



Justice and Reconciliation Project: Grassroots Perspectives on Amnesty

Report on Community Dialogues Conducted in Koch Goma Sub-County (Acholi Sub-Region), Abia Sub-County (Lango Sub-Region), Obalanga Sub-County (Teso Sub-Region) and Romogi Sub-County (West Nile Sub-Region) to Gather Grassroots Perspectives on Amnesty in Uganda.

INTRODUCTION

From the 7 – 29 October 2014, the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) on behalf of the Uganda Law Society (ULS) conducted four community dialogues in the sub-regions of Acholi, Lango, Teso and West Nile in northern Uganda to solicit grassroots perspectives on Uganda's Amnesty Act of 2000. The dialogues were conducted as part of a wider research project being implemented by the Uganda Law Society to inform the drafting of a future Model Amnesty Law for Uganda. This report provides a summary of the views and perspectives gathered from these dialogues. Detailed transcriptions of the dialogues are also attached as annexes.

METHODOLOGY

A community dialogue is a forum that draws as many participants as possible from the community as to exchange information face-to-face, share personal stories and experiences, express perspectives, clarify points of view, and develop solutions to community concerns and opportunities. Community dialogues allow participants to express their opinions in their own ways. The dialogues are usually conducted in open spaces and attendance is open to whoever wishes to attend. JRP routinely conducts community dialogues to gauge public opinion on specific issues.

The perspectives contained in this report were gathered from four community dialogues conducted in four sub-counties of northern Uganda from 7th – 29th October 2014. All locations for the dialogues were purposively selected based on JRP's knowledge and past interactions with the communities.

The first dialogue was conducted in Koch-Goma Sub-County located in Nwoya District on 7th October 2014. Koch Goma was chosen because of JRP's past interactions with members of the community and the presence of large numbers of formerly abducted persons. Koch Goma also acted as the location for piloting the questions which had been developed in consultation with ULS. Over 50 people from Koch Goma attended the dialogue.

The second dialogue was conducted in Abia Sub-County, located in Lira District, Lango Sub-Region on 21st October 2014. Abia was chosen based on JRP's past interactions with the community. It was also chosen based on its past history as the location of a gruesome massacre perpetrated by rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army on 2 February 2004, claiming the lives of 240 people. More than 150 people from Abia attended the dialogue.

The third dialogue was conducted in Obalanga Sub-County, located in Amuria District, Teso Sub-Region on 24 October 2014. Obalanga was also chosen based on JRP's past interaction with the community there and also based on the fact that it was the scene of numerous massacres and killings perpetrated by the LRA when they first invaded Teso sub-region in June 2003. Obalanga Sub-County, located at the northern tip of Teso Sub-Region was the entry point of the LRA and suffered numerous killings and abductions during the period in which the LRA operated there. It has a large number of former abductees and was therefore considered ideal for the dialogue. Over 60 people from Obalanga attended the dialogue.

The final dialogue was conducted 29 October in Romogi Sub-County, located in Adjumani District in West Nile Sub-Region. Romogi Sub-County was also chosen based on JRP's past interactions with the community and the presence of many victims and ex-combatants of the Uganda National Rescue Front I & II. JRP currently works with a survivors' group called Romogi War Victims' Association. Over 170 people from Romogi attended the dialogue.

The dialogues were open to attendance by all community members living within proximity of the Sub-County headquarters.

Mobilization for the dialogues was conducted by community mobilizers known to JRP and living within the communities. Mobilization was conducted by sending out radio announcements and pinning up posters in the communities to alert community members about the dialogues. Mobilization was also conducted through local leaders such as the LC III chairpersons, the district police commanders, sub-county security officers and LC I chairpersons who were alerted about the occurrence of the dialogues and also invited to participate. On the day of the dialogues JRP hired and used public address systems to announce the commencement of the dialogues and attract community members to the venue. We also used traditional dancers to entertain the crowds during breaks in the discussions.

More than 420 people across the four Sub-regions of Acholi, Lango Teso and West Nile regions participated in the consultative dialogues. This number was compiled from attendance lists of participants who accepted to register.

The categories of participants included political leaders, local leaders, cultural leaders, religious leaders, elders, ex-combatants, victims of maims, victims of sexual gender based violence, youths, women and men.

All dialogues started with brief opening remarks from prominent local leaders in attendance such as the LC III chairperson. Brief introductory remarks were then made by JRP facilitators who briefed the participants about the Amnesty Act of 2000, including its main aims and objectives and how it has been functioning to date. Caution was taken to brief participants about only the basic facts of Amnesty in order not to bias their views. JRP facilitators also highlighted the lapse of the Amnesty Act in May 2012 and its subsequent renewal in May 2013 including ongoing debates on whether Amnesty was still relevant or not. Participants were then invited in no particular order to give their views on Amnesty.

The dialogues were guided by four main themes of discussion:

A. Participants' knowledge and understanding of Amnesty

1. What is amnesty? Have you heard about it? Do you know about it?
2. What is your role in amnesty?
3. How is Amnesty granted? Circumstances leading to the grant of amnesty
4. Have you been consulted and involved during the granting of Amnesty?

B. Participants views on the success/ benefits of Amnesty in their communities

1. How has amnesty contributed to the well-being of the community?
2. How have you benefitted from Amnesty?
3. How has Amnesty facilitated reintegration and improved relations between community members and ex-combatants? What is your experience of living with returnees who have been granted Amnesty?

C. Participants views on the effects of Amnesty on Sexual Gender based crimes

1. What effect does the granting of Amnesty have on justice for gender based crimes?

D. Participants views on the challenges of Amnesty in its current form

1. What are the challenges with the current Amnesty Act?
2. Is Amnesty still supported?

E. Participants' recommendations on how Amnesty can be improved

1. What are the challenges with the current Amnesty Act?
2. How can Amnesty be improved?

All dialogues were conducted in local languages of the respective communities to ensure participation by all: Acholi in Koch Goma, Langi in Abia, Iteso in Obalanga, and Lugbara in Adjumani. In areas where JRP facilitators were not proficient in the local language such as in Teso and West Nile, local community members were used as translators. All proceedings were recorded using digital voice recorders and transcribed by JRP staff.

GENERAL SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This report does not in any way attempt to make an in-depth analysis of the participants' views. The perspectives contained in this report are therefore presented as the original views of the participants. The following however is a general analysis of the main points that emerged from all the dialogues;

A. KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF AMNESTY

1. The majority of the community members who participated in the dialogues were generally knowledgeable about Amnesty but they were not familiar with the details of the Amnesty Act and the process of granting Amnesty. Most of them simply knew Amnesty as forgiveness from the government of Uganda. As one participant from Romogi noted for example;

"I heard about the word Amnesty at the time when there was war in Romogi. We were told that Amnesty was going to be introduced in Yumbe therefore everyone should put down their guns so that they can be given Iron sheets .As a result people put down their guns and others received iron sheets while others did not receive iron sheets ; According to me Amnesty is forgiveness."

¹ Elder man B: from Romogi Sub-county, West Nile region. 29th/October /2014

- Victim communities critiqued the law for not involving them in awarding Amnesty. They believed that proper reintegration required forgiveness at the community level. Failure to involve communities has resulted in hostilities toward some returnees, especially those who have been identified as perpetrators of horrendous crimes against their neighbors. A few community members however mentioned that they had been consulted and involved during the granting of Amnesty. As one of the participant from Koch Goma noted for example;

"I want to agree with what the former camp leader has said that people were consulted about the Amnesty Law in various places here in Acholi because I personally went to the Caribbean ground in Gulu town where the Amnesty Commission had convened a meeting with the community members to discuss the Amnesty Law. For sure when people were asked if they accepted the Amnesty Law they all answered at once they that they accepted it"²

However, majority of the participants said that they had never been consulted and involved during the grant of Amnesty.

- Much as participants felt that they were not involved in the granting of Amnesty, many participants believed that they had an important role to play in ensuring its success. As one participant noted for example;

"Amnesty is something very important and my role as a community member is to help someone who has received Amnesty to have a piece of land to settle on, counsel them, and ensure that they are not stigmatized, advise them on how to live responsibly and also monitor their life style and give them a conducive atmosphere"³

B. SUCCESSES AND BENEFITS

- The majority of participants agreed that Amnesty had been instrumental and beneficial in ending the war and facilitating the return of ex-combatants. As one participant noted for example;

"We suffered in the camp before Amnesty was introduced. In 2005 I survived death when 30 people were massacred here in Koch – Goma camp. By then I was nine month pregnant and gave birth after 4 days but I want to thank God that when the Amnesty Law was introduced the war came to an end and I returned back to my home."⁴

- However, much as many participants agreed that the Amnesty Law had been instrumental and beneficial in ending the war, for example by facilitating the return of the ex-combatants, Amnesty had only focused on addressing the needs of the perpetrators and not provided redress for the victims who suffered during the war. As one participant noted;

"What I do not understand is how victims and perpetrators are being treated. As the victims are suffering in their various communities, the perpetrators are being given mattresses and other things while the victims are sleeping on mats and covering themselves with torn blankets"⁵

- The majority of the community members who participated in the dialogues also agreed that Amnesty had facilitated reintegration and improved relations between community members and ex-combatants. As one participant from Obalanga noted for example that;

"I remember when we had a rebel group here in Teso called the Uganda People's Army (UPA) there was no peace but when Amnesty was granted to these rebels, they accepted to put down their arms and return home. This enabled us to live together with these people after the government had granted them Amnesty. We know very well that these people killed our fathers and mothers. But when they were forgiven by the government it sent us a signal that they had been forgiven from above so we learnt to live with them, eat with them and share everything with them even if I have internal pain."⁶

C. GENDER

Discussions on gender did not come out strongly during the dialogues however a few participants consulted during the dialogues felt that Amnesty had a negative effect on pursuit of Justice for gender based crimes. As one participant noted;

"For me I was told that once someone is granted Amnesty, there is nothing you can do to them and yet some of the rebels raped us and gave as AIDs. How can I live while knowing that I was raped, contracted HIV and yet there is nothing I can do get justice. At least

² Man D: Koch Goma sub-county Acholi Sub-region. 7th/October/2014

³ Elder man B: Koch Goma sub-county, Acholi Sub-region. 7th/October/2014

⁴ Woman A: Koch Goma Sub-county, Acholi Sub-region. 7th/October /2014

⁵ Man D: Koch Goma Sub-county, Acholi Sub-region. 7th/October/ 2014.

