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Uganda, Factor 14: Conflict Resolution

**Uganda: Coaxing a Nation Out of Conflict with Global Diplomatic and Humanitarian Initiatives**  
(Sustainably Empowering the Foundations of Democracy and Agricultural Self-Proficiency)

“If you desire peace, cultivate justice, but at the same time cultivate the fields to produce more bread; otherwise there will be no peace.” -Dr. Norman E. Borlaug  
(*Founder of The World Food Prize, 1970 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, and Personal Inspiration*)

I have deemed it appropriate to begin this paper with the preceding quote from Dr. Borlaug purely by happenstance, whereas nothing could more accurately capture the scope of this report. Since the green revolution of which Borlaug is known as the father, we have had the ability to grow enough food to end hunger worldwide. Yet almost 10 million people, mostly young and living in sub-Saharan Africa, die every year of hunger, malnutrition, and resultant diseases (Thurow and Kilman, 2009). Food insecurity is at the forefront of the issues that a generation of global citizens must face. At its heart, this paper aims to take and portray an informed, humanitarian view of Uganda as a testament and call to action supporting the idea that food security can be better sustained in a country by the prevention and resolution of political and armed conflict through effective sustainable diplomatic initiatives. However, through the masquerade of gibberish, this is more than a case study or a look at how one factor is the root cause of all of a country's hunger, but rather, this paper aims to give a better and more personal, realistic understanding via a case study of how hunger and lack of food security, humanitarian issues of utmost urgency, actually derive from an incredibly complex network of social, political, economic, geographic, and technological factors that our modern global society has created through its lack of a sustainable food model and tolerance of human rights violations. More importantly, this paper aims to service the correlating responsibility that our modern global society has thereby created for itself-- to clean up the mess.

Though countries are occasionally better off left to their own devices as pertains to revolution, since the beginning of this globalized society it has been the responsibility of key world powers to aid in the conflicts of developing nations once basic human rights begin to be violated. It is also, then, the responsibility of the global community to aid in guiding that nation towards a successful sustainable future as conflict recedes. Why then has the Ugandan conflict directly and indirectly contributed to the violation of the human rights, including food security, of a whole region for decades?

In my experience researching this topic, I worked with a man named Denis Okema, born in Gulu, Uganda. Denis, a graduate of Chestnut Hill College, now works with Global Education Motivators, doing just as the name suggests at schools around much of the eastern half of the country. Denis' experience relates mostly to Northern Uganda, which will be the focus of this paper. I first met Denis when he came to my middle school speaking about his experience as an escaped child soldier at the age of 10 of the Lord's Resistance Army, though more on that later. I remember 13 year old me transiently staring into the kind eyes of this tall, experienced man, being disillusioned as to some of the harsh truisms in this world, never expecting to meet him again. For this reason, when this opportunity arose, I found it a remarkable chance to work again with Denis and to get him to alter the scope of his experience to focus on food security as pertains to conflict resolution. He and I both found that it was a natural and easy transition. Denis' firsthand knowledge contributed greatly to the satisfaction of my desire to deliver a real, more intimate look at this issue.

Uganda could reluctantly boast giving rise to Africa's longest running armed conflict. Since the 1990s Uganda has been involved in a civil war in the north against the Lord's Resistance Army led by Joseph

Kony, who wishes to, allegedly, establish a state based on the biblical Ten Commandments. Kony stands guilty of carrying out widespread abduction of children to serve as soldiers or sex slaves. The LRA has abducted an estimated 30,000 children and the civil war has led to the displacement of 1.6 million people from Northern Uganda, including the death, mutilation and kidnapping of more than 100,000 people (*Invisible Children*). After twenty years in Uganda, the LRA now operates minimally; in small, mobile groups across central Africa. One of the key notable characteristics of Kony's LRA is the consistent willingness to do whatever is required in the name of self-preservation (*Invisible Children*). The 21-year conflict, caused mostly by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) since the late 1980s, has left the Acholi sub-region scarred, recovering from the effects of armed conflict and displacement. The Northern region also includes Karamoja, which is Uganda's poorest sub-region. These regions, known for their chronic food insecurity and poor access to basic social services such as education and health, have been host to a combination of factors which have undermined the capability of households to meet their basic nutritional needs (*Invisible Children*). Uganda as a whole, however, has had a somewhat stable national government since 1986. And so, though conflict is on the way to resolution in Uganda, the impacts of this factor on Ugandan food security and life as a whole is still tremendous, and this presents an opportunity to help benefit the people and coax a nation into a much more supported and stable habitat.

