

Mapping Regional Reconciliation in Northern Uganda: A Case Study of the Acholi and Lango Sub-Regions

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Mapping Regional Reconciliation in Northern Uganda

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Acronyms

| | |
|-------|--|
| CSO | Civil society organisation |
| FAP | Formerly-abducted person |
| FoM | Families of the missing |
| GoU | Government of Uganda |
| HSM | Holy Spirit Movement |
| IDP | Internally displaced person |
| JRP | Justice and Reconciliation Project |
| LRA | Lord's Resistance Army |
| PRDP | Peace, Recovery and Development Plan |
| SAFE | Supporting Access to Justice, Fostering Equity and Peace |
| SGBV | Sexual- and gender-based violence |
| UPDA | Uganda People's Democratic Army |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| NRA | National Resistance Army |
| E.G | Example |

Executive Summary

Led by Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP), with funding support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Supporting Access to Justice, Fostering Equity and Peace (SAFE) programme, this report, titled *Mapping Regional Reconciliation in Northern Uganda: A Case Study of the Acholi and Lango Sub-Regions*, examines key conflict drivers at the sub-regional and community levels in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions, specifically, and northern Uganda more broadly, and identifies effective mechanisms for constructive social change processes towards regional reconciliation. It is a significant step towards comprehensively identifying and analysing obstacles to positive peace and reconciliation in the region to ensure that post-war recovery, reconciliation and development interventions are conflict-sensitive and aligned with the social, political and economic needs of the communities. The report also identifies strategic and effective mechanisms to foster regional reconciliation in ways that value embedded local capacities, narratives and forms of agency in the communities. The report concludes by highlighting recommendations directed to key actors across the horizontal and vertical axis of the society, eliciting a multi-stakeholder approach to engendering sustainable structures of lasting peace and reconciliation in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions. Different sections of the report include:

Chapter 1: Introduction comprehensively lays out the background of the war-affected context of northern Uganda, foregrounding the magnitude of violations experienced during the series of armed conflicts inflicting the region during the period of 1986-2006. It also locates the post-war challenges experienced by communities with a regional focus on the Acholi and Lango sub-regions. This section elaborates upon the different methodologies adopted during the data collection to obtain the qualitative and quantitative data that forms the blueprint of this report, and it details the profiles of the people who participated in the study and whose unique experiences and justice and reconciliation needs influence the report.

Chapter 2: Need for Reconciliation: Exploring Obstacles and Conflict Drivers delineates the key conflict drivers that hinder reconciliation at two levels – within communities and across sub-regions – among different stakeholders in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions. It presents a comprehensive analysis of the key conflict drivers depicting fractured relationships amongst communities and social structures to ensure that regional reconciliation interventions are conflict-sensitive and responsive to the needs of the region. The section also highlights the importance of cooperative and positive working relationships in implementing the social structures of democracy and ensuring lasting reconciliation at all levels of the society – personal, interpersonal, structural and cultural.

Chapter 3: Promotion of Reconciliation: Examining Effective Mechanisms identifies key mechanisms and processes that will effectively foster regional reconciliation in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions by addressing transition challenges and conflicts drivers in the region. This section also foregrounds the cyclical relationship between social change and personal change, and individual healing and collective healing, for the society of northern Uganda.

Chapter 4: Recommendations: Charting the Way Forward makes targeted policy and programmatic recommendations for actors at all levels of the society - top leadership, mid-level actors and grassroots actors - to improve responses to the identified conflict drivers and advance processes of reconciliation in northern Uganda through a multi-stakeholder

Introduction

Spanning over two decades from 1986-2006, the series of protracted armed conflicts inflicting the social, political and economic landscape of northern Uganda are considered the “biggest neglected humanitarian emergency in the world” by the United Nations.¹ Although preceded by several coups d'état and internal conflicts since the precolonial era in Uganda, this period has been particularly significant in witnessing protracted wars with unfathomable human rights violations, and international and regional power struggles, which comprehensively define the backdrop of the current post-war transition phase that Uganda is cautiously treading in. During the turbulent period of 1986-2006, civilians in northern Uganda experienced widespread violations of human rights perpetuated by rebels as well as state authorities at alarming rates, and they stood witness to political instability, economic decay, social disintegration, and national and regional insecurity. As the war-ravaged region gradually transitions amidst post-war recovery and reconciliation efforts, it continues to bear the legacy of its past, both materially and psychologically. Acute poverty, high youth unemployment, unaddressed physical injuries and psychological trauma, ethnic stereotyping and a prevailing sense of denied justice continue to impact upon survivors' ability to rebuild their lives and to move forward and beyond the many cleavages that divide northern Uganda.

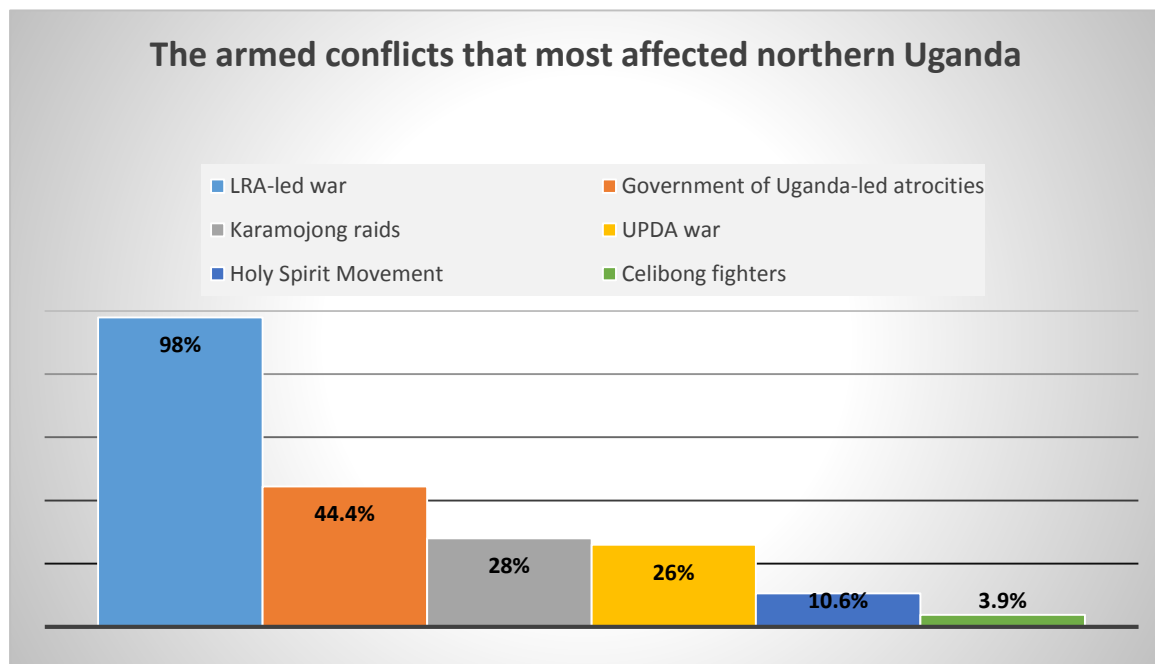


Figure 1: The armed conflicts that most affected northern Uganda, field findings, April 2015.

Tracing the historical trajectory of northern Uganda since 1986 brings to fore a series of armed groups that incited violence and civil wars that severely affected the population of the region. These include the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA), the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM), the Karamojong raids, and the Celibong fighters, followed by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) which has been the longest standing rebel group in the region perpetuating an astounding magnitude of human rights violations and abuses. The Government of Uganda has also been complicit in leading several massacres and atrocities

¹ Jan Egeland, “UN relief official spotlights world's largest neglected crisis in northern Uganda,” *UN News Centre*, 21 October 2004.

against the civilians. At the peak of these armed conflicts in northern Uganda, several thousands of civilians were subjected to brutal attacks, rapes, torture, extra-judicial executions, abductions and destruction of homes and communities² Severely affected by the atrocities, children, adults, women and men all suffered the violations in different proportions.³ During the armed conflicts, different forms of victimisation experienced by war-affected communities in northern Uganda are thematically clustered below:

- **Victims of abduction and enforced disappearance:** Systematic abductions of children and youth by the LRA to bolster its military strength and terrorise communities led to approximately 24,000 to 38,000 children being abducted and forcibly recruited as child soldiers in northern Uganda.⁴ Men, women and children were abducted at alarming rates and forcibly conscripted into rebel forces or tortured as sexual slaves. Compounding the issue was state-led abductions of women as wives and sexual slaves by the National Resistance Army during the armed conflict. Enforced disappearances by government forces on suspicion of complicity with rebel groups was also a common phenomenon. While several abducted victims have returned to their communities, the lack of holistic reintegration and stigmatisation remain a major challenge. Several other victims are either still in captivity or have succumbed to torture and died in the bush, with their fate unknown to their community, and the trauma of uncertainty lingering in the families of the missing persons.
- **Victims of forced displacement:** At the LRA-led armed conflict's peak in 2005, there were 1.84 million Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) living in 251 camps across 11 districts of northern Uganda.⁵ Displaced by life-threatening activities of rebel groups, civilians sought refuge in IDP camps, only to face challenges of starvation, loss of livelihood, sexual assault of young girls by government soldiers who failed in their responsibility to protect and instead became predators, as well as widespread occurrence of diseases like HIV/AIDS. Abduction of civilians from camps continued, while the loss of culture and drastically changing gender roles contributed to gender-based violence in the post-war phase. As displaced communities return to their lands, the issue of land wrangle over land use, access and ownership is a sharply escalating source of conflict.

² As stated in a Human Rights Watch interview with a victim at Kitgum Matidi camp on 5 March 2005.

³ Emmy Allio and Justin Moro, "LRA kills seven in Adjumani," *New Vision*, Kampala, 11 March 2005.

⁴ Phuong Pham, Patrick Vinck, and Eric Stover, *Abducted: The Lord's Resistance Army and Forced Conscripted in Northern Uganda* (UC Berkeley: Human Rights Center, 2007).

⁵ UNHCR, "UNHCR closes chapter on Uganda's internally displaced people", Briefing Notes, 6 January 2012. <http://www.unhcr.org/4f06e2a79.html> (Accessed on 26 November 2015).

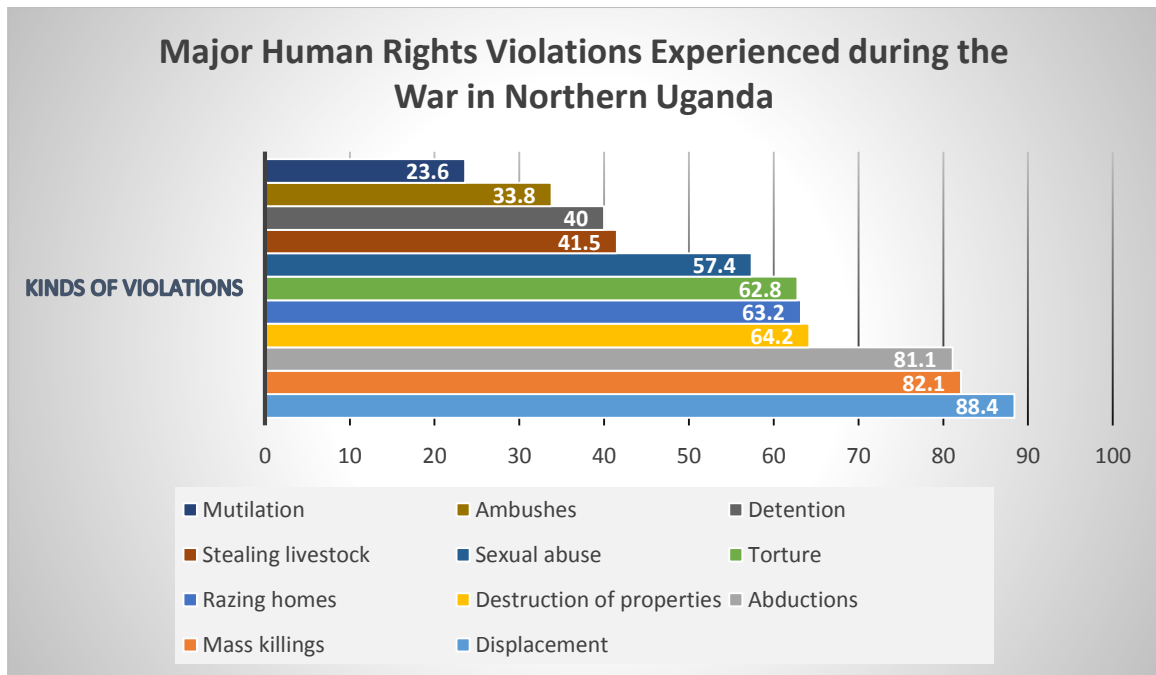


Figure 2: Major Human Rights Violations Experienced during the War in Northern Uganda, field findings, April 2015.

- Victims of loss of livelihood and property:** During the armed conflict, people were looted, their properties often forcibly occupied by government or rebel forces, their farms and gardens destroyed and their means of livelihood lost due to displacement and constant turbulence.
- Victims of killings and torture:** The LRA is responsible for more than 100,000 deaths over the course of the armed conflict in northern Uganda,⁶ along with several hundred being killed and mutilated during atrocities committed by government forces. Several survivors lost different parts of their bodies and continue to live with bullets inside their bodies, enduring severe physical injuries and psychological trauma without any comprehensive redress.
- Victims of sexual abuse:** Many women, children and men suffered sexual abuse through sexual slavery and forced marriages during the armed conflict. Usually, young women were abducted and forcibly given to older men as “wives,” while others were either conscripted as combatants or slaves, constantly raped and brutalised. As a result, most women now suffer from complicated gynaecological problems and have children born out of rape who are socially ostracised in the communities. Some men, on the other hand, were sodomised with the intent to “feminise” and humiliate them before their wives and children. Owing to these sexual atrocities, sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS are widespread in the communities.

The consequences of these severe violations are myriad, and range from difficulties in attaining livelihood means, to high dropout rates from schools, unaddressed medical complications, severe psychological disorders and depression, culture of alcoholism, increased rate of domestic violence, amongst several others. There is also a steep

⁶ United Nations, “Report of the Secretary General on the activities of UNOCA and on the Lord’s Resistance Army,” May 2013.

escalation in the number of orphans, widows and widowers, while stigmatisation of formerly abducted persons and children born of war within communities remains rampant. In addition to challenges experienced within communities, strained relationships across sub-regions also threaten recovery and reconciliation efforts in the region.

While exploring human rights violations, expanding the notion of human rights beyond strict legal frameworks to an understanding of the deeper psychological and social context of human rights violations helps to shed light on the deeply worrisome ruptured relational and social fabric of northern Uganda in the aftermath of the protracted war. It is critical to acknowledge that the war has deeply strained relationships across sub-regions, often witnessed in the drastic decline in inter-marriages and trade activities, and with interactions across sub-regions being marked with deep-rooted suspicion and prejudices against the “other.” There is an ominously growing culture of ethnic stereotyping, trust deficit, and fear of the other, coupled with blame and collective attribution of guilt for the war on certain communities that fracture relationships and incite tensions between different sub-regions. This primarily stems from widespread perceptions of the brutal LRA-led war in northern Uganda to be an “ethnic war” systematically spearheaded by the Acholi to further Acholi nationalism in the region.

