

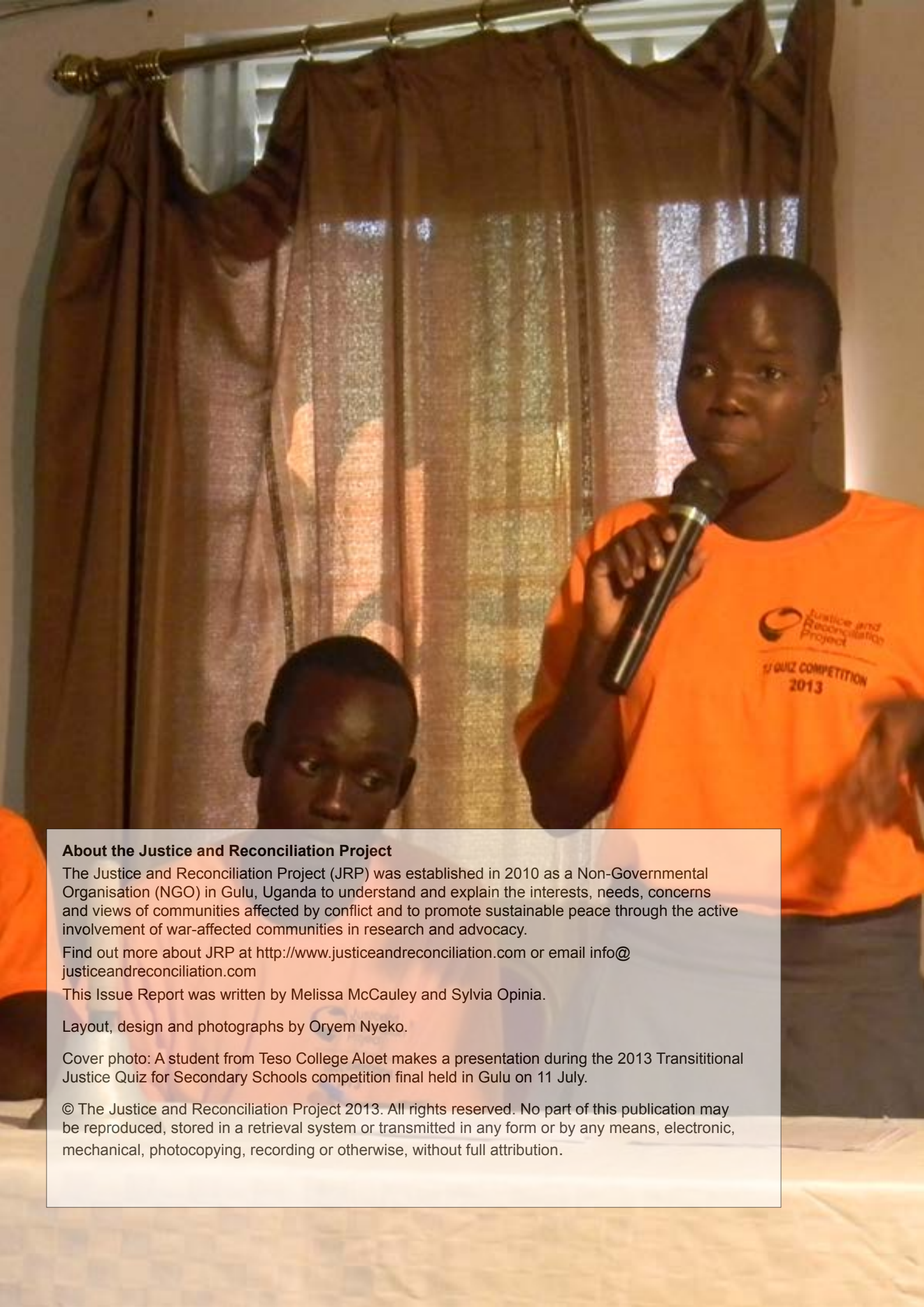


Youth Advocacy

Transitional Justice Competitions



Justice and Reconciliation
Project
Issue Report No. 2



About the Justice and Reconciliation Project

The Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) was established in 2010 as a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) in Gulu, Uganda to understand and explain the interests, needs, concerns and views of communities affected by conflict and to promote sustainable peace through the active involvement of war-affected communities in research and advocacy.

Find out more about JRP at <http://www.justiceandreconciliation.com> or email info@justiceandreconciliation.com

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Cover photo: A student from Teso College Aloet makes a presentation during the 2013 Transitional Justice Quiz for Secondary Schools competition final held in Gulu on 11 July.

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

(Excerpt from poem written by Pajule Secondary School students)

Introduction

Children and youth are arguably the most affected demographic in the midst of and following states of conflict. Yet, when it comes to the political processes that aim to assess and remedy the effects of such conflict, young people's voices are often delegated to the periphery. As these young people make up the future generation, this seems to be a costly exclusion. Graca Machel, an international children's rights advocate, reminds us that, "young people should be seen as survivors and active participants in creating solutions, not just as victims or problems."

The international framework for children's rights was established with the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The fact that more State parties have ratified this UN Convention than any other is a testament to its universal acceptance. The framework sets up a children's right to survive, develop, protection from harm, and, most notable for this report, the right to participate. Article 12 of the CRC is one of many that subtly refer to this right to participation: "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." The interpretation of this among states is highly variable and the inclusiveness of young people in political processes is still a developing norm.

