



# Paying Back What Belongs To Us

Victims' Groups in Northern Uganda and their Quest for Reparation

**JRP Field Note XVI, October 2012**



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## **Cover photos**

*Front:* Conflict-affected women performing a drama in Barlonyo sub-county, Lira district, Lango sub-region. Source: JRP

*Back:* Signpost of Acholi War Debts Claimants' Association at their head Office in Gulu town. Executive members of Lango War Claimants Association in front of their office in Lira town; Signpost of Kasese Landmine Survivors' Association

## **About the Justice and Reconciliation Project**

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 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.

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# Acronyms

<b>AWDCA</b>	Acholi War Debts Claimants' Association
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>GoU</b>	Government of Uganda
<b>ICC</b>	International Criminal Court
<b>ICD</b>	International Crimes Division
<b>IDP(s)</b>	Internally Displaced Person(s)
<b>JRP</b>	Justice and Reconciliation Project
<b>LDU</b>	Local Defense Unit
<b>LRA</b>	Lord's Resistance Army
<b>LWCA</b>	Lango War Claimants' Association
<b>NRA</b>	National Resistance Army
<b>NRM</b>	National Resistance Movement
<b>SACCO</b>	Savings and Credit Cooperative Organization
<b>UPDF</b>	Uganda People's Defense Forces
<b>VSLA</b>	Village Savings and Loans Associations
<b>WNKRWVA</b>	West Nile Kony Rebel War Victims' Association

# Introduction

As northern Uganda enjoys a period of relative peace following more than two decades of conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda (GoU), many victims of war have begun to demand reparations. However, the majority of victims' demands have not been fulfilled. In northern Uganda, state-led post-conflict assistance is currently limited to national recovery programs like the Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP), Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) and National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADs), which neither specifically address the demands and conflict-related needs of war victims nor include sufficient acknowledgement of conflict-related suffering. With the Final Peace Agreement (FPA) of the 2006-2008 Juba Peace Talks remaining unsigned, the implementation of reparations in northern Uganda – as stipulated in Agenda Item Number Three of the Juba Peace Agreement – appears to have fallen entirely by the wayside.

Victims and survivors in the sub-regions of West Nile, Acholi, Lango and Teso currently struggle to access necessary support to rebuild their lives and communities. Against the backdrop of those victims' challenges, different groups and associations were formed to advocate for victims, channel their demands for compensation and articulate their otherwise silent voices. However, despite the overwhelming number of individual survivors and victims, the number of organized groups or associations is limited. Although often established with the intention to advocate and lobby for compensation, the majority of local victims' groups have surrendered their quest for reparations to larger, more powerful and comprehensive claimants' bodies. Groups at the community level instead concentrate on economic and income-generating activities for short-term benefit. Although debates about Uganda's need for a national reparations and compensation policy continue on a professional level and within academic discourse, victims' voices and the views of organized victims' groups are rarely considered or acknowledged.

In light of the challenges faced by victims seeking reparations, this study serves to illuminate the current state, emergence and development of different victims' groups and associations throughout the Greater North of Uganda, and to highlight their activities and demands. Victims of conflict, including members of victims' associations, require a platform to raise their voices and articulate their demands. This report, therefore, aims to inform policy-makers, the government, stakeholders on the ground and local leaders about the current state of victims' groups in northern Uganda. Moreover, it provides a guiding resource for victim communities attempting to form a group or advocate for reparations.

## Methodology

With this focus in mind the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) conducted an in-depth study to examine the objectives, means of operation, challenges and success stories of a variety of victims' groups throughout the Greater North of Uganda, including the sub-regions of Acholi, Lango, Teso and West Nile. Between October 2011 and February 2012, JRP researchers spoke to 129 individuals – 75 male and 54 female respondents – to understand the groups' objectives and dynamics. Respondents included members and executive representatives of a wide range of victims' groups, as well as civil society representatives working with conflict affected victims. Collectively, JRP identified and studied 23 war claimants' associations and groups of victims, women, formerly abducted persons, landmine and massacre survivors, ex-combatants and war survivors. Individual victims and claimants were interviewed during the research process as well. Researchers used in-depth, open-ended individual interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with members and executive authorities of victims' groups and associations. Given the lengthy nature of conflict between the LRA and the GoU and the resultant concentration of victims, most groups included in this study were located in the Greater North region. The data collected for this report also contributed to a larger study on compensation and reparations by the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) entitled *Reparations in Uganda: Exploration of Potential Policy Options and Approaches*.<sup>1</sup> Particular parts of this study derive from the analytical work conducted for ICTJ's forthcoming report. We were not able to reach all groups in northern Uganda.

<sup>1</sup> International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), *Reparations in Uganda: Exploration of Potential Policy Options and Approaches*, forthcoming.



Members of a victims' group in Teso sub-region during consultation with JRP researchers.

## Background

*"When we organize ourselves we can raise our voices and make them be heard by the government in order to receive help."<sup>2</sup>*

In the context of transitional justice and post-conflict recovery *"reparations refer to the obligation of a wrongdoing party to redress the damage caused to an injured party."*<sup>3</sup> Against this backdrop, reparations can take many different forms, including restitution, rehabilitation, satisfaction and monetary compensation. These actions are meant to restore and repair the harm experienced by victims of extreme suffering or human rights violations. Furthermore, in the context of post-conflict northern Uganda, reparations constitute an important and integral component of traditional justice and reconciliation ceremonies. In many traditional rituals, including the Acholi ceremony of *mato oput*, compensation is an essential part of the acknowledgment of wrongdoing and restoration of relationships. Throughout JRP's consultation with victims in northern Uganda, conflict-affected individuals and communities alike expressed serious expectations of reparations for the harm they experienced.

The *Implementing Protocol to the Agreement on Comprehensive Solutions* signed during the 2006-2008 Juba Peace Talks in Southern Sudan appointed the Ugandan Government as responsible for meeting the reparations and compensation needs of victims. It reads as follows:

*The parties agree that the Government shall develop and implement a policy for the support and rehabilitation of the victims of the conflict.<sup>4</sup> The policy shall include, and the Government shall establish, a special fund for victims, out of which reparations shall be paid, including reparations ordered to be paid by an institution established pursuant to the Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation.<sup>5</sup>*

Additionally, agenda item three – the *Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation* – acknowledges that reparations may include a range of measures and can be both individual and collective. Nevertheless, when the first trial at Uganda's International Crimes Division (ICD) against former LRA-commander Thomas Kwoyelo commenced, the High Court's Registrar announced that the ICD – established to prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity domestically in Uganda – is not mandated to pay reparations and thus cannot do so.

In the aftermath of the conflict between the LRA and the government forces in northern Uganda, a number of victims' groups and associations developed, often initially to seek reparations or compensation for injuries or loss of life, land, property or cattle. Despite the overwhelming number of individual survivors and victims, comparatively few victims were organized into groups or associations. Throughout the four sub-regions of Acholi, Lango, Teso and West Nile, JRP identified 23 different victims' groups and associations. These groups vary from small community-based victims' groups to regionally-focused claimants' associations. Some groups unite survivors of landmine injuries or specific massacres, while others bring together returnees.<sup>6</sup> Still others comprise large numbers of claimants for loss of life, property and

<sup>2</sup> Individual Interview with male respondent in Koch Goma sub-county, Nwoya district, Acholi sub-region, 12 October 2011.

<sup>3</sup> The background information on reparations derives from an earlier study carried out by the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) and the South African Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in August 2011. See: *Pay Us so We can Forget: Reparations for Victims and Affected Communities in Northern Uganda*, JRP-IJR Policy Brief No. 2, August 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Implementation Protocol to the Agreement on Comprehensive Solutions, Clause 26, 22, February 2008.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Clause 28

<sup>6</sup> The term 'returnees' describes both, formerly abducted persons (FAPs) as well as ex-combatants. As our findings reveal, various former rebel fighters as well as soldiers fear labeling and stigma within the communities and therefore try to avoid using the term 'combatants.' Therefore, we refer to those categories of conflict-affected victims as 'returnees.'



cattle during the war. Due to the fact that women are generally extremely vulnerable to conflict and have specific needs, various women's groups<sup>7</sup> have come into existence. Bringing together formerly abducted women or victims of rape, these groups primarily focus not on monetary compensation but on rehabilitation support. Finally, in various parts of the conflict-affected regions, general survivors' associations are comprised of different categories of victims who are in most cases residents of the same place. Most of the victims groups included in this study consisted of both male and female victims. Also, among the different categories of groups and associations it appears that war claimants' associations are the most visible and active and often constitute victims' only path to claim compensation from the government.

Given the wide variety of groups, this first section describes different groups from the various sub-regions, including their main characteristics, and takes into consideration geographic and organizational differences. Since larger claimants' associations seem to be the most active and able to assist victims with making claims, the four claimants' organizations featured in this research will be compared to case studies of smaller groups by region.

