

Feature

11 The role of documentation in transitional justice

Opinion

13 How I am playing a role in post-conflict northern Uganda

Feature

21 Community-led reconciliation and reburying the dead in Lukodi

Voices

Sharing victim-centered views on justice and reconciliation in Uganda



A publication of
Justice and
Reconciliation
Project
Issue 6, December 2013

A changing landscape
Challenges and growth in justice and reconciliation since 2005

Voices

Sharing victim-centered views on
justice and reconciliation in Uganda

Issue 6, December 2013

Contents

Features

- 7** Influencing Uganda's Draft Transitional Justice Policy: From sparking interest to blazing the path
KATHERINE ALEXANDER
- 9** A Healing Wound: The journey of gender justice
NANCY APIYO
- 10** The importance of victim-sensitive legal sensitisation
ORYEM NYEKO
- 13** I am playing a role in post-conflict Uganda
STELLA, WOMEN'S ADVOCACY NETWORK
- 15** The journey of the Women's Advocacy Network
EVELYN AMONY
- 16** Women's Advocacy Network first anniversary
- 17** Haunted by 27 Spirits (part two)
LINO OWOR OGORA AND HARRIET ALOYOCAN
- 25** Ten years of justice and reconciliation
MELISSA McCAULEY



p. 17



p.7

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: Community theatre performance, Job Okot.

Design template by Erick Ragas at StockInDesign Inc.

Copyright © 2013 Justice and Reconciliation Project

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without full attribution.

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.

Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP)

Plot 50 Lower Churchill Drive, P.O. Box 1216, Gulu, Uganda, East Africa

Tel: +256 (0) 471433008 | Email: info@justiceandreconciliation.com

Website: <http://www.justiceandreconciliation.com>

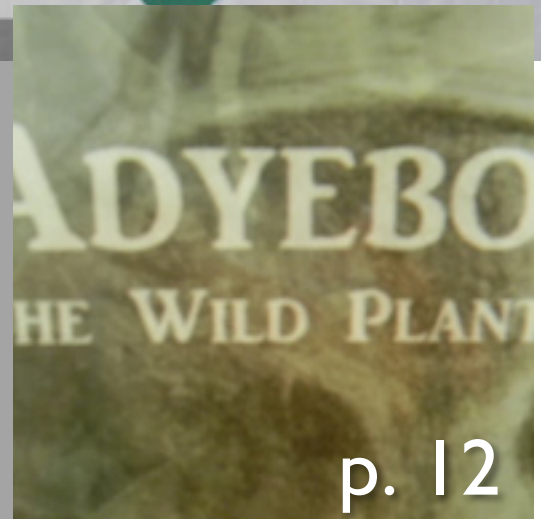


Opinion

- 11 Providing Justice: The role of documentation in transitional justice
HARRIET ALOYOCAN
- 14 Lessons learned from working with women survivors in northern Uganda
KASIVA MULLI
- 21 How the need for decent reburials helped community-led reconciliation in Lukodi
MELISSA McCAULEY

News and Updates

- 4 Editorial
ORYEM NYEKO
- 5 Empty promises and transitional justice in northern Uganda since 2005
LINO OWOR OGORA
- 12 Justice and Reconciliation Project publications
- 24 Launch of community-led documentation in Lukodi
RITA APIO



Editorial

Challenges and growth in justice and reconciliation since 2005

ORYEM NYEKO

THE JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION PROJECT came into being at a time when the conflict in northern Uganda became the focus of a discussion at the centre of which were two seemingly differing points of view regarding the future of the conflict in the country. On the one hand, supporters for criminal justice processes felt the International Criminal Court's indictments of key commanders in the Lord's Resistance Army would provide accountability and justice for victims of the conflict. On the other, some advocates for peace negotiations argued that these indictments would prevent the end of the lengthy war.

It seemed, on the face of it, to be a battle between peace and justice. Which was more important? Were they the same thing? Most importantly, what do the people that were directly affected by the conflict think?

This is where JRP came in.

Since 2005, JRP has succeeded in engaging victims of conflict in discussions about their needs and aspirations and played a key role in transitional justice processes and discussions. The organisation contributed to the Juba peace talks, has consistently recorded human rights abuses through the documentation of massacres and other atrocities, assisted vulnerable groups and individuals to advocate for their needs and supported community-led peace-building efforts.

A decade later, the landscape has, of course, changed. This issue of *Voices*, therefore, serves as a retrospective on the challenges, lessons learned, reflections and successes that Uganda's transitional justice arena has experienced from the perspective of practitioners that have worked to promote the needs and interests of victims of conflict in the past ten years.

In, "Lessons learned from working with women survivors in northern Uganda" (p14), JRP's Gender Justice Team Leader reflects on the unique contributions women survivors have made and continue to make to transitional justice discourse. Stella, a member of the Women's Advocacy Network that the Gender Justice department works with, talks about how the grassroots women's group began and rose to become a network the promoting of the needs of war-affected women. Read her narrative on page 13.

In, "Humble Beginnings, From Sparking Interest to Blazing the Path" (p7), we examine the role that civil society organisations like JRP played in the development of Uganda's future transitional justice policy. In this way civil society has contributed to at all levels of post-conflict development in the region.

In, the last issue of *Voices*, we began exploring the experience of Denis, a young man who was abducted at five years of age, but found the trauma he faced being manifested on his return. Read the second part of "Haunted by 27 Spirits" on page 17.

What the future holds for TJ, peace-building and reconstruction in the future, remains to be seen. One thing that can be guaranteed, however, is that like past decade it will not remain the same. □



Contributors

EDITOR: ORYEM NYEKO **WRITERS:** LINO OWOR OGORA, KATE ALEXANDER KASIVA MULLI, NANCY APIYO, EVELYN AMONY, HARRIET ALOYOCAN, MELISSA McCAULEY, RITAH APIO.



Your views!

Geoffrey A.: From the perspective of equality, international justice to me would meet the challenge in this era of conflict, the need to share beyond geographical boundaries or political boundaries. It is unhealthy to talk of international justice when there are countries or nations that support other countries or nations to launch wars against others, if other countries still fund or support forceful means of peace building instead of facilitating harmless means. International justice should focus on cross generational round table programming where issues are discussed on a round table where all ages are represented! The question is how do we involve or bring on board the young voices of faces to discuss issues of justice at all levels, national and international?

Share your views

Voices magazine welcomes your views on transitional justice and reconciliation in Uganda. To contribute to future issues write to voices@justiceandreconciliation.com or Justice and Reconciliation Project, P.O. Box 1216, Gulu, Uganda. Make sure to like our facebook page www.facebook.com/pages/justice-and-reconciliation-project or follow us on twitter @JRP_Uganda.



Empty promises and the pursuit of transitional justice in northern Uganda since 2005

LINO OWOR OGORA

WELCOME YOU all to last quarterly issue of the *Voices* magazine for 2013.

It has been an eventful year for transitional justice in Uganda. Among other events:

Part two of Uganda's Amnesty Act of 2000, the lapse of which in May 2012 abolished the granting of amnesty, was reinstated in full force by the parliament of Uganda, meaning rebels who abandon rebellion will continue to benefit from Amnesty.

The Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) released the third draft of the proposed transitional justice policy and civil society organisations and other stakehold-

ers were invited to participate in providing feedback. At the close of 2013 JLOS was on the verge of releasing the fourth draft of the policy.

The much anticipated trial of Thomas Kwoyelo, the former commander of the LRA did not take place. Kwoyelo continues to languish in prison as he waits for a Supreme Court ruling on whether he is eligible for amnesty or whether he should stand trial for crimes committed while in the LRA.

Meanwhile another LRA commander, Caesar Acelam, who was captured by the UPDF in 2012, was never charged before the International Crimes Division (ICD) and nobody knows what will happen to him.

Civil society organisations like the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) attended and organised various workshops and events to discuss and debate transitional justice appropriate mechanisms to promote redress for victims of the conflict.

In summary, it has been a busy year for transitional justice and all governmental and non-governmental actors deserve to congratulate themselves for a job well

done in 2013. But what about the victims of the conflict? What will they celebrate? Where are the victims located in all this hullabaloo and racket about transitional justice? Do they have a cause to celebrate the completion of the fourth draft of the transitional justice policy? How exactly do they benefit from the re-instatement of the Amnesty Act?

Transitional justice has come a long way since 2005, but all developments since then have not yielded significant fruits for its intended beneficiaries, the victims of conflict. Transitional justice as a term

Transitional justice has come a long way since 2005, but all developments since then have not yielded significant fruits for its intended beneficiaries.

first gained prominence in Uganda in and around the year 2005, when the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for five top commanders of the LRA. It was the ICC's first case since the coming into force of the Rome Statute (the treaty that established the ICC) on 1st July 2002. Earlier in 2003 the Ugandan Government had referred the case of the LRA to the ICC. Hungry for its first case, Louis Moreno Ocampo, the ICC prosecutor at the time, jumped at the opportunity and issued arrest warrants.

The issuance of arrest warrants in 2005 kicked off a debate on whether the ICC would deliver justice to the victims of conflict in northern Uganda or not. The move attracted opposition from religious leaders, traditional leaders and a cross section of civil society leaders in northern Uganda who argued that the ICC would strengthen the LRA's resolve to continue with, rather than abandon rebellion.