In establishing the impact that conflict and resultant food insecurity has had on Uganda, a better understanding of real, typical families in Uganda is required, and this account comes mostly from Denis' firsthand experience. To some degree, extended and prolific family units of about 6-8 people usually live together in small structures on their own farms, which vary in size from single acres to "commercial" farms of 50 or more acres. The majority of families do not directly own their land, but work under some form of modern sharecropping, being indebted to the land owner for permission to farm on the land. Sustenance farming carried out by these families is the basis of Uganda's food system and home life, and nearly all farms are managed by families or collective communities. Farms that do raise livestock rarely have more than cattle, sheep, or chickens, and the economies of some tribes in the Northeast even rely solely on local breeds of cattle. Livestock plays a big role in economics whereas livestock act as a sort of quasi bank account, temporarily occupying excess wealth in a profitable way. Most farms, however, are predominantly occupied with a wealth of crop maintenance duties rather than livestock. Barriers are faced as vegetables are difficult to store with underdeveloped technologies to do so. Benign jobs that would be nearly effortless in more wealthy areas are major sources of stress for many Ugandan farmers. Irrigation is found in a few instances, "less than ten percent", says Denis, as well as tractors and other large farm equipment, but most farming is done using hand tools and water transported by hand. It could surely be supported in saying that these practices are much more demanding and subject to inconsistent yields than the agricultural practices of more developed nations. This does, however, create a well representative image of many of Uganda's families, working together on farms as small communities and large families looking to ensure sustainable survival and aiming to thrive, just as the rest of humanity aims to do. Diets are therefore composed mostly of whatever families can grow; grains such as rice and millet, plantains, occasional red meat, and scarce vegetables, predominately white and less vegetative. These family farms are usually a family's only income source, whereas excess crops are sold at markets and used to acquire other required goods. However, only a good knowledge of agriculture can lead to the ability to produce excess. Families must understand planting season complexities and how to maximize the efficiency of the short rainy season from roughly April to November. Done correctly, some crops can be grown multiple times in the same season. However, done incorrectly and whole plots of crops can fail. Regarding the education system, Uganda's focus therefore lies in the necessities; literacy as pertains to communication, comprehension of the weather and market systems, basic math in order to keep records and understand basics of microeconomics. This education aims to enable young children to be productive members of their family farms, whereas that is how students will get the most use from their education. A family must have not just able minded, but able bodied individuals in order to maintain a successful viable family farm. Healthcare typically comes in the form of local village doctors and hopeful home treatments. Medicine is mostly accessible, but especially in poor northern regions, money acts as a major

barrier to adequate family health care. Somewhat paradoxically, while individual family members are depended on to be able to produce food and earn money for the family to buy goods such as medicine, individuals cannot be productive contributors when they are in failing health. Therefore, if a family member becomes debilitated, the debilitation itself acts as a barrier to achieving rehabilitation. And if families are not adequately educated, they will not be able to create excess food and therefore income. In this way, a vicious cycle preys upon the small farmers of Uganda, whereby no agricultural excess means no money, which in turn means no goods or medicine, causing unhealthy family members, furthering the inability of the family to produce excess food. Seeing as this agricultural system is so interconnected to all aspects of life, this lack of excess crops impacts the ability to make a living wage and to be connected to accessible food markets, and in turn the ability to properly provide nutrition for one's family. Indeed, the frailty of this interconnected web of factors is better understood by understanding how individual families function within their society.