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<sup>7</sup> Women's groups considered in this study include: Can Rwende Pe, Awach Tailoring Group and Otingteba Women's Group. See Appendix A for further information on all groups covered in this study.



A representative of the Koch Goma landmine survivors group in Koch Goma sub-county, Acholi sub-region in an interview with a JRP researcher.

## Groups of Victims in Acholi Sub-Region

The majority of groups covered in this research are located in Acholi sub-region because the two decades of conflict between the LRA and the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) predominately affected this area, leading to a high concentration of human rights abuses and war-related suffering. Victims argue this experience warrants compensation, which led to the establishment of numerous small, community-based victims' groups. Victims in the region make strong demands for compensation from the government, who they hold largely responsible both for specific abuses and for the chronic insecurity in the region. However, victims do not appear to trust the government's rehabilitation commitment and are disappointed by the lack of compensation payments. Therefore, the local claimants' body, the Acholi War Debts Claimants' Association, is extremely active in demanding compensation and has engaged the government in court.

The majority of victims' groups in Acholi sub-region are small community-based organizations that focus on a specific class of victims such as massacre survivors, women or landmine survivors. Groups examined in this study include the: Atiak Massacre Survivors Association (est. 1996), Mucwini Massacre Widows and Widowers Group (2002), Koch Goma Landmine Survivors Group (2004) and women's groups Can Rwende Pe (2007), Rubanga Matwero Palaro (2008) and Awach Tailoring Group (2005).

Massacre associations in Mucwini, Kitgum district and Atiak, Amuru district as well as the Koch Goma Landmine Survivors group provide peer-support for relatives of victims and survivors of attacks and engage their members in agricultural activities. The Atiak Massacre Survivors Association came into existence as an immediate response to the horrific and gruesome massacre by the LRA on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1995.<sup>8</sup> Due to the persistent insecurity in the region and various post-conflict challenges for victims and affected communities, the group subsequently abandoned its activities and only became operational again in 2010. Although peer-to-peer support is one of the main objectives and activities of the group, an underlying demand for compensation is something of importance for the 60 group members. Unfortunately, these groups lack the means to articulate claims and communicate with the government, thus their demands have not yet reached the relevant authorities.

The Mucwini Massacre Survivors Association brings together survivors of the LRA-attack that occurred on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2002.<sup>9</sup> In addition to bringing together community members with traumatic memories of this event, the group also focuses on joint agricultural activities, enabling members to generate small incomes. Similar to the Atiak Massacre Survivors Association, members of Mucwini Massacre Survivors Association desire reparations for their collective suffering. However, a persistent lack of resources hinders the group's effective claim for compensation or reparations.

The Koch Goma Landmine Survivors Association came into existence in 2004, uniting 34 survivors of landmines. Facing similar challenges as other groups in the sub-region, the association has not yet received any support in compensation claims and instead concentrates on activities with short-term benefits, like communal saving and loans. The women's groups, on the other hand, are mainly comprised of formerly abducted persons (FAPs) and actively perform drama and traditional dances to cope with their traumatic experiences, in addition to engaging in income-generating activities. One particular group in Awach sub-county also produces income for its members and their families through tailoring activities.

Other than channeling demands for compensation, community-based victims' groups in Acholi sub-region engage their members in economic and income-generating activities as well as psychosocial rehabilitation. One respondent explained this decision by noting that, as much as compensation is the victims' right and they *"still need that support from the government, you never know what will happen. That is why we [the groups] do small income-generating activities."*<sup>10</sup> The

8 For more information about the 1995 Atiak massacre see: *Remembering the Atiak Massacre: April 20th 1995, Field Note IV*, April 2007, Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP), available at: <http://justiceandreconciliation.com/2007/04/remembering-the-atiak-massacre-april-20th-1995-fn-iv/>.

9 For more information about the 2002 Mucwini massacre see: *Massacre in Mucwini, Field Note VIII*, November 2008, Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP), available at: <http://justiceandreconciliation.com/2008/11/massacre-in-mucwini-fn-viii/>.

10 Male respondent during focus group discussion in Lefori sub-county, Moyo district, West Nile sub-region, 7th February 2012.

groups' main functional activities include Village Savings and Loans Associations (VLSA) and minor joint agricultural activities, accompanied by peer-to-peer support for survivors and witnesses of traumatic experiences. The community-based victims' groups in Acholi sub-region face similar challenges and difficulties, including a lack of clearly defined objectives, a loose and disorganized structure, a persistent lack of ownership and increasing stigma and labeling.



The sign post of the Acholi War Debts Claimants Association at their Head Office in Gulu Town.

### Acholi War Debts Claimants' Association

- Established in 2005
- Objective is to claim for reparations and compensation from the Ugandan Government for loss of cattle, life and property incurred during the conflict
- Has 30,000 members
- Demands 37 trillion Ugandan shillings in compensation from government

### Case Study: Acholi War Debts Claimants' Association

The largest and most visible victims' group in the Acholi sub-region is the Acholi War Debts Claimants' Association (AWDCA).<sup>11</sup> This group, located in Gulu town, came into existence in 2005. The association covers all districts in Acholi and represents about 30,000 members. The objective of the association is to claim reparations and compensation from the Ugandan government for loss of cattle, life and property during the conflict. Therefore, the group's main activity is to register claimants and their demands. Collectively, the group demands 37 trillion Ugandan Shillings<sup>12</sup> for victims across the whole region for the timeframe between 1986 and 2008. According to the group's executive director, *"the government needs to pay [the victims] something to finally settle because those people lost everything."*<sup>13</sup> Throughout its seven-year struggle for compensation, the group received substantial media attention.<sup>14</sup> In 2008, they sued the GoU for reparations payments. This lawsuit resulted in the government opting for an out-of-court agreement to pay 2.1 billion Ugandan Shillings. This payment was not sufficient to provide reparations for the 30,000 claimants involved, therefore the organization's struggle for compensation continues. Recently it was announced that about 20 billion Ugandan Shillings would be released for the association from the regional PRDP<sup>15</sup> with an additional 100 billion Ugandan Shillings from the consolidated fund of the government to follow. However, at the time of writing the AWDCA had not received this money. Furthermore, according to the group's director the money would *"only cover around 10% of the demands."*<sup>16</sup>

The limited successes indicate a larger challenge in the reparations strategy in Uganda. The redirection of governmental rehabilitation programs and sporadic compensation payments increasingly leave victims confused. Clear acknowledgement of suffering is an integral part of effective reparations, yet the concessions made to claimants of the AWDCA have so far focused solely on monetary compensation. It is not clear to victims whether they are receiving assistance as part of a standard government-sponsored development program or as compensation for losses suffered during the conflict.

The AWDCA recently faced an additional challenge of alleged corruption within the organization. As indicated by various newspaper sources and revealed during our in-depth consultation with representative members of the association, 550 million of the 2.1 billion Uganda Shillings paid was allegedly misused by former leaders of the group and never reached the victims. In summary, although the AWDCA has been able to achieve limited monetary compensation for its claimants, the road to complete compensation and reparations for all victims in Acholi remains long.

11 For more information about the Acholi War Debts Claimants' Association, see: <http://www.acholiwardebtsclaimants.org>.

12 At the time of writing, this equaled about 14 billion US Dollars.

13 Executive Director of Acholi War Debts Claimants' Association during focus group discussion, Gulu town, 14th October 2011.

14 For recent examples of media attention, see: "Debts claimants' boss resigns," *Daily Monitor*, 31st May 2011; "War Debt Claimants Want Government to Expedite Pay," *Daily Monitor*, 27th October 2011, available at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201105240055.html>.

15 PRDP stands for Peace, Recovery and Development Programme. See: "Oulanyah Promises to Expedite War Debt Compensation Claim," *Acholi Times*, 6th August 2012, available at: <http://www.acholitimes.com/index.php/8-acholi-news/705-oulanyah-promises-to-expedite-war-debt-compensation-claim>.

16 Executive Director of Acholi War Debts Claimants Association during focus group discussion, Gulu town, 14th October 2011.

## Groups of Victims in Lango Sub-Region

JRP identified two landmine survivors' associations in Lango, located in Lira and Apac. Unfortunately, both groups have abandoned their activities making further in-depth analysis impossible. Although Lango region is home to many individual and community-wide victims of the conflict, only a limited number have organized themselves into victims' associations. Based on our conversations with civil society representatives, victims and current group members in Lango, it appears that the population's fear of stigma and labeling is still significant. This fear may prevent individual victims from joining or forming a victims' association, which would expose their status as potentially vulnerable victims. In contrast to the situation in Acholi, victims in Lango seem to particularly fear labeling and stigma and therefore do not want to clearly come out with their experiences or difficulties. Hence, only a limited number of groups could be identified in Lango.