In 2006, the Juba peace talks came in, and the debate on transitional justice began in earnest. It all began with the debate on whether the ICC was the best

solution or whether the peace negotiations should take precedence, a debate that came to be referred to as the 'peace versus justice' debate. The LRA fanned the flames of this debate by continuously insisting they would not sign the peace agreement unless the ICC withdrew its

arrest warrants. The ICC stood its ground. It was a stalemate. To break the deadlock, various alternatives to the ICC were suggested from all imaginable sources. Religious and traditional leaders proposed the use of traditional justice mechanisms of the various ethnic groups of northern Uganda. Others proposed the use of alternative justice mechanisms such as truth and reconciliation commissions while some proposed the establishment of local courts in Uganda and the domestication of the Rome Statute to allow Uganda to try international crimes.

Then somebody (and don't ask me who because I don't know) introduced the notion of transitional justice to collectively refer to all these various options. And the term gained popularity and spread like wildfire.

To be realistic, a full scale transitional programme can only be funded by the government and donors if it is to make an impact. Civil society complements government programmes. But in the absence of a comprehensive government funded transitional justice programmes, the impact of CSOs remain minimal despite the fact that they do a lot to help victims.

It was an easy term to grasp. All one needed to do was to read a little literature on transitional justice and become an authority on the subject. A practicing certificate was not needed for one to claim one was a transitional justice practitioner. And as the field of transitional justice cut across all academic disciplines (economics, sciences, humanities, technology) everyone was suddenly an authority on transitional justice. Religious leaders, civil society work-

ers, politicians, government civil servants (the list is endless) all joined the band wagon. Before we knew it the Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) had been established, and their first task was to draft a frame-

Transitional justice has come a long way since 2005, but all developments since then have not yielded significant fruits for its intended beneficiaries.

work for the implementation of transitional justice. Uganda now had a whole government sector dedicated to overseeing transitional justice.

Civil society organisations and any other parties who were brilliant enough to convince donors cashed in on this excitement by attracting huge donor funding. Experts on transitional justice flooded Uganda, presumably to give their views on what needed to be done. Uganda and northern Uganda in particular was the hot spot for transitional justice students and researchers

The rest is history.

But has transitional justice really delivered justice for victims in Uganda?

Since 2006 JLOS has been working on drafting a policy whose finalisation date is still uncertain. The

government has implemented programmes such as the Peace, Recovery and Development Programme (PRDP) but core transitional justice pillars such as accountability, truth-seeking, reparations, institutional reforms

and national reconciliation have not been implemented. Instead the government has concentrated on infrastructure development at the expense of these pillars. Civil society has used up massive donor funding in the name of promoting healing and reconciliation for victims, but the lives of victims has not changed much. This is

not because civil society is corrupt, but simply because the demand is much higher than the resources CSOs can marshal to respond to these needs.

To be realistic, a full scale transitional programme can only be funded by the government and donors if it is to make an impact. Civil society complements government programmes. But in the absence of a comprehensive government funded transitional justice programmes, the impact of CSOs remain minimal despite the fact that they do a lot to help victims. Never-the-less these efforts are better than nothing and should therefore continue to be funded by donors.

The result of all this is that the majority of the victims are still where they were in 2005. For these victims, the term transitional justice can be equated to a romantic dream that was never fulfilled. □



The opening of the trial of former LRA commander Thomas Kwoyelo in 2012. Pending a Ugandan Supreme Court decision, Kwoyelo's eligibility for amnesty for armed rebellion against the Government of Uganda remains unclear.

Influencing Uganda's Transitional Justice Policy: From Sparking Interest to Blazing the Path

KATE ALEXANDER

The launch of JRP report 'We Can't Be Sure Who Killed Us', Mukura, May 2011

SINCE 2005, JRP has lobbied the Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS) of the Government of Uganda, the body tasked with drafting and implementing the national transitional justice policy (JLOS) for policies on reparations, truth-telling mechanisms, a victim-centered process and gender-mainstreaming, but there were challenges. As late as 2006, when JRP would talk about transitional justice, "it was like we were talking to ourselves," recalls Programme Coordinator Lino Owor Ogora. Transitional justice was not a concept that JLOS, many other civil society organisations, or the Government of Uganda could understand or appreciate, and there was little to no interest in pursuing transitional justice as a comprehensive policy.

JRP continued discussing transitional justice, producing reports JLOS came to pay attention to, and began conducting trainings on transitional justice with government officials. The trainings, coupled with JRP publications and forums on transitional justice, gradually increased governmental appreciation of it. While JRP got the ball rolling, other civil society organisations began pushing it along further, and faster. Eventually, JLOS was able to recognise independently the need to draft a transitional justice policy, framework, and supporting legislation.

JRP joined JLOS' steering committee informally after

2008, and formally from 2010. As a member of the steering committee, composed of various representatives of the Government and ministries, civil society organisations and donors, JRP is a participant in regular meetings to screen and provide comments on the draft transitional justice policy before it is publicly disseminated, among other responsibilities. The civil society organisations on JLOS' steering committee have been consulted as key stakeholders in the drafting of Uganda's transitional justice policy, while at the same time keeping an

ear to the ground, listening to the calls of grassroots communities for the understanding, prioritisation, planning and implementation of a transitional justice (TJ) and reparations policy.

With a seat at the table, JRP is making strides towards transitional justice in that order: understanding, prioritisation, and, in the future, planning and imple-

mentation. Understanding was the preliminary, and daunting, challenge. It is achieved necessarily slowly, and progress towards a draft TJ policy remains somewhere in the understanding/prioritisation stages.

To further develop that understanding, in addition to the trainings for government officials previously mentioned, JRP began what would be a series of projects with JLOS. These projects have included a study of traditional and truth-telling mechanisms across Uganda, and teaming up with JLOS during the Juba peace talks

The civil society organisations on JLOS' steering committee have been consulted as key stakeholders in the drafting of Uganda's transitional justice policy, while at the same time keeping an ear to the ground, listening to the calls of grassroots communities for the understanding, prioritisation, planning and implementation of a transitional justice and reparations policy

to organise consultations in traditional justice and accountability.

JRP continues to build a deeper understanding of transitional justice publicly and within the draft transitional justice policy through the publication of reports and field notes, and by participating in JLOS events and inviting JLOS to participate in JRP conferences and workshops..

The biggest contribution civil society makes to JLOS is shaping policy, and how JRP makes that contribution is by ensuring JLOS has up to date information from victims perspectives on the ground. In 2013, with Avocats San Frontiers, JRP began to solicit views of victims on draft versions of the transitional justice policy.

This growth of understanding is reflected in the evolution of the draft transitional justice policy. The first draft was so scant, so shallow and lacking depth. It was really not a draft: it was a concept paper. But, a hurdle had been crossed: JLOS had prioritised the drafting of a transitional justice policy, and was now moving towards communicating their understanding of transitional justice and how it should be implemented.

The second draft of the transitional justice policy saw an expansion of the first draft, and some issues civil society organisations had taken with the first draft were resolved. However, there has been little improvement since those changes, leaving Uganda's transitional justice policy somewhere in the beginning planning stages.

In the second draft, and all subsequent drafts, the most common statement is 'the Government of Uganda *shall*': the Government *shall* establish a transitional justice mechanism, the Government *shall* imple-

The biggest contribution civil society makes to JLOS is shaping policy, and how JRP makes that contribution is by ensuring JLOS has up to date information from victims perspectives on the ground.

ment a reparations policy. However, the 'shall' statements are not supported by details on how the Government **will** pursue these policies. These statements are, however, supported by action steps adopted directly, sometimes word for word, from JRP reports and added to the transitional justice policy.

Thus, the biggest area for improvement is ensuring that the drafts are more detailed and answer the technical questions of how transitional justice will be implemented.

This policy must answer comprehensive questions of why and how transitional justice will be sought and implemented, for whom and by whom, where it is being implemented, and what exactly is being done.

As these questions of process and substance begin to be addressed in the transitional justice policy, JRP will shape reparations and gender-mainstreaming issues, two topics JRP tackles in the field, but which have been sorely missed from any draft of the transitional justice policy. These issues are neglected, but issues the Government of Uganda has more experience with, amnesty, for example, are dealt with in comparatively large detail in the draft policy.

There enlies the challenge: making JLOS and other members of the steering committee familiar with the material JRP and other civil society organisations address on a daily basis, so that 'should' statements become concrete, detailed steps for implementing transitional justice.

These steps will continue to be informed by a number of publications in which civil society organisations have defined and described ideal situations of transitional justice, which have been taken up for discussion, or word-for-word integration, by JLOS. □



Participating in the 2010 International Criminal Court (ICC) Review Conference in Kampala. JRP has played a key role in the development of transitional justice process in northern Uganda, including participating in the Juba peace talks between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Government of Uganda.



A Healing Wound: The journey of gender justice

NANCY APIYO

The launch of the Women's Advocacy Network (WAN), 25 May 2012.

SINCE ITS FORMATION, the Justice and Reconciliation Project has learned important lessons from working with women affected by conflict. After years of sharing their stories the women are beginning to overcome what happened to them and let go of the past. It has helped start a process of healing in the lives of the women. One of the women refers to it as “a wound that is starting to heal”.

JRP's Gender Justice Department pays special attention to transitional justice needs and concerns of vulnerable groups that are uniquely affected by conflict such as formerly abducted girls, men and women who were sexually violated in camps as well as children born in captivity. The department comprises of storytelling, legal sensitisation and advocacy.

