

**Nancy Rydberg**

Scott Kloeck-Jenson Fellowship report  
Summer Travel Award (2012) – Northern Uganda

Northern Uganda experienced over two decades of conflict and a large portion of its population was displaced for ten of those years. My summer fieldwork took place in a trading center located in what used to be one of the largest displacement camps in northern Uganda. I utilized a mixture of participant observation and formal and informal interviews to learn about what life is like in the trading center now that violence has subsided, and the policy of forced displacement in camps has ended. The experiences of war, displacement, and humanitarian aid were still very fresh in people's memories, and on a daily basis the spaces where I conversed with people invoked memories of the camp life. A man would point to the area around us and describe how closely packed the huts were spaced in the camp. Walking to visit a school on the edge of the center, a teacher would tell me that this area was not safe during the war, and if the military caught you out here, you would be considered a rebel. People still refer to the trading center as "the camp", and most public services are still concentrated in the trading center, which attracts many students who rent space in the center in order to attend school.

Another major component of my summer involved regularly visiting two primary schools, one vocational school and one secondary school in order to understand a bit more about the daily interactions between communities, students, and teachers. I spoke to teachers, head teachers and deputy head teachers about the main challenges their schools and communities currently face. I had the opportunity to attend a district conference on primary education where head teachers, deputy head teachers, representatives from NGOs, and local government officials discussed the issues they are dealing with in providing

quality education to all school-age students in the district. It was at this conference as well as through regular visits to schools that I observed the substantial role aid plays in public schools in the region. I witnessed governmental and non-governmental aid organizations like the Norwegian Refugee Council, AVSI, Save the Children, UNICEF, USAID, and World Vision intervening in schools to train teachers, evaluate programs, invest in infrastructure, sponsor students, promote parent participation in schools, and sensitize about the importance of girls' education.

I also spent quite a bit of time interviewing staff of NGOs, as well as local educational administrators, religious leaders, parents and teachers about their work in schools and communities. These interviews helped me understand the collage of international aid working in the education system in northern Uganda, as well as some local perspectives on how aid functions at the community and school level.

In order to connect the experiences of life in the trading center to life in the area surrounding the center, I accompanied friends from the center to their homes, which ranged between 7 and 20 miles from the center. While helping plant, weed and harvest crops in their homes I began to understand the connection between land, livelihoods and schooling in the region, as well as how land is connected to the mobility of people living there. I learned that often, the land people are currently farming is not the land they are entitled to under customary tenure, but due to land disputes, people either buy, rent or borrow (often from relatives) land in the place where they are temporarily living. For some, the hope of returning to one's land offers the hope of increased agricultural productivity, inheritance for children, as well as a way to pay school fees, which continue to limit access to education beyond the primary level.