quality of animals they received compared to those given to others, or by members of the community left out by NUSAF either because they had not applied for funding, or because they had applied and not received it. More generally we were told that,

> NUSAF has compounded poverty because of the social conflicts it has caused. People have been killed and even families have broken up due to failure to account for the money. Some members of group leadership committees were killed while others fled their homes because of corruption, especially in VGS projects (*Community Development Officer, Nebbi*).

One elderly respondent told us how he was physically assaulted when he confronted his co-beneficiaries, including his brother-in-law, over their misuse of project's finances for personal gain. This particular case ended up in protracted litigation amidst accusations of attempted murder, and was one of several cases we found that had required investigation by the police.

These problems reflect the general failure of NUSAF to inspire the formation of groups as the basis for co-operation, demand-making and entrepreneurship. According to one facilitator in Nebbi, 'most groups have split or collapsed because of conflicts between leaders and the group members', while a local government officer from the same district noted:

> Most groups have members with diverging interests, which explains why soon after receiving money from NUSAF they disintegrate amidst conflict over how to share the money or manage the group.

Where group-based enterprises had succeeded with VGS, it was often in cases where the groups had been established well before applying for and using NUSAF funds. Examples include the Gulu Women Dairy Farmers Association, founded in 1997, which used NUSAF funds to overcome problems with the conservation of milk by purchasing a milk cooler, and the Lakiche widows and orphans group in Nebbi district, which had successfully made profits from selling milk and had plans to expand their income-generating activities. These cases are characteristic of a broader genre of groups that have been found to have pro-poor tendencies, particularly in terms of the coherence and unity offered by their shared identity (Thorp *et al.,* 2005). They contrast starkly with the many cases we were told of whereby groups were formed opportunistically by enterprising 'community mobilisers' who simply visited market places and convinced or paid bystanders to write their names and append their signatures to documents that were then used to access NUSAF funds.

A key problem with group formation under NUSAF was the direct provision of finance and other assets to local groups. Despite being heralded in official reports as 'a good innovation on the part of the project for ensuring community empowerment and sustainability of community assets subprojects' (Republic of Uganda, 2005: 8), our interviews across all three districts strongly suggest that many NUSAF projects failed because people were given large sums of money and then left on their own without supervision or skills. For some observers,

> The project placed too much money in the hands of the poor. For example, a person who has never seen one million shillings in their life is entrusted with about 10 million shillings to manage. How fair is that and what do you expect such a person to do with the money? (*Town Clerk, Nebbi*).

In terms of promoting economic activity and entrepreneurship, the VGS component has gone some way towards increasing the asset-holdings of many people in the north. For example, a local civil servant in Pader district noted that 'NUSAF brought about 6000 heads of cattle to the district. Before NUSAF, there were only 2000 heads of cattle'. This is a significant move given the level of cattle rustling undertaken during the conflict and also through raids by neighbouring pastoralists. However, two types of problems emerged with the economic dimension of VGS. The first relates to the problem of sustainability, where group enterprises tended to collapse once the flow of NUSAF funding stopped. The second concerns a more fundamental problem. The beneficiaries we interviewed generally saw NUSAF resources as addressing short-term financial difficulties rather than providing the basis for long-term income generating activities. This non-entrepreneurial outlook was clearly articulated by the leader of one group in Gulu, whose project looked set to come to an end with the sale of their last batch of chickens:

> … We are not operating a business – this money is supposed to help people with their needs. If you keep selling and buying other chickens they will say this man is doing business on us. So when you sell you give out the money.

In this and several similar cases there is a clear clash between the model of entrepreneurial citizenship that NUSAF seeks to foster – in line with the wider emphasis in Ugandan political discourse on becoming 'economically active' (Hickey, 2005: 1001) – and the popular expectation in a highly impoverished environment that trustees of development should simply deliver finance and other assets.

When invited to explain the failures that they had identified, our respondents emphasised factors that are directly associated with the community-driven model of development employed by NUSAF. The problems cited most often were intra-group conflict, the lack of group capacity to manage resources and the bad (often corrupt) practice of group facilitators and leaders. This clearly problematises the theory that community-driven development is capable of catalysing processes of citizenship formation, an issue we return to below.

5.2   States and citizens: seeing each other differently?

In terms of relying on communities to promote the political dimension of citizenship, recent research reminds us that the much critiqued depoliticising tendency of inclusive liberalism cannot be seen as somehow predetermined. As Corbridge *et al.,* (2005) argue, even apparently technocratic interventions can engender important changes in the citizenship status of poor and marginal people, offering them a chance to make demands on the state and providing sites of political learning and empowerment.