The department was a brain child of Ododo Wa, a project that

was created to give women a culturally familiar space to talk about their experiences. Ododo Wa, meaning our stories, engages women in storytelling and theatre

Today over 200 women in well organised groups in Acholi sub-region are empowered to speak on their own. The women advocate for justice and reconciliation for war affected women through outreaches and radio talk shows to sensitise their communities about the challenges war-affected women face in the community.

performance. The women share their stories among themselves while giving each other peer support. Various methods are used to enable the women to freely express themselves. These include memory quilts, life maps, body maps, *wangoos*, dramas, songs, theatre and ribbon of life. These methods have helped to build the women's self-esteem. They have also helped to build trust and safety between us and the women. They have also served to share things that cannot

be easily expressed in words.

In 2011, the women decided that it was important to come out and speak about the issues they face. They felt that unless they speak, their plight may never be known or even addressed, so through organising themselves in a network they would be able to discuss issues that affect women and approach responsible stakeholders to respond to their needs. They saw this as an opportunity to speak and seek audience for responsible actors. Thus the Women's Advocacy Network was formed in May 2011.

Today over 200 women in well organised groups in Acholi sub-region are empowered to speak on their own. The women advocate for justice and reconciliation for war affected women through outreaches and radio talk shows to sensitise

their communities about the challenges war-affected women face in the community. They also meet stakeholders at various levels to talk about the plight of war-affected women. On the 23rd of September 2013, the women petitioned Gulu District Local Government on the challenges that women are facing after the conflict.

More to this, the participants felt that being organised in this group is empowering. They feel important and that they are people

Sharing their memories has helped empower the women. It has helped build their confidence and give them back a sense of their humanity. It has also given them the desire for justice. This is seen in the way the women have been able to speak out on their own.

with a message to pass across. Through this, they are able to work towards creating change in their own lives for instance fighting stigma and enable meaningful reintegration of war affected women.

Gender Justice has been providing capacity building for the women such as communication skills, mediation skills, leadership training and resource mobilisation, skills which are necessary for their advocacy initiatives.

The legal sensitisation work stream of the department has had dialogues with the women to ensure that their voices are articulated in the ongoing TJ debate. Women are informed of ongoing TJ debates such as the draft TJ policy and asked their thoughts on it. These thoughts, with consent from the women, are produced in form of quarterly reports, newsletters and policy briefs.

The legal programme has also supported mediation initiatives with women who have conflicts

in the community. There has also been sensitisation of the women on their rights and roles as mothers and also in the reuniting of children born in captivity with their paternal families.

The department began to work with one women's group that comprised of only formerly abducted women. Today the department is working with ten groups. These groups have been identified by the women themselves. Recently we added a boy's group to the list.

Sharing their memories has helped empower the women. It has helped build their confidence and give them back a sense of their humanity. It has also given them the desire for justice. This is seen in the way the women have been able to speak out on their own. It was a journey where the women rediscovered themselves, gained confidence and decided to do something about the violations and injustice they underwent. They had to look for ways of addressing the injustice they were subjected to and this was through forming the Women's Advocacy Network.

Ultimately, the women feel valued when are listened to when they talk. They become social activists and advocating for justice in their lives and for their children and this has shown us that justice is a process an individual goes through and not just the outcome.

□



The importance of victim-centred sensitisation

ORYEM NYEKO

SINCE 2012, JRP has implemented a legal programme designed to respond to the unique legal needs war-affected women face in northern Uganda. The programme monitors local and international policy developments with a view of making key recommendations to policy makers and civil society on gender and transitional justice. It also contributes to providing information to war-affected women about their rights related to land disputes, the rights of children born in captivity and mediation as an effective alternative form of dispute resolution.

In November 2013, women's groups were sensitised on Uganda's draft national transitional justice policy. This session provided an opportunity for the organisation to share the latest developments on the status of the policy with the women and provide explanations about its intricacies and the implications of its implementation. Since the sensitisation aims to be as participatory as possible, feedback on the policy was also sought from the women. The aim of this type sensitisation is to be victim-centred and to ensure that war-affected women are able to dialogue and contribute fully to developments that directly affect them.

One participant remarked that the sensitisation allows them to share what they learn with their community members. It has also given them a leadership status among their peers and provided them with a forum to ask questions that would not ordinarily be able to ask. □

Providing Justice: The Role of Documentation in Transitional Justice

HARRIET ALOYOCAN

WHEN ONE TALKS about transitional justice, we mean the transitional of societies from a period of political, authoritarian, dictatorial regimes or from conflicts. Transitional justice provides opportunities for such societies to address past human rights abuses, mass atrocities, or other forms of severe trauma in order to smooth the progress of a smooth transition into a more democratic or peaceful future. The core value of transitional justice is the very concept of justice which does not necessarily mean criminal justice. This concept and the political transformation, such as transition from conflict or regimes are linked toward a more peaceful, certain and democratic future.

As we document experiences of conflict we should be able to understand and know the relevance of documenting these experiences and how it will benefit community, nation and other persons at large. Documentation, as a role in transitional justice provides an account of rights abuse, including accounts of both victims and perpetrators. For the victims, it recognises their suffering, provides a method for emotional healing, and assures them that their experience will not be forgotten. Perpetrators' accounts are necessary in order to spot the root cause of abuses and be used as force for prevention and a reminder that the demand for justice will not be denied. It also serves to remind communities of their role for things which happened in their society and the importance of avoiding a sequence of revenge.

Documentation is vital to every element of a transitional justice process. For the purpose of **reparations**, docu-

mentation acts as proof in cases against perpetrators of human rights abuse and also of victims' efforts to create a truthful historical record and thereby determine who will be entitled to receive reparations in post-conflict contexts. The kind of reparations desired by the victims may include financial payments, health care and education services and compensation such as monetary compensation or apologies

Truth-telling initiatives allow actors in a country to explore past abuses and seek redress for victims. These processes aim to enable societies to examine and come to terms with past crimes and human rights violations in order to prevent their recurrence as they can also help victims obtain closure by knowing the truth about

what actually happened and understanding the atrocities they endured. Preserving good documentation is vital if any are to be used at a later date and the well written record may prevent future efforts to rewrite the past to deny events as the documentation can preserve people's history, memories and

contribute to conflict resolution and prevention. Truth-telling mechanisms are also test procedures to constructing memorials and museums. They also help to identify who may be entitled for reparations.

In terms of **memorialisation**, documentation contributes through its role seek to preserve memories of people or events. In the context of transitional justice, memory-based initiatives serve to honour those who died during conflict or other atrocities, examine the past, address contemporary issues and show respect to victims. They can help create records to prevent denial and to help societies move forward. Memorials may include memorial activities, such as architectural memorials,

Documentation is vital to every element of a transitional justice process. For the purpose of reparations, documentation acts as proof in cases against perpetrators of human rights abuses. Preserving good documentation is vital if any are to be used at a later date and the well written record may prevent future efforts to rewrite the past to deny events. In terms of memorialisation, documentation contributes through its role seek to preserve memories of people or events.

museums, and the monuments, annual prayer ceremony, and mass grave in northern Uganda, created in response to the war conducted by and against the Lord's Resistance Army there.

Documentation roles are acknowledged in **public institutional reform**, which includes reform of the police, military, and judiciary that often contribute to repression and other human rights violations. When societies undergo a transition, these institutions must be reformed in order to create accountability and prevent the recurrence of abuse. Institutional reform includes the process of restructuring these state actors to ensure that they respect human rights and abide by the rule of law. Re-

forms can include measures such as vetting disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programs which assist excombatants in re-joining society.

It is important to document experiences, which has both unrestricted and confidential element (a vital tool for on-going documentation work). The community should have access to archives outside their own communities or country that have important information which helps to shape the present as well as the future to understand how and why the conflict began and happened from the various perspectives of the people who were there at the time. □

Justice and Reconciliation Project publications

Since 2005, the Justice and Reconciliation Project has published timely reports on pertinent transitional justice issues - including policy briefs, field notes and statements. These and more are all available on www.justiceandreconciliation.com.



JRP's flagship report **'Roco Wat I Acoli: restoring Relationships in Acholi-land: Traditional Approaches to Justice and Reconciliation'**, published in 2005.



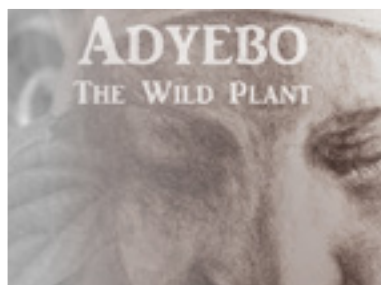
2 July 2007 marked the one-year anniversary of the initiation of peace talks between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda, hosted in the southern Sudanese capital of Juba. JRP took an active role in bringing the concerns and demands for justice and reconciliation from the grassroots to the bargaining table. The June signing of Agenda Item Three on Accountability and Reconciliation was in part the result of weeks of JRP's preparation of original research findings into a comprehensive presentation made to delegates.



The Mukura Massacre of 1989, FN XII - This 2011 Field Note provides a narrative of key events leading up to the massacre, based on the testimonies of survivors, and explores the major initiatives which were used by the incumbent Government to promote accountability, healing and reconciliation for the families of the Mukura victims and the survivors from the train wagon. A central finding of this report is that most of these initiatives to provide reparation—though likely well intentioned—were implemented in an untimely manner, with little involvement and consultation of the victims and in times of increased political incentive for Government.



