

The Lukodi Massacre 19th May 2004



LUKODI MEMORIAL
MASSACRE ON 19th
MAY 2004

Alex Panga	Aluk Christine
Daksh Angwacha	Agre Pious
David Robert	Aryem Kwaku
Deek Brian	Chad Christopher
Angela Juma	Rachia Innocent
Angela Susan	Alkeri Leticia
David Oyang	Cher John
David Vincent	Akella Nancy
David Eric	Chad Wilfred
Alfred James	Adi Isaac
David Joseph	Oryem Innocent Omer
Odigo Charles	Daniel Lawrence
Oliver Charles	Thomas Charles
Oliver Charles	Christina Sunday
Paul David	Charles Richard
Luigi January	Angus Sunday
Oliver Charles	Aryem Charles
Oliver David	Akiva Isidore of Kilima
Oliver Kibaga	Omer son of Oryem
Oliver Kili	Oryem son of Oryem
Oliver Anne	Oryem son of Oryem
Oliver Mully	Kidaga son of Kilima
Oliver Nereus	

Presented By Child Watch International


"By the time the LRA left, the whole camp was littered with dead bodies as if they had been on a hunting spree. They killed people as if they were hunting animals and not human beings." Lukodi massacre survivor

JRP Field Note XIII, April 2011



The Lukodi Massacre: 19th May 2004

Cover

Front: The monument at Lukodi constructed by Child Voice International in memory of victims who lost their lives. **Back (Clockwise):** List of victims on the monument at Lukodi. An elderly male survivor reflects during a focus group discussion. The cross on top of the monument at Lukodi. *Photos by JRP*

About JRP

The Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) has played a key role in transitional justice (TJ) in Uganda since 2005 through seeking to understand and explain the interests, needs, concerns and views of communities affected by the LRA conflict. 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.

Vision

A just and peaceful society

Mission

JRP empowers conflict affected communities to participate in processes of justice, healing, and reconciliation

Acknowledgements

This report was written by Evelyn Akullo Otwili and Roza Freriks with research conducted by Lino Owor Ogora, Evelyn Akullo Otwili, Harriet Aloyo and Roza Freriks. Much appreciation to the JRP team for the useful input extended towards the completion of this report. To our friends in Lukodi, we are most grateful for your selfless and dedicated cooperation and trust. We feel most privileged that you entrusted us with your stories, so that we could share them with a larger audience. Special thanks also goes to Child Voice International (CVI) for partnering not only with the community of Lukodi, but with JRP as well, all along the documentation and mobilization process. Thanks to the Community Reconciliation (CORE) Team in Lukodi; we would not have been able to complete this documentation without you. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Norwegian Embassy in Kampala for the funding. For a copy of our research reports and more information on JRP, visit www.justiceandreconciliation.com or email info@justiceandreconciliation.com.

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Acronyms

CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CORE Team	Community Reconciliation Team
CVI	Child Voice International
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GOU	Government of Uganda
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICTJ	International Center for Transitional Justice
IDP(s)	Internally Displaced Person(s)
JRP	Justice and Reconciliation Project
LC	Local Council
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
OTP	Office of the Prosecutor
NRA	National Resistance Army
NRM	National Resistance Movement
UPDF	Uganda People's Defense Forces
WFP	World Food Program

Summary

On the 19th of May 2004, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) raided the village of Lukodi, and carried out a massacre that led to the death of over sixty people. Lukodi village is located seventeen kilometers north of Gulu town, in Gulu district. It is one of the many villages in northern Uganda that suffered from persistent LRA attacks, leading to the death of several people. Northern Uganda has been under conflict for over twenty years, as a result of a civil war waged mainly between the rebels of the LRA and the Government of Uganda (GoU). The impacts of the conflict have been devastating, characterized by the displacement of over 1.8 million people into IDP camps, loss of lives, and abduction of over 38,000 children by the LRA to serve as child soldiers and sex slaves.¹ Lukodi, like many other villages in northern Uganda, was severely affected by the conflict, leading to the displacement of the inhabitants of the village who were forced to seek refuge in the congested camp of Coope² for three years. The people of Lukodi were able to begin returning to their homes as a result of the relative peace which ensued in northern Uganda after the conclusion of the Juba peace talks in November 2008.³

This report reconstructs a narrative of the Lukodi massacre and the major events that unfolded on that fateful day of 19th May 2004. The documentation centered on learning the experiences of this community prior to and during the massacre, the impact the massacre had on the population and the transitional justice challenges they continue to face today. It tells the story of a people that suffered from a horrible attack on their village in 2004, and were subsequently displaced for almost three years. It further looks at the current reintegration challenges faced by the people of Lukodi, now that the people are returning from displacement and trying to rebuild their lives, but in the process have to struggle with daunting resettlement challenges, in addition to complex questions on how to approach issues of reconciliation between victims and alleged perpetrators within the community. Many war affected communities in northern Uganda are faced with a similar scenario as they struggle to pick up the pieces of their lives in the wake of the conflict, characterized by difficulty to cope with their trauma, and challenges in the pursuit of their justice and reconciliation needs, specifically the need for accountability and reparations.

This report also briefly reflects on the visit and investigation carried out by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in Lukodi. As revealed by respondents, the Office of the Chief Prosecutor and the Ugandan Police visited Lukodi several times in the wake of the massacre, with the aim of gathering evidence for the case against the LRA. The report shows that, however well intended this intervention may have been, it has failed to serve the justice needs of the people in Lukodi. Rather than providing them with a solution, the ICC intervention has left the victims with more questions than answers regarding how to approach the question of accountability for perpetrators. Giving the victims a voice, this report therefore makes suggestions to the policy makers, practitioners and other stakeholders on how to address accountability issues using more appropriate means.

The report finally concludes with recommendations to the Government of Uganda and other stakeholders, in line with views and opinions gathered from the people of Lukodi. The people of Lukodi call for reparations, sharing of the findings of the official investigations carried out after the massacre, support for community reconciliation initiatives and a truth-telling process in which the community, the LRA and the Government of Uganda will take part. These views are shared by many war affected people all over northern Uganda, and therefore require the attention of the stakeholders in question.

Methodology

This report came about as a response to community leaders of Lukodi for the documentation of their conflict experiences for purposes of acknowledgment and preserving memory. In addition, it was aimed at supporting the development and implementation of a community model of reconciliation, a collaborative effort that the community of Lukodi, Child Voice International (CVI) and JRP are currently working on. This particular model could not be achieved in the absence of an accurate account of the massacre and other past events of Lukodi. The community model of reconciliation is being developed with the aim of helping communities affected by conflict to play a central role in defining and addressing their justice and reconciliation needs.⁴ A Community Reconciliation (CORE) Team was instituted, consisting of men, women, youth, the elderly and people with disability, to come up with issues that needed to be addressed within the community.

¹These figures are derived from a research conducted by Phuong Pham, Patrick Vinck & Eric Stover, "Abducted: The Lord's Resistance Army and Forced Conscript in Northern Uganda", June 2007.

² Coope is located approximately 15 kilometers north of Gulu town.

³ The Juba peace talks began in June 2006 and ended prematurely in November 2008 following the refusal of the LRA to sign the final peace agreement, despite the successful negotiation and signing of six agenda items.

