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# Voices

Sharing victim-centered views on justice and reconciliation in Uganda

A publication of  
Justice and Reconciliation Project  
Issue 5, September 2013



**Speaking Out!**  
How Survivors of Conflict Continue to Mobilise to Be Heard



# Voices

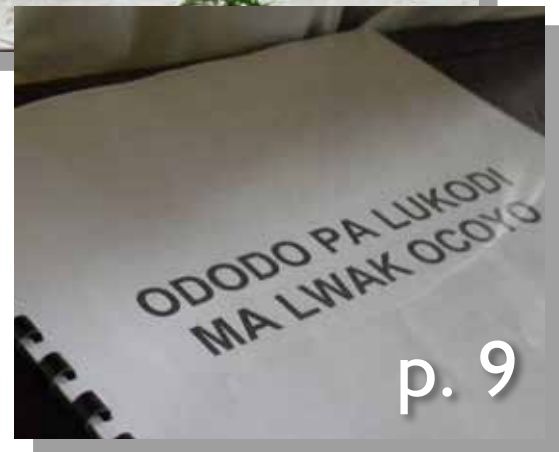
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Voices: Sharing victim-centered views on justice and reconciliation in Uganda

A publication of the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP)

Layout, design, editing by Oryem Nyeko

Cover Photography: War-affected women from across Uganda sit in a circle to discuss issues facing them during an exchange visit, July 2013. Oryem Nyeko/JRP.  
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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.

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## Editorial

### Ensuring victim participation in TJ

ORYEM NYEKO

THIS EDITION of the Justice and Reconciliation Project's quarterly magazine *Voices* deals with an important aspect of transitional justice – victim participation. The extent to which victims of conflict contribute to TJ processes has significant implications for policy development and the lives of grassroots communities that were affected by war. Fortunately, the Government has recognised the importance of victim participation. In May 2013, the Justice Law and Order Sector of the Government of Uganda (JLOS) asked JRP and Avocats Sans Frontiers (ASF) to conduct a victim stakeholder consultation on the recently developed TJ Policy to garner views of victims on a policy that would affect their lives. The result was a wide array of opinions that were shared and which will hopefully shape the policy to be as victim-centred as possible.

In this issue, we have articles dealing with the challenges and successes victims of conflict have experienced in organising themselves.

"*Speak Out! How Victims and Survivors of Conflict are Mobilising to be Heard*" (page 6) draws parallels between victims groups in northern Uganda and the Khulumani Support Group which was formed in 1995 by survivors and families of victims of South Africa's apartheid policies.

"*An Eye-Opener for the World: Lukodi Victims Lead Their Own Documentation*" (page 8) examines community-led documentation, an initiative led by JRP's Documentation department, where community members in Lukodi village, just north of Gulu town, are given tools to independently document their own history and experiences.

Peter Kelly, an accomplished journalist and Peace Studies student, shares his experiences with victim participation in Northern Ireland in an interview on page 12.

Community theatre has been recognised as an important tool for reconciliation within conflict-affected communities and a valuable way for previously sidelined sectors of society's voices to be heard. In "*A tool for transformation: How drama is used to promote understanding between 'perpetrators' and 'victims'*" (page 20), the role and impact of JRP's Community Theatre Project as a forum for understanding and expression is analysed.

We at JRP thank you for taking the time to read this issue. Please enjoy and share your voice in the next issue! □

## Letter from the Programme Coordinator

### Seven Years Down the Road

LINO OWOR OGORA



TAKE this opportunity as the newly appointed programme coordinator of JRP to welcome you all to this issue of *Voices* magazine. I took over the reins of leadership in August 2013 from Boniface Ojok, JRP's long serving programme coordinator since 2004. After seven years at the helm, Boniface left for the Kroc Institute to pursue his Master's degree in Peace and Conflict Studies. I applaud him for the firm foundation he set: the very foundation on which I begin my reign at the helm of JRP.

Since 2006 when I joined JRP, the majority of my work has been concentrated in research and documentation of events and occurrences in northern Uganda. It is in documentation that I have felt my contribution in promoting victim participation has been concentrated. Therefore as I take on my new leadership roles as the programme coordinator of JRP I cannot help but reflect on my work since 2006, and particularly as head of research and documentation.

I joined JRP in June 2006. At the time of my joining JRP was a project of Gulu District NGO Forum, and was located in a small cubicle which was barely fifteen square meters in size. JRP had no vehicles, and hardly any resources to operate with. Most of its operational resources were out of donations from the co-founders Dr. Erin Baines and Michael Otim. Other donations came from the Liu Institute for Global Issues where Dr. Baines worked. JRP had two other permanent staff then, who were Boniface and another lady called Ketty Anyeko. We had three office desks and three old computers.

## Contributors

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Although we were short on equipment, we had passion for the work we were doing. JRP had just released a flagship report called *Roco Wat I Acholi* which became one of the key publications in describing Acholi rituals and traditions.

Shortly after I joined JRP's fortunes improved. A new funder, the Royal Netherlands Embassy came on board. This was followed shortly by other funders such as the Royal Norwegian Embassy that continues to fund JRP to date. Our financial woes became history, and from then on we whole heartedly pursued our dreams of working to promote the rights of victims affected by conflict.

In 2010 JRP became an independent organisation, and presently employs close to twenty-four staff members, and has two additional departments of Gender Justice and Community Mobilisation.

As I reflect over the last seven years, my key role in all this setup and in promoting victim participation has been in the research and documentation department, which I have headed for as long as I can recall. It has been six years of rigorous documentation of conflict events, victims' experiences, and survivors' testimonies. It has been six long years of listening to sad and unspeakable stories of what victims and survivors went through.

In summary, the last six years

for me have been a period in which I was consumed by a passion of ensuring that the truth about what happened during the conflict came to light, and that the voices of victims and their experiences in the conflict were brought to light. This for me was the most appropriate way to promote victims' participation.

And the outputs have been tremendous. My first documentation was the Atiak massacre of 1996 in

*It has been six years of rigorous documentation of conflict events, victims' experiences, and survivors' testimonies. It has been six long years of listening to sad and unspeakable stories of what victims and survivors went through.*

which over 400 civilians lost their lives, followed shortly by the Mucwini massacre of 2004 in which over 56 victims were mercilessly slaughtered by the LRA. Along the way I had the opportunity to document other key events such as the Barlonyo, Abia, Mukura, Obalanga, Namokora, Ombaci, Palabek Lukodi, and Burcoro massacres. I also organised numerous workshops and events in which victims had the chance to express their views. I also had the opportunity to participate in the Juba peace talks and share my wealth of experiences and information.

I had the opportunity to meet thousands of victims as a result of the numerous field trips I made to collect data. One thing the victims

all had in common was a passionate, avid, and zealous desire to seek redress for the crimes that they went through. My new roles may not permit me to frequent the field again so I shall miss the victims, and the sad moments when we cried together in the course of hearing sad story.

It is therefore with nostalgia, reminiscence and melancholy that I depart from the documentation department which has been so key in enabling JRP bring to light the gruesome atrocities that occurred during the conflict. The documentation department has been crucial in bringing to light the experiences of victims and the suffering they went through. It has been fundamental in articulating their demands for accountability and highlighting their post-conflict needs.

Documentation, in my opinion, has been the key factor in promoting victims' participation. Today, alongside documentation, JRP operates the Gender Justice programme which recognises and responds to the unique needs of women, children, men and other vulnerable groups, and the Community Mobilisation department which engages communities in memorialisation and peace building initiatives.

As I depart from the documentation department therefore, I am ready to promote victims' participation from a new perspective and in a new role.

I salute you all. □



Conducting research with a male victim of conflict in Burcoro in Awach sub-county, Gulu District 2012.

# Speak Out! How Victims and Survivors of Conflict are Mobilising to be Heard



SYLVIA OPINIA



Members of the Women's Advocacy Network sit in a circle of trust with women from other parts of Uganda to share their experiences, July 2012. Oryem Nyeko.

**D**ESPITE a widespread understanding that it is the poor and disempowered that constitute most of the victims of conflict, a sustained engagement with such constituencies has not become part of the mainstream practice of transitional justice. In many cases processes of consultation with victims and communities are cursory (Patricia Lundy and Mark McGovern, 'Whose justice? Rethinking transitional justice from the bottom up', *Journal of Law and Society*, 35(2), 2008: 265 - 292). While there is emerging literature to challenge this practice, the Khulumani Support Group (*khulumani* means 'speak out' in isiZulu), formed in 1995 by survivors and families of victims of the political conflict of South Africa's apartheid past is probably one of the biggest and most popular victims' movements on the African continent. With a population of over 54,000 members, it was set up in response to the then pending Truth and Reconciliation Commission by victims who felt the Commission should be used to speak out about the past to ensure that such violations never occur

again. Today, Khulumani continues to do advocacy, lobbying and build the capacity of its members to ensure that their voices are heard.