The Beasts at Burcoro recounts atrocities by the NRA's 22nd Battalion in Burcoro village in April 1991. It explores the enduring challenges victims of the atrocities continue to face.



Adyebo: The Wild Plant is a compilation of stories told at a 'storytelling' session organised under JRP's Ododo Wa programme. It is the story of women of different ages and backgrounds in northern Uganda that were abducted during the height of the Lord's Resistance Army conflict in the region. Their stories illustrate the unique challenges faced by women during and after conflict.

I am playing a role in post-conflict northern Uganda

Stella was abducted by the LRA in 1994 and returned home in 2005. She is one of the founding members of the Women's Advocacy Network (WAN) and today is part of its steering committee. She has engaged actively in ongoing TJ debates in northern Uganda, such as during the consultations on Amnesty and the TJ policy and on reparations. She is one of the women who have been empowered through JRP's Gender Justice programmes such as Ododo Wa and is advocating for justice for war affected women under the umbrella of WAN.

WE BEGAN TO work with JRP under the storytelling programme in 2008. Our group was identified by the first groups that JRP began to work with. It was at first a Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) group in the community but later split from the rest of the community and remained with only formerly abducted women. We decided to break away from the rest of the group because we felt the magnitude of our problem was a lot.

We began to meet regularly and that was when JRP found us. JRP first worked with us under the storytelling programme. JRP kept on coming back to us from time to time and never forgot us unlike other people who interviewed us, got our ideas and we never heard from again.

Slowly I began to gain confidence and began to talk openly of the past. Before that I used to fear telling people that I was abducted. I thought that I would be looked at as a perpetrator if I talked of the bush. It is normal to have such guilt. Now am free to talk about my experiences without fear. I was a very angry person but now I feel relieved of the past. I seldom get angry. Now I only get angry when I am lacking something but not because of what I experienced in the war.

During the storytelling we had peer support and gave each other advice. The peer support has been important and helped me cope up with life. I don't regret the past but just want to have a better future. As a group we have been able to forgive each other. Women hurt each other in the bush and as we shared our stories, we realised that it was important to reconcile with each other in the group. Before that women had vendettas with each other.

I was among the women who formed the Women's Advocacy Network. I am now respected and valued by the community and stakeholders because of the advocacy we are doing. I have been

able to attend meetings and take part in discussions on justice. Through these meetings I made my contribution together with the other women towards implementation and formulating of policies. This has been important because we have authentic information. We are the real survivors.

As a member of WAN I attended a meeting on amnesty where I shared that not everyone should have been given amnesty. There was no point in giving amnesty to women who were abducted. I also shared that the amnesty package was not gender sensitive. Right now there are plans of revisiting amnesty. If we had not talked nothing would have been known.

Together with the other women I have been able to talk about the violations that we were subjected to. I have also shared in various platforms the reintegration challenges we are facing and how I think it can be solved. I am not stigmatised in the community since the rate of stigma has reduced because of the advocacy. People know that not all those who stayed in the bush were fighters and bad.

I am playing in a role in post-conflict northern Uganda and I feel better and at times I don't feel as though I was abducted. I didn't know that I would have value one day. I feel valued and respected because the contribution am making. I know that what I am doing is important. I used to think I was useless but given the platform to speak and listened to makes me realise I am important and valued. This restores my dignity and relieves me from the past. Recently, JRP partnered with an organisation and I got treatment for a condition that I had been living with for a long time as a result of the war. This has also improved my life.

Even if we have accomplished certain things there is still a lot to be done. We are still in the process of achieving justice and transformation in our lives. JRP and other stakeholders should work together with the government so that we get reparations. Even if our future has been robbed our lives can still be repaired and transformed so that we take good care of our children.

It should also be noted that we have urgent needs and can't wait for formal reparation to take place. The government should apologise for not protecting us and then give us reparation. There should also be remembrance for abductions. This day should be dedicated to women and children who were abducted and returned home. Women were courageous and walked through jungles to come back home.

My prayer is that JRP should continue to work with us. We trust them. We are still committing to working with JRP because they fully support us and take our issues seriously. They value our ideas. We were not given the chance to advocate for ourselves before. Women were not a priority and not given the chance to speak on their own. People spoke on our behalf. I have hopes that what JRP has begun to do will bring a change in my life. □

Lessons learned from working with women survivors in northern Uganda

KASIVA MULLI

THERE HAS BEEN tremendous progress at international level on the rights of women in conflict. Resolutions such as United Nations Security Council resolutions 1325, 1820, 1889 and 2106 to the codification of sexual crimes as international crimes amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Rome Statute are some of the great achievements we have made in gender and transitional justice. Agenda Item Three of the Juba Peace process's Agreement on Justice and Accountability which highlighted the need to take special consideration of women and children affected by the war was also an achievement worth applause in Uganda. However, despite these great strides in policy provisions, the majority of ordinary women survivors of conflict continue to feel detached from such processes and their engagement is still minimal. The question becomes why?

In northern Uganda, women were subjected to horrific forms of violations during the two decade war. As a result most of them developed health problems, such as gynecological problems and other physical injuries, as well as trauma. They also become mothers through forced marriages and rape, continue to suffer from abject poverty, and have become primary bread winners for their families with little or no resources. They and their children are often subjects of stigmatisation in their communities.

These conditions which have continued to exist even after five years since the collapse of the Juba peace talks and the withdrawal of LRA from Ugandan territory have made women survivors to feel disenfranchised and wonder why progress at the international level does not reflect in to their ordinary lives. How come that, though there is ongoing plans to implement the transitional justice processes in Uganda and there has been a number of policies passed to deal with the aftermath of the war, gendered voices are still missing? It is my opinion that though good intended, transitional justice processes do not always focus on removing impeding obstacles that usually hinder the full participation of such women and thus incorporate their voices in the ongoing processes.

JRP's experiences while engaging with women survivors has made us realise that women are willing to participate and engage in processes that will result to improvement of their lives but they have great impeding obstacles that hinder this participation. Such obstacles include social cultural practices that hinder them from speaking out, stigmatisation, poverty and lack of support at the community level.

Poverty is a hindrance because women will never prioritise participation of a transitional justice process over access to basic necessities. As much as justice and ac-

countability is crucial and important to women, it does not address their immediate needs that are essential for their own and their children's survival. It becomes hard to comprehend such things on an empty stomach.

Health problems continue to hinder them from having an active life where they can work and provide for their family. Many have been denied access to land because of their status in society leading to them flocking in town centers where cost of living is high. This results in poverty and vulnerability to abuse and exploitation and as such makes economic empowerment crucial in post-conflict situations.

Another hindrance to women engagement is empowerment. The community in northern Uganda is patriarchal. This means that often women are not allowed to hold opinions or to air them. They are marginalised and their issues are often ignored. Patriarchal control

JRP's experiences while engaging with women survivors has made us realise that women are willing to participate and engage in processes that will improve their lives but they have great imbeding obstacles that hinder this participation.

also means that the society has socialised them to heavily rely on the men in their lives to speak on their behalf and to provide for them economically placing them in a vulnerable position where they live by the whims of the said men. If they are not allowed to hold an opinion they cannot then be free to discuss issues affecting them in post-conflict situations.

Women also need to be empowered with information. They lack access to information because the majority is either illiterate or terms related to transitional justice that are generally are very technical and difficult to understand. Due to social and cultural practices they are usually not allowed to attend meetings where they can gain from such information. Creative ways need to be adapted for them to access information in the most efficient and simple way. Such information gives them opportunities to understand

the processes and policies in place and also gives them a chance to have their views and opinions which in turn can be used to adopt policies that respond to their needs.

Women by nature are peaceful and favour social cohesion and reconciliation because acceptance of them and their children by their community is crucial. Thus a reconciliation process that is not community based does not make sense to them. Women have also begun to support traditional justice processes because they are seen to address this need for community reconciliation. However, in most cases traditional justice processes lack provisions for dealing with gendered crimes. It is important for transitional justice practitioners to appreciate the role played by community systems in post-conflict recovery and thus empower them to take into consideration gender issues.

At JRP, we have tried to fill in

these gaps by establishing creative ways of engaging women survivors such as our Ododo Wa project, where we are able to provide an informal setting for women to get information discuss experiences and opinions in relation to post-conflict recovery. Through the Women's Advocacy Network, women survivors have become empowered to speak out about issues affecting them. We also continue to ensure that traditional justice mechanisms take into considerations unique gender needs.

We have learnt that if transitional justice does not take into account how a community treats its women, then they will not offer such women an opportunity to become active participants in post-conflict situations. In any post-conflict situations, reparations are important and urgent as are programmes that empower women economically

and ensure they access social safety-nets. Informal processes are becoming common in post-conflict societies as they are quick, community owned and led and strengthen reconciliation. Engagement and support for such processes to include gendered aspects are crucial. □



The journey of the Women's Advocacy Network

EVELYN AMONY

Evelyn Amony has been the chairperson of the Women's Advocacy Network since its formation in 2011.

In this article, she describes the creation of WAN, the successes as well as the challenges it has faced in advocating for the needs of war-affected women.

AFTER THE STORYTELLING sessions we came up with an idea to form the network to enable us advocate for our own issues since we felt that though many NGOs claimed they were helping us, many issues were left out. This made us to believe that we would be the best people to present out these issues without bringing in those who do not know anything at all to talk on our behalf.

We selected representatives of WAN from each group, the three groups within town brought in two members each and those outside town sent six members

that is all the groups where captured. We have twelve committee members of WAN that sit and discuss issues of the network.