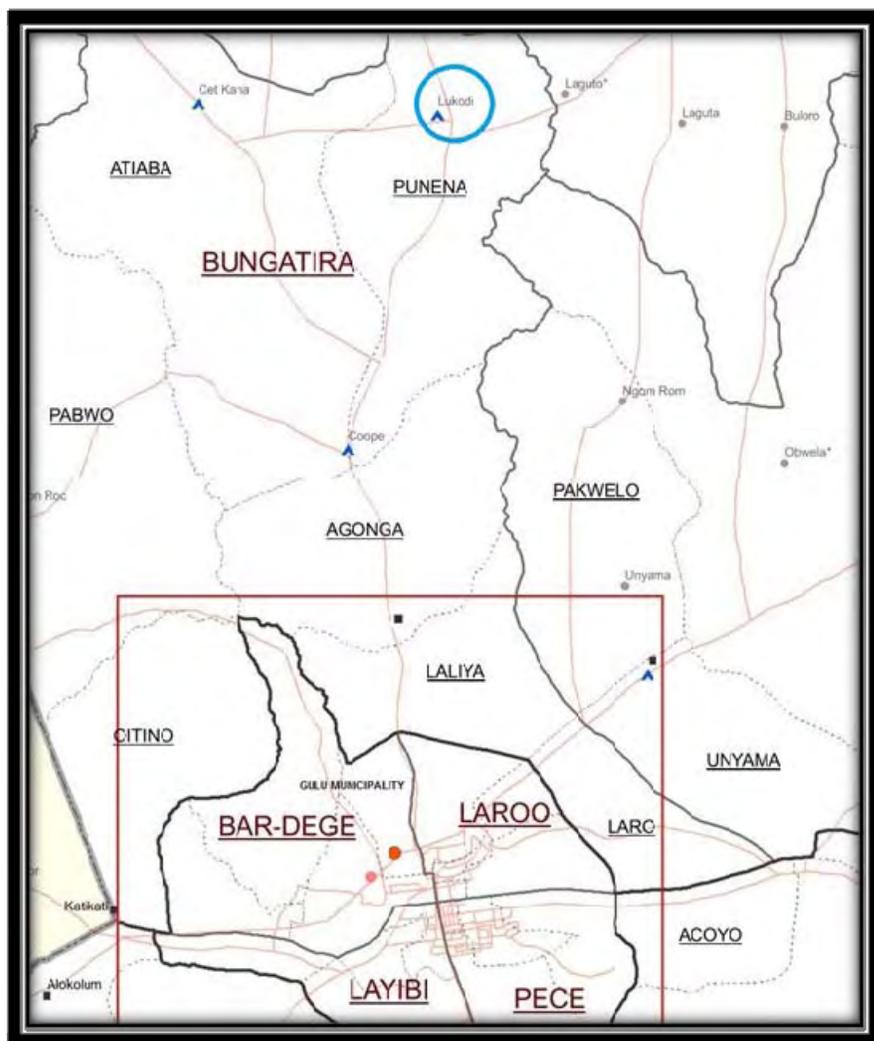
⁴ Lukodi village was chosen for the development and piloting of this model, which if successfully completed can be replicated elsewhere.

The CORE team was subsequently instrumental in providing useful information and feedback to the research team throughout the course of the documentation process. A preliminary field visit to Lukodi was conducted in May 2010 by the documentation team. Interviews with people in Lukodi started on 23rd August 2010 and ended on 19th November 2010. A total of 54 respondents were interviewed, including survivors of the massacre, former LRA combatants and a former home-guard who was assigned with the protection of the village of Lukodi. Our researchers also met with sources within the Uganda Police Force, to further investigate claims that exhumations were carried out after burials of the dead in the wake of the massacre. Overall the researchers conducted 28 face to face individual interviews and two focus group-discussions were held with a total of 26 participants. The interviews were conducted in Luo, and translated into English. Respondents were selected based on their various experiences during the massacre. Both purposive sampling, and snowballing methods of research were used to establish contact with the necessary respondents. Since the documentation was conducted in a setting where this particular community is still severely traumatized and bitter, respondents' names mentioned in this report have been changed for ethical and security reasons.

Introduction

Armed conflict broke out in northern Uganda in 1986 when several rebels groups waged war on the new Museveni Government in Kampala. Arguably, the most brutal one of all these rebellions was the one by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) that lasted for over two decades. This conflict left northern Uganda devastated by its impacts forcing millions of people into displacement camps where they lived under squalid conditions; thousands of people - a vast majority of them being children - were abducted and forced to become child soldiers or rebel 'wives'; and untold massacres unfolded in places like Atiak, Barlonyo, Mucwini, Omot, Abia and Lukodi – the focus of this particular report.

However, for about five years now, there has been relative peace as a result of the Juba peace talks that started in 2006 and ended in 2008. With these talks, came the dilemma of justice and accountability for the people of northern Uganda. Much as the peace negotiation did not yield the Final Peace Agreement it was hoped to deliver, key protocols were signed. Among these signed protocols was agenda item three, on accountability and reconciliation, which laid the framework for the implementation of transitional justice initiatives in Uganda. Through this protocol, the Government of Uganda has tendered its commitment to move towards development of a transitional justice agenda for the country. Key among these include the establishment of a War Crimes Division of the High Court to investigate and try crimes related to the conflict in northern Uganda. Albeit these developments, local level transitional justice mechanisms are yet to be realized by the war affected communities such as in Lukodi.



Partial map of Gulu District showing the location of Gulu Municipality (in red box) and Lukodi (encircled in blue). Source: UNOCHA



A resident of Lukodi walks through the village. Survivors of the massacre began resettling in 2006 but the village is yet to regain its former glory. Photo Credit: JRP

Lukodi lies seventeen kilometers north of Gulu town. Prior to the conflict, the population consisted of peasant farmers from the zones of Loyo Boo, Lalweny, Laco Anga, Lukodi and Lagot Kicol, that would later form the IDP camp of Lukodi. When the community members were asked about their lives before conflict broke out in 1986, they described Lukodi as a very pleasant place to live. Life was peaceful and they were free to go about their daily business. They grew cash crops like tobacco, and three times a week people from all over the area attended local markets. The members of the Lukodi community lived their lives with the comfortable reassurance that they knew what tomorrow would look like. The respondents from the community romanticized life in Lukodi before the conflict. One said, *'people were friendly to one another, would drink, stay up late and could even decide to sleep in the market. There were no land wrangles, people loved themselves as brothers and sisters. Issues of defilement were unheard of and there was no HIV/AIDS.'*⁵

In the early sixties, Martina,⁶ one of the respondents, moved to Lukodi, after marrying her husband who was a dairy truck driver. They had thirteen children together. Although five of their children died due to natural causes, these deaths did not impact her as much as the later violent losses of her other relatives would. She remembers how life went on peacefully until 1986, when Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA) overthrew the Government of Tito Okello Lutwa and began to pursue the remnant soldiers of the Lutwa regime. Being largely from the North, these troops fled northwards through Lukodi. On their arrival they instilled great fear into the community of Lukodi about the brutality and suffering that the NRA Government would inflict on them. This resulted in complete chaos, and resistance to the NRA was supported within the community. The remnant soldiers from the Lutwa Government organized themselves into a new rebel group, called '*Cilil*'.⁷ In its struggle to take control of the whole country, the NRA Government began to hunt down the *Cilil*. During the violent confrontation between the *Cilil* and the Government forces, the population paid the heavy price of these power struggles. People would run from the Government troops, have their cattle stolen by the *Cilil*, and both the NRA and the *Cilil* recruited youth to fight in their armies. It was during that time, that Martina had her first child fall victim to the conflict, when the *Cilil* abducted her son. Although he returned from captivity, she mentions he has not been mentally stable since.

In these chaotic times various rebel groups were also operating in northern Uganda. Life in Lukodi became increasingly difficult. Health services started to break down and people had to find new ways to generate income. Agriculture had become challenging, now that people no longer went to their lands to dig, due to fear of being abducted or killed. On top of that, Karamojong warriors raided a large number of cattle from the village of Lukodi in 1988, an attack that resulted in the deaths of several people. Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement carried on the struggle that the *Cilil* eventually abandoned, when the majority of them surrendered to the NRA Government after a peace accord and the few remaining ones decided to join Alice Lakwena. Alice rallied support among the local population with claims that she possessed supernatural powers. She embarked on a march to capture Kampala, but she was defeated in Bugembe forest in eastern Uganda, and fled to Kenya.

⁵ Interview with a 35 year old male, Lukodi, 24th August 2010.

⁶ Not real name. All references to respondents in this report are pseudo names, unless otherwise indicated.

⁷ The term '*Cilil*' was a local nickname for rebel groups which sprung up in northern Uganda after the LRA came to power. The name signaled the rebels' courage and readiness to fight the government army, often urging the population to inform of their presence

The situation in northern Uganda entered a new violent phase following the defeat of Alice Lakwena, when the LRA rose to the scene in 1988. The people of Lukodi, like many other communities in northern Uganda, suffered tremendously during this period. Whenever the Government increased pressure on the rebels, the LRA would retaliate against the civilians, whom they often perceived as 'Government collaborators'. During the years that followed, houses were burnt, property was looted, people were abducted and both men and women were subjected to indiscriminate mutilations, rape and killings by both warring parties. Like in the rest of northern Uganda, the majority of the people of Lukodi suffered forced displacement from their homes to camps for IDPs. Though the intensity of the conflict fluctuated in the twenty years it lasted, life in Lukodi never returned back to normal. The violence caused people to flee from the isolated areas within the other parishes of Lukodi, such as Lalweny and Lagot Kicol, to the village of Lukodi. This changed the structure of the village into a camp. Fearful of being taken by the rebels, the inhabitants of Lukodi no longer dared to sleep in their houses, but spent their nights in the bush. *'Kony started forcefully abducting children and men to join his rebel group. [Kony] killed those he came across, and the ones I would call 'fortunate' were left with mutilated bodies; lips and ears chopped. There came a time when they started planting landmines on footpaths and other places that people frequented, like wells.'*⁸

