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# RENEGOTIATING THE 'IDEAL' SOCIETY

Gender in peacebuilding in Uganda



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## Gender in peacebuilding in Uganda

Judy El-Bushra, Henri Myrntinen and Jana Naujoks

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## About the authors

Judy El-Bushra is an independent consultant specialising in research and programme design on conflict and peace. She has over 35 years' experience in the field of gender, peacebuilding and development, the last 15 of which she has spent in senior-level management positions with International Alert and ACORD and engaging in African fragile state-focused consultancy work.

Jana Naujoks works in the Peacebuilding Issues Programme of International Alert. She graduated from the University of Bradford's Department of Peace Studies, and has worked in the coordination of the Initiative for Peacebuilding and the Foro Andino para la Transformación de Conflictos Socio Ambientales.

Henri Myrntinen is a senior research officer on gender in peacebuilding at International Alert. He has been working and publishing on issues of gender, peace and security with a special focus on masculinities and violence for the past decade and holds a Ph.D. in Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

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## Abbreviations

<b>ADF</b>	Allied Democratic Forces
<b>AIDS</b>	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
<b>CAR</b>	Central African Republic
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of Congo
<b>GUSCO</b>	Gulu Save the Children Organisation
<b>HIV</b>	Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus
<b>HUR�PEC</b>	Human Rights and Peace Centre
<b>IDP</b>	Internally displaced person
<b>LC</b>	Local Council, Local Councillor
<b>LGBTI</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
<b>LRA/M</b>	Lord's Resistance Army/Movement
<b>MGLSD</b>	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
<b>NAP</b>	National Action Plan
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>NRA/M</b>	National Resistance Army/Movement
<b>NUWEP</b>	Northern Uganda Women's Empowerment Programme
<b>OPM</b>	Office of the Prime Minister
<b>PRDP</b>	Peace, Recovery and Development Plan
<b>PVP</b>	People's Voice for Peace
<b>RLP</b>	Refugee Law Project
<b>RMM</b>	Role model man or men
<b>SGBV</b>	Sexual and gender-based violence
<b>SMOWAC</b>	Social Mobilization of War Affected Communities
<b>SPLA/M</b>	Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement
<b>STD/I</b>	Sexually-transmitted disease/infection
<b>SWAY</b>	Survey of War-Affected Youth
<b>UNHCR</b>	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UPDF</b>	Uganda People's Defence Force
<b>VISO</b>	Voluntary Initiative Service Organisation
<b>VSLA</b>	Village Savings and Loan Association
<b>WPP</b>	Women's political participation
<b>WPS</b>	Women, peace and security

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study is one of four country studies contributing to the second phase of a three-year research project on gender in peacebuilding being conducted by International Alert. Alert's understanding of 'gender' is that both men and women lead gendered lives, coloured by age, class and other identities, and that these gender relations are shaped by the political, socio-economic and cultural dimensions of their specific contexts. Gender relations vary from one context to another. Alert describes gender as 'relational', because masculine and female identities are created in relationship with each other, within the context of the whole society.

Research in this second phase explores how a gender analysis, emphasising the 'relational' nature of gender, can shine light on four peacebuilding themes. These are: the economic and livelihoods dimensions of peacebuilding; violence and its many manifestations and the interconnections between them: inter-generational conflict and age–sex dynamics; and access to justice.

A review of the conflict context of Uganda demonstrates that, despite the establishment of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) as the national government in 1986, and the relative stability that followed it, unrest continues in peripheral parts of the country and, increasingly, in national-level politics. The discovery and exploration of oil reserves in Uganda in 2006 have begun to generate political problems both nationally and in the communities directly affected. Moreover, Uganda has contributed to, and has been impacted in various ways by, conflicts beyond its borders: it receives large numbers of refugees from neighbouring countries, mainly from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). While in the recent past Uganda has been supported by the donor community, in 2012 donors suspended approximately US\$300 million in promised aid, because of concerns about corruption, political repression and human rights abuses.