In Uganda, the need for implementing credible TJ process gained momentum in 2006 following the Juba peace talks leading to the ongoing

*With nowhere to turn, different groups and associations have been formed by victims and survivors to channel their demands, usually for reparations or to be specific compensation. However, despite the overwhelming number of victims and survivors in northern Uganda, the number of organised groups or associations is limited.*

discussions around development of a national policy intended to address justice, accountability and reconciliation needs of post conflict Uganda. It is assumed that like any other policy making process, the TJ policy development will emanate from a consultative, participatory and inclusive process undertaken by the Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) throughout the country. In reality however, these consultations are limited to urban areas with very little participation of the victims and survivors who have suffered the biggest brunt of this conflict and yet continue the struggle to come to terms with

the daily transition challenges as a result of their experiences.

With nowhere to turn, different groups and associations have been formed by victims and survivors to advocate for and channel their demands, usually for reparations or to be specific compensation. However, despite the overwhelming number of victims and survivors in northern Uganda, the number of organised groups or associations is limited, ranging from small community based groups to regionally organised claimant associations. Initially demanding for reparations, many of the groups especially the small ones, have abandoned this quest to concentrate on economic and income generating activities for immediate benefits (See *Paying Back What Belongs to Us: Victims Groups in Northern Uganda and their Quest for Reparation* JRP Field Note XVI, October 2012).

The Justice and Reconciliation Project, through its victim centred approach, empowers victims and survivors of conflict to meaningfully participate in processes for redress, healing and reconciliation. Through the work of JRP, a number of victims

groups have been formed and/or had their capacities strengthened to articulate issues of concern to them and their justice needs. Outstanding is the now popular Women's Advocacy Network (WAN) which advocates for the unique gender needs and challenges facing women affected by conflict including the interests of children born in captivity. There is also the victims working group on missing persons is comprised of parents and relatives of persons missing as a result of conflict from West Nile, Acholi, Lango and Teso sub regions.

Victims and survivors of conflict require a platform to raise their voices, articulate their demands and highlight their activities. As evidenced from our work, across the greater north region of Uganda, victims and survivors want to tell their stories, they want to be heard, but not just by anyone but someone who is going to do something about their situations. These groups and associations organise and participate in self initiated activities ranging from storytelling sessions, community theatre, memorialisation, community outreach, documentation of their experiences and missing persons, among other activities, mostly if not all, for purposes of advocacy. Through JRP's victim exchange and solidarity programmes, victims and survivors across the region also meet annually to share experiences, learn from each other, network and form one voice for advocacy.

The work of victims and survivors groups has not at all been in vain as there are some visible gains. Through a victim led campaign named 'the Right to Know', victims across the region have been able to raise public awareness on the issue of missing persons as a result of conflict in northern Uganda and the agony their families go through. These groups have also been a source of information for the community on ongoing post conflict initiatives, a source of peer support and above all providing a collective voice for victims and survivors. The WAN for instance has worked tirelessly to fight stigma towards formerly abducted women and children born in captivity in communities they live in.

Their success however, has not come without challenges, for instance at the local level, many groups have reported experiencing negative interactions with their local leaders, especially at the district level with LCVs (Local Councilors) and RDCs (Resident District Commissioners). In some instances, this is also true for sub-county and parish-level interactions. Oftentimes, the local leaders do not fully understand the needs of the victims and further stigmatise them. Many groups also experience challenges related to logistical support towards facilitating their meetings and advocacy activities. This is true with groups that are spread across a wide geographical area such as the West Nile Kony Rebel War Victims Association and the victims working group on missing persons.

While these victims and survivor groups are working against all odds to become agents of change within their

communities, they are yet to make a break through at the national level. It is important for civil society organisations and national bodies such as the parliament of Uganda and the Justice Law and Order Sector to start listening and considering the views presented by victims and survivors to ensure that any post conflict intervention, both in policy and practice address and are relevant to the needs of the communities. It is a hope to see the victims and survivors of conflict in northern Uganda become a group to reckon with similar to that of Khulumani in South Africa. □

## Victim's groups in northern Uganda

ORYEM NYEKO

*PAYING BACK WHAT BELONGS TO US* is the Justice and Reconciliation Project's sixteenth Field Note. Written as a report on the state, emergence and development of various victims' groups throughout the greater north of Uganda, *Paying Back* provides insight into the workings, structure and objectives of associations that have gained great notoriety in the past few years. The report aims to inform policy makers, the government and stakeholders on the ground (including local leaders) about the current state of victim's groups in northern Uganda.

The Field Note assesses the struggles groups such as Acholi War Debt Claimants, Teso Cattle Rustling and War Victims Association and the Barlonyo Memorial Preservation Committee from West Nile, Acholi, Lango and Teso sub-regions face in working to rebuild the lives of their members and their communities.

In addition to outlining the objectives, membership and accomplishments of the various groups, the report makes recommendations to effectively address the needs and challenges the groups face. These include a suggestion for a comprehensive national reparations policy to effectively provide support for the war-affected. The report also recommends capacity building to address the lack of functionality some organisations face due to insufficient funding and other interrelated challenges.

Read *Paying Back What Belongs To Us*, Field Note XVI on JRP's website: [www.justiceandreconciliation.com](http://www.justiceandreconciliation.com). □





# An Eye-Opener for the World: Lukodi Victims Lead Their Own Documentation



VICKY ESQUIVEL-KORSIAK

**A**LMOST EVERY WEEK since October 2012, a dedicated group of individuals from the community of Lukodi makes the long trek from their homes to the Lukodi Memorial Site. With their notebooks and drawing books in hand, members arrive early, ready to participate in documenting the story of their community. Between 18 and 25 people gather in one of the mud huts that mark the memorial site and share the latest news and updates from their various corners of Lukodi.

The group consists of men and women members of the Uganda Museum Committee and the Lukodi based Community Reconciliation (CORE) team, all of whom were elected by their community to represent Lukodi in undertaking memorialisation. The group ranges from spritely young people to old *mzees* (elderly men) who shuffle across the room to take their seats each week as we begin. At a typical meeting, the group has decided what topic they are going to discuss and document that day and either the mobiliser or another member gamely takes on the task of secretary as they begin discussion. Each of the members participates avidly in the conversation, recounting their personal experiences and the other stories they've heard around the community of other people's experiences. Debates frequently break out among members as they remember things differently or disagree on the impact of a particular event. At the end of each two to three hour meeting, the group has produced several pages of written work which JRP types and compiles back at the office. JRP steps in at meetings only to provide training on different ways of doing documentation (including, storytelling, songs, drawing, interviewing, group discussion, and verification), and to mediate debates that come up when memories conflict.

Since they first started community-led documentation, the group has produced a timeline of the events in Lukodi dating to the 1970s, and they have written about their life in the displaced persons camps, their experiences with Cilil (one of the many armed groups that existed in northern Uganda), their losses at the hands of Karamojong cattle raiders, and their lives when Idi Amin was in power. As they finished drafts of their chosen topics, each member took a copy home to practice their skills in verification by sharing the findings with their families and friends and making note



of changes and additions. After months of difficult moments sharing their personal stories with the group and venturing out to their families, friends, and neighbours to add to the documentation effort, the group produced an impressive short book of their history accompanied by hundreds of drawings made by children and adults alike.

On a rainy Saturday in April, the Lukodi community-led documentation team gathered with over 150 members of the community to share this work. Over the course of several hours, the group painstakingly read out their writing and collected comments from the community members. After months of weekly meetings and countless hours at home speaking with friends and family members, the group was proud to receive validation from the wider community. People finally understood what the group had been working on and enthusiastically supported the endeavor. As the meeting came to a close, the group committed to continue their work by undertaking documentation of LRA and NRA crimes during the war. This committed team has a long road ahead with many topics still to be covered and community members to be reached, but they remain enthusiastic about ensuring that the memories of what took place in Lukodi are preserved for future generations.

### **The Concept of Community-Led Documentation**

When JRP first conceptualised community-led documentation (CLD) it was with the intention to teach communities how to undertake their own research into the events that have shaped their lives and to produce materials which would be accessible and available to community members. We believe CLD is an important way to memorialise events in communities that have long been featured in reports, but who have so much more to share about the many events that have shaped their lives. The key driver behind CLD is to di-

*JRP has trained the group on using drawings, interviews, and body maps, among others, to explain the history of Lukodi and discussed ethical issues of research and controversial problems, like how to document government crimes.*

rectly involve community members in the decision, research and writing process to ensure that these skills stay in the community and enable them to take control of their story. Thus far, JRP has implemented CLD only in Lukodi, where training in memorialisation and research methods has taken place via semi-weekly meetings.

Since the start of the project, JRP has trained the group on using drawings, interviews, and body maps, among others, to explain the history of Lukodi. We have also discussed ethical issues of research

with the members and helped them come to agreement about controversial problems, like how to document government crimes. Above all, the group has been the one to set their direction, deciding what to write and draw about and how to go about collecting information. They have used a variety of methods, including working in pairs to write case studies of specific members' experiences, discussing as a group the broad strokes of time periods like Amin's era, and they have even had lively debates between members that had served with opposing armed groups and remembered things differently.