Several serious incidents in Lukodi during the years prior to the massacre show how the Government offered inadequate protection to the civilians in this area from the start. In the market place that used to bring together the people of Lukodi, several LRA attacks took place. *'A lot of people were killed, until that market eventually collapsed,'*⁹ one of our respondents remembers. She also remembers another heavy attack by the LRA in 2002, when the community members were attending a funeral. *'When [the rebels] came, instead of asking for salt, sugar, food or whatever else they wanted, they just began to kill,'* she remembers. *'They killed so many people. I was among the people who were injured that day, while my husband died in the attack.'*¹⁰

The security setup of Lukodi at the beginning of 2004 further acted as a catalyst for the subsequent attack which was to occur in that year. Even though many people from the outlying areas had decided to move closer to the soldiers' detach, there was little protection against rebel attacks, which became even more frequent, because the protection of the camp was in the hands of less than forty Government soldiers. The residents of Lukodi did not dare to move long distances any more, and by 2003 most of the children had been sent off to Gulu town. Their parents had sent them away from the countryside, fearful they would otherwise be abducted. Furthermore, owing to the nature in which people migrated and settled in Lukodi, the army detach ended up being located in the middle of the camp, a factor which did not go down well with many of the civilians. *'That [specific setting of the army detach] is what beats our understanding up to today. 'Everyone who lived here murmured silently that the set up of that detach was bad and unfair, but no one could come out to boldly tell the soldiers. In any normal setting, [the army] should have been the one to surround the civilians from the outside.'*¹¹



A resident of Lukodi stares at the site on which the army detach was located prior to the massacre. Many residents were not happy with the security set up because the civilians' houses were surrounding the detach. Photo Credit: JRP

In addition, the majority of the soldiers were home-guards; local militias that consisted of young boys, who were locally recruited by the Government to fight the LRA. Lamony was among those boys that the UPDF recruited and deployed at the Lukodi detach to guard the civilians. Ever since Lamony's youth, the LRA had been a force to reckon with in the area surrounding Lukodi, where he

⁸ Interview with a 57 year old male, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

⁹ Interview with a 38 year old female, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

grew up. Like other boys who joined the UPDF, he was driven by the need to protect himself and his family members. In his own words, 'a time came when I became fed up of running away from a fellow man. At the age of seventeen, I resolved that it was much better for us to battle it out using guns. So in 2002, I joined the army.'¹² After joining the army, Lamony received superficial training at one of the UPDF training grounds in Lugore Hills, along with a large number of boys like himself. For about three months, they were trained in basic military skills, such as handling a gun, hiding for safety, and marching. Their military training was so limited that some recruits became injured as a result of the gun salutes which were fired in the air on their last day at the training unit. Before serving at Lukodi, Lamony was stationed at the village of Bungatira, a few kilometers from Lukodi, for a period of three months. During this time, the soldiers who were assigned to protect Lukodi failed to do so. The LRA often had the upper hand in battles with the small detachment of home-guards stationed at Lukodi. When Lamony and thirty seven others from Bungatira were summoned to replace them in June 2003, they found a village at the mercy of the rebels. The new home-guards spread out all over the camp every night in an attempt to guard civilians, but no real adjustments had been made to the security set up in Lukodi, so the new recruits could not change the situation.

The army detach was under the command of a 2nd Lieutenant from the UPDF, a man from outside of northern Uganda. This commander was not an expert on the local circumstances and did not speak the local language. Both were needed skills for commanding the local recruits. This complicated the communication between the home-guards and their UPDF superiors. All in all, the group lacked sufficient capacity, knowledge, and skills to regain army control over the area.



JRP researchers in a focus group discussion in Lukodi: Photo Credit: JRP

Though Lamony remembers how they managed to repulse some of the rebel attacks on the civilians' kraals, he says the Government forces could not fully prevent the LRA from ambushing vehicles close by the army barracks. The living conditions at the Lukodi detach were tough. The home-guards suffered from hunger most of the time. The supplies of beans and posho¹³ they received were so meager that the young men would track the rebels in the bush for a week, with supplies that lasted only for a single day. Upon their return to the detach, they would not find any food either. 'Despite this situation, the detach commander never ceased sending us out each morning to go and guard the roads, so that vehicles could pass through this place,'¹⁴ Lamony remembers. Though the community of Lukodi may have been under the illusion that the village was at least protected by UPDF professionals, the home-guards at the barrack felt the consequences of their lower rank compared to the official forces. They were entitled to a monthly salary of 60,000 Ugandan shillings¹⁵, which was only one third of the monthly pay a UPDF soldier would receive. This small amount would have made it challenging for them to properly provide for their families even if it would have been handed out on a regular basis, but the Government failed to pay the home-guards for almost a year. 'Each time salaries came,' Lamony recalls, 'only the UPDF were paid while we reserves sat and watched. This discrimination angered me so much.'¹⁶ After one year of service in the army, the home-guards had become severely demoralized. Lamony and his comrades were waiting for the 'right' moment to get out of these conditions. Their commitment to their families in the camp, where they often went and spent their nights as well, seems to be the main reason that held them back from deserting the army straight away.

As the Government forces struggled to gain control over the area in the beginning of 2004, the LRA had already started carefully planning the events that were to follow. Olong is a formerly abducted man who was part of the rebels that came to Lukodi for that attack. Olong has returned to the village of Lukodi, but lives a lonely life because he has not fully

¹² Interview with a former home-guard, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

¹³ Maize flour.

¹⁴ Interview with a former home-guard, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

¹⁵ Approximately 26 USD.

¹⁶ Interview with a former home-guard, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

reintegrated into the community there. Olong passionately explains how the LRA became determined that the community of Lukodi had to be 'punished'. From his narrative arises a picture of the LRA's detailed intelligence.

The acts of the Lukodi people had angered us so much. We needed to teach them a lesson. The LRA had gathered information that detailed each and everything that happened to them in particular places including Lukodi, such as how many of their fighters had died or were injured in certain places, and what was to be done in revenge when they reached that place. The community of Lukodi never let any secret about the LRA to remain hidden. Any small information they got about us would be reported to the Government soldiers.¹⁷

However, much to the LRA's frustration, the Government forces at the Lukodi detach were relatively well informed about their movements. Information would flow quickly from the civilians to the soldiers regarding the movements of the LRA. The LRA started to perceive the population of Lukodi as a group of Government collaborators because of such cooperation. They blamed the community for several incidents. In one particular incident that contributed to the wrath of the LRA, a woman who had been abducted and released by the LRA three days before the massacre, ran into the Government soldiers on her way back home. The Government soldiers made her reveal the location where she had been released by the rebels. This led to a confrontation between the home-guards and the LRA, in which one rebel died and the home-guards captured an LRA gun. After explaining how four of their rebels and one of their commanders died in the same area and five more weapons were lost, Olong continued to emphasize that such losses fell hard on the LRA. 'We value all our guns very much, because acquiring them was a matter of life and death. It wasn't easy to get guns,' he emphasised. 'To us acquiring and training four dedicated fighters takes such a long time. Acquiring four guns takes us even longer.'¹⁸ In addition to these losses, the LRA was also upset with the Lukodi community as a result of an earlier failed abduction. The rebels had tried to abduct a man from one of the parishes within Lukodi, hoping he could show them the exact location of the soldiers, but this man protested so heavily that his screams attracted the attention of the Government forces. This led to heavy UPDF fire. Even though this incident did not result in serious casualties, it confirmed the LRA's perception of the community as being cooperative with Government forces. A final incident within the surroundings of Lukodi that bothered the LRA occurred when one of their former intelligence officers deserted with their gun. They managed to capture and kill him. 'All these events increased our bitterness towards the community of Lukodi,' Olong continues. 'We were coming back to Lukodi, but not in good faith. We came purposely with the aim of attacking Lukodi.'¹⁹



A respondent in Lukodi draws a sketch map showing the set up of the camp in 2004: Photo Credit: JRP

The rebel command therefore mobilized different groups within the LRA to conduct a joint attack on Lukodi. Based on the findings of our documentation, commander Tulu of the LRA was in charge of this joint force. The LRA's plan for the attack included a thorough prior investigation of Lukodi. According to Olong, this exercise was carried out to ensure that no close relatives of committed high ranking LRA commanding officers from Lukodi and its surrounding areas were residing there at that time. These preparations may explain why some villagers claim the LRA had spies at their disposal, who allegedly visited the village before the massacre. The LRA did not find any reason to change their plans as a result of these

¹⁷Interview a former LRA combatant and a resident of Lukodi, 4th October 2010.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

investigations. None of the close relatives of these trusted commanders were present in the targeted area at that time. The LRA therefore had a final meeting on the morning of 19th May 2004, where they all agreed that the population of Lukodi had to suffer for 'past sins'.