The policy environment in Uganda in respect to gender and peacebuilding focuses on promoting women's rights to services and political participation. Despite 35 percent of parliamentarians being women, women's effective participation in politics and in decision-making is limited, and statutory bodies representing women are under-resourced. The role of women's civil society organisations has often been to provide a space for debate and challenge in attempting to hold government accountable for its policies and actions. In addition, as a body, women's civil society has supported and collaborated with government, as is the case with the National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820. Neither government nor civil society has yet given policy attention to issues of men and masculinities.

The report's main area of focus is on the Acholi sub-region in northern Uganda, the site of violent conflict between the Uganda national army and various resistance movements from 1986 to 2006. The population of the area has been deeply affected by widespread displacement, during the conflict, into 'protected villages' (at its height, 95 percent of the population were living in camps) and by the violent abduction of an estimated 66,000 Acholis by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Most of the abductees have now returned and are reintegrating with varying degrees of success. The internally displaced population began returning to their villages after 2006, although some 30,000 remain in camps in northern Uganda.

In relation to the four peacebuilding themes, the research found the following:

*The economic dimensions of peacebuilding seen through a gender lens:* Displacement into camps had a major impact on livelihoods and the division of labour. With access to agricultural land limited, dependence on petty commerce and the labour market increased. On return to the home villages, where intense physical labour was required to clear overgrown fields and build houses, older men found they no longer had sufficient command of resources (including labour) to provide for women and young people as they had been able to in the past, and hence could no longer expect them to submit to their authority. Land conflict following the return from the camps became very common, and women and young people lost out in this, being disadvantaged by their relatively low level of knowledge of the law and their lack of powerful contacts.

*The continuum of gendered violence:* The Acholi sub-region witnessed extraordinary levels of violence during the war, perpetrated both by the Ugandan army and by the LRA. This, mirrored by high levels of interpersonal violence and by institutional neglect, amounted to what has been termed “social torture”.<sup>1</sup> Both men and women were victims of this violence, and both to some degree perpetrators. Sexual violence against men, mainly perpetrated by the Ugandan army, has come to light publicly only recently. The constraints imposed by the war thwarted men’s ambitions to achieve their gendered aspirations: namely, to create a family, to provide for and protect it, and to uphold community values of dialogue rather than aggression. Their inability to achieve these aspirations generated further levels of interpersonal violence, self-harm and anti-social behaviour.

*Inter-generational dynamics:* Although precise figures are difficult to establish, some studies suggest that one third of those abducted by the LRA were under 18 years, around two thirds of whom have returned. At any one time, the proportion of under-18-year-olds in the LRA ranks may have been higher, since adolescents tended to be kept for longer periods. The LRA used boys and girls as porters and fighters; a quarter of the girls were allocated as wives to LRA officers, and of these half gave birth to children. Although the violence and abuse experienced by abducted children was extreme, studies have shown that most of them have proved remarkably resilient: the minority of abducted children who continue to be extremely vulnerable and distressed, and to have difficulty functioning in society, tend to be the forced mothers. Moreover, children who were not abducted have not fared much better: levels of education, employment and skills among young people generally are very low. Many, but by no means all, have rejected the rural agricultural lifestyle that provides the majority livelihood. At the same time, relations between older and younger people are changing, with older men and women expressing regret at the passing of a ‘golden age’ when women and youth were suitably respectful, while younger people feel let down by their elders’ inability to provide for and protect them. The traditional position of elders has been compromised because of economic conditions; women and youth are less dependent on them than in the past.

*Access to justice:* There has been a revival of cleansing rituals and other ceremonies of absolution and reconciliation, with a view to facilitating the return and reinsertion of ex-LRA members, many of whom committed crimes against their communities and even families during the war. Opinion is divided on the usefulness of these measures, some believing they are beneficial to the mental health of the returning combatants and others that they fail to solve the real problems such people face, are limited in scope and discriminate against women by implying they are responsible for atrocities committed against them. Current justice concerns include the delayed establishment of a truth and reconciliation mechanism, problems with the application of the government amnesty for LRA cadres, land conflict and domestic violence. Customary and statutory legal frameworks exist side by side, with little clarity on how they should be used. Those who know how to use the power structures have an unfair advantage over those without this knowledge. This is especially the case for women, because of their low levels of literacy, legal knowledge and powerful contacts.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Dolan (2009). *Social Torture: The Case of Northern Uganda 1986–2006*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.