⁶ Man E: Obalanga Sub-county, Amuria district, Teso Sub-region. 24th/October/2014.

since the government has forgiven the people who raped us let the government come to Abia and ask how many people were raped during the war so that they can receive medical help and financial support".

D. CHALLENGES

1. The majority of the participants agreed that the current Amnesty Law had some challenges. They believed that the Amnesty Law was selective as one of the participants from Koch Goma noted for example that;

*"This Amnesty Act is so selective. You all know people like Kony, Dominic Ongwen are not supposed to benefit from the Amnesty Law. How can you fail to forgive me the head of the family and forgive my children and what do you expect me to tell my children and yet children always listen to their fathers. If this Amnesty Act is going to be revised then Amnesty should be for all people not the one that leaves out a few people."*⁷

2. Participants believed that the current Amnesty Law does not put into consideration traditional cultures and values of affected communities. They felt that there is need for perpetrators' to first undergo traditional justice methods like *mato put* before they are granted Amnesty by the government.as one of the participant noted;

*"Amnesty Act does not put into consideration our culture and customs. According to the Acholi tradition, if you kill someone you cannot share food with the person before a cleansing ceremony called mato oput is performed. The Amnesty Act pardons people and this makes them free to join the community irrespective of what they did"*⁸

E. RECOMMENDATIONS

Majority of the community members believed that the current Amnesty Law could be improved in various ways;

1. **Amnesty as a motivation for surrender and apologies to victims;** community members believed that for one to be granted Amnesty, they should first come out willingly and apologize to the victims and then the government can go ahead and grant them amnesty. As noted by one participant;

*"There are some people who were forcefully abducted by kony and taken in the bush to fight against the government of Uganda for example Kwoyelo was abducted when he was still young but he refused to surrender and was captured during the battle but when he was taken to court the judges wanted him to be granted amnesty yet he did not surrender but was forcefully captured. Since he did not surrender he should not be granted Amnesty therefore if the rebels want Amnesty they should first apologize and the government should also apologize and then compensate us for our loss. This is how I think amnesty should operate"*⁹

2. **Consultations and sensitization;** community members agreed that massive consultations and sensitization should be carried out across the regions by officials from the Amnesty commission to ensure that grass root communities are informed and made familiar with the whole process of granting Amnesty. As one participant noted;

*"If amnesty is to be granted people should be sensitized about the law right from national level to the grass roots community so that us in the community we are aware of what we are accepting".*¹⁰

3. **Amnesty and culture;** most community members agreed that to ensure true forgiveness and reconciliation, Amnesty should work hand in hand with traditional cultural practices such as *mato put* which leads to true reconciliation between two clans. The Commission should also involve cultural leaders and cultural institutions during the process of granting Amnesty. As one participant noted;

*"Amnesty should respect the culture of each and every one that is why I am suggesting ker kwaro Acholi as one of the places within Acholi region where people should go to sign the Amnesty certificate".*¹¹

4. **Amnesty as a permanent law;** participants believed that the Amnesty Law can only be improved if it is made a permanent law in Uganda. A law that has no time limit and is applicable to all citizens in Uganda. As one participant noted that;

*"Amnesty is something good but I think it will drive the people in the bush crazy because as they plan to leave the bush it may expire before you reach home. How can you extend the law for six months and yet as someone walks from the bush to their home, the six months period would have expired and this can led them to be arrested or killed therefore the Amnesty Commission should leave this law to function for as long as it can so that as someone returns they know they will be welcomed"*¹²

⁷ Man B: Koch Goma Sub-county, Acholi Sub-region. 7th/October/2014.

⁸ Young man A: Koch Goma Sub-county, Acholi Sub-region. 7th/October/2014.

⁹ Elderly man C: Abia Sub-county, lango sub-region. 22nd /October /2014

¹⁰ Young man B: Koch Goma Sub-county, Acholi Sub-region. 7th /October /2014.

¹¹ Man B: Koch Goma Sub-county, Acholi Sub-region. 7th/October/2014.

¹² Man B: Koch Goma Sub-county, Acholi Sub-region. 7th October /2014

5. **Blanket amnesty;** the majority of the community members who participated in the dialogues did not agree with how the current amnesty is operating and in particular the granting of the blanket amnesty. Across all the sub-regions, community members felt that Amnesty should be granted on a conditional basis depending on the circumstances Such as whether one joined rebellion voluntarily or forcefully. As noted by one participant;

"For me I think before the grant of Amnesty the government of Uganda should first look at how each person becomes a rebel or how the person went to the bush? Was it through forceful abduction or born in captivity; Then also the initiators of these rebel activities should not receive a blanket Amnesty to discourage other people from going to the bush. We are looking at this in two ways first, encouraging rebels who are in the bush to come back home and also discouraging those who are at home to form rebel groups and join the bush".¹³

6. **'Holistic' and 'Improved' amnesty with a focus on both victims and perpetrators:** Participants strongly felt that Amnesty should not only focus on perpetrators at the expense of their victims. In Lango the community members called for state institutions connected with the granting of Amnesty to be dismantled because they were not doing much for the victims. In Teso participants used the term 'Holistic Amnesty' to describe situations where Amnesty should not only benefit perpetrators but should also consider the victims. The people of Romogi called it 'Improved Amnesty' which they recommended should not only focus on perpetrators' needs but also the victims' needs.

7. **No Amnesty for perpetrators of sexual Gender based crimes;** majority of the community members agreed that perpetrators of sexual gender based crimes should not be granted Amnesty at all. As noted by a participant;

"In times of war rape is one of the weapons of war; some of the rebels sexually abused others to show that they were weak. For a man to be abused sexually shows that he is weak, powerless and has no right over anything at all. Therefore, if a commander in the LRA is found to have committed such atrocious crime then they do not qualify to receive Amnesty. Therefore this makes other people to qualify for amnesty while others do not qualify"¹⁴

8. **Follow up mechanisms;** the majority of the community members consulted during the dialogue mentioned that the current Amnesty Law does not have follow up mechanisms for establishing whether or not perpetrators have been properly re integrated in their various communities. They suggested that for a model amnesty law to be effective the ex-combatants should be followed up continuously to ensure that they are safe and are not committing crimes in the community as noted by a participant in Koch-Goma for example;

"There is also no provision for follow up on the returnee. I may surrender, hand in my gun and hide some that is why some returnees are being caught stealing as far as around Karuma falls. This is why follow up on the returnees after the granting Amnesty would further disarm such people"¹⁵

¹³ Man C: Obalanga Sub-county, Amuria district, Teso Sub-region 24th/October /2014.

¹⁴ Elder man A: Koch Goma Sub-county, Acholi Sub-region 7th/October /2014

¹⁵ Man B: Koch Goma Sub-county, Acholi sub-region.7th/October /2014.

ANNEX A: COMMUNITY DIALOGUE IN KOCH-GOMA
Koch-Goma Sub-County, 7 October 2014

Over 50 people from Koch Goma attended the dialogue, including the LC I Chairperson, Sub-County officials, elders and other and community members.

Official opening remarks were made by the LCIII Chairperson of Koch Goma Sub-county. He told members present that the dialogue was being organized by JRP and thanked the community members for coming to attend the dialogue, and thanked JRP for choosing Koch Goma Sub County as one of the Sub counties in Uganda to give their views on Amnesty. He urged participants to give their views freely to the enable the Government to draft a proper law. He noted that the dialogue was important to the people of Koch Goma and entire Acholi land and so encouraged people to participate whole heartedly.

Introductory remarks were made by a JRP staff member who informed the community members that the purpose of the dialogue was to solicit their views on Amnesty. He noted that this was not JRP's first time to work in Koch Goma. He briefly introduced JRP as an organization that works to advocate on behalf of conflict-affected communities to aid them in attaining justice and reconciliation. He noted that the dialogue was being conducted in partnership with the Uganda Law Society (ULS).

He provided a brief background of the current Amnesty Act 2000 before inviting participants to give their views

Q: What is Amnesty? Have you heard about it? Do you know about it?

Unanimous response from community: Yes, we have heard about the Amnesty Law but we do not have so much knowledge about it.

Man A: I remember this word Amnesty was so popular during the war among the people and it pointed at people who committed atrocities during the war. The law is used to pardon those who committed atrocities so that they can forget about what they did while in captivity.

Elder man A: I understand Amnesty as a law that pardons those who committed atrocities like killings in Acholi and Koch –Goma during the LRA war. But if we look into those who committed these atrocities, most of them did it against their will. If someone did something against their will, they should be forgiven even in their absence their family members who live among us should be forgiven.

Man B: For me my understanding of the Amnesty Law or how I heard over the radio and from other people is that if you were not happy with the government then you picked arms to go and fight against the government and now you feel you cannot stop the war and walk away freely. Through Amnesty, the Government is giving you a chance to come out openly and surrender and you will not be taken to court for the crimes committed.

Man C: I know forgiveness is not only for those who stayed in the bush but it is important for us to practice forgiveness among our friends. We should forgive to show love among ourselves. We have to forgive those who returned from captivity to show that we love them. It is not only the Government to forgive but we also have to forgive because these people not only rebelled against the Government but also committed atrocities to us the community members or civilians.

Man D: Amnesty should not only focus on those who committed atrocities during the war but even here within the community. A child can commit a crime against you and ask you for forgiveness and you forgive. But basically we are talking about the Amnesty Law because it was put in place to pardon those who rebelled against the government otherwise, I think without the Amnesty Law; the war would have not yet ended up to date.

Elder man B: The Amnesty Law is a very comprehensive law that is applicable to the people who commit crimes both in the situation of war and other situation. What I am telling you people is not to stigmatize the people who received amnesty.

Man E: Forgiveness is not something so hard like some people think. If you commit a crime and you go and apologize for the wrongs you have done automatically you are forgiven

Woman A: Sometimes you can commit a very serious crime like burning a house, killing your wife then you then you remember you have children to take care of and cannot leave them home and go to jail so you ask for forgiveness from the government then you are forgiven. For people who were abducted and taken to captivity and were forced to kill, some people will tell you that you killed their brothers and fathers. In such circumstances you have to apologize to them and tell them it was not your will to be abducted and forced to kill.