Amako, a young formerly abducted girl we spoke to several times, was among the LRA group that attacked Lukodi. Amako had been abducted a year earlier, and was babysitting Tulu's children. She was only ten years old at the time of the massacre, and so not as well informed as the older fighters about what was going on.

Information was passed that we were going to attack Lukodi, but they never told us, the children. All they said was that we were coming to get food from Lukodi. In fact we only got to know what the preparation was all about when we finally came to Lukodi, and attacked the place. The aim of the fighters who attacked the detach, was to loot uniforms and ammunition and also get satisfaction from the fact that they had defeated Government soldiers. Before that time, they told us that we, the girls, were coming to carry loot and that they would also abduct some older men to help us in carrying the loot.²⁰

To a certain extent her line of reasoning is shared by what most survivors attribute as one of the causes of the massacre. Caritas, one of the NGO's assisting the IDPs in the area at the time, had just distributed relief

items, so the village was stocked with beans, posho, cooking oil, and aluminium saucepans. It hardly seems a coincidence that the LRA command chose that exact moment to release its wrath on the

population of Lukodi, but rather proves how well the LRA was informed of what was going on in the village. After all the preparations for the operation were finalized, the final command issued to the rebels before they went off to launch the attack was: '*Pe i wek makwo, pe i bal nyig ricac*' (Don't leave anyone alive, don't waste bullets).²¹

The Massacre

The people who perished in my home were simply reduced to tiny lumps, which was very hard for me to come to terms with, because they were my loved ones with whom I had lived all my life. It was a horrible scene. I felt like a mad person.²²

On the 19th of May 2004, the LRA attacked. Prior to the attacks, respondents recall various events in Lukodi that hinted at the danger at hand. One woman remembers how in the morning hours a boy came to warn her that he had seen some unfamiliar uniformed men around River Unyama. The boy's fear had been heightened after he climbed a hill and saw the rebels heading in the direction of Lukodi. All this had led him to believe that the rebels were about to attack. '*Mama Olony,*' he said, '*pinye nen tin garo garo*', loosely translated as: '*the atmosphere today appears tense and full of uncertainties*'.²³ The detach commander is also said to have received intelligence of the LRA's presence, and passed it on to the local leaders, who were in the process of warning the people just before the LRA attacked. The residents of Lukodi however went about their daily routine, oblivious to the catastrophe that was about to befall them.

At around 4pm, Laloyo, a local leader in Lukodi, received two unexpected visitors under the mango tree at his home. One of the two, a young boy, had just escaped from the LRA and wanted to surrender. This formerly abducted child told the



A victim of the massacre displays a spot in her side where the rebels stabbed her with a bayonet and left her for dead. The rebels were indiscriminate in their killings. Photo Credit: JRP

²⁰ Interview with an 18 year old female, Lukodi, 23rd September 2010.

²¹ Interview a former LRA combatant and a resident of Lukodi, 4th October 2010.

²² Interview with a 43 year old female, Lukodi, 25th October 2010.

²³ *Ibid.*

local leader he had escaped from Paicho, a village close by, and noted that the LRA were just around Atoo Hills. The young boy wanted to return to his parents. Following standard procedures of handling returnees by the local leaders at the time, Laloyo notified the army detach in the camp that a boy had returned. He was lucky to find the boy's aunt at the trading center. Together with this aunt and another soldier, they went to deliver the boy to the detach. At the detach, the home-guards were just performing their evening parade. *'Little did we know that the rebels had also lined up and were observing us from Lukodi hills,'*²⁴ mentions Lamony. The LRA had already reached Lukodi, and were carefully observing the movements of the Government soldiers, as the local home-guards organized themselves to return to the camp, where they would spend the night. At about 6pm, as sunset neared, the rebels advanced towards Lukodi from the east;

*The rebels divided themselves into three groups. The first group came and engaged the soldiers in combat and with time, overpowered them. The second group targeted the civilians and started killing them. The third group was taking cattle and other things that they needed to help them in the bush such as food, clothing and other valuables. The group that was killing the civilians was also burning houses and at the same time looking for valuable items to take along. Meanwhile, the fighting was going on.*²⁵

*'One group curved through the southern part of the village, another group went through the middle and the third group curved through the northern part of Lukodi. In this way we formed a bow shape [on either side of the village]. As soon as all these groups had drawn nearer to Lukodi, the middle group blew whistles.'*²⁶ Amako explains. The other groups responded by blowing whistles as well, and the LRA opened fire upon the population of Lukodi. The attack completely surprised Laloyo and the others, who were still on their way to deliver the boy to the official authorities. Suddenly, the whole of Lukodi was filled with ululations, shouts and whistles. *'All of us got confused. It wasn't just a single whistle being blown; there were so many of them at the same time. Then as soon as the whistles ceased, gunshots broke out in powerful bursts, together with the explosion of bombs. On hearing that, all of us started running towards any direction that came to our minds. It wasn't a moment for thinking or making sense of anything.'*²⁷

*The people who fled all headed towards the valley. Some of them got injured along the way. We all fled and then later met in the bush where we had gone to hide. Even if you had left a child, your wife, or any other valuables at home, you would not return to pick them. This is because the rebels had overpowered the soldiers. They had engaged the soldiers in combat from the barracks, and forced them to retreat to the outskirts of the camp. So the rebels were in control of the camp. The Government soldiers fled to the centre and then over the hill. The rebels were simply too many for the soldiers.*²⁸



A female victim displays injuries she sustained in the massacre. In addition to maiming women, the rebels are alleged to have forced several mothers to trample on their own babies. Photo Credit: JRP

²⁴ Interview a former LRA combatant and a resident of Lukodi, 4th October 2010.

²⁵ Interview with a 34 year old male, Lukodi, 24th August 2010.

²⁶ Interview with a former LRA captive who participated in the attack on Lukodi, 4th October 2010.

²⁷ Interview with a 57 year old male, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

²⁸ Interview with a 40 year old male, Lukodi, 24th August 2010.

Martina's husband, who was picking mangoes in the compound when the rebels attacked, immediately realized what was going on. He was an old man, and therefore did not expect the LRA to harm him. He stayed where he was, but ordered his children to run. 'By instinct,' Martina recalls, 'I also got out of the hut, and entered into a pit latrine that was just a few meters deep because it was still under construction.'²⁹ Her daughter-in-law with her two children, her brother-in-law and her daughter who was breastfeeding her baby, remained hiding inside the house. 'At first the rebels ran past my house, as they headed to the army detach,'³⁰ Martina remembers. In the twilight, the rebels did not notice her hideout. Meanwhile, Laloyo was running towards the army detach as well. He hoped to find protection from the Government forces, but instead witnessed most of the remaining home-guards abandoning the detach as fast as they could. 'I do not know whether that was how they were trained to defend themselves,' he remarks with a bitter sense of sarcasm, 'but none of them remained. They all ran away.'³¹ The home-guards had lost control of the situation as soon as the LRA attacked. 'The LRA didn't know where the detach was, but as soon as we fired some bullets towards them, they came charging at us,'³² Lamony remembers. The detach commander ordered his men to take cover in the *adaki*.³³ They obeyed his orders, but instantly came to realize they did not stand a chance against the rebels. As Lamony recalls, 'The rebels headed straight for us. If you didn't have real courage, you couldn't stand firm.'³⁴ Terrified, the home-guards ordered their wives to abandon the detach as soon as possible, and soon most of



The main road at Lukodi village. Many of the residents fled westwards after the LRA had attacked, crossed this road and sought refuge in the valley. Photo Credit: JRP

them gave up the fight as well. Lamony remembers how he tried to withstand the rebels as long as he could.

*Out of the thirty eight home guards, less than ten of us stood to fight back. After some time I remained alone to fight back, and saved one civilian man when the rebels were pursuing him. At this point even our own commander had already fled the area. I stayed until I couldn't hold it anymore and started running. The rebels had spread everywhere; most of the huts were now burning.'*³⁵

After defeating the home-guards, the LRA embarked on plundering the village without any interference. It was no coincidence that the attack started when it was still daylight. The LRA wanted to make sure all could see clearly that they had the upper hand in the area. 'We wanted to show them that UPDF were very inferior to us. What happened in Lukodi clearly demonstrated that the UPDF were indeed useless. We came and carried out our operation in Lukodi and not a single one of us was killed,'³⁶ narrated Olong. Laloyo ran from the detach in a bid to escape from the LRA. 'I ran until the gunshots became too much for me to bear. There were so many rebels that I could not cross the road, so I entered a hut.'³⁷ It turned out three people were already hiding there, when the rebels kicked their door open. One of the men inside jumped through the opened window, and was shot to death instantly. Laloyo was pulled out of his hiding place behind the opened door, and one of the LRA started shouting orders at him. 'It was a very small mean looking rebel you could take for any village child,'³⁸ Laloyo remembers. 'He dragged me out of the hut and said; 'if you dare run, I am going to shoot

²⁹ Interview with a survivor of the Lukodi massacre whose husband was abducted in the massacre, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

³⁰ *Ibid*

³¹ Interview with a local leader in Lukodi at the time of the massacre, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

³² Interview with a former home-guard, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

³³ Trenches dug around the detach for soldiers to take cover in case of an attack.