As time passed the group started working more independently, meeting without JRP researchers to make decisions about topics to cover and how to go about gathering information. The group's eventual goal is to produce written and visual documentation which can be displayed in a museum to be built at the memorial site. For JRP, the goal of CLD is to reach as many communities as possible in northern Uganda. Recognising that it is impossible for NGOs alone to document everything that has occurred in the region, JRP is developing a toolkit that can be distributed to communities to help them undertake their own documentation.

### **The Impact**

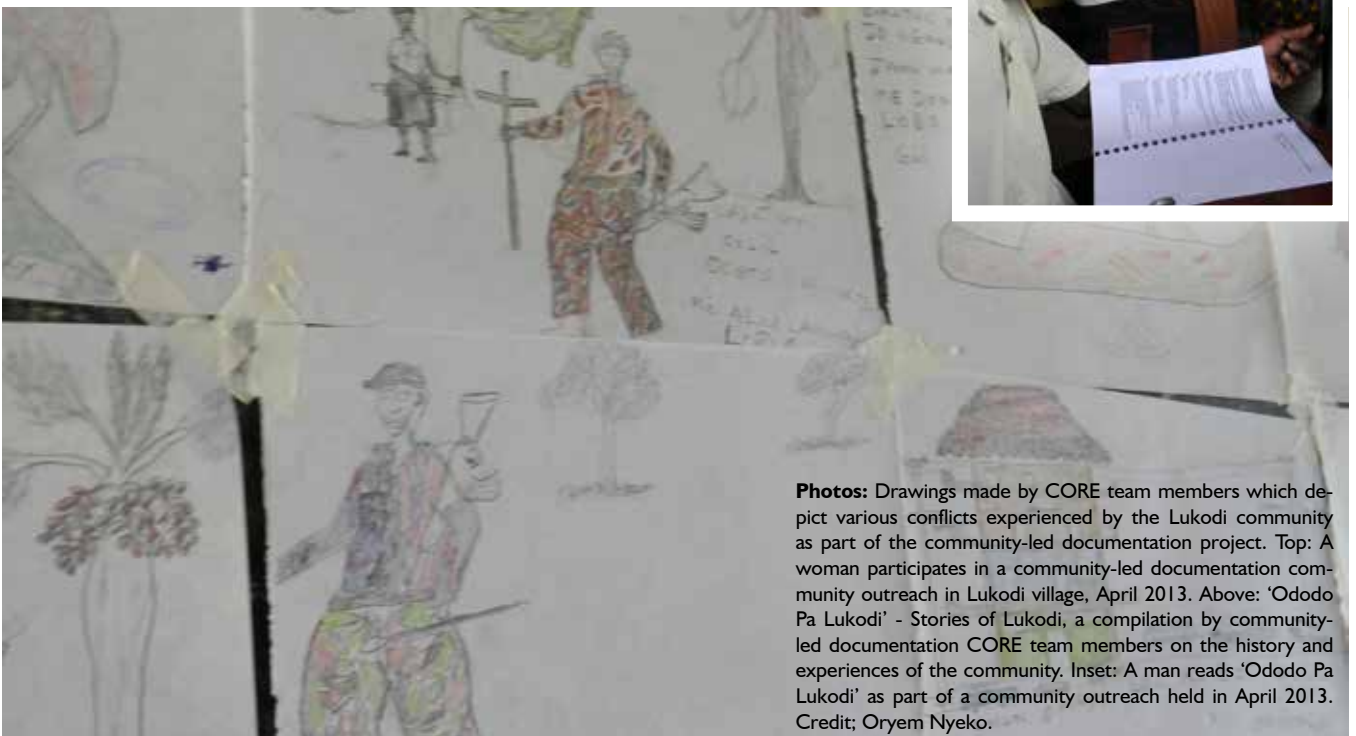
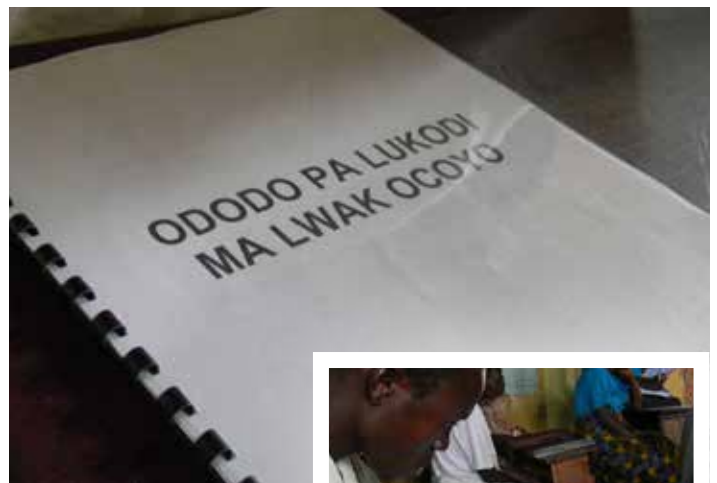
In the months since JRP started supporting Lukodi with CLD, the group has made great strides both



Members of the Lukodi CORE team participate in a community outreach in Lukodi in April 2013. Credit: Oryem Nyeko.

professionally and interpersonally. The group has provided JRP with frequent feedback which has helped to determine the direction of CLD. During the first feedback session held with the group, one member explained that he “appreciates the way JRP has handled this informally and interactively. I consider this empowering because our capacity was built – in the future even without JRP we as a community of Lukodi will be able to carry out our own documentation.”

At a recent meeting, another member commented, “I have never heard [this man] speak at length before! These sessions are really opening us up.” The group has also come to realise the importance of writing down memories since “memory fails as time goes on.” They have appreciated the lobbying and advocacy tools that we have been teaching them and the fact that the group has served as a uniting point for people from disparate corners of Lukodi. Discussing events in individual topics has also helped the group appreciate that the “conflict was so dynamic that it’s hard to grade the most paramount impact. Now we are beginning to realise that each and every thing that happened to us has value – learning to value things that we thought were meaningless.” Most importantly, the group has valued the feelings of pride and empowerment that this work has brought them: “We feel empowered to campaign to younger generation on having ‘no more war.’ Now, we are speaking from an informed point of view.” The group is committed to continuing this work not only for the younger generations but also because this “book is going to be an eye opener for Uganda and the world, people will get to know what we went through.” □



**Photos:** Drawings made by CORE team members which depict various conflicts experienced by the Lukodi community as part of the community-led documentation project. Top: A woman participates in a community-led documentation community outreach in Lukodi village, April 2013. Above: ‘Ododo Pa Lukodi’ - Stories of Lukodi, a compilation by community-led documentation CORE team members on the history and experiences of the community. Inset: A man reads ‘Ododo Pa Lukodi’ as part of a community outreach held in April 2013. Credit; Oryem Nyeko.



# Enhancing Victim' Participation In The Formal Justice System



OLIVE EDERU



Photo credit: Oryem Nyeko

Victim participation in formal justice is an essential part of ensuring that transitional justice processes are victim-friendly and contribute to redress. In this article JRP's Legal Officer examines the nature of the court system in Uganda and discusses the need for full and effective participation of victims of conflict in it.

**I**N THE AFTERMATH of conflict, societies often engage a number of means to respond to past violations committed during conflict, technically referred to as transitional justice. These mechanisms take the form of prosecution (formal justice), truth commissions, reparation schemes, traditional mechanisms and institutional building, all aimed at accountability for violations suffered and reconciliation within communities.

The Government of Uganda in response to the 20 year conflict in northern

Uganda and conflicts in other parts of the country has come up with a draft Transitional Justice Policy to "enhance legal and political accountability, promote reconciliation, foster social re-integration and contribute to peace and security". The policy has thus proposed a combination of justice mechanisms: truth commissions, reparations, prosecutions and traditional justice mechanisms. This article now seeks to examine ways in which victims can effectively

participate in the formal justice system as a means to respond to past violations.

Formal justice refers to the prosecutions of criminal architects and perpetrators of grave human rights violations and abuses which may be pursued internationally or nation-

*This aspect of complementarity has been stressed in the draft TJ policy in which it recognises that the solution to national reconciliation and justice lies in the multiple systems of justice functioning simultaneously and effectively complementing each other. This is a fact that victims have to know in order to make the right choices for the appropriate means to pursue.*

ally. Pursuant to Agenda no. 3 of the Juba Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation (Article 4.1 provides that "formal criminal and civil justice measures shall be applied to any individual who is alleged to have committed serious crimes or human rights violations in the course of the conflict, provided that, state actors shall be subjected to existing criminal justice processes under this agreement") and in fulfilment thereof, the Government of

Uganda enacted the International Criminal Court (ICC) Act in 2010 to enable Ugandan courts to try crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide as defined under the Rome Statute. Thereafter the Government established the War Crimes Division (now the International Crimes Division of the High Court of Uganda) to give effect to the Act which gives it jurisdiction to try genocide crimes, war crimes and crimes against humanity, laying the foundation for prosecuting international crimes.

