Northern Uganda: Analyzing Vulnerability of Primary Schools by Poverty and Conflict

Background
Conflict and instability have plagued northern Uganda for decades, yielding severe consequences for the protection of people and their rights. Children and education systems suffer greatly from the consequences of war and violence, and the instability in northern Uganda is no exception to this trend. Although education has the potential to be life-saving and life-sustaining, children and entire communities are being denied of their right to education. The Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) is notorious for abducting children from schools in northern Uganda, which further impacts already-suffering enrollment rates and quality levels. Although the LRA has now migrated into the Democratic Republic of Congo, there are still attacks in northern Uganda, and the war-torn region continues to suffer from instability and violence.

Meanwhile, livelihoods are closely tied to the nature of conflict in many parts of this northern region. For many families, livestock traditionally comprised the main source of wealth and nutrition. However, instability, marginalization from the central government, and shifting internal power dynamics have contributed to an increase in cattle raiding and violent conflict. The traditional sources of livelihoods in these places have thus been severely challenged, and instability and poverty deepen as a result. Access to education suffers from poor financing and prevalence of violence. To help put this in perspective, of 31.6 million people in the entire country, 76% live on less than $2/day. (UNESCO EFA GMR 2011)

Project Overview & Purpose
This project explores the relationship between primary school locations, conflict, livelihood type, and poverty levels. These are some of the factors influencing children’s ability to go to school. My hypothesis was that in areas with high poverty rates (which I anticipated to be rural, and where livestock and agriculture were key livelihoods), there would be fewer primary schools for more people.

In recent decades, schools have been increasingly targeted. Abductions of boys and girls from schools supply militias with impressionable fighters, bush wives, workers etc. Demonstrating the vulnerability of northern Uganda’s primary schools, particularly that most conflicts are occurring in close proximity to these schools, is a strong advocacy tool for better protection of children and the need to turn schools into safer environments. This project serves to explore and remind us of the dangerous impact that conflict can have on future generations. The spatial analysis conducted focuses on northern Uganda, and the data used is broken down by sub-county.

Measuring Vulnerability
Vulnerability was measured by two factors. First, official poverty density statistics per sub-county in northern Uganda were used. The poverty density rates were broken into six ranges, which were given numbers to rate them from best to worst (1-6). Second, conflict in relation to schools was quantified. I assumed that a 7 kilometer radius around the center of conflict locations would be no-go zones that would severely impact the movement and safety of people within those areas. I then calculated which schools had conflicts occurring within 7km of their grounds. Based on the number of conflicts occurring within this radius, I rated the schools from best to worst (1-6).

Once these individual ratings were obtained, I assigned the subcounties a combined rating to see which areas were most affected by poverty and conflict-near primary schools. These are considered the most vulnerable areas for education, where enrollment rates and educational quality are likely very low.

What the Spatial Analysis Demonstrates
The spatial analysis shows that the areas with the highest vulnerability are urban. These are also the areas where there are fewer primary schools in relation to the size of the population. The agriculture areas also have fewer primary schools in relation to population size than the livestock and livestock/agriculture mix zones. Violent conflict is also more congegated in livestock/agriculture mix zones than in areas where agriculture is the main source of livelihood.

Conclusions
The available data certainly has limitations, including missing data for a few sub-counties, enrollment and retention rates, number of child abductions from school, and dates of conflict incidents. However, this analysis makes it clear that schools are heavily impacted by conflict, and that poverty rates coincide with these areas. Now that the LRA has mostly left Uganda, a case is to be made that re-building the education system is integral to combating poverty. The ratios suggest that more schools are needed in urban areas, and it is unclear whether or not the small numbers of schools are contributing to poverty rates or resulting from them. Regardless, there is a correlation. The children of northern Uganda’s rights have been continuously violated, and unless these challenges are faced head-on, they will continue to fall victim to rights violations.

Cartographer: Lisa DiPangrazio
Sources: Uganda Bureau of Statistics, World Resources Institute, USAID, Armed Conflict Location & Event Database (ACLED), Uganda Clusters. All accessed April 2012.

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