

My Body, A Battlefield

Survivors' Experiences of Conflict Sexual Violence
in Koch Ongako

JRP Field Note 22, November 2015

About the Justice and Reconciliation Project

The Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) was established in 2005 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

Cover photo: A woman documents her conflict experiences through drawing. Copyright Evelyn Amony, 2010.

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Acronyms

DPP	Directorate for Public Prosecutions
GJU	Gender Justice Unit
GoU	Government of Uganda
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HRDP	Human Rights Documentation Programme
HSMF	Holy Spirit Mobile Forces
ICC	International Criminal Court
IDP	Internally-displaced person
IGA	Income-generating activity
JLOS	Justice, Law and Order Sector
JRP	Justice and Reconciliation Project
LDU	Local defense unit
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRA	National Resistance Army
SGBV	Sexual- and gender-based violence
TJ	Transitional justice
UHRC	Uganda Human Rights Commission
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UPDA	Uganda People's Democratic Army
UPDF	Uganda People's Defense Force
WAN	Women's Advocacy Network

Executive Summary

Sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV), especially in the context of protracted conflict, continues to be one of the least accounted for crimes in Uganda and the world. In January 2013, the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) embarked on a process to document, through storytelling and other participatory methods, the experiences of conflict sexual violence that occurred during more than two decades of conflict between the Government of Uganda (GoU) and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Koch Ongako, a community in Gulu district, northern Uganda.

The purpose of the exercise was to document and acknowledge these violations and their long-term consequences on the lives of male and female victims and the community in which they live, to help survivors come to terms with the past, and to inform policies and processes to provide redress and accountability.

The following field note provides first-person accounts of sexual violence at the hands of state and non-state armed actors and civilians from the perspectives of male and female survivors in Koch Ongako. It is divided into sections that identify emerging patterns and themes that emerged out of the various accounts, including the types of conflict sexual violence that occurred in Koch Ongako, the dangerous spots where the violence was most likely to occur, analysis on the state's failure to protect civilians from such violations, attempts by individuals to intercede to stop the violence, and reasons why survivors oftentimes choose to keep quiet. It concludes with an exploration of outcomes from the documentation process and recommendations for the GoU, civil society, and the community to provide accountability and redress to survivors of conflict sexual violence in Koch Ongako and other affected communities.

It is envisaged that this document shall inform and feed into national processes for transitional justice (TJ), both in terms substance and the participatory process used to engage victims.

Key findings

Conflict sexual violence--such as rape (including gang rape and male rape), sexual torture, forced marriage and pregnancy, and sexual exploitation--occurred in Koch Ongako during intense periods of conflict between the GoU and LRA between 1993 and 2005. Both civilians and armed state and non-state actors--including the National Resistance Army (NRA), Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF), LRA, and Amuka Boys--are implicated in the perpetration of conflict sexual violence in the community.

Evolving roles for women during the conflict exposed them to unprecedented levels of physical and sexual violence. Known "dangerous spots" emerged in and around the camps and communities, locations that women were known to frequent in their everyday lives.

State forces, in the course of escorting or accompanying community members to/from the camps to their gardens, markets and other locations in and around the community, perpetrated acts of sexual violence against civilians, thus betraying their duty to provide civilian protection and security. There have been few-to-no avenues to hold such persons to account for their actions.

There were frequent intercessions by armed actors and/or community members to stop the violence as it occurred, however, such persons were often helpless to do so, due to the nature of the violations and the power imbalance between the perpetrators and others present.

Intimidation by authorities, including threats of death, was a major obstacle to reporting experiences of conflict sexual violence and seeking treatment, redress and accountability.

Perpetrators of sexual violence often made deliberate efforts to hide their identities. For instance, at times one armed group would masquerade as another to confuse the community.

Reporting procedures for sexual violence were limited, with virtually no mechanisms for referral or support. Instead, for much of the war, the only option for reporting sexual violence was in the military barracks.

Consequences of this sexual violence have proven grave and sustained over time, and include physical, emotional and social repercussions, such as disease, fistula, mental illness, depression, poverty, and rejection and blame by family, friends and the community. This further compounds victims' vulnerability to subsequent violations and revictimisation. As a result, it is common for one to try to keep the experience a secret to avoid the judgment and blame of others.

The process of documenting conflict sexual violence experienced by men and women in Koch Ongako has resulted in a number of outcomes, including breaking the silence, increased advocacy for accountability and redress, healing and relief, and referrals.

Key recommendations

1. The **Human Rights Documentation Programme of the UHRC must investigate and document the sexual violence** that occurred during the longstanding conflicts in greater northern Uganda.
2. **Perpetrators of conflict sexual violence must be identified and held accountable** for their actions.
3. A **special desk should be established within the UPDF to receive and investigate allegations of misconduct** by members of the military during the conflict period.
4. The **GoU must provide gender-sensitive reparations** to survivors of conflict sexual violence, especially for acts committed by its armed forces.
5. **Long-term medical treatment must be availed** to survivors of conflict sexual violence.
6. **Dialogues, meetings, and discussions must be held at the local-level** to sensitise community members on the consequences and impact of stigma against survivors of conflict sexual violence and persons living with HIV/AIDS.
7. **Measures must be taken to ensure that victims of conflict sexual violence participate meaningfully and fully in ongoing and proposed TJ processes in Uganda.** The authors further call on the GoU to expeditiously adopt the pending draft National TJ Policy and to fast-track legislation to operationalise it.

Introduction

“Men were killed during the insurgency, but ladies paid through their bodies. They fought the war with their bodies.”¹

Sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV), especially in the context of protracted conflict, continues to be one of the least accounted for crimes in Uganda and the world. For instance, the initial charge sheet for former Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) commander Dominic Ongwen before the International Criminal Court (ICC) included no charge of sexual crimes, despite known accounts of forced marriage and rape by LRA forces, including Ongwen. Victims of sexual violence are often reluctant to speak out about their experiences or seek justice because of fear, stigma, and cultural norms shrouding speech about sex, hindering investigations and accountability for such crimes.² Further, methods for documenting and investigating such violations often fall short by not permitting victims to speak on their own terms and time, making it difficult to identify individual survivors and include them in the many formal and informal processes for justice and accountability.