One sees evidence of this in the context of deeply divided and embittered relations between diverse sub-regions in the north. In particular, the case study in focus is the Acholi and Lango sub-regions, where communities remain suspicious, accusatory and disconnected from the trauma and upheaval experienced by the “other” ethnic community during the war. Unhealed trauma can permeate memory and get passed down for generations, getting woven into personal and cultural narratives and creating a distorted relationship to current circumstances, which become viewed and experienced through the lens of past traumas.⁷ This reflects especially in the case of most victims and survivors of past atrocities in Lango sub-region who lay accusations on ethnic communities in other sub-regions, particularly the Acholi and quite often the community of Odek sub-county, the birthplace of LRA Commander Joseph Kony, for all their pain and suffering during the war. The widespread perception of all Acholi as perpetrators and all Lango people as victims creates rigid perceptions of “us versus them,” causing group identities to get polarised and hostilities to deepen. This victim-perpetrator binary all too often results in engendering a culture of bitterness and revenge, creating a threatening ethos of new cycles of violence and new victims in the region of northern Uganda.

Given this backdrop, as the divided northern Uganda slowly transitions in the aftermath of decades of armed conflict, it becomes critical to draw lessons from the past as we chart prospects for the way forward to avoid the danger of repeating past mistakes in the future. It is critical to note that the impact of brutal military and counter-insurgency operations on the civilians in the region has been enormous, and although modest progress has been made in rebuilding infrastructure, institutions and livelihoods, there is a massive dearth of allocation of resources to comprehensively deal with the past and foster reconciliation. There is a deeply held sense of injustice amongst the communities due to a lack of holistic reconciliation and reparation efforts following the devastating effects of the wars, and intra-community and inter-sub-regional tensions continue to escalate. Without a comprehensive

⁷ Judith Thompson and James O' Dea, *The Social Healing Project*, 2011.

program that holistically seeks to address the violations suffered by the people, effective reconciliation in northern Uganda has a bleak future.

To this end, JRP conducted a comprehensive survey, one-on-one interviews and reflective community dialogues in seven communities across Acholi and Lango sub-regions on the theme of regional reconciliation between the Acholi and Lango sub-regions, which formed the blueprint of this report. This report, which examines key conflict drivers at the sub-regional and community levels in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions specifically, and northern Uganda more broadly, is a significant step towards comprehensively identifying and analysing obstacles to positive peace and reconciliation to ensure that post-war recovery, reconciliation and development interventions are conflict-sensitive and aligned with the social, political and economic needs of the communities. The specific objectives of this report are:

- To identify the key challenges and opportunities for regional reconciliation in northern Uganda, with a regional focus on the Acholi and Lango sub-regions;
- To identify key mechanisms and processes that will effectively foster regional reconciliation by addressing key transition challenges and conflicts drivers in the region;
- To inform a comprehensive conflict-sensitive approach to regional reconciliation permeating across the horizontal and vertical divides of the northern Uganda society and eliciting a multi-stakeholder participation;
- To make targeted policy and programmatic recommendations for actors at all levels of the society to improve responses to the identified conflict drivers and advance processes of reconciliation in northern Uganda.

This tabular representation offers a snapshot of the key conflict drivers and obstacles fueling tension and hampering reconciliation within communities and across sub-regions, some of which are already escalating into violent conflicts.

| Personal | Interpersonal |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Untreated physical injuries from war • Unaddressed psychological trauma and depression • Economic challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic violence • Land grabbing and land conflicts • Ethnic strife and negative inter-community perceptions • Stigmatisation of formerly abducted persons and children born of war • Poor reintegration of former combatants • Alienation, deep-rooted grievances and trust-deficit between sub-regions • Reduced contact between sub-regions with respect to declined business and inter-marriages • Grievances of community members of lack of support from local leaders |
| Structural | Cultural |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak governance • Corruption and embezzlement of funds • Poverty and unequal economic development • Inequitable social services • Lack of livelihoods • Food insecurity • Delayed transitional justice and redress for victims • High unemployment • Unequal distribution of post-war development and recovery assistance • Political, economic and social disengagement of youth | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erosion of cultural values • Culture of dependency on aid and stealing • Culture of alcoholism amongst men • Changing gender relations and roles and increasing SGBV • Culture of impunity for state-led atrocities • Culture of silence amidst shrinking public spaces of expression of dissent and grievances • Culture of insecurity and fear of outbreak of violence |

Figure 3: Conflict Drivers in Acholi and Lango Sub-Regions

Fieldwork Methodology

To gather public opinion on the need for regional reconciliation in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions and on effective mechanisms that could be adopted to foster reconciliation, information was gathered from communities across the two sub-regions with the aid of diverse methods. These included:

1. **Opinion Survey:** An opinion survey in the form of a structured questionnaire was developed by JRP that included approximately 65 close-ended questions to determine key opportunities and gaps for fostering regional reconciliation and social cohesion among communities in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions. In April 2015, the survey was administered to 207 respondents across seven communities in Acholi and Lango sub-

regions, namely Atiak, Lamogi, Lukodi, Burcoro, Odek, Abia and Barlonyo. Through stratified random sampling, the survey elicited views from victims' communities, survivors of conflict, peace committees, religious and traditional leaders and local government leaders.

2. **Community Dialogues:** Between March and June, 2015, seven reflective community dialogues were held with 633 participants in seven communities across Acholi and Lango sub-regions. Representing diverse participation, the participants comprised local leaders, victims and survivors of the war, NGO representatives and other community members. Our intention was to get a sense of:

- What are the post-war challenges experienced by them;
- What is inhibiting regional reconciliation and why;
- What mechanisms could lead to regional reconciliation and how;

Although the statistical data gathered by JRP during the opinion survey primarily included quantitative data, the analysis focuses strongly on teasing out the perceptions expressed by the members at community dialogues about how their situation could progress towards long-term peace, security and reconciliation.

3. **Key Informant Interviews:** A total of ten structured one-on-one key informant interviews were conducted with religious and cultural leaders, local government officials, members of peace committees at the community-level, and victims of war in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions. Selection of respondents from the stated categories followed the method of stratified random sampling. The questions focused on transitional issues in the region such as how the war had affected relationships within communities and across the sub-regions of Acholi and Lango, who were the major actors serving as connectors and dividers in the region, and what mechanisms could be adopted to foster lasting regional reconciliation.

A few limitations of the study include its geographical specificity and focus on the Acholi and Lango sub-regions, while the larger aim is to envision a roadmap for regional reconciliation in the entire war-affected northern Uganda, encompassing all sub-regions. While the findings from this study are not representative of the diversity of life experiences and unique needs of the different sub-regions across northern Uganda, they do serve as useful indicators of the post-war transition challenges, situation of trust-deficit and strained relationships, along with desired mechanisms for reconciliation that broadly permeate the fabric of the region. The study also did not consider the historical relationships and grievances among the Acholi and Lango communities, and instead focused primarily on narratives and experiences over the last three decades.

Sampling and Respondent Profiles

While the participants at the seven community dialogues and ten key informant interviews represented diversity in geographical location, gender, age, and occupation, the sampling method was purposive. However, the profiles of respondents to the opinion survey need further elaboration, as is elucidated below:

- Location of Respondents:** In order to get representative views to guide the efforts directed towards promoting regional reconciliation between the Acholi and Lango sub-regions, two of the most war-affected districts from each of the two sub-regions was selected to conduct the survey. These districts included Gulu, Amuru, Lira and Aleptong. Of the total 207 respondents that participated in the survey, 41.5% came from Gulu district, while 29% were from Amuru district, 15.5% from Alebtong district and 14% of the participants were from Lira district. Within the districts, the survey was conducted in seven sub-counties, namely Atiak, Awach, Bongatira, Lamogi Odek, Agweng and Abia.

Our chosen sites for the survey had similarities and differences in terms of culture, core issues and stages of post-war transition and reconciliation. Each setting had been characterised by gross human rights violations and competing narratives about the nature of the war and ‘the other’. Thus, each was a laboratory for how reconciliation takes place between highly polarised and historically antagonistic groups. There is also a higher participation of respondents from the Acholi sub-region vis-à-vis Lango sub-region due to greater damage by the war being inflicted on the former, as well as owing to an identification by JRP of the most severely war-affected communities in the two sub-regions. The purview of JRP’s networks and mobilisation capacity also informed the selection of communities for the survey.

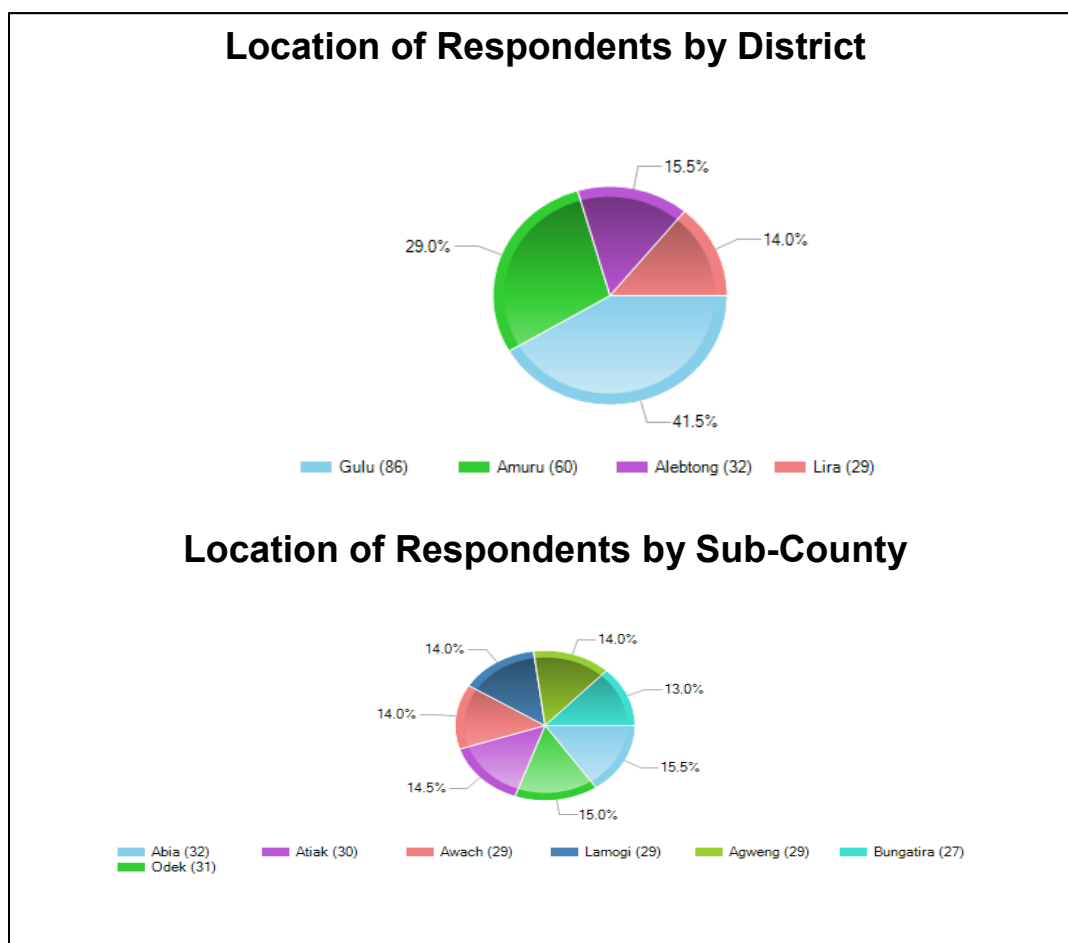


Figure 4: Location of Respondents of Opinion Survey across Districts and Sub-Counties

- Categories of Respondents:** In a bid to draw a meaningful conclusion from the survey, respondents were selected from among a diverse cross-section of traditional and religious leaders, peace committees, local government officials, victims' groups that had suffered grave violations during the war and the general community members.

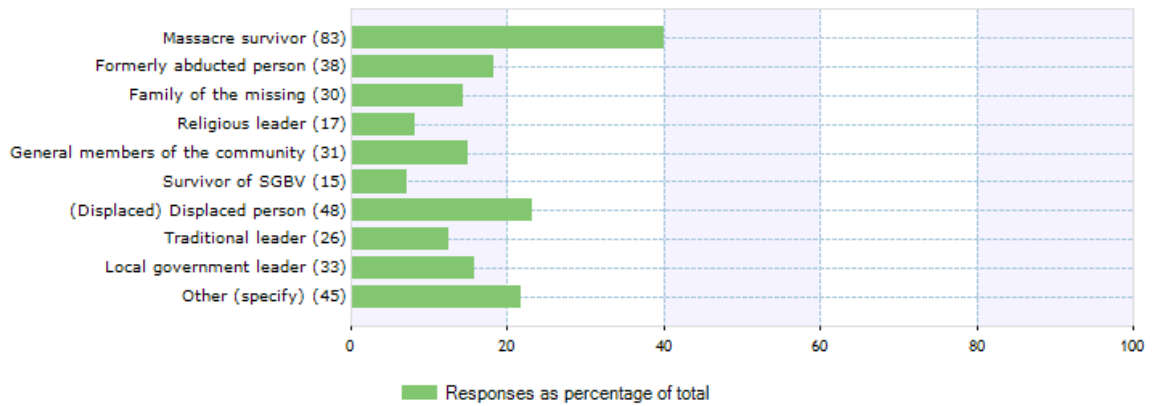


Figure 5: Categories of Respondents to Opinion Survey

- Gender of respondents:** Both men and women were accorded equal opportunity to participate in the survey. A majority of 59% of the respondents were men, while 41% were women. More men participated in the study because of the nature and composition of leadership structures in the communities where members of traditional and religious institutions, who formed a significant percentage of the respondents, were primarily men. Because of the importance of soliciting views of traditional and religious leaders on regional reconciliation processes, more men had a chance to participate in the study.

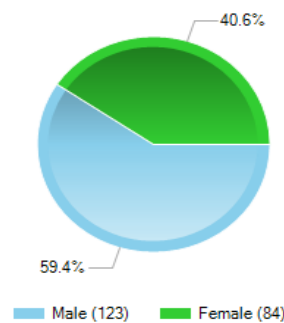


Figure 6: Gender of Respondents to Opinion Survey

- Age of respondents:** Upholding the value of age mainstreaming, people representing different age groups were considered in the survey to gauge their unique needs and experiences. The diverse age groups included children, youth, adults and elders, who were invited to participate in the survey.

Mapping Regional Reconciliation in Northern Uganda

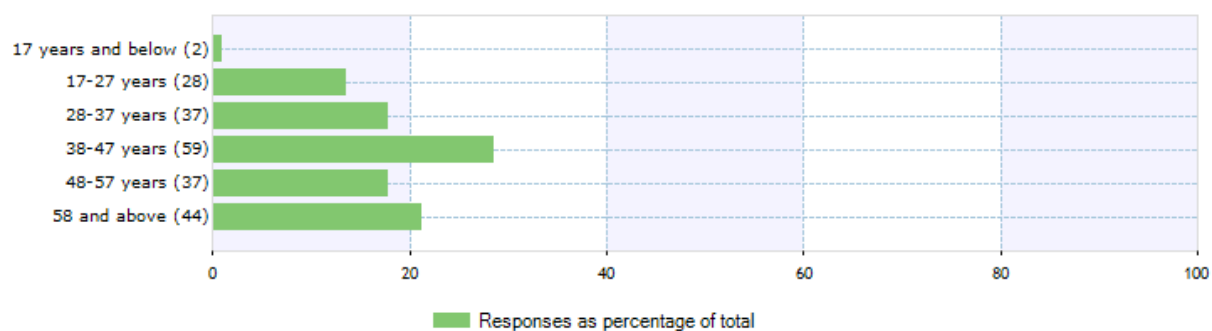


Figure 7: Age Brackets of Respondents to Opinion Survey

- **Levels of Education:** People with different educational qualifications participated in the survey and academic qualification was not the basis of consideration to participate in the survey. It is interesting to note that the level of academic qualification of the respondents was also evidence of the disrupted education system in northern Uganda as a result of the protracted war.