### Case Study: Lango War Claimants Association (LAWCA)

Like in Acholi, a claimants' body called Lango War Claimants Association (LAWCA) exists in Lira town to claim compensation and channel victims' demands. Founded in 2008, the association represents about 51,000 claimants in the whole of Lango sub-region who demand 1.4 trillion Ugandan Shillings<sup>17</sup> for the loss of 480,000 head of cattle. Unlike its counterpart in Gulu, LAWCA mainly focuses on the loss of cattle as the chief compensation claim due to the prevalence of cattle rustling in Lango during the conflict. Similar to other regional claimants' associations, LAWCA registers war claimants across the region's districts in order to present a verified group compensation claim.

On 26<sup>th</sup> October 2010, the association took the GoU to the High Court to claim compensation. The group's regional coordinator remembers that although out-of-court negotiations were held, no agreement has been made, resulting in an on-going court case. Apparently, the government verbally promised to provide compensation for Lango's losses. However, those oral commitments are not satisfactory, and the group's leaders demand written commitment from the government.

To complicate matters, LAWCA faces the difficulty of negative influence and oppression by political leaders who try to undermine and jeopardize the organization's activities and demands. According to the chairperson of LAWCA, "the government tried to create another group in March this year 2011."<sup>18</sup> Civil society representatives in the region, who are not affiliated with the claimants' organization but follow their work, also referred to the existence of a rival claimants' group. This group is run by high-ranking government representatives and politicians from Lira and the wider region. As a response to persistent and continuing pressure from LAWCA, "the President [of the Republic of Uganda] called for a meeting at the State House with representatives from the north to form such a [rival] group."<sup>19</sup> JRP was only able to gather limited and often contradictory information on the newly-formed rival group and its demands. Outside observers and interested parties were generally confused about the nature of the new organization.

### Case Study: Barlonyo Memorial Preservation Committee

The other prominent victims' group in Lango sub-region is the Barlonyo Memorial Preservation Committee in Barlonyo sub-county, a community that suffered a gruesome and horrific massacre by the LRA in 2004. In an attack lasting less than three hours in the late afternoon of 21<sup>st</sup> February 2004, the LRA brutally murdered over 300 people and abducted an unknown number of civilians.<sup>20</sup> In the aftermath of the massacre, a



Executive members of Lango War Claimants in front of their office in Lira Town.

### Lango War Claimants Association

- Established in 2008
- Has 51,000 members
- Demands 1.4 Trillion Ugandan shillings in compensation from government
- Court case began October 26, 2011.
- Out of court negotiations held but did not reach agreement

<sup>17</sup> "Lango War Victims Sue Government – Want 1.4 trillion in compensation," *Uganda Radio Network Online*, 25th May 2011, available at: <http://ugandaradionetwork.com/a/story.php?s=33921&PHPSESSID=40ef697909f8c1d4a0d5aa4200b2e87c>.

<sup>18</sup> Individual interview with the regional coordinator of Lango War Claimants' Association, Lira town, 20th October 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> For more information on the massacre see: *Kill Every Living Thing: The Barlonyo Massacre*, Field Note IX, February 2009, Justice and Reconciliation Project, available at: <http://justiceandreconciliation.com/2009/02/kill-every-living-thing-the-barlonyo-massacre-fn-ix/>.

survivors' association was established uniting survivors and witnesses of the massacre to provide peer-support and care after the traumatic experience. Eventually, the original massacre survivor's association collapsed and in November 2011 victims established the current Barlonyo Memorial Preservation Committee with support from the Uganda National Museum. As the committee's name implies, the organization's main objective is to preserve the memory of the past, maintain the established monument and document victims' experiences and testimonies at a community-level. As one of the committee's members narrated, *"Another activity we're planning is to put up a resource centre to preserve the impacts of the massacre for historical purposes. Recently, we found some leftover bullets and want to keep those and other things so that people won't forget what happened."*<sup>21</sup> In the long-term, such community-driven initiatives are highly important for victims' ownership of memorialization.

<sup>21</sup> Male respondent during focus group discussion in Barlonyo sub-county, Lira district, 20th October 2011.



Individual member of a community-based victims group in Acholi sub-region.

## Groups of Victims in Teso Sub-Region

This study included four victims' groups in Uganda's eastern sub-region of Teso. These include a massacre survivors' association, a general war victims' association, a women's group and a regional claimants' association. In general, groups in this region are characterized by clearly defined leadership structures. As our findings evince, these associations' drive for compensation is not easily compromised. Furthermore, groups and individual respondents appear to be enthusiastic about research efforts and welcome documentation of their experiences.

Multiple community-based victims' groups exist throughout the region, comprising general war victims, massacre survivors and conflict-affected women. Whereas the Ogoma War Survivors Organization in Kumi district and the Morungatuny Helicopter Gunship Attack Survivors Group in Amuria district are newly established and therefore have a limited history of activities, the Otingteba Women's Group in Katakwi district previously carried out a successful peace-building and reconciliation program for female victims in Teso and Karamoja regions. The Otingteba Women's Group, established in 2005, developed as a response to the insecurity in the region caused by frequent raids from the Karamojong. These raids had a particularly damaging impact on the female population. To improve the situation, the group, organized exchange visits with women from the districts bordering the two regions with support from external actors. By sharing experiences and learning from each other, the women have been able to contribute to relative peace, security and reconciliation in the region. However, this fruitful work ended due to lack of funding, leaving the group to focus on minor agricultural activities. When it comes to compensation claims, the group leaves the responsibility to the Teso Animal and Property Claims Organization (TAPCO), the claimants' association set up by the government. The group's demands concentrate on loss of cattle and property. To date, the group has received no payment or feedback.

The Mukura Memorial and Development Initiative (MUMEDI) is the fourth major community-based victims' group identified in Teso sub-region. This organization, located in Ngora district, came into existence in 2011, more than two decades after a massacre by a battalion of the National Resistance Army (NRA) in 1989. Motivation to form this group stemmed largely from JRP's extensive documentation of the massacre.<sup>22</sup> With the objective of offering a platform for victims to talk with one mutual voice, the group brings together survivors of the attack as well as other conflict-affected civilians in the area. Although the group has received 200 million Ugandan Shillings in compensation already, the group continues to demand further compensation, arguing that the amount is not enough to cover all victims and survivors of

<sup>22</sup> For more information on the Mukura massacre, see: *The Mukura Massacre in 1989, Field Note XII*, March 2011, Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP), available at: <http://justiceandreconciliation.com/2011/03/the-mukura-massacre-of-1989-fn-xii/>.

the attack. A group representative noted during a focus group discussion that out-of-court negotiations are the intended way forward instead of suing the government. At the same time, several individual members who lost cattle or property in another context of the conflict are members of the regional claimants' association the Teso Cattle Rustling and War Victims Association and through that group intend to take government to court for compensation or reparations. In addition to the ongoing claim for compensation, MUMEDI mainly concentrates on communal saving activities through a Savings and Credit Cooperative Organization (SACCO) where members contribute a certain amount of money on a monthly basis. In addition, members who are direct survivors and victims of the 1989 massacre have been engaged in conducting memorial prayers and drama performances in order to raise awareness and inform younger community members.

### **Case Study: Teso Cattle Rustling and War Victims Association**

The Teso Cattle Rustling and War Victims Association functions as the main avenue for victims' quests for reparations in the sub-region. Since 2006, the group, which originally started in Amuria district and has now spread its activities to the whole region, mainly advocates for victims of conflict to be compensated and furthermore *"tasks the government to lay a foundation for the development of a national reparations policy."*<sup>23</sup> In addition, the group advocates for assistance

for victims facing various post-conflict challenges, including but not limited to decent burials and accountability of perpetrators. Categories of victims represented by the group include mainly those who lost their cattle and property, but also those who suffered loss of life, physical and psychosocial torture, or abduction. The group focuses on losses that occurred between 1986 and 2008, although it is currently trying to extend its mandate back to 1979. This mandate extension entails various constitutional and legal challenges, given that the government can only be responsible for compensation for events that occurred since they came to power in 1986. Overall, the group is well-structured and organized, with representatives and committees at all points from the district to the village level. The group's claim for compensation is based on an in-depth identification and registration process of war victims, which has successfully identified and united over one million claimants in the whole of Teso sub-region. With the assistance and guidance of a team of lawyers, the group has appeared in court several times to file four separate cases to claim compensation from the Ugandan government. However, the cases are currently pending and at the time of writing no money or support had been released for claimants in Teso.

