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The JRP logo (below) is symbolic of hands surrounding a calabash, often used in reconciliation ceremonies.
Northern Uganda has suffered through 21 years of war. Over 1.7 million people have been displaced, often forcibly, into overcrowded and underserved camps. Each week, it is estimated that 1,000 people die of war-related causes (Internally displaced persons health and mortality survey, Uganda, 2005). In 2005, Jan Egeland, the former UN Undersecretary-General, recognized northern Uganda as one of the world's worst and most neglected humanitarian crises.

The primary victims of this conflict are civilians. Over 30,000 children have been abducted and forced to commit gross atrocities, sometimes against their own communities. If they manage to escape, they often return to live in insecure camps where they face intense stigma from their communities, gross poverty, the potential of re-abduction, and the consequences of powerful trauma.

About JRP

The Justice and Reconciliation Project works with marginalized and war-affected communities to strengthen locally-owned approaches to the reintegration of ex-combatants, justice and reconciliation in war-torn northern Uganda.

Based primarily in the Acholi-land districts of Amuru, Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader, JRP employs a local team of Acholi researchers that conducts grassroots-level, action-oriented and community-mandated research. It hosts dialogues, focus-group discussions and cultural activities to involve communities in discussions on justice. Through its reports and papers, Field Notes series, dialogues and national and international workshops, JRP disseminates findings to local, national and international stakeholders and continuously seeks to engage with these actors in order to identify approaches to the issues identified.

JRP also builds local capacity through training and technical support and improves policy coherence and consensus on approaches to justice and reconciliation in Uganda. It does so by documenting and supporting locally-identified solutions from a gender and youth-sensitive perspective. JRP works directly with victims of the conflict in some of the 100 internally displaced persons camps in northern Uganda, providing them tools needed to collaboratively identify and analyze problems in the area of justice and reconciliation.

JRP advocates on behalf of marginalized communities, striving to ensure that their voices are included in high-level policy forums and debates, including the Juba Peace Talks in southern Sudan. It produces policy relevant reports, participates in media communications and networks with a wide variety of justice actors (locally, nationally and internationally). It has a field office in Gulu, northern Uganda and satellite offices in Amuru, Anaka, Kitgum Matidi, Padibe and Pajule.

The Justice and Reconciliation Project envisions contributing to the attainment of peace, justice and reconciliation in Uganda as a whole. With local, national and international stakeholders, the Project will continue to collaboratively identify solutions to the challenges facing Acholi-land in 2008 and beyond.

Project History

JRP is the result of a 2005 research initiative between the Gulu District NGO Forum (Gulu, northern Uganda) and the Liu Institute for Global Issues at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver, Canada). It was formed with the support of Ker Kwaro Acholi, the cultural institution representing the Acholi people of northern Uganda. In response to the horrific humanitarian crisis unfolding at the height of the war and to the subsequent response of the international community, this international team began the process of exploring and documenting local approaches to the challenges of justice and reconciliation in northern Uganda. A major finding of JRP’s initial research was that in order to move forward, culturally-sensitive healing and reconciliation must begin to take place within Acholi-land. This finding and more can be read in JRP’s flagship report, Roco Wat I Acholi: Traditional Approaches to Justice and Reconciliation in Northern Uganda (2005).
The Year in Review

July 2007 marked the one-year anniversary of the initiation of peace talks between the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda, hosted in the southern Sudanese capital of Juba. JRP has taken an active role in bringing the concerns and demands for justice and reconciliation from the grassroots to the bargaining table. The June signing of Agenda Item Three on Accountability and Reconciliation was in part the result of weeks of JRP’s preparation of original research findings into a comprehensive presentation made to delegates. The seminar, entitled *Towards a Common Understanding of Traditional, National, and International Justice Options*, was co-organised by JRP with the International Center for Transitional Justice and convened Ker Kwaro Acholi on June 2 in Juba.

The past year of research has uncovered a plethora of issues that must be addressed in order for lasting peace to be attained in Uganda. From January through March, the JRP team conducted a major research phase in 9 IDP camps, examining community-level mechanisms that might facilitate a process of truth-telling at the local level in northern Uganda. The ensuing report, *The Cooling of Hearts: Community Truth-Telling in Acholi-land* examines the desires and fears of the war-affected populace in learning the truth about the now 21-year-old conflict. In an ongoing strategy of community consultation, this report was translated into Luo, brought back to the camps, and discussed in local papers, international forums, community dialogues, and on the radio. Consultations with local leaders were sought in order to refine the report to truly reflect the opinions of Acholi. It provides important new insights into current debates in the country and at the Juba peace talks on how justice can be served in northern Uganda.