Including the voices of youth in Uganda's post-conflict environment ensures that valuable youth-specific information and perspective can better its reconstruction efforts. A better understanding of structural inadequacies relevant to children and youth populations could bring about a more holistic approach to necessary institutional reform as a part of these efforts. Empowering youth populations to participate in today's transitional justice processes also increases their own understanding of the past conflict period, supports the transformation of remaining wartime ideologies, battles widespread apathy, and builds greater public awareness concerning the needs and dreams of young people. Additionally, youth that have the opportunity to participate in such processes gain a sense of empowerment that is central to their psychosocial development, enhancing their capacity and willingness to engage constructively as active citizens. Participation and protection of young people in peacebuilding efforts sustains overall reconciliation by helping to break the cycles of violence.

Voices of Youth: JRP's Transitional Justice Quiz Competitions



It is with this in mind that the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) sought to give voice to the young people of Northern Uganda as it conducted its 2012 and 2013 Transitional Justice (TJ) Quiz Competitions in schools around the Acholi, Lango, Teso, and West Nile sub-regions. JRP adopted the themes *Everybody Counts: Voices of Young People in Transitional Justice* in 2012 and *Across Ethnic Boundaries* in 2013, to emphasise the promotion of dialogue between not only older and younger generations, but also between youth of different backgrounds. JRP focused on creating a safe environment where the youth would feel both supported and empowered to discuss their justice needs. During the quiz competition students' general knowledge on transitional justice processes was tested, with a great emphasis on the Ugandan context. Additionally, each team was given the opportunity to share personal conflict experiences and formulate their own recommendations. This took the form of a 'Compulsory Presentation' round, which made up the largest portion of points awarded during the competition.

As the name suggests, the purpose of these presentations was to provide space for the students to not only share their youth-specific experiences during the armed conflict, but also to advocate for what they find most pressing in today's environment of post-conflict reconstruction in Uganda. In making recommendations, the students were asked to reflect on the potential for youth in making active contributions to ongoing initiatives.

JRP's overarching goal in creating the Transitional Justice (TJ) Quiz was **to enhance capacity of the young people in northern Uganda to actively participate in peacebuilding, reconciliation and post-conflict reconstruction**. Increasing the awareness of these students and facilitating a critical discussion concerning the

role of youth during and after conflict helped to achieve this goal. In the words of many participating students, the TJ Quiz was important in bringing a ‘voice to the voiceless’.

The Format

Testing general knowledge on TJ processes was divided into themes such as criminal prosecutions, traditional justice mechanisms, peace agreements and cross cutting topics such as gender justice, truth telling and reparations. The ‘Compulsory Presentation’ round was divided into two sections. In each section, the students were asked to address three specific prompts as shown below:

PART ONE: Experience sharing	PART TWO: The role of youth in transitional justice and post-conflict reconstruction
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How has armed conflict affected your school? 2. What is the general impact of conflict on young people in your community? 3. How did youth: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Sustain the conflict? b) Control the wave of violence? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What challenges do young people face during post-conflict reconstruction? 2. How should transitional justice processes encourage or facilitate reintegration, accountability, healing, and reconciliation for young people? 3. Suggest some strategies through which young people can be involved in ongoing post-conflict reconstruction initiatives.

Summary of Student Responses

This report presents the student responses from the regional competitions in the Acholi, West Nile, Lango, and Teso sub-regions. It is organized according to the prompts listed above. Each section includes a brief discussion on the most common responses expressed by the students, supporting charts that show the range and frequencies of ideas presented, and direct quotes taken from the student presentations. Attention has been given to present the students’ voices as authentically as possible in this report, avoiding the infusion of outside ideas or opinions.

In sharing this, JRP hopes to highlight youth as vital stakeholders in the peacebuilding process. There has been a tendency to sideline the voices of youth in any meaningful dialogue about post-conflict reconstruction in Uganda. This issue report works to draw attention to the value of these youth voices and to promote their inclusion in ongoing transitional justice debates.



PART ONE: Experience Sharing

The overwhelming majority of schools discussed the impact of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency on the youth population. Other conflicts briefly mentioned included:

- Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF) in West Nile
- Mukura massacre committed by the Uganda People’s Defence Force (UPDF) in Teso
- Karamoja cattle rustling