³⁴ Interview with a former home-guard, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

³⁵ *Ibid*

³⁶ Interview a former LRA combatant and a resident of Lukodi, 4th October 2010.

³⁷ Interview with a local leader in Lukodi at the time of the massacre, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

³⁸ *Ibid*

and kill you.³⁹ By then, Lukodi had already turned into an inferno. 'All round there were killings going on and so much fire burning, that the entire place became so bright as though it was broad daylight,'⁴⁰ Laloyo recalls.

After the soldiers fled, the rebels were free to do what they wanted. They started taking whatever goods they wanted, such as goats and other valuables. Some women and children who had been captured were being prepared for departure. Some rebels were checking the houses which had not been burnt to ensure that nothing was left. They were also checking to ensure that all the dead people were actually dead. They were checking to make sure that no stone had been left and unturned. The barracks had also been burnt up. As for the civilians, if you were caught you would simply be killed. The rebels would push you and your children into your house and burn you all alive.⁴¹

When the LRA took Laloyo, Martina was still hidden in the pit latrine. From her hideout she was unable to see what was happening outside, but she heard all too clearly how the rebels came to the hut where her family members had hoped to find shelter. The LRA was on its way back from the detach and abducted the people they met on the way. The old man Martina had married years before would soon befall the same fate. The rebels ordered him to get food from the granary, and forced him to carry it on his head for them. Gunshots were being fired everywhere, and this forced Martina to remain inside the pit. She heard how after taking her husband, the rebels now ordered her daughter-in-law to get out of the hut with her baby. They told the girl to carry luggage as well. The girl however, refused. In a desperate attempt to make the rebels leave her alone, she claimed the child had measles, and would contaminate them if she came out. Her defense was useless as the rebels threatened to kill her instantly. When she finally got out of the hut, they ordered her to leave her child with her uncle inside. It was at that moment that the rebels set fire to the large family hut. Martina's brother-in-law, her second daughter-in-law together with her two children and her daughter's child whom she had been ordered to leave behind, were all set ablaze. The LRA was indiscriminate in their killing.

They (LRA) were here to kill and that is what they did. If you were a mother and you had a child they would put your child into a polythene bag and suffocate the child to death. There was an elderly lady who was very sick. When the rebels came, the people who were taking care of her fled. This lady was so sick that she could not run. The LRA came and despite the fact that she was helpless they killed her. The rebels simply went about killing everyone that they found. If they found you drunk they would just kill you. If they told you to carry some luggage for them and you refused they would kill you. If they were suspicious of you they would kill you on allegations that you were a Government spy.⁴²

An army helicopter arrived at around 9pm and hovered over the village again and again in a bid to scare away the rebels. By this time however, the rebels had made their way out of the village. As many civilians continued to hide in the bush throughout the night, Martina came out of the pit latrine, and saw what had happened to her village. 'I was shocked at what lay before my eyes,' she recalls. 'All along as I had hidden in that unfinished pit latrine, I had heard the wails of my people, and the explosion of gunfire. But I had never imagined that in my home alone, the lives of five people were being brutally brought to an end!'⁴³

The whole operation lasted about one hour, according to many respondents, and afterwards the LRA departed, leaving behind a scene of death and destruction. In the words of one respondent, 'by the time they left, the whole camp was littered with dead bodies as if they had been on a hunting spree. They killed people as if they were hunting animals and not human beings.'⁴⁴



A male victim displays a bullet wound sustained in the massacre. Many victims are currently not able to pursue demanding tasks such as agriculture because they are physically impaired. Photo Credit: JRP

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Interview with a 32 year old female, Lukodi, 26th August 2010.

⁴³ Interview with a survivor of the Lukodi massacre whose husband was abducted in the massacre, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

⁴⁴ Interview with a 73 year old male, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

After completing their operation, the rebels departed, taking with them an unspecified number of men, women, and children. Respondents even told us, how just before leaving, the rebels also took a large number of mothers, after forcing some of them to trample upon their own children and set huts on fire. Martina's husband and her daughter-in-law, Laloyo the camp leader, and Amaro, a young girl were among the many people taken by the rebels. As the people of Lukodi mourned and grieved for their loved ones, the rebels and their captives were already several kilometers away from the village. These captives were all given large amounts of luggage to carry and were constantly beaten, while some of them, especially those who were too weak to walk, were later killed. Pursued by the UPDF soldiers, they walked through the bush for a long time. The rebels eventually split up again into three different groups which then headed in different directions. Most of these captives were eventually able to escape after the UPDF engaged the rebels in battle. While some of them returned home tired but unscathed, others like Amaro fell victim to rape at the hands of LRA soldiers.



A man walks round the graveyard where he buried his mother, father, and two siblings. On the morning after the massacre, survivors had to hurriedly bury the dead in shallow graves such as the one indicated above. Photo Credit:

JRP

Many civilians spent their night in the bush, too terrified to return to their homesteads. It was

only the following morning, that they slowly came trickling out of their hiding places, only to be met by scenes of death and destruction which had been wrought by the LRA. In just a few hours time, the LRA had killed a large number of people, looted all the food and property they could find, mutilated civilians and abducted a large number of people. All around the village, people wailed and cried when they were confronted with the massive scale of the brutalities. Several respondents mention how they were never the same again after the shock of that morning. Walking around what was left of the village, most of them were totally devastated by what had taken place in the village where they had lived most of lives. For people like Martina, nothing, but heaps of ashes were left of her own family.

As I moved around to see what became of the others, it was a shocking scene; innocent children had been picked and thrown into burning huts and those that attempted to cry had had guns pushed through their open mouths and the back of their heads had been shattered by bullets. The corpses of the adults and children were all mixed together and we had to separate them for the burial, in five different graves.⁴⁵

The Aftermath

The gruesome manner in which the rebels killed and burned people in Lukodi that day, makes it hard to establish the exact number of victims of the massacre. Some of the bodies of people who died in the bushes, were only recovered in the weeks, months or years afterwards. However, most survivors mention a total of approximately sixty people killed. On top of that, a number of people are still missing up to date. Most of the abducted men never returned from the bush. Martina's husband is unfortunately still among these missing persons. After more than six years, she has come to realize he may never return home. *'On that day, my husband was abducted, and he has never come back,'* she tells. *'He was in his late sixties. Do you think such a person is living up to now?'*⁴⁶

Burials

The whole village was stinking of death. Nobody could live here anymore. Even the soldiers left the detach after the burials had taken place and relocated to a nearby hill. Nobody could live here given what happened. It took about a month, before the smell of the village became fresh again. Many people had been burnt in their houses along with other animals such as goats and chicken. All these burnt

⁴⁵ Interview with a survivor of the Lukodi massacre whose husband was abducted in the massacre, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

*corpses and carcasses combined to make the village stink horribly. There was no way anybody could stay here. It was a very painful incident.*⁴⁷

Everywhere they turned, the civilians were confronted by the ghastly scenes of burning houses and corpses that littered many homesteads. 'As we moved around, the smell of dead bodies filled the air around here,' Martina recalls. 'Over two hundred huts were totally razed down.'⁴⁸ The atmosphere was tense and the majority of the survivors were too frightened to stay behind to accord any decent burials to their dear ones. Only a few men from Lukodi volunteered and hastily dug shallow graves for the dead bodies the next morning, and buried them. They did not have the time to decently bury the people.