The report describes three projects, which, although based on varying interpretations of 'gender', all highlight the 'relational' dimensions of a gender approach.

*Community Education Project, Gulu district:* This project, which took place in two villages from 2008 to 2010, was based on the hypothesis that psycho-social education supports post-conflict reconstruction more effectively than humanitarian aid or materialistically focused projects. Initially, a year of ethnographic research was conducted, which supported the design of an education project to address the psycho-social needs of community members. Subsequently, the education component of the project used discovery-based discussion methods focusing on topics chosen by participants. The project worked with groups of men, women, and male and female youths, with the main aim being to deconstruct gender identities. At the end of the project, an auto-evaluation identified the major impacts as including: greater egalitarianism within families along with warmer relationships, increased participatory planning and decision-making within families, increased community integration, significantly reduced levels of violence, greater responsibility in sexual relations and improved economic wellbeing.

*Roco Kwo ('Transforming lives'):* An integrated development programme managed by CARE International since 2009, *Roco Kwo* supports Acholi communities returning to their villages from displaced camps. The programme aims to effect change in the areas of gender, livelihoods and peacebuilding through interventions in economic, social and psycho-social fields. It explicitly focuses on women from vulnerable families as the target group, to lift communities out of poverty by creating opportunities for women's empowerment and equality in decision-making. It recruits 'role model men' as change agents in the fight against violence against women, aiming to validate and support positive behaviour by men. A mid-term review found that it had begun to enhance livelihoods for the poorest, thereby reducing their vulnerability to shocks, to strengthen women's decision-making at household and community levels, and to reduce conflict and violence within the household.

*Refugee Law Project (RLP):* RLP seeks to ensure fundamental human rights for all forced migrants in Uganda: asylum seekers, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). It was originally set up to enhance refugees' enjoyments of their rights in domestic and international law. Since then, RLP has extended its range of services to include counselling, psycho-social support and medical referrals; has established field offices near Uganda's borders with DRC and Rwanda to provide better support to refugees on arrival; carries out research and advocacy on issues of forced migration and transitional justice within Uganda; and provides training to duty bearers interacting with forced migrants on a regular basis – primarily police, prisons officers and immigration officials. RLP's work on gender and sexuality highlights the needs of male survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and the struggle for the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) forced migrants. Both these groups are generally overlooked and discriminated against by service providers and policy-makers. RLP hosts the Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Constitutional Law, which seeks to protect the human rights of the LGBTI community.

## Conclusions

*Lessons for gender policy approaches in Uganda:* Despite improvements in women's economic and political participation, these gains are still limited. Gender discourse tends to emphasise women as a 'vulnerable group', and to separate women out for special assistance, often generating a 'backlash' against women. The association of women with vulnerability has negative consequences for men too, since the notion of *male* vulnerability becomes unimaginable, with physical and mental consequences for men who suffer abuse and their families. The discourse is dominated by a version of heteronormativity which privileges conventional marriage as the desired state for both men and women: women are under pressure to conform to norms of respectability and deference within marriage, and people of alternative sexualities find themselves excluded, with

severe consequences. The three projects highlighted suggest ways of challenging the prevailing normative paradigm.

*Lessons for peacebuilding themes:* Approaching peacebuilding in Uganda with a ‘relational’ gender lens brings to the fore a number of frequently overlooked issues. In terms of the economy, the Uganda case emphasises the importance of the psychological dimension of economic recovery after a long period of neglect and violent destruction, and highlights how the vulnerability of socially and politically marginalised groups (including refugees, the displaced, sexual minorities, unemployed youth and ex-abductees, for example) weakens the broader economy as well as constituting a form of rights violation. The Uganda case also underlines the mutual interconnection between domestic violence reduction and the general welfare of the community, but also highlights in the discussion of violence the importance of acknowledging male as well as female vulnerability to violence, and of recognising the use of male-on-male sexual violence as a tool of warfare. Male vulnerability to violence has proved to be highly sensitive, with both the men concerned and service providers finding it hard to discuss the issue openly.