In January 2013, the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) embarked on a process to document, through storytelling and other participatory methods, the experiences of conflict sexual violence that occurred during more than two decades of conflict between the Government of Uganda (GoU) and LRA in Koch Ongako, a community in Gulu district, northern Uganda.

The purpose of the exercise was to document and acknowledge these violations and their long-term consequences on the lives of male and female victims, and the community in which they live, through supportive and empowering methods. To-date, much has been written on abduction and life in captivity of the LRA, however, there are few testimonies or analysis on the types of conflict sexual violence perpetrated in the communities and the internally-displaced person (IDP) camps by state and non-state armed actors and civilians.³ Currently, the Cabinet of the GoU is reviewing a comprehensive national transitional justice (TJ) policy, and the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) is preparing to undertake an official documentation process called the Human

Rights Documentation Programme (HRDP), for which JRP serves as a member of the technical advisory committee. Such initiatives offer much-sought-after opportunities for justice, accountability, and redress for victims, but they risk succumbing to over-simplified narratives of rebel-only perpetration. It is envisaged that this document shall inform and feed into such national processes, both in terms of substance and the participatory process used to engage victims.

In addition to the aforementioned purpose to document and acknowledge experiences of conflict sexual violence in Koch Ongako, the documentation process further sought to help survivors come to terms with the past and provide a measure of healing through the act of breaking the silence and sharing one’s experiences with others.

Field notes at JRP are designed to provide in-depth case studies of communities and/or thematic conflict experiences in northern Uganda, so as to inform TJ policy and programme development and implementation. The following field note provides first-person accounts of sexual violence at the hands of state and non-state armed actors and civilians from the perspectives of male and female survivors in Koch Ongako. It is divided into sections that identify emerging patterns and themes that emerged out of the various accounts, including the types of conflict sexual violence that occurred in Koch Ongako, the “dangerous spots” where the violence was most likely to occur, analysis on the state’s failure to protect civilians from such violations, attempts by individuals to intercede to stop the violence, and reasons why survivors oftentimes choose to keep quiet. It concludes with an exploration of outcomes from the documentation process and recommendations for the GoU, civil society, and the community to provide accountability and redress to survivors of conflict sexual violence in Koch Ongako and other affected communities.

¹ Community member, focus group discussion, Koch Ongako, February 2014.

² Cybèle Cochran, 2008, “Transitional Justice: Responding to Victims of Wartime Sexual Violence in Africa,” *Journal of International Policy Solutions* 9: 33-39.

³ See Adam Branch, 2011, *Displacing Human Rights: War and Intervention in Northern Uganda*, Oxford: Oxford University Press;

Chris Dolan, 2013, *Social Torture: The Case of Northern Uganda, 1986-2006*, New York: Berghahn Books; Holly Porter, 2013, *After Rape: Justice and Social Harmony in Northern Uganda*, PhD. dissertation, University of London; Sverker Finnström, 2008, *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Methodology

“Ever since I joined the storytelling group, I am now relieved.”⁴

The Gender Justice Unit (GJU) at JRP, which spearheaded this documentation process, was founded in 2012 in order to pay special attention to the unique, gender-related experiences, needs, and desires of victims of conflict in northern Uganda. Its goal is to recognise and support gender justice and social repair of women and men affected by conflict by opening spaces for exchange, valuing their lived experiences and knowledge, fostering leadership, and changing justice debates.

The documentation process in Koch Ongako adopted a participatory, qualitative approach. Storytelling, theatre, games, and drawings were used to enable participants to freely express themselves, and to build trust and relieve tension. Individual interviews, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews were used to follow-up or better understand specific stories or incidences. The methods employed were largely informal, encouraging the survivors to share their stories on their own terms and in their own time. Each spoke about what happened to him or her as an individual or to people s/he knows. When one person would reach a particularly difficult moment in sharing, others would provide words of encouragement and comfort. As the survivors spoke, the GJU team took notes and recorded conversations that were later transcribed and analysed for recurrent patterns and themes, as well as emblematic incidents or experiences.

In total, the documentation involved the participation of 64 persons, including 52 women and 12 men. Fifty-four of these participants self-identified as survivors of conflict SGBV, whereas 10 were invited to participate based on their role or position in the community, such as local government official or opinion leader.

The documentation process began with a storytelling session on the experiences of female survivors of conflict sexual violence in January 2013 with 54 people, including female community members, formerly-abducted persons, child mothers, and women who had reportedly been raped in the camps by government soldiers.⁵

Following this initial session, the JRP team began to follow-up with 20 of the women in order to create more intimate spaces for sharing and reflection. They met with different configurations of these 20 women over the course of 12 months. In doing so, they carried out five home visits, since some of the women preferred to talk there, and one-on-one interviews with two women who did not want to share their stories in public, but

preferred to share their stories after the storytelling sessions. They also conducted a retreat in April 2014, in which the women converged for two days in a safe space in Gulu town to share their stories.

The GJU facilitated one additional dialogue with 10 community members and leaders in February 2014. They then conducted follow-up interviews to confirm with the survivors, community members, and leaders that what was transcribed was what they had said and meant, and also to clarify some stories that were unclear during the first telling.

Although the documentation initially focused on female survivors of sexual violence, due in part to prominent narratives of SGBV occurring primarily against women, participants also recounted stories of rape against men, compelling the team to identify four men in the community who experienced conflict sexual violence and to acknowledge their experiences herein. The team was advised that there are undoubtedly more male survivors living in the area, but was restricted by time and human resource constraints, and was unable to identify and reach out to more. Two of the four identified men elected to share their experiences with JRP in individual interviews, while one declined.

The names of the people who took part in this documentation process have been changed to conceal their identities. Names of some key persons in the community who were mentioned in the stories and can easily be identified have also been changed. The title of the field note was derived from a statement from a community member that women “fought the war with their bodies.”⁶

The community of Koch Ongako was selected as the geographic focus of this field note because of the known incidents of sexual violence that occurred there during the conflict, the specifics of which shall be explored in subsequent sections of this publication. The GJU first learned of the experiences of this community through a group of formerly-abducted women who originate from there.

Participants were selected based on a snowball sampling methodology. After reviewing all of the accounts collected and verifying with the participants that they have been written as intended, emblematic experiences were selected for inclusion in order to provide insight into the different patterns of sexual violence that men and women experienced during the conflict in this location.