1. How has armed conflict affected your school?

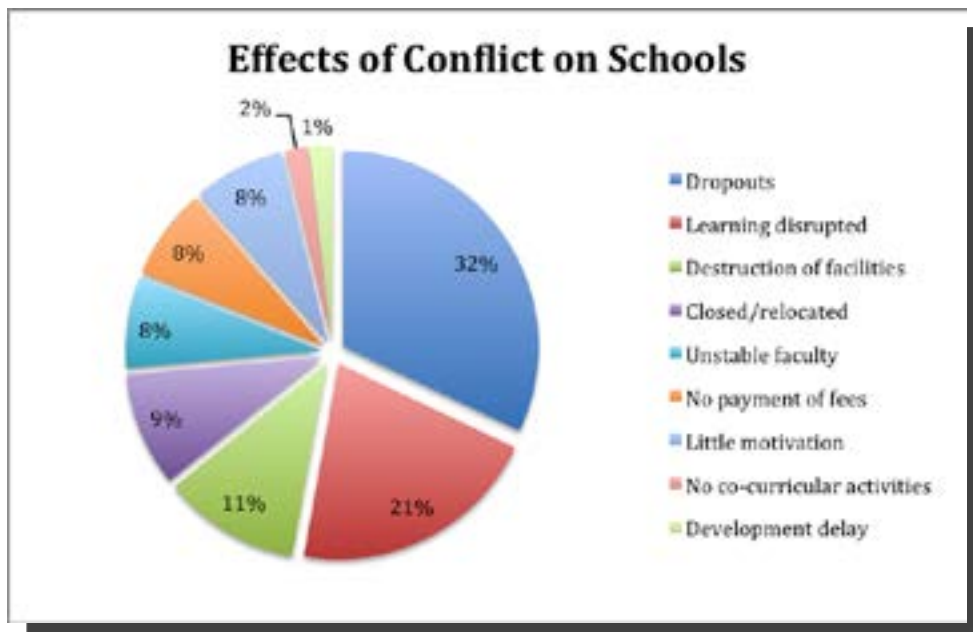


Figure 1: The student responses consolidated into common categories, with frequency of responses represented in percentages.

Dropouts: The most significant impact on schools during the various conflicts, as presented by the students, was a markedly increased dropout rate. The major

reasons mentioned for this decreased student population included loss of lives, abductions, and forced migration. It is important to note that all of these reasons point to the involuntary nature of dropouts. Alternatively, one participant described his school's experience as displaced students flooded in from other areas.

Learning Disrupted: The second most cited effect on schools was the disruption of learning experienced as daily routines became unstable. The student youth described the immense amount of insecurity and fear amidst the conflict, which contributed to irregular attendance and poor academic performance.

"Learning became a problem as the staff and students were on their toes ready to take off any time after hearing a bullet shot."

Adjumani Model Secondary School

Other significant categories:

- **Destruction of Facilities:** Many students recalled how their school property was destroyed and/or looted by soldiers.
- **Closing or Relocation of Schools:** One student shared the experience of how their school was turned into a military detach for the soldiers.
- **Unstable Faculty:** Students detailed their experience of faculty members being killed, abducted, or displaced.
- **Inability to Pay School Fees:** Impoverished conditions during conflict left many youth without the means to pay school fees.
- **Little motivation:** The students described general lack of interest as an underlying cause of unruly behavior during class hours. Caught in violent conflict, many youth felt as if getting an education was useless.

"One has in mind that even if you go to school I would gain nothing."

Aculbanya Secondary School

Present State of Returnees:

Alere Secondary School took the opportunity to describe not only the past effects of the conflicts on their school, but also the ongoing effects seen in the present state of returnees, as listed below:

- Low self-esteem
- Isolation from non-returnees
- Impoverished; unable to pay school fees
- Hostile/violent
- Unwilling to share past experiences
- Poor performance
- Low participation

The students of St. Mary Magdalene Girls’ secondary school also brought up the stigmatization of previously abducted girls by their families and communities, with many of these girls being discouraged from joining school altogether.

2. What is the general impact of conflict on young people in your community?

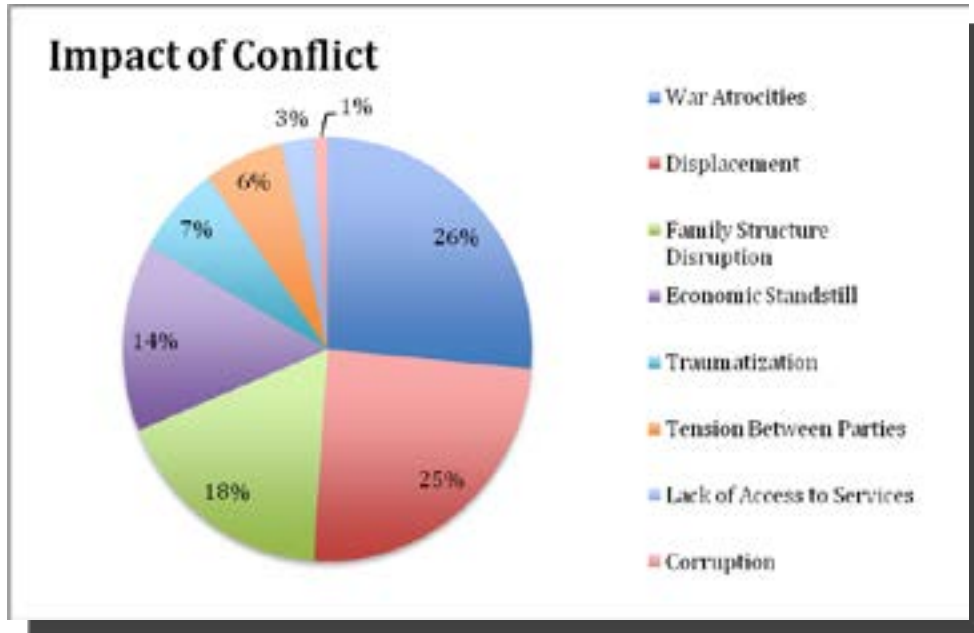


Figure 2: The student responses consolidated into common categories, with frequency of responses represented in percentages.

War atrocities: Mention of wartime atrocities had the highest frequency in the presentations. The atrocities stressed by the youth included loss of life, sexual abuse, physical/psychological torture, permanent deformation and property destruction/looting. Family houses, livestock, crops, and social infrastructure were all named in relation to property destruction/looting. Most teams elaborated on the massive abduction of both girls and boys who later became child soldiers and sex slaves to the rebels.