The Uganda case seemingly bears out the view that war is often a war between generations: both youth and elders blame each other for the war, and continue to stigmatise each other for failure to maintain the ‘true’ Acholi values. However, on the ground, tensions between the old and the new are less stark. The lack of an assured future for the new generation is a matter of dominant concern for the whole society.

Issues of vulnerability are key to access to justice. First, the Uganda case demonstrates the specific vulnerabilities of women (especially child mothers and widows), children and male survivors of sexual violence in obtaining justice. Second, as is common in many countries emerging from long periods of civil war, the existence of both customary and statutory systems operating side by side confuses options, and further limits the practical possibilities of the most vulnerable to seek and achieve justice. This is especially the case with regard to SGBV, a serious personal affront, which is nevertheless often dealt with as a matter to be settled between families.

*Lessons regarding gender-relational peacebuilding:* The Uganda example upholds the hypothesis that gender equality is a key component of sustainable peace, since inclusive societies are less vulnerable to violent conflict and have a better outlook for post-conflict recovery. However, the review of evidence in this case study emphasises that this rationalisation only works if a broad and relational concept of gender is applied.

Conflict presents an opportunity to find new ways of conceptualising gender itself, as well as rethinking actual gender relations. The three projects described raise the issue of men and masculinities. What role do men play in a gendered approach to peacebuilding – should they be seen as perpetrators of abuse against women, as victims of violence themselves or as gatekeepers of change? Or are women and men together the joint creators of a new post-conflict society? Further, the RLP case study enjoins new thinking about male vulnerabilities, about what constitutes sexual violence and domestic violence, and about the need to expand the concept of gender to include the sexual dimension. RLP’s experience has led it to see sexual identity and orientation as integral to a broad conception of gender identity, and hence to be understood as falling within the framework of ‘gender and peacebuilding’. A positive peace is one in which everybody has access to justice and to the services they require – including the upholding of the rights of sexual and gender minorities. A focus on a policy of mainstreaming *diversity* in the fullest meaning of the term might enable this broader view to be captured more effectively.

A ‘relational’ gender analysis of Uganda brings out aspects of peacebuilding practice that are often overlooked or under-emphasised. Forced displacement, for example, including refugee cross-border migrations, is generally under-theorised within peacebuilding. The northern

Uganda project examples also underscore the importance of dialogue-based and problem-solving methodologies for reconstituting relationships damaged by war.

The evidence suggests that in reality people are shaped by age, class and life experiences as well as by gender, and that all these factors are important in teasing out the relations of power and realms of agency that each deploys. This reinforces one of the conclusions of the report, *Gender in peacebuilding: Taking stock*,<sup>2</sup> that how a gender analysis is done is as important as doing it. A gender analysis that consists in asking a range of open-ended questions about the nature of gender relations and roles in the context concerned is likely to reveal the colours and complexities of how people actually live.

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2 J. El-Bushra (2012). *Gender in peacebuilding: Taking stock*. London: International Alert. Available at <http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/publications/201210GenderPeacebuilding-EN.pdf>

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction to this study

This study is the first of four country studies contributing to the second phase of International Alert's research project on gender in peacebuilding.<sup>3</sup> The first phase of this study consisted of a mapping exercise of key gender issues in peacebuilding and resulted in the publication of an interim report entitled *Gender in peacebuilding: Taking stock*.<sup>4</sup> The report defines the focus of the second phase of the research, which is to explore, document and draw lessons from practical ways in which peacebuilding incorporates gender as a 'relational' concept.

Alert's starting point in the discussion is that gender is 'not just about women' but is a relational concept. What this means is that gender analysis starts from the understanding that both men and women lead gendered lives, influenced by age, class and other identities. It is based on the proposition that the political, socio-economic and cultural dimensions of the context concerned, as well as its historical and geographical positioning, combine to produce varied patterns of gender relations. Gender relations vary from one context to another. Alert describes gender as 'relational', because masculine and feminine identities are created in relationship with each other, within the context of the whole society.