Indeed, we do find *some* evidence here to support the more optimistic claims that participatory anti-poverty interventions can enable states and citizens to gain more positive sightings of each other, and thus perhaps promote processes of citizenship formation and improving levels of governance. A senior politician in Gulu district spoke eloquently about the impact of NUSAF on people's civic awareness:

> …it enabled people to learn how to be demanding as a society. It somehow strengthened the demand side. In a situation where the state had almost collapsed here because of the war, citizens somehow started seeing the state just as a security agency without any ability to respond to their economic and welfare needs. So through NUSAF people learnt that you can actually demand some interventions.

More generally, some observers noted that the participatory mechanisms have had some impact. According to one senior civil servant in Gulu, 'Communities had a lot of say in the implementation processes…communities that benefited have built up a lot of skills and experience'.

Testimonies of some beneficiaries we interviewed re-enforce this, revealing how visits to NUSAF and local government offices to follow up on applications increased their confidence in dealing with public servants and re-enforced the sense that it was within their rights to act

in this way. There was even one example of what Corbridge (2007) refers to as 'citizenship as complaining'. Here, a group of aspiring chicken farmers had lost the livestock gained through VGS due to illness. Infuriated by a slow response to their request for help from the veterinary department, the group dumped the carcasses at the district veterinary office in protest. For many, however, the frequently disappointing or often non-encounters with public officials often led to a sense of resignation to the idea that there was nothing they could do to get public officers to act on their needs. According to one respondent, civil servants tended to react to citizens seeking their assistance by asking them to 'come tomorrow, come the other day' and, if they persisted, telling them 'you are disturbing us too much'. Another, from Gulu, pointed out the consequences of repeated failure to get his problems attended to: 'With a vulnerable person, if you turn him down, he will also turn away from you'.

As such, NUSAF has generally not catalysed a process whereby active citizens demand and an effective state responds. Nor has it enabled each party to gain significantly more positive sightings of each other or even to become more accustomed to their respective habits (Corbridge *et al.,* 2005). The decision to use parallel structures and adopt a demand-driven approach effectively excluded and alienated the state from the process, thus further embedding the popular idea in northern Uganda that the state was essentially absent from their lives and disinterested in their needs (Jones, 2009). As has been the case with social action funds elsewhere in Africa, the danger of using non-state actors to deliver development is that it '…may have a very negative effect on people's interest in politics, increase cynicism about government and, in return, weaken the democratic process' (Lange, 2008: 1139). For example, a Youth Councillor in Nebbi stated that he could no longer convince any youth to assemble for NUSAF-related activities because of disillusionment with the project's failures. Importantly, and to reverse the optic, the high rate of project failure within NUSAF has lent support to those elites who question the capacity of poor people to manage development resources effectively (e.g. Bahigwa *et al.,* 2005, Golooba-Mutebi, 1999). Here, placing unrealistic demands on poor people to become responsible for their own recovery has actually had disempowering effects.

5.3   NUSAF and the politics of patronage

NUSAF was incorporated into the politics of patronage in Uganda early in its life and the problems associated with this have continued to characterise the project through the implementation stage. Evidence that NUSAF funds and resources have been subject to large-scale mismanagement by project officials as well as recipients are a matter of public record in Uganda,[15] and at least twenty NUSAF staff are known to have been arrested over concerns regarding their mismanagement of funds (Beyond Juba Project, 2008: 2). Our

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[15] See numerous newspaper cuttings on financial mismanagement and corruption scandals in relation to NUSAF.

research did not focus explicitly on this but related concerns were frequently raised by our respondents. Perhaps the most damaging aspect here, at least to the image of NUSAF, was the corruption that our respondents claimed operated within the proposal vetting process. Several applicants and elected local leaders contended that some applications which were judged to have the potential to receive approval for funding were allocated to other groups by corrupt, politically motivated or nepotistic officials involved in the appraisal process. In a testimony similar to findings from interviews with other respondents, a senior political leader in one district described at length what happened in some instances:

> In some cases the information in the files was deliberately being tampered with. That's one of the reasons why some of the NUSAF district technical officers are in prison. When a project has been approved, they tear out the pages which have the names of the community members and then they insert their own henchmen. And then they inform the henchmen 'don't worry, you are going to be the signatories of this account but you must do as we tell you'. The tampering with files and the collusion with what I would call 'ghost communities' in this case, totally undermined the effectiveness of NUSAF because in this case, you had people who actually had no intension of implementing a project, all they wanted to do was to steal money.

