

## The Slow Road Home

*Decongestion in Kitgum IDP Camps, 20-06-2006*



*Boy Farming in Camp – even in the decongestion camps there is always fear of LRA attacks, so families use all of the available land in the camps to plant food.*

In North Uganda, it's just after noon on a dirt road 35 kilometers from Kitgum, and scattered along the roadside are a couple dozen people beginning their long walk from the fields back to the Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps where they live. Though they are few, the fact that farmers have begun venturing from the camps at all is a sign of hope.

Kitgum has been one of the hardest hit areas during the long-running conflict in Northern Uganda. Insecurity and fear of attacks from LRA rebels and the Karamojong have dislodged an enormous number of people from their homes, forcing them into IDP camps under the protection of the Ugandan Peoples Defense Force (UPDF).

With over 300,000 IDPs in Kitgum district alone, living conditions in the camps are crowded and degrading. Huts are spaced only a few meters apart, and there are inevitably five or more people living in each small home. Women wait in line for hours at boreholes and often end up with less water than is required by minimum sanitation standards.

But things are beginning to look up: the past few months have seen no major incidents with the LRA, and people are slowly feeling encouraged to move out of the densely packed camps into smaller “decongestion” camps closer to their parishes. Some farmers, like those walking along the road, have started to tend to their fields during the day and returning to the protection of the camps in the evening.

It is a priority of LWF-Kitgum to provide support to those people who are making the transition to move closer to home. In Oryang, a relatively small camp the LWF is building the first solar-powered motorized borehole in a Kitgum decongestion camp. The borehole will offer four different sites of four taps each, thus serving a greater population. There are currently 5,000 people living in Oryang camp, with an expected increase of 2,000 people during this time when many are moving in the direction of home.

“People want to go back home, that is our wish,” says the Sub-County Chief for Palabek-Ogili IDP camp. “But people are still afraid. They have no security when they go to their fields.” She adds, “We are so grateful for what LWF is doing here. We cannot thank you enough for your support.”

Ogili is one of the furthest camps from Kitgum Town Council and it lies just 40 kilometers south of the Sudanese border. Its location along the route from Gulu to South Sudan has made it particularly susceptible to attacks from LRA rebels moving between the two areas. It’s only in the past few years that people have felt comfortable enough to move this far out.



*Ogili Borehole: the long line of jerrycans waiting to be filled*

In Ogili, LWF has drilled one borehole and is in the process of building another; LWF has also built several institutional latrines and trained 20 hygiene promoters to raise awareness in the community about safe sanitation practices—an education that will surely be useful as those families continue their slow road home.