“Grass thatched houses along the main road were all put ablaze. This left many homeless and people started sleeping under the trees like animals.”
Aboke High School

Displacement: The second highest category encapsulates the students’ discussion on the “squalid conditions” of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps and the various aspects of community disruption that resulted from mass displacement. Moral degradation and anti-social behavior were named most commonly as a direct effect of this displacement. The students discussed the prostitution and general promiscuity that arose in the IDP camps and, consequently, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. Many attributed this moral degradation to the economic desperation during conflict and the overcrowded nature of the camps.

"Girls go to prostitution to sustain life."

Comboni College Lira

Students referenced high levels of drug and alcohol abuse, violence, and criminal activity such as theft in relation to increased anti-social behavior. The chaotic environment during violent conflict and the idleness in IDP camps were named as contributing factors. The nature of the camps also caused laziness and dependence on aid in the students' eyes. Another noteworthy addition to this category of displacement was the students' description of cultural erosion that occurred.

Other Significant Categories:

- **Family structure disruption:** A large majority of students spoke of the overwhelming presence of orphans and child-headed families due to conflict. Early, forced marriages, widows, and separated families were also mentioned. A student from St. Mary's Magdalene shared an experience about her sister who was abducted by the rebels and is still missing up to now. This family struggles with the pain of not knowing whether she is dead or alive, along with countless other families of missing persons.

"The conflict led to the decline and degradation of Acholi culture. This was because the elderly qualified people to teach the youth on the cultural norms and values were swept away by the LRA invasion."

Kitgum High School

- **Economic standstill:** The students' referred to unemployment and the decrease in agricultural production that has led to widespread poverty and famine/starvation. They spoke of the devastating poverty that the conflict caused. Fear of investors and halted development in the unstable northern region was also mentioned.

"Most people's hopes and dreams have been shattered down. Therefore they have resorted to drinking as a result of frustration."

Ayer Seed Secondary School

- **Traumatisation:** The experience of trauma, both direct and secondhand, as witnesses to atrocities, was frequently named as a major impact of conflict. The trauma endured by children as they were forced to commit atrocities was a concern shared by many students. A few student presenters went further in discussing the spiritual harms brought on by the war, and the worrying levels of suicide.
- **Tension between parties:** Tribal conflict was stressed as a part of this tension, with various students' describing shared hatred for Acholis by the other sub-regions because of the Acholi origins of the LRA. Further tension among Ugandans due to the regional imbalance between north and south was stated. The students also talked about the general insecurity, suspicion, fear, and spirit of revenge that the state of conflict produced.

“The conflict caused hatred for Acholi ... because the rebels used the Acholi language as their medium of communication.”

Monsignor Bala Senior Secondary School

3. How did youth a) sustain the conflict and b) control the wave of violence?

a) Sustaining the conflict

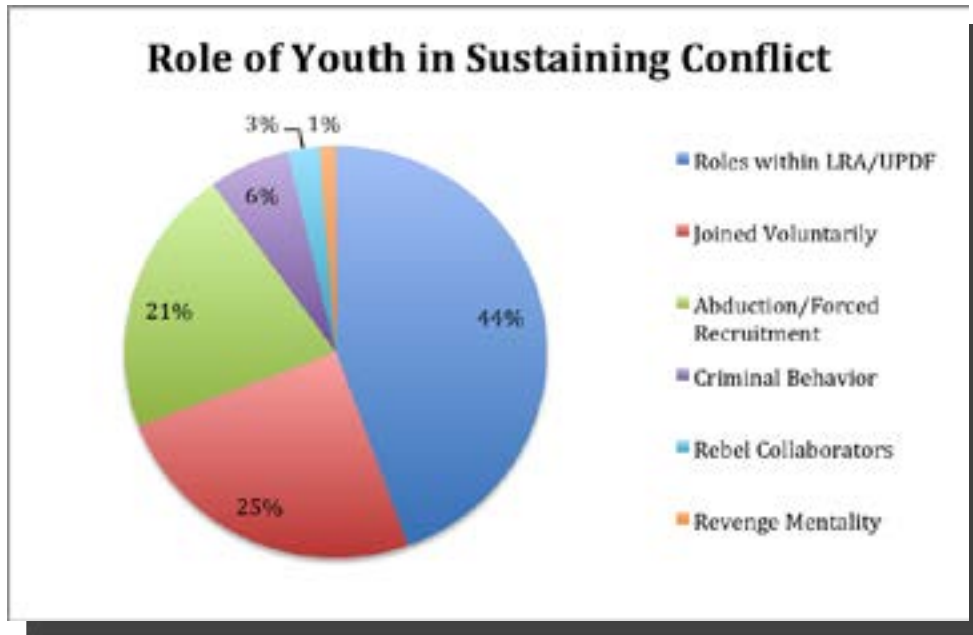


Figure 4: The range and frequency of roles cited in student responses.

Roles within LRA/UPDF: Different roles that youth played within the LRA were described including spies, leaders/commanders, and support roles such as cooks, wives, and porters. A majority of students talked about the reality that many young people were active in committing various wartime atrocities, whether it was voluntary or involuntary. The students mentioned that on many occasions, the UPDF also used the young people to act as spies. One student elaborated that upon return from captivity, many youth were kept to provide information on LRA hideouts, armory, etc., which would in turn lead to retaliation on the community by the LRA.