Throughout the course of the truth-telling research, staff also uncovered a desire amongst residents that certain massacres be documented and that their consequences be discussed. JRP responded and produced *Field Note 4: Remembering the Atiak Massacre of April 20, 1995*, released in April. A JRP representative visited the community for the memorial ceremony; the site of one of many as-yet undocumented scars on the populace of northern Uganda. JRP continues to document other major atrocities and several similar reports are forthcoming in 2008.

A fifth *Field Note* entitled *Abomination: Local belief systems and international justice* was written by JRP in order to emphasize the need for policy-makers to understand the importance of understanding local spiritual beliefs in Acholi when considering transitional justice strategies in the region. In the spirit of previous JRP reports such as *Roco Wat I Acholi* (2005) and *Alice’s Story* (2006), this *Field Note* bridged the gap between indigenous and international motives for justice in Acholi.

JRP continues to lead its colleagues locally, nationally and internationally in the unification of local voices aiming to affect positive change in Juba, Garamba and Kampala. JRP was instrumental in the release of the August 11th *Lira Declaration on Agenda Item Three of the Juba Peace Talks by Cultural and Religious Leaders, Women and Youth from Madi, Teso, Lango and Acholi Sub-Regions*. The Lira Declaration is the result of a consultation attended and signed by the leadership of traditional and religious institutions, including women and youth representatives.

On August 20 and 30, over 100 civil society organizations were involved in consultative meetings in the regions of Acholi, Lango, Teso, and West Nile to reach a common position on the ongoing Juba consultations. JRP played a significant role in facilitating the discussions and provided technical guidance during the regional meetings. The resultant *Declaration by Northern Uganda Civil Society Organisations on Agenda Item Three of the Juba Peace Talks* is a model of CSO cooperation.

JRP continues to grow and respond to the changing needs of the people of northern Uganda. Project staff actively built upon their capacities as researchers and advocates throughout 2007, attending numerous workshops and presenting solutions to justice and reconciliation issues on behalf of JRP’s community partners. JRP will continue this important work in 2008 and beyond.

Erin Baines, Research Director
Michael Otim, Project Coordinator
The Justice and Reconciliation Project continuously strives to produce grassroots-endorsed and policy-relevant research reports. The Project defines ‘action research’ as a reflective process whereby research is dictated by the goal to affect positive change in the host community. By collaborating with local stakeholders in Acholi, JRP’s work results in successful interventions. Its research is thus community-driven and designed to serve the needs of the host community.

**Excerpt from The Cooling of Hearts: Community Truth-Telling in Acholi-land**

‘I am an old man. I need to hear the truth before I die.’

Every county in northern Uganda holds a story of atrocity; a story with no official record, no acknowledgement by perpetrators and no support for its victims. In researching just three areas where massacres had occurred, the researchers were unable to obtain definitive numbers and names of the dead or missing, where records have been improperly recorded, lost, or exist in memory only.

However, what does exist is the testimony of survivors, partial, informal records of NGOs, elders and government officials, and the bones of the dead. Given proper attention and time, these could provide important evidence in providing a detailed account of what happened in northern Uganda during the course of the conflict. Most importantly, the survivors of these atrocities want to be involved in establishing the truth themselves, and see this process as vital to moving beyond the conflict.

**JRP Reports and Papers**


In a quantitative survey with 1,143 internally displaced persons, a resounding 97.5 percent of persons responded ‘yes’ to the question ‘should the truth about what happened during the conflict be known?’ In the overwhelming majority of qualitative interviews and focus group discussions conducted by JRP in early 2007, persons argued that truth-telling was needed in order to:

- Understand the root causes of the conflict (in particular, why the LRA or Government took the actions they did) in order to prevent future conflicts;
- Bring closure: to learn what happened to loved ones who are still missing;
- Bring closure: to lay the spirits of the dead to rest and cleanse the area of misfortune;
- Initiate reparations: to receive both symbolic and material compensation (culu kwor);
- To be able to move towards reconciliation (mato oput).