In addition to the government's inaction on victims' demands, the group faces numerous challenges and political oppression, mostly imposed by external actors. Regional political authorities jeopardize the groups' activities by threatening and harassing its leaders or trying to stop them from travelling to Kampala to attend relevant court hearings. As one regional group representative recalls, *"They threatened us and scared us with very ugly language and they wanted us to abandon our activities."*<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the government established TAPCO as a regional rival group. According to representatives of Teso Cattle Rustling and War Victims Association, their work *"is [negatively] influenced by TAPCO because they give the registration forms for free and don't demand any membership fee."*<sup>25</sup> Also, the rival group only focuses on losses of cattle and ignores all other human rights violations, which remain of high importance to victims of conflict. Teso Cattle Rustling and War Victims Association faces a further challenge of leadership disagreements and externally-influenced executive corruption. While trying to demonstrate government interference in the affairs of the association, one member alleged:

*Recently a high ranking government official delivered twenty million Ugandan Shillings to our chairman and the president promised to pay for the 100 head of cattle that our chairman at time had personally lost. They wanted us to announce publicly that we would withdraw the case. Our chairperson at that time was tempted by the bribe and took the money. When we heard about that we called a regional meeting and agreed that he*

### **Teso Cattle Rustling and War Victims Association**

- Established in 2006
- Mandate covers 1986-2008
- Trying to extend mandate back to 1979
- Filed four separate compensation cases against the government in court

<sup>23</sup> Male respondent during focus group discussion, Soroti town, 31st January 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

*consented without our mandate. Hence, he has been removed from the group because the members gave him a vote of no confidence.*<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, these attempts have not negatively influenced the group's drive for compensation in the long-term; the group continues to sue the government for compensation and recently re-appeared in court. As demonstrated above, the situation concerning victims' demands for compensation in Teso is comparable to that of Acholi and Lango sub-regions. Generally, community-based organizations focus on joint agricultural activities and savings schemes, and surrender their members' quests for reparations to a regional claimants' association. In all regions, the government has attempted to jeopardize the groups' activities, making it difficult for millions of victims to access reparations or compensation.

26 Respondents during focus group discussion, Soroti town, 31st January 2012.



Members of a community-based victim's group in West Nile sub-region during consultation with a JRP team.

## Groups of Victims in West Nile Sub-Region

Lastly, this study examines the situation of victims' groups in West Nile sub-region. This region suffered numerous simultaneous armed conflicts since the early 1980's which gave rise to a diverse array of victims' groups and associations. These groups have varying objectives based on losses caused by diverse actors during different conflicts. Despite the unique focus of each group, it appears that West Nile's groups have been collectively disappointed by numerous unfulfilled promises and a lack of feedback following interaction with government or NGO representatives.

Six community-based victims' groups were identified in the districts of Yumbe and Moyo, including an ex-combatants' group, a landmine survivors' group and a general war victims' group. In Itula sub-county, Moyo district, a group of former soldiers and combatants formed Itula Survivors Association in 2003 and is now engaged in small agricultural activities to improve the standard of living of its members. The scope of the group's work does not go beyond this income-generating component.

Two groups which comprise general war victims and survivors exist in Moyo, The Metu War Victims Association and the Abirichaku War Victims Group, established in 1999 and 2000, respectively. Both groups advocate for victims and survivors of conflict and engage in minor agriculture work and operation of a VLSA. Members of those two associations mainly experienced losses of property or money as a result of lootings by both the LRA and the West Nile Bank Front II (WNBF II) rebels. The most significant challenges identified by the Moyo groups were unfulfilled promises by external actors and subsequent disappointment and frustration amongst group members. The groups explained that external actors such as politicians and representatives of larger NGOs make initial promises of assistance, but then do not maintain contact with group representatives and the promised benefits never materialize. This appears to be a common problem throughout West Nile region.

The last independent victims' group identified in the West Nile region is the Yumbe Landmine Survivors' Association. Established in 2007, the group represents both landmine survivors and other victims of torture, and is a member of a comprehensive umbrella organization for landmine victims.<sup>27</sup>The group currently focuses on minor agricultural activities

27 The Uganda Landmine Survivors Association is based in Kampala and represents nine local and regional groups or associations of landmine survivors throughout

and is further divided into two regional sub-county branches of about 30 members each that advocate for physical rehabilitation and support. Throughout the different conflicts affecting the region, various victims lost their physical ability to engage in agricultural work and live self-sufficiently. As a result, the members of this particular group are dependent on external support and consequentially demand compensation.

We also found a number of victims' groups in the region that were founded and administered by larger non-governmental organizations. In Adjumani, a local NGO has established thirty-three victims groups to allow about 900 individual victims to access external support under the Trust Fund for Victims (TVF) of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Those groups – all located in Dzaipi and Pakele sub-counties – receive small support for income-generating activities and comprise various categories of victims, ranging from formerly abducted persons (FAPs) to torture victims, ex-combatants, landmine survivors or widows and orphans. The external factors that led to the creation of those groups imply a lack of local ownership. Beyond these activities, the groups do not demand additional compensation and have no mutual activities or other motivating factors that would indicate long-term sustainability. Similarly, an external individual – a member of local civil society – founded a group in Moyo to participate in potential future ICC hearings and access support from the Court's fund. However, after uniting potential victims to testify and forming the association, the group has not engaged in any activities. Without activities to unite and galvanize group members, it ceased operations.

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Uganda. Founded in 2005, the organization focuses on advocacy and victims' assistance. For more information, please see: <http://uganda-survivors.org/>.

### **Case Study: Competing Claimants' Associations in West Nile**

Given the region's complicated history of violence and armed conflict, two different groups claim compensation for losses during the peak of the liberation war between 1979 and 1981 as well as during the LRA insurgency that mainly affected the region in the late 1990s. Those groups are the West Nile Kony Rebel War Victims Association (WNKRWVA) and the West Nile Liberation War Victims Association.

Established in 2006, WNKRWVA aims to register all war-victims based in the West Nile sub-region, including the districts of Arua, Maracha, Koboko, Yumbe, Moyo, Adjumani, Nebbi and Zombo. It aims to identify which atrocities have been inflicted on victims and subsequently investigate their needs by documenting the names of victims who lost property during the conflict, the abductees of the LRA and the deceased. An earlier extensive consultation between JRP and the group in 2010 found *"the victims in West Nile felt they would have a stronger position if they could approach the government as a group, instead of as uncoordinated individuals. There is a strong belief within the group that the government indeed intended to pay compensation to the West Nile victims, but was unable to do so as long as they were not united."*<sup>28</sup> However, the association has not succeeded in persuading the government to compensate the victims. In fact, the group's activities have been suspended due to various internal complications surrounding the leadership structure.

JRP's interaction with victims on the ground revealed that the same person who is behind this group has recently established the second claimants' body in the region, the West Nile Liberation War Victims Association. In addition to channeling demands for compensation for losses due to LRA atrocities, this group goes back to the late 1970s and early 1980s and the liberation war within that time. According to one of the group's executive members, *"There are so many war victims. West Nile has been affected by so many different wars and not only Kony's LRA so you can't leave out the other victims."*<sup>29</sup> The association came into existence in July 2011, following extensive consultation with local opinion leaders. Similar to its counterpart focusing on the LRA's atrocities, this particular group aims to unite victims of conflict and advocate for assistance for conflict-affected communities. Being a very young association, the process of identifying and registering victims and members has not yet started. Furthermore, instead of demanding compensation and reparations, the group concentrates on community-based development and services which would be beneficial for the whole community, such as income-generating activities. A group representative

#### **West Nile Liberation War Victims Association**

- Established in September 2011
- Represents victims of conflict in West Nile extending back to the 1970's
- Intends to carry out income-generating activities for members

#### **West Nile Kony Rebel War Victims Association**

- Established in 2006
- Includes districts of Arua, Maracha, Koboko, Yumbe, Moyo, Adjumani, Nebbi and Zombo
- Demands compensation for victims of LRA atrocities.

<sup>28</sup> See: *West Nile Victims Speak Out: A Look into Transitional Justice Concerns in the Region*, Regional Consultation Brief, October 2010, Justice and Reconciliation Project, available at:

<sup>29</sup> Individual interview with male respondent, Ombachi sub-county, Arua district, West Nile sub-region, 9th February 2012.



justified this focus by noting that “*an immediate benefit would be best for the victims because immediate compensation will not work.*”<sup>30</sup> However, this is not completely in line with victims’ opinions which tend to question this approach and express a desire to request compensation.

The person behind both groups is planning to set up a comprehensive umbrella organization to coordinate and facilitate their objectives and activities. During a regional consultation meeting in September 2011, a committee for the group was established but the intended umbrella organization is not yet functional. The continued existence of the two groups without a coordinating umbrella organization has left victims and communities confused and irritated. This example demonstrates the challenges that derive from having strong individual leaders. Once the leaders lose interest, lack commitment or change the focus, the group is often forced to abandon its activities since no one else can fill the leadership gap.

Obviously, the situation of claimants’ associations in West Nile is different from other regions covered in this research. Instead of having one united body, different, partially conflicting organizations exist who focus on different events and timeframes and follow different approaches. For the victims themselves, this causes a lot of confusion. Also, in West Nile, both groups struggle to show sufficient progress. This is partially due to the fact that West Nile’s conflict history is more complex with various warring parties fighting for different reasons throughout recent decades. It is also due to the issues that arise from having one strong individual in a leadership position.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



Two individual claimant victims in Kitgum demanding compensation for the loss of their family members by government forces.