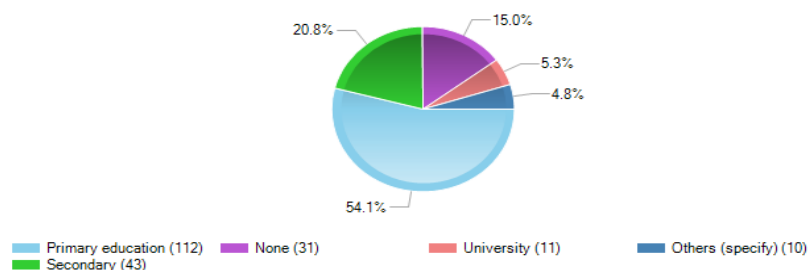


Figure 8: Educational Qualification of Respondents to Opinion Survey



Interview with the Chairman LCIII, Atiak sub county-Amuru district

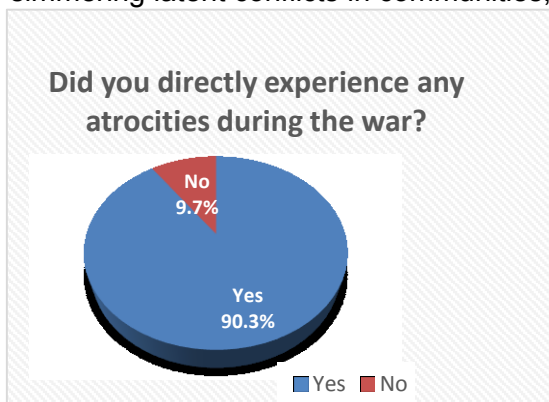
The Need for Reconciliation: Exploring Obstacles and Conflict Drivers

Drivers

How can we move forward, if we have not paused to first look back and reconcile with our past.

-Community Leader, Atiak sub-county⁸

Northern Uganda has progressed a long way since the violent history of political instability, turbulent rebellions, social disorder and coups d'état which marked the immediate post-independence era and continued up until the protracted war between LRA and Government of Uganda - one of the worst humanitarian crisis plaguing the social and political landscape of East Africa. Seven years after the guns have fallen silent, the question of whether northern Uganda is truly at peace or if the semblance of peace masks dangerously simmering latent conflicts in communities, lingers unanswered in the psyche of the nation,



while the fear of relapse into violent conflict manifests from the deeply divided society of northern Uganda. At the same time, the absence of overt violence in the last few years has been significant in bolstering community confidence in sustained peace and security, thus presenting an enabling environment for the recovery and reconciliation process to deepen in the region.

Figure 9: Direct Experiences of Atrocities during the

War, field findings, April 2015.

As the war-ravaged society of northern Uganda transitions amidst post-war recovery and reconciliation efforts, the country continues to bear the legacy of its past, both materially and psychologically. The impact of brutal military and counter-insurgency operations on the civilians in the region during the LRA war has been enormous, and although modest progress has been made in rebuilding infrastructure, institutions and livelihoods, there is a massive dearth of allocation of resources to comprehensively deal with the past. As the divided northern Uganda slowly recovers from decades of armed conflict, it becomes critical to draw lessons from the past as we chart prospects for the way forward to avoid the danger of repeating past mistakes in the future. In this context, how we choose to remember the violent and divisive nature of the protracted armed conflict plays a pivotal role for reconciliation in the region. As conflict transformation practitioner John Paul Lederach aptly states, reconciliation is not to “forgive and forget,” it is to “remember and change,” and to collectively “renegotiate history and identity.”⁹ This beckons the need to maintain a “delicate balance between forgetting and remembering,”¹⁰ so that as a society, we do not operate at the two extremes of either perpetually nurturing grievances or cultivating collective amnesia, as we embark on the journey towards reconciliation.

⁸ A community member at the community dialogue in Atiak organised on 28 May 2015.

⁹ John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹⁰ Luc Huyse, “The Process of Reconciliation,” in *Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: A Handbook* (Sweden: Bulls Tryckeri AB Halmstad, 2003), 30.

Highlighting that, “Reconciliation envisions protracted conflict as a system and focuses its attention on relationships within that system,” Lederach foregrounds the need to “address and engage the relational aspects of reconciliation as the central component of peacebuilding.”¹¹ Relationships are also vital to ensuring a functional democracy, which is a form of governance that northern Uganda is striving, and oftentimes struggling, to model as it recovers from the devastation of a protracted war. A functioning democracy is built on a dual foundation: a set of fair procedures for peacefully handling the issues that divide a society (the political and social structures of governance) and a set of working relationships between the groups involved.¹² However, in the aftermath of a brutal war spanning over 20 years, many relationships in northern Uganda are based on antagonism, distrust, and hurt. Thus, there is a pressing need to address the fractured relationships at all levels of the society, which are the legacy of a violent past, to ensure that positive working relationships generate an enabling atmosphere within which a democratic culture and a robust and just governance can thrive in Uganda. Lederach lays emphasis on the “importance of building right relationships and social structures through a radical respect for human rights and life.”¹³ These “cooperative relationships are critical to implement the social structures of democracy,”¹⁴ and ensure lasting reconciliation at all levels of the society – personal, interpersonal, structural and cultural.

Locating this relational lens within the social landscape of northern Uganda brings into focus the deeply ruptured social fabric and fractured relationships, which mark the ethos of interactions - both within communities and across sub-regions – among different actors at multiple levels of the society. A clear majority of 68.1% of respondents to the survey noted poor relationships *within their community* due to the war, bringing to fore increasingly frequent manifestations of conflict in the form of reintegration challenges and stigmatisation faced by formerly-abducted persons (FAPs), clashes between communities and government officials over the latter’s failure to adequately represent the victims’ demands for justice and reparation, violent community disputes over boundaries and resources, or changing gender relations leading to sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV), among several others.

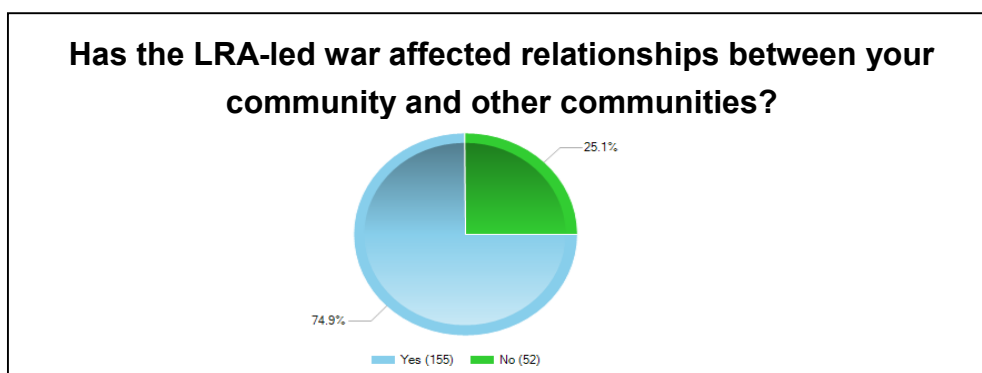


Figure 10: Has the LRA-led war affected relationships between your community and other communities? Field findings, April, 2015.

¹¹ John Paul Lederach, “Reconciliation: The Building of Relationship,” in *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1997), 26.

¹² David Bloomfield, “Reconciliation: An Introduction,” in *Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: A Handbook* (Sweden: Bulls Tryckeri AB Halmstad, 2003), 10.

¹³ John Paul Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (Good Books, 2003).

¹⁴ Bloomfield, *op. cit.*

Similar patterns of adversarial relationships were mirrored even at the *sub-regional level*, where an overwhelming majority of 75% blamed the war for adversely affecting relationships across sub-regions. Fear of revenge and renewed violence, frustrated business opportunities and decline in intermarriages across sub-regions, deep-rooted grievances and collective attribution of responsibility for the war on ‘the other’ community often manifest in the conflictual relationships between sub-regions.

*Can diversity be understood in terms of complementarity?
How do we move from a divided past towards a shared future?*

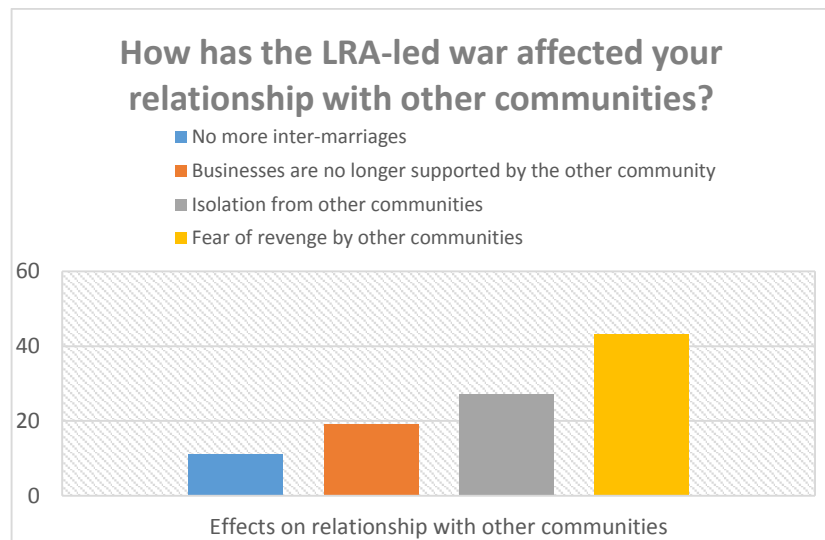


Figure 11: How has the LRA-led war affected your relationship with other communities?, field findings, April 2015.

For a democracy to be functioning effectively, it is vital that positive and trusting relationships prevail between community members and government institutions, wherein the general population must be minimally prepared to trust the system and cooperate. However, in northern Uganda, relationships between communities and government institutions are deeply strained, with a pronounced sense of being tremendously let down by the political and local leaders, both during the war as well as in the recovery phase. Condemning the Government of Uganda for its failure to protect the civilians at the peak of the war, and instead becoming a predator violating their human rights through state-led atrocities, and also failing to reconcile hostile parties in the aftermath of the war, led a clear majority of 33.25% to hold the Government of Uganda responsible for their suffering. In close comparison, 30.5% also accused Joseph Kony, the Commander of LRA, to bear responsibility for the suffering of people in the community for directly violating their rights. Thus, a clear sense of violation, grievances and trust deficit permeates the relationship of community members of northern Uganda with government leaders and former rebels.

This alarming backdrop of strained relationships, deep-rooted animosity, fear and severe stereotyping in northern Uganda, beckons the need for deliberation over some questions that lie at the heart of reconciliation: Can diversity be understood in terms of complementarity? How do we expand the network of our relationships to include those who are perceived as ‘the other’, and cultivate a sensibility of tolerance, respect, and inclusivity? With this view, there is a need to replace the atmosphere of fear and scepticism of the perceived “other” with nonviolent coexistence—the first step in the journey towards reconciliation.¹⁵ The need of the hour is for the fractured society of northern Uganda to move

¹⁵ Huyse, *op. cit.*

from a divided past towards a shared future. In this realm, reconciliation promotes an encounter between the open expression of the painful past, on the one hand, and the search for the articulation of a long-term, interdependent future, on the other hand.¹⁶ This is a complex and active struggle which marks the endeavour to collectively participate in unveiling new horizons and to invest in a future that stands on a creative appropriation of the opportunities that the present offers.

Reconciliation is a complex and long-term process of deep change which encompasses several processes. Lederach looks at the dynamic tension between truth, mercy, justice, and peace as cornerstone principles that blend to engender reconciliation. Truth is the longing for acknowledgment of wrong and the validation of painful loss and experiences, but it is coupled with Mercy, which articulates the need for acceptance, letting go and a new beginning. Justice represents the search for individual and group rights, for social restructuring, and for restitution, but it is linked with Peace, which underscores the need for interdependence, well-being and security.

Given this backdrop, this chapter will elucidate the key conflict drivers underpinned with deeply strained relationship patterns that form the context of the ongoing conflicts and hinder reconciliation at two levels – within communities and across sub-regions – among different stakeholders in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions.¹⁷ This serves as a significant step towards comprehensively identifying and analysing key conflict drivers depicting fractured relationships amongst communities and social structures to ensure that regional reconciliation interventions are conflict-sensitive and responsive to the needs of the region.

Obstacles to Reconciliation within Communities

Land Grabbing and Land Conflicts

Land and boundary disputes were cited by members during community dialogues as the most sharply escalating source of conflict, both within communities and across sub-regions, as tensions rise over land use, access and ownership. Land remains an important factor in shaping the socio-economic and political relationships between individuals, investors, and the state. Land disputes involve diverse parties, pitching individuals against their own families, clan against clan, or community members against district authorities and/ or private investors, amongst others.¹⁸ The key conflict drivers for land dispute include competition over commercially valuable land, fraudulent transactions, illegal occupation, contested boundaries, misinterpretation or poor understanding of the land laws and post-conflict return policies.¹⁹

In Acholiland, more than 98% of the 1.8 million IDPs who lived in camps at the height of the conflict have returned to their areas of origin or have resettled in new locations.²⁰ Land wrangles are on the rise. As a result of years of displacement and living in camps, many people have lost a sense of historical boundaries, which was knowledge held by the elders of the communities, many of whom perished in camps and during war. This has led to

¹⁶ Lederach 1997, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ Some conflict drivers, such as land disputes, strain relationships both within communities, as well as across sub-regional borders, and are overlapping in their scope.

¹⁸ Saferworld, International Alert and Refugee Law Project, *Northern Uganda Conflict Analysis* (Uganda: Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity, 2013).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

contested boundaries and disputes over land ownership. A community member from Barlonyo, Lango sub-region, expressed this sentiment,

Before the war, we were happy, peaceful and only concentrated on farming on our own land whose boundaries had been clearly demarcated. But when war broke out, we were forced to go to the camps for six years. And by the time we returned, our elders who knew very well the land boundaries, had already passed away, leaving behind us, the children, who do not have clear knowledge about land boundaries. This resulted in severe land wrangles between community members.²¹

Poverty has been a significant driving factor in most of these land conflicts. The lack of other assets after years of encampment compelled people to look to land as a means of raising cash. Furthermore, many returnees are now seeking to individualise communal land to protect their property rights, leading to clashes within affected communities.²² The sale of communal or customary land can be considered an infringement on common interest and readily triggers conflicts.²³ Citing this concern, a community member from Odek, Acholi sub-region, shared:

When people were forced into the camp, the government clearly told the Acholi that they were only left with land and education as their personal belongings, and hence should guard them well. In an atmosphere of scarcity, people panicked and community members started owning land individually as opposed to how life was before we went to camps, when we all owned land communally. Divisions between families and clans members became so frequent, and everybody was trying to protect their own piece of land which was their only possession when all else was destroyed in war. This has greatly increased levels of land wrangles in Acholiland.²⁴

Land conflicts with communities from neighbouring sub-regions also adversely impacts relationships across borders, as was seen between the Madi from West Nile, and the Acholi people. Interventions by local leaders has been helpful in addressing this issue, as was noted by a community member,

We have had severe land conflicts with the Madi in Adjumani area, but the leaders stepped in and helped us to resolve our issues. We, the Acholi, have a bad reputation of being 'land grabbers' but we managed to reconcile with the Madi and we now have good relationships across the border.²⁵

²¹ A community member at the community dialogue in Barlonyo organised on 24 June 2015.

²² A.M. Rugadya et al., "Analysis of Post-Conflict Land Policy and Administration: A Survey of IDP Return and Resettlement Issues and Lessons," in *World Bank Report* (2008).