Limitations

Due to time, funding, and human resource constraints, it was not possible to speak to every survivor of conflict sexual violence in the community, nor to independently verify every allegation or violation contained herein. As such, while intensive efforts have been made to depict accounts of conflict sexual violence in Koch Ongako as

⁴ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, 14 April 2014.

⁵ In the narratives, participants often used the term “soldiers” to refer to the government forces (National Resistance Army [NRA] and/or UPDF) and “rebels” to refer to the LRA.

⁶ Community member, focus group discussion, Koch Ongako, February 2014.

remembered and narrated by the participating victims, JRP is not responsible for any historical inaccuracies contained in this field note.

Background

Koch Ongako sub-county is located in the southwest corner of Gulu district, Acholi sub-region, northern Uganda. It contains five parishes: Onyona, Patuda, Kal, Abwoc, and Alokolum. According to the provisional results from the 2014 census, an estimated 23,207 people live in the area. The majority of the population are peasant farmers.

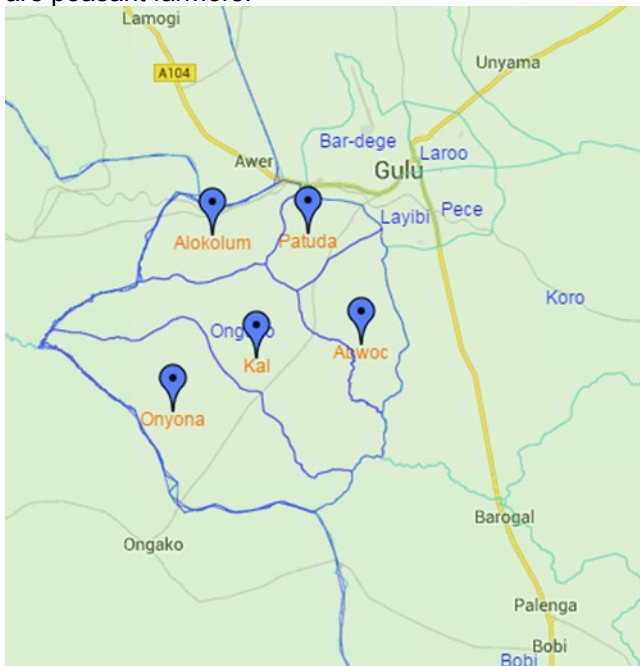


Figure 1: A map of Koch Ongako. Courtesy of the Land Conflict Mapping Tool. Accessed at www.lcmt.org.

According to accounts of community members, locations within Koch Ongako experienced conflict-related violence as early as the late-1970s, when Idi Amin's forces attempted to root out perceived Acholi loyalists to former president Milton Obote. When President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni took over in 1986 through a military coup, his forces, too, pushed northwards in an attempt to consolidate state power and security, giving rise to a number of popular insurgencies in the sub-region which resisted his rule, such as the Uganda People's Democratic Army

(UPDA), the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces (HSMF), and the LRA.

The majority of accounts of conflict sexual violence we collected in Koch Ongako centre on violations that are alleged to have occurred between 1993 and 2005 during the most intense periods of conflict between the GoU and LRA. As later sections in this field note reveal, many of the violations occurred during periods of migration and displacement around 1996 in which the residents of Koch Ongako were forced by the government to relocate to IDP camps in efforts to "protect" them from rebel attacks. Both civilians and armed state and non-state actors--including the National Resistance Army (NRA), Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF), LRA, and Amuka Boys⁷--are implicated in the perpetration of conflict sexual violence in the community.

Conflict sexual violence

Sexual violence can be defined as a form of gender-based violence that encompasses, "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting."⁸ Conflict sexual violence refers to such acts that occurred during northern Uganda's longstanding conflicts by state and non-state armed actors and civilians.

According to survivor narratives collected in the documentation exercise, the community of Koch Ongako experienced a breadth of sexual violence during the conflict period. Perhaps the most pervasive was that of rape, including gang rape and rape against men.⁹ Countless accounts narrate the violent and degrading acts the victims were subjected to, including being violated by 12 or more armed men over the course of hours or even days. As one survivor recalled:

After they beat me, the boys began to have sex with me in their presence. Some of the

⁷ The Amuka Boys refers to a pro-government militia from the Lango sub-region which assisted the UPDF in combatting the LRA.

⁸ United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, citing the World Health Organisation, 2011, "Analytical and Conceptual Framing of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence," p. 1.

⁹ According to Section 123 of Uganda's Penal Code, rape includes "unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl, without her consent, or with her consent, if the consent is obtained by force or by means of threat or intimidation of any kind or by fear of bodily harm."

Colloquially, but not legally, the term "sodomy" is used when men commit sexual acts on other men. In line with the Rome Statute, JRP adopts a comprehensive definition of rape, in which: "The perpetrator invaded the body of a person by conduct resulting in penetration, however slight, of any part of the body of the victim or of the perpetrator with a sexual organ, or of the anal or genital opening of the victim with any object or any other part of the body." Unlike that used in Uganda's legal system, this definition acknowledges that rape can be perpetrated on and by men and women.

soldiers refused to participate in the act. My hands were put up and my legs apart. They had sex with me one by one. They took turns. As one finished, another took over. It had rained and my cloth was soiled. I can't recall how many soldiers beat or raped me. The soldiers then decided to take me to the barracks.¹⁰

A male survivor recounted how he was raped at the same time as his mother:

When I put on my clothes, I began to walk, but I could not walk properly. I found my mother on the road, and she was not good to look at. Just like me, she had also been raped. She saw how I was walking and began to cry. We both cried.¹¹

Other survivors narrate being abducted or detained by the LRA or state forces, and then being subjected to subsequent sexual violations, such as sexual torture, damage to reproductive organs, or forced marriage or pregnancy.