“The youth, being the most energetic and able-bodied, became the main focal point in committing the LRA massive atrocities like mutilation of body parts, vandalism, torture, as well as murder.”

St. Mary's Secondary School

Joining voluntarily: Students also spoke of youth voluntarily joining the LRA, UPDF, or local militia. Several schools made reference to youth resistance groups, such as the Arrow Boys in Teso and Amuka Boys in Lango, who joined the violent conflict in attempt to wipe out the LRA.

Abduction/forced recruitment: Students cited abduction and forced recruitment

into the LRA/UPDF frequently as a way of youth sustaining conflict.

Other Significant Categories:

- **Criminal behavior:** The students explained that many youth also took advantage of the chaotic conflict environment to engage in criminal behavior.
- **Rebel collaborators:** Motivated by personal gain and/or fear, many youth acted as collaborators with the rebels. For example, some youth became suppliers to satisfy the many rebel demands.

b) Controlling the Wave of Violence

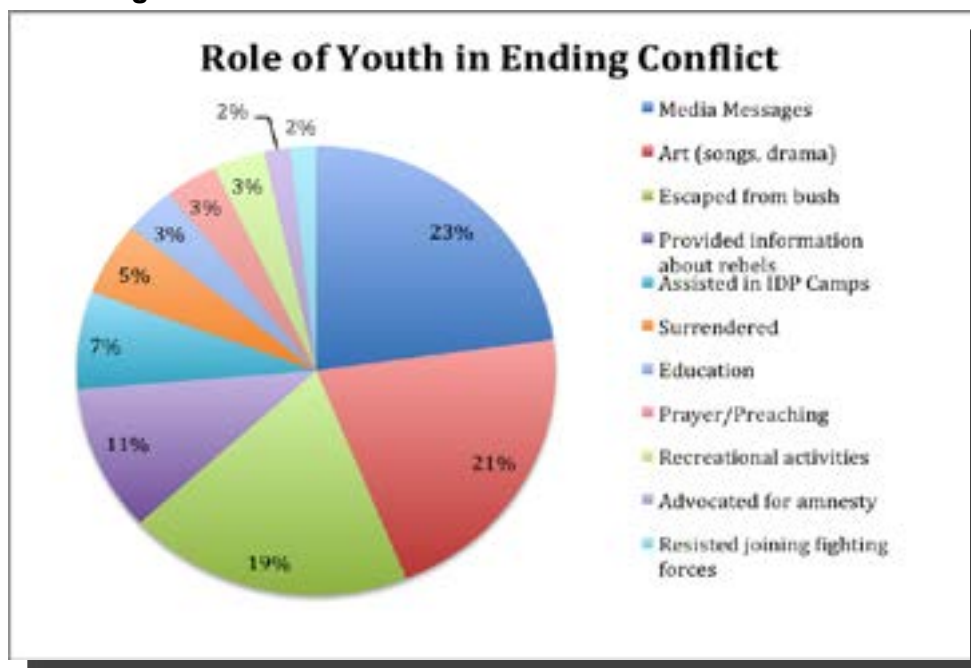


Figure 5: The range and frequency of roles cited in student responses.

Media messages: “Come Back Home” radio programs were the highest shared response when students were asked to discuss the role youth played in controlling the wave of violence. These were community radio programs, in which former child soldiers were invited to encourage those still in the bush to follow their lead and come back home, while promoting a general call for peace and amnesty. Their voices helped other children and youth realise the possibility of safely returning home.

“Many youth have also laboured to send their voices through radios asking their fellow young ones to come home where they are still needed, against the false preaching of the LRA leaders that the government and people at home are against them.”

Bezza Al-Hijji Secondary School

Art: The students also commonly referred to the use of art, including songs and drama, in speaking out against the violent conflict. Many students brought up the artist Bosmic Otim’s song called ‘Peace Return’ as an example of a song frequently performed.

Escape from the bush: Numerous schools presented the act of resistance shown in escaping the rebel group and returning home as a contribution made by the youth in bringing the conflict to a close.

Other Significant Categories:

- **Information about rebels:** Students spoke of the youth coming back from the bush and volunteering information about the rebels to the UPDF. Although, as noted above, this also led to violence in some cases.
- **Assisted in IDP Camps:** Youth played different volunteer roles in the IDP camps such as cleaning and guiding civilians.
- **Surrendered:** Students discussed youth surrendering and putting down their weapons as a way of discontinuing the violence.
- **Education:** Students also felt that education about peace, justice, and reconciliation also helped to control the violence.