A gender analysis that consists in asking a range of open-ended questions about the nature of gender relations and roles in the context concerned is likely to reveal the colours and complexities of how people actually live. While respecting global and normative policy frameworks, peacebuilders should interpret these in the light of the varying dynamics encountered in specific contexts.

This understanding of gender incorporates – and extends – the women, peace and security policy framework (WPS),<sup>5</sup> which currently dominates international policy discourse. WPS focuses on upholding the rights to protection and participation of women and girls in conflict-affected situations. The hypothesis of Alert's research on gender and peacebuilding is that an emphasis on gender dynamics (understood as 'relational') will have a number of positive outcomes. These will include, but not be limited to, increased gender equality and increased enjoyment of rights by women and girls.

The research for the second phase explores, in specific country contexts as well as at a more abstract level, how a gender analysis might shed light on four peacebuilding themes. The themes emerged from a preliminary review of conflict and peace-related issues in the selected case study countries, and reflect the research team's view of the potential of gender analysis to amplify understanding of conflict dynamics. The four themes are: the economic and livelihoods dimensions of post-conflict recovery; violence and its many manifestations and the interconnections between these (for example, between mass inter-communal violence and domestic violence); inter-generational conflict and age-sex dynamics; and access to justice, especially in the transitional and post-conflict recovery context.

This report begins with a brief summary of Uganda's conflict background and current national-level political challenges. This introductory section includes a summary of the current government

3 The other three countries covered in the second phase are Burundi, Colombia and Nepal.

4 Available at <http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/publications/201210GenderPeacebuilding-EN.pdf>

5 Set by UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 and associated resolutions.

machinery for addressing gender equality, and the role of civil society and the women's movement. Section 2 outlines current challenges with regard to the four themes described above, focusing specifically on the Acholi sub-region, the area of Uganda that has experienced the most destructive violence in the last 30 years. Section 3 describes three peacebuilding projects, each based on a different interpretation of gender but together highlighting the 'relational' dimensions of a gender approach. Section 4 summarises the foregoing material and its relevance to improving and advancing policies, discourse and programme approaches on gender and peacebuilding. The case study ends with a list of resources on gender, conflict and peace in Uganda.

The Uganda country study is based on two visits to Uganda by the research team between November 2012 and February 2013, in which government and civil society actors were interviewed and three specific projects documented. The study also draws, as far as possible, on current literature on conflict in Uganda and on the projects concerned, as well as on Alert's experience in the country since its programme was established in 2007. However, much of the discussions held by the research team involved relatively new, unfamiliar or ambiguous issues. For example, facts and figures on Acholi youth abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) vary from source to source, while the issue of male-on-male sexual violence is a new one, with cases still coming to light. By the nature of the topics covered, it is not always possible in this report to provide hard factual or quantified information. Where appropriate, we refer readers to authoritative sources.

## 1.2 Background to conflict in Uganda

Since Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army and Movement (NRA/M) gained power in 1986, the most well-known site of mass violence in the country has been the Northern region, and more specifically the Acholi sub-region.<sup>6</sup> However, this has arguably been merely the most tangible, published and most destructive manifestation of structural tensions that exist both within the Ugandan state<sup>7</sup> and within the wider East African region.<sup>8</sup>

### Background to tensions within Uganda

The north in general, and the Acholi sub-region in particular, has long perceived itself as being excluded from state power and influence. This perception began with the British colonial government's policy of allocating functions to different ethnic groups (the army to the Acholi, administration to the Baganda, for example), and continued in post-independence (1962) struggles for political control through competition for the presidency. These struggles had both a regional (south against north) and an ethnic character.<sup>9</sup> The civil war, which was largely regional in nature and which raged between 1979 and 1986, ended when Museveni<sup>10</sup> took over Kampala, became president, and established the NRM as the single governing party.

Ugandans generally have viewed the NRM victory and the ensuing relative peace positively. However, in peripheral regions in Uganda in the east, west and north, some continued to harbour disaffection because of the perceived strength of southern Ugandan groups in terms of their access to state power.