However, the respondents also voiced certain fears, including fear of retaliation from perpetrators, fear of revenge against perceived perpetrators, fear of re-traumatisation and disappointment, and fear that a truth-telling process would negatively affect the Amnesty and peace process.

These results, published in _The Cooling of Hearts_ have been presented for consideration to delegates at the Juba Peace Talks.
Major Research Findings

The National launch of the *Cooling of Hearts* was held on July 13 at the GUSCO Peace Centre in Gulu. This one-day function involved representatives from the Government, local and national civil society organisations (CSOs), local and international peace actors. The launch was attended by over 50 representatives, including Rtd. Col. Walter Ochora, the Resident District Commissioner of Gulu District, Mr. Aliro Omara, the chairperson of the Uganda Human Rights Commission, Mr. Oketta Keneth, the Prime Minister of Ker Kwaro Acholi, Adam O’Brien of the International Crisis Group, and Mr. Nobert Mao, the chairman of Gulu District. The workshop address was delivered by Justice Julius Peter Onega, the Chairperson of the Amnesty Commission, who also officially launched report.

Field Notes

*Field Notes* is a series of short reports that explore the various dimensions and challenges of justice based on consultation with war-affected people. They cover topics discovered over the course of JRP’s more intensive research phases to be of import to the Acholi community. JRP produced two editions of *Field Notes* in 2007.

A crowd awaits a ceremony to begin outside of the JRP office, Anaka Camp, 2006. Photo by Lino Owor Ogora.
Major Research Findings

‘All of us live as if our bodies do not have souls. If you think of the massacre and the children we have been left with, you feel so sad.’

On April 20th 1995, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) entered the trading centre of Atiak and after an intense offensive, defeated the Ugandan army stationed there. Hundreds of men, women, students and young children were then rounded up by the LRA and marched a short distance into the bush until they reached a river. There, they were separated into two groups according to their sex and age. After being lectured for their alleged collaboration with the Government, the LRA commander in charge ordered his soldiers to open fire three times on a group of about 300 civilian men and boys as women and young children witnessed the horror. The LRA commander reportedly in charge – the now indicted second in command Vincent Otti – then turned to the women and children and told them to applaud the LRA’s work. Before leaving, youth were selectively rounded up and forced to join the LRA to serve as the next generation of combatants and sexual slaves.

Twelve years later, the wounds of the massacre have far from healed. As the survivor’s testimony at the beginning of this report puts it, ‘all of us live as if our bodies do not have souls.’ Despite the massacre being one of the largest and by reputation most notorious in the twenty-one year history of the conflict, no official record, investigation or acknowledgement of events exists. No excavation of the mass grave has been conducted and therefore the exact number of persons killed is not known. Survivors literally live with the remains of bullet fragments inside them. Although the massacre site is only a few kilometres from the trading centre, a proper burial of those slaughtered 12 years ago is not complete: as one survivor reminds us, ‘the bodies of some people were never brought back home, because there were no relatives to carry them home.’

Excerpt from Remembering the Atiak Massacre: April 20th 1995.


This report provides the first known written record of events leading to the massacre, based on the testimony of 41 survivors and witnesses, as well as prominent community members.

Drawing on the findings of JRP’s research phase on truth-telling, the report contains a series of reflections on steps that could be taken to advance transitional justice, including acknowledgement, truth-telling and reparations. Recommendations are advanced in the conclusion of the report.
Major Research Findings

Testimonies illustrate the powerful impact of the ceremony and how it provides a space in which to bring together diverse actors. It does not claim to be complete, but rather provides a partial record in hopes of prompting the Government to begin an investigation into the multiple massacres that have taken place in Uganda. Ideally, this will lead the Government to advance a transitional justice strategy, together with civil society, that will begin to heal the open wounds of Atiak.

Forthcoming 2008 JRP reports of other massacre sites in northern Uganda will detail how and why people remember the dead.

- **Abomination: Local belief systems and international justice.** Justice and Reconciliation Project, Field Note 5, September 2007.

Over the course of two years of research in internally displaced persons camps in Acholi-land, JRP researchers have repeatedly come across the concept of kiir, or abomination: the local belief that certain transgressions of the moral order will lead to grave misfortune. This Field Note analyzes the Acholi concept of abomination to assess what relevance it has for transitional justice in that region. It suggests that processes such as psycho-social healing, accountability of perpetrators, development and the return of displaced persons to their villages may be shaped by the belief in abomination, and so any intervention might consider its relevance in planning.