There are, however, parameters within which this mechanism operates in Uganda. Pertaining to the issue of jurisdiction - the court may only hear cases of crimes that took place after July 1, 2010 (when the ICC Act came into force). Pertaining to criminal culpability - the court only tries those bearing the greatest criminal responsibility. This is in line with the Director of Public Prosecution's (DPP) commitment to prosecute the top 10 LRA commanders for atrocities committed during the conflict in northern Uganda. This leaves room

for other mechanisms to address those crimes that do not fall within its jurisdiction. This aspect of complementarity has been stressed in the draft TJ policy in which it recognises that the solution to national reconciliation and justice lies in the multiple systems of justice functioning simultaneously and effectively complimenting each other. This is a fact that victims have to know in order to make the right choices for the appropriate means to pursue.

The question is how do victims participate in this process? The basis for victims' participation was laid in the Juba Peace Agreement on Accountability which imposes an obligation on the Ugandan Government to allow victims to participate in the War Crimes Division trials. Under formal justice, victims can participate as individual witnesses or under umbrellas of victim groups or organisations represented by common legal representatives (in *Prosecutor V Thomas Lubanga Dyilo*, there were a total of 129 victim participants authorised by the Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Court). Victims' participation in this process starts right from identifying victims of atrocities by documenting their experiences in the conflicts and it is at this point that violations or crimes are identified and potential witnesses are identified.

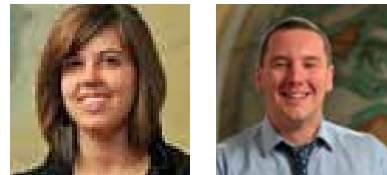
Awareness creation among victims on their rights is another way to ensure their full participation. It follows that where victims are aware of their rights, then they will definitely identify the violations they have suffered.

As such, witnesses should be enlightened on the rules of procedure and the general court etiquette (what to expect) considering the adversarial nature of the system of criminal courts in Uganda. They should also be told how the state will protect them before, during and after trial. Drawing from international jurisprudence, Uganda could benefit from decision in *Prosecutor v Thomas Lubanga Dyilo* where the Appeals Chamber of the ICC laid down guidelines pertaining to victims' participation. Following an application by a group of victims seeking to participate in the Lubanga case it was held that victims have the right to participate in trials. The court further proceeded to make the following pronouncements which are spot on for Uganda's War Crimes Division to emulate to ensure full victim participation:

- Victims have the right to consult the record of proceedings.
- Victims have the right to receive notification of all public filings and those confidential filings which concern them
- Victims have the right to request the chamber to use its broad powers to call all the materials it considers relevant for the determination of the truth
- Victims have the right to participate in public hearings
- Victims have the right to file written submissions
- Victims have the right to be provided with court protective measures that include voice and face distortion and pseudonyms. □

## Insights into Victim Participation in Northern Ireland: An interview with journalist Peter Kelly.

LINDSAY McCLAIN OPIYO AND PETER KELLY



*Former JRP Communications Team Leader Lindsay McClain Opiyo teamed up with Peter Kelly, an accomplished journalist and her classmate at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame, to learn more about victim participation in the wake of the longstanding conflict in Northern Ireland. In 2011, Lindsay participated in the University of Ulster's Transitional Justice Institute Summer School in Derry, Northern Ireland, and since then, she has been interested in similarities and differences between community-based struggles in Northern Ireland and northern Uganda for victim-centered transitional justice.*

**Peter, thank you for taking the time to share your experiences with *Voices* magazine. Can you please tell us more about yourself?**

My name is Peter Kelly, and since 1996 I've been a published journalist analysing the peace process in Northern Ireland (NI) for the national press. I have been a candidate for elected office for the party whose leader won the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize, and a speechwriter/strategist for bomb victims speaking at conferences around the world. I'm currently pursuing a Master's in Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame in the United States.

**What has the conflict been like in Northern Ireland? Who are the victims? The perpetrators?**

The conflict in NI, from a population of 1.5 million people, has claimed over 3,600 lives, which is the equivalent per-capita sum of 600,000 fatalities in the USA. Two blocs of terrorist groups –the Irish Catholic Irish Republican Army (IRA) and British Protestant Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF)/Ulster Volunteer Force



(UVF)—have killed mostly civilians in a conflict over the national identity of Northern Ireland. This was centered around whether NI would be part of a United Ireland with Dublin, or remain a part of the United Kingdom with London.

### Has there been any justice for victims?

Justice for victims in NI has been very problematic. The Good Friday Agreement peace accord of 1998 authorised the unlocking of the high security jails, releasing all terrorist prisoners. Many of them joined the coalition government of the country and were paid vast salaries using taxpayer dollars. Whilst ex-prisoners and ex-combatants should play a part in a new society, sensitivity and balance towards the needs of victims must also be observed and respected. There are many concerns and much dismay from the victims' community that victims have been significantly undermined and betrayed by the peace process in favour of a terrorist elite.

### I understand you have been working with victims. How have they organised themselves to advocate for justice? What has your role been?

Victims have organised themselves to lobby government agencies for support and assistance for their needs, material and healthcare, etc. Bringing perpetrators to justice for atrocities has been a big concern, as well as influencing politicians to maintain the morality of the peace process. This, rather than making

deals with terrorist groups, has been an additional priority of victims. I have assisted in both regards by giving strategic advice, networking, speechwriting, lobbying and media-platforming for one particular victims' group, the Omagh Support & Self Help Group, whose members were effected by the 1998 Omagh bombing, the country's worst terrorist atrocity sometimes called 'Ireland's September 11<sup>th</sup>.'

*"Victims have organised themselves to lobby government agencies for support and assistance for their needs, material and healthcare. Bringing perpetrators to justice for atrocities has been a big concern, as well as influencing politicians to maintain the morality of the peace process."*

### What has victim participation in transitional justice been like?

A holistic transitional justice process has not been a chosen option in NI. There is a concern in certain sectors that it carries with it an association of immunity/impunity or dilution of retributive justice for perpetrators, thus it has not taken root. Whether this perception is accurate

*"It is highly morally problematic that those who committed the worst atrocities of our past should be entrusted with providing the best for our future."*

or not is another issue. Each society deals with its conflict aftermath in different ways. Judicial-based justice systems have been the norm in dealing with outstanding issues in our context.

### What might be done to fully bring victims on board?

Victims must be made integral to

the peace process by ensuring that the memory of those innocents killed in conflict is enshrined in the new government, rather than ignored for the sake of political expediency. Peace at any price is highly morally scandalous. In the United States, it is unthinkable that either Timothy McVeigh (the Oklahoma City bomber) or Mohammed Atta (one of the 9/11 hijackers) would be instated in the White House for the sake of peace. Yet, there is a perception in Northern Ireland that this has taken place with local equivalents.

It is highly morally problematic that those who committed the worst atrocities of our past should be entrusted with providing the best for our future. This seems to be the case in NI, where there is a strong imbalance in favour of the perpetrator. The governing parties have close associations with paramilitary organisations and both joint-First-Ministers have criminal convictions and have spent time behind bars for conflict activities. Strengthening victims' rights and services, which rebalances the morality of the peace process, in turn effectively promotes reconciliation and the enduring reputation of the Good Friday Agreement. □

Peter Kelly can be reached at peterkellyfolder@hotmail.com for comment. To learn more about the advocacy efforts of the Omagh Support & Self Help Group, a victims' group that was founded after the 1998 Omagh bombing, please visit [www.omaghbomb.com](http://www.omaghbomb.com)

Photo: Courtesy of Matt Cashore/ University of Notre Dame

# An Ambition for Justice

Stephen Oyet was stripped of his innocence when he was abducted days before his tenth birthday. Today he wants to pursue his dream to be a judge. This is his story.

STEPHEN OYET

**T**HE YEAR 2001 marked the beginning of suffering and disaster in my life. I was abducted in the year 2001 when I was only left with five days to celebrate my tenth birthday. I was born on 26<sup>th</sup> of December 1993 thus I was abducted on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 2001.

People were busy preparing for Christmas regardless of insurgency of the LRA and I had taken long without seeing my grandmother, thus when my mother suggested that she would like to go and celebrate Christmas together with

*I was exposed to live slaughtering of human beings. Forcefully we were made to watch and participate. I went through serious rough training thus after three months we were handed over guns thus for me they gave me an AK 47.*

grandmother, I insisted to go with her even though both of my parents never wanted me to go to the village. Hence on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 2001 we took off to the village and reached safely. Come evening, we gathered around the fire which I set. As we take our

supper it was coming to 7:30 pm when we found out we were encircled by LRA rebels. Personally it was my first time to see rebels.