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ A community member at the community dialogue in Odek organised on 11 March 2015.

²⁵ A community member at the community dialogue in Atiak organised on 28 May 2015.

Land Disputes through a Gendered Lens

In the aftermath of the war, structural violence against women, particularly widows, is rampant in the form of denial of economic and land rights. Widows are often evicted from their deceased husband's land by their in-laws, and suffer the loss of right to property, livelihood, safety, and a life of dignity. As shared by a widow from Atiak during the community dialogue:

“During the armed conflict, when we were forced to leave our lands and go to the camps, my husband committed suicide. Now that I have returned, I am a landless widow. This is because my brothers-in-law forced me out of my land in order to get wealth. Like me, so many women are left helpless without any land or support by the government. Where am I supposed to go? This is like poison in my life, killing me slowly every day.”

Reintegration Challenges and Stigmatisation

In a political climate of impunity and gross human rights violations during the 1986-2006 armed conflict, civilians in northern Uganda were abducted and went missing at alarming rates. Systematic abductions of children and youth by the LRA to bolster its military strength and terrorise communities led to approximately 24,000 to 38,000 children being abducted and forcibly recruited as child soldiers in northern Uganda.²⁶ Compounding the issue were state-led abductions of women as “wives” and sexual slaves by the National Resistance Army (NRA) during the armed conflict.

In the aftermath of the war, the reintegration of thousands of formerly-abducted persons (FAPs) back into the northern Uganda society, from which they were abducted, represents tremendous social, cultural and economic challenges. In this sphere, 43% of the respondents affirmed the issue of stigmatisation to be the most pressing challenge serving as a resilient conflict driver threatening a sudden breakout of overt violence, if left unaddressed. Representing a continuum of history, gender and age, the categories of victims identified to be the most severely stigmatised within communities include:

- FAPs
- Victims of SGBV
- Children born of war
- Families of missing persons (FoMs)
- Survivors of mass killings

Hostile relationships between community members and FAPs amidst a vicious cycle of accusations, bitterness and stigma permeates through most communities in the region. Community members usually ostracise FAPs and blame them for their sufferings during the brutal war:

²⁶ Phuong Pham, Patrick Vinck and Eric Stover, *Abducted: The Lord's Resistance Army and Forced Conscriptioin in Northern Uganda* (UC Berkeley: Human Rights Center. 2007).

Former abductees are always reminded of their past experiences whenever they say anything. I was once abducted and now a lot of people call me Okello Adui (Okello, the rebel) which severely undermines peace in our community.²⁷

A gendered lens sheds light on the severe stigmatisation that formerly abducted women experience, especially those who return with children born in captivity or following rape by soldiers. Vulnerable subjects to constant re-victimisation, these women are exposed to cycles of shame and stigma, along with experiencing increased risk for “abuse and violence due to economic marginalisation.”²⁸ Their relationships with the community members at large, and with their families in specific, remains largely adversarial.

In the past, when a girl gave birth and went back to her father’s home, she was not chased away with her child but welcomed and given a piece of land to live in. But currently, it is just the opposite. Today most of the mothers who are back from the bush are being chased away with their children by their own family members.²⁹

An oftentimes invisible category of victims who suffer “ambiguous loss”³⁰ are families of missing persons (FoMs), who wait indefinitely for their loved ones who went missing during mass atrocities in the war. The plight of the missing and their families has been marginalised in the national agenda of Government of Uganda, and there has been neither a national initiative to oversee search efforts of the missing, nor considerations for providing formal support to their families. Given this backdrop, the anguish of families of missing persons continues to linger and gets compounded by myriad unaddressed psychological, legal, administrative, social and economic challenges. Most FoMs exude bitterness towards their local elected leaders for their failure to ably represent their grievances and needs to the government, as well as for their inability to protect their loved ones from being abducted during the war. In some cases, community perceptions towards FoMs are also negative, with the latter being labelled as “parents of rebels.”

Years ago, the state failed to protect our children when they were being abducted and forced into the bush, and now they’re labelling them as rebels and talking about amnesty for them. I feel so bitter towards them and their refusal to acknowledge our suffering or bring home our children.³¹

Survivors of mass killings hold similar grievances against their local leaders for failing to represent their demands for justice, acknowledgment and apology. Several are also stigmatised due to their experience of being part of a mass atrocity:

My parents perished in the massacre in Barlonyo. I grew up and got married, but my in-laws were constantly insulting me for being an orphan and relating me to the massacre which I somehow survived. That is the reason why my husband and I are not together

²⁷ A community member at the community dialogue in Lukodi organised on 26 May 2015.

²⁸ Lindsay McClain Opiyo, *Alone Like a Tree: Reintegration Challenges Facing Children Born of War and Their Mothers in Northern Uganda* (Gulu: Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2015), 1.

²⁹ A community member at the community dialogue in Atiak organised on 28 May 2015.

³⁰ Erin Jessee et al., *The Right to Know: Policy Recommendations for addressing the rights of the missing and their families in northern Uganda* (Gulu, Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2015), 2.

³¹ A community member at the community dialogue in Lukodi organised on 26 May 2015.

*and I'm now back at my parents' house. I struggle to live alone without any support from the government or our leaders in the community.*³²

Worrisome and escalating patterns of stigmatisation have been noted in the communities, which seek to undermine recovery and reconciliation efforts in northern Uganda. A sharp rise in the frequency of stigmatisation since 2012 was observed within communities. While in 2012, only 5% of respondents “frequently” and 8% “occasionally” observed stigmatisation of conflict-affected individuals in their community, the figures had sharply risen to 12.4% and 52.8% respectively, showing steep increments. Also, while 62% of respondents never observed instances of stigmatisation in their communities in 2012, the percentage fell down to 0% in 2015, implying every community member affirmed to the widespread presence of practices and attitudes of stigmatisation in their community, which seek to dangerously undermine reconciliation efforts.

Gender and Generational Conflicts amidst Changing Social Realities

In northern Uganda, the post-conflict recovery process has to grapple with the tension between the old and new social realities,³³ amidst changing cultural values, gender norms, and relationship with elders. Triggered rather suddenly in the aftermath of the war, rapid social changes are inciting conflicts characterised by destructive relational patterns within families and communities as women and youth mobilise and challenge the status quo. A worrying indicator of such conflicts is the prevalence of domestic violence in northern Uganda which was cited in the survey as one of the most common security threats and sources of community disputes in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions.

While examining domestic violence, it is key to note that armed conflicts are never gender-neutral. Whether it is economic deprivation, displacement, poverty, or gender-based violence, the costs of conflict are borne disproportionately by most women and children³⁴. The same translates to conditions of latent conflict, where even during ostensible ‘peacetime’, violence inherent in structures, institutions, and cultures impacts women negatively and disproportionately. This was clearly revealed in the results of a study conducted in northern Uganda in 2010 which showed an alarmingly high prevalence of ongoing domestic violence experienced by female partners in the aftermath of the war. In 2009, hailing from seven war-affected rural communities in northern Uganda, 80% of women reported at least one type of verbal/psychological abuse, 71% were exposed to at least one type of physical abuse, 52% suffered isolation and 23% fell victim to sexual violence.³⁵

Given this backdrop, it is pertinent to dissect some contextual factors contributing to domestic violence and strained intimate partner relationships in the region. Gender relations have changed dramatically during and after the war in northern Uganda, particularly amidst development initiatives to empower women. Women now occupy prominent positions at all

³² A community member at the community dialogue in Barlonyo organised on 24 June 2015.

³³ Saferworld, International Alert and Refugee Law Project, *op. cit.*

³⁴ Lisa Schirch and Manjrika Sewak, ‘Women: Using the Gender Lens’ in *People building Peace II Successful Stories of Civil Society* (London: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2005).

³⁵ Frank Neuner et al.. “Prevalence and predictors of partner violence against women in the aftermath of war: A survey among couples in Northern Uganda” *Social Science & Medicine*, no. 86, (2013): 17–25. *The researchers conducted an epidemiological survey in 2010 with 2nd-grade students and their male and female guardians from nine heavily war-affected communities in Northern Uganda employing structured interviews and standardised questionnaires. The present study analysed a subsample of 235 guardian couples from seven rural communities in order to determine the prevalence and predictors of current partner violence experienced by women in the context of the past war.*

levels of government and are represented in many civil society organisations, while in some communities, men are struggling to redefine their role in society after the conflict.³⁶ Alcoholism in men is deeply prevalent and often stems from the frustration of being unemployed or being a widower designated to household chores and childcare –roles that most men in this context are not socialised into. Alcoholism exacerbates conflicts in homes,³⁷ and is a risk factor for domestic violence. Studies also reveal that prior victimisation of men in terms of childhood maltreatment and exposure to human rights violations has been associated with a higher risk of physical partner violence perpetration against their female partners,³⁸ and would hold true for most men growing up in the violent context of northern Uganda.

Changing social realities also manifest in the generational gap between old and young people that is driving conflicts in the region, with “family authority breaking down and youth challenging authority, causing tensions in communities.”³⁹ Several community members expressed concern over eroding cultural values and changing societal norms that define relationships between the old and young generations to be marked with disrespect and mutual recrimination. At the community dialogue in Barlonyo, a man shared:

*The unfortunate death of most of the elders in our community during our time in the camps has affected our cultural values in deep ways. There is a lack of guidance and sound advice from elders, which leads young people to take decisions that lack wisdom, respect and care for others. This has also led to a loss of cultural values and traditions in young generations which pain my heart to watch.*⁴⁰

Drawing a connection between changing societal norms with respect to gender, culture and respect for elders in communities, a member at the community dialogue in Atiak observed,

*In the past, before war broke out, girls were married traditionally with permission and blessings from the elders and paying dowry was a must. But after staying in the camps, men have acquired the habit of eloping with our girls, not caring to seek the blessings of elders and refusing to pay dowry. Instead they are abusive to both the girls and her parents, and this deeply affects relationships in our communities.*⁴¹

Economic Insecurity, Class Conflicts and Corruption

Within the paradigm of human security, there is a close relationship between reconciliation and security. The necessary element for the transformation from victimhood and suffering to healing is the perception of security and safety⁴². In this context, economic security plays an important role as a vital indicator for reconciliation. If people have jobs, if they are able to make ends meet, if they are not preoccupied with basic existential issues, they will be less inclined to view themselves as fundamentally disadvantaged, and hence potentially less likely to resent and blame members of other groups.⁴³ Briefly encapsulated, “economic

³⁶ Saferworld, International Alert and Refugee Law Project, *op. cit.*

³⁷ Opiyo *op. cit.*

³⁸ Frank Neuner, Regina Saile, Verena Ertl and Claudia Catani, *op. cit.*

³⁹ Saferworld, International Alert and Refugee Law Project, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ A community member at the community dialogue in Barlonyo organised on 24 June 2015.

⁴¹ A community member at the community dialogue in Atiak organised on 28 May 2015.

⁴² Janine Natalya Clark, *International Trials and Reconciliation: Assessing the Impact of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia* (Transitional Justice) (Routledge, 2014).

⁴³ *Ibid.*

problems intensify the relative deprivation that less privileged groups may experience in normal times.”⁴⁴ Given this backdrop, it is critical to note that economic inequality and class conflicts based on socio-economic standards are fast emerging amidst scarcity of resources in the post-war context of northern Uganda.

Upon their return from years of encampment and life in the bush, a large majority of people in northern Uganda report economic insecurity resulting from loss of livelihood in terms of loss of land, oxen, and agricultural equipment. Results from the survey indicate that even in 2015, 43% of the respondents reported having not recovered at all from their economic losses suffered during war, while 55% shared having recovered only partially. This has led to severe economic challenges, miring most communities in abject poverty and hunger. The burden of raising children of relatives and friends massacred during war or those who went missing further exacerbates the economic insecurity of people struggling to make ends meet in the post-war phase. The economic inability of paying school fees also creates a situation of differential access to education, where mostly people belonging to the rich and middle class groups can afford education for their children. This was expressed by a community member from Barlonyo,

*After returning from the camps, we are unable to financially support our children in school because we have no reliable sources of income. So, only children of the rich are currently studying in schools, and no child from Barlonyo is studying just because of the expensive school fees. At this rate, Barlonyo will always remain backward in education.*⁴⁵

Inability to pursue an education restricts opportunities for upward mobility for most people, miring them in vicious cycles of poverty and resentment at the relative deprivation, inciting class conflicts, which threaten violent manifestations.

In this context of class conflicts and economic insecurity, it is critical to note that a key factor contributing to disparity in wealth distribution in the war-affected communities of northern Uganda is the deep-rooted corruption which plagues most institutions of governance, people in power as well as some opportunistic NGOs, leading to rampant embezzlement of funds. There remains a significant gap between the “haves” and “have-nots” in Uganda today, with a widespread perception of accumulation of wealth in the country through misappropriation of public funds and resources, which fuels grievance amongst communities in the North.⁴⁶ Corruption is entrenched in the country to the extent that the aggregate likelihood of bribery is highest in Uganda amongst East African countries, where a citizen seeking state services encounters the highest likelihood of bribery.⁴⁷

During the community dialogues, a male farmer from Barlonyo shared that although the government had provided the farmer seeds to encourage agricultural produce and offer support, the seeds were very poor quality and were adulterated, thereby failing to produce

⁴⁴ E. Staub, *Overcoming evil: genocide, violent conflict and terrorism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁴⁵ A community member at the community dialogue in Barlonyo organised on 24 June 2015.

⁴⁶ Saferworld, International Alert and Refugee Law Project, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷ Transparency International, East African Bribery Index 2013: Bribery remains high in East Africa, but 90% of citizens will not report, http://www.transparency.org/news/pressrelease/bribery_remains_high_in_east_africa_but_90_of_citizens_will_not_report 2013. (Accessed 23 October 2015).

any crops. In other instances, it emerged that although support through funds was being provided by the government and other foundations, the resources systematically failed to reach the victims and were being misappropriated. This became a point of deep resentment and was highlighted in several accounts during the community dialogues,

After the war, people are biting each other like dogs. I am confirming that someone diverted the money meant for building a church and a school in Barlonyo to instead build his own fancy house with dazzling glasses. The house is unique and incomparable to any other house here, while we have no roofs over our heads.⁴⁸

Underscoring the complicity and betrayal of even community leaders and NGOs, another person remarked,

NGOs and Community Leaders manipulate the process of registration of victims for recovery aid by registering only their close relatives which denies most people their right to benefit for programs designed for victims. Several victims are not even mobilised for such meetings that discuss their needs. Also, the rich are paying for their own children with the money meant for orphans. If tomorrow our children become thugs because they did not get a chance to study, who is to blame?⁴⁹

Most community members voiced the need to monitor the fair and effective implementation of recovery programs and encouraged foundations and other bodies aiding their recovery to increase their direct interface with the beneficiaries in order to hinder cycles of corruption and embezzlement of funds.

Political, Economic and Social Disengagement of Youth

Uganda has the world's youngest population with over 78% of the population below the age of 30.⁵⁰ Ideally, this would open up enormous possibilities for dynamic change, inclusive development, and progressive governance in the country. However, youth in northern Uganda are growing up amidst feelings of hopelessness and frustration in a climate of lack of formal sector employment, lack of quality educational opportunities, and accusations and tension regarding their role in the war. The increasing feelings of hopelessness amongst youth arising from poverty, unemployment, low educational attainment and poor governance constitute part of a global pattern in areas of armed conflict.⁵¹

For a large majority of youth, having growing up amidst a brutal war and living in camps without access to schools contributed towards their intellect and dreams gradually atrophying. In the post-war context, several youth who lost their parents during the war are compelled to discontinue their education and care for younger siblings. Young abductees who missed the opportunity to be educated while they were in captivity are unable to re-enter the school system and face immense stigmatisation. Compounding the issue is the lack of adequate employment opportunities for youth in the region which de-motivates them

⁴⁸ A community member at the community dialogue in Barlonyo organised on 24 June 2015.