*“Our main goal is to unite victims and lobby for a better way to improve our lives.”<sup>31</sup>*

## Shifting the Focus: Groups’ Development, Activities, and Challenges

In addition to documenting the basic characteristics and activities of victims’ groups in northern Uganda, this report aims to analyze recent developments of victims’ groups and associations by examining their activities and their concentrations. As evidenced by the juxtaposition of the various groups mentioned above, claimants’ associations are the most visible and active groups and often constitute victims’ only path to claim compensation from the government. In fact, the majority of local and community-based associations surrendered their intended quest for reparations to larger, more powerful bodies and they now concentrate on economic and income-generating activities for short-term benefit instead.

*Table I: Groups’ Challenges and Activities*

Category of Group	Definition	Mutual Activities	Mutual Challenges
<b>Claimants’ Associations (4)</b>	Advocacy and compensation claiming for victims’ loss of life, cattle, property and land	Claiming and channeling compensation for loss of livestock, property and life; Registration of war victims and claimants; Interaction with the GoU	Political oppression and harassment; Existence of rivaling groups jeopardizes and undermines activities; Lack of resources for registration processes
<b>Community-Based Organizations</b>			
<b>Massacre Survivors’ Groups (4)</b>	Advocacy and assistance for survivors, relatives of victims and witnesses of massacres	Peer-support; Minor agricultural activities; Village Savings and Loans Associations (VLSA); Documentation and preservation of memories; Minor income-generating activities	No means and avenues to articulate voices, demands and claims; Loose and disorganized structure; Lack of resources; Partial lack of ownership; Lack of interaction and feedback by external actors
<b>Women’s Groups (4)</b>	Advocacy and moral support for conflict-affected women (including formerly abducted women)		
<b>Landmine Survivors’ Groups (2)</b>	Advocacy for landmine survivors and lobbying for the ban of landmines, cluster munitions and explosive remnants of war (ERWs)		
<b>General War Victims’, Ex-Combatants’ and Survivors’ Groups (7)</b>	Advocacy for ex-combatants and victims and survivors of conflict		

### *Development and Evolution of Victims’ Groups*

The process of establishing victims’ groups differs widely and depends on various external and internal factors. Overall, groups and associations tend to organize and mobilize by location as well as by the type of harm they experienced. For example, survivors of landmines in one particular region may form a group<sup>32</sup> due to their similar injuries and their

<sup>31</sup> Interview with male respondent in Ombachi sub-county, Arua district, West Nile sub-region, 16th February 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Groups of landmine survivors considered in this study include: Koch Goma Land Mine Survivors Group – Rubanga Pewany, Yumbe Land Mine Survivors Association

“particular need for physical and rehabilitation support.”<sup>33</sup> Still other victims’ groups are open to all survivors of conflict within a particular location, such as a sub-county or region.

Underlying issues that led to the formation of groups can be categorized along external and internal dynamics. Driven

Example of a claimant's data for by the Lango War Claimants Association.

by outsiders or external factors, different groups have been motivated to access assistance through various government programs, such as PRDP or NUSAF, or under the TFV of the ICC.<sup>34</sup> In fact, in some cases, the main motivation behind forming a group was the hope of easy access to resources. One respondent explained that “as a group, you can easily access people who have an interest in you. Some people come and say they want to give support but in most cases they just give it to established groups.”<sup>35</sup> As another respondent described, “The government told us that being in a circle of already existing groups makes it possible for us to receive funding.”<sup>36</sup> In various other cases, victims’ interaction with the government, researchers or NGO representatives led to the creation of a group. Furthermore, various victims’ demands for reparation by the government come as a direct reaction to national developments on compensation, such as the payment of Kampala’s 2010 Al-Shabaab bombing victims. Victims of this attack in Uganda’s capital city were compensated immediately, whereas conflict-affected communities in the north are still waiting. This causes a lot of frustration and disharmony amongst war victims throughout the Greater North, and has galvanized many to demand similar compensation for their war-related losses. Other claims for compensation have also been awakened by numerous promises by government officials during election campaigns – most of which remain unfulfilled.

Some groups were motivated by internal dynamics and often came into existence because of the commitment of strong individual leaders from within the community who

are victims themselves. Several other groups found themselves brought together by mutual harms they experienced. Furthermore, the timeline of when groups were created shows that a majority of groups were formed as a response to a particular incident or a set of events. Whereas some survivors of massacres formed associations immediately after the attack, the majority of groups considered in this study emerged towards the end of the insurgency, between 2005 and 2008.<sup>37</sup> In other conflict-affected parts of the country, like central and western Uganda, groups of victims and war veterans came into existence following their respective insurgencies during the post-conflict era.

A number of groups that emerged during times of on-going conflict were forced to abandon their activities shortly after their establishment, mainly due to persistent insecurity in large parts of the region. Given that the civilian population regularly had to flee or live in camps for internally displaced persons, many groups’ members were unable to keep community-based organizations or associations operational. According to one member of the Atiak Massacre Survivors Association (1996), “As a result [of the continuing insecurity], the association collapsed and only became functional again last year, in 2010.”<sup>38</sup> Groups that remain operational derive their funding and financial maintenance from membership fees which are required either once upon joining or annually. Additionally, savings schemes, which are operated by a majority of groups, constitute another form of income since they generate small amounts of interest.

### Claimants’ Associations

In general, war claimants’ associations appear to be the dominant mechanism for victims to claim and advocate compensation from the government across the Greater North. Referring to the objective of a claimants’ group, one of our respondents recalled, “There is a need to task government to promote a sense of national reconciliation by paying compensation for losses as well as laying a foundation for the development of a national reparations policy.”<sup>39</sup> As our interaction reveals, claimants’ associations are engaged in channeling the voices and claims of huge parts of the population who demand compensation for losses suffered during the war. These include the loss of life, property, cattle and livestock at the hands of government soldiers and LRA rebels during the 1986–2006 conflict which devastated northern Uganda. In this process, victims and claimants are required to fill out forms to register the initial losses as well as to identify the overall amount that they are claiming. Interestingly, those dominant claimants and advocacy bodies often claim to represent the entire society and population of victims in their respective sub-regions, even when not all

and Kasese Land Mine Survivors Association. See Appendix A for further information on all groups covered in this study.

33 Female respondent during focus group discussion in Kasese town, western Uganda, 16th February 2012.

34 As revealed during key-informant interview with civil society representative in Adjumani Town, West Nile sub-region, 7th February 2012.

35 Interview with female respondent in Gulu Town, Acholi Sub-region, 25th October 2011.

36 Female respondent during focus group discussion in Atiak sub-county, Amuru district, Acholi sub-region, 7th October 2011.

37 For further information and analyzes, see Appendix A.

38 Female respondent during focus group discussion in Atiak sub-county, Amuru district, Acholi sub-region, 7th October 2011.

39 Male respondent during a workshop with members of the regional claimants’ association in Teso, Soroti town, Teso sub-region, 31st January 2012.

victims are registered by the association and the losses suffered are not homogenous. Other than registering victims' losses and channeling their demands towards government authorities, those claimants associations are not mandated to engage in any community-based services or activities with short-term benefits for victims of armed conflict.

As claimants' groups expand in visibility and adopt a regional rather than community-based focus, they have begun to attract a wider number of victims and can make a correspondingly larger monetary claim. These developments have recently attracted the government's attention and made them increasingly uncooperative. This has also recently led to the establishment of rival groups to block claimants' efforts. In various locations, those rival groups interfere with the original associations' mission statements, make competing claims for compensation and jeopardize their efforts. Referring to the particular example of Teso sub-region, an opposing group was set up by the government, misguiding potential claimants on the ground and hindering the original association from making effective claims. As one executive member of the Teso Cattle Rustling and War Victims Association recalls, *"When the government heard about us [the claimants' association] they became concerned and sent some people to investigate what was going on. As a result, they set up a rival group because they feared the outcome of the court case."*<sup>40</sup> Despite this obstacle, some victims' advocacy groups have been able to successfully draw the attention of the government and the public through various court appearances. Examples of groups who took the Ugandan government to court over compensation include the Lango War Claimants' Association, the Teso Cattle Rustling and War Victims Association and the Acholi War Debts Claimants' Association.

We also found that claimants' associations in different parts of the north are cooperating with and learning from each other. For example, the claimants' bodies in Lango and Teso both consulted representative and executive members of the Acholi War Debts Claimants' Association before registering claimants and taking the government to court for losses incurred during the conflict.