Man F: The government introduced amnesty for some group of people who rebelled against the government. In northern Uganda our elected leaders in Acholi also worked so hard to ensure that amnesty was put in place. In Acholi, forgiveness is part of our culture even in cases where a relative is killed the families have to perform the ritual of mato oput. But the law we are discussing today, it is true we were in war but the government is aware that these people were forcefully taken to captivity even though they rebelled against the government.

We found out that a law should be put in place to pardon them because it was against their will that they went to captivity and committed these atrocities. So to avoid mistreating them for the crimes they committed the Amnesty Law was put in place for those who returned home willingly and those captured during the battle.

What is your role in amnesty?

Man B: From the time we heard that the government of Uganda had introduced a law to pardon those who were forcefully abducted and taken to captivity, as local leaders we started sending information to people who had not heard the information that if you know that your child was forcefully abducted and taken to captivity or even the ones who went willingly and are ashamed to come home, you should tell them not to fear to come back home because they will not be sued for the atrocities they committed if they apologize they will be left free to continue with their normal life.

Our main role as leaders was to inform all people in Uganda that much as you rebelled against the government you can still return home. We also told the community members to accept these people when they return home from rebellion.

Youth A: As a community member we have people who fought against the government and now they have returned home. We formed a group to empower the returnees with livelihood skills that has helped them earn some income.

Secondly some people keep stigmatizing others and yet I even know those who killed who in this community but I don't talk about it. The government has forgiven people so we should also forgive these people other than stigmatizing them and reminding them of their past.

We should also know that forgiveness should continue so that those people who have still remained in captivity can also return home as well.

Elder man B: Amnesty is something very important and my role as a community member is to help someone who has received amnesty to have a piece of land to settle on, counsel them, and ensure that they are not stigmatized, advise them on how to live responsibly and also monitor their life style and give them a conducive atmosphere.

Elder man C: I am going to talk about the war because it was the interest of a few groups of people who preferred to fight instead of engaging in peaceful talks. At the peak of the war my father and other family members were killed. I was living in Kampala by then when we heard that very many Acholi people were dying we started praying for the war to end and we sent information to the Acholi people not to revenge for the killings because the people who were fighting against the government had also been forced to do so.

Man F: As a leader in this community, I made sure the issue of stigmatization was not taken lightly because this war affected all of us in different ways. People were killed and tortured but life has to continue but sometimes we hear about some people who use gatherings in villages to stigmatize others. You hear someone telling the other;

“You, while in the bush you killed very many people now that you are here with us, try killing and you will see”.

So our role was to sensitize community members that ‘now the government has granted amnesty to the people who rebelled against them during the war, why can’t we respect the Amnesty Law and also forgive these people for the atrocities they committed to us’.

I should ensure that when these people return home we should not segregate them but treat them equally the way we treat the children who did not stay in captivity.

Man G: As a leader the first thing I talked to the members in my community to welcome and accept all those who were returning home from the bush.

I also went as to the bush and convinced some people to come back home. Others even stayed in my home yet they were from as far as Ongako then from my home I would take them to the government so that they could receive amnesty since most of them were afraid of what the government might do to them.

Woman A: I also benefitted from the Amnesty Law that was granted by the government. My role is to ensure that the people who return home are not stigmatized and also I don’t stigmatize anybody much as my own family also suffered so much from the war, I don’t blame it on anybody.

Man C: Forgiveness and sensitizing people on their rights ;I told people that these people who have returned are just like the people who did not stay in the bush and therefore have a right to live freely in the community.

How is Amnesty granted? / Circumstances leading to the grant of Amnesty?

Man A: For me i think you should first show interest that you want to be forgiven before you are granted amnesty. Some people sometimes do not want to admit that they have wronged others and in such cases it becomes hard to forgive such a person. Therefore, one should ask for forgiveness from the government and the community members before being granted amnesty.

Man F: Forgiveness shows that you have repented from your sins .Therefore the people who committed atrocities against the government and the community members should first apologize.

Man B: When the Amnesty Law was introduced, announcements were made over the radio informing the people who had rebelled against the government to report to sign the amnesty paper to show that they had been forgiven. There was a call by the local leaders, army commanders, religious leaders and other authorities to encourage the returnees in their communities to go and sign the amnesty paper to show that they had been forgiven by the government.

Elder man A: Forgiveness is right if the person who committed the crime asks for forgiveness after committing a crime and makes a promise never to commit such a crime again, and the person who is offended has to accept to forgive the person asking for forgiveness as well.

Man A: For me as I saw amnesty was done in writing and the people who were granted amnesty had to put it into writing that they will not commit a crime again.

Woman B: Amnesty was granted by the government to the people who were forced to commit crimes in the bush. On their return home, they were made to sign the amnesty paper to show that they were not going to continue committing atrocities because it was not their will to do what they did in the first place.

Have you been consulted and involved during the granting of the amnesty?

Youth A: For me I remember when Amnesty Law was introduced, people were called for various meetings and their views were asked on the law. I even remember announcements were made over the radios calling people to go and listen to what the people from the Amnesty Commission were going to say. I was among the people who

supported the Amnesty Law so much because I knew it was one the ways being used by the government to end the war in northern Uganda.

Elder man C: For me I was not consulted during the granting of amnesty.

Elder man B: As a community member I was not consulted but our leaders in Parliament discussed the Amnesty Law and agreed to use it. Because they are my representatives I supported their views.

Elder man A: I remember the team from the Amnesty Commission moved from one sub-county to another telling people about amnesty and people even accepted the Amnesty Law at once for the sake of peace.

Man D: I want to agree with what the former camp leader has said that people were consulted about the Amnesty Law in various places here in Acholi because I personally went to the Caribbean ground in Gulu town where the Amnesty Commission had convened a meeting with the community members to discuss the Amnesty Law. For sure when people were asked if they accepted the Amnesty Law they all answered at once that they accepted it.

Woman A: Because of war, I started living in the camp when I was still young and while in the camp I produced six children. Life was so hard but then the people from Amnesty Commission came to the camps and started telling us about the Amnesty Law which would encourage the children in the bush to come back home so that the war could end. I supported the law because I wanted to go home and live like a normal human being.

How has Amnesty contributed to the well-being of the community?

Woman A: The reason why I am talking so much is because I know how we suffered in the camp before amnesty was introduced. In 2005 I survived death when 30 people were massacred here in Koch –Goma camp. By then I was nine month pregnant and gave birth after 4 days but I want to thank God that when the Amnesty Law was introduced the war came to an end and I returned back to my home.

Youth B: Amnesty helped us in various ways; first it encouraged the children who were taken to the bush to return home.

Secondly, it has helped to unite the people who returned home to live without fear because if the government has pardoned them then the community members must also forgive them for the crimes they committed.

Man E: If the Amnesty Law was not introduced, I guess people would not have returned to their homes up to date. The Amnesty Law was so helpful because it encouraged most people who were in the bush to return home without fear of being accused of the crimes they committed.

How have you benefitted from amnesty?

Elder man B: I really benefitted from amnesty because these days I sleep freely in my house and dig without disruptions from the rebels and my children are also in school without fear.

Man F: Amnesty has made the people who were pardoned by the government to feel free in the community and then for us who remained in the community to feel free to interact with the people who returned from the bush. As a result the relationship between the people who were in the bush and those who remained at home improved and now we are now living as brothers and sisters within the community.

Man B: During the time of war I did not feel free to talk to my friends and even some relatives, there was disunity and mistrust among people but with the introduction of the Amnesty Law, the war slowly came to an end and now we are free to associate with each other without any fear of the government or community members.

How has amnesty facilitated reintegration and improved relations between community members and ex-combatants? What is your experience of living with returnees who have been granted amnesty?

Youth B: There has been improved relationship between the community members and the ex-combatants. The Amnesty Act has helped to unite the victims and the perpetrators. Also through the traditional justice mechanism called *mato oput* the victims and perpetrators were made to reconcile in various parts of Acholi.

Elder man B: Amnesty has made me have the opportunity to stay close to people who were taken to the bush and i thought i would never meet them again but when the Amnesty Law was put in place they returned home and we are now living as one in the community

Elder man C: the Amnesty law has united the people who held guns and the ones who did not. This showed love as a result of the forgiveness that was granted.

Man E: According to me, amnesty has improved the relationship between the community members and the ex-combatants. This is because at least each of us or our relatives was affected by this war. So when they return home after receiving amnesty from the government and we think we should not associate with them it becomes a bad thing.

Youth F: I think we are relating with them well but as you all know once in a while there are issues of stigmatization because some of the returnee keep telling people the horrible things they did while in the bush which causes misunderstandings but generally we are trying to stay with all of them well.

Woman C: There was a day a group of men were drinking alcohol near my home and there was this particular man who had lost 3 fingers from his right hand while in the bush. When he got drunk, he started threatening his friends saying;

“You people do not joke with me because I will kill very many people like I did while in the bush”

This made all those people who were drinking alcohol to beat him up seriously before they all left.

Man G: We are relating so well with these people because these days at least people are living freely and the counseling that was given to the returnees at the reception centers was really important because it prepared them to join those who remained in the community hence they were received well by the community members.

Man D: I and the people in my community have not seen anything bad. I have not heard any criminal issues. But there is something I see happening which I don't understand. As community members we are told to receive these people, love them and respect them but unfortunately these people start behaving in a very bad way, bragging about the things they did while in the bush.

The people who received amnesty need to be cautioned on how to speak especially about the things they did while in captivity. For example there was a boy who told the other that by the way

“There was a big man I killed in the bush who really looked like you”

A law should be put in place to stop them from such careless talks that hurt people who lost their loved ones during the war.

Some people are also using these returnees to commit crimes for example those who have land issues may hire them to threaten or kill someone.

Young woman A: I remember when I was still in primary six; I had a friend who was a returnee who told me I looked like a wife to a certain commander who escaped from the bush. I was so scared of her because I had never been to the bush so I went to the teacher and reported her. The teacher told me to forgive her and continue being her friend but what she said really scared me

Man D: People who received amnesty are being treated well in our community however, some people think once you stayed in the bush you automatically committed atrocities. That is why some people here go and commit crimes near the homes of returnees then later accuse them of being the people who of committing such crimes.

