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It's your right to vote: A voter participates during a previous election. Uganda is due to hold presidential elections in February 2011. (Internet photo)

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brother Olweny?" Otim would not pass a night without hearing the voice of Opoka. He spent sleepless nights and got terribly worried. Otim would not enjoy his food, and he became isolated because of guilt; because he knew he was the killer of Opoka.

Death Visits Otim's homestead:

As time passed, Otim's children started dying one by one from some mysterious sicknesses which medical authorities could not diagnose nor treat. After losing four children he decided to confess publicly to Olweny's family members and elders around in the village that he was the one that killed Opoka and not Olweny, his brother who was wrongly charged with murder and executed. Otim requested the elders and family members of Olweny and Opoka to allow him to make reparations for the death of the two brothers. However, the elders refused on the grounds that when Opoka was killed and his brother Olweny denied responsibility, they asked if anybody else was responsible but nobody came out. So they believed that Olweny was responsible for the death of his brother. For Otim now to come and declare that he was the one who killed Opoka would not be accepted. Consequently they left things to take their own course, knowing well that the *Cen* of Opoka had started revenge.

Death continued to consume Otim's family members, including daughters who were married to other clans. Finally death hit the last nail in the coffin by taking Otim's life.

It is interesting to note that before Otim died, after failing to convince elders as well as the families of Olweny and Opoka to accept reparations for what he had done, he gave himself up to the police in Gulu

saying that he was Opoka's killer and not Olweny who was wrongly condemned to death for killing his brother.

The Police did not take Otim seriously. They told him that the case of Opoka's death was closed and that he should go back home and settle the matter with the relatives of Opoka and Olweny.

Conclusion:

The above incident is a typical scenario involving *Cen* in the Acholi culture. *Cen* is therefore real in the culture of the Acholi and has been recognized from time immemorial.

For this reason, when an incident happens which is likely to evoke the wraths of *Cen* every effort must be made to deal with it before it erupts into *Cen*. This is precisely why the Acholi have the culture of paying compensation (*Culu Kwor*) for whatever wrong has been done to a person. The ceremony is then crowned by reconciliation, famously known as *Mato Oput*.

ENDS

CASTING THE BALLOT TO ADDRESS VICTIMHOOD: A CALL TO PUT TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE ON THE ELECTION AGENDA

By Lindsay McClain

Internationally, transitional justice, or TJ, is increasingly recognized as an important tool in resolving post-conflict instability and inter-communal tensions.

However, in many circles, especially among politicians and policy-makers, TJ still remains underestimated and largely misunderstood. Yet, in a country like Uganda, marred by a history of violence and unrest, citizens and leaders informed of the merits of TJ mechanisms are vital to

healing the wounds of war and ensuring the sustainability of peace - locally, regionally, and nationally.

At the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP), we work with grassroots communities to explore and engage on issues of justice and reconciliation and seek opportunities for war-affected communities to share their thoughts, ideas, and concerns with stakeholders and TJ actors. As Uganda prepares for the upcoming election season and reflects on the leadership of the last five years, we see an immense opportunity for war-affected communities to influence the direction that the justice and reconciliation debate takes in this country, whilst informing aspiring politicians of the political and social value of prioritizing transitional justice.

In order to ensure that victims' voices and interests are at the forefront of contestants' minds in the upcoming 2011 Ugandan elections, transitional justice must be prioritized on the election agenda. To do so, war-affected communities must demand that their concerns be addressed and acknowledged by candidates and parties contesting for seats in local and national government.

Moreover, this election needs candidates and parties that commit to sustainable peace in Uganda and that requires not only forward-looking planning and development, but also

stakeholders who address past abuses and feelings of injustice. It is our belief, guided by the ideas of the communities in which we work, that votes in this election should therefore be in favor of those who will commit themselves once elected to:

“...As Uganda prepares for the upcoming election... we see an immense opportunity for war-affected communities to influence the direction that the justice and reconciliation debate takes in this country...”

1. Accountability for past abuses: That they support a fair, transparent and balanced national transitional justice system that includes judicial investigations and prosecutions and traditional justice mechanisms, so that those responsible for human rights violations are held accountable.

2. National reconciliation through truth-telling: That they support provisions for truth-telling both at national and community-levels, so that forgiveness, healing and reconciliation can take place in Uganda.

3. Reparations for war victims: That they support a national reparations policy to fairly administer reparations to war victims in Uganda. There is need for coordination of all compensation efforts to ensure that reparations schemes across the country are consistent and that victims are consulted throughout the process.

4. **Memorialisation:** That they commit to undertake symbolic measures to promote remembrance, healing and closure nationally and among their constituencies.
5. **Gender justice:** That they support efforts that challenge impunity for sexual and gender-based violence and ensure women and children's equal access to redress of human rights violations.
6. **Structural reforms:** That they support efforts that transform state institutions from instruments of repression and corruption to instruments of public service delivery and integrity, with a transparent and independent military, police and judiciary.



Communal ceremony of nyono tong (stepping the egg) in Lukung, Lamwo district. Engaging transitional justice in the election agenda would in the long term hold political leaders accountable to the community. (Photo from www.justiceandreconciliation.com)

understanding of how transitional justice can be effectively implemented. But by mobilizing war-affected communities to demand their grievances be addressed and acknowledged, we are providing communities and the country at large a space for reflection, debate, and analysis of the issues.

This strategy to encourage voters to hold candidates accountable matches our general approach to community involvement: the most successful activities will engage and empower communities to act for themselves. By reminding voters to ask their candidates where TJ is in their manifestos and then offering six general action points to guide their advocacy, we frame these communities' arguments into a unifying demand that provides strength in numbers.

In conclusion, knowledge on effective (and ineffective) TJ measures in these complex environments can greatly combat prevailing cycles of violence and contribute to lasting, sustainable peace in northern Uganda and elsewhere. Putting TJ on the election agenda is crucial to prioritizing the issues, meeting victims' and survivors' needs, and constructively ending impunity for past abuses and moving forward as a peaceful Uganda.

(Lindsay McClain is the Communications Officer at the Justice & Reconciliation Project. JRP promotes locally sensitive and sustainable peace in Africa's Great Lakes region by focusing on the active involvement of grassroots communities in local-level transitional justice. In line with this article, JRP has launched a campaign to put TJ on the election agenda. For comments related to this article or to get involved in the campaign, please contact info@justiceandreconciliation.com, or visit JRP's website at www.justiceandreconciliation.com. JRP welcomes input and partnership with civil society, grassroots communities, contestants in the upcoming Ugandan elections, and any others.)

Throughout the region, and unfortunately much of the world, there is still a profound lack of

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