In 1999, Lakwena rebels¹² took me with them. We went to Kalang Hill, where they distributed us to men to sleep with. We were still young, but there was no way out even though it was painful. We had to accept to sleep with the men or else we would be killed. The next day UPDF soldiers attacked the rebels and I escaped.¹³

Numerous women reported being held against their will by government forces in barracks. According to one participant, "There was a lady who was beaten in Koch Goma barracks. She was accused of taking food to rebels. She was beaten badly. Even her private parts were beaten."¹⁴

Another recounts how she was forced into marriage by a soldier:

One of the soldiers threatened to kill me if I did not stay as his wife. I accepted due to fear. We stayed for a short time before he eventually left the barracks. I did not get to know him much. I did not know his clan or tribe. All I know is that he infected me with AIDS.¹⁵

For those who were forced to bear children, the enduring consequences today are especially stark.

One of my daughters who I was raped with got pregnant and gave birth to a child. Her private parts had been severely torn due to the gang rape. She later passed on, but the child is alive. Just before she died, she asked for her child, who was given to her, and she passed on with the child on her chest. The child is not mentally fine. We think it is because he was carried by his mother before she died. He is forgetful and acts weird. He even speaks to his faeces.¹⁶

Often times, when the mothers survive, they raise the children alone, with no ties or connection to the fathers or the child's paternal clan. Due to patriarchal social and cultural norms, a child obtains his/her identity from the father, and children conceived through conflict sexual violence, as well as their mothers, face severe stigma, rejection and blame from relatives and the community at-large. Although the mothers experienced the initial violations of conflict sexual violence, they and their children continue to face ongoing rights violations in the post-conflict period that impede their ability to live in dignity and with their basic needs met.¹⁷ There have been few opportunities to trace the fathers of these children, and little-to-no recourse for accountability or child support, even when the fathers are known.

Lastly, many women in Koch Ongako were subjected to sexual exploitation during the conflict, especially during the periods in which they resided in IDP camps. Due to a lack of adequate food, shelter, and medical care in the camps, women were forced to turn to survival mechanisms that were not only dangerous, but also humiliating and degrading, such as sex in exchange for money or goods. At times, they would exchange their bodies for a portion of the meagre salaries the soldiers earned, so as to be able to provide food and other basic needs to their families. For example, during the insurgency there was a market in Koch called Tongwiri, where many soldiers flooded to buy alcohol, especially after getting paid. Community members recounted how women went to this market to drink and sell alcohol. It was a haven for sexual exploitation, where girls and women were lured into sex.

While some women willingly went to soldiers, others were forced to marry them by their families, by life circumstances, or by the soldiers themselves, and their whereabouts are still unknown today because they were taken to other districts. One of the participating women shared how her sister left her husband and went to stay with a soldier, who could provide for her.

¹⁰ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

¹¹ Male survivor, Individual interview, Koch Ongako, September 2014.

¹² LRA soldiers are often colloquially referred to as 'Lakwena', which means 'messenger' in Acholi. This is not to be confused with Alice Lakwena's HSMF.

¹³ Female survivor, storytelling session, Koch Ongako, January 2014.

¹⁴ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

¹⁵ Female survivor, storytelling session, Koch Ongako, September 2014.

¹⁶ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

¹⁷ Lindsay McClain Opiyo, 2015, "Alone Like a Tree: Reintegration Challenges facing Children Born of War and Their Mothers in Northern Uganda," JRP situational brief, available at <http://justiceandreconciliation.com/publications/statements-briefs/2015/alone-like-a-tree-reintegration-challenges-facing-children-born-of-war-and-their-mothers-in-northern-uganda/>; Virginie Ladisch, 2015, "From Rejection to Redress: Overcoming Legacies of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Northern Uganda," ICTJ report, available at <https://www.ictj.org/publication/rejection-redress-overcoming-legacies-conflict-sexualviolence-northern-uganda>.

Unfortunately, he infected her with HIV, and she has since died.

My sister left her husband because of poverty and went for a soldier. She was not forced by the soldier but was enticed by the money he had. Unfortunately, this soldier was already HIV positive. They stayed for some time, and the soldier started falling sick. They went together to the soldier's home in Soroti, and he passed away. She also died of AIDS. Young girls also went for soldiers to survive.¹⁸

Medical care to treat such conditions has been scarce, with survivors having to travel long distances to reach hospitals that have the equipment and technical expertise required. Even if the care is accessed and subsidised, as is the case in government hospitals and clinics, travel and upkeep for patients is a required expense, and many of the prescribed medications have to be purchased elsewhere, as they are often not in stock.

Consequences on survivors

Without doubt, the consequences of conflict sexual violence on survivors are grave, and include physical, emotional and social repercussions, such as disease, fistula, mental illness, depression, poverty, and rejection and blame by family, friends, and the community.

High rates of HIV infection due to exposure during conflict sexual violence featured prominently in the narratives documented. According to one woman: "I got HIV as a result of the rape. I began to fall sick and eventually the man refused me saying I was weak and useless. Right now, I am suffering alone with the children."¹⁹

Many of the survivors living with HIV/AIDS are weak and cannot perform heavy work, such as farming. This affects their productivity and ability to secure a livelihood, and further exacerbates the stigma and rejection they face.

When I went for antenatal, I found out that I had HIV. I had been infected as a result of the rape. My husband had also been infected. He was angry and began to say that my husband, the soldier, had infected me. He abused and beat me. I began to fall sick, and he did not give me any support. It is my family that helps me. He said he was not the one who infected me. Every time I fell sick or was admitted, he kept on reminding me how I was raped and got infected.²⁰

In addition to the consequences of living with HIV/AIDS, other women report experiencing gynecological problems, such as damage to reproductive organs, because of the brutality they experienced when raped. As one woman recounted:

When I stayed in the barracks, the man inserted the penis where it was not supposed to go. Now my private parts pain so much. At times, I can't sit. In the past, I couldn't hold faeces for long, although I am now better. My buttocks still pain as if there is a stick pushed in. It pains up to my stomach.²¹

¹⁸ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

¹⁹ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

²⁰ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

²¹ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

Recurring patterns and themes

After documenting the numerous narratives of survivors of conflict SGBV and their fellow community members, a number of similarities in experiences emerged, suggesting recurring patterns and themes of conflict SGBV in the setting. The following section explores the four that were the most prominent to the authors in their review of the documented experiences: dangerous spots, protection failures, attempted interventions, and keeping quiet.