Woman A: My husband was abducted but returned before the Amnesty Law was introduced. From the time he returned he is disturbed by spirits *cen* all the time that he always threatens to kill everyone he comes across. As a result it was difficult to live near him so I decided to separate with him because he tried to cut me with a panga several times. He stays like a mad person always carrying a panga. We even performed some rituals but his condition did not stop.

What effect does the granting of amnesty have on justice for gender based crimes?

Man B: A lot of things happened. Women were raped and men were also abused sexually and these things happened and the culprits were not known but when they returned home, some of the people who committed these atrocious crimes were identified. But because they had already received amnesty from the government, nothing could be done to make them pay for what they did.

Man G: I want to add on what my brother has said that we all make up part of this government. So by accepting the Amnesty Law means that we have also forgiven these people.

Elder man C: Some of the people contracted sexually transmitted diseases due to sexual violence and others lost their body parts and yet nothing was done to help them because these people had been forgiven by the government. If possible, the government should support these victims.

Man C: I think amnesty should not stop justice from prevailing, because if I was sexually abused by a fellow man who is either an LRA rebel or a government soldier and then he returns home. I believe I have the right to sue such a person and incase the government grants amnesty to such a person in order to protect them, then I will sue the government for failure to protect me.

Woman A: I suffered so much during the war but because of the Amnesty Law which pardons all the people who committed crimes during the war, I am supposed to keep quiet and forget about all forms of abuses that i passed through both in the hands of the LRA rebels and the government soldier while I was still living in the camp.

What are the challenges with the current Amnesty Act?

Young man A: The way I see this Amnesty Law was not grouped for example there are some people who participated in rape and massive killing and therefore according to me they should not have received amnesty. But this current Amnesty Act has forgiven all the returnees irrespective of the crimes they committed while in the bush.

If this is the case, women who were raped should be supported or the government should be sued for those crimes.

Man B: This Amnesty Act is so selective. You all know people like Kony, Dominic Ongwen who are not supposed to benefit from the Amnesty Law. How can you fail to forgive me the head of the family and forgive my children and what do you expect me to tell my children and yet children always listen to their fathers.

If this Amnesty Act is going to be revised then amnesty should be for all people not the one that which leaves out a few people.

Secondly, these people were not reintegrated. That is why when they return home they form a group of returnees and you hear people saying those are a group of returnee's *dwog cen paco* other than them mixing and staying with other community members.

There is also no provision for follow up on the returnee. I may surrender my gun and hide some that is why some returnees are being caught stealing us far as Karuma. That is why follow up on the returnees after the grant of amnesty is so important.

Man G: I feel this Amnesty Act has a problem because it is one sided. Everyone is blaming those who returned from captivity.

“Do you want to say the government did not commit crimes against us the community members?”

The government should also ask for forgiveness from us the community members for the crimes committed by the government soldiers during the war.

It's us the community members to forgive the government because the government took our cattle and nothing is being said about it.

Elder man B: This war was between the government and the rebels but the community members suffered most. The government is granting amnesty to the LRA rebels and giving the freedom but what is being done to the community members who lost all their property during the war?

This Amnesty Law is only being used to benefit those who are close to the government neglecting the people who suffered most at the grass roots level.

Woman A: Our sons and husbands were killed during the LRA war and now there is no one to build for me a house, I saw government soldiers lock people in their huts and burn them down. But I don't see the government asking for forgiveness from the community members or at least compensate people for the loss of their property.

Woman C: We the widows are being left out and yet it is because of this war that we lost our husbands. The Amnesty Act has not considered how to help widows and orphans that is why we are suffering. We hear people saying they have given cows and goats to people who have husbands but how about the future of our children who do not have their fathers to follow up on the property that they lost during the war?

Man B: The problem I see is that within the community forgiveness is granted according to the crime committed. I wish amnesty could come up with a law that looks at the crime each person committed before granting amnesty. For example there are people who killed so many people and they are just out there moving freely.

Elder man A: The greatest weakness of the Amnesty Law is that they have sent you people too late to come and get our views; I wish they had sent you people early for this dialogue they would have helped the people who suffered in the hands of those who had been granted amnesty by the government. Unfortunately the Amnesty Law does not cater for the needs of such people but other than pardon the perpetrators.

Young man A: Amnesty Act does not put into consideration our culture and customs. According to the Acholi tradition, if you kill someone you cannot share food with the person before a cleansing ceremony called *mato oput* is performed. The Amnesty Act pardons people and this makes them free to join the community irrespective of what they did.

If your brother kills my brother we cannot share food before a ceremony called *mato put* is performed.

Man B: Amnesty is something good but I think it will drive the people in the bush crazy because as they plan to leave the bush it may expire before you reach home. How can you extend the law for six months and yet as someone walks from the bush to their home, the six months period would have expired and this can lead them to be arrested or killed therefore the Amnesty Commission should leave this law to function for as long as it can so that as someone returns they know they will be welcomed.

Is amnesty still supported?

Yes we still support the Amnesty Law but I don't like the way it is being granted.

I don't support the Amnesty Law so much because this Act has turned into a joke. If you all have noticed, there are people who returned with their guns and are using it for committing crimes and after being arrested they also ask to be granted amnesty.

Amnesty is a very good law but they need to look into this law to ensure that some people do not take advantage of it especially to commit crimes within the community.

How do you feel amnesty should function in the long run? Should it be conditional or blanket?

Elderly man B: More consultations and dialogues should be conducted in other area within Acholi here so all the views of everyone is taken into considerations,

Man B: We have been discussing a lot to fill the gaps in the current Amnesty Law for example the period of the grant of amnesty is too short and if possible the amnesty law should just be included as permanent law in Uganda. Secondly amnesty should be granted to everyone. Thirdly amnesty should respect the culture of each and every one that's why I am suggesting *Ker kwaro* Acholi to be one of the places within Acholi region where people go to sign the amnesty.

Man C: Follow up should be made on the community members on how they are living after receiving amnesty.

Man A: Amnesty Commission should allow each and every one to send their representatives. I know this law is a law that is applicable internationally and therefore they don't know the culture of each and every community in Uganda. Like here in Acholi sub region compensation and mato put are so important. For this law to be effective they must look into people cultures otherwise we shall never be satisfied with this law.

Man H: Amnesty should only be granted to people who surrender willingly and returned home not to someone who has been forcefully captured from the battle field because such a person is not interested in the amnesty and may continue committing crimes.

I want to add on our culture there are people who committed serious atrocities and they were granted amnesty and due to fear they have settled in other place far from their ancestral land because of fear of the other clan that they offended there. To ensure true reconciliation, amnesty should look into our culture of mato put which leads to forgiveness and reconciliation between two clans.

Man F: For the Amnesty Law to function well in the long run another law should be added. But also how shall we differentiate those who deserve to get amnesty and those who do not? There are people who do not deserve to be granted amnesty.

Elder man A: For amnesty to function well in the long run, we should involve our cultural leaders and chiefs in all in the process of the grant of amnesty.

Man D: What I do not understand is how victims and perpetrators are being treated. As the victims are suffering in their various communities, the perpetrators are being given mattresses and other things while the victims are sleeping on mats and covering themselves with torn blankets.

The Amnesty Law should first look at who is asking for amnesty and ask them what crimes they committed so that the victims are given something otherwise these days you hear community members saying so that these people made us suffer but they are now rewarding them with money and other things.

Young man B: It is true everyone here has agreed that the amnesty law has weaknesses that need to be worked on. The people's views were asked, amnesty was granted to rebels and government soldiers but this amnesty was granted in a hurry. For us who were wounded during the war, were we one day asked if we agreed to grant amnesty to the soldiers and rebels and we answered in a group that yes.

If amnesty is to be granted people should be sensitized about the law right from national level to the grass roots community so that us in the community we are aware of what we are accepting.

How should amnesty be granted?

Man B: I think this dialogue had been conducted a bit late right .It is now too late. The time for asking our views would have been before this law was put in place. If possible they should first find out how many people suffered

during the war so that they are helped. In places where war occurs a lot of things take place and the people who suffer most are the civilians.

Elder man A: In times of war rape is one of the weapons of war; some of the rebels sexually abused others to show that they were weak. For a man to be abused sexually shows that he is weak, powerless and has no right over anything at all. Therefore, if a commander in the LRA is found to have committed such atrocious crime then they do not qualify to receive amnesty.

Therefore this makes other people to qualify for amnesty while others do not qualify.

Much as some people say that amnesty should be granted to whoever surrenders and comes home, we still believe that amnesty should not be blanket but it should be conditional.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A JRP staff member thanked all the members of Koch Goma for freely sharing their views on the Amnesty Law. She noted that Uganda Law Society approached JRP to use their network to seek views of the community members in Teso, Lango, West Nile and Acholi. In Acholi sub-region Koch Goma was chosen because of the presence of many victims including victims of displacement, ex-combatants, sexual gender based violence victims, victims of maim and other forms of torture. She thanked the community members for attending.

ANNEX B: COMMUNITY DIALOGUE IN ABIA
Abia Sub-County, 21 October 2014

Over 150 people from Abia attended the dialogue, including the, Sub-County officials, elders, women, youth, staff members from Abia primary school, religious leaders, Abia and other and community members

The dialogue was opened with a song from Abia Women's Group relating to the conflict and a drama relating to the massacre. The women sang about the killing of their children by the LRA. The children who should have been lawyers, doctors, presidents were hacked to death by Kony. They also mentioned the different kinds of violations in Abia like abductions, displacement's, mutilations, looting of crops in the garden and destruction of property and forcing of civilians to take refuge in the bush.

The official opening remarks were made by the LC II chairperson of Abia sub-county. He welcomed JRP to Abia Sub-county. He said that he was so happy that JRP had returned to Abia after such a long time and he requested the people to listen to whatever JRP was going to share with them and participate when requested to do so. He briefly took the members present through the history of Abia massacre; he said that on 2/4/2014 the LRA rebels attacked Abia camp in Alebtong district and killed over 100 people and over 35 people are still missing. Very many houses were burnt by the rebels and properties destroyed. Fortunately on that day very people had gone to Golgoi to buy food items therefore when the rebels entered the camp, they found a few people otherwise they would have finished all the people in Abia. The government soldiers who had been brought to Abia camp to protect the civilians were not near the camp on that fateful day but still it was lucky that Mobile Patrol soldiers had come to Abia trading center to buy food so when they heard that the rebels had attacked Abia camp, they responded and repulsed the rebels.