⁴⁹ A community member at the community dialogue in Burcoro organised on 6 June 2015.

⁵⁰ International Youth Foundation, *Navigating Challenges, Charting Hope. A Cross-sector Situation Analysis on Youth in Uganda*, 2011.

⁵¹ Harini Amarasuriya, Canan Gündüz and Markus Mayer, *Rethinking the nexus between youth, unemployment and conflict: Perspectives from Sri Lanka* (London: International Alert, 2009).

towards pursuing an education. A young member of the community in Parabongo evocatively expressed,

*We don't have dreams. The children of this community have forgotten how to dream. We don't study with a purpose or a goal like other children in the world do.*⁵²

Raised as “children of conflict,” an entire generation in the war-affected region of northern Uganda has grown up in a hostile environment with perpetual exposure to violence, deprivation, militancy and lack of opportunities for growth and upward mobility. This threatening combination of acute poverty, high youth unemployment, socio-economic and political disengagement, and a widespread perception of marginalisation and neglect by the state fuels deep grievances and holds potential for outbreak of violent conflicts in the region.

The above lose ends questions peace building and reconciliation efforts within community after the protracted conflict in northern Uganda. The combination of acute poverty, youth unemployment, social-economic and political disengagement, and widespread marginalisation emanating from a hostile environment of conflict is an obstacle that require to be dealt with the achieve community reconciliation.

Obstacles to Reconciliation across Sub-Regions

Accusations, Ethnic Stereotyping and Trust-Deficit between Sub-Regions

In the aftermath of the protracted war, the society of northern Uganda stands deeply divided and relationally fractured, with a strong sense of trust-deficit, prejudices and deep-rooted grievances permeating across sub-regions and presenting challenges to reconciliation in the region. One sees evidence of this phenomenon in the context of deeply divided and embittered relations between Acholi and Lango sub-regions, where communities remain suspicious, accusatory and disconnected from the trauma and upheaval experienced by the “other” ethnic community during the war. This stems from widespread perceptions of the brutal LRA-led war in northern Uganda to be an “ethnic war” systematically spearheaded by the Acholi people to further Acholi nationalism in the region. This belief strongly resonated in the views expressed in the survey, where 65% of respondents blamed the Acholi highly or moderately for instigating the war. It emerged that, according to the majority, the Acholi were attributed collective responsibility as an ethnic group for leading the brutal LRA war and were being systematically isolated by other ethnic groups. A minority also regarded them as being spiritually possessed by evil spirits. The people of Lango, on the other hand, were blamed by 33% of the respondents for the suffering of the people in northern Uganda. A clear majority of 62% affirmed that the LRA war had adversely affected the relationship between the Acholi and Lango sub-regions to a great extent, while 25.1% agreed with the statement to some extent.

⁵² A community member at the community dialogue in Parabongo organised on 27 May 2015.

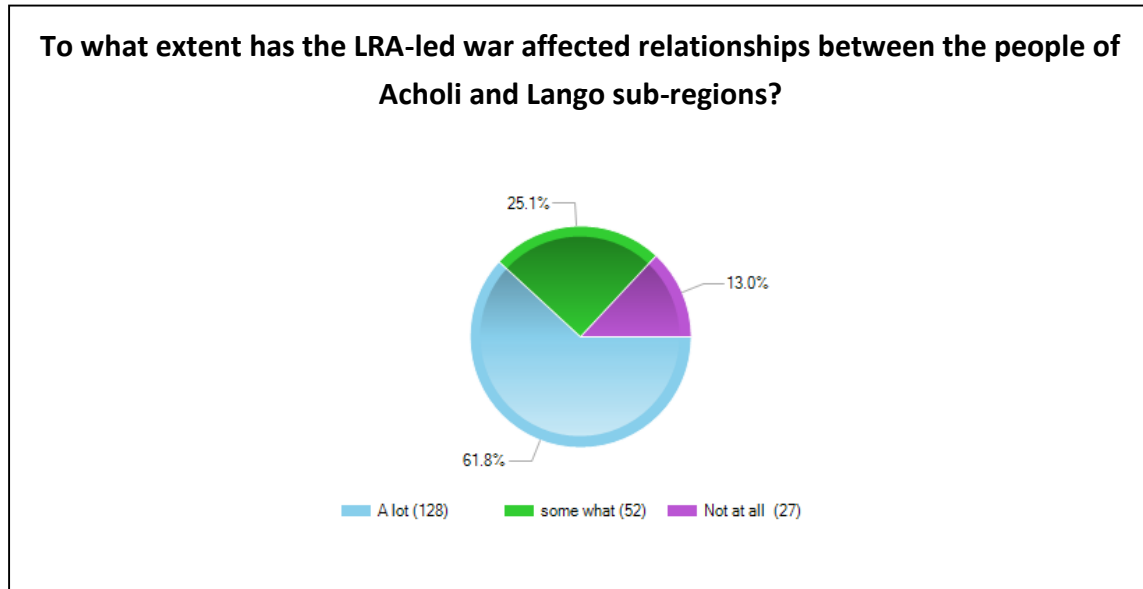


Figure 12: To what extent has the LRA-led war affected relationships between the people of Acholi and Lango sub-regions?, field findings, April 2015.

Testimonies of deep-rooted grievances and accusations by the Lango against the Acholi community emerged at community dialogues in Barlonyo. Interestingly, these testimonies also shed light on the sense of conflict fatigue and disposition for inter-community dialogue and peace that most people from Lango held, despite the anger and bitterness they simultaneously felt against the Acholi people,

The people of Acholi are evil and they came and killed our people. What they did was terrible and I hate them. But later, I realised that most of our people are not alive anymore, and the very few of us who still remain need to carry on with our lives somehow. For how long will we keep fighting? We should reconcile now, which is possible only through peaceful dialogues.⁵³

Inter-ethnic identities polarise and hostilities deepen often as spaces for interaction and positive contact between the Acholi and Lango shrink. This is increasingly witnessed in the severed business and trade ties and the drastic decline in inter-marriages between the two sub-regions. To this end, a community member from Barlonyo remarked:

Before the war there were intermarriages between the Lango and Acholi, but today people are afraid that the people of Acholi are killers. How can we trust them with our daughters?⁵⁴

⁵³ A community member at the community dialogue in Abia organised on 5 June 2015.

⁵⁴ A community member at the community dialogue in Barlonyo organised on 24 June 2015.

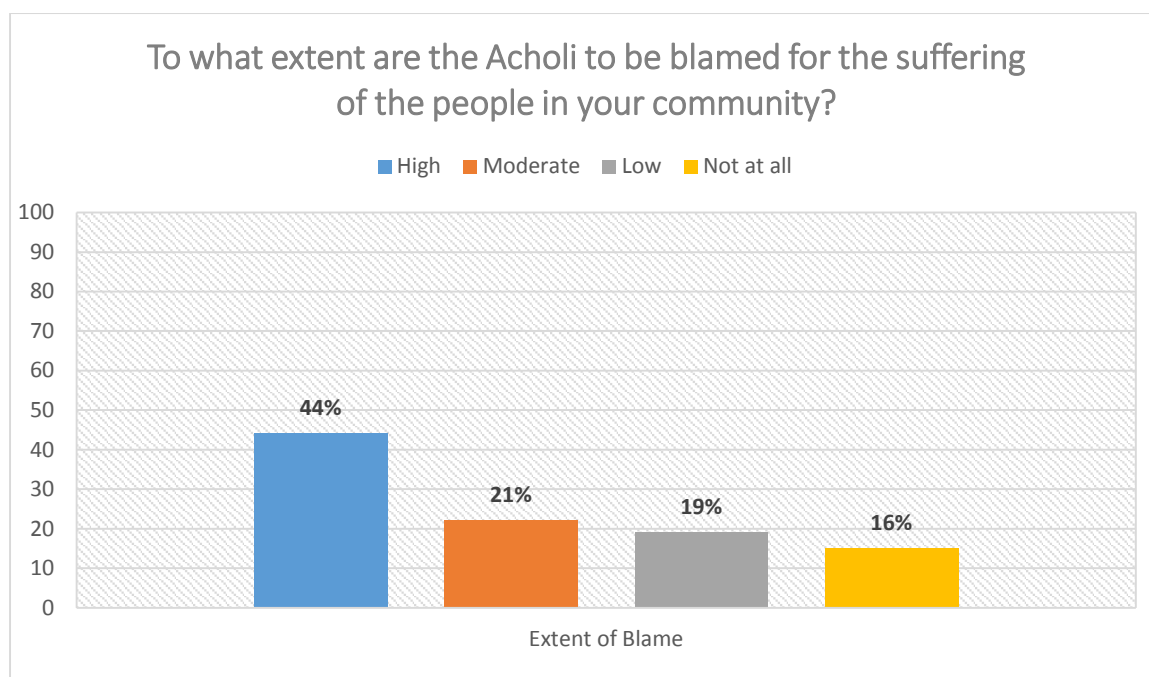


Figure 13: To what extent are the Acholi to be blamed for the suffering of the people in your community?, field findings, April 2015.

Community dialogues held in several sub-counties of Acholi sub-region foregrounded the worrisome patterns of negative stereotyping, animosity and deep-rooted prejudices that most Acholi people had experienced centred around their ethnic identity,

We as Acholi are indeed having a hard life with our neighbouring clans. I experienced that when I was doing some business with the Lango in the past. People would often mock me and say, “You need to stop behaving like Kony.” When I would move around in that place, people would point fingers at me and shout, “Look at that murderer!” Such statements show there is a strong segregation and bias in people’s minds.⁵⁵

Another person shared:

At the back of their minds, most of the different tribes constantly think that the Acholi are arrogant and are brutal killers. I can give an example of when I was walking on the road and saw a Bantu lady on a motorbike who had come to visit her daughter working at the health centre in Awach (Gulu). Suddenly, the motorist had some problem with his machine and requested her to get down while he looked for help from the nearby homes. She looked very worried and said that she should not be left alone due to the fear that some Acholi would kill her. Therefore, perception is a big hindrance to peace.⁵⁶

A constant sense of fear to associate with their ethnic identity and feelings of threat and vulnerability lingered in the psyche of several community members, who experienced social ostracisation and stigma:

⁵⁵ A community member at the community dialogue in Parabongo organised on 27 June 2015.

⁵⁶ A community member at the community dialogue in Atiak organised on 28 May 2015.

I really feel there is a need for reconciliation. This is because when I was growing up, I was in Lango region and the kind of negative attitude and rejection the Lango people would give to us because we were “Acholi” and “had Kony’s blood within us” was not good at all. They would refer to us as rebels who killed them and their families. This alone made us not to identify ourselves as Acholi because of fear of rejection and stigma. It was because of this that I had to leave studies and return.⁵⁷

Amidst the divisions and fractured relationships that mark the social landscape of Acholi and Lango sub-regions, a strong desire to build common ground and share their sufferings with other communities, as well as receive acknowledgement for their victimhood, echoed in several community dialogues:

An Acholi leader once asked for forgiveness to all other tribes in a public forum, where he apologised for the harms caused by some Acholi and sought forgiveness, while also sharing that we all had equally suffered the same pain during war. This is because most of the people in the bush were mixed up. That is to say, Acholi, Lango, West Nile people, and some Bantus. Also, the killings were done everywhere and Kony also killed people in his own land. Therefore, there is no need to accuse one side but to find a way to help bring people together.⁵⁸

Amidst the deeply steeped negative stereotyping and hostile attitudes between the two sub-regions, several narratives carrying empathy for the sufferings of all, including the Acholi, as well as collective responsibility for the war, and re-humanisation of the “other” side, instilled hopes for regional reconciliation:

It is always said that the people from Acholi were the ones who killed people in Barlonyo but I don’t agree with the accusation because if you are to go to Acholi region, you will find that more people were killed there than they were killed in Barlonyo. As Barlonyo community, we believe that the God we serve shall keep us safely and my strong appeal to the Barlonyo community is to look at Kony as a human being despite him making us suffer. Let us also not blame the people of Acholi who equally suffered like us. Those are the only ways we can bring peace back into our society.⁵⁹

Perception of Unequal Distribution of Recovery and Development Assistance

Inequality matters not only for those at the poorest end of the distribution, but for society as a whole—as it threatens social cohesion and hampers social mobility, fuelling social tensions that can lead to civil unrest and political instability.⁶⁰ This holds particularly true in the post-war context of northern Uganda, where perceptions of marginalisation over distribution of development assistance between different sub-regions fuel frustration and bitterness among communities through the lens of relative deprivation.

Highlighting their concern about the unsatisfactory recovery process, 36.7% of the respondents to the survey reported a high to moderate likelihood of overt conflict manifesting

⁵⁷ A community member at the community dialogue in Odek organised on 11 March 2015.

⁵⁸ A community member at the community dialogue in Atiak organised on 28 May 2015.

⁵⁹ A community member at the community dialogue in Barlonyo organised on 24 June 2015.

⁶⁰ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report: Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience*, 2014.

between the Acholi and Lango if “justice is done to only one section of the affected communities” and if “unbalanced distribution of peace and recovery programmes continues” in the region.

Noteworthy are the several development initiatives that are being implemented in northern Uganda to facilitate the recovery process of victims, amidst which the Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) is often contended to have an ambiguous framework for allocation of funds, which inadvertently reinforces perceptions of marginalisation amongst some communities, thus fuelling tensions between the sub-regions. The proportion of funds as a percentage of the total PRDP II budget allocated to different sub-regions varies. The lack of awareness or understanding of the criteria for fund allocation, which are based on damage inflicted by the war and population size, has given rise to accusations of favouritism towards some communities to the detriment of others.⁶¹ This in turn fuels inter-communal conflicts.⁶²

We are always marginalised and never considered important in Uganda. I am suspicious that other communities and leaders are fighting hard to keep the people of Odek struggling, marginalised and oppressed. This is because, ever since our cattle were taken away during the government operation, we have never been compensated and yet we hear that people from Mbale, Bududa and many other places were compensated for the atrocities they went through. Another example is the fact that most of the facilities needed to help the people of Odek are usually just shown to us and then taken away. For example, an ambulance was presented to the community to help the people of Odek. But that is not in service and we don't even see it in now, while people keep dying since they cannot access medical services. I would also like to say that, the LRA rebels also killed many of Joseph Kony's brothers and sisters, leave alone the people of Odek. Given this, why are we always marginalised from social development while other regions get all the benefits?⁶³

Violating the principle of Do No Harm, most development assistance programs are unfortunately perpetuating perceptions of neglect and exclusion entrenching beliefs of other sub-regions benefiting more from government investment than their own regions. Rather than bridging gaps, this pitches districts and sub-regions against one another in their competition for support, to the extent of communities privileging their suffering over that of others. This phenomenon is intensified due to perceptions of marginalisation by government oftentimes being equated as a lack of recognition of the community or sub-region as victims, which fuels further cycles of sub-regional hostility and bitterness. A dearth of contact and safe channels of interaction between different sub-regions, particularly the Acholi and Lango, further allows these perceptions to crystallise.

After the war, we had lost a lot. But the government is not recognising us, as if we were the ones who killed our people during the war, while instead we were also captured. I would like to say that the tribe of Acholi are the most unlucky ones. Other tribes can now look down on us because they are all now in big offices and the Acholi are now known to be security guards and mocked at. Some of the children we have are very

⁶¹ Saferworld, International Alert and Refugee Law Project, *op. cit.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ A community member at the community dialogue in Odek organised on 11th March, 2015.