In the case of Uganda, conflict resolution has long served both directly and indirectly with other factors as a barrier to food security. Agricultural productivity faces its own problems without conflict's presence. Ugandan farmers are under equipped and often and unfortunately inadequately educated as is. The systems that Ugandan farmers operate under (social, political, economic, geographic, and technological) create an agricultural system that is frail when subjected to stress. Nonetheless, sustenance farming itself is indeed sustainable without conflict in the picture. To be rather blunt, conflict nearly halts agricultural production in a country that is structured as Uganda has been described previously. Where conflict arises, the population is often displaced and families, no longer able to run their own sustenance farms, become dependent of relief organizations. Internally Displaced People is a term that has been assigned those leaving their own homes and farms abandoned due to lack of conflict security. When all aspects of human, let alone crop, security are minimized, trauma ensues and long term food sustainability is no longer the priority of displaced citizens. Families can lose all sources of income as they are displaced by conflict, especially whereas most incomes are directly related to agricultural productivity. In this way, conflict resolution has long been pairing with other factors to decrease agricultural productivity in Uganda. Job providing institutions are often unable to operate in a conflict ridden nation, creating more unemployment cases. In this way, instances of true living wages in Uganda effectively go from common to rare in a time of conflict. In a conflict-free Uganda, local markets would thrive to various degrees and nutrition would be suitable, at least, for most families. Conflict is able to impact these aspects of food security, whereas when production halts, markets crash. Markets still functioning are hardly so, whereas public places can become hotspots for conflict instigation. Also, Internally Displaced People, having resorted to aid from organizations such as the Red Cross, often see a dietary shift that actually catalyzes malnourishment by relying heavily and almost exclusively on micronutrient-lacking grains and corn. As these displaced individuals find themselves resorted to refugee camps, other aspects of health pertaining to human rights suffer. The inadequacy of medicine is furthered as diseases such as cholera, dysentery, and malaria can spread in close quarter camps, which accompanies a widespread loss of hope in the most affected areas. In this way, it could be seen that conflict acts as a catalyst to the aforementioned vicious cycle impacting family farms. There is also evidence that households in conflict affected areas deliberately make choices that reduce their production and, thus, the risks of predation, looting, or loss of crops or livestock. In northern Uganda some households purposefully shifted their livestock holdings from cattle to smaller ruminants, reducing the value of their herds by two-thirds ("Food, Security, Justice and Peace"). In these ways, conflict builds upon preexisting barriers to agricultural productivity and the ability to live sustainably, directly or indirectly disturbing nearly all aspects of Ugandan life.

I believe it is plain to see how the successful and supportive coaxing of this nation out of conflict would therefore benefit Uganda as a whole. Not just food security would be improved, but the whole of Uganda's return to normalcy could come to fruition. The problem, however, is that conflict's presence is the result of other major issues within a society, and the ability to sustainably resolve conflict is impacted by many other factors that are themselves interconnected (Simmons, 2013). Climate, for example, is

incredibly likely to impact conflict, whereas climate is a basic cause of conflict. Climate, especially in a world increasingly impacted by the ever-present threats of climate change, displaces citizens and creates increased numbers of dependent people and increased human interaction. Climate dictates good farmland, and good farmland becomes a scarce resource. And indeed, resource scarcity is largely at play in Uganda due mostly to factors such as climate's impacts and overpopulation. Water scarcity is surely a major problem in many regions of Uganda. In Uganda, fertility rate is high, a bad sign for resource deficient nations and the world as a whole. More people to satisfy means more resources and energy are required. Energy in rural areas comes mostly in the form of wood for cooking, which consumes resources including farmland. However, as deforestation ensues, the fragile climate is additionally altered. As population rises, sanitation decreases from lack of living space, but if people proliferate they are utilizing more resources. Pollution increases correspondingly. Trauma ensues from all these stress factors and societal values decay in general. All of these factors magnify the effects of each other exponentially and the nation becomes stressed, a certain prerequisite to conflict. This vast interconnectedness of factors contributing to conflict resolution and food security is the true issue at hand, whereas conflict is both a cause and effect of food insecurity.

In regards to Uganda, it is not about resolving conflict to resume food security, but rather about how to coax a nation that is coming away from a conflict that impacted all aspects of life into a nearly self-sufficient society as relates to food security especially. However, in this sense, I do not feel that food security is what should be directly focused on, whereas food security tends to be an indicating factor as to a nation's success with unseen variables. Rebuild a conflict nation correctly, and food security will be not far. In this way, our goal in Uganda should be to help rebuild a strong nation that can rely on its own agriculture to support itself. If we help Uganda globalize itself while catering to local societal and cultural needs, conflict will be more effectively resolved and prevented as food security is bettered. **And so it is a simple idea- increase food security indirectly as a byproduct of supporting a nation's peaceful foreign/domestic relations and construction on the foundations of effective democracy and agricultural self-proficiency.** So now to the important part- How do we do it? My revised model to be explained here and the general concepts within are the result of collaborating my own research, first hand input from Denis Okema, and the call for action as outlined by Roger Thurow and Scott Kilman (p259-276).