Some went straight in the huts while others climbed the trees where they looted our chickens, while those in the house looted the sorghum and maize grains. Outside where we were sitting they threatened to kill my mother if she did not give them money and show them where the government troops were hiding. Thank God Innocent the boy from our village who was abducted one year before



abduction came in and rescued the situation. He was one year older than me and we grew together and indeed we were great friends and when he was abducted. The only word I could whisper from my heart was that my help is in the name of the Lord because I knew for sure he would not let me remain.

*It was the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2004 when we entered into an ambush of the government soldiers where we fought for nine hours. That was the day I realised that there is time for everything. Both me and my friend Innocent escaped death narrowly. I thought I would not see light again.*

We were wondering what these rebels were going to do because they were threatening to kill. Innocent then exclaimed: "Long lasting friend I thought I would never see your face again! All along I have been checking for you here at home but all in vain. Now let us go the person that have been searching for is here at hand." Thus said Innocent, my friend whom we grew together.

At once Innocent welcomed me in the new life telling me I should not fear. I indeed wondered whether I would come back or not and in fact we travelled so far away I could not point the direction of our home.

Innocent was the bodyguard of our leader so he requested our leader who was called Sir Onen to allow me to be among the guards. All the guards comprised of only below 16 years of age thus he accepted and admitted me in his guards. Innocent did this so that he could make me forget home and from other extra ordinary torture. I was beaten with 75 sticks and 5 heated panga on my back. Before that, walking in the bush made my legs swollen and when I was tired they said they would give me everlasting rest. For them, when you are tired they kill you, so to avoid death I persevered till I recovered from my wounds. Sometimes we did not eat for two days and I encountered serious wars that by the mercy of God I escaped before dying as a true soldier.

I was exposed to live slaughtering of human beings. Forcefully we were made to watch and participate. I went through serious rough training thus after three months we were handed over guns thus for me they gave me an AK 47. I was interested in machine guns and later I was given two guns though they were too heavy for me. From the bush I encountered a lot of fighting which at times by grace of God that I survived. Food was another problem as were heavy rainfall, forceful recruitment among others.

My last day in the bush was the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2004 when we entered into an ambush of the government soldiers where we fought for nine hours. That was the day I realised that there is time for everything. Both me and my friend Innocent escaped death narrowly. I thought I would not see light again. From that moment I left my friend Innocent and what he told me was that when I am captured by the government soldiers I should greet his parents, friends and relatives. By that time bullets were raining and there was no sign that I was going to escape death. Fortunately I made it.

Though I came back happily things had worsened at home. I came and found that my father was beaten by the rebels and he could not move until early this year that after his surgery. Now he can move but he still can't even carry a jerrycan of ten litres. My joy changed into tears because young as I was, I had to begin struggling together with my mother to feed our family.

The issue of education is almost making me mad among other problems like stigmatisation, food shortage and lack of proper medical care and accommodation. I and my brothers and sisters want to study but at times it's very hard for me to raise money that can buy for us books and pens simply because am I am not working. Even in the school of which we are studying there are debts that we should pay in order to collect our certificates thus at times I could ask myself If the

*I am feeling the pain of being abducted and thus I still cry to anybody for help because I would like to study and become a judge so that I can enforce justice in the country.*

world is coming to an end then it should begin from me because even the many NGOs whose doors I knocked none has answered my cry. At times I feel like I should give up because there is no way I can get out of this trouble.

The only way is through education which now is the major problem because there is no way I can pursue it. At the moment I am feeling the pain of being abducted and thus I still cry to anybody for help because I would like to study and become a judge so that I can enforce justice in the country. □

Stephen's story first appeared in Issue 2 of *Voices Magazine* (September 2012), in "My Acholi Lesson" and "An Unlikely Friendship". He can be contacted for more information or assistance at [oyetstephen@yahoo.com](mailto:oyetstephen@yahoo.com).

# The Women who Brought Peace to Yumbe

SYLVIA OPINIA

ON 24<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2002, the Government of Uganda and the Uganda National Rescue Front II (UNRF II) signed a historical peace agreement that has remained a milestone in the direction of ensuring security and stability in the West Nile region in northern Uganda. Ten years down the road, this peace process has been applauded as a best practice for conflict resolution both nationally and internationally. Different stakeholders have been praised for their roles during this process yet very little if not nothing has been in place to formally recognise the very important roles played by the grassroots women during this process, even though they bore the biggest brunt of the conflict.

2011, however, was a memorable year for women activists as it saw women being honoured for the role they played in bringing peace in the world. The Nobel Peace Prize for 2011 was awarded in three equal parts to three women: Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee (both from Liberia) and Tawakul Karman (from Yemen) for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work. The celebration of these heroines sheds light on the transformative power of women in achieving peace and democracy. However, as a person working with communities affected by conflict in northern Uganda, it occurred to me that there are hundreds and thousands of women at grassroots level, especially women in Yumbe who have done more amazing things than we give them credit for during war, not just as targets but as people who held the communities together and also in the fight for peace and reconstruction.

Margaret Banduga is an active member of Romogi War Victims Association (RWVA) in Yumbe district, a group that was formed in 2011 and has been engaging with JRP since then. RWVA is comprised of former child soldiers, victims, wives of former combatants, among others. Like many other women in this village, she is the wife of a former combatant of the defunct UNRF II. Margaret has experienced conflict since her child-



hood. She was a young girl when she fled with her family to southern Sudan at the time Amin's government was overthrown. During that period, her childhood was disrupted as she had to drop out of school as a result of the hardships her family was going through with life as refugees. As a young girl, Margaret opted to get married when she met her husband in 1984 with whom she later returned to Uganda to settle in Romogi, her husband's home.

As Margaret and her husband were building their family, another conflict started in West Nile when the remnant soldiers regrouped to form UNRF II under the command of General Ali Bamuze to fight the government. In 1994, Margaret's husband was abducted by the rebels from their house while they were sleeping at night, leaving her and their five children behind after looting their property such as money and goats among others. Most of the soldiers that formed UNRF II were from West Nile. In the initial stages, the civilian support was important for enabling the rebels to operate within West Nile and recruit voluntarily. The rebels depended on the community for food, supplies and intelligence information. However, this support appeared to have diminished when civilians increasingly became victims of the war both in the hands of the rebels and the government soldiers. "The UPDF would accuse and torture us for collaborating with the rebels while the rebels would also blame us for giving information about them to the UPDF," said one of the group members. The forces have been accused of using aggressive tactics of war including methods such as abduction, torture, looting of property and animals, sexual abuse among others.

While their husbands were away fighting, these women held their families together. They became the breadwinners, did the farm work all alone and took care of their children with very little and sometimes no support from the extended families. According to Margaret:

That time, the situation was the same in the whole of this area, where ever you go, you get the same problems. I just had to console my children to be strong as it depended on God whether he [her husband] would return or not. So I just chose to live with my children, because if I left and got married to another man, my children would suffer. The children suffered a lot during his absence.

As many civilians found themselves caught in a war they no longer supported, Margaret and the women swung to action. While in the bush, the rebels would often sneak

home to see their wives and families and to get more supplies. Those who could not visit would send messages to their family members about their safety. On such visits, Margaret and her colleagues got the opportunity to convince their husbands to abandon the rebellion and come back home as she narrates:

We told our husbands that the children are suffering because of their absence, that they need

*"We told our husbands that the children are suffering because of their absence, that they need to come back home. When they refused to listen to us, we would ask our in-laws and other elders to talk to them so that they can see reason to abandon the rebellion which had become unbearable."*

## Praying The Devil Back to Hell

KASIVA MULLI

**USUALLY IN CONFLICT** women suffer the most due to their status in society and as such they most importantly know the price of conflict and the importance of peace. Women often are peace activists participating to bring an end to conflict through dialogue and peace activism. However, their contribution is largely ignored and rarely documented. Such was the story of the women peace movement in Liberia until filmmaker Abigail Disney heard about it.

Pray the devil back to hell is an inspiring documentary about the selflessness of women of Liberia determined who take it upon themselves to rally parties to the conflict to participate in the peace talks and push them to sign a peace agreement. One woman says "We went back to the bible and did what Esther did for her people," referring to the story of Esther in the Bible, who is said to have saved the people of Israel from execution, shows the personal responsibility they felt to fight for peace in their country.

Liberia had never experienced peace since the 1980s due to frequent wars caused by fight for resources. During the reign of President Charles Taylor, a rebel movement known as LURD began fighting his leadership from 1999. This resulted to massive atrocities committed by both sides. As the fighting intensified, women from different backgrounds led by Nobel Laureate Leymah Gbowee, Etweda "Sugars" Cooper, Asatu Bar Kenneth came together and rallied women to demand for peace. The women dressed in white t-shirts and wrappers only with no makeup or ornaments and set camp at the fish market amidst war to demand attention from Taylor and the rebels to force them into peace negotiations. Once the parties to the conflict agreed to hold talks in Ghana, the women followed and implored them to agree to peace. At one point they barricaded the venue of the talks to force the fighting sides to take the negotiations seriously.