Dangerous spots

Before the longstanding war between the LRA and the GoU erupted in the mid-1980s, men were the primary breadwinners in most Acholi homes. They owned cattle, sheep, and goats, and grazed them on customary land to take care of their families. During the conflict, the government initiated a policy of forced displacement of the civilian population into IDP camps, supposedly to protect them from rebel attacks.²²

Due to the limits on movement, men were no longer able to freely leave the camps to cultivate land or rear animals due to fears they would be suspected by the government to be rebel collaborators. Women, on the other hand, still could travel limited distances in and around the camps, as they were perceived to be less of a threat to the security of the area. At the same time, a number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) adopted policies in which emergency food relief was distributed through women rather than men, further reducing men's roles as providers. In many homes, these circumstances led to women increasingly serving as breadwinners, while men sat idly by. With this shift in gender roles came an increased prevalence of alcoholism and domestic violence, a legacy that continues to today.

These evolving roles for women exposed them to unprecedented levels of physical and sexual violence during the conflict.²³ According to one participant, "When people were in the camps, food was distributed, but it was not enough. We had to collect food from the villages or find ways to supplement on the rations we

were given by agencies providing food items to the IDPs."²⁴

Known dangerous spots emerged in and around the camps and communities, locations that women were known to frequent in their everyday lives. "Widespread shortages of water, food and cooking fuel" required women and girls "to enter the bush to plant small gardens or to search for water and firewood, rendering them vulnerable to abduction by the LRA," and to rape by government soldiers and local defence units (LDUs).²⁵ According to one local leader, "Soldiers who were to protect the women were the same ones who raped them. They waited for women in the gardens and raped them."²⁶ Bore holes, gardens, markets and latrines became sites of abuse. Women took the risk of being raped even when they went to buy necessities for the home, such as salt.

When people were not yet confined in the IDP camps, I went to buy salt at a market called Opwuk Ongweco. I was stopped from going by my husband, but I insisted. I was pregnant at that time. I walked and found government soldiers on the road. They asked me where I was going and told me to put my luggage down. I wondered what they were going to do to me. One of the soldiers told me, "You think that stomach of yours will prevent anything?" He took me to an old house... and he raped me. I later on gave birth to the child and it died.²⁷

Another woman, unable to retreat to the *alup*, a makeshift structure in the bush for shelter at night, was raped by a formerly-abducted neighbour. According to the account:

She never used to go hiding because her child cried a lot and people chased her away before the child's noise would attract attention to their hiding places. On this day, [the neighbour] found her mingling bread and grabbed her. He raped her and threatened to kill her if she said a word to anyone. Unfortunately, he infected her with HIV.²⁸

²² In reality, civilians continued to experience raids by the LRA even when in camps, and the squalid living conditions created a humanitarian crisis. At the height of the displacement, more than 1,000 people died per week from hunger and disease in the under-served camps (<http://www.irinnews.org/report/56063/uganda-1-000-displaced-die-every-week-in-war-torn-north-report>).

²³ Robert Senath Esuruku, 2011, "Beyond Masculinity: Gender, Conflict and Post Conflict Reconstruction in Northern Uganda," *Journal of Science and Sustainable Development* 4: 25-40.

²⁴ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

²⁵ Diane Paul, 2006, "Heading home? Protection and Return in Northern Uganda," *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*, available at <http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine/issue-36/heading-home-protection-and-return-in-northern-uganda>.

²⁶ Local leader, focus group discussion, Koch Ongako, February 2014.

²⁷ Female survivor, storytelling session, Koch Ongako, 2013.

²⁸ Female survivor, storytelling session, Koch Ongako, February 2014.

Protection failures

In the discourse on reparations in northern Uganda, victims often speak of government responsibility for failing to protect them. As this documentation suggests, this goes well beyond failing to protect civilians from abduction or atrocities by the rebels. Survivor after survivor who participated in the documentation recounted how state forces, in the course of escorting or accompanying them to/from the camps to their gardens, markets, and other locations in and around the community, perpetrated acts of sexual violence against civilians, thus betraying their duty to provide civilian protection and security. According to one woman, "Soldiers who escorted women to collect food from the villages also raped them on the way."²⁹ As another participant remembered:

There was a lady who stayed near the upper barracks. One of the soldiers who had been sent to patrol the place found her bathing at night and raped her near the bath shelter. After raping the lady, he told her to pick her basin and go back in the house. Then, he continued with his patrol towards the centre.³⁰

Oftentimes, opportunities of chaos and confusion were used to separate and violate civilians. For instance, during periods of migration from homesteads to the camps, numerous sexual violations are alleged to have occurred:

People were forced to go to Goma camp. I carried my son on my back and went with the rest to Koch Goma. We moved with government soldiers. As I was walking, one of the soldiers grabbed me, pulled me behind, and told me to sit down. This was in a place called Tochi. The rest of the people and the soldiers had moved on. I remained behind with this soldier, and he raped me. He then told me to continue with the rest. I moved and came to Koch Ongako trading centre. Other people went to Goma. I later on learnt that other women were also raped on their way to Koch Goma camp.³¹

In another account, during a fight between the rebels and government forces, a woman's two daughters were abducted by government forces. When the mother followed after them and pleaded for their release, they were all taken behind the barracks and

raped: "They took turns to sleep with each and every one of us."³²

The Constitution of Uganda provides that there shall be a national defence force to "preserve and defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Uganda," and to "foster harmony and understanding between the defence forces and civilians."³³ Their character is to be "patriotic, professional, disciplined, [and] productive,"³⁴ and it is their duty "to observe and respect human rights and freedoms in the performance of their functions."³⁵

However, for survivors of sexual violence at the hands of state forces, there are few avenues for recourse when these standards are not upheld. According to the Uganda Peoples' Defense Force Act of 2005, military courts are to be established for persons subject to military law.³⁶ Information on such hearings has, however, been hardly forthcoming, creating a widespread belief among communities and survivors that the GoU has offered impunity for state actors who have committed violations against civilians, especially sexual crimes.³⁷

Participants in the documentation allege that in Koch Ongako, if a victim came forward with such allegations, the accused would often disappear or be transferred to another posting. During a focus group discussion one of the participants said, "When we reported the matter to the army, the soldiers were shifted and we never saw them again. Nothing was done to them."³⁸

Attempted interventions

In several of the stories, the women recounted how soldiers or other community members tried to intervene and stop the violations as they occurred, yet often failed. According to one survivor, "There was a boy in the army called [Opiyo], son to Omona. He came and said, 'Kill me and let this woman go. She did not do anything. Why are you treating her like that?' When he made this remark, he was arrested and taken to a pit."³⁹

The prominence and consistency of these attempted interventions in the narratives of conflict sexual violence in Koch Ongako suggest a deep-rooted importance of these details for survivors. Amidst the barbarism of sexual violence, especially collective acts of gang rape and sexual torture, it is as if the attempts by soldiers and civilians alike reinforce the humanity of the victim and decry the indignities committed against him or her. Further, they may vindicate one's sense of

²⁹ Female survivor, storytelling session, Koch Ongako, January 2014.