*The whole camp was littered with corpses. The strong hearted people immediately started burying their dead. We buried all of them here without attempting to distinguish between who was from Lukodi and who was not. Even strangers who were passing on the road came and helped us. The burials were carried out very quickly. There was no time to bury the dead people properly. You would simply find a piece of cloth wrap the dead body of your relatives in it, dig a shallow grave and then place their bodies in it. Many people could not afford to get coffins in a hurry. I buried my brother and the other relatives using blankets, bed sheets, and other pieces of cloth that we could find at that time. There was no time to carry out traditional rituals in line with Acholi culture. People were afraid that the LRA would come back and that is why the burials were carried out hurriedly. Some of the bodies were not properly covered up and the dogs feasted on them. The dogs began feasting on the bodies even before the burials were conducted.*⁴⁹



A woman stands next to the grave of her relative who perished in the massacre. Forensic investigators from Kampala went to Lukodi after the massacre, exhumed bodies and examined them to collect evidence against the LRA. The findings of this investigation were not shared with the community Photo Credit: JRP

Exhumations

A day after that burial, a group of unknown 'doctors'⁵⁰ from the Government in Kampala went to the scene of the massacre. They made the local residents who were still in Lukodi to exhume the bodies which had been buried. The inhabitants who were present during this exercise remember how the Government representatives numbered the bodies and took pictures of the dead. 'They came with protective gear, which they gave to the local people to help them to exhume the bodies'⁵¹, a residence of Lukodi tells. It was a horrifying experience;

*I recall the body of a woman that we exhumed. She had been horribly killed. They had smashed her skull and her eyes were just popping out. Her stomach had been ripped open with a knife, and her intestines had spilled out. The sight of her body was so horrible and terrifying that I ran away and left the doctors there.*⁵²

This exhumation and reburial took an entire day. The motive of the exhumation remains a puzzle to the community of Lukodi and those who participated in this exercise. 'They did not tell us who they were, but they only told us that they needed to examine the bodies to determine how the people had died,'⁵³ remembers a man who participated in the exhumation. Because neither the 'doctors' nor the Government came out to state why the bodies were exhumed, numbered and their pictures taken, this exhumation has left many questions in the minds of most of the Lukodi massacre survivors. They believe this was the first incident of a kind where the Government sent investigators to a massacre site for this kind of activity. Yet they wonder why so many years after this incident occurred, these doctors still haven't shared their

⁴⁷ Interview with a 34 year old male, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

⁴⁸ Interview with a survivor of the Lukodi massacre whose husband was abducted in the massacre, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

⁴⁹ Interview with a 44 year old male, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

⁵⁰ Forensic investigators. The respondents referred to them as doctors.

⁵¹ Interview with a 40 year old male, Lukodi, 24th August 2010.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Interview with a 34 year old male, Lukodi, 24th August 2010.

report with the Lukodi community. The pictures they took have not been made available, nor has the motive for this exercise been explained to the survivors in Lukodi. However, this particular incident did not stand alone. A source within the Ugandan Police confirm that during those days, documentation efforts similar to the one in Lukodi were done at some other massacre sites as well.⁵⁴ Though they claim that this type of post-mortem investigation is a standard procedure after homicide, it seems that the authorities took a particular interest in the events in northern Uganda in the first half of 2004, to back up investigations being conducted by the OTP at the time. Thorough investigation was first carried out in Barlonyo, where a massacre happened in February 2004.⁵⁵ A similar team visited Lukodi as well, and then later carried out investigations in other camps such as Pagak, which had been struck by the LRA that same month. The team examined the bodies, and took statements and photographs, based on which they later identified Tulu as the commander of the massacre. The investigators left the place as soon as possible, and though they claimed to have made some contacts among the people they found in Lukodi, no clear instructions were given to the victims as to what should happen next. As such, the victims of Lukodi have been left in the dark to this day in regard to the exhumations that took place.

Displacement

People fled to Gulu town because of fear. Most of them had seen the dead bodies of people who had been killed in a horrific way. They therefore feared that the incident would occur again. There is no other reason that can explain why people fled. One person could have lost five of his relatives. Some people lost their entire families and were left alone hence they were terrified. Other people simply followed the crowds as they headed for Gulu town because they were not in a state of mind to think rationally. Other people went because they felt confident in the presence of their colleagues. Some of these people could have killed themselves if they had remained on their own.⁵⁶



Children in Lukodi village. With their village having been destroyed, the residents of Lukodi were forced to relocate to Coope IDP camp where they lived for three years. Photo Credit: JRP

The morning after the massacre, hardly anyone wanted to stay in Lukodi, as the rebels were likely to still be around. They fled the area, and went to Kaunda grounds⁵⁷ in Gulu Town. By then, Gulu had grown into a relatively large town, since so many people left the county side in search of safety from the conflict. At that point however, the people of Lukodi were still unaware that they would not return home for more than three years. They were simply hoping to draw attention to their plight by assembling at Kaunda grounds, and indeed they received some aid from representatives of the Government and several NGOs. 'We were given porridge by some of the District Officials,⁵⁸ remembers Martina. 'Sauce pans and maize flour were distributed as well. Sometimes they brought ripe mangoes on the back of vehicles.'⁵⁹ Their stay at Kaunda grounds was intended to be a temporary arrangement only. It did not have enough toilets, food, health centers and shelter, so the people from Lukodi had to relocate. At that time, returning to Lukodi was not a feasible option. The majority of them were still too afraid, and it was dangerous for them to return to their village while the LRA were still active. It only took a few days before a Governmental decision was found for them. They were asked to relocate to Coope IDP camp, and without any proper resettlement, the displaced people of Lukodi moved from one displacement to the other.

It should be noted that around that time, displacement had equally become a shockingly common phenomenon in northern Uganda. Research indicates that by 2005 some two million Ugandans had become displaced. Over 90 percent of

⁵⁴ This info was obtained in an interview with an officer of the Uganda Police Force who preferred to remain anonymous

⁵⁵ On 16th December 2003 the Government of Uganda had referred the 'situation of the Lord's Resistance Army' to the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Uganda was not the only country that was soliciting for the ICC's assistance. This created an urgent need within the Ugandan Government to come up with convincing data, to back up their case in The Hague. This explains the need for the 'hard facts', that our informants were suddenly told to gather. After half a year this strategy apparently turned out to be successful, since the OTP launched its investigation in northern Uganda on 28 July 2004. In a highly confidential manner, it sent teams to Uganda to collect its own evidence. Still, even after the OTP took over the investigation, our information suggests they kept relying strongly on their Ugandan partners.

⁵⁶ Interview with a 34 year old male, Lukodi, 25th August 2010

⁵⁷ Kaunda Grounds is a large open place in Gulu town that serves as a public space and park.

⁵⁸ Interview with a survivor of the Lukodi massacre whose husband was abducted in the massacre, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*

the Acholi were no longer living at their original homesteads.⁶⁰ One thousand households from Lukodi alone, consisting of four thousand people including children, settled in Coope. This camp had a very large detach, from where a full battalion of more than eight hundred soldiers protected the people. Coope was the obvious place for their resettlement, since it was close to their homes in Lukodi. Living in the camp however, they were unable to grow their crops as they used to, so NGOs and international institutions like Caritas and the World Food Program (WFP) took it upon them to provide food rations to the people. Despite this aid, life was difficult. The massacre had completely destroyed some of the families. Martina watched the remaining members of her family leave the area soon after the massacre. *'My home became a scene of ruins,'* she says. *'I had two daughters-in-law who were co-wives. One was a mother of four, and the other was the one who was burnt in the house. So when the other saw what had happened, she abandoned my son and remarried somewhere else. She claimed that if she continued to stay then the cen⁶¹ of her co-wife would kill her.'*⁶² Not only did her remaining daughter-in-law leave with her grandchildren, her son did not stay with her either. He left for Kampala and hasn't set foot in Lukodi since.

The three years spent in Coope turned out to be further traumatizing to those who had lived to survive the massacre. Camp life had a devastating impact on the social relations among the former inhabitants of Lukodi. People were relying on aid, homes were disintegrating at an alarming rate, children were dropping out of schools and diseases increased. *'People needed to grow extra food and yet there was nowhere to farm. Our children were not going to school and becoming disobedient. Young girls were getting involved in early pregnancy, HIV/AIDS increased, and poverty increased. As a result the young girls ended up going with the soldiers, who at that time were far much better off in terms of money.'*⁶³ Married women were leaving their husbands for soldiers, and other men who could provide for them. Dera's story illustrates how camp life led to a profound change in the identity of men and women, in terms of their gender roles. Dera was among the people who were critically injured in the Lukodi attack. He was admitted in hospital for a while, and upon discharge followed his people to live in Coope. His wives had built homes there, a task that is traditionally performed by the men instead. Upon return to his family, his physique did not allow him to work like before.