The film ends with a quote from one of the women saying "but Liberians knew if things ever got bad again we would be back!" showing how women continue to be fully involved in rebuilding their country.

Pray the devil back to hell is an inspiring documentary which shows the contribution of women in peace and reconciliation processes.

Find out more about this documentary at [www.PrayTheDevilBackToHell.com](http://www.PrayTheDevilBackToHell.com).



to come back home. Sometimes we would refuse to give them food or water for bathing whenever they sneaked home. When they refused to listen to us, we would ask our in-laws and other elders to talk to them so that they can see reason to abandon the rebellion which had become unbearable. Indeed some of the rebels were convinced and through the Local Councils of the area surrendered their guns. This did not go well with the rebel leadership who often followed those who surrendered and either killed or tortured them because they were accused of betraying the rebellion.

At the same time, the women whose sons had joined the rebellion also started convincing their sons to come back home. This pressure from families, especially the wives and mothers forced the elders to start talking to both parties for dialogue which is why the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces started working together with the community to create an environment of mutual trust and confidence to enable the rebels to come out of the bush. After eight years, Margaret's husband finally snuck home to inform her and the family that the rebels had moved and camped in the bushes nearby as they were monitoring the developments that would later culminate into the formal peace process.

After initial trust and confidence building meetings between the UNRF II leadership and the government first in Khartoum and later on in Nairobi, between April and June 2002, General Bamuze and his soldiers were camped at Bidi Bidi site as the peace talks progressed. On 24 December the two parties presented the signed peace agreement to the population as their Christmas present and in April 2003, the soldiers were demobilised. This was when the women especially the wives got some relief when their husbands finally came back home.

Though she feels the amnesty package her husband received was not enough to compensate for the damages and losses her family had incurred during the period, Margaret who now has ten children is happy that her husband has returned home and there is peace as she narrates: "Yes of course things have changed. I feel now that I have a husband, he goes out to do casual work and supports the family and even now we sleep in our houses unlike during the conflict times when we were not at peace. The fear that the guerillas might come is no longer there." Margaret feels that the peace process neglected the victims who bore the biggest brunt of this conflict as the processes only focused on the combatants especially its leadership. She hopes that the government at least considers facilitating the education of the children in this area and empowering the community members economically. □

## News



Credit: Oryem Nyeko

### Women's Advocacy Network calls on the Government

ORYEM NYEKO

ON THE 23<sup>RD</sup> of August 2013, 73 members of the Women's Advocacy Network initiated the process of petitioning the Government of Uganda on behalf of war affected women to take concrete steps to support war-affected women in northern Uganda.

A petition drawn up by the grassroots organisation specifically calls for action for the special needs of the children of war-affected women, some of whom were born in captivity, and who have continued to suffer the brunt of stigmatisation in their communities despite the end of armed conflict. They are also often deprived of education and psycho-social support and, in some instances, do not know the identity of their paternal relatives.

The petition also requests that a reparations policy be adopted by the Government of Uganda to address the socio-economic needs of war-affected women, to help build their capacity to support themselves and to compensate them for the losses they suffered during the war. The women's organisation also requests that accountability processes for the atrocities that took place during the war be effected in order to aid reconciliation and healing within communities and throughout the country.

The petition was put on the agenda of the Gulu District Local Government representatives to be tabled on Tuesday, September 10<sup>th</sup> 2013 at the Gulu District Local Government District Council Hall.

The petition requested the Local Government representatives to appeal to the Government of Uganda to initiate policies which will address the needs of war-affected women in the region, many of whom were abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army during its twenty year conflict with the Government of Uganda, as well as their children. □



## Families march through Gulu for the missing on International Day for the Disappeared

On the 30th of August 2013, family members of the missing, civil society and local leaders marched through Gulu to draw attention to the issue of missing persons and to commemorate the International Day Against Enforced Disappearances.



## Conviction of former Guatemalan president gives hope that perpetrators can be brought to justice

VICKY ESQUIVEL-KORSIAK

ALMOST 20 YEARS after the end of the three-decade-long civil war in Guatemala, former President Jose Efraim Rios Montt has finally been convicted for genocide and crimes against humanity. This is a momentous occasion for Latin America and the world. Rios Montt is the first former head of state to be convicted for genocide in that region and the first in the world to be tried by a national court.

Rios Montt and fellow ex-General Jose Mauricio Rodriguez Sanchez were accused of systematically massacring almost 2,000 Mayan-Ixil civilians as part of a brutal scorched-earth military campaign. Soldiers tortured, raped, and murdered people, burnt down houses and destroyed crops and livestock. Though he was in office for only 17 months in 1982-3, findings from the UN-sponsored truth commission in Guatemala show that nearly half of all reported atrocities committed during the civil



Photo: Ixil Indian women and men whose family members were killed in Guatemala's civil war celebrate the guilty verdict given to Jose Efraim Rios Montt after his genocide trial in Guatemala City. Credit: Luis Soto.

war occurred in 1982 while he was in power.

Over 100 courageous victims turned out to testify at the trial about their experiences of torture, sexual violence, and witnessing the murder of infants and other innocent civilians. The trial also made use of forensic evidence, anthropological and archival documents and video footage, including an interview with Rios Montt himself collected for the documentary film *Granito*. Rios Montt was sentenced to 50 years in prison for genocide and 30 years for crimes against humanity. The Judge's decision noted that he was fully aware of security forces' plans to exterminate the indigenous Ixil population.

The trial came about in large part as a result of mobilisation from indigenous communities and survivors of the war who have worked tirelessly to bring Rios Montt to justice. They had previously tried to mount an

unsuccessful case in Spain under universal jurisdiction laws, and filed the complaints which led to this trial in 2000 and 2001.

In many ways the war in Guatemala reminds us of the war in northern Uganda, which saw the Acholi civilian population caught between the Lord's Resistance Army rebels and the Ugandan military leading to deaths and mass displacement. The long-awaited conviction of Rios Montt provides a strong legal precedent and gives hope to victims that perpetrators of genocide and human rights violations can be held accountable even decades after war has ended.

For more information on the trial, see <http://www.riosmontt-trial.org/>. Video footage of victims' testimony and more information on the Granito documentaries is available at <http://www.granitomem.com/genocide-trial/>. □



Community members participate in a community theatre exercise. Photo courtesy of Grassroots Reconciliation Group (GRG).

## *A tool for transformation:* How drama is used to promote understanding between ‘perpetrators’ and ‘victims’

VANESSA FORTUNE AND CHRISTOPHER MACLAY, GRASSROOTS RECONCILIATION GROUP (GRG)

**W**ITH A RICH CULTURE of narrative story telling including imagery, song and dance, northern Uganda is well-placed to use these traditions in community theatre that aims to transform conflict. These mediums carry traditional idioms, myths and values, which hold a background of meaning and in some cases a sense of security particularly when dealing with difficult or even painful circumstances.

Community theatre, through its fundamental use of participation, is a tool for transforming relationships and thus facilitating conflict resolution. It creates a forum in which those participating can recognise the forces that hinder them and helps participants to acknowledge their personal and community strengths to create positive responses. Creating an interactive community theatre that also engages audience participation through intervention or discussion furthermore teaches others to be better communicators, which is a valuable tool for preventing future conflicts. Participants can recognise issues and build on foundations of dialogue and tolerance.

Community theatre can be direct and objective staging fictionalised stories anonymously illuminating the specific community conflict. Isolating the issues from persons involved or affected allows the community to assess the problem objectively and witness a theatrically staged option for resolving the conflict and apply these options into the real conflict. Community theatre also has the capacity to become a third party medium via the stage while the fictionalisation process ensures indirectness and guarantees audiences access to a process of conflict-resolution



that allows face-saving approaches when dealing with high-intensity issues.

In Rwanda, participatory theatre has been used to address land conflict – Search for the Common Ground’s theatre troupe travels to rural communities performing acts that reflect on common land conflict issues. They also use participatory theatre in schools to foster discussion among Rwandan youth on ways to address diverse issues peacefully to strengthen reconciliation and lasting peace. However these activities are more top down approach to participatory theatre, while the Amani People’s Theatre in Nairobi, Kenya – who work with disadvantaged oppressed and/or conflict involved communities’ – use participatory community theatre to create skills and space for conflict resolution.

As Auma Jackline from Kica Ber group (meaning ‘forgiveness is good’) in Abole, Gulu District explained, “I like to act and I am so happy that we are starting the community theatre project. This will make me deal with the past because we will share a lot and dance together.” As such community theatre can act as an organic outward expression of fundamental community experience. The more a community is involved in creating and implementing their performance, the more likely it is to receive popular approval by their wider populace.