The beginning was not easy. We first had WAN quarterly meeting and we agreed to advocate by moving to the different offices to inform them about our move. The advocacy was mainly done by the chairlady together with any other WAN representatives.

During the first WAN quarterly meeting, the committee raised issues of concern that they needed to work towards addressing them such as having radio talk show so as to sensitise the public to stop stigmatising the formerly abducted, teach the returnees how to conduct themselves in their homes and the community where they live. We felt this would also enable us to get advice from the different callers who may have what to say towards the topic we discuss over the radio. For example some parents denied their children when they came back home but after listening to peoples discussion they would ask forgiveness from their children and then welcome them back home.

Another issue was to try and see that we help in identifying the paternal side of our children born in captivity. This was to be done through use of radios, visiting Ker Kwaro Acholi and also other relevant offices.

We also wanted to see that the men who forced us to be their wives and mistreated us while in captivity to apologise for what they did to us.

We requested to have outreaches where once in a while we would go with the support of JRP staffs to sensitise the community on issues like land rights, child maintenance, stigma and many others.

We also had an idea of pushing forward to see that our concerns reach the national level.

Here are some of the successes I feel we have tried to achieve. I feel or basing on the reports from my colleagues from the different groups, stigmatisation has reduced of the radio talk show and community outreaches.

We also succeeded in identifying the paternal side of some few children and were able to visit them and with the help of JRP we were able to petition Gulu District Council and happy to say they took the matter seriously. Allow me say that I am happy since the petition has been approved and soon we hope to take it to the speaker of parliament which would be a great achievement to us.

Here are some of the things I feel we have not been able to achieve. We have failed to trace the paternal homes of most of our children born in captivity and this hurts us a lot.

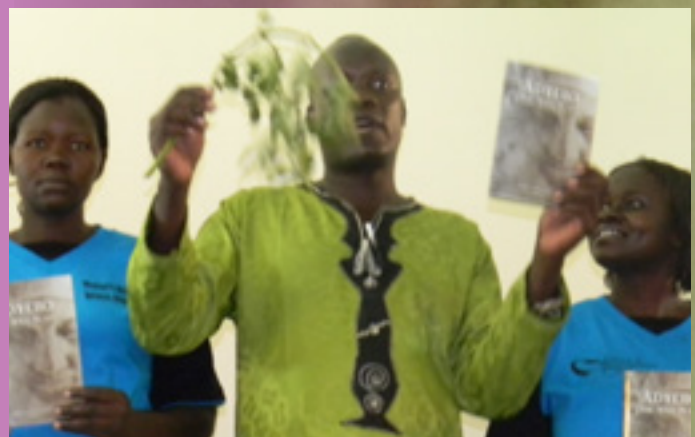
These men who forced us to be their wives at the same time mistreated have not yet apologised to us.

Funding is also a very big challenge. Many women cannot afford to trace the paternal families of their children on their own, and this makes them not want to participating in WAN's advocacy initiatives fully.

As far as expectations are concerned, we want to expand WAN to all districts within Acholi and Lango region so that all the women can get justice. We want each

woman to be independent and stand on their own so that they may be able to survive with or without the organisation. □

Women's Advocacy Network anniversary, May 2013





Haunted By 27 Spirits – part two

LINO OWOR OGORA AND HARRIET ALOYOCAN

*In the last issue of **Voices**, we introduced Denis, a young man who was abducted by LRA rebels at five years old. During captivity he was forced to kill twenty-seven people. On his return, Denis was isolated from the rest of his community and found himself harbouring dark thoughts. He was advised that in order to move on, he would have to appease the spirits of the twenty-seven people that he killed. This is his story.*

When I returned I told my uncle everything about life in the bush and I even told him I had killed very many people. And from that time when I first killed, my life changed, and the people's spirits haunts me a lot. That may explain the reason why I am like this and I feel better when I stay alone because when I am in a place with many people thoughts of killing come to my mind and I fear that I could end up doing something bad.

DENIS RETURNED HOME a changed person. Having been abducted when he was only five years old, he returned when he was 15. His innocence had been taken and he was now a killer haunted by his past.

One of the challenges Denis faced immediately on his return was the manner of his welcome. Denis felt he did not receive the heartfelt welcome he deserved from the village as a whole, including his own relatives. Denis felt the 250,000 Ugandan shillings he received from the Amnesty Commission was mismanaged by his relatives. In his opinion, the money should have been used for performing the traditional rituals required for his cleansing.

The Amnesty Commission gave me money (250,000/=), a mattress and a blanket as my package to carry home to begin a new life. But what really hurt me is that when I went to Lira I was not welcomed warmly. My aunt misused the reintegration money. I gave the mattress to my mother. Life was so hard in Lira that I decided to

come back and live with my uncle in Koch Goma.

Interview with Denis, Koch Goma Village, July 2012

Denis also failed to cope with post-abduction life. He was often unable or unwilling to participate in activities such as farming which was a source of livelihood for his family. Denis also faced a lot of stigmatisation from the villagers, especially the youth.

As a result he drifted apart from the villagers and was often alone. According to Denis, whenever he sat among people, or when he was angry, different thoughts would race through his mind and he would even feel like killing people who pointed fingers at him. He therefore decided to stay isolated as a means of preventing himself from doing anything he would regret. His only friend was a relative called Hannington who understood him and treated him well.

My problems are very many because, one I face a lot of stigmatisation from the people around especially the youth, when I am with them and because of the stigmatisation I have decided to live alone and when I sit among people, or when am angered, different kind of thoughts starts to ring in my mind like maybe I should kill the people who point fingers at me and I decided to stay alone.

Interview with Denis, Koch Goma Village, July 2012.

Worst of all Denis was haunted by the 27 spirits of the people he had killed while in captivity. This discovery was made following a visit to an *ajwaka* by Denis' uncle after

Denis displayed abnormal behavior and revealed to his uncle the atrocities he had committed while in captivity. Denis believes the welcoming rituals performed for him on his return were inadequate to deal with the problems he was facing.

When I returned I was told to step on the eggs and water was sprinkled as I entered the house. No other ritual was performed and that is why I say I was not welcomed in the right way which hurts me a lot and has contributed to my condition.

Interview with Denis, Koch Goma Village, July 2012.

Of these 27 spirits four were extremely aggressive and ready to kill Denis if their demands were not fulfilled. One of these was the spirit of a civilian boy from Palaro who was not happy with Denis for killing him without reason while on their way to Sudan. This was the boy Denis killed after the Atiak massacre. Denis had been ordered to kill this boy because he could not walk as fast as the LRA wanted him to. The second aggressive spirit was that of Denis' former commander whom he killed during their retreat from Teso region. He was angry with Denis for killing him instead of helping him. The third aggressive spirit was that of a Dinka Sudanese businessman Denis killed around Agoro Hills in Kitgum District. The fourth aggressive spirit was that of a Langi from Lira district who demanded a cock.

Denis' condition is referred to as *cen* in Acholi, or spiritual haunting in English. The Acholi believe that *cen* is a condition where a person is haunted by spirits of dead people he killed. It is believed that such spirits are often seeking vengeance against the person who killed them. *Cen* manifests in different ways such as madness, unexplained illnesses and other forms of abnormal behavior. If not attended to, *cen* could even lead to death.

In Acholi culture, one of the first stages to healing a person suffering from *cen* requires consultation of the dead people's spirits by an *ajwaka*, who performs a ritual ceremony called *lwongo tipu*, or calling the spirits of the dead. The traditional healer pleads with the dead peoples' spirits, asking them to stop haunting the victim. As a condition, the spirits tormenting a person afflicted by *cen* will often demand for sacrifices.

Following his consultation with the 27 spirits, the solution, according to the *ajwaka*, was to carry out a *moyo kum* (cleansing of the body) ceremony for Denis and offer sacrifices to the spirits haunting him in order to pacify them.

In Acholi culture it is believed that spirits haunting a person always make different demands according to their whims.

When consulted by the witch doctor, the spirit of the boy from Palaro had warned that Denis would never live a happy life. However, when the traditional healer pleaded with him to pardon Denis, arguing that it was not Denis' wish to kill him, the boy's spirit agreed to pardon Denis if he met his demands - a black goat, a black cock, alcohol and a bottle of soda.

The spirit of Denis' former commander similarly threatened that Denis would never have a peaceful life. However, when the traditional healer pleaded with the commander's spirit he demanded that Denis return his army uniform and provide a bullet, *matooke* (green bananas), a black goat, a black cock and some alcohol.

The spirit of the Dinka businessman also demanded a goat, soda and alcohol. According to the witch doctor, the businessman claimed he was killed while on a trip to purchase these things in the hope that he would sell them in Sudan.

The spirit of the Langi man, when consulted also had its demands, among which was a cock.

The rest of the 23 spirits, while not aggressive, also kept haunting Denis and demanded various items and sacrifices. In total, the demands included: *matooke*, soda, rice, a black he-goat, an army uniform, a bullet, tea, alcohol, a new knife, prepared food (*boo*, millet bread and potatoes), cooking oil for cooking the food, a black cock and a cigarette.

Other items required for the traditional ceremony were cleansing water from Ayago River, *opal* (a wooden dish), *ajur* (dry grass), and a calabash (*awal*) to be used for carrying the water for cleansing.

In addition, Denis' family had to come up with 500,000 Ugandan shillings for paying the traditional healer who would perform the rituals. It took a while for Denis' family to gather all the items required and part of the fees for the ceremony.