*bright but we have no capacity to take them to school and I appeal to the government to take note of this problem. Give us schools like you provide to other regions. I wish it was possible that one of the children from Acholi-land would someday also be at the top of the government in a respectable position.*⁶⁴

Lack of Accountability and Justice by the State

As a classic “weak-strong state,” Uganda “possesses weak state structures and strong coercive apparatuses.”⁶⁵ Beset by growing questioning of political authority and a weakening of institutions, Uganda is in dire need of “legitimate political authority and strong institutions to cope with the dissatisfactions of ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities,”⁶⁶ particularly in the north. Seven years after the guns have fallen silent, the deeply prevailing sense of denied justice in the form of acknowledgment and compensation by the state, continues to impact upon survivors’ ability to rebuild their lives and to move forward beyond the many cleavages that continue to divide the region. Amidst a culture of silence and impunity for state-led crimes during the war, the truth of several atrocities remains withheld and acknowledgement for sufferings is denied, which continues to perpetuate broad misconceptions such as “all Acholi people as perpetrators” during the war, and denies exposure of other communities to the nuances and layered complexities of sufferings experienced on all sides, particularly in the Acholi sub-region. Furthermore, a lack of trust in the ability and motivation of the government institutions to proactively address the unmet justice needs of victims lingering in the aftermath of the war dampens hopes for the possibility of regional reconciliation.

In northern Uganda, public spaces to voice dissent and share narratives of atrocities and grievances are shrinking, and frustration is constantly accumulating in the communities at the barriers imposed on sharing their truths. While people are systematically discouraged, often through brute force, from airing grievances publicly amidst an atmosphere of fear and impunity, bitterness over lack of apology, acknowledgment and accountability by the state continues to linger amidst a web of strained relationships:

*Whenever we try to talk about what happened in Burcoro, we are intimidated. For example, a person like me is disabled, and I was among the people taken to be killed in Burcoro during the massacre. They beat me mercilessly and left me. Now despite this brutal past situation, no one has come to me to say sorry. And if at all someone had acknowledged the wrong that happened in Burcoro, personally I would have peace in my heart. But this has never happened. Then how do we say that forgiveness is possible without dialogue?*⁶⁷

Another community member from Burcoro noted:

If I reflect back on what happened in Burcoro, it brings tears to my eyes. On that night, I lost my younger brother and two sons after they were suffocated in the pit, and my other children were taken away and have not returned until now. I do not even know whether

⁶⁴ A community member at the community dialogue in Odek organised on 11 March 2015.

⁶⁵ Sumit Ganguly and Kanti Bajpai, “India and the Crisis in Kashmir”, *Asian Survey*, vol. 34, no. 5 (University of California Press: 1994), 401-416.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ A community member at the community dialogue in Burcoro organised on 6 June 2015.

*they are still alive or not. Therefore, I am very bitter towards the government for these brutal actions. And it is the role of the government to come and ask for forgiveness since they were the ones who did the wrong. As I talk right now, I am very bitter and vengeful of the government for having made me go through pain and there is nothing that has been done about it.*⁶⁸

It is key to note that as long as the guilt of the state and its weak institutions is not publicly established, vicious cycles of accusations by the communities stemming from a desperate need for acknowledgement of sufferings continue, and often get misdirected to blame other ethnic communities, fuelling communal violence. This was pointed out by the Chairman, LC-I, from Barlonyo, who shared,

*We cannot blame the people of Acholi for our suffering but the government of Uganda for failing to protect her people along with their property during the war. It is the foremost duty of the government to not watch helplessly when wrongs are being committed but rather to act to protect us. Kony started the rebellion with a few people and expanded when the current government was in power, yet the government did nothing and allowed the violence to continue. This makes me blame the government and not the Acholi people. I am appealing with my community members to not conflict with the Acholi people because we are all one. We share borders, we are neighbours and we can do so much together as one. What makes me believe that the government is not bothered about what happened to us is that they have not done anything since the brutal violations of the war occurred. They should have immediately designed a rehabilitation and reparation plan.*⁶⁹

Deep-rooted grievances were shared regarding the government's lack of responsive towards addressing the sufferings of victims and survivors, and a sense of betrayal was felt in light of empty promises which the government failed to deliver upon,

*Sometime back when the President came to Awach, he acknowledged what happened in Burcoro and promised to compensate the victims. But up to now, nothing has happened. Therefore, it is very important to make true promises and commit to them. I was among the men who were tortured and beaten in Burcoro. And our women that night were raped in our presence. This makes it a little hard for reconciliation to take place since most of the soldiers that the President sent are rich at the expense of others' suffering. Therefore, when someone promises to help with compensation and later fails to, it is deeply painful.*⁷⁰

It is therefore imperative to address the legacy of accusation, ethnic stereotyping and trust deficit, address the unequal distribution of resources meant for post conflict reconstruction and development and to emphasise accountability for wrongs committed during conflict to facilitate regional reconciliation; the case of Acholi and Lango people.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ A community member at the community dialogue in Barlonyo organised on 24 June 2015.

⁷⁰ A community member at the community dialogue in Burcoro organised on 6 June 2015.

The Case of Odek

Being the birthplace of the LRA Commander, Joseph Kony, Odek sub-county in Acholi sub-region continues to grapple amidst myriad daunting challenges, performing abysmally poorly in indicators of social, economic and political growth relative to other communities in northern Uganda. The people of Odek experience bitter accusations, stigmatisation and social ostracisation for the crimes committed by the LRA. 48.4% of the respondents believed that it was justified to socially and economically exclude the community of Odek due to the atrocities perpetuated by the LRA, because “they failed to manage their own son” (referring to Joseph Kony). Furthermore, the people of Odek are often denied access to public services such as health and education, and they experience systematic discrimination in employment opportunities. There is a strong perception of marginalisation over distribution of post-war recovery and development assistance, amidst a lack of political will to bring Odek up to the development levels of the rest of the country. Thus, the need for regional reconciliation initiatives with particular emphasis on Odek is critical for an inclusive future of peace and harmony in northern Uganda. Some testimonies from Odek are highlighted below:

- Double-edged Stigmatisation and Denial of Access to Public Services**

We the people of Odek are usually referred to as “Kony” since he comes from this area and people believe that it is the common people of Odek who started the war. Therefore, tribes like the Lango are not in good terms with us. Not only that, even within the Acholi people, Odek is always stigmatised and marginalised. For example, when you go for treatment to any hospital in Gulu town and you identify yourself as a person from Odek, your papers are picked and trashed away. They tell us we have no right to live after what our people did. Therefore, you end up not being treated.⁷¹

- Deep-rooted Hostility, Social Ostracisation and Accusations**

I am going to talk about a challenge I faced in school, when people around me got to know that I was from Odek. On seeing that I come from Odek, the other students started to call me ‘Kony’, just because Kony comes from the same community. Therefore, I started to fear people’s perception of me. I started to internalise the guilt of Kony’s crimes and feeling fearful of what the rebels of Kony could have done to the relatives of the students in class with me. This made me have fear and it really soiled my relationship with other students. I would be in a hideout most of the times. Therefore, with such incidents, many of us lost morale for studies because of the constant references to Kony, and those who proceeded had to change their information background in order to fit into the society.⁷²

- Lack of Acknowledgment and Understanding of their Sufferings During War**

The other tribes feel that we did not experience any pain during the war. But I strongly believe that we, the people of Odek, suffered more than anyone else did. That is why we have called for a memorial monument to be constructed in Odek to remember all those who died during massacres in the conflict. This will also serve as a sign to other tribes to understand that we all suffered the same atrocities that they did.⁷³

- Systematic Discrimination in Employment and Marginalisation in Development**

⁷¹ A community member at the community dialogue in Odek organised on 11 March 2015.

⁷² A community member at the community dialogue in Odek organised on 11 March 2015.

⁷³ A community member at the community dialogue in Odek organised on 11 March 2015.

Assistance

The biggest challenge we have is that the government does not want to directly face and help the people of Odek. And this is a clear sign that the hatred between the government and Joseph Kony is still going on and is adversely affecting the people of Odek since Kony comes from this area. This can be clearly seen in the way we are treated. When you travel to other places like Kampala, Bweyale, and others, the kind of development there is very different from the one you find in Odek, which has received no development aid. Also, when there was recruitment of new police forces, and some of our children went for that, they were frustrated and turned down for coming from Odek. And this treatment is given to all people from Odek, whether you are educated or not. I fear, yet strongly believe, that with time, there will be no respectable leaders from Odek, like leaders such as head masters and others, marginalising us as the poorest and most alienated community for no fault of ours.⁷⁴



A JRP-supported monument in Odek.

⁷⁴ A community member at the community dialogue in Odek organised on 11 March 2015.



Odek at a glance: A memory stone in the names of people killed by the LRA on 29 April 2004.

The Promotion of Reconciliation

There is no handy roadmap for reconciliation. There is no short cut or simple prescription for healing the wounds and divisions of a society in the aftermath of sustained violence.

Creating trust and understanding between former enemies is a supremely difficult challenge. It is, however, an essential one to address in the process of building a lasting peace.

Examining the painful past, acknowledging it and understanding it, and above all transcending it together, is the best way to guarantee that it does not – and cannot – happen again. This involves a very long and painful journey, addressing the pain and suffering of the victims, understanding the motivations of offenders, bringing together estranged communities, trying to find a path to justice, truth and, ultimately, peace.⁷⁵

-Desmond Tutu

Reconciliation is a “society-wide, long-term process of deep change,”⁷⁶ which follows a non-linear trajectory to address, integrate and embrace the memories of the divided past and the vision of the desired shared future as a course to engage with the challenges and opportunities that impregnate the present. As a backward-looking operation, reconciliation brings about the personal healing of survivors, the reparation of past injustices, the building or rebuilding of non-violent relationships between individuals and communities, and the acceptance by the former parties to a conflict of a common vision and understanding of the past.⁷⁷ In its forward-looking dimension, reconciliation means enabling victims and perpetrators to get on with life and, at the level of society, the establishment of a civilised political dialogue and an adequate sharing of power.⁷⁸

The process of reconciliation foregrounds the cyclical relationship between social change and personal change, individual healing and collective healing, for a society such as northern Uganda that is emerging from years of historical violence and armed conflict to holistically transform. As we explore blueprints for reconciliation in northern Uganda, it is key to note that “peaceful coexistence, trust and empathy do not develop in a sustainable way if structural injustices in the political, legal and economic domains remain,”⁷⁹ which are key challenges in this context. A reconciliation process must therefore be supported by a gradual sharing of power, an honouring of each other’s political commitments, the creation of a climate conducive to human rights and economic justice, and a willingness among the population at large to accept responsibility for the past and for the future.⁸⁰

Given this backdrop, as the society of northern Uganda paves the path for reconciliation and recovery efforts and explores appropriate mechanisms, several questions emerge: How do we guide a new narrative of national unity and reconciliation aimed at engendering a culture of respectful coexistence and human rights in a deeply divided society characterised with deep-rooted historical grievances and ethnic segregations? How can one recover and exercise agency to restore democracy into the moribund institutions of the country such that values of justice and dignity are not compromised? How do we expand our imagination of justice and social healing to creatively address the challenges of intergenerational transfer of

⁷⁵ See the Fall 2004 issue of *Greater Good magazine*.

⁷⁶ Huyse, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷ John Paul Lederach, “Reconciliation: The Building of Relationship,” in *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1997).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Huyse, *op. cit.*

⁸⁰ Huyse, *op. cit.*

trauma and feelings of revenge? How do we inspire a culture of positive political participation in a society disillusioned with democratic deficits and political manipulation? How do we expand the notion of human rights beyond strict legal frameworks to an understanding of the deeper psychological and social context of human rights violations while seeking redress for victims, survivors and perpetrators?

As these questions inform and mould the process of reconciliation in the broader context of northern Uganda, it is vital to map the reconciliation journey of the region to identify and learn from the ongoing processes, best practices, and mechanisms in this realm. 65.2% of the respondents to the survey affirmed the presence of several ongoing attempts to promote reconciliation *within their community*. These included sensitisation programs on clarifying the genesis and root causes of the LRA war and on peaceful reintegration of former combatants into the community, along with mediation of community conflicts by traditional and religious leaders, religious sermons on forgiveness and reconciliation as well as truth telling processes. 48.1% affirmed the community reconciliation efforts to be very useful, while 48.1% deemed them moderately useful.

In the sphere of *regional reconciliation efforts between the Acholi and Lango sub-regions*, we observed mixed reactions. A considerable population of 50.7% of the respondents confirmed the presence of ongoing initiatives to promote regional reconciliation in the form of sensitisation programs emphasising the importance of inter-community reconciliation, truth telling dialogues and cross-border mediation efforts by traditional and religious leaders. However, a majority of 58.1% regarded these initiatives to be only partially successful in their implementation and impact. At the same time, 49.3% of the respondents denied the presence of any regional reconciliation efforts. Highlighting the prevailing tensions and bitter relationships across sub-regions and the inadequacy of effective regional reconciliation initiatives, 36.7% of the respondents reported a high to moderate likelihood of overt conflict breaking out between the Acholi and Lango.

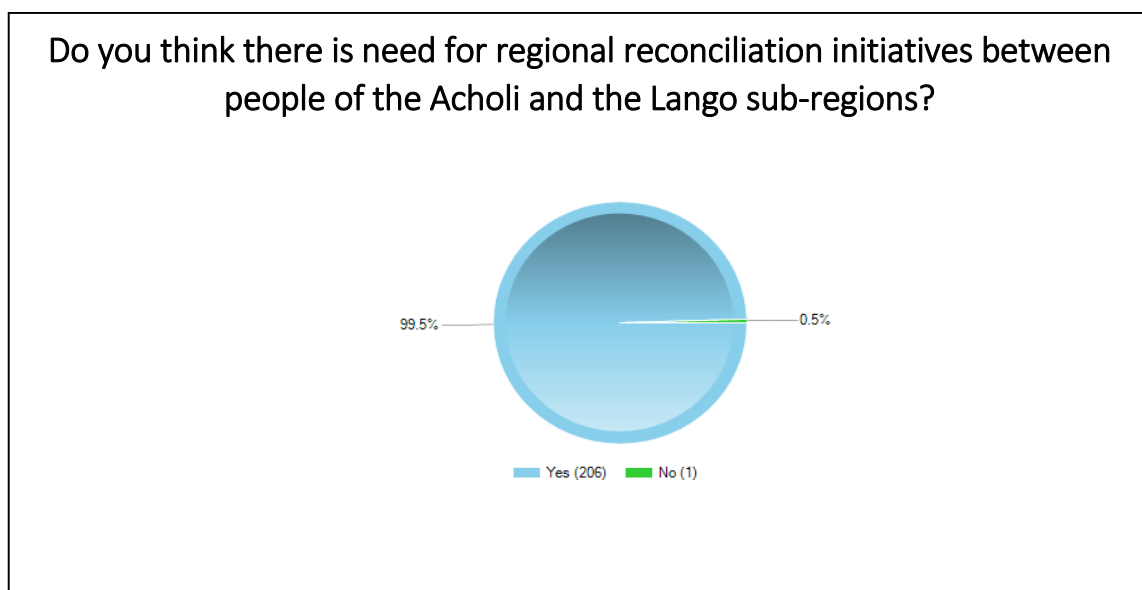


Figure 14: Do you think there is need for regional reconciliation initiatives between people of the Acholi and the Lango sub-regions?, field findings, April 2015.