Other claims of corrupt practices relate to some NUSAF officials conniving with suppliers to inflate the prices of animals and other purchases. In Gulu municipality, not only does one hear the story of a 'NUSAF village' with beautiful houses allegedly built using money stolen from NUSAF, but also that of one pig which was bought by a beneficiary group at four times the 200000 shillings an animal of its size and breed should have cost. Yet other charges of corruption relate to facilitators manipulating or forcing beneficiaries to pay them more money than they were entitled to. There are also claims that some groups received funding faster than others after submitting their proposals, and that they did so because they had agreed to pay off some of the people involved in decisions related to vetting proposals, approving them, and deciding which ones got funded quickly and which ones were kept waiting. In Gulu some NUSAF officials are in prison having been convicted for such corrupt practices.

The involvement of politicians in the 'distribution' of projects was critiqued by technocrats and project participants alike. Project distribution was linked either to politicians influencing vetting decisions in favour of applications from their constituencies to the disadvantage of those from elsewhere, or shrewd councillors urging people in their constituencies to submit applications in large numbers and ahead of other areas whose representatives were slow to seize the patronage opportunities offered by NUSAF.

5.4   Delivering the goods: the relative success and failures of CDI

> Poverty, feelings of marginalisation, poor service delivery and inequity are some of the factors that fuel conflict. CDI attempts to address these issues through community empowerment and improving access to services (World Bank, 2006: 3).

The CDI (Community Development Initiatives) component of NUSAF has generally been a greater success than VGS, albeit not to the extent suggested in the World Bank quote above. CDI focused on the construction of community assets and infrastructure, with priority projects identified by community groups. A large majority of our respondents in both Nebbi and Pader Districts thought that CDI initiatives had tended to succeed more often than they failed, not least because 'there is something at hand to be seen, such as classrooms, boreholes, school dormitories, health centres, etc' (*Sub-county Secretary, Nebbi*). Community assets such as boreholes have had tangible benefits in terms of reduced burden on women and children with regard to carrying water over often long distances. New classrooms and accommodation quarters for teachers have been associated with higher levels of attendance by both children and staff at schools. CDI sub-projects have also benefited local people through employment on project construction, through sales of local construction materials as well as providing for their transportation.

In certain respects, the community-driven character of NUSAF appears to be directly associated with these successes, particularly in terms of the apparent relevance of the projects that were prioritised. This in turn seems to have helped secure relatively high levels of pride and ownership amongst villagers with regards to the new community assets. For example, CDI projects were much more successful at generating in-kind contributions from locals than VGS, in the form of construction materials, labour and sometimes land. Many respondents linked this directly to the specific nature of the participatory process associated with determining priorities for CDI projects, which involved a facilitator using PRA techniques to identify the list of possible projects before holding a vote to prioritise amongst these. It seems likely that the greater level of rigour and direct representation offered by a vote as opposed to the more 'consensual' approach of other participatory approaches which are often more open to manipulation, helped to achieve these outcomes.[16]

However, it is also clear that the success of CDI projects needs to be qualified in comparison to the results that might have been achieved had the same resources been employed through a modality other than an exclusively community-driven approach. As with the VGS component, most of the problems identified by our respondents as causing the failure or under-achievement of CDI projects are directly linked to the community-driven approach.

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[16] On the problems with using PRA methods to identify consensus see Cooke and Kothari (2001). On the need to employ some of the more disciplinary mechanisms associated with representative rather than participatory forms of democracy and also bureaucratic expertise, see Brett (2003).

This is particularly apparent in terms of the capacity of communities to manage and monitor the work of those contracted to carry out the construction work for the projects. Communities found it difficult to identify the best people for the job and were often cheated out of funds by contractors who delivered low quality work and materials. The long-term viability of many projects is thus highly questionable, with nearly a quarter of our 118 respondents in Nebbi and Pader citing problems of maintenance and sustainability with CDI projects. Perhaps predictably given the higher financial flows associated with CDI projects compared to VGS projects, it is with these projects that corruption amongst NUSAF staff is mentioned. In this, and in several other ways, our research corroborated the widespread evidence that NUSAF funds and resources have been subject to large-scale mismanagement by project officials as well as recipients.[17]

Our research thus joins other independent evaluations of the CDI component of NUSAF in concluding that the fuller involvement of local government technical experts working in collaboration with beneficiaries would have likely improved the quality of the project outputs, helped ensure greater sustainability and lower the costs of maintenance. One respondent was emphatic in criticising the establishment of parallel structures and sidelining of the state, claiming that 'Much of the work done on projects is of poor quality because they did not involve local government in their design and supervision and monitoring' (*Community Development Officer, Nebbi*).