Walking to the ceremony. Credit: Kate Lonergan.

The traditional ceremony

A number of rituals exist in Acholi traditional culture and some of these have been adapted for reintegrating and rehabilitating formerly-abducted persons. One of the rituals performed for Denis immediately after his return was the *nyono tong-gwe-no* (stepping on the egg) ritual. This ritual was historically used by the Acholi for welcoming back people who had been away from home for an extended period of time in order to cleanse them from abominable acts they could have committed. Another symbolic ritual performed for Denis was *Iwoko pik wang* (washing away tears). This ritual involves family members washing their faces with water which is then sprinkled on the person in question as a form of blessing.

The above are all welcoming rituals.

For a person suffering from *cen*

According to Acholi culture, a ceremony such as this is usually performed away from the homestead, preferably in a forest or bush. The walk to the designated venue of the ceremony started with a traditional burial folk song as a symbol that the people involved were in mourning.

(spiritual haunting), however, more elaborate rituals such as *moyo kum* (cleansing of the body) and *laketeket* (spiritual exorcism) are often required. These rituals require the offering of sacrifices depending on the spirits' demands. Given that these rituals are expensive, it took time before the family could gather the requirements. The total cost of the ritual, including the traditional healer's costs, amounted to 600,000 Ugandan shillings, which for an average low income family like that of Denis is a lot of money. When Denis' family finally came up with all the requirements and a down payment for the *ajwaka's* fee, the ceremony was fixed for 6 August 2012.

The first thing the *ajwaka* did was to consult the spirits haunting Denis and reaffirm their willingness to have the ceremony on this particular day. This consultation was con-

ducted at 6.00 am and only required Denis' parents, a few elders and the *ajwaka* to be present. The spirits consented to having the ceremony.

After seeking the consent of the spirits, the requirements for the ceremony were checked and all the participants gathered together in the home of Denis' uncle.

According to Acholi culture, a ceremony such as this is usually performed away from the homestead, preferably in a forest or bush. The walk to the designated venue of the ceremony started at 1.40 p.m. with a traditional burial folk song as a symbol that the people involved were in mourning. As the people walked to the venue for the ceremony, three more songs were sung.

On arrival at the venue, grass and saplings were cleared to create an opening in the bush to perform the ceremony. Denis was told to build a fire for cooking the spirits' food while

others gathered firewood.

After clearing the ground, Denis started

cooking the food demanded by the spirits. The traditional healer and the other men built *abila* (shrines) that the spirits were to reside in when summoned. *Abila* are significant in Acholi culture. In many Acholi homesteads, *abila* are built and maintained as shrines in which spirits of departed ancestors reside and receive offerings. The traditional healer invited the spirits haunting Denis to reside in these *abila*.

The traditional healer then started to boil water, while Denis peeled the *matooke* and prepared it to be cooked for the spirits. This cooking signified the way Denis used to cook for the LRA while in captivity. Denis himself had to cook all the food demanded by the spirits.

The alcohol demanded by the boys' spirit from Palaro was first offered to him and then given to people gathered at the ceremony to drink. The alcohol had its effect and the people soon began to sing and

dance to traditional folk songs as they drank and while Denis continued with his cooking.

After Denis finished cooking, he served the food demanded by the spirits in small calabashes. The tea was served in small cups. He then distributed the food and tea to the *abila* which had been built for the spirits. Each spirit was served according to its demands. For example, the bullet and army uniform were placed in the *abila* built for the army commander along with his food. Then Denis also sat down and ate his share of the food he had served the spirits to show they were in harmony. Most of these spirits demanded for a goat and cock. One goat and one cock had been brought along to be sacrificed to the spirits. These were brought near to Denis who proceeded to kill the goat using a club. The goat died without making a sound or passing any droppings, a sign that the spirits had accepted it as an offering.

After he had finished killing the goat, he held the cock by head and twisted its neck. Vital organs of the goat such as the liver, heart and kidneys were offered to the different spirits. The cock was thrown into the bush where (according to the *ajwaka*) it would be found by the spirits who had demanded it.

Then the traditional healer told the gathering to sing a traditional burial folk song for the dead spirits and dance. As the singing and dancing was going on, more sacrifices were offered to the spirits. Denis was instructed by the *ajwaka* to offer soda and beer to the *abila* of the spirits who had demanded them. Denis then cut open the dead goat and, on instructions from the *ajwaka*, he cut off pieces from liver, lungs, heart and ribs and took them to the *abila* of all the spirits in fulfillment of their demands.

The gathering started another song and they danced to the success of the ceremony as Denis blew a *bila* (horn). The traditional healer told the gathering to sing 27 different traditional burial folk songs, one for each of the spirits.

After the 27 songs had been sung and dances performed, Denis'

uncle prayed to the spirits to pardon Denis because it had not been his wish to commit these atrocities. He offered the spirits different items such as soda and alcohol as he continuously pleaded with them to pardon Denis.

As he offered the soda to one spirit, he said, "I give to you this bottle of soda today to drink as you demanded and I kindly ask you to pardon my son Denis because it was not his own wish and making that he killed you. So take this and drink."

To another spirit he offered beer and said, "I give to you this bottle of alcohol to drink as you demanded and I still repeat that Denis was acting in response to orders and it was not his will and making to kill you, so please take this alcohol and pardon him."

To another spirit who had de-

Within those two weeks they started seeing positive changes in Denis. When he woke up in the morning he would sweep the compound and fetch water at the spring. Whereas Denis used to isolate himself, now he began socialising and interacting more frequently with his age mates.

manded milk, he said, "I also give you this milk to drink because among you [spirits] there were mothers who had children and were breast-feeding. So take this milk, drink and also give your children to drink since it is one of your demands. It was not Denis' will to kill you; he was also given orders to kill so please pardon him."

To the spirit who demanded biscuits, he said, "These biscuits are for the children since they demanded for it. So really if you are the ones making my son Denis to have a miserable life, then leave him and pardon him to live a happy life because it was not of his own will that he killed you, but he was acting on orders and it was a mistake."

To the commander who was haunting Denis, he said, "Here is your army uniform and bullet that you demanded. I give them back to you and still request you to pardon my son Denis, because he did not kill you at his own will but he followed orders from above, so take this and set him free."



Interviewing Denis prior to his traditional ceremony in 2012. Credit: Kate Lonergan.

The pleas by Denis' uncle are significant because in Acholi culture one clan member's crime affects the whole clan under the principle of collective guilt. The resulting punishment is also shared by the whole clan. In the case of Denis for example, the spiritual haunting he was facing could spread to the whole clan if not attended to. Thus Denis' uncle had to intercede

with the spirits on his behalf.

Then Denis held a spear and moved three times round the tree where the sacrifices had been offered. According to the *ajwaka*, this act symbolised the transfer of the spirits from Denis to the tree. The *ajwaka* then shaved Denis' forehead with a razor blade, and afterwards fixed the used blade into the tree trunk. This act also symbolised the transfer of the spirits from Denis to the tree.

The traditional healer finally washed Denis' head, hands and legs using the cleansing herbs mixed with the water from Ayago River in a calabash. He also asked everyone who had accompanied Denis to wash their hands and legs from the calabash before leaving the ceremony ground. This was done as a cleansing process for people who had accompanied Denis. It also marked the end of the ceremony and after this the assembled party started back home. Everyone was told not to look back as they walked so that the dead spirits that had left Denis

would not follow any of them. A traditional burial song was sung as they walked back home.

Evaluating the impact of the ceremony

One month after the ceremony, we visited Denis to see how he was doing. His family members seemed to be happy and satisfied that the ceremony had been a success. Denis himself said he felt better after the ceremony. He said he felt relieved from the spirits that used to haunt him.

His uncle also confirmed the positive changes in Denis. For example, after the traditional ceremony Denis had been instructed by the *ajwaka* not to leave home for two weeks, an instruction which he obeyed. Within those two weeks they started seeing positive changes in Denis. When he woke up in the morning he would sweep the compound and fetch water at the spring. Whereas Denis used to isolate himself, now he began socialising and interacting more frequently with his age mates. He also began helping with domestic chores.

In the evenings Denis and his uncle would sit at the *wang-oo* (fireplace) and chat with each other, a thing that never used to happen.

Denis himself has expressed a wish to go back to school and acquire some vocational skills to enable him to pursue a livelihood and be self-reliant. He hopes to acquire basic mechanical skills which he can use to repair machines such as motorbikes and bicycles. This would also enable him to start up a shop dealing in spare parts and inputs for bicycles. He also hopes to be able to build a home for himself in the future. His aunt and uncle are ready to help him. □

How the need for decent reburials helped community-led reconciliation in Lukodi

MELISSA McCAULEY



In August 2013, the community in Lukodi began the process of reburying the remains of people that died during and after the massacre almost a decade before. Initially, the reburial process was meant to dissipate growing tension between land-owners and the families of the deceased, but it ended up having a greater impact than anyone expected.

*This is an abridged version of **Finding Community Relevance in Transitional Justice: Drawing Attention to the Need for Decent Reburials – A Case of Lukodi in Gulu District Justice**, published by the *Justice and Reconciliation Project*.*

MEANINGFULLY ENGAGING SURVIVORS and victims' groups in community-led justice and reconciliation initiatives is the core objective of JRP's Community Mobilisation department. The term 'community-led' implies that communities should not only participate, but also play a central role in defining and addressing their own transition needs. This is not to say that they do not need support, quite the contrary.