Community perceptions on the need for regional reconciliation were almost unanimous, with 99.5% of respondents acknowledging the need for regional reconciliation initiatives between the Acholi and Lango sub-regions. Following this consensus, an exploration of the existing practices and programs for promotion of regional reconciliation which were ongoing and needed further support in the communities revealed mediation and reconciliation practices by traditional leaders, along with regional dialogues for leaders of Acholi and Lango sub-regions to be the most common practices. Other popular approaches also include arts-based sensitisation and advocacy for regional reconciliation through dance, drama and music, along with participation of community members in exchange visits across sub-regions.

With the pressing need for regional reconciliation in northern Uganda clearly established, it is critical to examine how energies at the regional and national levels can be synergised towards holistic reconciliation in Uganda. These linkages were seen in the encouraging response of 71% of the respondents who viewed regional reconciliation as an important step towards national reconciliation in Uganda. In their view, regional reconciliation would be pivotal in harmonising cultural differences and addressing regional issues that threaten to jeopardise national unity, along with restoring trust and confidence in the national government, paving the path for national reconciliation in the divided society of Uganda.

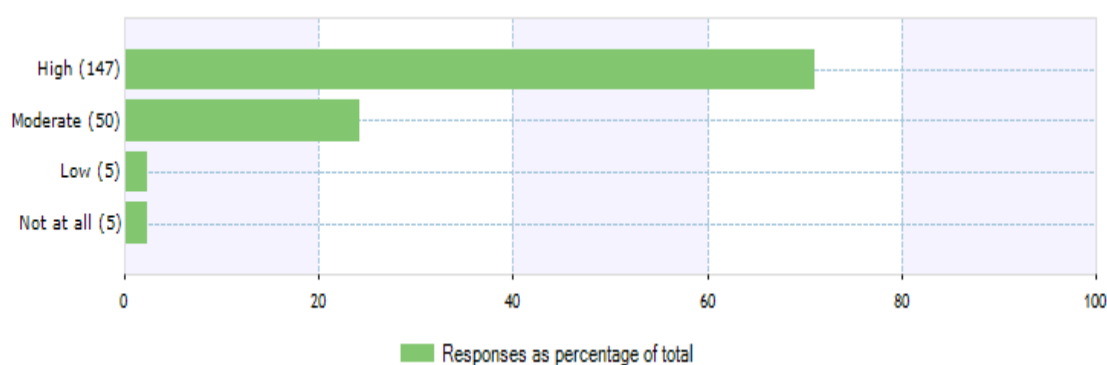


Figure 15: To what extent is regional reconciliation a step towards achieving national unity?, field findings, April 2015.

As the need for regional reconciliation gets foregrounded amidst the transition challenges and conflict drivers delineated in the previous chapter, this section of the report focuses on consolidating effective mechanisms and processes for regional reconciliation between the Acholi and Lango sub-regions. It is key to understand that within the context of northern Uganda, it is pertinent for several processes to blend together for holistic reconciliation, which includes public acknowledgment of the truth about past wrongs, acknowledgement by the state or by perpetrators of the injuries perpetuated during war, holistic reparation programme for those violated during war, keen attention to structural inequalities and the basic material needs of victimised communities, memorialisation processes to commemorate and preserve memories of war, clear end to the threat of further violence, amongst several others.

Highlighted below are key mechanisms and processes that will deepen regional reconciliation within the context of Acholi and Lango sub-regions by addressing transition challenges and conflicts drivers in the region.

Truth-Telling Dialogues

Truth-telling is a precondition of reconciliation because it creates objective opportunities for people to see the past in terms of shared suffering and collective responsibility⁸¹. Truth telling dialogues create safe spaces for multiple realities, experiences and truths to emerge and become a part of the public discourse. It also helps investigate patterns of abuses and violations committed over a period of time by bringing to fore unheard, marginalised voices, which oftentimes helps to reverse cycles of stigmatisation and hostility amongst communities. The purpose of truth telling dialogues is not to get one complete, coherent, absolute truth, but to gain different insights into the past events and to 'have people on opposing sides begin to see each other's truth with empathy and understanding that will allow for healing to begin to take place'⁸². This process enables the identification of key transitional challenges and reconciliation needs of a community. Community truth telling dialogues also help to challenge and pierce through the invisibility of certain atrocities, as was seen in Burcoro parish, where state-led violations committed by the National Resistance Army in April 1991, have been systematically silenced:

*There is no recorded truth of the brutal events that happened in Burcoro. There is a lot of fear and most leaders don't want to speak the truth because it will expose the government. This is a way of delaying forgiveness, and yet we all know that for achieving peace, truth needs to be shared. Also, in our parish, there are a lot of misconceptions about the atrocities that were committed and most outsiders have no information about our suffering. So they keep blaming all Acholi people to be murderers without realising that we too lost hundreds of our own. Therefore, the truth needs to be clearly spelt out to bring to light the sufferings all different people and to help in the process of reconciliation.*⁸³



A woman from Barlonyo, Lira district speaks about her conflict experiences

⁸¹ Huyse, *op. cit.*

⁸² C. Villa-Vicencio, "The limitations of academic history: The quest for truth demands both more and less," in W. James & L. van der Vijver (eds.), *After the TRC*, (Cape Town: The Rustica Press, 2000).

⁸³ A community member at the community dialogue in Burcoro organised on 6 June 2015.

Why Share Conflict Memories?

Sharing stories of conflict experiences marks a clear transition of the invisible, yet deeply lingering, pain and trauma, being transformed into visible expression and acknowledgment of the suffering. When handled sensitively, the process of sharing conflict memories in a safe space:

- Gives voice and a cathartic release to the unheard suffering of individuals/communities, enabling excluded or marginalised voices to become part of public discourse;
 - Allows public acknowledgment of the trauma and violations;
 - Creates spaces for advocacy for redress of past violations;
 - Empowers the speakers with a renewed sense of agency to 'own their stories';
 - Brings to fore different truths, foregrounding the diversity of experiences and complex fluidity of roles in a conflict (e.g. Perpetrators can also be victims);
 - Creates spaces to cultivate empathy and understanding of the other's experiences, building relationship and a web of interdependent relationships;
 - Creates a shared (sometimes common) understanding of history which acknowledges the presence of competing truths and diversity of perspectives; and
 - Honours the historical memory of conflict of individuals and communities
-

Exchange Visits

Exchange visits play a pivotal role in reducing social distance and increasing contact between communities with adversarial relationships, creating constructive spaces to re-humanize the "other." By visiting each other's contexts, previously blocked channels of communication open and engender shared spaces to interrogate and challenge the misconceptions that communities hold about each other. Exchange visits are instrumental in building an understanding of the challenges and realities of the other's contexts, which reduces prejudices, and is fruitful in fostering a deeper and more empathetic understanding of the commonalities in conflict experiences of community members across different regions. Shattering the binary of us versus them, exchange visits uphold the role of empathy and compassion in the work of social healing as well as the strategic value of being in dialogue with the "other" as a road to peace.

Beckoning the need for exchange visits between the Acholi and Lango sub-regions, a community member from Lukodi shared:

It is important to have some of the victims who are accusing the Acholi people of killing their loved ones, to come visit us and see that in Acholi also people were killed and tortured. We too were vulnerable and they should understand that. An understanding that what happened during the war was in no one's interest and everyone suffered, will give us a clear vision for reconciliation.⁸⁴

Sensitisation Programmes and Mediation by Traditional Leaders

Sensitisation programs led by traditional leaders help to deepen the communities' understanding of roots causes of armed conflict and nudge reflection on a deeper scrutiny of

⁸⁴ A community member at the community dialogue in Lukodi organised on 26 May 2015.

victim/perpetrator dynamics and how they co-exist within any given group, which is instrumental in sensitising communities and discouraging cycles of unwarranted accusations and violence. At the community dialogues, most members asserted that “the majority of local people trust the Rwot,” and called upon the Paramount Chief and other Chiefs of different tribes to collectively engage in sensitisation dialogues across sub-regions. These sensitisation programs are key in “giving voice to the silenced atrocities for different tribes to listen” and in cultivating a shared experience of suffering and loss across sub-regions. A community member from Odek shared:

We should ask the traditional leaders from Lango and Acholi regions to sit together with the communities and sensitise and reconcile them because in the future our children will live in other places and they must live together in peace. Some people try their best to deny being an Acholi in other places but for sure one cannot run away from his own tribe. People in Lango should be told that all the Acholi are not bad people just because one person who wanted to overthrow the government was one amongst us. They should also know that he used our own children to achieve his goal by killing and abducting hundreds of our people first, and his goal was not our goal. I believe that it is only the traditional leaders who can bring us together and sensitise us to each other's experiences for reconciliation to happen.⁸⁵

The use of media such as newspapers, radio etc. can expand the scope and reach of sensitisation programs. Furthermore, traditional leaders have also been active in mediating conflicts on issues both within and across sub-regions and must continue offering their support to address conflicts.

Apology and Acknowledgment by Government and Other Actors

In the aftermath of a war, acknowledgment of crimes plays a crucial role for healing, and the absence of acknowledgment keeps latent conflicts and relational estrangement firmly in place. Lack of acknowledgment takes many forms: a refusal to acknowledge what one group has done to the other, a refusal to accurately reflect historic events, and subsequently, a refusal to see the other's reality and acknowledge the other's suffering.⁸⁶

In the context of northern Uganda, where several atrocities were systematically perpetuated by the state and where the state failed to protect its citizens on several occasions, a strong need for acknowledgment of the crimes and sufferings caused permeates through the communities. It is important to understand that acknowledgment is a crucial step in social healing because:

- It validates the other's dignity and the integrity of their reality;
- It rectifies the historic record of events for future generations;
- It creates a social narrative that can be the basis for co-existence and reconciliation;
- It is frequently the foundation for sincere apology and forgiveness.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ A community member at the community dialogue in Odek organised on 11 March 2015.

⁸⁶ Judith Thompson and James O' Dea, *The Social Healing Project*, 2011.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

The widespread need for acknowledgment by the Government of Uganda in the post-war context of northern Uganda, and its significance in healing and reconciliation was shared by a community member from Barlonyo:

I see that the government should be responsible for this reconciliation process. They should accept that it was their failure to protect the people of Uganda and their property, and accept to pay for the damages caused to people who've lost their loved ones or whose properties have been destroyed in the war. One important thing that the government should have done was to accept that they failed, they were wrong and apologise to the victims so as to bring healing to us. That is a way for us to feel satisfied and feel that justice has been done.⁸⁸

In addition, the need to acknowledge the wrongs committed by communities against one another and seek forgiveness would also lead the region in the direction of reconciliation, where apology would serve as a symbolic form of reparation,

When I was growing up, I often used to hear people say “Lango ki wango gi i ot” (The Lango people was burnt in a house). This clearly indicates that something wrong must have happened and therefore we need to accept the wrongs committed by us or our forefathers, in order for reconciliation to take place between the people of Acholi and Lango sub-regions.⁸⁹

Traditional Justice

In the aftermath of the LRA-led war, to ensure effective social reconstruction requires a holistic approach that combines different mechanisms for justice and reconciliation that respond to the needs of victims and respects traditions embedded in communities.

Upholding traditional justice processes, in sync with other justice mechanisms, ensures that healing, repair of fractured relationships and reconciliation processes are deep and lasting. 78.3% of the respondents held positive perceptions on the effectiveness of traditional justice mechanisms and 67% considered it to be very effective in addressing conflicts and restoring relationships.

The conflict in northern Uganda has revealed that there is a rich body of traditional systems of law and justice that reflect principles of conflict management with both retributive and restorative elements where the objective is to reintegrate the perpetrators into their communities and reconcile them with the victims, through a process of establishing the truth, confession, reparation, repentance and forgiveness⁹⁰. It is key to note that traditional justice mechanisms are embedded in and responsive to the cultural and contextual sensitivities of the context and are sustainable because of their reliance on local processes. They are highly participatory in nature and foreground restoring unity amongst the community through eliciting the active involvement of victims, perpetrators, elders, women, youth, men, families and larger community members in the process. Traditional justice processes take into account the unique experiences of victims and perpetrators during the war and comprise varied rituals such as the ritual of “cleansing the body” (*moyo kum*) performed with persons

⁸⁸ A community member at the community dialogue in Barlonyo organised on 24 June 2015.

⁸⁹ A community member at the community dialogue in Lukodi organised on 26 May 2015.

⁹⁰ James Ojera Latigo, *Traditional Justice and Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: Learning from African Experiences* (International IDEA, 2008).

returning from captivity; the ritual of “cleansing an area” (*moyo piny*) where war-related massacres have occurred; and the vow of “bending the spear” (*gomo tong*) to declare a cessation of hostilities between conflicting parties. The reconciliation rites of *mato oput* and *nyono tong gweno* have been used extensively in the region in the aftermath of the war.

As elucidated by Latigo, traditional justice mechanisms in northern Uganda have several strengths:

1. The traditional justice system fosters the *culture of dialogue and inclusiveness* which is intrinsically enshrined in the processes. In any conflict situation, dialogue plays a significant role as a first step towards a peaceful resolution.
2. It is *culture-specific* and consistent with tried and tested methods that have restored relations in the past. This makes it difficult for the ever-present ‘spoilers’ to manipulate the process for cynical political purposes.
3. The *open nature* of the process applied is in itself a deterrent to many who would have contemplated committing similar crimes.
4. The traditional justice system fosters a greater *sense of unity* by allowing many community members to witness and/or participate in the process, as well as ironing out any doubts about whether fair justice is being dealt.
5. The traditional justice process often generates *community-focused outcomes* that impact positively on the entire community.
6. Community and human powers sanction the agreements reached. The agreement reached is normally unassailable and has to be implemented to the satisfaction of the entire community. *Compliance* is often achieved to a very high degree.
7. The *possibility of perpetrators negating or avoiding the process is limited* since it is largely an intra-community process.⁹¹

Rekindling Exchange of Trade Activities

Gradually restarting business and trade activities between the two sub-regions will serve as a source of economic empowerment and mutual understanding between the Acholi and Lango people. It will increase contact between the two tribes and bolster economic security, which as a key component of human security shares a close nexus with reconciliation. Encouraging exchanges in business activities between the sub-regions, a community member from Atiak remarked:

*In relation to business between the Acholi and Lango, we usually get beads, chicken, and many other items from each other. Now if there is poor relation between us, then the Lango will not get money from the Acholi, and therefore there is a need to reconcile. Because if this is not done, then the silent war will one day blow up and cause another huge war.*⁹²

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² A community member at the community dialogue in Atiak organised on 28 May 2015.

Ensuring Reparations for Abuse

The question of reparations⁹³ to victims and survivors of conflicts in northern Uganda has been largely neglected and the prevailing sense of denied justice continues to adversely impact upon peoples' ability to rebuild their lives and move forward. Little has been done to deal with the physical and psychological harm inflicted by the war on victims and survivors while the full reintegration of former combatants remains a work in progress. Access to justice for individual and community wrongs remains a challenge for the majority, and people continue

living with the trauma of forced displacement, sexual abuse, torture, and physical wounds that remain unaddressed. There is also a massive dearth of compensation in recognition of the wrongs done and to make good the losses suffered, whether they are nominal damages, pecuniary damages or moral damages. Sharing her experience of ongoing victimisation as a female victim of war, who lacked any support from the government for the harms she suffered, a woman from Parabongo shared:

When the soldiers released me, my husband told me not to step into his compound since I had been raped by the soldiers. Now tell me, how can a homeless woman with deep psychological wounds and bitterness, and who is HIV positive, ever forgive without being compensated? How will I survive alone?⁹⁴

Thus, as the society of northern Uganda emerges from the devastation of war, it is critical to note that without a comprehensive reparation program, the sense of denial of justice will continue to weigh down affected individuals and communities and hinder their ability to meaningfully engage in a broader process of social rehabilitation, reconciliation or development. This sentiment was expressed by a community member hailing from Burcoro,

I was a small boy, yet I saw nasty things that the soldiers did to our parents - women getting raped and who are now infected with HIV/AIDS, children were massacred, and others were abducted and have never returned. The soldiers beat everyone brutally, destroyed our food reserves, property and livestock. Many are suffering and sometimes I want to take revenge. I am saying this because I have a lot of pain and bitterness. Before anything else, we first need to be compensated for our loss and given medical

What are Reparations?