PART TWO: The role of youth in transitional justice and post-conflict reconstruction

1. What challenges do young people face during post-conflict reconstruction?

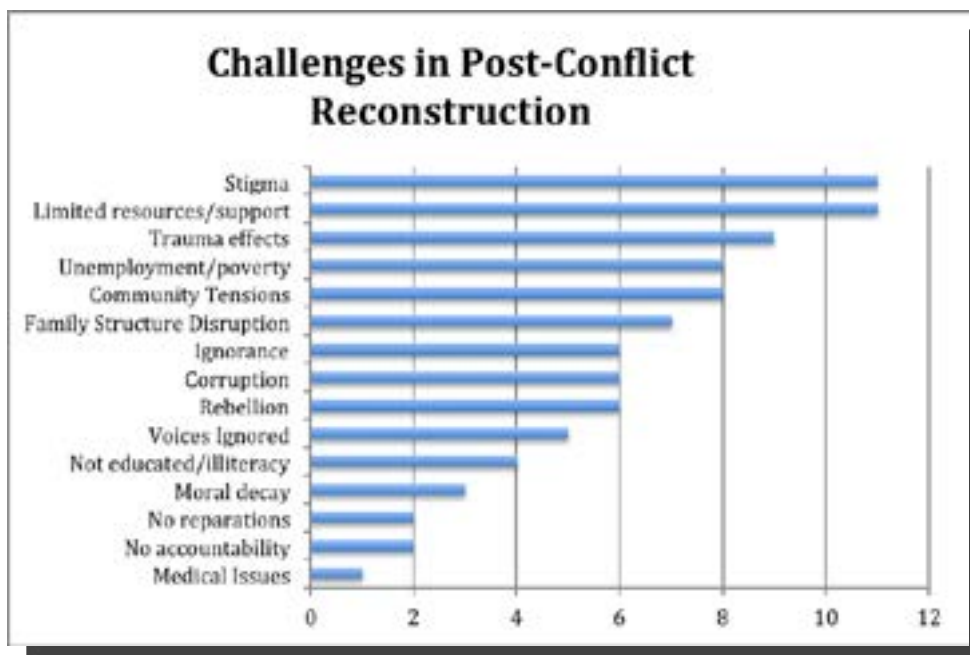


Figure 6: A visual summary of the student responses and their frequency

Stigma: Returnees’ experience of neglect, isolation, unfair treatment, finger pointing, and social division was the most frequent challenge expressed.

“There is that gap that is created as a result of fear because people think the returnees are still traumatized and can cause injury at any time to the entire society.”
 Restore Leadership High School

Limited resources/support: Lack of access to funds and inadequate support from NGOs, the government, and communities was commonly referenced.

Trauma: The lingering effects of trauma were widely discussed, including flashbacks, mal-adjustments to community life, guilty feelings, and difficulty in telling the truth and asking for forgiveness. Trauma-affected behavior, such as emotional instability and high levels of aggression, was also mentioned. Many students attributed these lingering effects to a lack of counseling and guidance.

“There is trauma amongst students, especially those who have once been in the bush, for those who had killed have the trauma in them that at times, when they get angry, they think violence that involves fighting and bloodshed is the best for themselves as a solution.”

Restore Leadership High School

Unemployment/poverty: Poverty was once again linked to a concern for youth who could not afford to pay school fees.

Community tensions: Tensions within communities were cited in relation to tribal segregation, land wrangles, and the growing disunity between elders and youth.

Family structure disruption: The ongoing challenge of family structure disruption was repeated with concerns raised about the neglect of orphans and lack of support for child-headed families. The issue of missing persons also continues to plague youth populations.

“We can all imagine how life is very unpleasant without parents.”

Alere Secondary School

Ignorance: Students confirmed the reality that ignorance of laws & rights and inadequate information on reconstruction & transitional justice mechanisms currently hinders the potential for youth participation.

Corruption: Corruption was linked with a lack of political will to address the post-conflict challenges of youth. Young people see selfish desire and political instability as detrimental to recovery.

“Corruption has become inevitable.”

Mukura Memorial Secondary School

Rebellion: Students described the problem of peers holding negative attitudes and engaging in criminal activities. Some students referred to these rebellious peers as being “brainwashed”.

“The youth are used to revenge.”

Mungula Secondary School

Voices ignored: Students also expressed the common experience of having their voices ignored in the current post-conflict environment. Many feel as if their right to speech is being violated because they are not consulted or included in meaningful

dialogue and are often criticized or immediately discounted when they do find space to speak out.

“The young people face the challenge of criticism. Whenever the youth come with any ideas, the public discourages them and this makes the youth draw back.”

St. Mary Magdalene Girls Secondary School

Other Significant Categories:

- **Not educated/illiterate:** As stated before, many youth did not have access to education during the conflict years, which has left many young people illiterate and in need of educational opportunities.
- **Moral decay:** Students discussed the lingering effects of the moral decay that originated during the conflict, especially in the IDP camps.

2. How should transitional justice processes encourage or facilitate reintegration, accountability, healing and reconciliation for young people?