#### **Establish a transitional justice system.**

A transitional justice system is a temporary justice system that focuses not on retribution for war crimes, but on moving past the problem with sustainable rehabilitation and peace. This type of system has been shown effective through instances such as post-apartheid South Africa and in Rwanda following the '90-'94 genocide. Denis referenced a national transitional justice system as a necessary step to be taken to achieve and sustain Ugandan peace.

#### **Develop agricultural infrastructure.**

International organizations must answer the call to expanding infrastructure in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, where less than four percent of cropland is irrigated, and one third of the rural population lives within one and a half miles of a paved road, according to a report from the Partnership to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa. Simple and cheap improvements made by entrepreneurs and scientists towards irrigation accessibility must be embraced. Infrastructure supports the means of production in any country, and rural Ugandan farmers are in need of that support.

#### **African governments must increase spending on important sectors.**

It should be more the priority of many African governments to spend money on agriculture, directly and indirectly. Scientific research, education, outreach programs to provide aid to a country's farmers, technology improvement initiatives, etc. Uganda spends less than 10 percent of its national budget on

agricultural support (“Uganda”). This is not nearly sufficient for a country in modern day sub-Saharan Africa.

**The means of production must fall to the people.**

African governments must allow private land to be owned by small farmers, whereas currently, most land in many African countries is controlled by some level of administration. However, this system of share-cropping discourages and disables small farmers from securing credit with their land or from making improvements to their property, including irrigation. Uganda has the ability to be sustaining itself and even exporting agricultural produce, but the systems in place and the nation’s political history discourage this from being achieved. Denis told me that giving back the land and therefore the means of production to the people is the first way he would attempt to improve food and conflict security in Uganda.

**We must spread scientific and technological advancements in agriculture to small farmers.**

It begins with energy. Solar and wind power technologies are advanced almost literally every day. Why should we aim just to sustain Uganda, when we can make them and other developing African nations into true models for sustainable global energy systems? Though advancements in energy and other technologies such as irrigation could greatly benefit small farmers in Africa, another great potential for improvement comes from a taboo source- genetically engineered seeds. For all the deserved negative publicity that companies such as Monsanto have received, these technologies are real, they are safe, and they can change the world for the better. Once again, the problem with these technologies come largely from economic factors. “Western biotech companies should see it is in their interest to share their breakthroughs with poor farmers on a royalty-free basis... If these seeds help millions of farmers reduce their poverty, those farmers will eventually become customers who can afford to pay for commercial seed. (Thurow and Kilman, p270)”. This is not the case currently though. Regardless, money should be set aside and the ethics should prevail- the simple fact is that we could bring drought, pest, and disease-resistant seed technology to rural farmers all across Africa. It is now the responsibility of leading world markets in Europe and across the globe to embrace GE products and promote their incorporation into the free market. All countries involved should reserve the right to conduct any testing on these products that they desire, but very few legitimate concerns have been raised globally, and these products have been widespread on American shelves for years. Ugandan farmers could benefit tremendously from the incorporation of drought-resistant seeds, among other technologies.

**Biofuels should be considered at least as an ethical quandary.**

In the face of an energy crisis, the world can’t be blamed for looking to alternative fuel sources such as ethanol from corn. However, these technologies continue to alert moral discretion as food is “wasted” in pursuit of combustible fuel while global hunger remains vastly prevalent. From India to Africa to the United States, however, alternatives are being considered that use inedible plants or inedible parts of plants that are already harvested, such as corn. Nonetheless, these technologies must be supported and considered for ethical conundrums by both consumers and governments.

**Local democracies must be well empowered and utilized by citizens.**

True governments of the people must be existent and active in Uganda; not just at the national level, but at the local level. True governments of the people address grievance and actively prevent conflict. Local leaders should be empowered in negotiation and resolution skills to combat tribal rivalries. Rule of Law must be obeyed while evaluating the cost of conflict long-term. Local governments are the key to sustainable national governments, whereas this is where individuals can make the most difference. The global community must be willing to take all measures to preserve democratic elections and government in Uganda.

**Establish an emergency United Nations food reserve.**

In the new modern era, socialism has become a buzzword for much worse implications. However, especially as relates to international food security, it is far time that we embrace some aspects of humanity's interdependence and desire to work for the common good. An international grain reserve could save millions in times of emergency, and could be fueled by aid efforts from governments or a sort of "tax" system for donation based on levels of production in wealthy nations. Wealthy nations could also rally in times of need to restock the reserve, which would be withheld from impacting national markets. Millions of Ugandan refugees could have benefitted from an aid system such as this.