Importantly, there is a high degree of overlap between CDI and other government programmes, including the Local Government Development Programme and School Facility Grant. When compared it was found that 'On the whole the NUSAF community assets subprojects are somehow of inferior quality to those of LGDP and SFG programmes…This is largely inadequate due to lack of technical supervision' (Republic of Uganda 2005: 8). This is not to suggest that full responsibility and control should be handed back to the state – it is clear from numerous other investigations that the implementation of projects by local government in the north and elsewhere is not necessarily a guarantee of good quality delivery (Muhangi, 2007). However, and as argued by Uganda's main advocacy organisation, 'communities in Uganda, however much they might be knowledgeable, still need mentoring; and this is what is missing in NUSAF. Who is mentoring the communities in Northern Uganda if extension workers have become a rare phenomena in Uganda?' (UDN, 2004: 3). For local development efforts in Uganda to be both efficient and empowering will require an appropriate blend of different institutional actors, both public and private (Brett, 1996b, 2003), something that is too often overlooked in the social action fund model employed by the World Bank here as elsewhere (Lange, 2008; Tendler, 2000).

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[17] The high levels of corruption associated with NUSAF are a matter of public record in Uganda, being widely reported in the press and highlighted by such campaigning NGOs as the Uganda Debt Network. A number of project staff have been imprisoned for the misuse of project resources for private gain and the President gave serious consideration to shutting the project down in September 2007.

6 The convergence of inclusive liberalism with the politics of development in Uganda: a critical discussion of NUSAF

Our research in three of the districts targeted by NUSAF suggests a somewhat mixed picture. There have clearly been some gains, most notably with regards to the construction of community assets and, to a lesser extent, the provision of individualised assets such as livestock. Given the severe difficulties faced by people in northern Uganda, these improvements should not be easily dismissed. Nonetheless, when one places them against the scale, depth and (importantly) the character of the problems faced by northern Uganda, it is arguable that NUSAF has not only had little impact on the underlying politics of chronic poverty here, but may actually have exacerbated the tendencies that contributed towards this situation in the first place. The key problems can be traced to the residualist mode of poverty analysis that informed the project and the closely related decision to adopt a community-driven approach. Of further significance here are the ways in which these globalised tendencies within inclusive liberalism converged with the politics of development in contemporary Uganda, in ways that tended to deepen the dysfunctional tendencies within the project (Gledhill, 2001). We discuss each of these three issues in turn.

6.1 Community-driven development and chronic poverty

Overall, the weight of our findings suggests that NUSAF's heavy reliance on a community-driven development approach can be directly associated with most of the project's more serious failings. Three particular problems can be identified here, each of which suggests wider problems with this central strategy within inclusive liberalism. First, and most obviously, the reliance on a localised community-driven approach within NUSAF overlooked the historical and structural character of the north's adverse incorporation into the polity and political economy of Uganda, which sets the context for chronic poverty in this region. At the same time, NUSAF also failed to engage constructively with the political economy of development *within* northern districts. For example, several NUSAF projects collapsed due to problems around land access and ownership, including where livestock were distributed under VGS to women who actually had no land of their own for grazing. A more common problem was that some who owned the land on which project infrastructure had been built later tried to appropriate the buildings, either while the projects were still operational or after they had fallen idle.[18] Lacking ownership rights, other group members were unable to make a challenge, leaving land-owning group members to profit from the failure of collective enterprises. This failure to engage with local structures of power has become a signature problem with community-based projects, something recognised now by the World Bank,

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[18] For example, in one case in Gulu, one land owner appropriated a chicken house belonging to a group of women to whom he had lent the land, and converted it into rented accommodation for personal benefit.

whose own review notes that community-driven development programmes are more likely to reproduce than challenge the 'wider unequal power relations' that underpin poverty (Mosse, 2007: 32, with reference to Mansuri and Rao, 2005).