³⁰ Female survivor, storytelling session, Koch Ongako, January 2014.

³¹ Female survivor, storytelling session, Koch Ongako, January 2014.

³² Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

³³ Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 2005, article 209, available at http://www.politicsresources.net/docs/uganda_const_1995.pdf.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, article 208.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, article 221.

³⁶ See

<http://www.ulrc.go.ug/ulrcsite/sites/default/files/Downloads/Laws%20of%20Uganda/Laws%20of%20Uganda%20-%202001%20-2006/U.P.D.F%20Act%202005.pdf>

³⁷ Refugees International, 2007, "Uganda: Government must live up to protection responsibilities in the north," available at <http://refugeesinternational.org/policy/field-report/uganda-government-must-live-protection-responsibilities-north>.

³⁸ Local leader, focus group discussion, Koch Ongako, February 2014.

³⁹ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

victimhood, both in the moments of the abuse and in the time that has followed, serving as a reminder that not everyone condoned what took place, nor was the victim to blame for what was done to him or her.

Despite the attempts to decry such violations from occurring and the symbolic value of the attempt, the emerging pattern suggests that those who spoke out were often helpless to stop what was occurring, due to the nature of the violations and the power imbalance between the perpetrators and others present. For example, as one survivor remembers, “[Olak], a boy I knew who was in the barracks at that time, saw me and cried, but there was nothing he could do.”⁴⁰ Or, as another recalled, “There were female soldiers who asked the leader to have mercy on me. He told them they would be the ones to pay for what I did if he was to have mercy on me.”⁴¹ The consequence of speaking out was grave, perhaps making the attempt even more meaningful and powerful, as the perpetrators’ wrath could be redirected from the victim to that person.

In general, communities and bystanders often had few opportunities to speak up against what they witnessed, and seemingly deliberate actions were taken to parade victims before their families and neighbours, so as to reinforce the armed groups’ power and control over the civilian population. As one survivor recalls, “The soldiers then decided to take me to the barracks. I was told to run from the forest to the barracks. I found people on the way when I was being taken to the barracks. They looked at me quietly with empathy.”⁴²

In this regard, almost everyone knew what was taking place, yet they were reminded of how powerless they were to stop it. The fear that they could be the next target of violations ensured civilian compliance and complacency.

Keeping quiet

Although some episodes of conflict sexual violence were public, as noted above, many more took place without witnesses. Most of the survivors interviewed admitted to having suffered in silence and having never shared their experiences with anyone. The following provides insight into the reasons and causes that conflict sexual violence has remained a whispered phenomenon in Koch Ongako.

Stigma and rejection

Many survivors reported fearing to speak about their experiences during the conflict, preferring to keep quiet because of the stigmatisation and rejection that survivors of sexual violence often face:

What hurts most and what makes it hard to forget is the finger-pointing. Whenever I pass,

people talk about me as the woman who was raped. They say all kinds of things. Yet, I was raped for no reason. I was married. It has spoilt my name.⁴³

Rape and other forms of sexual violence go against social norms of intimacy, sexuality and general order. However, rather than blame the perpetrators for such alterations from the norm, society often finds fault within the victims, insinuating that their actions, inactions, or character instigated their fate. In Koch Ongako, like in other areas of northern Uganda, survivors of conflict sexual violence often face severe discrimination and social exclusion when their experiences are known by their families and/or the public. This further compounds their vulnerability to subsequent violations and revictimisation, such as poverty, health issues, and further sexual- and gender-based violence. As a result, it is common for one to try to keep the experience a secret to avoid the judgment and blame of others.

For those whose experiences are known, they often face repercussions long after the violations have taken place. For example, for some who were married at the time they were raped, they have experienced abandonment by their spouses. “When my husband confirmed that I had been raped, he refused to take me back as his wife. He said he did not want me.”⁴⁴ Others are belittled by their in-laws, who they feel are constantly trying to break up their marriages.

Even when one wishes to “forget” and move on, the survivors lament that others constantly remind them of the past through their words and actions: “What annoys me most about the rape and what makes me not forget is the stigma. It does not end. People keep on saying, ‘You were raped by soldiers.’ You just can’t forget... It is so painful. The harsh words are a scar. This is an impact that cannot go.”⁴⁵

Fear and intimidation

In addition to the possible social consequences of speaking out about experiences of sexual violence, during the conflict it could have even meant death, with many survivors narrating how they were warned they would be killed if they spoke about what had happened: “Their leader warned me that I would be killed if I confessed that I had been raped.”⁴⁶

Intimidation by the authorities was a common theme that surfaced in the survivors’ accounts, and a major obstacle to reporting experiences of conflict sexual violence and seeking treatment, redress, and accountability. For instance, “If soldiers identified that you were the one who reported a case, they followed you up and killed you. This caused fright in the people. People did not mention what happened to their

⁴⁰ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

⁴¹ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

⁴² Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

⁴³ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

⁴⁴ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

⁴⁵ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

⁴⁶ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

neighbours because of fear.”⁴⁷ One of the women said, “What happened to women made them terrified, but there was no one to speak on their behalf.”⁴⁸

Local leaders we spoke to recounted how they too felt silenced, supporting survivors' claims that community members were threatened with death if they reported abuses by the state or other armed groups: “People didn't have a voice. Even [local councillors] did not have a voice. They feared for their life, and that's why everybody kept quiet.”⁴⁹

Another leader recalled how he tried to follow-up on his own wife's rape, and was instead arrested and accused of being a rebel: “My wife was raped by a civilian, and I followed up the matter with some colleagues. We arrested the man and took him to the barracks. His mother was seeing one of the generals in the army, and we were instead arrested. We were taken to Gulu barracks and accused of being rebels.”⁵⁰ Another remembered how, “In 1993, a girl of Minlawino village was arrested by five government soldiers and raped badly. When her father reported the matter to the barracks, he was instead beaten, and he lost his teeth... Such treatment made leaders petrified of reporting rape cases.”⁵¹