In 2012, JRP’s community theatre project took on a new challenge as it began a partnership with the Grassroots Reconciliation Group (GRG). What makes the JRP/GRG community theatre initiative so unique is that it works directly at the site of one of the most significant post-conflict challenges in northern Uganda: the interaction between perceived ‘perpetrators’ and ‘victims’. GRG was established in 2007 to promote reconciliation and the community-based reintegration of ex-combatants in northern Uganda. Rather than just working with returnees – which risks stigmatising them further – GRG works with groups which combine ex-combatants and other community members, or as some would see, the ‘victims’ and the ‘perpetrators’. By engaging these groups in a combination of locally designed projects which contribute to social and economic progress, GRG has found the process significantly contributes to the establishment of new relationships, trust building, and long-term recovery. Our experience has shown that community theatre can play a major role in this process.

By engaging and participating in drama workshops and presentations, participants gain insights not only into their own feelings and perceptions, but into those feelings of the ‘other’. Community theatre can be used as a powerful tool to build empathy. While many post-conflict challenges including stigmatisation developed

out of a failure to understand the past, perspectives, and actions of others, community theatre provides the forum to put oneself in the other position. Okelokara David of the group Can Rwede Pe (meaning ‘poverty has no owner’) in Olwal, Amuru District, recently told us, “[Community theatre] brings forth trust among us – we do story telling from which members are getting to understand and come to terms with each others’ past.” This can be an important step in reconciliation for these groups.

After a highly successful pilot with two groups in 2012, the partnership was expanded in early 2013 to work with 10 more of GRG’s groups. Through participatory problem examination and needs assessments, these 10 groups had themselves identified community theatre as a potential tool to solve local problems. In Pawel, Amuru District, for example, members of Opoto Matuku (meaning ‘It fell freely’) explained that the group had problems of “disunity” and that community theatre would provide a forum for relationships to be built, and for the cultural history of Acholi to be celebrated.

Four months into the second phase of this partnership, the community theatre project is providing a forum for enjoyment, understanding, and relief; as one member of Can Deg Wor (meaning ‘poverty needs no quarrels’) in Laminadera, Gulu district, explained, “We are enjoying the community theatre sessions – it is really helping us share experiences on the past.”

The participants of community theatre are not just the actors, but the community that engages in the performance. For GRG’s groups, ‘perpetrators’ and ‘victims’ collaboratively presenting plays of conflict resolution for the wider community can have a strong impact. In Lugwar, Lamwo District, the groups of Bedo Dano Tek and Konya Dong (meaning ‘Being a human is difficult’ and ‘Help me so I grow’) are planning to present a performance to their community about stigmatisation. Although a challenge which is only felt directly by a fraction of the group, after exploring each others’ stories, they decided that it is an important issue to share with the community. This exemplifies the core goal of community theatre: the discovery of empathy through creative participation, and the desire to share this learning with others. □

Grassroots Reconciliation Group (GRG) supports projects that bring together local community members and ex-child soldiers of the LRA who have escaped from rebel captivity. Find out more about the Grassroots Reconciliation Group at their website: [www.grassrootsgroup.org](http://www.grassrootsgroup.org).

*The participants of community theatre are not just the actors, but the community that engages in the performance.*



# Haunted By 27 Spirits

Acholi Traditional Ceremonies in Re-integration and Rehabilitation of Ex-LRA Combatants (Part One)

Denis was abducted from his village when he was only five years. Like many former abductees he was forced to kill and carry out other atrocities during his captivity. On his return home, he found that he was haunted by the 27 spirits of the people he had killed. This piece is the first part of a report by JRP researchers LINO OWOR OGORA and HARRIET ALOYOCAN on the role and impact of Acholi traditional mechanisms on former combatants and abductees like Denis.

When we reached Kitgum on our way to Pader, I killed 2 people we had just abducted. One was a boy from Palaro whom I was ordered to kill because he was big headed and he did not want to follow orders. The second man I killed and took money from was a Dinka trader who was on his way to Uganda. Our main aim of going to Kitgum and Pader was to abduct people whom we could recruit into the LRA. From Kitgum we went to Pader and headed to a place called Gang pa Ajullu where we abducted so many people, and killed others. Some of the dead people were chopped into pieces and cooked in the pots for the survivors to eat.

Interview with Denis, Koch Goma Village, July 2012.

Twenty-seven spirits!

**WE** COULD NOT IMAGINE anyone living with 27 spirits in them, but our imagination turned to reality when we met Denis, a formerly-abducted person, who claimed to be haunted by 27 spirits of people he killed while in captivity of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

Denis is a formerly abducted person living in Koch Goma village, located approximately 15 miles north of Gulu town. Denis lives with his uncle, aunt and grandmother. Sixteen years ago in December 1996, when he was only five years old, his life changed when he was abducted by the LRA from Koch Goma village. As he was a young child, Denis cannot recall the exact date of his abduction. All he remembers was that it was the month of December and that the village was in a

festive mood as everybody prepared to celebrate Christmas. The rebels came to Denis' village in the dead of the night and took him and other small children his age, assuring their frightened parents not to worry. Denis recalls that the rebels told his parents they would 'take good care of him'.

Denis was carried off into captivity to serve as a child soldier. He spent nine years in captivity, a period in which he was forced to kill, mutilate, loot property, and commit a wide range of atrocities against other civilians. When Denis eventually escaped and returned to his village in 2005, he was changed forever. He was returning to his community a killer, not a little boy who had been abducted nine years earlier. Shortly after his return, Denis displayed abnormal behavior and suffered demonic attacks. Denis' uncle consulted the *ajwaka* (traditional healer), who pronounced that Denis was haunted by 27 spirits of people he had killed in captivity. The solution was to pacify those spirits through traditional ritual cleansing ceremonies.

The effectiveness of traditional justice in reintegrating and rehabilitating formerly-abducted persons has been a subject of contention in debates regarding how best to rehabilitate ex-LRA combatants. In addition, traditional justice mechanisms continue to raise debate regarding their potential to complement more formal mechanisms such as court processes. Using the example of a traditional ceremony performed for Denis, a former LRA fighter, this article outlines the significance of Acholi traditional justice ceremonies in reintegrating and rehabilitating formerly abducted persons. It is based on the interaction of the authors with Denis, the subject of this story, between



July 2012 and June 2013.

### Denis' Abduction Experience

Denis recalls that he was abducted in the month of December as his village was preparing to celebrate Christmas. It had been a long day of fun and games for Denis and other children in the village, so he had gone to bed immediately after his supper. Denis recalls that his grandmother sung him a lullaby that quickly sent him to sleep.

The rebels came to the village at about 10:00 pm, when the whole village was fast asleep. Being just a child, Denis didn't know what was happening. He only remembers that a group of rugged looking soldiers came to their home, entered their house and took him with them. They carried him out of his bed and told his parents that they would take good care of him and the other children. That night the rebels abducted ten young boys who were of his age from Koch Goma village. On their journey to captivity the rebels continued abducting more young boys of his age, but because Denis was a very young child he could neither remember nor trace the route they used to reach Sudan in order to escape. At the time of his abduction Denis did not know why he was taken by the soldiers, but later, as he spent more time in captivity, and interacted with LRA soldiers in his group, he learned that the rebels wanted young children who could easily be trained to serve the LRA's cause.

When Denis reached Sudan, an LRA Commander called Tullo, who also happened to be the leader of the Trinkle Brigade that abducted him, took Denis to stay at his home because he was still young. Denis' chief responsibility was to take care of Commander Tullo's young baby and to play with his children. As Denis grew older, Commander Tullo started teaching him simple military skills, such as dismantling and reassembling the different parts of a gun. Denis was tasked with carrying Tullo's gun each time they went on operations. When Denis was seven years old, Tullo made him his escort and continued training and teaching him how to use a gun. A short while later, as Denis finished his training, he also started going more frequently on operations with Tullo.

My duty [at Commander Tullo's home] was to babysit his child but as I grew older he started teaching me about the different parts of the gun and I began carrying his gun each time he going somewhere. That was at the age of 5 years. When I was about 6 to 7 years old he made me his escort and he started training and teaching me how to use a gun. Then later after a short time I also

started going with him for operations as a child soldier.

Interview with Denis, Koch Goma Village, July 2012

Life in captivity was not easy. Denis describes it as cruel, harsh and with very cold, sad and sleepless nights. He recalls that they frequently were on the move through bushes, sometimes for up to 40 days and nights without food, rest, and water. In all these movements, Denis and his group always sought foodstuffs like cassava which they uprooted from peoples' gardens.

As an LRA soldier, Denis was also forced to commit a number of atrocities. He recalls that one of his first operations was in Atiak where he participated in a massacre of civilians. Denis and his group had gone to loot foodstuffs, medicine, clothes and other items. But unfortunately the civilians learnt of their presence and alerted the Ugandan Army. A battle followed, in which ten soldiers and three commanders of the LRA were killed. In retaliation, the LRA carried out an attack against the civilians in which hundreds were massacred.