He said that as a result of the LRA war, they are having a lot of problems; there are very many widows and orphans who need help, the people of Abia are always sick because of too many worries and instead of the government of Uganda helping the victims, they are helping the perpetrators in the name of granting Amnesty.

He said that the government should help the people of Abia and whether the government likes it or not they need compensation. He said noted that there were politicians who want to campaign in 2016 but he is telling the people of Abia not to accept to vote for those who will come empty handed and those who have been making empty promises without including the issue of compensation of the people who were killed during the Abia massacre in their agenda.

He therefore requested the community members to stay calm and listen to the people from JRP. He also requested JRP to construct for them a monument in memory of their loved ones who died during the Abia massacre of 2004 so that their children who are still growing can know about the bad things they went through.

Introductory remarks were made by a JRP staff member who told the community members that JRP is Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that started operating in 2005. She said that JRP works with conflict affected communities to document their conflict experiences. She said that JRP documented the Barlonyo massacre and JRP also worked with the Abia massacre survivors and helped to send their voices to policy makers. She said that JRP is an advocacy organization and therefore does not give direct help to the victims but identifies their needs and advocates for those needs.

She said that Uganda Law Society (ULS) had entrusted JRP to seek the views of the community members on the Amnesty Law because JRP has always worked closely with the grass roots communities. She said that in the year 2000 the parliament of Uganda introduced the Amnesty Act to enable those who were rebelling against the government of Uganda to put down arms. She said that this law was not only applicable to the people of northern Uganda but the law was for all Ugandans. She said that Uganda Law Society (ULS) and Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) sent JRP to consult the people on Amnesty.

Transcription of the community dialogue

What is Amnesty? Have you heard about it? Do you know about it?

Elderly woman A: According to me, Amnesty is forgiving someone who has done something wrong to me but I feel before the grant of Amnesty, the person who has committed a crime should first apologize to me so that I can clearly study and know what is in their heart. For people who are still in the bush, we cannot forgive them but if they want to be forgiven they should first return home.

Man B: Amnesty is forgiveness to those who have rebelled against the government of Uganda for example the LRA rebels; for me I think by granting Amnesty, the government is committing a crime because instead of the government bringing these people who committed atrocities to the grassroots members so that they can be forgiven the government gets these people and tells them you are forgiven, go back to your homes without asking what we the victims who are down here in the community think about these people.

What I am asking the government to do is arrest these people bring them to us physically so that we know the crimes they committed and decide whether to forgive them or not.

Man C: Mine is a question, they want us to grant amnesty. Are we going to forgive air? We are here suffering because of the effects of the war; there are so many widows and orphans suffering. Unfortunately most of these women have been infected with HIV so no one can marry them again. Everyone is suffering therefore, for us to forgive the perpetrators of this war they should first compensate us and then come and ask for forgiveness because we have suffered enough.

Woman B: Even in our homes when you do something wrong to your husband, you have to wait for him to come and tell him my husband forgive me; But you cannot forgive a wall. In Abia we have very many orphans, widows and widowers. The government destroyed our crops and property. The rebels raped mothers and their daughter. For amnesty to be granted the government should first compensate us for the things we lost then there will be forgiveness.

Man D: The greatest crime was committed by the government by failing to protect the people of Abia and that's why the LRA rebels killed us and destroyed our property therefore, the government should first come to us and ask for forgiveness, compensate us for our loss then we shall forgive.

Elderly man B: I know what I am going to say is a bit different. You people are talking about Amnesty but I know Kony and other people who are still in the bush are scared of coming back home. Since the government has all the powers, they should forgive Kony so that he can return home and ask for forgiveness. As for me I do not want them to ask me for forgiveness face to face. The government can go ahead and grant these people Amnesty because if they bring some of these perpetrators close to me I may remember how my sisters, daughters and mothers were raped forcing me to do what I was not prepared to do.

What is your role on amnesty?

Woman B: I don't think I have played any role in this Amnesty Act. The government of Uganda seems to just be playing around and deceiving us just like how a mother plays with her children when she wants to leave them at home and go to the market. We are suffering and each time we want to forget our problems the government sends people like you to raise our hopes again by telling us that the government wants to know our views but let me ask, for what? If our health centers have even no panadol, the female nurses are always going to town to stay with their husbands and the government is not doing anything to improve on the health care service in our area.

Man F: I see that we the victims have been locked out by the government in this process of granting Amnesty. We the victims have no say and did not receive anything from Amnesty and yet if we are to apportion blames, it is the government who failed to protect us the community members that's why we suffered a lot.

Woman D I thank god for bringing you people to Abia today. I have heard what you people have said. Whether we forgive the rebels or not we cannot change the fact that our children were killed, others orphaned and others are

still missing. We were in the displaced camps for a long time and but ever since we returned home, we are facing very many challenges therefore they should first pay us for our loss.

Youth A: Amnesty is a good thing but most of the returnees are still so traumatized that each time you try to talk to them, they only think of fighting. If possible the government should follow up these returnees in their various communities just to find out how they are living after receiving amnesty.

How is amnesty granted? /circumstances leading to the grant of amnesty

Man F: Amnesty should be there. Some of our children were abducted and taken to the bush and forced to kill their own people here in Abia. For example Odhiambo is from here and he killed a lot of people therefore, the government should bring him here so that we can forgive him and his clan members otherwise if the government decides to forgive those people on our behalf for we shall not forgive them.

Man D: The process of Amnesty is either direct or indirect ; for example if I offend Odong , I will either go direct to Odong and tell him am sorry or I will go to someone I trust to go and tell Odong that I am sorry for the crimes I committed.

Man H: The government of Uganda introduced the Amnesty Law; the law made some people who were in the bush to willingly surrender and come home because they knew they had been forgiven for what they did to government and the community members. In addition I feel the government should compensate us for the loss of our property and then we shall accept to forgive.

Elderly man E: The government is aware of all the atrocities that were committed in Lango Sub- region both by the Karamojong warriors and the LRA. While we were in the camp as the government soldiers would be cooking at one end the LRA rebels would also be cooking at the other end? The government should therefore come to us and ask us for forgiveness instead sending you people to come and ask as about amnesty.

Man D: For example when I am a rebel leader fighting in a battle; in order for me to receive Amnesty, I will lift up my hands and surrender with all the rebels in my group to the government soldiers who will then come for us and take us to the Amnesty commission to be granted amnesty after that we are allowed to go back home.

Elderly man E: If you are a rebel and you want to receive Amnesty, you will either surrender but for one to receive Amnesty you can show your location or write a letter to some NGO that now you don't want to fight again then you can receive amnesty or sometimes if you are captured from the battle field you can be granted Amnesty.

Man C: Is this amnesty going to be granted to our children who were innocently abducted by Kony and taken to captivity or to Kony and his commanders? If it is for our children we already forgave them long time ago and we want them to come back home.

Have you been consulted during and involved during the granting of Amnesty?

Man D: The government granted Amnesty without consulting us first that's why this Amnesty Law has not benefitted the community members. As I talk now, there is still a boom in my house but nothing has been done about it. I cannot use that house because of fear that the boom may explode any time. Forgiveness is good but the government should first compensate us for the loss of our property and then they can go and sort out their cases with Kony.

How has Amnesty contributed to the well-being of the community?

Man D: I feel Amnesty has contributed a lot to my well-being. I was abducted forcefully by the LRA rebels from our home here in Abia and I stayed in captivity for a long time but when I returned home the government of Uganda welcomed us and granted us amnesty. As I speak now I am living peacefully and doing farming and I have no intention of causing trouble to anyone.

Woman A: For me I feel amnesty has not benefitted anyone here in Abia. You people as NGO have a right to operate anywhere why don't you people also go and ask the views of Kony about amnesty also so that we can know what he things.

Man F: The Amnesty Act helped us a lot; I remember while we were still living in the Abia camp, life was so challenging but when they introduced Amnesty the rebels stopped attacking us and after a short while the war ended.

How has Amnesty facilitated reintegration and improved relations between community members and ex-combatants? What is your experience of living with returnees who have been granted amnesty?

Man A: For us we have no problem with the returnees in our community but we want the government of Uganda to compensate us for the loss of our loved ones and our property which was destroyed during the war because if we accept amnesty it means that we have also forgiven the returnees and therefore we cannot receive any compensation.

Elderly woman A: I have a problem with this government not the ex-combatants because first of all the government aware of what Kony is doing in the bush. Their Instead of the government telling Kony to come back home and receive amnesty they are just there confusing us. I want the president of Uganda to resign because he has failed to play the role of protecting his people. The motto of this country has become for gun and my tear gas just to silence people when they try to speak as a result people are suffering from wired diseases like Ebola and Marburg.

Man D: I have no problem with the ex-combatants because I know most our children here were forcefully abducted and taken to captivity by the LRA but my concern is that they should also help the victims who suffered during the war to ensure that their life goes back to normal. As you know, most of the victims lost all their property during the war therefore if possible the government should also compensate the victims in Abia.

What effect does the granting of Amnesty have on justice for gender based crimes?

Woman A: For me I was told that once someone is granted Amnesty, there is nothing you can do to them and yet some of the rebels raped us and gave us AIDs how can I live while knowing that I was raped, contracted HIV and yet there is nothing I can do get justice. At least since the government has forgiven the people who raped us let the government come to Abia and ask how many people were raped during the war so that they can receive medical help and financial support to us.

How should Amnesty function in the long run? Should it be conditional or blanket?

Elderly man C: There are some people who were forcefully abducted by Kony and taken in the bush to fight against the government of Uganda for example Kwoyelo was abducted when he was still young but he refused to surrender and was captured during the battle but when he was taken to court the judges wanted him to be granted amnesty yet he did not surrender but was forcefully captured. Since he did not surrender he should not be granted Amnesty therefore if the rebels want Amnesty they should first apologize and the government should also apologize and then compensate us for our loss. This is how I think amnesty should operate: If they are giving the rebels packages they should also give the victims packages. I see some NGO, s trying to replace the lips of some of the victims that were cut by Kony but I think this is impossible because even after putting for someone another lip it still looks different.

Man B: Amnesty should be conditional that is the people who returned should accept that they committed crimes, the government should come out and compensate the victims and Kony should not be forgiven because he is the one who started the war so he should be arrested when he is caught.