Below: An elder gives an agat (blessing) at a Moyo Piny ceremony (cleansing of the area). Kalongo Camp, Pader District, 2006. Photo by JRP.

Cleansing too is a form of reconciliation. It is reconciliation at the highest level, for it is reconciliation initiated by the powerless to the benefit of all Acholi people, living and dead. As we witnessed in one cleansing ceremony, the elder spoke his agat, or blessing, and evoked the names of the local ancestors: ‘You are the ones who brought us into this world. You gave us life and above all the rituals to cleanse our people. Today we come before you to do the same things you used to do when you were in this world. We cleanse your children in your presence as a deed destined to harmonize them with their brothers and sisters in the community. They were captured and forced to kill their own people. They have greatly displeased the spirit world against their own wish and therefore call for cleansing so that they return to normal. So bless and accept our ritual.’

He concluded by saying ‘Poto ceng otee (let every cen go as the sunsets).’ As the crowd pointed to the sunset, they responded, ‘Otee matwal. Let them go forever.’

Excerpt from **Abomination: Local belief systems and international justice.**
Engaging Grassroots Actors

Dialogues and Debates

Focal Points are camp residents employed by JRP to engage grassroots actors in action-oriented research on justice and reconciliation. In order to ensure that JRP’s research is action-oriented and serves the needs of its research subjects, the work of the FP is directed by the needs of the community. Their primary responsibilities include facilitating grassroots mobilization and participation in JRP activities, participating in research design and data collection with the Research Officers and documenting case studies and general observations in daily diaries.

Focal Points also hold dialogues and debates within the IDP camps on a variety of justice and reconciliation issues. Hundreds of community members attend each dialogue and actively participate in the discussions. Results of the dialogues are typed into field reports and central findings are rolled into research reports and Field Notes. Dialogues conducted in 2007 included:

- January 2007, Truth-telling, Anaka
- January 2007, Truth-telling, Amuru
- March 16, 2007, Truth-telling, Lapul

JRP Research Officer Anyeko Ketty conducts a community dialogue, 2007. Photo by JRP.
Engaging Grassroots Actors

- March 17, 2007, Truth-telling and justice, Kalongo
- March 31, 2007, Truth-telling and justice, Pajule
- April 30, 2007, Justice, reconciliation and culture, Pajule
- August 13, 2007, Peer support and reintegration, Anaka

Cultural Activities

Pajule Cultural Competition, June 2007. Photo by JR P.

Case Studies

JRP provides tools to Focal Points and their grassroots communities to do their own documentation on issues they feel are relevant to the Project. Members of the community often volunteer to document day-to-day conflicts within camps, and how these conflicts are resolved using local justice and reconciliation mechanisms.

Case studies of former war combatants were also compiled by focal persons and filed to JRP’s offices, where they are used to contribute to reports and Field Notes.

Cultural Competition

In May and June, through the initiatives and funding of Gulu Walk, JRP held a cultural gala in all the focal camps. The competitions attracted 40 cultural groups with a theme centered on justice and reconciliation and the winners were given prizes and support to carry out the competition. The competition provided a rich insight on what local mechanisms exists that can be used in reconciliation in Acholi. A report of the competition, including documentation in still photos and video, is forthcoming in 2008.
Engaging Grassroots Actors

This conflict, this conflict our KKA
What do we do to curb enmity?
What do we do to curb death?
Let’s go for peace talks to reconcile the people
Mediation reconciles people; it brings us together
Let’s come together and have dialogue so that peace returns to Acholi-land

Justice needs no siding, it needs no cheating
It needs no force, it needs no order, don’t consider friends and relatives in bringing justice

Mato oput unites people together
Let’s come together for mato oput to take place, we need peace
Once peace is here then we can return home, we shall dig, dance and worship the gods.

Excerpt from Wan lutino Acholi wabedo piny i wang oo wa (the children of Acholi gather around the central fire place). Ket Pong, Amuru Camp, 30 May 2007, Translated from Luo.