The Atiak massacre, which occurred on 20 April 1995, was the first massacre to be documented by JRP. It was also one of the first large scale massacres perpetrated by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Under the command of the late Vincent Otti, the massacre began at 5:00am when an unknown number of LRA rebels entered the trading centre of Atiak and attacked the local defence unit. There was an exchange of heavy gunfire before the military was eventually overrun. Afterwards, the rebels embarked on a looting spree and rounded up all the civilians they came across. Atiak Technical School was also raided by the rebels and approximately 60 students were captured. The rebels then ordered all the captives to march with them into the bush. The captured civilians were made to carry luggage and other commodities that had been looted by the LRA. At 11:00am the rebels and the captured civilians arrived in a valley called Ayugi where there was a stream called Kitang. Able-bodied men and boys were separated from women, young children and the elderly. Otti, then second-in-command to LRA leader Joseph Kony, lectured the civilians, chastising them for siding with the Government. According to one witness:

Otti told us that we were undermining their power. He also said we people of Atiak were saying that LRA guns have rusted. He said he had come to

show us that his guns were still functioning. They then commanded children below 11 years and pregnant women and breast-feeding women to stand aside. He then ordered his men to shoot at the civilians. After the bullets were silent, the soldiers were ordered to fire a second time on the dead corpses to make sure they were all killed. Then they fired a third time to make sure all the people had been shot.

Lino Owor Ogora and Erin Baines: *Remembering the Atiak Massacre, April 20<sup>th</sup> 1995*. Justice and Reconciliation Project, Fieldnote No.4, April 2007

The total number of people estimated to have been killed in the massacre varies from anywhere between 200 and 300 persons. Some people disappeared and their whereabouts are still unknown because in the post-massacre confusion it was not possible to immediately identify all of the dead. Denis recalls that he personally killed a boy and 20 other people in this massacre. This boy's spirit was one of those that came to torment him later on.

After the operation in Atiak Denis' group returned to Sudan, but shortly after their arrival they were ordered to go to Teso region for another operation. Denis recalls that they carried out atrocities in a village whose name he does not remember. In addition to killing civilians, Denis confessed that while in Teso he was forced kill his immediate commander who had sustained injuries as a result of a helicopter gunship attack by the UPDF. Denis recalls that this particular attack had been so terrible, involving four helicopter gunships bombing them from all directions that it left very many of their soldiers dead. Denis and other survivors had tried carrying the wounded for several kilometers, but they found this a daunting task as they were being pursued by the UPDF. Denis was carrying his injured commander. Worried that he would be captured by the UPDF, Denis made the difficult decision to kill the commander. Denis executed him with a blow to the head using a club and was then able to escape from the UPDF.

From Teso Denis' group was ordered to go to Pader for another operation. Denis and his group headed to Pader via Kitgum. En route, they went through a place called Gang Pa Acullu in Omot village where they committed more atrocities. This particular incident stands out in Denis' mind because of the gruesome nature of atrocities they committed.

Denis recalls that they entered the village at about 6:00am just as the villagers were stirring and preparing to leave their homes for their gardens. The morning was very cold and misty, which offered the rebels a good opportunity to attack and carry out mass abduction, killings, and looting. Denis recalls that he hacked about ten civilians to death. Later the rebels chopped some of the bodies into pieces and cooked the meat with the intention of forcing the surviving villagers to eat

their neighbours. Denis had no choice but to carry out the orders of his commanders. The massacre in Omot was conducted in retaliation for a past incident in which LRA soldiers had been poisoned by one member of the village. On that occasion the rebels had been conducting a raid in the village when they stopped to rest at the home of a man. He boiled cassava for them and secretly poisoned it, as a result many of the LRA rebels lost their lives while others survived narrowly.

Denis eventually managed to escape from the LRA. His opportunity came as they were making their way back to Sudan from Pader, closely pursued by a group of UPDF soldiers. When they reached Agoro hills in Kitgum district, Denis and his group found the UPDF soldiers who engaged them in a battle. As a helicopter gunship was also shelling them from the sky, Denis decided to hide in the bush for safety. The LRA soldiers eventually fled but Denis remained in his hiding place. After some time, he came out and surrendered to the UPDF soldiers.

He was brought to Gulu town where he reported to the Amnesty Commission offices and was taken to the World Vision Rehabilitation Center. Denis stayed at the World Vision Rehabilitation Center for one year before he was set free to go back home. He did not even know where his village was; World Vision had to make radio announcements calling upon his relatives to come and pick him up from the center. When his uncle heard the radio announcement, he came immediately and collected Denis. The Amnesty Commission gave Denis a reintegration package of approximately 250,000 Ugandan Shillings, a mattress and a blanket.

*Read part two of Denis's story in the next issue of Voices magazine.*

### Remembering the Atiak Massacre

*JRP's fourth Field Note, seeks to provide the first known written record of events leading to the massacre based on the testimony of 41 survivors and witnesses, as well as prominent community members. It does not claim to be complete, but rather provides a partial record in hopes of prompting the Government to begin an investigation into the multiple massacres that have taken place in Uganda. Read the full report at [www.justiceandreconciliation.com](http://www.justiceandreconciliation.com).*



# A War Without Cause

OKOT SIMON PETER

*War has been part of our lives,  
From the day we were born to date  
We've heard gunshots*

*We hear a woman, named Alice Auma,  
Led by the spirit of a dead Italian officer,  
And armed with sticks and stones,  
Mobilised a troop and opened the chapter*

*Crowned with blessings in disguise,  
She proved victorious, from Opit to Jinja,  
Yet on meeting her equals,  
She conceded defeat, and made off to Kenya*

*What an irony Alice, barren in life  
Yet giving birth to, series of infinite wars,  
Wars without cause*

*Not learning from history, Joseph, Alice's supposed  
cousin, and an altar boy  
With claims of being possessed by the Holy  
Ghost, and  
Forcefully mobilising his kin mates  
Into an unholy war branded the Lord's  
Yet possessing nothing of the Lord's  
But demonic terror  
With brute force, terrifying violence,  
The power of myth and invincibility,  
You, Joseph terrorize the Lord's people*

*Look at your kin mates,  
Children of your very mother  
Why so different a look?*

*You abduct your kin mates,  
and enlist them into your unholy troops,  
through brainwashing and violence,*

*You brutally order, the killing of a brother by a  
brother,  
And forcefully order them to be cannibals and  
Further forcing them to pretend, that all is ok,*

*You mercilessly maim your kin mates physically  
Brutally chopping their lips, ears, mouth, noses,  
breasts, and penises,  
with claims that they are traitors, informers and  
betrayers,  
Yet, are you not the one betraying our cause?*

*Innumerable kin mates of yours commute from their  
homes, to towns  
With papyrus mat and blankets on their heads daily  
as squatters  
Under verandas, in classes, hospitals, churches, and  
stores*

*Innumerable kin mates of yours are raped, defiled,  
and infected,  
Under condition of night commuters, living in camps  
And the child soldier hood in the bush*

*You made your kin mates to be displaced in camps,  
With nothing to hope for in life but survival,  
Forcing them to share in the inhuman experience of  
hell on earth.*

*Innumerable kin mates of yours go missing and  
unaccounted for,  
Invisible dying in combat without cause,  
And their parents, with unending grief carry on with  
daily life*

*Countless kin mates of yours dropped out of schools,  
As more schools closed, than remained open,  
And the excruciating camps' schools,  
a total mess*

*Look at your very village,  
Houses burnt down, crops destroyed, and livestock  
taken,  
Is that your Christmas gift for your kin mates?*

*Your kin mates are mentally injured,  
By the atrocities you forced on them  
And are sceptical they are totally forgiven*

*With little knowledge of our readiness to mend  
bonds with you,  
Countless of your innocent kin mates, are but afraid  
of us,  
And so sacrifice to fight a war without cause. □*

This poem was performed by a Senior 5 student of Pajule Secondary School in Pader District during the Acholi regional competition of the 2013 Transitional Justice Quiz for Secondary Schools at Lacor Seminary.



## Across Ethnic Boundaries: The 2013 Transitional Justice Quiz for Secondary Schools



This year's Transitional Justice Quiz final featured four schools from West Nile (Awere S.S.), Acholi (Kitgum High School), Lango (Comboni College) and Teso (Teso College Aloet) sub-regions competing for the 2013 title. Kitgum High school ended up the champions (pictured above) while Comboni Colege were runner-ups (above left, pictured in black t-shirts).  
Photos credit: Oryem Nyeko.

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Working for justice and reconciliation with grassroots communities

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Read our **TJ Monitor** and **#CommunityVoices** blogs for updates on local and international transitional justice processes as well as accessible personal and collective accounts on the experiences challenges of communities affected by decades of conflict in northern Uganda face.

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# Voices

Sharing victim-centered views on  
justice and reconciliation in Uganda

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