Members of the Awach Tailoring Group - a women's group in Awach sub-county, Gulu District, Acholi sub-region during one of their monthly meetings

### **Community-Based Victims' Groups**

As indicated above, only a limited number of community-based victims' groups are still engaged in advocacy for compensation. The majority of groups which initially intended to channel victims' demands for compensation had to shift their course of action to economic and livelihood activities for immediate benefit instead. One respondent acknowledged that, as much as compensation is the victims' right and they *"still need that support from the government, you never know what will happen. That is why we [the group] do these small income-generating activities."*<sup>41</sup> As a result, the main activities of most community-based groups in all regions include VLSAs as well as minor joint agricultural activities. Such income-generating activities enable impoverished and marginalized victims' communities to address daily-life, post-conflict challenges and to meet survival needs. Another activity which cuts across groups and locations is peer-to-peer support for survivors and victims or witnesses of traumatic experiences. One respondent noted, *"When we come together in a group, it is easy to share experiences and memories and we can try to forget what happened to us as the community [...] together as a group."*<sup>42</sup> One particular form of victims' assistance and peer-support includes the performance of dramas or traditional dances, which are frequently organized by women's groups, associations of returnees and massacre survivors' associations<sup>43</sup> throughout northern Uganda. These groups are also often involved in organizing annual memorial prayers or commemorations as well. Throughout the years, obvious changes have occurred in the way victims' groups position their objectives and articulate their demands. As much as all group members require monetary compensation for losses during the conflicts, most associations shifted their focus, leaving compensation as an unarticulated but underlying demand. Most current activities concentrate on short-term benefit, such as economic

40 Ibid.

41 Male respondent during focus group discussion in Lefori sub-county, Moyo district, West Nile sub-region, 7th February 2012.

42 Male respondent during focus group discussion in Atiak sub-county, Amuru district, Acholi sub-region, 7th October 2011.

43 Massacre survivors associations featured in this research include: Atiak Massacre Survivors Association, Mucwini Massacre Widows and Widowers Group, Barlonyo Memorial Preservation Committee and Mukura Memorial and Development Initiative. See Appendix A for further information on all groups covered in this research.

and livelihood support. At the same time, those joint, mostly agricultural, activities serve to keep the group together and functional. The fact that the victims are still together in a group and have been able to sufficiently transform their operational focus is considered an achievement by group members. As one respondent expressed, *“Being together after all this time and despite all those difficulties is our personal success story.”*<sup>44</sup> Advocacy for compensation is mainly transferred to and dominated by regional claimants’ associations, leading to conflict victims being members of multiple groups. Whereas claimants’ associations assist victims in channeling and articulating their demands for monetary compensation, smaller victims’ groups at the community level enable them to benefit from, inter alia, economic activities and psychosocial peer support. Nevertheless, this dual-membership bears a potential conflict of interest given that members don’t focus their efforts on one group. Beyond that, groups driven by strong individual leaders can lose momentum when that particular person becomes less committed. Also, different groups have abandoned their course of action after insufficient response to groups’ demands from the government. To complicate matters, the larger claimants’ associations often need to modify their course of action and their objectives due to government establishing rival groups, as mentioned above. Whilst suing the government and appearing in court are characteristic approaches for claimants’ associations, smaller victims’ groups seem to be more open to dialogue and might accept other out-of-court options or agreements, often because of weak leadership, alleged bribery or low capacity.

As evidenced above, a large number of victims’ groups have been forced to either cease or decrease their activities for different reasons. By now, most small and community-based groups lack any strategy for a way forward, including long term perspectives and clear objectives, and don’t know how to fulfill their intended goals. The organizational capacity of those groups is either weak or non-existent and therefore results in no means to articulate their voices. There is a clear and definite need for those groups to receive capacity building and training in order to be able to reach their intended goals, access compensation and generally advocate for their members’ rights and well-being while helping them to improve their lives.



A group of conflict-affected women performing a drama in Barlonyo sub-county, Lira District, Lango sub-region.

## Challenges

While groups obviously vary greatly in terms of objectives, structure and size, most of them face similar challenges. The majority of groups featured in this study – apart from some of the larger claimants’ associations – are characterized by a very loose and disorganized structure. Without having an organizational system in place and without clearly defined objectives, groups struggle to carry out activities and advocate for their long-term goals. Additionally, as indicated earlier, many groups are characterized by a persistent lack of ownership, which often leads the group to cease operating. Generally, this lack of ownership is caused by a lack of progress and tangible achievements, dual-membership, and the fear of labeling which discourages group members from openly participating. As our interaction with executive group members and civil society representatives demonstrates, stigma and labeling are still an immense challenge for survivors throughout Uganda, partially influencing the progress of victims’ groups. In addition, fear and intimidation by external parties constitute further obstacles for members of victims’ associations.

In addition to this cross-cutting challenge, a majority of groups face the difficulty of stakeholders’ and government’s inability or unwillingness to respond to their compensation demands. In fact, group representatives increasingly complained about the lack of communication between the victims themselves and government officials, NGOs and other stakeholders on the ground. Although most of the groups approached stakeholders or government authorities at some point during their existence, most haven’t seen any response to these efforts. One group member recalled, *“As a group, we tried to approach many NGOs throughout the whole of northern Uganda but so far, we didn’t get an appropriate response from the organizations.”*<sup>45</sup> The lack of a timely response leaves members feeling ignored and discouraged, as evidenced in these comments from a victim’s group member:

*So far, there has been no serious reaction by the government. Although they say that they are looking for a way forward*

<sup>44</sup> Female respondent during focus group discussion in Ngariam Village, Palam sub-county, Katakwi district, Teso sub-region, 1st February 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Individual interview with male respondent in Koch Goma sub-county, Nwoya district, Acholi sub-region, 12th October 2011.

*for us, nothing has happened yet. Those are just empty words but no action. Up to now, nothing really happened. We also approached some NGOs for support [...] but again, we didn't receive any support. Right now, we are helpless and incapable of any action.*<sup>46</sup>

In fact, rather than helping or assisting victims' communities, it appears that local politicians occasionally ignore the groups or do not take their claims and demands seriously. As articulated during a focus group discussion, *"The politicians of Uganda are not helping us to overcome our challenges and to heal our trauma."*<sup>47</sup> In line with this particular difficulty, victims frequently complained about a lack of feedback following interactions with either the government or organizations on the ground. However, this insufficient communication with stakeholders also often results from the lack of a clear leadership structure within the victims' groups. Without a strong and committed leadership in place, groups lack the capacity to approach external actors and effectively maintain communication with potential partners or sources of support.



Members of the Rubanga Matwero Palaro women's group in Palaro sub-county, Gulu District, Acholi sub-region during consultation with a JRP researcher

## Victims' Voices: Perceptions and Expectations of Compensation

### Expectations

Over the past five years, peace has slowly normalized life for victimized communities in northern Uganda, although underlying issues and post-conflict challenges remain. For victims, survivors and conflict-plagued civilians, reparations and in particular compensation constitute an integrated part of this rehabilitation and reconciliation process. As reflected in the title of this study – *Paying Back What Belongs to Us*<sup>48</sup> – victims in northern Uganda want to be compensated by the government for what has been taken, looted or destroyed by warring actors during the conflict. This expectation transcends sub-regions, tribes, language, age, gender and individual conflict experiences. Throughout the two-decade-long conflict – in addition to abduction of tens of thousands of children, mass displacement and countless killings – civilians' livestock and homesteads were destroyed, cattle were raided and property was looted. As one group representative in Gulu town stated, *"[The] Government shall pay reparation for all those people who lived in camps and lost all their property, including their land. People now have a right to live a decent life. The government needs to pay them something to finally settle because those people lost everything."*<sup>49</sup>

Although the conflict between the LRA and the GoU has ended and the LRA has moved on to Uganda's neighboring countries, the civilian population still requires a lot of support and assistance. The loss of livestock and cattle has robbed people of their primary source of income. A local group representative reiterated that, *"In the rural communities and villages, people were dependent on cattle and used their cattle for almost everything. For example, for marriages, for paying the school fees or for buying and paying for medical treatment or medications. During the war, the cattle were taken away by the LRA but also by the NRA or were killed during gunfire. People simply didn't have their animals anymore."*<sup>50</sup>

Another frequently raised issue is people's forced displacement all over the northern region. During the insurgency, as many as 1.9 million people were forced to flee into so called internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. While far from providing protection and security, the conditions in these camps restricted the communities from their traditional way of living. People were forced to leave behind all of their belongings and thus lost all of their property. For those losses

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Female respondent during focus group discussion in Metu sub-county, Moyo district, West Nile sub-region, 8th February 2012.

<sup>48</sup> "Paying back what belongs to us" is a statement given by a male respondent during a workshop-discussion on reparation and compensation in Amuria town, Teso sub-region, 13th March 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Individual Interview with 64-years old male respondent in Gulu Town, Acholi sub-region, 14th October 2011.