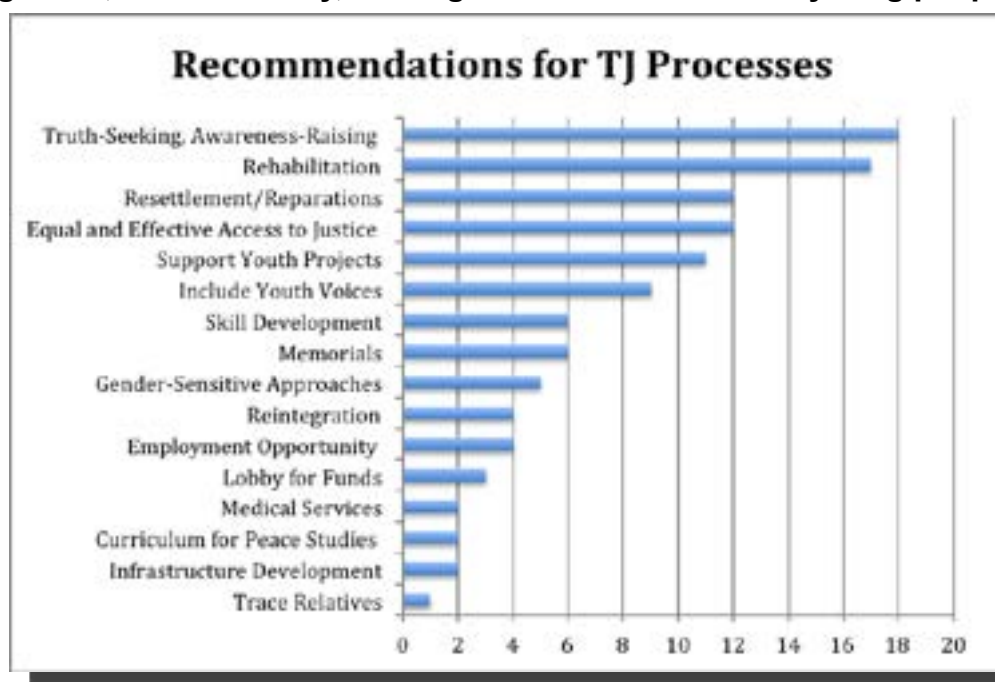


Figure 7: A visual summary of the student responses and their frequency

Truth-seeking/awareness-raising: The majority of students stressed the importance of truth-seeking and awareness-raising as necessary activities in addressing the needs of young people in today’s post-conflict environment. Some referenced the need for a truth commission to provide information to the public. The youth want to see more public acknowledgment and expect apologies to be made by all conflict parties, including the government.

“Before you say forgive me, you must say I am sorry.”

Teso College Aloet

Rehabilitation: The students expressed the need for rehabilitation centers that can provide services such as psychosocial support, spiritual guidance, and drug abuse programs. During the student presentations, it was expressed that the hope, trust, and confidence of youth populations must be restored.

"They have been consumed and broken by fear."

Ayer Seed Secondary School

Resettlement/reparations: The students highlighted the need for reparations and resettlement packages in the form of compensation, educational scholarships/services, and the replacement of lost property/livestock. Some students singled out child-headed families as being the most in need of these packages and reparations.

Equal and effective access to justice: Students stated their desire for the promotion of accountability to be carried out in formal prosecutions, community-based court proceedings, traditional rituals, and mediations between conflicted parties. They also expressed the need to incorporate witness protection, victim confidentiality, and sensitivity to potential re-victimization in these justice processes.

Support youth projects: The youth population shows a desire to be included in reconstruction initiatives and requests more opportunities for the training of youth leaders. An example of a youth-led project that came up regularly was the formation of peace clubs in schools. Members would be tasked with the job of raising awareness and encouraging engagement of fellow peers.

Include youth voices: In response to feeling as if the voices of youth are being ignored, students discussed the desire to be included in consultations. They expressed the need for support in claiming their rights and being able to join debates and dialogues in a meaningful way. An idea repeated during the student presentations was the formation of regional school children's forums.

"Processes should be developed to enable the young themselves to come forward to claim their rights."

Everest Girls Secondary School

Other Significant Categories:

- **Skill Development:** Students also felt as if transitional processes should help empower youth with skills such as livelihood and peace management.

"Since young people are the most influential in the society, JRP and transitional justice organizations should train all the schools about how to establish, manage, and sustain peace in the society."

Alere Secondary School

- **Memorials:** The youth requested the creation of memorials at schools and massacre gravesites. Additionally, days of commemoration were praised as a valued form of memorialization.
- **Gender-sensitive approaches:** The students spoke of adopting a gender-

sensitive approach, mostly in the design of reparations.

- **Reintegration:** Students discussed the need for more drama and dialogue activities to be included in reintegration efforts.
- **Employment Opportunity:** Another noteworthy idea presented by a few students was the possibility of extending credit to youth as a way of increasing their employment opportunities.

4. Suggest some strategies through which young people can be involved in ongoing post-conflict reconstruction initiatives