Man E: Amnesty should continue being blanket but the government should compensate us first for the loss we suffered during the LRA war. This killing was the fault of the government. I remember the NRA soldiers used to send us to go and see if the LRA rebels were coming and we would end up being killed government.

Man D: The amnesty law needs to be revised. It is not okay because it is the government who granted amnesty to the rebels but us the victims have not forgiven the rebels for the things they did to us.

Woman B if we are forgiving the rebels. What will the government do for me for the loss of my children? I have remained childless yet I produced children who were taken away by the LRA rebels.

Woman E: Everyone is coming here to Abia to asking us about the Amnesty Law even there is another NGO called the African Youth Initiative Network (AYINET) that come here and started asking us about forgiveness .For me if it is just about forgiveness I have already forgiven the returnees but now we want something that will change our lives because as I speak now my husband was killed by the LRA rebels and I had to suffer alone taking care of my children, pay school fees alone. You people should tell the president that we have forgiven the rebels therefore if there is something they can do for us please let them help us.

Man F: For me I feel amnesty should be conditional not blanket like it has been. Some of the returnees some of them committed very serious crimes that if possible the amnesty acts should make them account for it.

What are the Challenges with the current amnesty?

Man A: for me I think amnesty should be there but if there is to be forgiveness of any kind the person who has committed a crime against me should first apologize and if they don't then there is no way I can forgive. For example during the LRA war there were people who committed atrocities in this community and when they returned home some of them apologized and we forgave them but people like Kony who are wanted by ICC and Have refused to get out of the bush cannot be forgiven because we do not know there intentions.

Elderly man A: I agree with what my son here is saying, if there is going to be any kind of forgiveness these rebels should first come back home.

Man B: This Amnesty Act is not good at all, because I have seen returnees receiving packages while the victims who lost everything are not given anything. I hear this law has been implemented by the parliament. You people should go and ask the parliament how they can ament a law to protect someone who has done wrong to other and then do nothing for the victim?

Man E: You tell parliament that the people of Abia have said this Amnesty Law is not good and therefore they should make the following changes. Both the victims and perpetrators should be compensated since most of the perpetrators were also forcefully abducted and forced to committee crimes.

How can Amnesty redress gender justice?

Woman A: For us women we have suffered a lot as a result of Kony war especially us the widows whose husbands were killed by the rebels. Each time NGO, s comes to Abia our leaders do not want us to talk because they want to eat our money. If a project comes up we are asked to pay some money in order to benefit from it and yet we have got no money. Our children are not in school due to lack of school fees and other scholastic materials. Therefore I am asking amnesty to also include us the widows in their plan so that we can support our children who are suffering.

Man A: During the war very many young girls and women in Abia. some of these women here are HIV positive and therefore no man can inherit them because of fear of catching the diseases and yet the people who committed these atrocities are being welcomed and forgiven I think people who committee such crimes should be arrested by the government.

ANNEX C: COMMUNITY DIALOGUE IN OBALANGA

Obalanga Sub-County, 24 October 2014

Over 60 people from Obalanga Sub-County and the surrounding areas attended the dialogue, including the sub-county officials, elders, women, youth and other community members.

In Obalanga the majority of the community members who participated in the dialogue did not agree with how the current Amnesty is operating. They said they want an improved Amnesty that should not focus on the perpetrators, but also consider the victims.

They also held the view that amnesty should only be granted to people who were forcefully abducted and those born in captivity but not the people who voluntarily joined the LRA war and spear headed the fight like Joseph Kony. They believe that granting of blanket amnesty regardless of the circumstances surrounding how one joined the LRA would encourage more people to go to the bush well assured of forgiveness by the government of Uganda. As one youth noted;

"This blanket amnesty will encourage more people to join rebel groups because they know that when they return they will be rewarded with certificates and packages. Therefore, before the government grants amnesty they should first find out whether the person went to the bush willingly or they were forcefully abducted by the LRA rebels."

Official opening remarks were made by the Chairman LC I chairperson of Odungu village in Obalanga. He said that he was so happy to receive JRP in Obalanga sub-county. He welcomed all the community members who had turned up for the dialogue and encouraged them to freely express themselves during the dialogue because Obalanga is a very safe place.

A JRP staff member introduced other team members and told the community members that JRP was happy with Amuria Local government for giving them permission to be in Obalanga. She told the community members that it was not JRP's first time to be in Obalanga because in 2011 - 2012 JRP was had been active in Obalanga and JRP come up with a publication of the LRA massacre. Unfortunately, they could not launch the report because of a misunderstanding with the RDC at that time. She said that JRP was happy to inform the community members that they had been cleared this morning by the RDC's office. She thanked all individuals in their capacities who worked tirelessly to ensure that JRP returned to Obalanga.

She told the community members that JRP is not a political organization. She said that Since 2005 JRP has been working with different communities affected by the LRA and government of Uganda conflicts by empowering the community members to become advocates of their interests. She said that Initially JRP was concentrating their work in Acholi land but by 2007 JRP had spread their work to Lango, Teso and West Nile.

She mentioned that the reason why JRP was visiting Obalanga was because JRP had been requested by the Uganda Law Society to conduct dialogues on the Amnesty law in the Sub-regions of Acholi, Lango, Teso and West Nile region on how a model Amnesty Law should look like. She told the community members that all the information JRP is collecting will be taken to Uganda Law Society (ULS) who will analyze the information and use it to design a model Amnesty Law.

Transcription of the community dialogue

What is amnesty? Have you heard about it? Do you know about it?

Elderly man A: There were so many rebels in Teso during those days, some were arrested and others were not arrested; the governments of Uganda come up with the Amnesty Law to forgive the rebels like the bible tells us to forgive other people.

Man A: It is not my first time to hear about the word Amnesty and the way I understand it is that Amnesty is always applicable to an armed group organize to either fight the government or the community. When the armed group gets defeated by the government the government will forgive them meaning that they are free to go home.

Woman A: Amnesty is one of the legal redress systems to seek justice. Perpetrators are given chance by the government to surrender so as to build reconciliation between those affected and those who violated their rights by the government.

Man B: Rebels attacked us; our friends the Karamojong attacked us, during the over throw of the government they also come and punished us. We failed to understand who was supposed to protect us we continued to suffer for many years; we lost so many people and our properties were destroyed but as people of Obalanga we want to forgive and if possible , they should bring back our children who were abducted by the LRA rebels it would be good.

Man C: Amnesty arose into existence as a result of advocacy from religious leaders, Academia, Civil Society Organizations who cried to the government to forgive some individuals who had wedged war against the government to put down their arms. In simple terms Amnesty means to be pardoned of the massive atrocities they and for me I remember Amnesty was community driven.

Woman B: For me I understand Amnesty as an appreciation to the rebel. During the grant of Amnesty certificated and packages were given to the perpetrators to rejoin them with their families. According to my understanding, certificates were given to these people for killing other people; the victims were not given any packages or assistance by the government. It came to my mind that the government was giving them certificates for killing people. This might sound stupid but here in Teso we have over 10,000 children who are still missing. We don't know whether they are dead or still alive. Our relatives and friends are laying down here dead. Ever since the Karamojong started attacking us, the Uganda People's Army (UPA) war in Teso, the Luwero war, Lakwena war and then the Kony war but the government has continuously given support to the rebels. Recently the government compensated the Karamojong worriers who raided Teso but we got nothing and then a man who has lost a wife and children is not recognized but the rebel who has done that is given a certificate and a package. That is why i say Amnesty is meant to appreciate the rebels

How is amnesty granted?

Man C: I remember when I was still young, the people of Teso sub-region become annoyed with this government and they started forming rebel groups. They formed a group called the UPA but with time they put down their arms and received Amnesty from the government. When I become the sub-county chief in this sub county, there was a group of people who were rebelling against the government but the government told them that if they put down their arms they will receive packages as I talk now these people are free with the government and the community members because of the Amnesty Law.

Elderly man E: People like the former RDC Max Omeda and Musa Ecwero were once rebels but they decided to surrender to the government and the government received them, talked to them and gave them packages and responsibilities.

Man D: For me I know forgiveness is biblical and it depends on the person who was offended. But we should all know that all the people who committed those atrocities are Ugandans and the victims were Ugandans; what we should know is that some times this is the work of the devil. We need to unite and decide on something that will unite us all therefore; we should all embrace the Amnesty Law

Man E: Amnesty has an aim or purpose. I understand the president himself at one point was a rebel who also committed atrocities so he has brought Amnesty to protect himself so that no one can follow him up. Instead of a blanket Amnesty people should be given conditional Amnesty because some people were abducted, raped and others gave birth while in the bush. I believe the initiators of war must not be given Amnesty.

Have you been consulted during the grant of Amnesty?

Man F: It is my first time, hearing people consulting about Amnesty. Asking us what we can do to the perpetrators. The government has forgiven the commanders of Kony because he fears them but nothing has been done to the victims. I think people who initiated the war should be given conditional Amnesty and they should be asked what

their aims and objectives were. I believe some rebels think that even though they kill thousands of people, they will always receive blanket Amnesty.

Man G: How can you talk about Amnesty when someone has not been arrested? Some of our children are still in the bush while others still have blood oozing from their ears up to date as a result of the torture they suffered from during the war. They should just give us help other than talking to us every time.

How has Amnesty contributed to the wellbeing of the community?

Man B: When the government granted Amnesty to the rebels it gave room for most of the rebels to surrender. That was when the war in Teso came to an end otherwise if it was not for Amnesty Law, people like Musa Ecwero and Max Omeda would still be in the bush causing havoc but now our land is peaceful and some of these former rebels have turned into good leaders in our communities.

Man C: Amnesty has really contributed greatly to end war in our community; Most of the rebels who surrendered are now free with their families and this will send signal to the other rebels who are still afraid to come out of the bush that all is well.

Youth b: For us the students are so happy with the Amnesty; Amnesty has given us the opportunity to access services like health and education. During the war all we thought of was going to hide in the bush even if you would be sick but when amnesty was in.

Man E: Amnesty has helped to end this war by enabling some of the rebels to return home without fear of being arrested by the government; most of our children here in Teso were forcefully abducted and made to commit crimes. So when they returned, their parents were so happy to see them again.

How has Amnesty facilitated reintegration and improved relation between community members and ex-combatants? What is your experience of living with returnees who have been granted Amnesty?