<sup>50</sup> Individual interview with an executive member of the Lango War Claimants Association in Lira Town, 20th October 2011.

and living restrictions, civilians now demand compensation or reparations. In the words of one claimants' association representative, *"The war was prolonged because of those property losses. The best way for government is to compensate people. The best way of reconciliation is to pay everybody who lost something. Every homestead lost property, lost livestock. [...] When compensation has been paid, there will be total peace here."*<sup>51</sup>

### **Responsible Parties and Specific Demands**

Throughout the region covered in this research, the party at whom compensation demands are being levied is the GoU. It was the government's failure to protect people which contributed to their suffering and led to devastating situations. The primary form of support that victims affected by the conflict request is monetary compensation, to be paid by the government. "Our grievance is as simple as this: The [members] in the association want to be given compensation by the government."<sup>52</sup> This demand, raised by almost all groups featured in this study, is not only articulated by war claimants' associations but by all other community-based groups, including women's groups, landmine and massacre survivors, etc. However, although various respondents have different ideas on how much should be paid to relieve victims, no mutual consensus prevails on an adequate and appropriate amount of money for losses suffered. Respondents are only able to agree that *"no amount of money can equal the value of a lost life or pay for it. Human beings are of much higher value than any money could ever be."*<sup>53</sup> Against this backdrop, several respondents highlighted the need to provide assistance to victims in the form of livelihood training and capacity building. Due to the fact that individual compensation payments might not have a sustainable and lasting impact, potential income-generating skills and activities are valuable aspects for members of victims' groups. As one member of a women's group noted, *"All of the [group's] members need training in skills to earn a living on their own or even start a small business."*<sup>54</sup> On a long-term basis, these skills can help victims of grave atrocities to regain a sense of independence and simultaneously empower them by enabling them to generate an income and therefore support their family or community. In addition, selected groups requested additional education such as literacy training<sup>55</sup> or assistance in being *"re-enrolled into school to allow [them] to learn all the important things [they] need to know to earn a living and finally settle in [their] new homesteads."*<sup>56</sup>

Despite the large volume of claims and demands, the Ugandan government has only released small amounts of compensation in rare cases and little compensation seems to be materializing for war-affected victims. Members of victims' groups cited a long history of empty promises by government officials and President Museveni, including his recent announcement on Sunday, November 27, 2011 that the government is going to compensate victims on a large scale to stop people's bad memories.<sup>57</sup> JRP has documented several instances where government representatives verbally promised compensation would be given soon, while the promises remain unfulfilled. As an executive group member demanded during an individual interview, *"We want a written statement by the government, promising to compensate us."*<sup>58</sup> Closely interrelated to victims' disappointment with unfulfilled promises is frustration at the government's current strategy for handling issues concerning reparations and compensation. Frequently, our respondents referred to the fact that victims of the 2010 al-Shabaab terrorist attack in Kampala were compensated immediately, whereas northern Uganda's victims are still waiting.<sup>59</sup> This has caused a lot of frustration among the local population, as seen in one massacre survivor's statement, *"Sometime back, a terrorist attack by the al-Shabaab occurred in Kampala. The victims and survivors of that attack have been compensated directly as we still have to wait for any reaction since 1995. We need compensation, now!"*<sup>60</sup> In response to the same issue, one claimants' group representative observed that:

*"Compensation should not take too long because people should be paid when they are still alive. These people here suffered so much. When they are paid after 25 years or also after 10 years, what do you expect? People have been old during the conflict already but are even older now. They need the money now to be able to finally start living in normality and should not wait for their money anymore."*<sup>61</sup>

In summary, as interaction with victims' groups and communities on the ground reveals, compensation is of great importance to victims throughout northern Uganda and is seen to be an integral part of any regional or national transitional justice efforts. Reparations in general and monetary compensation in particular are considered a form of acknowledgement for the crimes committed and suffering experienced by respondents. For some, compensation is an important way of healing. Respondents articulated that victims themselves should determine compensation, while the government should be responsible for enforcing it. However, there is a lot of confusion amongst victims as to what defines compensation and how to access it. Due to the existence of various government programs as well as occasional compensation payments on a national level, victims are confused as to where the money they might eventually access will come from.

In addition, despite an overwhelming number of conflict-affected victims throughout the whole of Uganda, most of them are not part of an organized group. Consequently, only a limited number of victims' associations exist, and many of these have shifted their focus from claiming compensation to more short-term benefits, such as economic activities.

51 Male respondent during focus group discussion in Gulu Town, Acholi sub-region, 14th October 2011.

52 Ibid.

53 Male respondent during focus group discussion in Mucwini sub-county, Kitgum district 15th November 2011.

54 Male respondent during focus group discussion in Paloro sub-county, Gulu district 28th October 2011.

55 As stated by a female representative of a women's group during an individual interview in Gulu town, Acholi sub-region 25th October 2011.

56 Female 24-year old respondent during focus group discussion in Awach sub-county, 26th October 2011.

57 See: "President asks Acholi to let go of past," Daily Monitor, 27th November 2011, available at: <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/-/688334/1280670/-/bga0k5z/-/index.html>.

58 Individual Interview with male respondent in Lira town, Lango sub-region, 20th October 2011.

59 See: "Uganda: Death toll rises in terror bombings," Global Post Online, 11th July 2011, available at: <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/africa/100711/terror-bombings-rock-uganda-kill-60>.

60 Female respondent during focus group discussion in Atiak sub-county, Acholi sub-region 7th October 2011.

61 Individual interview with male respondent in Lira town, Lango sub-region 20th October 2011.

Although victims argue that compensation is necessary for long-term reconciliation in war-affected regions, we also found contradictory views on the links between reparations and genuine forgiveness. One respondent clearly stated that compensation “cannot remove the deep pain in my heart.”<sup>62</sup> He and other respondents do not expect reparations, particularly monetary payments, to suddenly make them willing or able to forgive their perpetrators or the government who failed to protect them. On the other hand, a different group of respondents argued that compensation “would relieve the pain at least” and that forgiveness after having received monetary support might be “the only choice we have.”<sup>63</sup>

### Current Efforts and Attempts

When it comes to compensation, victims increasingly feel confused and misguided by the existence of various government rehabilitation programs. As demonstrated by our interaction with communities on the ground, it is difficult for victims to understand whether supportive resources or money come through official development programs, such as PRDP or NUSAF II, or as compensation payments for losses suffered during the conflict. Also, victims frequently noted that resources and money that come through governmental rehabilitation programs in most cases do not reach them directly or do not address their particular needs. Instead of providing direct support for victims of conflict, the money is used for infrastructure improvements, something which benefits the whole population and is seen by the victims as something the government should provide regardless of past conflict experiences. Therefore, policy-makers and stakeholders actively need to ensure that victims of conflict – whether individually or as part of a group – are able to access support from the rehabilitation programs or projects intended for their benefit. Consequently, consultation with victims’ on the ground to explore what they want and need and how they can be reached is essential before planning or implementing those programs. Nevertheless, even if government programs are re-designed and modified to specifically address victims, they cannot replace monetary compensation. For victims of conflict, compensation not only provides financial remedy and assistance, but is also symbolic, it implies acknowledgment of their suffering and contributes to memorialization of their often traumatic experiences.



A low cost house constructed as an alternative form of livelihood support for a member of Koch Goma Landmine Survivors Group by World Vision.

## Recommendations

To be able to effectively address the needs and challenges of victims and victim’s groups throughout Uganda, stakeholders on the ground and policy-makers at the regional and national level need to be involved and informed. To successfully implement policies and programs designed to provide assistance to victims, comprehensive consultation between authorities, NGOs and communities is vitally important. After documenting and analyzing groups’ demands and experiences, we have developed the following recommendations regarding reparations for various stakeholders to consider in northern Uganda:

1. **There is urgent need for a comprehensive national reparations policy.** In order to effectively provide support for war-affected victims, the GoU needs to implement a comprehensive reparations policy, in line with the official *Implementation Protocol to the Agreement on Comprehensive Solutions and the Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation* which resulted from the 2006-2008 Peace Talks in Juba. Ideally, this reparations policy will include the creation of a reparations fund to ensure adequate capacity to provide compensation. Against the background of victims’ particular needs and their voices, such a reparations program should be sensitive to and seriously consider the demands of various categories of victims.

62 Individual interview with female respondent in Obia Kwach village, Yepa parish, Mucwini sub-county, Kitgum district, Acholi sub-region, 16th November 2011.

63 Individual interview with 76-year old female respondent in Obia Kwach village, Yepa parish, Mucwini sub-county, Kitgum district, Acholi sub-region, 16th November 2011.