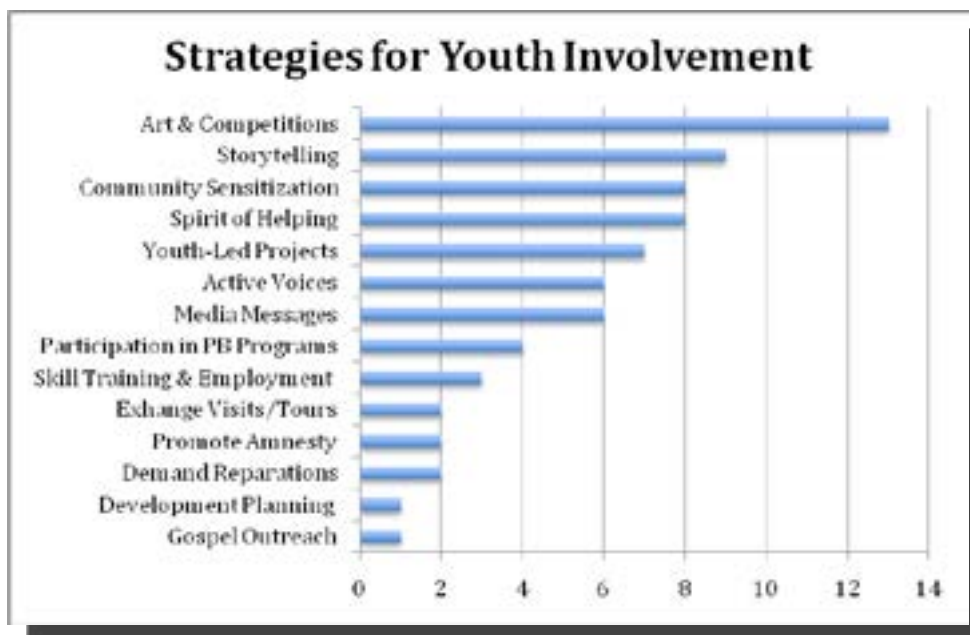


Figure 8: A visual summary of the student responses and their frequency

Art and competitions: The most common response to how young people can be involved in post-conflict reconstruction initiatives centered on their participation in art and competition activities. Students mentioned sports, debates, quizzes, drama, music, and dance as productive activities for young people. Participants not only enjoyed the transitional justice quiz competition, but felt it was an effective way to engage youth.

“Through this quiz competition, we know how to coordinate with those affected, see how to live with them well, and respect their feelings.”

Soroti College Secondary School

Storytelling: The second most frequent strategy promoted by the students was storytelling. During presentations, students encouraged youth to share their experiences through testimonies and informal story exchanges. Many students spoke about the positive impact that telling one’s ‘success story’ can have on other peers as it spreads hope and encouragement among them.

Community sensitisation: Students explained the role youth can play in talking to communities about the need for peace, justice, and reconciliation. Students specifically encouraged young people to condemn revenge and promote forgiveness.

“The masses also need to be sensitized on the fact that war is already over and it is time for reconciliation and forgiveness, and therefore, to be flexible over painful events that occurred during the period of insurgency.”

Dzaipi Secondary School

Spirit of helping: This strategy mentioned by students is one that is accessible to all young people. Students talked of the significance of young people sharing, giving equal treatment, socializing with returnees and those traumatised, and providing guidance for one another.

Youth-led projects: Once again, the students shared their idea of forming peace clubs within their schools. One participating school also mentioned building a youth center.

Active voices: Students encouraged youth to communicate their needs to transitional justice practitioners and to demand a place in the decision-making in reconstructive processes

Media messages: Students advised for the continued use of media messages, such as radio talk shows, as another strategy for youth participation. In this, one school mentioned the possibility of youth getting more involved in documentation of the war and its effects.

Other significant categories:

- **Participation in peacebuilding programs:** There was a general call in the student presentations for young people to get more involved in peacebuilding programs that already exist.
- **Skill training and employment:** During the presentations, several students also noted the importance of young people attending vocational institutes to develop skills and become involved in income-generating activities.

“Youth, have love for our country.”

Teso College Aloet

Conclusion



The TJ quiz provided a regional forum, the first of its kind, where the focus was on young people sharing their past experiences, current challenges, and recommendations for the future in relation to peace and justice.

When asked how the TJ Quiz Competition was beneficial, the participating students gave the following responses:

- Provided a “central point to discuss justice needs”
- Created solidarity and understanding between students from different places
- Widened youth knowledge (i.e.- conflict & peace processes, formal & traditional justice mechanisms, reparation programs, stakeholders such as the Transitional Justice Working Group and Justice Law & Order Sector, crimes & human rights culture)
- Contributed to truth-seeking by listening to youth experiences
- Informed students about gender inequalities
- Built leadership capacity (i.e.- to participate in debates)
- Restored hope and courage in youth

In partnership with Gulu District Local Government, JRP conducted a student leaders training on August 17th, 2013, with 95 participants from 18 secondary schools in attendance. The purpose of this training was to build the capacity of student leaders to facilitate peacebuilding activities in their schools and communities as ‘peace ambassadors’. The training was guided by the theme **promoting sustainable peace through a culture of non-violence and reconciliation in Gulu district schools**. Students in attendance were encouraged to explore the common issues that spark conflict between young people. With these issues in mind, the student leaders had the chance to formulate creative strategies to bring back to their schools and communities.

It is the hope of JRP that practitioners in the field of education begin to understand the integral link between peacebuilding and education. Student leader trainings, like the one noted above, should be replicated and supported by relevant stakeholders.

More importantly, the emphasis should be placed on supporting the implementation of action plans that result from such trainings. Additionally, education practitioners should be provided with opportunities to improve their capacity to incorporate related activities into their curriculum, after-school programs, and wherever else appropriate.

The inclusion of young people needs to go beyond the superficial. Providing a space to be heard is a step in the right direction, but youth involvement must be furthered. Their voices must actually influence the processes in which they are meant to benefit from. In order for this to happen, respect for the perspective of young people must be more widely promoted, especially in societies such as Uganda with hierarchical cultural norms. Emphasising the idea that youth participation should always match their evolving capacities, as noted in the CRC, could help in easing adult resistance.

To conclude this issue report, JRP makes a general call to all stakeholders, including the Government of Uganda, CSO's, and other relevant practitioners to listen to what the young people are saying, learn from them, and create meaningful ways to involve them in post-conflict reconstruction.



Published by the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP)
With support from the Royal Norwegian Embassy, Kampala

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