A second problem is that demand-driven development presumes a high-degree of agency amongst potential beneficiaries, a feature known to be in short-supply amongst the most persistent poor (Cleaver, 2005). Our findings on the problems encountered in group formation and in group members struggling to hold their often better educated leaders to account bear this out. This reflects the broader experience with social action funds (e.g. Tendler, 2000) and highlights once again the contradiction in making chronically poor people responsible for their own escapes from poverty.

Finally, and somewhat ironically, the community-driven approach fails to fully resonate with the priorities of local people, who are painfully aware of the huge scale of the development challenge facing the north. According to one anthropologist who has worked extensively in Nebbi district,

> …the agenda of development, to which virtually all (West Nilers) are committed, although they define it in different ways, depends crucially on the kind of infrastructure projects (roads, telecommunications, power supplies) that are usually outside the remit of NGOs. The latter are widely seen as merely scratching the surface of Arua's economic problems (Leopold, 2005: 160).

To an extent, this association of development with tangible forms of development helps to explain the relative popularity of CDI projects. More pertinently, though, it draws attention yet again to the limited scale and character of NUSAF in comparison to the scale of the development challenge that faces the north.

6.2 Blaming the victim: how residual approaches overlook the causes of chronic poverty

As noted earlier, NUSAF is informed by a residual understanding of poverty that tends to overlook and obscure the deeper causes of poverty in northern Uganda. In turn, NUSAF was explicitly framed as an attempt to help the north 'catch-up' with the rest of the country, an intention that was clearly understood at the local level by those associated with its implementation:

> It was designed as a social action fund that is community driven, mainly to try and reduce poverty in Northern Uganda. It was a kind of 'catch up fund' to empower communities in building household assets, in decision making, etc. (*Civil servant, Gulu*).

NUSAF thus located both the problem of poverty and the means of its resolution within the north rather than in terms of its relations with broader economic and political formations. The effort to make local communities responsible for alleviating their own poverty was particularly apparent in the notion that $20 million of NUSAF's overall project costs should be raised locally, as a counterpart to the funding supplied by the World Bank and Government. This was swiftly critiqued by Uganda's leading advocacy organisation, the Uganda Debt Network, which stated that this proposed level of community contributions were 'definitely too much' given that,

> It is now an established fact that Uganda is poorer now and that the Northern Uganda region is the poorest of all the regions…Now one wonders what an impoverished community should be able to contribute (UDN 2004: 3).

This strategy was swiftly rejected by local leaders, of whom one Lira District Chairman pointed out that,

> Isn't this a contradiction that a community which is so poor like ours should be required to provide counterpart funding for a project which, in the first place, is meant to alleviate their poverty? (New Vision, 2002b).

These criticisms draw attention to the tautological logic that underpins residualist approaches, which tend to locate in poor people and places both the cause and the solution to deprivation. Unsurprisingly, community contributions seldom included finance when the project was rolled out. One report noted that 'Community members' contributions are hardly financial and were found to be inflated. This issue of community contribution should be revisited so that the communities are allowed to pay only in kind, as this is what is happening in practice' (Republic of Uganda, 2006: 8).

A further example of NUSAF's tendency to locate the problems of poverty and violence in the north as essentially internal in character concerns the project's attempt to address problems of conflict and peace-building via the Community Reconciliation and Conflict Management (CRCM) component. CRCM would involve local leaders being encouraged to meet together to resolve their differences peacefully and groups being awarded money to compose pro-peace songs and stage pro-peace drama. Here,

> It was hoped that communities would identify conflict mitigation measures to overcome the legacy of violence and address its underlying causes. Development interventions would flow out of processes of conflict management by providing former combatants, abductees and victims of violence with livelihood opportunities and secure sources of income from labour and contracts for community infrastructure projects (Robinson, 2005: 14).

Importantly, it has been acknowledged that '…the design team did not examine the underlying causes of conflict in detail' (*op. cit*). Rather, the CRCM component locates the north's problems with conflict squarely within internal squabbles rather than within the broader political economy of north-south relations. The World Bank social protection specialist in Uganda claimed in 2006 that 'CRCM is beginning to prove critical for effective and sustainable community cohesion and participation' in the north (World Bank, 2006: 3). However, this is disputable: according to the Bank's own figures, CRCM only accounts for a tiny amount of overall project expenditure (around two percent) of this demand-led project. Our own research found little evidence that CRCM funding was being taken up in the three districts we examined. More damagingly, this reconstitution of conflict as a problem rooted in the characteristics of the north and northerners themselves tended to re-assert a more widely held prejudice in Uganda that tends to blame northerners for their own problems with violence and poverty (Finnstrom, 2003).