2. **Victims' groups require capacity building to remain operational and effective.** Throughout conflict-affected Uganda, victims' groups and associations constitute pathways to recovery for traumatized men, women and youth. Due to insufficient funding, lack of capacity and a number of other interrelated challenges, these groups are often far from being fully operational or beneficial for their members. Given that on a community level these groups occasionally constitute the only means of peer support for victims of gross suffering and human rights violation, there is a serious need to provide training and capacity building to the group's representatives and members. Stakeholders, NGOs, CSOs and the local and regional governments need to initiate training and development initiatives for the many groups representing victims. After receiving institutional capacity building, empowered groups might be able to regain more independent ownership of their activities instead of depending on actions by outside actors.
3. **Victims of conflict require sensitization and information about reparations.** In order to successfully claim for reparations or rehabilitation support from the government, members of victims' groups and associations need more information about the concept of reparations and how to achieve it. Although an overwhelming number of victim communities demand reparations and compensation, only few understand that reparations and compensation are not a treat or a benefit, but rather their right which they need to fight for. Therefore, it is essential to sensitize and inform victims' groups and government representatives alike about the status of reparations as a right.
4. **External actors need to provide feedback for victims' groups following their consultation.** Throughout our research, respondents continuously claimed that they need feedback on the status of promises of assistance or ongoing advocacy efforts. While various government officials, independent researchers or NGO representatives interact and communicate with victims' groups for various reasons, they provide almost no feedback for the group after the initial interaction. Since those consultations often raise expectations, it is essential for external actors to clearly communicate the purpose of the visit and to provide feedback concerning the outcome of the respective interaction.

# Appendix A: Table of Victims' Groups in Northern Uganda

SN	Group	Type	Location	Type of Activities
1	Acholi War Debts Claimants' Association (AWDCA)	Claimants' Association	Acholi – Gulu	Claiming and channeling compensation for losses of livestock, property and life; Registration of war victims and claimants; Livelihood training
2	Lango War Claimants' Association (LAWCAS)	Claimants' Association	Lango – Lira	Claiming and channeling compensation for losses of livestock, property and life; Registration of war victims and claimants
3	Atiak Massacre Survivors Association	Massacre Survivors	Acholi – Amuru	Peer-support for victims and witnesses
4	Mucwini Massacre Widows and Widowers Group	Massacre Survivors	Acholi – Kitgum	Peer support and minor agricultural activities
5	Koch Goma Land Mine Survivors Group (Rubanga Pewany)	Landmine Survivors	Acholi – Nwoya	Peer support for victims and VSLA
6	Can Rwepe Pe	Women's Group	Acholi – Gulu	Peer support for FAPs
7	Rubanga Matwero Palaro	Women's Group	Acholi – Gulu	Peer support for FAPs, VSLA, minor agricultural activities
8	Morungatuny Helicopter Gunship Attack Survivors Group	Survivors Group	Teso – Amuria	Peer support and minor agricultural activities (intended)
9	Barlonyo Memorial Preservation Committee	Massacre Survivors	Lango – Lira	Documentation and preservation of memories
10	Awach Tailoring Group	Women's Group	Acholi– Gulu	Peer support and tailoring activities; VSLA
11	Teso War and Cattle Rustling Victims	Claimants' Association	Teso – Soroti	Claiming and channeling compensation for losses of livestock, property and lives; Registration of war victims and claimants
12	The Ogoma War Survivors Organization	Survivors' Group	Teso – Kumi	Peer support and minor agricultural activities
13	Mukura Memorial and Development Initiative (MUMEDI)	Massacre Survivors	Teso – Kumi	VSLA/SACCO ; Peer-support; Preservation of memory
14	Otingteba Women's Group	Women's Group	Teso – Katakwi	Minor agricultural activities; VSLA; Peacebuilding in Teso (exchange visits)
15	Itula Survivors Association	Survivors' Group	West Nile – Moyo	Lobbying activities for IDPs – <i>Not operational at the moment</i>
16	Mali-Mali Ex-Combatants Group	Ex-Combatants' Group	West Nile – Moyo	Minor agricultural activities
17	Abirichaku War Victims Group	Survivors' Group	West Nile – Moyo	Minor agricultural activities; VSLA; Income-generating activities
18	Metu War Victims Association	Survivors' Group	West Nile – Moyo	Minor agricultural activities; VSLA; Rotational financial contribution
19	Moyo LRA War Victims Association	Survivors' Group	West Nile – Moyo	<i>Not operational at the moment</i>
20	Yumbe Land Mine Survivors Association	Landmine Survivors	West Nile – Yumbe	Minor income-generating activities
21	West Nile Liberation War Victims Association	Survivors' Group	West Nile – Arua	Registration of victims of Liberation War in West Nile
22	West Nile Kony Rebel War Victims Association	Survivors' Group and Claimants' Association	West Nile – Arua	Claiming and channeling compensation for losses of livestock, property; Registration of war victims and claimants

	Definition	Year	Contact Information
	Advocacy and compensation claims for victims; Interaction with government	2005	Mr. Noa Obwonyah (Executive Director) Acholi War Debts Claimants Association, Plot 4 Awach Road, P.O. Box 105, Gulu, Tel.: 0772311309 / 0471432205 Web: www.acholiwardebtsclaimants.org
	Advocacy and compensation claims for victims; Interaction with government	2008	Mr. Moses Adonyo Mr. Ongong Chris (Uganda Victims Foundation, Lira) Tel.: 0753191303 / 0776191303
	Advocacy for massacre survivors and relatives of victims	1996 / re-established in 2010	Mr. Jacob Nokrach (Chairperson), Ms. Betty (Secretary) Tel.: 0777337001
	Advocacy for massacre survivors and relatives of victims	2002	Mr. Ensino Onyango Tel.: 0784512947 / 0753702479
	Advocacy for landmine survivors	2004	Mr. Odong Hannington Tel.: 0715183966 / 0792171380
	Advocacy and moral support for formerly abducted women	2007	Ms. Lanam Stella, Ms. Ajok Pauline Tel.: 0787250034 / 0787064643
	Advocacy and moral support for formerly abducted women	2008	Ms. Apiyo Stella Tel.: 0775591237 / 0779043920
	Advocacy and compensation claims for survivors / victims	2011	Mr. Enyemu James Tel.: 0773360156
	Advocacy for massacre survivors and relatives of victims	2010	Mr. Ongwang Moses (Chairperson), Mr. Ongong Chris (Uganda Victims Foundation, Lira) Tel.: 0774547276 / 0782499532
	Advocacy for formerly abducted women	2005 / re-established in 2010	Ms. Jackline Aber Tel.: 0774460721
	Advocacy and compensation claims for victims / Interaction with government	2006	Mr. Julius Ochen Tel.: 0713671377 / 0772671377
	Advocacy for survivors / victims of conflict	2012	Mr. Emudongo William (Chairperson)
	Advocacy and compensation claims for survivors / victims	2011	Martin Ononge Tel.: 0782343503
	Advocacy for women victims	2005	Ms. Akumat Skola
	Advocacy for survivors of conflict and IDPs	1999	Mr. Andrew Tralega Tel.: 0774362989
	Advocacy for ex-combatants	2002	Mr. Charles Loruba Mr. Francis Irama Tel.: 0774590296 / 0756107674
	Advocacy for victims and survivors of conflict	2000	Mr. David Arabuaku (Group Secretary), Ms. Meliku Glorica (Justice and Peace Commission, Moyo) Tel.: 0772372101
	Advocacy for victims and survivors of conflict	1999	Mr. Anthony Vusa (Chairperson) Tel.: 0753235774
	Advocacy for victims and survivors of conflict	2011	Mr. Agala Robert Tel.: 0759815273
	Advocacy for landmine survivors	2007	Mr. Waiga Rasul (Coordinator) Tel.: 0775135751
	Advocacy for victims and survivors of conflict	2011	Mr. Stephen (Secretary) Tel.: 0782800223
	Advocacy and compensation claims for victims; Interaction with government	2006	Mr. Sam Buti Alebo Chistopher West Nile Kony Rebel War Victim's Association P.O. Box 1114, Arua, Tel.: 0777196803 / 0772453652



This report serves to illuminate the current state, emergence and development of different victims' groups and associations throughout the Greater North of Uganda, and to highlight their activities and demands.

Victims and survivors in the sub-regions of West Nile, Acholi, Lango and Teso currently struggle to access necessary support to rebuild their lives and communities. Against the backdrop of those victims' challenges, different groups and associations were formed to advocate for victims, channel their demands for compensation and articulate their otherwise silent voices. However, despite the overwhelming number of individual survivors and victims, the number of organized groups or associations is limited.

Although often established with the intention to advocate and lobby for compensation, the majority of local victims' groups have surrendered their quest for reparations to larger, more powerful and comprehensive claimants' bodies. Groups at the community level instead concentrate on economic and income-generating activities for short-term benefit. Although debates about Uganda's need for a national reparations and compensation policy continue on a professional level and within academic discourse, victims' voices and the views of organized victims' groups are rarely considered or acknowledged. This report, therefore, aims to inform policy-makers, the government, stakeholders on the ground and local leaders about the current state of victims' groups in northern Uganda.



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