Man E: I remember when we had a rebel group here in Teso called the Uganda People's Army (UPA) there was no peace but when Amnesty was granted to these rebels, they accepted to put down their arms and return home. This enabled us to live together with these people after the government had granted them Amnesty. We know very well that these people killed our fathers and mothers. But when they were forgiven by the government it sent us a signal that they had been forgiven from above so we learnt to live with them, eat with them and share everything with them even if I have internal pain.

Woman A: Much as in Teso we don't have so many people who were directly involved in the LRA war; Amnesty was really helpful in facilitating the return of a few of the people in Teso who were forcefully abducted and taken to the bush by the LRA rebels.

Woman C: The relationship between the ex-combatants and the community members is good because the Amnesty Law made rebel activities in Teso to come to an end. Imagine one of the rebels is your father, brother or sisters and they are denied Amnesty how would you feel? So I thank the government for introducing the Amnesty Law in Uganda because it ended so many rebel activities hence making us to live peacefully with our sons who were stranded in the bush.

What effect does the granting of Amnesty have on Gender based crimes?

Woman A: Women and children were affected most during The LRA conflict but I don't think Amnesty has done anything to address the problem these people went through. How will they help the women who were raped during the conflict? All the attention is on the perpetrators? I think the people who abused women during the war should not be granted blanket Amnesty. Justice has to be done because these women are suffering in their homes from sexually transmitted diseases and stigmatization.

Woman G: As a mother I don't understand how this Amnesty operates. our children were abducted when they were still young , taken to unknown place and forced to commit serious crimes , our daughters were raped and I don't

hear the Amnesty Law addressing these problems but what they only tell us is forgive; how about my daughter who was raped and is at home suffering with me? What will the government do for her?

What is the challenge with the current Amnesty?

Woman D: This Amnesty Law was put in place without sensitization. For us we used to hear about Amnesty but we did not know what the content was. At one point we thought this law was for the rebels because the victims were not mentioned anywhere.

Man E: Not only the government should come up and say they have granted Amnesty but also the people at the grassroots level should be asked whether they agree to pardon the perpetrators and when they say yes, then Amnesty can be granted.

Man D: I see this Blanket Amnesty has a challenge with issue of justice and accountability; when someone is granted Amnesty. There is no way you can ask them about what they did to you or to your family. For me I want these rebels to face us if possible and tell us I am sorry I killed your father or I am sorry I raped your wife and sisters. Otherwise most victims of war are not yet satisfied with this Amnesty.

Youth C: Amnesty should be consultative. I mean people should be consulted from bottom to top especially the victims, Women and survivors and this should not only stop at consultations but the needs of the victims should be addressed because these victims need rehabilitation.

Man D: Amnesty has mainly benefitted the rebels; some have been rewarded with big government posts unlike the victims who got nothing.

Woman C: Amnesty should apply equally to all people. This system of granting Amnesty to some people and living others is the reason why some rebels are still in the bush. In addition to this, the government should also prepare some packages for the victims as well.

How do you feel Amnesty should function in the long run? Should it be blanket or conditional?

Youth A: I think for the sake of peace Amnesty should be in a blanket form not in a conditional form because if it is conditional the LRA rebels will come back and continue attacking people because they want to protect their leaders. But if it is in blanket form, it will encourage other rebels to start admiring their friends who are already with their families; "If Ewago surrendered and is at home enjoying with his family members, why don't I also leave the bush and go home to live with my family"

Man B: It is better for us to have a conditional Amnesty because a blanket amnesty will encourage more people to join the bush or form rebel groups, commit atrocities and return home knowing that they will be protected by the blanket Amnesty; The government should not only come up and say they have granted Amnesty but the people at the grassroots level should be asked whether they agree to pardon the perpetrators before Amnesty is granted.

Man F: I think Amnesty should have a time limit; time which is given to all rebel groups to surrender and come home other than living them to first continue causing more problems and then in the end the government still grants them Amnesty. If possible the government should just arrest some rebels who are mainly forced to surrender.

Man D: Amnesty has mainly benefitted the rebels; some have been rewarded with big government posts unlike the victims who got nothing after suffering for so long in the hands of the rebels

How should Amnesty be granted?

Man E: I want those who were abducted and those born in captivity to be granted amnesty and those top leaders like Kony and other commanders should be given conditional amnesty or face the law for what they did.

Man F: Amnesty is good but I don't like the way the government is granting it. When the government senses danger in a particular area he decides to grant Amnesty because of fear that if they do not grant Amnesty they will be kicked out of power.

Man C: For me I think before the grant of Amnesty the government of Uganda should first look at how each person becomes a rebel or how the person went to the bush? Was it through forceful abduction or born in captivity; Then also the initiators of these rebel activities should not receive blanket Amnesty to discourage other people from going to the bush. We are looking at this in two way firstly encouraging rebels who are in the bush to come back home and also discouraging those who are at home to form rebel groups and join the bush.

Youth B: When Amnesty was granted during the UPA war I don't remember the rebels who surrendered returning back to the bush to fight again, even the Acholi people who at first supported the war later realized the dangers and decided to support Amnesty so that the war could end.

Man H: I feel the government should allow people to forgive the perpetrators first and then the government can come in and ask people whether they have forgiven the rebels or not and if they say yes, the government can go ahead and grant Amnesty and if they say no then the government has to investigate the perpetrators and ask them to apologize first to the victims and then grant them Amnesty

Concluding remarks from the LC IV Woman Councilor

She told the community members that the people of Teso want a holistic Amnesty that will benefit both the victims and the perpetrators. She said that during the conflict their crops were destroyed, women were raped and infected with HIV/AIDS, people displaced, lips and other body parts maimed, and as a result many people still have remains of bullets in their body. In addition there were also many cases of missing people. She recommended that a truth telling and reconciliation process should be put in place the Amnesty Act was to function well.

She said that the government in the course of bringing back peace committed a lot of atrocities. She said that the government soldiers rapped women, destroyed crops and therefore the government should also apologize to the community members.

She said that she remembered attending an exchange visit were the women from Acholi land told them they were sorry for what their children did to them during the war and women from other tribes accepted the apology. She said that this was the kind of Amnesty they wanted and not the one imposed on them.

ANNEX D: COMMUNITY DIALOGUE IN ROMOGI

Romogi Sub-County, 29 October 2014

Over 170 people from Romogi attended the dialogue, including Sub county officials, elders, members from Romogi War Victim's Association, cultural leaders, youth, women, men and other community members.

The majority of the community members who participated in the dialogue did not agree with how the current Amnesty is operating. They said that they needed an Improved Amnesty which not only focuses on perpetrators but also victims' needs and brings promotes their involvement and accountability.

Official opening remarks were made by the sub-county chief of Romogi Sub-county. He thanked JRP and Uganda Law Society for choosing Romogi as one of the regions to be consulted on the Amnesty Law. He told community members that the war in West Nile affected almost every family and as a result they are all victims of war. He thanked JRP for always working with the people of Romogi and emphasized that as the officials of Romogi Sub-county they will always support the programs introduced by JRP in Romogi. He also thanked the Members of Romogi War Victims Association for the spirit of unity they had showed in the community of Romogi.

A JRP staff member thanked the Sub-county officials for welcoming JRP and giving them a platform. He told community members that in 2011, JRP visited Romogi based on rumors but when they visited Romogi sub-county to find out what had happened during the war; JRP was welcomed, given information that they did not know. It was based on this information that JRP had chosen Romogi as one of the places in West Nile to conduct the Amnesty Law dialogue.

He told the community members that JRP is Non-governmental Organization (NGO) that works to represent the, views, concerns and needs of victims of conflict. He said that JRP is an advocacy organization based in Gulu but works in the four sub-regions of Acholi, Lango, Teso and West Nile. He said that in line with this meeting, JRP was working with the Uganda Law Society to gauge the opinion of the grassroots communities on the Amnesty Law. He briefly told community members about the Amnesty Act 2000 and welcomed them to share their views and perspectives.

What is Amnesty? Have you heard about it? Do you know about it?

Man A: According to me Amnesty is mediation between the government and the people who are fighting against the government.

Man B: Amnesty means forgiveness in Aringa.

Elder man B: I heard about the word Amnesty at the time when there was war Romogi. We were told that Amnesty was going to be introduced in Yumbe therefore everyone should put down their guns so that they can be given Iron sheets .As a result people put down their guns and others received iron sheets while others did not receive iron sheets ; According to me Amnesty is forgiveness.

Elder man C: The word Amnesty was very common during the time of the rebellion in Romogi. They told us that if you know that you did something to someone for example, if you know you cut off someone's ear you should repent so that you can be forgiven in order for peace to return to our home.

How is Amnesty granted? / Circumstances leading to the grant of Amnesty?

Man J: The granting of granting Amnesty was not so well because we were forced to forgive those who offended us against our own will.

Man F: Amnesty was granted by making the two conflicting parties to sit somewhere and forgive each other. After that some people were given packages like blankets, iron sheets, Amnesty cards and people were given a trans-social education to make people reconcile.

Man D: Amnesty was granted in Romogi by making two conflicting parties to sit down under a tree and asked by the Amnesty commission officials to forgive each other. After forgiving each other, they were given Amnesty certificates to sign and later they were given iron sheets.

Elderly man F: In Romogi forgiveness was so easy because the community members come out openly to forgive because they were tired of the war. When the Amnesty commission visited Romogi asking us to put down our guns, everyone responded very well.

Man B: Amnesty was granted by bringing together the two conflicting parties and sensitizing them about forgiveness and when they agree to forgive, they were made to sign the Amnesty certificate.

Have you been consulted and involved during the granting of Amnesty?

Elder man A: we were involved and we also heard what was said by the officials from the officials from the Amnesty commission. They told people to put down their gun so that they could receive certificates and packages.

Man E: I was one of the rebels at the time; the amnesty commission official come to me and asked me to put down my gun so that I could be forgiven. When I accepted to surrender, I was given an Amnesty certificate and iron sheets which I have used to build my house.

Elder man D: I was not consulted about the Amnesty Act but I was ordered by some people who said they were from the Amnesty commission that my sons are coming back home therefore, I should forgive them and accept them when they reach home.

Man F: I was not consulted during the grant of Amnesty but according to what I know is that people were forced to receive Amnesty; the community members were forced to forgive and the rebels were also forced to put down their arm by the government.