6.3   A pernicious convergence?

NUSAF's reliance on a community-driven approach to development and the attendant suggestions that both the problems of impoverishment and responsibility for overcoming this lie within the north, have a particular political resonance in Uganda at present, especially with regards the north. Here, NUSAF's modality chimes with the Government's apparently deepening preference for poverty reduction to be led from the grassroots. This tendency was re-enforced during the 2006 presidential election campaign. The ruling-party manifesto was entitled 'Prosperity for All' and promised to launch a strategy centred on the provision of microfinance to individuals within community groups known as 'savings and credit cooperatives' (NRM, 2006). The same manifesto included an explicit commitment to the NUSAF model of development (see the quote that helped open this paper), a model that the NRM had to some extent already trialled through an infamous credit scheme in the mid-1990s.[19]

Importantly, this 'bootstraps' approach to self-reliant development has a particular resonance in the north, and fits with a longer history of the government promoting 'home-grown' solutions to under-development in this region. For example, Branch (2005) details various efforts by the military to co-opt local peasants in its struggle with the LRA, including the infamous 'Home Guard' campaign when peasants were encouraged to form protective guards with only the most minimal training and support from the military. The failure of this initiative did little to prevent LRA atrocities and left villagers defenceless and with a strong sense of abandonment. Relations between northerners and the regime were worsened

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[19] Known as *entandikwa*, this credit scheme ostensibly sought to promote grassroots development but swiftly became mired in controversy over the misuse of funds, mass repayment failures and claims that the NRM was effectively using the scheme as a means of vote-buying and rewarding their supporters either side of the 1996 elections (Hickey, 2003: 20).

during the government's infamous Operation North, undertaken as a means of crushing the LRA. This was associated with 'violations and mass humiliation' of ordinary northerners, leading some to claim that the regime has 'failed in its responsibility to protect those living in the North' (Dolan and Hovil, 2006: 5). Its refusal to acknowledge the north as a disaster area has meant that no state of emergency could be called, and has reduced the level of humanitarian assistance that could be given (Dolan and Hovil, 2006).

This reflects again the expectations that citizens have of the state to solve such intractable problems as conflict and poverty:

> Referring to their right as Ugandan citizens, rather than as simply inhabitants of a war zone, and with reference to a government's responsibility to protect its citizens, I was frequently told by informants that the job of ending the war must be the mandate of the government (Finnstrom, 2003: 149).

However, the regime has also tended to promote home-grown solutions as a means of establishing peace and reconciliation in the north. Here, the Government has now rejected the involvement of the International Criminal Court in favour of developing – or perhaps more accurately *inventing* – 'traditional' forms of justice based on local cultural norms (Allen, 2006b).[20] Such approaches not only tend to re-enforce the notion that the north is responsible for sorting itself out, but also that it is somehow beyond the realms of modernity in Uganda, leading Allen to argue that, 'People in Northern Uganda require the same kinds of conventional legal mechanisms as everyone else living in modern states…[they are not] 'a race part' (Allen, 2006b: 168, 181).

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[20] However, it is also important to note here that the government's decision to resist the ICC process was made under intense pressure from people in the North who feel that securing peace in the sub-region is of more immediate importance than pursuing justice. Also, the idea of traditional courts was strongly opposed by the President when it was first mooted, at a time when he and influential elements in the UPDF still believed that only military force could end the war.

7   Conclusion

The promotion of NUSAF by development trustees as a means of helping northern Uganda to 'catch-up' with the rest of the country resonates strongly with the ideological and strategic tendencies of 'inclusive liberalism'. This is particularly apparent in the tendency to elide tricky issues of uneven development and exclusion in favour of governing the poor via a series of depoliticised mechanisms that limit the possibilities for genuine empowerment (Craig and Porter, 2006). Here, as elsewhere within mainstream development efforts (Li, 2007), residualist understandings of poverty have helped obscure the need for reforms at the level of politics and the political economy. This approach offers an incomplete and misleading basis for understanding and challenging chronic poverty (Hickey and du Toit, 2007). With particular reference to contexts where structural relations of impoverishment are readily apparent, as in northern Uganda, such an approach has a strong and debilitating effect on development programming for such contexts, whereby,

> …questions that are rendered technical are simultaneously rendered non-political. For the most part, experts tasked with improvement exclude the structure of political-economic relations from their diagnoses and prescriptions (Li, 2007: 7).