Juba Peace Talks

The Juba Peace Talks, although currently on hiatus, remain the single most significant opportunity for peace to be attained in northern Uganda. The Justice and Reconciliation Project remains committed to dialogue with Juba delegates and sent representatives to the Talks in 2007. JRP actively re-affirmed its mandate to strengthen, unify, and build-upon the capacities of local stakeholders through its facilitation of several workshops aimed at consensus-building vis-à-vis justice and reconciliation issues at Juba.


- Lira Declaration on Agenda Item Three of the Juba Peace Talks (Accountability and Reconciliation) by Cultural and Religious Leaders, Women and Youth from Madi, Teso, Lango and Acholi Sub-Regions. St. Augustine Hall, Lira, Uganda. August 11.

- CSO Consultations on Agenda Item Three. JRP, under the auspices of Gulu District NGO Forum and with funding from UNOHCHR, organized and provided technical guidance during regional consultations with civil society organisations working on peace, justice and reconciliation activities in northern Uganda. August 20-31.

Four consultative meetings in the regions of Acholi, Lango, Teso, and West Nile were held to reach a common position on the ongoing consultations on accountability and reconciliation. The Acholi meeting was from August 22 to 23 at the GUSCO Peace Centre and was spearheaded by JRP.

A declaration entitled Northern Uganda CSO Declaration on Agenda Item Three of the Juba Peace Talks was finalized and disseminated.

Public Outreach

‘When you share a report of this nature with stakeholders, it is very good, because not many NGOs do that after conducting research.’

Otim Benson Humphrey, Sub County Chief – Lapul S/C, Pajule on The Cooling of Hearts

JRP Presentations


• ‘Impact of War on Young Girls,’ World Vision’s Mother-Daughter Project in conjunction with ACCORD, Nairobi. The results of this workshop were sent as recommendations to the Juba Talks on Agenda Item Three. Acholi Inn, Gulu, Uganda. May 24.

• ‘Ethnographic Methodologies for Justice and Reconciliation in Northern Uganda’ at the Department of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. November 22

• ‘Young Mothers’, Crofton House School, Vancouver, Canada. November 15.

• ‘The Conflict in Northern Uganda’ the International Relations Students Association, University of British Columbia. Vancouver, Canada. November 27.

• ‘Pursuing Justice and Peace in Northern Uganda’ at Seminar on Crisis and Its Aftermath, the Payson Center for international Development and Technology Transfer, Tulane University. New Orleans, USA. December 4.


Workshops and Symposiums


• JRP shares research findings and best practices with Dr. Richard Vedan, Director of First Nations House of Learning Longhouse and Dr. June McCue, Director, First Nations Legal Studies. Musqueam, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. December 7.
Public Outreach

Media Impact

Research Officers hosting a radio show in Gulu, June 2007. Photo by Chessa Osburn.

Print


Radio

Local radio remains an essential and important vehicle for information dissemination in northern Uganda. Often listened to by LRA still in the bush, directed programmes have successfully encouraged hundreds of people to come home.

JRP project staff are regularly invited to discuss research results on the air in northern Uganda.

Three radio programmes in particular were devoted to discussing JRP’s truth-telling research, The Cooling of Hearts report, and the wider peace process. JRP staff presented findings on the programmes and took local calls during each of these sessions.


Video


JRP Website

The JRP website features a comprehensive link to all JRP reports and documents, including its flagship report, Roco Wat I Acoli: Traditional Approaches to Justice and Reconciliation in Northern Uganda (2005).

The website also features several photo galleries of traditional rituals and reconciliation ceremonies. Created in March 2006, to date the website has received over 17,500 unique visitors to the site from four continents.

Visit:

www.justiceandreconciliation.com
Capacity Building


- Transitional justice, research design, analytical skills and advocacy. External consultant training. April 30-May 4.

- Cape Town Transitional Justice Fellowship Program, Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ). Cape Town, South Africa. September-October.


- Qualitative analysis workshop, Dr. Felice Wyndham, Associate Professor of Anthropology. Department of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. November 20.


- Restorative justice and indigenous issues in Canada and Uganda. Dr. Bruce Miller, Professor of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Canada. November 26.

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The Annual Report 2007 was written by Letha Victor.

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Gulu Town, 2005. Photo by Elizabeth Langslow.
Women and children of the LRA. Nabanga, South Sudan, 2006. Photo by JRP.

Front, inside front, and back covers: Kalongo Camp, 2006. Photos by JRP.