Limited avenues for reporting

Further compounding the situation of fear and intimidation, reporting procedures for sexual violence during the conflict were limited, with virtually no mechanisms for referral or support. Logistically, there was nowhere to go: “I was in Ongako camp and rape happened on many occasions, but we didn't have the office to report to. The [local council] offices were in Gulu. That is why there are no statistics on the number of women who were raped.”⁵² Further, in the immediate aftermath of an incident, “Victims of rape did not attain medical support, since there was no nearby hospital. Some cases were taken to court but dismissed due to lack of evidence.”⁵³

One male survivor recalled how he tried to report his rape to his local *rwot kweri*,⁵⁴ who told him, “...it was difficult to talk to the soldiers, since they did not even understand the local language.”⁵⁵ He advised him to go to town, but there was nowhere in town to report.

Official protection mechanisms were severely underfunded during much of the conflict period. For instance, the UHRC had limited resources to work at the district and community-level during the conflict, and according to a 2007 report, the Gulu office only employed six staff to oversee 16 districts.⁵⁶ Further, it was only in 2003 that the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) deployed an officer responsible for humanitarian coordination in Gulu after years of conflict.⁵⁷

Instead, for much of the war, the only option for reporting sexual violence was in the barracks, but as one participant gravely pointed out: “Soldiers who were to protect the women were the same ones who raped them.”⁵⁸

Inability to identify one's attackers

Another significant challenge to speaking out after experiencing conflict sexual violence has been the inability of most survivors to identify their attackers. According to survivors' narratives, perpetrators of sexual violence often made deliberate efforts to hide their identities. For instance, at times one armed group would masquerade as another to confuse the community, such as in allegations of government forces pretending to be rebels. According to one participant:

Government soldiers who went for patrol hid in the bush at the opok tree near Mr. Oryang's place in Koch Ongako. Instead of waiting for the rebels, they waited for women who had gone to collect food. They pretended to be rebels. Women were grabbed near this tree and raped on the road on their way from collecting food. No woman whether young or old who passed here survived.⁵⁹

In other instances, the act of rape by multiple assailants over a sustained period of time made identification difficult, especially in determining the paternity of a child conceived. Further, the timing and location of violations, such as in a secluded place at night, could make it difficult for a victim to fully see a person's face or other distinguishable characteristics.

In addition, the documentation also revealed that the state forces used intimidating tactics when a woman

⁴⁷ Local leader, focus group discussion, Koch Ongako, February 2014.

⁴⁸ Female survivor, storytelling session, Koch Ongako, January 2014.

⁴⁹ Local leader, focus group discussion, Koch Ongako, February 2014.

⁵⁰ Local leader, focus group discussion, Koch Ongako, February 2014.

⁵¹ Community member, focus group discussion, Koch Ongako, February 2014.

⁵² Local leader, focus group discussion, Koch Ongako, February 2014.

⁵³ Local leader, focus group discussion, Koch Ongako, February 2014.

⁵⁴ *Rwot kweri* translates into “chief of the hoe.” In Acholi society, these local leaders have intimate knowledge of land boundaries and members of the community.

⁵⁵ Male survivor, individual interview, Koch Ongako, September 2014.

⁵⁶ Refugees International, 2007, “Uganda: Government must live up to protection responsibilities in the north,” available at <http://refugeesinternational.org/policy/field-report/uganda-government-must-live-protection-responsibilities-north>.

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch, 2005, *Uprooted and Forgotten: Impunity and Human Rights Abuses in Northern Uganda*, pp. 64-65, available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/uganda0905/uganda0905.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Local leader, focus group discussion, Koch Ongako, February 2014.

⁵⁹ Female survivor, storytelling session, Koch Ongako, January 2014.

reported rape, such as parading many men in uniform before her and asking her to make a positive identification.

When a woman was raped by a soldier and reported to the army, she was asked to point out the culprit amidst many soldiers. They were all clad in the same uniforms, and this made it hard for the women to identify them.⁶⁰

Knowing that one cannot easily identify and locate the person responsible, coupled with the stigma and rejection associated with being a survivor of conflict sexual violence and the pervasive intimidation by authorities to keep quiet, there were, and continue to be, few incentives for a survivor to speak up about his or her experiences, making the pursuit of justice and accountability for conflict sexual violence in Koch Ongako virtually impossible.

⁶⁰ Community member, focus group discussion, Koch Ongako, February 2014.

Documentation outcomes

The process of documenting the conflict sexual violence experienced by men and women in Koch Ongako has resulted in a number of outcomes, in addition to this resultant field note, which creates a written historical record. The following section highlights four major outcomes that were observed or reported during and after this process.

Breaking the silence

Notwithstanding the aforementioned reasons that survivors of conflict sexual violence keep quiet, their consensual participation in this documentation process served to break the silence on the prevalence of sexual violence in this community during the conflict period. Many participants reported that they had never spoken of their experiences prior to this process, saying things such as, “I have never told this to anyone. What women went through was too much. You cannot even talk about it,”⁶¹ and “I have never shared my story with anyone. Today is my first time.”⁶²

Their opening up to JRP may be explained by a number of factors, including the storytelling methodologies used, JRP’s experience and reputation working with victims of conflict in northern Uganda, as well as the current post-conflict political climate in the country. As one woman said, “I never thought I would open up to speak about what I went through, but because of the trust I have developed for you people, I will speak today.”⁶³ We have noted that trust and timing are crucial factors in supporting survivors of conflict sexual violence to share their experiences.

Advocacy for accountability and redress

Across greater northern Uganda, there is a growing network of survivors of conflict sexual violence who are speaking out and demanding accountability and redress for their experiences. This documentation

process by survivors in Koch Ongako undoubtedly feeds into this movement.