As with World Bank programming in other regions characterised by deeply political forms of poverty and conflict,

> Altering the existing set of political-economic relations was, the planners suggested, beyond their purview…Liberal ideas about formal inclusion in institutional procedures and the opportunity to compete took centre-stage. Structural deformities…fell outside the programmable domain (Li, 2007: 268).[21]

With reforms at the level of politics and political-economy effectively ruled out, and the state viewed as a liability rather than as the key trustee of development, inclusive liberalism instead promotes the 'community' and particular forms of citizenship as providing the ways forward. Here, placing decision-making power and resources in the hands of groups of citizens is charged with achieving behavioural shifts within both the citizenry (becoming co-operative with each other, making demands of the state, and entrepreneurial vis-à-vis the market) and state (becoming more accountable and responsive). Our investigation strongly challenged such assumptions that 'community-driven' approaches can provide an adequate

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[21] This failure of perception was even more pronounced with NUSAF than with the case of the KDP in Indonesia discussed by Li (2007). There, the World Bank similarly ignored the political-economic relations that they thought too difficult to 'render technical or redesign', but, armed with a phalanx of social science researchers, there was to be a concerted effort to 'get the social relations right' (Li, 2007: 230). Although NUSAF pays lip-service to issues of empowerment, here the language of social development is rarely exercised and the programme is limited to developing the capacities of atomised individuals and groups.

basis for challenging chronic poverty, particularly in circumstances where deep-seated processes of exclusion and adverse incorporation are apparent.

Importantly, these globalised tendencies within international development theory and practice have converged with the politics of development in Uganda in ways that have tended to either elide or exacerbate the underlying problems of the north's adverse incorporation. Given the extent to which '…it is common that people in Kampala regard people from northern Uganda as backward, primitive and martial' (Dolan, 2002a: 63f, cited in Finnstrom, 2003: 114), this discursive framing of poverty and its solutions within NUSAF has risked further embedding a sense in which the north is seen as responsible for its aberrant status in relation to the rest of the country's renowned development success.

Even where NUSAF has made some material improvements to development in the north, most notably in terms of local infrastructure projects, it seems likely that these gains could have been exceeded had the community-based approach been integrated, and a state-led approach, involving local governments, more strongly monitored and supported by the centre. Importantly, there are few signs that the Government has learned from the problems encountered by NUSAF in terms of its more recent policy plans to reduce poverty in northern Uganda. The most notable initiative is the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP), and over-arching strategy intended to run from 2007–10 (GoU 2007: vii-viii). However, the PRDP has already become the subject of much criticism, with one close observer describing it as '…very much a containment exercise, a set of technical solutions to a gamut of political problems' (Dolan, 2008: 5). Importantly, the information base for the PRDP is the same as that employed under NUSAF and lacks any serious analysis of the political economy of the north. Unsurprisingly, the vision of development for the north revealed in the PRDP emphasises internal rather than external transformations, with a now familiar focus on community empowerment and local infrastructural development. Overall, the Plan '…only partially confronts the major political problem of a north-south divide' and does little in terms of 're-visioning what an integrated Ugandan economy could actually look like' (Dolan, 2008: 5–6).[22] Under inclusive liberalism, it seems, dealing with deep-seated problems of structural poverty is being postponed once more. As such, and although there is much evidence to the contrary in some other cases (e.g. Chhotray, 2007; Corbridge *et al.,* 2005), the anti-politics machine appears to be alive and well in the context explored here.

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[22] Worryingly, the same forms of adverse politicization that affected NUSAF also appear to be shaping the PRDP. For example, the target itself has shifted to help ensure the political success of the PRDP, whereby 'During the drafting period proposed PRDP coverage expanded from the initial eighteen districts to forty, stretching from West Nile across Northern Uganda to Elgon sub-region in southeastern Uganda (Beyond Juba Project, 2008: 3).