JRP, in collaboration with Child Voice International (CVI) and the conflict-affected community of Lukodi, developed a Community Reconciliation (CORE) team with the hopes of creating a replicable community-driven model of reconciliation after years of violent conflict. JRP provides support by building the capacity of the team to be increasingly self-sustainable in the form

of various trainings, such as on advocacy and conflict analysis. JRP also plays an advisory role to the activities of the CORE Team when requested.

The Lukodi CORE team provides a shining example of a victims' group that has risen to the challenge of identifying, planning, and implementing relevant community-led justice and reconciliation initiatives. Thus far the 25-member team has engaged in the documentation of Lukodi conflict stories, developed a memorial site, organised remembrance events and held on-going meetings to identify potential or existing conflicts and respective strategies to address them. It is in these meetings that indecent burials were named as an issue preventing peaceful coexistence in the community.

According to Acholi tradition, if someone dies outside their ancestral land, the body must be brought back home for proper burial following traditional rituals. If not brought home and properly buried, it is believed that the spirit of the deceased will feel deserted and will come back to haunt and bring harm to family members and even the wider community. This spiritual vengeance is referred to as *cen*. Laying a loved one's soul to rest is of utmost important in Acholi tradition, however in the midst of violent conflict, and the chaos that comes with it, this becomes a formidable, if not impossible, task.

On the 19th of May 2004, LRA rebels carried out a gruesome rampage in the village of Lukodi. Those that made it through the day alive joined the staggering numbers

of northern Ugandans in forced displacement. The community members scattered in all directions, however the majority relocated to the nearby Coope IDP camp.

Due to the chaotic environment, most of the affected families of those killed in the massacre did not have the time, means, or state of mind to carry out decent burials for their loved ones.

Those who relocated continued to live in times of great insecurity and suffer from the harsh living conditions of the overcrowded camps. Therefore, family members of any who died, whether it was from further killings, disease, or other causes, were forced to give similarly hasty burials away from the land of their homes.

In 2006, the community of Lukodi gradually started the resettlement process, which would last for years. The challenge of facing realities past and rebuilding lives obliterated by the conflict days continues to plague Lukodi, and countless other communities in northern Uganda, today.

In the years after settlement, complaints of *cen* permeated the community. Affected family members experienced nightmares, abnormal thoughts, mental disturbances, miscarriages, sickness, and feelings of being 'stuck' that prevented happiness and productivity. On top of the experiences of *cen*, tensions between affected families and landowners arose. The landowners wanted the remains reburied near ancestral homes, so that they could use the land for their own purposes. Cultural tradition forbids these landowners from making use of any land containing dead bodies. As much as affected family members wanted reburials, the majority did not have the means to do so. This tension continued to escalate with no clear resolution in sight.

"When you are not happy with yourself or your neighbour, there can be no peace. Community members were annoyed of the on-going tensions. It became a burden for the entire community," the secretary of the CORE Team, Vincent Oyet said.

In the absence of the taking of accountability by the government or the LRA, the CORE team decided to push forward with a community-driven reburial process to bring healing and peace to the community.

Community-led preparation

After recognising the need for reburials, the CORE team sought out participation from the Acholi cultural institution, Ker Kwaro Acholi. The approval of sub-county officials was also sought. The team proceeded with planning meetings, in consultation with JRP and cultural leaders, to complete tasks such as the creation of a



budget. They also worked tirelessly to identify affected families who desired and needed support in a reburial.

Once identified, the team assisted in organising family meetings necessary for logistical and emotional preparation. All the while, the CORE team mobilised and solicited contributions from relevant stakeholders. JRP was able to provide financial contributions, while various community members were able to provide support mostly in the form of reburial materials.

Landowners played their part by granting permission to families for exhumations and directing them to grave sites. Some of these landowners even cleared the graves in preparation for the exhumations and accompanied the families to the new burial site.

A reburial event involving the community

The perseverance and hard work of the CORE team paid off on the 20th of August 2013, the opening day of the reburials. Hundreds of Lukodi community members, cultural leaders, local leaders, the media and various CSO representatives were in attendance as the event was kicked off with a ceremonial welcome of the acting Acholi paramount chief Rwot Peter Oola Ojigi.

Acholi tradition was closely followed with the sacrifice of a goat for each body to be exhumed, the wrapping of the remains in a blanket or bed sheet, the throwing of *wee* (food in the process of digestion taken from a goat's intestines after slaughter) in the old grave, the cleansing of the transport vehicle with a chicken and the reburial near the homes. These rituals were performed

"When you are not happy with yourself or your neighbour, there can be no peace. Community members were annoyed of the on-going tensions. It became a burden for the entire community."

to bring peace both to the families and the spirits of their loved ones.

All in all, 53 bodies were successfully exhumed and reburied as a part of a week long event. The bodies were recovered from 11 locations, with large numbers coming from Lukodi and Coope. Besides Lukodi, there were eight other locations in which recovered bodies were reburied.

Evaluating the impact of the reburials

According to the project beneficiaries, the reburial process, from planning meetings to the reburial, brought unity within families and reconciliation between landowners and affected families and strengthened community relations overall. Trust was built between the CORE team and community and there were noticeable improvements of teamwork within the CORE team.

The working partnership with the cultural institution enabled the proper execution of cultural practices. Beneficiaries saw the teaching of cultural values and traditions to the entire community as another significant achievement. The passing of knowledge to younger generations encouraged many community members because they believe it will ensure the continuity of traditional practices.

Family members also spoke of the happiness that the reburials brought to them after years of waiting. They report that the experience of *cen* and related fear no longer plagues the community and the “pain in their hearts” has been removed.

“My heart is at peace now, I am indeed very relieved that finally my husbands’ remains are going back home where he belongs. This is such an emotional but happy moment for me and my family,” one woman said. □

For more information about the Lukodi massacre of 2004, see JRP’s Lukodi Massacre Field Note No. , available on www.justiceandreconciliation.com.



Launch of community-led documentation in Lukodi

RITAH APIO

On the 20th November 2013, JRP's Documentation department launched community-led documentation in Lukodi. Community-led documentation gives victims the opportunity to comfortably express their experiences in various ways to preserve memory and to promote closure and healing. The Commu-

As highlights of the day, there was a call for the local leaders at district levels to come out and support memorial efforts such as annual memorial prayers in Lukodi, a call for JRP to continue supporting war-affected communities in other places as well.

nity Reconciliation (CORE) team in Lukodi, with the help of community members, was able to document their own experiences during the conflict through poems, drawings, songs and a banner depicting life stories and experiences at the camps. Brochures were also created to provide more information about the Lukodi memorial site.

The launch of community-led documentation in Lukodi was attended by community members of Lukodi, traditional leaders, victim representatives from Burcoro, NGOs operating in Bungatira sub-county, JRP staff, JRP Board, Gulu Local Government leaders and officials from the Norwegian Embassy in Kampala.

The event started with a dance from the women of Lukodi, then, recorded poems and songs were played for the guests while Vincent Oyet, a member

of the CORE team, provided a brief description of life during the camp.

The chief guest Mr. Holm, a representative of the Norwegian Embassy that has supported JRP through the years of its work, arrived with the team from JRP's Board and Secretariat along with leaders from Gulu District Local Government. They were warmly welcomed with "bwo-la dance" by the pupils of Lukodi Primary School.

There was an exhibition at the memorial site of different memories that the communities of Lukodi went through during the conflict. The exhibits included a wooden map depicting the different zones of Laco Anga, Lalweny, Loyo Boo, Lagot ki Col and Lukodi, which were all displaced to Lukodi Internally Displaced Persons' (IDP) Camp before the Lukodi massacre of 2004,.

There was also a story book called 'Ododo pa Lukodi ma Lwak Ocoyo' which speaks of the major events in Lukodi from 1971. Several drawn pictures depicting community experiences of conflict and peace were displayed as well as poems and songs on the same themes of conflict, peace and the different transitional justice pillars.

As highlights of the day, there was a call for the local leaders at district levels to come out and support memorial efforts such as annual memorial prayers in Lukodi, a call for JRP to continue documenting issues of war affected communities not only in Lukodi but other places as well.

The District officials present pledged that from next year they will support and attend Lukodi memorial prayers. They tasked the donor to continue funding JRP because of the tremendous work the organisa-



tion does with victim communities. It was highly observed that the guns are silent but there is still no total peace. There are still very many vulnerable people like orphans and widows who need help.

Several accolades were given to the CORE team in Lukodi for the impressive exhibitions. Suggestions were made that since the Lukodi community has documented all the events and experiences of conflict, Lukodi memorial site should become a tourism centre where people can go and learn about the war in northern Uganda.

The guest speaker in his speech said he was so happy to be in Lukodi and thanked JRP for the good work being done and he added that the Norwegian Embassy has been funding JRP for the last three years. He encouraged the people that for people and culture to survive, we must preserve their memories and give people the opportunity to come up with different ways to share their past.