6 Karamoja is the other main site of extensive violence in northern Uganda. For a recent assessment of the conflict context in Karamoja, see Saferworld (2010). *Karamoja Conflict and Security Assessment*.

7 For a summary of developments from the colonial era until 1986, see R. Atkinson (2010). *The Roots of Ethnicity: Origins of the Acholi of Uganda*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers, Fountain Studies in East African History, pp.275–282.

8 For descriptions and analysis of the impact of the LRA war on Acholiland, see, in particular, C. Dolan (2009). *Op. cit.*; A. Branch (2011). *Displacing Human Rights: War and Intervention in Northern Uganda*. New York: Oxford University Press; T. Allen and K. Vlassenroot (2010). *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and Reality*. London & New York: Zed Books; Conciliation Resources (2010). 'Initiatives to end the violence in northern Uganda: 2002–9 and the Juba peace process'. ACCORD Update to Issue 11. Information in this background section is taken from these sources unless otherwise stated.

9 R. Atkinson (2010). *Op. cit.*

10 Museveni himself is from the southwest of Uganda, and, although the NRM has always had a reconciliation and unity focus, southern groups have tended to dominate.

### War in the north

In the north, those Acholi troops who had fought against the NRA were split, after 1986, between those who accepted the NRA's victory and those who sought – but failed – to find popular support to oppose it. Perceiving resistance from the Acholi, Museveni retaliated with harsh military action against northern opposition elements; this in turn triggered a series of messianic Acholi resistance movements, of which the last and most dramatic was the LRA, which emerged in the late 1980s under the leadership of Joseph Kony.<sup>11</sup>

The ferocity of LRA attacks on Acholi civilians, whom it accused of moral degeneracy and collaboration with the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF), is well documented and widely known. The attacks, which included murder, mutilation and abduction of both adults and children, were one impetus towards the movement of inhabitants into 'protected villages' or displaced people's camps from the end of the 1980s onwards. Another, however, was the action of the national army, the UPDF, which forced many Acholi into the 'protected villages' in what was later described as "the government's mass internment of the Acholi peasantry"<sup>12</sup> and also inflicted considerable violence and abuse on the Acholi population generally.

The war in the north was not purely an internal Ugandan affair, but also had transnational dimensions, forming part of Uganda's often tense relationships with both Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). For example, while the Khartoum government was supplying the LRA with arms and shelter, the UPDF was supporting the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). However, collaboration between the governments of the two countries eventually led to joint military action against the LRA, and to Sudan hosting the Juba peace talks between the Ugandan government and the LRA from 2006 to 2008.

Prior to 2003, northern Uganda appeared to be of little strategic interest to the international community, and intervention was limited mainly to food distribution to the displaced. Perceiving themselves abandoned by the rest of the world, some Acholi began to talk about "genocide by neglect".<sup>13</sup> A visit in 2003 by Jan Egeland, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, prompted him to declare the conflict in northern Uganda to be "the biggest forgotten, neglected humanitarian emergency in the world today".<sup>14</sup> This triggered interest by agencies and donor governments in seeking a political solution to the humanitarian crisis in the Acholi sub-region.

In 2006 the Ugandan government, seeking a negotiated solution to the LRA problem, entered into peace talks with the LRA in Juba. The resulting ceasefire and agreements marked the effective end of the LRA insurgency in Uganda and paved the way for reconstruction and rehabilitation of the war-affected areas.<sup>15</sup> Kony retreated into the borderlands of South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR) and DRC, where he wreaks havoc on the local population, and where Ugandan and United States troops continue – unsuccessfully so far – to pursue him.<sup>16</sup>

Since 2006 there has been a gradual return from the displaced persons' camps,<sup>17</sup> and a commitment by the Government of Uganda to reconstruct after years of neglect and destruction. As a result, northern Uganda increasingly feels part of the larger state, and opposition to

11 For a detailed account of the LRA, see T. Allen and K. Vlassenroot (2010). *Op. cit.*

12 A. Branch (2011). *Op. cit.*

13 Civil society activist, personal communication.

14 'War in northern Uganda world's worst forgotten crisis: UN', *ReliefWeb*, 11th November 2003. Available at <http://reliefweb.int/report-uganda/war-northern-uganda-worlds-worst-forgotten-crisis-un>

15 A comprehensive peace agreement was drawn up but never signed.

16 For an account of local peace initiatives in the LRA-affected areas of South Sudan, CAR and DRC, see <http://www.c-r.org/resources/voice-peace>.