Reparations is a comprehensive notion, including several concepts and covering a wide range of measures that are taken to redress past wrongs. These include:

Restitution refers to "re-establishment of the situation which existed before the wrongful act was committed," and it relates to essential "belongings," such as the return of property, the restoration of liberty, citizenship and other legal rights, the return to place of residence and the restoration of employment.

Compensation is the payment of money as a recognition of the wrong done and to make good the losses suffered.

Rehabilitation can be defined as the restoration of a victim's physical and psychological health.

Satisfaction applies to those types of redress that do not aim to make good specific individual losses or harm. The main forms of satisfaction are: (a) the verification of the facts and the disclosure of the truth; (b) an apology; (c) sanctions against individual perpetrators; and (d) commemorations of and tributes to the victims.

⁹³ For more information on reparations, see the *Nairobi Principles on Women and Girls' Right to a Remedy and Reparation*. The text from the box on page 40 were extracted from the Principles.

⁹⁴ A community member at the community dialogue in Parabongo organised on 27 May 2015.

*treatment, and then we can have prayers. How can we think of reconciliation and moving forward when there has been no justice for our sufferings?*⁹⁵

Willingness to Forgive

A viewpoint that echoed in numerous conversations at the community dialogues was the need for widespread support for and practice of forgiveness in Uganda as a pathway to rebuilding fractured relationships and furthering reconciliation in the region. In Uganda the motivations for forgiveness range from religion, tribal traditions, family traditions, the desire for psychological peace, the quest for peace in the community at large, and a recognition of the complexity of perpetrators' motives.⁹⁶ A community member from Parabongo shared:

*The bad things have already happened and we, the Acholi, cannot run away from it. Our children were abducted and forced to become rebels, which is an honest truth. But another truth is that they killed and started this war too. So who is the offender and who is the victim? We do not know, but this definitely has made us enemies with several people. So we have accepted that we have done wrong and we ask for forgiveness and understanding so that our tribes can live in peace.*⁹⁷

Perceptions on the Amnesty Act in Uganda reflect an overwhelmingly favourable leaning towards the Act, with 87.4% of the respondents expressing positive perceptions of the Act. A clear majority of 78.3% laud the Act for its high contribution to peace building and reconciliation efforts in northern Uganda since it facilitates the return of captives and rebels and promotes reintegration of returnees into the communities. Advocating for having a disposition of forgiveness and supporting amnesty for returnees from the bush, a woman from Lukodi said:

*I am one of the mothers of the people who were killed in the massacre. I want to say that things can go bad and when that happens we have to sit down and talk about it and forgive one another. Take our voices to Lango and other parts of the country where Kony killed people. Let them not look at us badly. When things go bad we talk about it. On our side as the most affected people, we would like to say that forgiveness is the key. My youngest child is still in the bush and I am not sure if he is still alive or not. Forgiveness/amnesty should be given to the people who are now returning back home from the bush, despite all the bad things that they have done. We have to heal together.*⁹⁸

Memorialisation

Post-war contexts often impose a culture of collective amnesia and refrain from remembering the past, for fear of reopening painful wounds and disrupting the fragile peace. However, not preserving the memories of the past and choosing to ignore it can be a huge obstacle in the process of reconciliation because:

- It refuses victims the public acknowledgement of their pain.
- It invites offenders to take the path of denial.

⁹⁵ A community member at the community dialogue in Burcoro organised on 6 June 2015.

⁹⁶ University of Notre Dame and Refugee Law Project, *Forgiveness: Unveiling an Asset for Peacebuilding*, 2015.

⁹⁷ A community member at the community dialogue in Parabongo organised on 27 May 2015.

⁹⁸ A community member at the community dialogue in Lukodi organised on 26 May 2015.

- It deprives future generations of the opportunity to understand and learn from the past and to participate in the building of a lasting reconciliation.⁹⁹

A clear majority of 76.7% acknowledged processes of preservation of historical memory and memorialisation to play a very vital role in the journey to reconciliation. Some memorial initiatives that were expressed by respondents to the survey to play a central role in fostering a culture conducive to reconciliation in communities include memorial prayers, construction of memorial monuments, beautification of memorial sites as a safe space for healing, and community-led documentation of war memories and the justice and reconciliation needs of communities.

Memorialisation processes further efforts for reconciliation because they provides public acknowledgment of the violations committed during war, and are an important tool to collectively advocate for redress. By giving a 'collective dimension to private pain'¹⁰⁰, it also serves as a safe coping mechanism facilitating healing for individual and community reconciliation. Recounting memories of the past also allows the future generations to learn from the past and invest in a peaceful future. To this end, memorial monuments to pay honour to those who perished, memorial prayers, public expression of memories through dance and drama, among several other memorialisation strategies can be implemented. A community member hailing from Odek noted:

I think all of us here from Odek know that we also lost our loved ones during the war and several massacres, but this has not been recognised by other communities. Therefore, I suggest that a memorial monument bearing the names and number of the people who perished from Odek should be constructed to tell our stories of suffering to other so that they know that we also suffered the same way as they did during the war. I also want to add that if a book could be produced with all the atrocities that the people of Odek went through and published to the world, it would help reduce the problem of regional blame-game, with only us being held responsible for all killings, ignoring that our own were also massacred.¹⁰¹

The inadequate implementation of transitional justice program seen in to play is a real denial of justice for the conflict affected communities of northern Uganda. Thus far achieving genuine regional reconciliation is myth. A holistic TJ process with emphasis on reparation, rekindling trade activities, traditional justice, official apology and acknowledgement, truth telling, exchange visits and sensitisation on forgiveness will provide firm platform for reconciliation across ethnic boundaries.

⁹⁹ Huyse, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ A community member at the community dialogue in Odek organised on 11th March, 2015.



Regional reconciliation taskforce pose after inter cultural/religious leaders' dialogue in St. Lira Hotel-Lira town

Recommendations: Charting the Way Forward

As the society of northern Uganda gradually transitions amidst post-war recovery and reconciliation efforts, a synergy in the efforts of key actors strategically positioned at different levels of the society is central to increasing the stakes for peace and engendering a culture of constructive social change geared towards long-term reconciliation. As explained by Lederach, constructive social change is the art of strategically and imaginatively weaving relational webs across social spaces within setting of protracted conflict¹⁰² to build sustainable structures of just peace. In the context of northern Uganda, a ‘lasting and even reasonably just peace depends on a wide array of actors and activities, at all levels of society and between societies, oriented toward the past, the present, and the future’¹⁰³. This strategy of strategic peace building beckons the need for a multi-stakeholder approach in the process of society-wide reconciliation which emphasises collaboration and coordination between different key actors across the horizontal and vertical axis of the society.

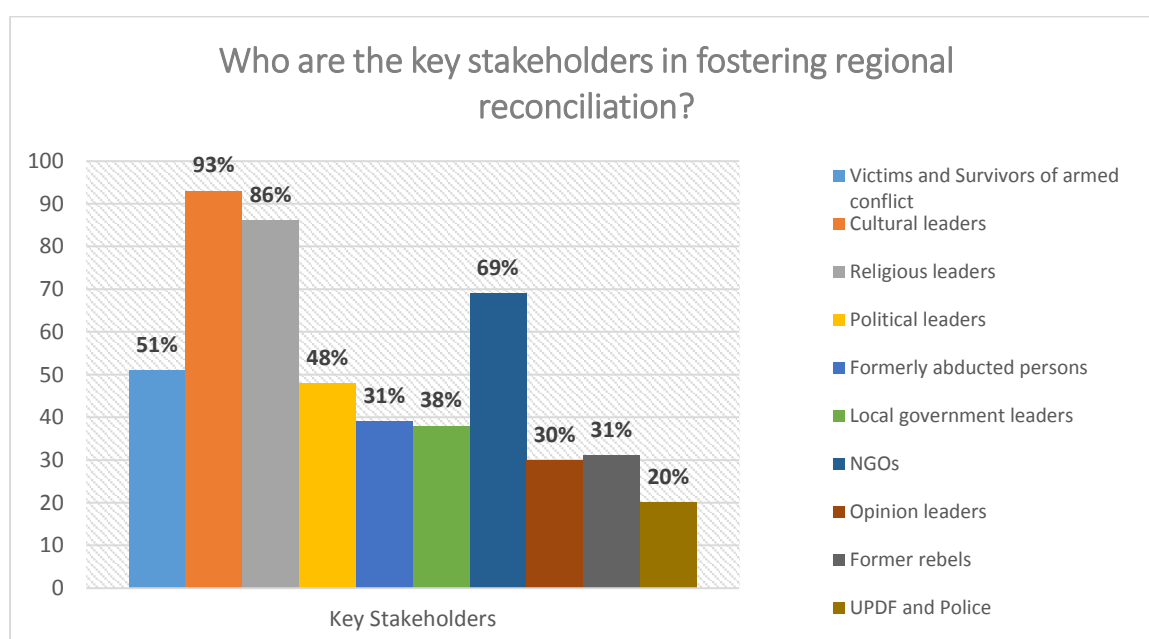


Figure 16: Who are the key stakeholders in fostering regional reconciliation?, field findings, April 2015.

In this context, Lederach defines the “strategic who” as those actors who when brought together to work collectively have the capacity to initiate and sustain social change by pooling in their skills, expertise, energies, and resources. Through their actions, they have the capacity to replicate and exponentially affect the larger whole and strengthen the motivation for peace at all levels of the society. Appleby and Lederach underscore certain hallmarks of the constructive relationships and just social structures that strategic peacebuilders seek to foster among conflicted parties which underlie and are imperative for reconciliation, particularly in northern Uganda. These include:

- The cultivation of interdependence as a social and political context for the effective pursuit of human rights, good governance, and economic prosperity;

¹⁰² Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, *op. cit.*

¹⁰³ Daniel Philpott, “Introduction: Searching for Strategy in an Age of Peacebuilding”, *Strategies of Peace* (Strategies of Peace, 2010).

- The promotion of transparent communication across sectors and levels of society in the service of including as many voices and actors as possible in the reform of institutions and the repair or creation of partnerships conducive to the common good; and
- The increasing coordination and (where possible) integration of resources, programs, practices, and processes.¹⁰⁴

Thus, there is a pressing need for collaboration and/or coordination between government and political leaders, traditional and religious heads, national and international NGOs, local leaders, victims groups', women's associations, businesses, media houses, academics and other actors in the context of northern Uganda, for lasting reconciliation in the region.

Recommendations to Top Leadership

This level comprises the key political and military leaders in Uganda who form the highest representative leaders of the government and opposition movements. These leaders are highly visible and have significant power and influence. Key recommendations for them include:

- Accelerate the process of development of a comprehensive reparation policy that holistically addresses the needs of all categories of victims and fills in the current reparation gaps experienced by communities, to facilitate physical and psychological rehabilitation and economic stability in the region.
- Establish a transparent system for the distribution of recovery and development programs with a robust monitoring and accountability mechanism to track progress and address any discrimination in the process.
- Take initiative to provide public apology and acknowledgment for the government's failure to protect civilians during the LRA-led armed conflict and for certain state-led atrocities during that period.
- Take concerted steps to bolster human development with particular focus on ensuring equity, access and quality of primary and secondary education in northern Uganda to promise a bright future to the young generation.
- Adopt a multi-stakeholder approach to justice and reconciliation by inviting the views of NGOs, local leaders, victims groups, traditional and religious leaders in shaping policies and programs aimed at justice and reconciliation in northern Uganda.
- Enforce effective implementation of affirmative action and consider victims of armed conflict as special interest groups.
- Develop trainings and sensitisation programs for security sector personnel and leaders to eliminate systematic discrimination in recruitment and employment along ethnic lines.

Recommendations to Middle-Range Leadership

This level is constituted by highly respected leaders in different sectors of the society of northern Uganda such as education, business, agriculture and health. They also include religious and ethnic leaders, academics and intellectuals and humanitarian leaders representing NGOs. These leaders are not necessarily connected to or controlled by

¹⁰⁴ John Paul Lederach and R. Scott Appleby, "Strategic Peacebuilding: An Overview", *Strategies of Peace* (Strategies of Peace, 2010).

structures of the formal government or major opposition movements, and they serve as a powerful connector between the top and grassroots levels of the society with a pre-existing network of relationships with influential leaders at all levels of the society. Key recommendations for them include:

- Support community-led transitional justice processes of healing and advocacy and serve as effective bridges between the top-level and grassroots leaderships.
- Encourage action-oriented research through collaboration between academics, NGOs and cultural leaders to comprehensively document and analyse historical grievances between different communities in Uganda, examine the root causes of violence in the region, and record the degree of human rights violations committed to create a robust and comprehensive database and make recommendations for appropriate redress.
- Cultural institutions of different sub-regions should work in collaboration to effectively address historical and current challenges that jeopardise peaceful coexistence such as ethnic stereotyping and land conflicts among others.
- Religious leaders should actively lead prayers and religious events as a powerful healing and reconciliation mechanism in communities and use religious spaces like churches and mosques to sensitise the masses about forgiveness and reconciliation in addition to strengthening church counseling programs.
- Advocate for the Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) and national Transitional Justice policy to be victim-centred and addressing the unique justice needs of victims, ensuring that reparation and other justice needs are holistically met.
- Initiate livelihood activities led by NGOs and businesses to provide economic security and empowerment to communities and aid the recovery process by addressing dissatisfaction stemming from perceptions of relative deprivation between regions.
- Encourage the media to practice peace journalism by using a conciliatory vocabulary in print media that avoids propaganda. Audio-visual media such as radios and televisions should run sensitisation programs to create awareness about domestic violence, stigmatisation of former combatants, and other key issues to pave the path towards reconciliation.

Recommendations to Grassroots Leadership

This level represents the masses and is constituted by local leaders and community organisers. They have an expert knowledge of local politics and witness first-hand the challenges experienced by communities on a daily basis. Key recommendations for them include:

- Establish community-based Peace and Reconciliation structures at the grassroots level which elicit participation of trusted and respected leaders in the community to provide a strong community-based platform to listen to, identify and collectively advocate for transition challenges and reconciliation needs in northern Uganda.
- Ensure that able and committed leaders are elected who will lead the people with sincerity and address their challenges supportively.
- Strengthen community-led processes of memorialisation that enhance the acknowledgement of violations committed during war, serve as a safe space for individual and collective healing, and also allow advocacy for redress.

- Uphold harmonious coexistence among communities from different sub-regions through inter-community reconciliation dialogues, and exchange, learning and solidarity visits that sensitise communities to each other's war experiences and reduce prejudices and ethnic stereotyping.
- Adopt a community-friendly arts based approach to furthering advocacy, healing and sensitisation efforts through formats such as Theatre of the Oppressed and storytelling that enable communities to effectively communicate their concerns and needs and to collectively demand for justice. Issues such as reintegration challenges, stigmatisation of children born of war, domestic violence, denial of justice and accusation of other ethnic communities, among several others could be discussed in these safe spaces.

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