This colorful day was concluded in Lukodi primary school with a community exhibition of drawings of conflict experiences and post conflict life through poems, story walls and a timeline of events in Lukodi. JRP will continue to support the community-led documentation project for this war-affected community still in great need. □

Ten years of justice and reconciliation

MELISSA McCAULEY

The Justice and Reconciliation Project was formed as a response to a changing landscape of reconciliation initiatives in war-affected areas in northern Uganda in the mid-2000s. Since its inception, JRP has engaged with a number of individuals from a multitude of backgrounds who are passionate about the needs and interests of victims of conflict. In response to the retrospective theme of this issue of *Voices*, past and present JRP staff and volunteers were asked to reflect on their time with JRP and to share their opinions on its transitional justice work in northern Uganda. Just as JRP seeks to listen to and amplify the voices of affected peoples in its work, I will let the voices of JRP speak for themselves...



What Working for Justice and Reconciliation Means To Me

“To me JRP is a unique organisation, an organisation that is down-to-earth and that prioritises the concerns, the interests and the voices of conflict-affected people.

Working for JRP is one way of giving back to the community that is so dear to me, one way to begin to see the start of change and, more so, to see a community that knows that there is still hope beyond all their suffering. It makes me feel proud to make a contribution to peoples’ lives. The community is a part of me; I can’t do without them, they can’t do without me. It is a kind of shared identity.”

–Akullo Evelyn Otwili, Documentation Team Leader

“Having had the opportunity to work with JRP for me personally meant working with a lot of interesting, encouraging, inspiring and amazing colleagues, which not only provided me with **an opportunity to learn a lot about northern Uganda, the conflict, the general context and peace and reconciliation, but also about life in general.**”

–Philipp Schulz, Documentation Intern (2012)

A Trip Down Memory Lane

“I still look back with a tinge of nostalgia on the days I used to ride my Yamaha Motor Bike for hundreds of kilometers into IDP camps to collect data.”

- Lino Owor Ogora, Programme Coordinator



“My first field trip with JRP was in Arua for a victims consultation workshop. This was the first time I heard about such experiences and it was really so touching. I felt I was actually privileged for the kind of life I have lived. I broke down.

I couldn't imagine human beings going through such experiences.

After listening to these stories I went back to the hotel room and told myself, 'Harriet, you should thank God for being alive today and leading a decent life. You have to work for the people, for the community.' It gave me more motivation. **It gave me a stronger vision of how I can be of help to these people and contribute to their recovery from past conflict experiences.**

-Aloycan Harriet, Documentation Research Associate

“I really enjoyed being a part of the community theatre project. I enjoyed taking the groups through the process from rehearsals to the final stage of the performance.

The experiences they were able to show, like gender-based violence and land conflict... they were able to put it out there and say this is not good, there is a better way to solve a conflict.

-Apio Ritah, Community Mobilisation/Documentation volunteer

“There are many memories but the one which comes to mind is when we were celebrating the second anniversary of WAN [the Women's Advocacy Network] and members of WAN decided to present issues to stakeholders themselves. It showed how empowered they have become.”

-Kasiva Mulli, Gender Justice Team Leader



Standout Achievements

“I have seen JRP grow from a small research project to an independent NGO in this mission. It has supported justice and reconciliation work not only in the Acholi sub-region where it started, but also expanded to other regions of the north, such as West Nile. JRP has been able to amplify the voices of war victims at local, national and international levels by articulating their justice needs and concerns.”

-Michael Otim, JRP Board Chairperson

“JRP seems to be handling advocacy in a unique way, which to me is bringing out better results.

It is actually the community that is meant to think and bring out the issues that they are facing themselves instead of somebody else thinking for the community.”

-Masi Flavia, Finance and Admin Team Leader

“I think capacity-building of victims of conflict is one of JRP's greatest achievements. We are seeing now victims of conflict taking their issues to the next level and they are

doing it on their own with some assistance from JRP, but minimal assistance. And I think this is a result of giving them an opportunity to express themselves and developing their skills and abilities to talk about the issues they face.”

—Oryem Nyeko, Communications Officer

Reflecting on Current and Future Challenges

“I think gender justice is a major hurdle. I think that the GJ team needs to do a gender mainstreaming course for the other departments because JRP makes a good conscious effort to talk with different categories of stakeholders like religious leaders, government officials... different factions of the community... but does not recognise when these factions are 99% male. This wide imbalance cannot be corrected without awareness. **Even if we are not speaking to these stakeholders as men, they are speaking to us as men. Gender-related knowledge needs to grow within JRP because there are a lot of stories missed when we do not talk to women.**”

—Katherine Alexander, Community Mobilisation intern

“While peace and justice remains a crucial need for the war affected communities, **it is not easy to build peace and ignore the immediate tangible and economic needs of the people who continue to live in poverty.**”

Cognisant that one organisation cannot solve the whole society’s problems, it might be time for JRP to rethink how to incorporate some bit of economic empowerment programs so that poverty, which is a stumbling block to peace and justice advocacy, can be removed.”

—Ketty Anyeko, former Gender Justice Team Leader.

Lessons in Working for Peace, Justice and Reconciliation

“I have learned the best way to resolve conflict is to begin from the roots. That is why I say there is need for dialogues and mediations. Although at times they fail, most times they are better. JRP is on the ground trying to address root causes of conflict and through documentation we advocate for non-repetition of these kinds of atrocities. The communities agree with that. **They do not want these atrocities to happen again. They have to say no to conflict again.**”

—Aloyocan Harriet

“I learned that in working with war-affected communities you need to be cautious, be flexible, you need to feel what has happened with them, you need to be a part of them in the process of bringing change to their lives. **When you are dealing with victims don’t put yourself aside as just a worker coming to do something, but be a part of that work.** You can go in with your manual and say this is what I am going to do, but sometimes you find it is different in the field. You need to adjust and be diverse in your approaches.”

—Achan Grace, Gender Justice/Community Mobilisation volunteer

“When you come for this kind of work you can’t just come with brain, you need to come with heart to sustain you through the most difficult times.”

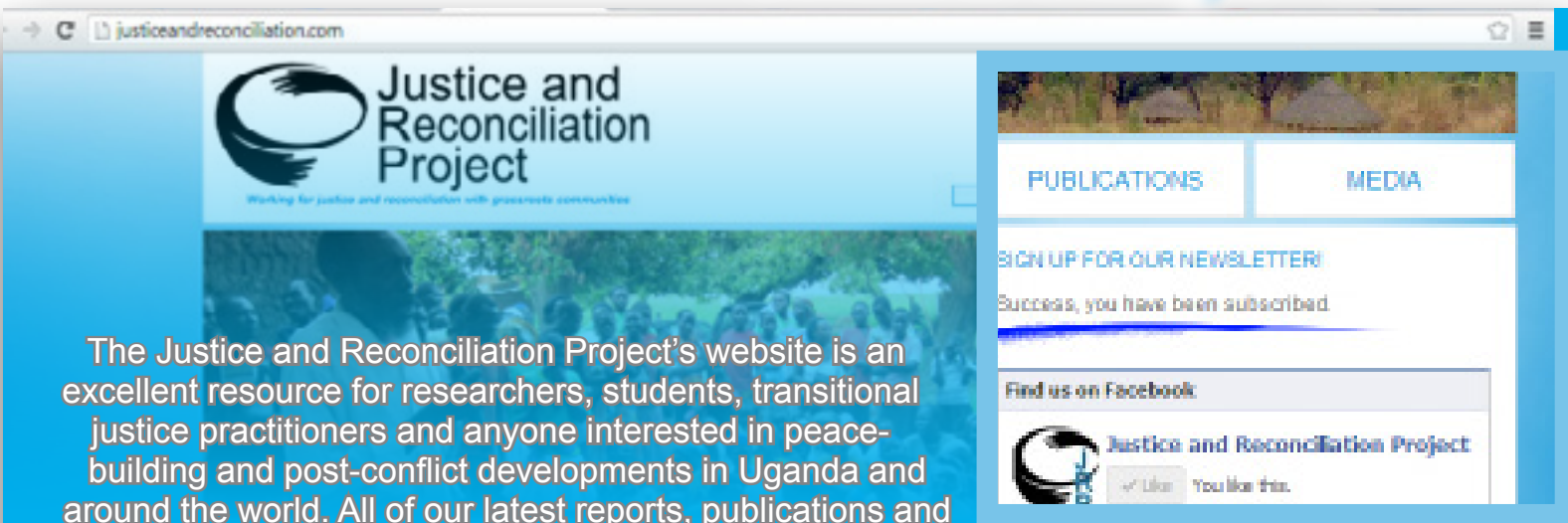
—Akullo Evelyn Otwilli

“It is not a one man’s job alone and it is not about who does it best. It is about how we merge efforts, build consensus on the issues and together push the affected people’s agenda forward in a manner that does not leave the affected feeling excluded or powerless, but in a manner that puts them at the center stage of peace and justice advocacy as they know best what they want, how they want it done, and who needs to support them to arrive at a peace and just society.”

—Ketty Anyeko

Thank you to all of the contributing voices in this issue. Cheers to many more years of passionate and transformational work for JRP!

Connect with JRP online!



The Justice and Reconciliation Project's website is an excellent resource for researchers, students, transitional justice practitioners and anyone interested in peace-building and post-conflict developments in Uganda and around the world. All of our latest reports, publications and field notes are available for public access.

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. Remember to **subscribe to our monthly newsletter** for updates on our work, initiatives and views on transitional justice in northern Uganda. Also, like us on Facebook and follow us on twitter @ **JRP_Uganda** and YouTube **JRP Uganda!**

www.justiceandreconciliation.com

Voices

Sharing victim-centered views on justice and reconciliation in Uganda



Published by the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP)

With support from the Royal Norwegian Embassy, Kampala

www.justiceandreconciliation.com