17 In December 2011 the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) counted around 30,000 war-displaced persons still living in camps, of whom 67 percent were in camps that are officially closed and 31 percent in transit camps – staging posts between camps and villages where government services are provided (IDMC (2012). *Uganda: Need to Focus on Returnees and Remaining IDPs in Transition to Development*. Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre).

central government has lessened. However, at the time of writing this study, the discovery of corruption on a massive scale in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), which administers the reconstruction budget through the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP), was raising questions in the minds of some northerners about the government's commitment to the reconstruction process.<sup>18 19</sup> While at one level this appears to be an aberration by individual criminals, some Acholi see it as part of a continuing conspiracy to keep the Acholi poor and weak.<sup>20</sup> Although the prospects for peace seem increasingly secure, recovery (both physical and political) remains fragile.

### Current tensions within Uganda

After the victory of the NRM in 1986, Museveni attempted to unite the country in a 'democratic renaissance' based on a five-tier governance pyramid, which created a chain of links between grassroots representatives and the presidency. These tiers, which continue up to the present to form the basis of the Ugandan local government system, consist of five levels of local government councils (Local Council 1 at the village or ward level, reaching up to Local Council 5 at the district level). The (elected) Chair of the district-level LC5 works in parallel with the Resident District Commissioner (RDC), who is a political nominee and the embodiment of the president at district level. For a number of years, most regions of Uganda broadly accepted this regime. However, some cleavages (for example, unrest in the Karimojong-dominated northeast and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) insurgency in the west<sup>21</sup>) did at times continue to be manifested, although at a relatively low level compared with the north.

Moreover, national-level politics have grown more tense over the last 10 years, and serious challenges have been raised to the legitimacy of Museveni's power. The 2010 elections were unusually violent, and opposition to the regime is increasingly vocal (both from the formal opposition and from within the NRM). Further indicators of political tensions are those surrounding the discovery and exploration of oil reserves in 2006.<sup>22</sup> While offering the hope of prosperity for the whole country, oil has begun to generate tensions nationally (in terms of decision-making about how oil revenue will be managed) and locally (in terms of uncertainties about the impact on local communities).<sup>23</sup>

### Regional and international dimensions

Conflict within Uganda cannot be understood separately from conflict with and within neighbouring countries. Uganda has contributed to, and has been impacted in various ways by, conflicts beyond its borders. The UPDF has engaged in military interventions in DRC, Rwanda, Somalia and Sudan at various times, and has incurred international criticism for its involvement in illegal trades in gold, coltan and timber from DRC.<sup>24</sup> However, Uganda is also seen as a place

18 'Uganda government plans budget cut after aid freeze', *The East African*, 5th December 2012.

19 A brief overview of the PRDP can be accessed from the OPM at <http://www.opm.go.ug/assets/media/resources/23/Recovery%20and%20Development%20Plan%20for%20Northern%20Uganda.pdf>, while the full plan is available at [http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/\(httpDocuments\)/F9933A32534907A8C12573B700779C11/\\$file/PRDP+Sep+2007.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/(httpDocuments)/F9933A32534907A8C12573B700779C11/$file/PRDP+Sep+2007.pdf).

20 Interview, civil society activist, 30th January 2013.

21 On Karamoja, see Saferworld (2010). Op. cit.; on the ADF, see <http://monusco.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=10727&language=en-US>.

22 Petroleum was first identified in Uganda in the 1920s. The existence of commercial quantities of oil was finally confirmed in 2006 through the activities of two companies, Hardman and Tullow (International Alert (2013). *Governance and Livelihoods in Uganda's Oil-rich Albertine Graben*. London: International Alert).

23 Strengthening government and civil society relations around the oil issue has been a focus of Alert's work in Uganda; see International Alert (2009). *Harnessing Oil for Peace and Development in Uganda*. London: International Alert, Investing in Peace No. 2; and International Alert (2013). Op. cit.