Residents of Lukodi sitting next to a dilapidated house in the trading centre. Reconstruction and recovery has been slow in many areas because most of the infrastructure was destroyed during the conflict. Photo Credit: Roza Freriks

*The challenge I faced, was that my wives were constantly admiring other women who had strong husbands who could provide for them. And when there was no food and the children could not go to school, they had to improvise since I was weak and could not provide for my family. My wives started abusing me and my first wife would say she was looking at other husbands providing for their families. That she wished she had not gone to take care of me in the hospital. She should have gotten married to someone else. My wife said I could not perform my responsibilities as a man in order to fulfil her needs. Eventually she went to another man who could 'provide' for her, but this new relationship did not work out either.*⁶⁴

During their stay in Coope camp, many women assumed new roles as heads of households, as most of their men resorted to drinking. *'Alcoholism was very high on the part of men,'*⁶⁵ recalls one male during the focus group discussion. *'Most of the time they were idle and resorted to drinking, as a way of keeping on with life.'*⁶⁶ The people of Lukodi felt stuck in the set up of the camps. *'We were deprived of our freedom,'*⁶⁷ several respondents recall during a FDG with members of

⁶⁰ World Health Organization et al, 2005. Health and mortality survey among internally displaced persons in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts, northern Uganda.

⁶¹ Ghostly vengeance inflicted by the spirit of a dead person. See *'Roco Wat I Acoli: Traditional Mechanisms of Coping in Acholi'*, Liu Institute for Global Issues, Gulu District NGO Forum, and Ker Kwaro Acholi, September 2005.

⁶² Interview with a survivor of the Lukodi massacre whose husband was abducted in the massacre, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

⁶³ Focus group discussion, Lukodi, 17th November 2010.

⁶⁴ Interview with an elderly male, Lukodi, 18th November 2010.

⁶⁵ Male respondent in a focus group discussion, Lukodi, 17th November 2010.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*

⁶⁷ *Ibid*

the JRP team. They were not allowed to move freely. They recall how they all had to be at their homes by 7 pm, even in difficult situations. Even if one needed to go out at night to ease oneself, he or she had to wait until the next morning. In 2006 the problems in the camp had worsened, and people were complaining. In the meantime, rebel attacks had become less frequent, so the Government began advising people all over the north to return closer to their homes. 'I assembled the people of Lukodi and talked to them about this idea,' a local leader tells. 'They supported it, but said some soldiers should be assigned to go back with them to Lukodi.'⁶⁸ The Government granted their request. About sixty soldiers were sent to go along with the people of Lukodi. Though resettlement back to Lukodi started in 2006, it was gradual, and due to fear, people established yet another camp. It was still uncertain if the 'peace' would last, so the community of Lukodi did not feel ready to return to their former mode of living. It was not until later that people finally started to return to their original homes.

Resettlement Challenges & Coping Mechanisms

I am now about 43 years old. When the conflict started I think I was about fourteen years old. I have grown up in this conflict and I know how disastrous it has been. I have seen the pain inflicted on our people by the conflict. I have taken care of twelve orphans who were left by my brothers and sisters who were killed by the rebels. I also had to take care of my orphaned brothers and sisters when our mother left us after having been massacred by the LRA. We were thirteen children in total. I had to take care of my siblings and my own children. At 43 I feel very exhausted. I have not been able to save anything for my old age.⁶⁹

Six years have passed since the Lukodi massacre, but its devastating impact still lives to haunt the community. A vast section of the Lukodi community is still nursing the trauma caused by the massacre. As a result most of them live in denial, bitterness and hopelessness. Most families have failed to rebuild their lives due to abject poverty and trauma. Child headed families have become a common phenomenon in this place, posing challenges to education and life in general. The affected community can only guess what may have instigated the massacre or who should be held responsible, as no accountability mechanisms are in place. They continue longing to understand what happened. Very



Elderly survivors of the massacre. Northern Uganda has a high population of elderly and vulnerable people who lost all their relatives in the conflict. Such people often have no one to look after them in their old age. Photo Credit: JRP

few of the formerly displaced communities received any substantial support to enable them to begin their lives afresh, to care for those who were permanently disabled in this event, or to cater for the orphans and widows the massacre left behind. Reparations measures have neither been developed nor implemented and the majority of the massacre survivors linger in abject poverty. Since the community still didn't know the true motive behind the massacre at the time of this research, the atmosphere is tense. Most people are at a loss when it comes to who to blame for what happened, and as a result, there is a tendency to blame some members within the community itself for their alleged participation in the

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Interview with a 43 year old male, Lukodi, 24th August 2010.

massacre. The majority of the community of Lukodi still treats most of those people who have returned from the bush with suspicion, and they do not trust the families whose relatives have not yet returned from captivity.

Homecoming proved to be challenging for many people in Lukodi such as Lamony. After the massacre, he stayed with the home-guards for another two years. As before, the Government continued to default paying the home-guards their salary. Lamony stresses how he really needed the money to meet his children's school fees. *'When civilians began to come back home in 2006, and rebels were no more, I made a resolution to come back home. I just escaped from the army.'*⁷⁰ His superiors did not simply accept this desertion. After his escape they followed him home and continued to harass his mother to reveal his location. Lamony is still hiding from the UPDF. He spent half a year in Gulu first and now keeps a low profile deep in the village. He has not been able to return to his mother's home either. *'Even today if they come across me, I could still get arrested. But I keep dodging them. I know it is not very bad because I did not escape with their gun. If I had escaped with a gun, they would have arrested me by now.'*⁷¹



Children along a path in Lukodi village. Many children were orphaned as a result of the massacre, a factor which has turned out to be a daunting resettlement challenge. Photo Credit: JRP

Olong, the former LRA fighter who participated in the massacre is even more isolated than Lamony. Olong is no longer with the LRA, but he has not been rehabilitated to enable him cope with civilian life. He lives alone by himself and does not interact with the community much. Many of the problems that the residents of Lukodi faced in the camps have persisted upon their return to Lukodi. Issues such as alcoholism and trauma, don't just disappear.

Dera is still struggling to cope with the impact of the massacre. After his first wife left him during their stay in Coope, back in Lukodi Dera's second wife started seeing other men as well. He had become very depressed and seriously contemplated committing suicide, which further challenged their relationship. At the current moment they are still together, but there is no intimacy between them anymore he alleges. She has contracted HIV, and he fears contracting the disease too.

Over the years, the people of Lukodi have been trying to cope with their past and present suffering in various ways. Although the challenges they face are serious, they are finding ways to deal with them too. Dera still feels weaker than before the massacre, but lately he has started up a small business of his own. His wives have disappointed him, but he has begun to retrieve his self-esteem. *'Today I live my life as a man,'* he says. *'I run this small business of mine. If it is a market day I go to town and buy meat, and cook for those who have come to sell their commodities. And that is how I earn my living.'*⁷² He also benefits from a village savings scheme, that included him into one of their groups. Others have started taking up businesses as well. Even though Lamony still hides from the army, he has cautiously started trading too. Some of inhabitants of the village have found refuge in being born-again⁷³, in order to cope with the trauma from the massacre. One of Martina's daughters, who was abducted on the day of the massacre, suffered from *cen*.⁷⁴ Martina explains how when she returned from captivity about a year later and she was not the same as before. She was frequently attacked by *cen*, until she decided to become a born-again Christian, and the attacks then ceased.

⁷⁰ Interview with a former home-guard, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Interview with an elderly male, Lukodi, 25th August 2010.

⁷³ In Uganda many new religious sects have emerged from the mainstream Catholic and Anglican Churches, and are commonly referred to as 'Born-Again' churches. Many people have flocked to these churches in search of solutions to various problems. Members of these churches refer to themselves as 'born-again' Christians.

⁷⁴ Spiritual vengeance inflicted by the spirit of a dead person. See *'Roco Wat I Acoli: Traditional Mechanisms of Coping in Acholi'*, Liu Institute for Global Issues, Gulu District NGO Forum, and Ker Kwaro Acholi, September 2005.

The people of Lukodi have embarked upon various memorialisation efforts. Some have started conducting funeral rites for their deceased loved ones who died in the massacre; they tend to the graves of their relatives with great care. However, stories of inhabitants of Lukodi show that silencing the ghosts from the past is anything but easy. At some point, Martina and her relatives were planning a ceremony in honour of the dead at her home. It is customary in most Acholi homes to consult a spirit medium in the process of conducting funeral rites for people who have died in such a gruesome manner. When they went to the spirit medium, respondents claimed that Martina's deceased brother-in-law allegedly told his relatives that no rites were to be conducted in his honour on that occasion. The relatives however proceeded to conduct rituals dedicated to his memory, which led to a very violent storm that day while the rites were taking place at Martina's home;

In the afternoon, a very thick dark cloud formed and it looked like it was going to rain heavily. From nowhere a very strong wind appeared and the entire place turned so misty that you could not see someone four meters away. The strong wind didn't cease. Then it began to rain so hard, that it appeared as though someone was just hitting the roof of the house with stones. Hail stones were littered all over. Roofs were blown off. At the mass funeral site, the tents that were erected for the ceremony were all blown away.⁷⁵

More institutionalized memorialization takes place as well. Close to the eastern side of the Lukodi market, lies a monument constructed in memory of those who died in the massacre. The monument has been erected close to the graves of a few internally displaced persons from Lalweny, who died too far away from their homesteads to be buried there. The monument was presented by an international NGO in Lukodi called Child Voice International, after the



The monument at Lukodi is often overgrown by bushes and poorly maintained. There is need for more memorialization initiatives. Photo Credit: JRP

community members themselves had initiated the idea in their first memorial prayers of 19th May 2005. The people of Lukodi made the bricks, while local councilors provided them with cement to complete the building of the memorial. Inscribed in the stone it reads: 'Lukodi memorial massacre on 19th May 2004'. Below this writing is an incomplete list of the names of civilians who perished in Lukodi on that fateful day of the massacre. The monument stands isolated from where the bodies were buried, since most of the burials were done at household level. The community members who had initiated the idea of the monument, laid the bricks and provided the labor for its construction, soon lost touch with the monument. It seems as though their expectations as to what would happen after the monument was constructed were not met. The monument has not attracted due attention from the Government. Government participation in memorial services for example, would have been an important form of acknowledgment.