Further, in 2014, the Women’s Advocacy Network (WAN) at JRP,⁶⁴ of which some of the participants of the documentation are members, successfully presented a petition to the Parliament of Uganda demanding that their plight be addressed by the government.⁶⁵ This resulted in a resolution being unanimously passed.⁶⁶ Moreover, a growing number of NGOs and researchers have released publications on conflict sexual violence in northern Uganda, resulting in a growing body of evidence of perpetration by state and non-state actors. The GoU has even committed to the aforementioned documentation process through the UHRC, and it is expected that the documentation of conflict sexual violence will be given special consideration and priority.

Without doubt, for some participants, one of the major reasons for breaking the silence was to pursue accountability and redress: “I thought no one would ever follow-up on this matter. I tried to follow this on my own and failed.”⁶⁷ Whether their search for justice shall bear fruit remains to be seen.

Healing and relief

Another outcome of the documentation process has been a measure of healing and relief to individual participants. As one survivor said, “The idea of sharing our experiences will help us let go of whatever has passed.”⁶⁸ Others made statements suggesting that they found comfort in having someone express interest in and bear witness to their experiences: “I thought this would never be known by anyone. I thought no one would ever follow up.”⁶⁹

In addition, because of the participatory nature of the documentation process, it led to a strengthening of survivor-led networks and movements for peer support and advocacy. By the end of the process, the participating survivors had created a network for victims to give each other emotional support. They continue to meet frequently and visit each other in their

⁶¹ Female survivor, storytelling session, Koch Ongako, 2013.

⁶² Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

⁶³ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

⁶⁴ The Women’s Advocacy Network (WAN) at JRP is a forum where more than 500 war-affected women come together to advocate for justice, acknowledgement, and accountability for sexual- and gender-based violations inflicted upon them during conflicts in northern Uganda. For more information, visit <http://justiceandreconciliation.com/initiatives/womens-advocacy-network/>.

⁶⁵ See

<http://justiceandreconciliation.com/uncategorized/2014/womens-advocacy-network-petition/>.

⁶⁶ See <http://justiceandreconciliation.com/media/newsroom/press-releases/2014/parliament-adopts-resolution-to-address-the-needs-of-war-affected/>.

⁶⁷ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

⁶⁸ Female survivor, storytelling session, Koch Ongako, 2013.

⁶⁹ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014.

homes. Some confirmed that they feel better and relieved: “I used to worry a lot but as I talk now, my heart has calmed down,” said one of the participants.⁷⁰ According to another, “Ever since joining the storytelling group, I am now free.”⁷¹

Referrals

Meeting the needs and expectations of victims of conflict necessitates a holistic, multi-pronged approach. Recognising JRP's limited mandate of research, documentation, and advocacy, during and after this documentation process, JRP has referred participants to and/or partnered with organisations that provide rehabilitation, skills training, and livelihoods to survivors of conflict sexual violence. The women in the community who participated in the initial storytelling session have benefited from these services, and are currently engaging in group income-generating activities (IGAs) and savings and loan schemes. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the community, which emerged strongly in the women's accounts, has also become an advocacy point for war-affected women under the WAN. WAN members have spoken to various stakeholders at local, national, and international levels to intervene in the matter.

⁷⁰ Female survivor, storytelling session, Koch Ongako, 2013.

⁷¹ Female survivor, retreat, Gulu town, April 2014 .

Recommendations

In response to the pervasive sexual violence documented to have occurred in Koch Ongako during the conflict period, JRP offers the following recommendations to the GoU, civil society, international community, and community members and leaders:

The Human Rights Documentation Programme of the UHRC must investigate and document the sexual violence that occurred during the longstanding conflicts in greater northern Uganda. This documentation should acknowledge the various violations inflicted on men and women by both state and non-state armed actors, and identify patterns and themes of sexual violence across communities, regions, and time periods. Its findings should inform the operationalisation of official transitional justice processes in the country through concrete recommendations for reform and redress.

Perpetrators of conflict sexual violence must be identified and held accountable for their actions. This requires full and meaningful coordination between government bodies such as the UPDF, Directorate for Public Prosecutions (DPP), Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS), UHRC, and Amnesty Commission in order to investigate allegations and identify and hold to account persons responsible. The findings and outcomes of such investigations and processes must be available to victims and the public at large. Further, resources must be made available to trace the paternity of children conceived out of conflict sexual violence.

A special desk should be established within the UPDF to receive and investigate allegations of misconduct by members of the military during the conflict period. This office should be accessible and responsive to the needs of survivors of conflict sexual violence, and its staff must be regularly trained in guidance and counselling. Information on all investigations and trials to date into these matters should be made available to the public. In addition, all members of the UPDF must be required to attend mandatory trainings and programmes in human rights and civilian protection.

The Government of Uganda must provide gender-sensitive reparations to survivors of conflict sexual violence, especially for acts committed by its armed forces. This includes official acknowledgment of and apology for the magnitude of violations that took place, as well as individual and collective compensation to survivors in the form of monetary allowances, livelihoods programmes,

educational bursaries, and medical support, among others. A special fund must be established to distribute the reparations, and processes for registering and accessing its support must be sensitive to the needs and experiences of survivors of conflict sexual violence.

Long-term medical treatment must be availed to survivors of conflict sexual violence. This includes treatment for HIV/AIDS, fistula and other gynaecological problems, chronic body pain, trauma and depression, among others. Mobile clinics must be instated in areas like Koch Ongako to enable accessibility to persons with disabilities or those who are unable to make frequent visits to health centres due to resource constraints or family obligations. Treatment and medications must be free and regularly available to those who qualify.

Dialogues, meetings, and discussions must be held at the local-level to sensitise community members on the consequences and impact of stigma against survivors of conflict sexual violence and persons living with HIV/AIDS. Such gatherings should be supported and facilitated by local leaders, NGOs, and community members, and held routinely in order to affect the desired decrease in stigma and rejection. These cannot be one-off conversations and must occur over time for the foreseeable future.

Measures must be taken to ensure that victims of conflict sexual violence participate meaningfully and fully in ongoing and proposed TJ processes in Uganda. They must be consulted at all phases, including design, planning, implementation, and evaluation. Efforts must be made to ensure that processes acknowledge the range of sexual violations that occurred during the conflict, against both men and women, whilst creating safe spaces for survivors to share their views and experiences without fear of reprisal or further revictimisation. **The authors and research team further call on the GoU to expeditiously adopt the pending draft National TJ Policy and to fast-track legislation to operationalise it.**