**Develop an international graduated agricultural subsidy program.**

Food security is directly related to national security, and every nation should have the ability to feed its own citizens at least. Historically, it has been shown that subsidies are required to achieve sustainable agricultural models, such as the beginning of the Green Revolution in Europe and the Americas. Subsidies targeted to help farmers obtain good seeds and fertilizers have been proved to work and boost private business. However, this system must be graduated in a way that does not discourage farmers from growing as much as they can. Farmers should be subsidized on an application basis and should be additionally supplemented for sustainable agricultural practices such as water preservation and other environmental conservation efforts. Ugandan farmers need to be granted the means to better themselves, from crop insurance to bailouts to other incentives.

**Aid organizations should support local agriculture.**

Instead of sending U.S.-grown food, the national government along with organizations like the Red Cross should focus their food aid budget on buying crops in regions close to hunger-impacted areas. In turn, food will arrive to those impacted quicker and cheaper with lessened transport costs, and African-grown crops will have a new market. It is far time that the domestic economic benefits are kept out of international relations as pertains to human rights. Morality is the basis of government, not income. This could also contribute to improving nutrition of food aid as native diets are preserved, which was not the case for Ugandan refugees among others under current food aid systems.

**Increase educational aid in African countries.**

Education is the key to both sustained peace and to successful agricultural practices. Education truly is power. Local educators and the national education system in Uganda must be supported by the Ugandan government along with international forces. Educated citizens become active participants in the economy and the government. And if nothing else supports this notion, then the global community should resort to proverbs- "Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day, teach a man to fish and he will never starve." - Anonymous

**And perhaps most importantly, a worldwide shift is required at the level of individual action.**

In a few ways, some of the most important issues facing our global society today have surpassed the level of individual action. However, the power of grassroots movements, community projects, and individual determination is not to be underestimated. Regardless of the role of governments in the process, individual action can grow with exponential impact. History is full of stories of small groups of people making a tremendous impact. For example, the global effort to fight wheat rusts—fungi that can rapidly decimate wheat as it matures in the field—involved a critical breakthrough that brought modern science to bear on the challenges of agricultural development at the hands of Nobel Prize Laureate Norman Borlaug. As a result of his actions and those contributing, about 117 million hectares of land under wheat cultivation were protected from the fungi, directly ensuring the food security of 60 to 120 million rural households and many more millions of consumers ("Millions Fed"). One idea or effort can be all it takes.

As history may indicate, one of the most important corollaries to any plan like this is this importance of maintaining a supreme cultural awareness founded on mutual respect, not forced assimilation or pigeon-holed aid programs. This is why cultural understanding plays an integral role in successful diplomacy and

international support. So though it is indeed the role of national governments and international organizations to support and even lead these processes, it must be remembered that the goal is interdependence by choice and by preference, not interdependence by some twisted form of modern colonialism. In this way, the real Ugandan people must step up to accept aid and better themselves. It is the job of local families to actively partake in democratic and agricultural initiatives. With these ideas in mind, this model could truly make a difference to the sustainable food security of Uganda as it rises from conflict.

Uganda has indeed significantly reduced its levels of hunger and poverty over the last two decades, namely as a result of the decline of conflict. Many diplomatic initiatives are already impacting Ugandan lives, but not sufficiently. I suggest that the type of initiatives outlined in this paper could make this improvement more substantial and sustainable, and are the correct ways to do so. By creating sustainable conflict resolution, so many of the securities lacked in Ugandan society would be better sustained in obvious ways, especially pertaining to hunger. And even if the Ugandan case becomes close to resolution in achieving sustainability, the global community must learn from the mistakes it has already made and correct the system at the roots. These types of initiatives should be more the focus of governments and organizations worldwide. And these ideas are well supported- the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a new, universal set of goals that UN member states will be expected to use to shape their agendas and political policies over the next 15 years. The SDGs follow, and expand on, the millennium development goals (MDGs), which were agreed by governments in 2000, and are due to expire after a similar 15 year deadline (“Proposal for Sustainable Development Goals”).

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**#2-** End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

**#12-** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

**#16-** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

**#17-** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

... (“Proposal for Sustainable Development Goals”) ...

And so, it has been recognized internationally that it is our responsibility to continue to fight not just for food security, but for all human rights and for peaceful supportive diplomacy worldwide. Now the proper measures need to be made priority. But not to forget that we have overcome much worse as a global community, let’s answer the call to the world’s next great problems.

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