Unfortunately, such Governmental involvement did not materialize, nor did the local authorities facilitate the memorialization efforts. As a result, most of the memorial services during the years after the massacre, have mainly been conducted at family levels. Currently, the monument's only surroundings are overgrown bushes. It seems like the survivors attach more meaning to the graves by their homesteads, than to the official monument.

Over the past year, JRP has been creating a Community Reconciliation Model in collaboration with CVI and the community of Lukodi. This model is being developed and implemented as a response to the community's need to pursue local level community based initiatives for reconciliation and healing. JRP and CVI together with the community are currently working towards creation of a community driven model that is based on reconciliatory efforts by elders and local traditional leaders in the area. To date, a team has been named to advance the model. This documentation effort is the first step to taken in implementing the reconciliation model and the group intends to have this report as their first official

⁷⁵ Interview with a 43 year old female, Lukodi, 24th August 2011.

account of the Lukodi massacre to necessitate future engagements. The CORE team has since been trained in advocacy and is working hard to ensure positive memorialization of the massacre. They have carried out exercises to build trust and interconnectedness in the community. The team has started regular cleaning of the memorial site, and it is making progress to turn the memorial site in Lukodi into a national symbol of remembrance. The CORE team has also held a workshop in which the members came up with a number of factors that are currently working against peaceful coexistence among the community members, to further develop the CORE team's strategy. Through the activities of the CORE team, the JRP team interacted with the community on a regular basis, building trust that also benefited the documentation process, the first step in the Community Reconciliation Model. At the time of writing the report, the CORE team's efforts



Members of the Lukodi Community Reconciliation (CORE) Team in a session. JRP is working in collaboration with CVI to create a community model of reconciliation. The CORE team has been instrumental in providing leadership and guidance during the process. They were also instrumental in guiding the process of documenting the Lukodi massacre. Photo Credit: JRP

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gh it is too early to come up with an overall evaluation of the impact of the activities it carries out, they are clearly supported by a large part of the people of Lukodi, almost all of them victims from the conflict in one way or the other, which signals it holds a large potential to support local initiatives of healing and reconciliation.

Recommendations

What happened was terrible. So I think it is the Government of Uganda that needs to come in and help because the Government is big. There is no one else who can provide the resources needed to help the victims. The Government can provide money for paying death compensation for the relatives of the people who died. The Government knows that the people who died was as a result of the massacre. So the Government should take responsibility even if it means providing only one cow for a Mato Oput ceremony. What happened was not the wish of the Government and neither was it the wish of the people. So the Government needs to engage in discussions with the victims to see how Mato Oput can be carried out. That is what I think needs to be done and that is the little advice that I can give.⁷⁶

For the last five years, northern Uganda has entered a new phase of recovery after conflict. Only recently have people like Martina, Laloyo and Dera, started to live in the same homes as they did before. The residents of Lukodi are slowly trying to resume the lives they used to live, even though so many things have changed tremendously since the massacre occurred. Olong, Amako and Amaro, who were part of the LRA, are still searching for their new place within the community in which they once belonged. Lamony is still hiding from the army, but slowly becoming confident that he may never have to serve as a home-guard again.

In these times of relative peace people start to face the reality back home, and their needs for justice and reconciliation become apparent. Up to today, none of the parties involved in the massacre have officially stood up to acknowledge what happened, let alone speak out on their roles in the traumatizing events. Both the LRA and the Government have failed to break the silence that still surrounds the bloody past. In the meantime, many people continue to be traumatized and bitter; still struggling to find ways to deal with the past and move on with life. There is a strong need for those people to reconcile with each other and with what has happened to them.

After careful consultation of the people of Lukodi, we therefore recommend the following measures that we believe hold a strong potential to bring justice and reconciliation to the people of Lukodi;

- a) **Support local level community based initiatives of reconciliation and healing;** As in the rest of northern Uganda, healing can only be successful in war affected communities such as Lukodi, if the measures undertaken to support these process are based within the community itself, instead of imposed on the people from outside. Therefore, community based initiatives, such as those being undertaken by the CORE team in Lukodi, should be supported. As demonstrated by the case of Lukodi, memorialization of the deceased in many communities across northern Uganda is inadequate, and many places where massacres occurred either lack monuments, or the existing monuments do not serve their purposes well, and lack connectedness to victims. To preserve the memory of the past, there is need for additional support of memorialization efforts, to honor the dead and acknowledge past events.
- b) **Victims of conflict should continuously be consulted on decisions that affect them.** The Government of Uganda and international institutions like the ICC should listen more closely to the opinions and concerns of the victims they claim to represent. In Lukodi, the involvement of the ICC does not sufficiently serve the needs of this community. The victims fail to see how the international efforts the ICC makes are connected to their needs regarding justice and reconciliation. The ICC should embark upon more consultative outreach to the communities, to gain a better understanding of the injustices the victims faced and their local perceptions of justice.

⁷⁶ Interview with a 34 year old male, Lukodi, 24th August 2010.

- c) **The Government of Uganda and the ICC should share the findings of forensic investigations carried out in Lukodi with the members of the community.** The official silence surrounding the massacre is overpowering. Despite investigations carried out by the CID just after the massacre, the people of Lukodi have not been officially informed on who they should hold accountable for what has happened. The Government has not shared the findings of this exhumations procedure with the community that still longs for answers to the many questions that keep haunting them up to today. Just like their local partners, the ICC has also failed to provide feedback to the community members, despite the OTP having conducted investigations in Lukodi to collect evidence against the LRA. There is a strong need for the Ugandan or international authorities to come out to answer the questions the local population still has. The findings of the investigation should be shared with the local community in Lukodi. In this time of relative peace the GoU should work on building trust on the ground, to work together to a continuously peaceful future with the people of northern Uganda. Sharing its findings and answering questions can be a first step in such a process of trust building.
- d) **A twofold process of truth-telling is required to further break the silence.** Both the Government of Uganda, the LRA, and the members of the community of Lukodi, should take part in such an exercise. The lack of acknowledgment of the Lukodi massacre of 19th May 2004, currently hinders the population of Lukodi from finding ways to overcome their trauma. As long as they cannot understand what happened and why, it is difficult to trust such events will not occur again. Acknowledgment is a first step in breaking the silence surrendering the traumatic events that occurred, and will make the victims feel that the Government cares for them. Only after their experiences are acknowledged, will they believe that Government recognizes its people as citizens who deserve just and fair treatment.
- e) **The Government of Uganda should design and implement a transparent and inclusive reparations policy.** As soon as the massacre occurred the people of Lukodi lost almost all their livelihood and fled to go and live in the IDP camps, without any means to sustain themselves. All over northern Uganda, people became completely dependent on aid and they lived in poverty. When they were told to return home there was no form of assistance to rebuild their lives. No matter how gross the violations of the human rights of the people in northern Uganda were, the Government has not taken any serious steps to repair those harms done to them. However, according to the UN basic principles and guidelines on the right to a remedy and reparations, the survivors of the Lukodi massacre have a right to adequate, effective, prompt and appropriate remedies.⁷⁷ If we look at the conditions under which the people of Lukodi are living today, the need to respect this right becomes even more urgent. Though some initiatives have been taken to remedy their injuries, such as the construction of the monument, they are insufficient to repair the seriousness of the harms done to the community. The inhabitants of Lukodi have sustained heavy losses, in every sense of the word. The lack of prompt reparations adds up to their severe psychological suffering. Therefore, we call upon the Government of Uganda to design and implement an inclusive and transparent reparations policy for the victims in northern Uganda.

⁷⁷ *UN Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations on International Humanitarian Law*, UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/60/147, Clause 15, 21st March 2006.