How has Amnesty contributed to the well-being of the community?

Man G: Amnesty has played a great role in bring peace in our community. As we talk now, there are no more gun shots.

Man C: Amnesty has made the rebels who used to cut off people's ears to return home without fear of revenge from the community members; it has also prepared the victims to receive the perpetrators without any feeling of revenging against them.

Elderly man B: As an elder we were the ones in charge of granting Amnesty because we were sensitized to grant Amnesty. I am glad that I was part of the people who talked a lot about forgiveness and as a result I am now enjoying the peace.

Man H: The Amnesty Act made some rebels who had returned with their guns and grenades at home to voluntarily hand it over to the government after signing of the peace agreement as a result there is no more war in our community.

Elder man J: For me I have not benefitted from Amnesty because when Amnesty was being granted in Romogi. They considered only the rebels and the elders were left out especially when they were giving packages therefore as elders we did not benefit from Amnesty.

Elder man B: I want to respond to what my fellow elder is saying, for you if you did not benefit for us we did; the fact that the war has ended because of the Amnesty Law is so important to us.

Woman B: Before the Amnesty Law was introduced, there was a rebellion in Romogi and I was forced to cook for the rebels at night against my own will but Amnesty has brought peace and freedom

Man I: The UPDF soldiers used to come to our house forcing us to tell them where the rebels were and at the same time the rebels were also forcing us to tell them where the detach of the government soldiers were but after the introduction of the Amnesty Law all the torture and Harassments by the soldiers come to an end. Civilians started moving freely at night without any fear of being arrested or abducted.

Man F: After the Amnesty Law was put in place, a peace agreement between the government and the rebels was signed and they promised to build for us a primary school and this promise was fulfilled after sometime hence improving education in our community.

Man K: Before the Amnesty Law was introduced; our children could not go to school but after the government granting Amnesty to the rebels the war in Romogi come to an end and our children were able to study without fear. Amnesty also helped the child soldiers to return home, and some got opportunities to join the UPDF and they are being paid salaries by the government of Uganda.

Woman C: During the time of the rebellion women were separated from their husbands at night; we were being denied the right to sleep with our husbands. But because the Amnesty Law brought peace in our community, we are able to share beds with our husbands.

Woman E: Before the Amnesty Law was put in place, one woman would have more than two husbands because the other men would forcefully have sex with you. But when the war ended women are no longer raped by other men; “one woman one man”.

Man G: Amnesty made me to return home from the bush to take care of my family as a result I settled down to take care of my children and my first son has joined the university.

Youth A: During the time of the rebellion, we had to run away from our home because the soldiers used part of our land as a detach but when the Amnesty law was introduced in Romogi the war ended and the government soldiers left our land, we were able to return home and live peacefully.

Man H: When I was in the bush I had no house of my own, I was suffering but when the Amnesty Law was introduced, I accepted to surrender to the government and returned home to receive iron sheets and build my own house that I live in today with my wife and children.

How has Amnesty facilitated reintegration and improved relation between community members and ex-combatants? What is your experience of living with returnees who have been granted Amnesty?

Man B: Before the Amnesty Law was put in place, the community members were not happy with the return of the rebels; the relationship was bad because according to our culture when someone commits crimes that includes bloodshed before they return home, a sheep must be slaughtered but when Amnesty was introduced the community members just decided to forgive and forget.

Man D: The relationship between the ex-combatant and the victims is not good because I was not compensated and yet the people who killed my relatives and destroyed my property were given packages and iron sheets to build permanent houses.

Woman D: Amnesty has made me to forgive the ex-combatants for the bad things they did to me. Even before the Amnesty Law was put in place I had already forgiven some people who I know had committed crimes during the war and I used to talk to them freely but for them they were not free with me because they knew I saw them committing atrocities but when amnesty law was introduced they become freer with the community members.

Woman G: The relationship between the community members and ex-combatants is okay because even if we know these people committed crimes while in the bush they have never committed any crime ever since they returned home. The officials from Amnesty commission sensitized us and asked us to forgive and welcome them home.

Woman B: when Amnesty was introduced the rebels were reintegrated but all those who were doing wrong to us through our prayers died and those who did not commit atrocities are still alive and living happily with us.

Woman C: The Amnesty Law made us to forgive the rebels but I have a problem with this Amnesty because the community members who suffered most during the war were not given any support.

Man E: I thank the Amnesty commission for bringing forgiveness to Yumbe because it gave me the courage to forgive the person who killed my real father and brother.

Man I: After the Amnesty Law was introduced, we the religious leaders continued to encourage people to forgive and forget about the past.

Have you forgiven them? Is your relationship good?

Unanimous response from community: Yes, we have forgiven the ex-combatants

What are the challenges with the current Amnesty Act?

Youth: The Amnesty Law gave packages and Amnesty certificates to those who committed crimes but the victims who suffered and lost their property were not given anything.

Man D: Amnesty should have supported those whose education had been disrupted by war to go back to school.

Elder man D: My son was abducted and forced to become a rebel but when he died the Amnesty commission did not compensate him even after I tried to explain to them.

Man B: I have a big challenge with this amnesty because the people who were raped, tortured, have not received packages and yet packages are being given to the people who committed atrocities.

Elderly man E: There was a day when officials from the Amnesty commission come and we gathered under this some tree, they told us to forgive the rebels and they promised those whose property had been destroyed and looted that they would receive compensation has been done up to date. My prayer is that may God punish the people who looted my property during the war.

Woman A: During the war, women were raped and others contracted diseases; the community members suffered so much but instead of the people from Amnesty giving packages to the community members who suffered during the war, they gave packages to the rebels who raped us and took our goats.

Woman E: The ones who were sexually abuse were us women. Instead of looking for ways to help us treat diseases that we contracted as a result of rape Amnesty has not done anything. The amnesty Act should see how to address the issues of women who suffered during the war instead of only focusing on the perpetrators.

Woman B: women played a great role in bringing peace in this community therefore; we should have been consulted first before implementing this Act so that our need could also be addressed.

Elder man A: as an elderly man I am suffering, I had sons who were killed by the rebels but these some rebels on their returned were given iron sheets as packages to return home; they constructed big houses and as for me who lost my son I am sleeping in a tiny grass thatched house so I am not happy with this Amnesty law at all because Amnesty has done nothing to victims of conflict.

Elder man E: Amnesty come here and consulted us under this same mango tree and I told them that my brother who planted this mango tree was killed by the LRA soldiers in Anaka while on his way to Kampala so he was indecently buried. I asked them to help me so that I can transport his body back home and they accepted but up to date I have not heard anything from them.

Man C: I remember one day as we gathered under this tree and the amnesty commission officials promised us a lot of things but they did not fulfill their promise of compensating us; how long shall we wait for them to fulfill their promises?

Woman G: When the rebels attacked our home, my brother and father were abducted and killed by the rebel, we remained as orphans while my mother was made a widow but the man who killed my father and brother returned home from the bush and constructed a big house in the neighborhood for his family members yet for us there is no one to build for us a house.

Youth D: After the Amnesty Law was introduced, the defunct UNRFII child soldiers were taken to school by the government and the government promised them that they would later join the army after the training but this promise was not fulfilled. Therefore Amnesty has failed to follow up on some of the promises that were made by the government.

Elderly man B: Officials from Amnesty went direct to the camp of the UNRFII camp without first consulting the community members. According to me this is a big challenge.

Man F: My main challenge with this Amnesty Act is that the community members were not consulted before the amnesty law was put in place that's why even up to date most of us are not aware of what exactly Amnesty is about other than forgiveness.

Youth D: Much as the Amnesty was so helpful in solving the conflict in Romogi, they did not make follow ups on the people who received Amnesty to find out how they are living and what they are doing. This has left so many returnees dissatisfied because most of the promises made by the officials from Amnesty were not fulfilled.

Is amnesty still supported?

Majority of people in Romogi were in support of Amnesty while others do not support Amnesty.

How do you feel Amnesty should function in the long run? Should it be conditional or blanket?

Man B: The new Amnesty should construct and renovate the war torn areas for example Bidibidi as the base of the defunct UNRFII; There should also be follow ups on the ex-combatants to see whether they have re integrated or not. In the long run, the Amnesty Law should ensure that there are organized channels through which they operate for example consultations should be made from the national level, district, and sub-county and then to the community members unlike the current Amnesty that went straight to consult to the rebels .

Elder man E; if the people from Amnesty accept to work in districts and sub-counties I suggest that for Yumbe let their office be in Romogi sub-county because Romogi was a battle field during the UNRFII war.

Man F: Amnesty should not forget to fulfill their previous promises in the new Amnesty Law; the new Amnesty Law should involve the following categories of people when making decisions; representatives of war victims, ex-combatants and community members so that in taking decisions all views are respected. If there is going to be a regional office in west Nile it should be in Yumbe because as you all know out of the 8 districts in West Nile Yumbe is in the center of all of them.

Man B: Amnesty should build technical schools for those who did not get the opportunity to go to school as a result of war.

Man A: The new Amnesty should grant the community members the opportunity to sue some of the people who fought during the UNRFII because of the crimes they committed.

How can Amnesty redress gender justice?

Woman B: During the war we were sexually harassed by the rebels and soldiers but the amnesty act has not done anything to help the women; I think Amnesty should come up with a law to punish people who sexually abused women during the war.

Man C: The new Amnesty Law should address the issue of sexual Gender based violence by considering the women in a special way and also ensure that they are compensated accordingly.

Man F: Amnesty should come to the community and find out those who were raped and after that they should be given treatment and psychosocial support. Medical examination units should be put in place to help women because some women here are barren as a result of rape they suffered during the war.

Closing remarks

Closing remarks were made by a JRP staff. She thanked the sub-county officials and the community members of Romogi for welcoming JRP. She told the community members that the information generated was very not different from what they got from other places. She said that In Acholi during consultations, the general consensus was that they wanted conditional Amnesty. In Lango they also said that they wanted a conditional Amnesty but they were calling on the state institutions and the government to step down because they were not doing much for the victims. She said that in Teso they were calling it Holistic Amnesty that much as they are compensating the perpetrators, they should also consider the victims and today, the people of Romogi have called it Improved Amnesty which should look at the perpetrators but also the victim's needs and bring into place involvement and accountability. Once again JRP she thanked all participants for their contributions.

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About the Justice and Reconciliation Project

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

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