7.1   Moving forward

The first step towards establishing a more progressive policy agenda for tackling those forms of chronic poverty that are underpinned by processes of adverse incorporation is to radically reform the analytical basis for policy-making in international development. Our research suggests that a relational approach to understanding poverty has a significant contribution to make here vis-à-vis the residual approach that has tended to dominate discussions of persistent poverty both in Uganda and more broadly. This is no idle 'academic' argument. Recent comparative research into the politics of poverty reduction clearly shows the mobilising effects of relational approaches. Here, a key driver behind successful and sustainable social protection interventions (such as the social pensions in southern Africa) is a belief amongst political elites that external factors rather than the poor themselves are to blame for poverty (see Hickey, 2007). As such, there is an urgent need to devise forms of poverty analysis that can help persuade elites that externally-imposed constraints require public action to overcome them.[23]

More space than we have here is required to explore what would constitute a progressive new policy agenda for the north; and, clearly, the challenge is as much of finding a new form of politics as devising a new set of policies. Contrary to the focus of the PRDP on increasing state authority in the north, an effort to develop the state's political legitimacy would seem to be the first step (Dolan, 2008), a challenge that involves a genuine effort to extend a new political settlement to the north. Details of this highly sensitive issue need to be developed in context, but could include a recognition of (and perhaps an apology for) the role of the state and military with regards to the human rights abuses that occurred during the conflict, stronger encouragement for northerners to be more involved in other forms of public service beyond the military and justice sector (e.g. via scholarships and bespoke training places), and a renewed commitment to developing the capacity and legitimacy of the local state in the north. This latter point resonates with one of the few strong arguments for decentralisation as a pro-poor strategy, given the evidence that a redistribution of economic and political resources to those regions where inequality is primarily created by exogenous rather than endogenous factors can help reduce marginalisation (Manor, 1999). The question in Uganda is whether the recent proliferation of new districts has rendered this strategy redundant, given the now virtually unviable size of many districts (Green 2008), or whether this offers scope for a new, intermediate level of government between the centre and the districts.

In terms of revitalising the economy, the focus on local infrastructure needs to shift to a more ambitious, regional approach. As Dolan (2008: 5) asks, '…why not turn Gulu into Uganda's second international airport? And where is the highway from Soroti to Arua via Moroto,

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[23] As discussed elsewhere (Hickey and du Toit, 2007), an important starting point could be to incorporate the use of 'social exclusion' within the poverty diagnostics and analysis that underpins poverty reduction strategy papers, as has been done so far in at least three countries (Albania, Cambodia and Nepal; see Booth and Curran, 2005).

Kotido, Kitgum and Gulu? When will the rail link to Juba and Mombasa be functioning?' A similar shift is required with regard to the peace-building, which (as under NUSAF) is resolutely localised rather than focused on north-south relationship-building.[24] In their work on addressing spatial inequalities, Kanbur and Venables (2005) make the case for considering 'second order' features of economic geography, and encourage a policy focus on '…a more spatially equitable allocation of infrastructure and public services, and for policies to ensure freer migration', each of which has a strong resonance in the north.

Clearly, localised efforts to reduce poverty will still be required alongside the wider efforts proposed here, and our research would tend to concur with the argument that it is better to target the reasons for impoverishment rather than poor people per se (Krishna, 2007). With specific regards to northern Uganda, Ssewanyana *et al.,* (2007) have argued that geographical rather than categorical targeting is the most appropriate way forward here, given the context-specific nature of the vulnerabilities faced across this varied region. What is clear is that, although the problems experienced with NUSAF were to some extent related to the problems caused by continued insecurity within the region, there is little evidence to suggest that the standard social action fund model will be any more appropriate under present conditions. Our findings prove once more that the discretionary and parallel project structures associated with social funds – as proven more globally (e.g. Tendler, 2000; Lange, 2008) – not only render such interventions prone to capture and open to abuse and corruption, but also tend to undermine the role and accountability of the state. As such, we would join earlier calls for 'Focus[ing] the Social Action Fund on building the Ugandan government's capacity to deliver services in the north, rather than creating a separate parallel funding mechanism' (International Crisis Group, 2004), while adding that a full extension of the Local Government Development Programme to the north would be a central part of this. More broadly, and taken together, it is clear from this discussion of policy that the task of challenging persistent poverty in northern Uganda, as elsewhere, relies heavily on the role to be played by a developmental state committed to extending a social contract to those currently adversely incorporated into actually existing processes of economic and political development.

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[24] Dolan (2008: 6) refers to this poorly funded dimension of the PRDP as its broken leg, 'broken in the sense that, rather than deal with the structural issues noted by the Inter-ministerial Technical Committee, it focuses on the micro level of peace building and reconciliation, particularly the individual and clan levels, and has little to offer in terms of *national* reconciliation.

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cprc@manchester.ac.uk