24 See, for example, J. F. Clark (2002). 'Museveni's adventures in the Congo war: Uganda's Vietnam?' in J. F. Clark (ed.) *The African Stakes of the Congo War*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers; 'Old friends, new war', *The Economist*, 19th August 1999. Available at <http://www.economist.com/node/233381>; C. Dolan (2009). Op. cit.; <http://amisom-au.org/2013/08/summit-of-amisom-troops-contributing-countries-in-kampala-uganda>, for report of Uganda's military engagements in these countries. For documentation of Uganda's involvement in the trade in natural resources from DRC, see Forest Monitor (2007). 'The timber trade and poverty alleviation: Upper Great Lakes region'; J. Cuvelier (2010). 'The complexity of resource governance in a context of state fragility: The case of DRC'. London: International Alert; and various reports of the UN Committee of Experts on DRC, available at <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1533/egroup.shtml>

of refuge for war-displaced populations, mainly from DRC but also from Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia and Sudan.

Internationally, Uganda was for a while the ‘darling’ of the donor community, because of its support to Western countries with regard to the ‘war on terror’ and because of its relative efficiency in accounting for aid funds (despite several corruption scandals). Aid accounted for 25 percent of Uganda’s 2012–2013 budget.<sup>25</sup> However, recent evidence of corruption and political repression, and concerns over the Anti-Homosexuality Bill (see page 15 below), have raised big questions and concerns for donors. In 2012 the European Union, the United Kingdom, Austria and the World Bank suspended a promised US\$300 million in aid, following the disclosure of the above-mentioned corruption scandal in the OPM.<sup>26</sup>

### 1.3 Uganda’s gender policy framework and machinery

An early action of the NRM administration in 1989 was to introduce a policy of affirmative action for women, resulting in an immediate rise in the number of women members of parliament. This was partly in recognition of the role women played in support of the NRA during the ‘bush war’.<sup>27</sup> Uganda was one of the first countries to commit to implementing the outcomes of the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women and to set up post-Beijing national women’s machinery.

The electoral system put in place by the NRM includes reserved seats for women at all levels (though women are also free to stand for election to non-reserved seats) and women parliamentarians comprise 35 percent of the current parliament.<sup>28</sup> Legal measures ensure women’s membership of some statutory decision-making bodies such as courts operated by Local Councils. However, many women activists feel that women are still effectively excluded from decision-making, whether at a local or a national level.<sup>29</sup> The lead government agency for gender policy is the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD), whose mandate includes empowering communities for sustainable and gender-responsive development. However, statutory bodies representing women lack funds and personnel, and find it hard to go beyond policy-setting and the implementation of donor-initiated projects. There is generally little presence of these bodies at local level, giving rise to a disconnect between local and national approaches and initiatives.

Although the Ugandan constitution is considered by women’s civil society groups to be relatively gender-sensitive, in the sense of attesting women’s rights, there remains the challenge of enacting legislation to make its provisions a reality. For example, while the Domestic Violence Act outlawing domestic violence was passed in 2009, the Domestic Relations Bill, which addresses equality issues, has been stalled for several years. Furthermore, although women may be present in decision-making assemblies at different levels, they have struggled to find the political space to represent and promote women’s interests actively, often finding themselves viewed as a tool by male politicians.<sup>30</sup>

Although the Ugandan government and the women’s movement hold clearly different positions on many issues, women’s organisations feel able to challenge the government, and claim to have successfully lobbied for legislative change in respect of key issues, including domestic violence,

25 ‘Uganda government plans budget cut after aid freeze’, *The East African*, 5th December 2012. Available at <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/Uganda-government-plans-budget-cut-after-aid-freeze/-/2558/1637754/-/74ee50/-/index.html>

26 Ibid.

27 S. Tamale (1999). *When Hens Begin to Crow: Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.

28 ‘Women in national parliaments’, available at <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

29 International Alert (2012). *Changing Fortunes: Post-war Economic Opportunities and the Implications for Women’s Political Participation and Empowerment in Northern Uganda*. London: International Alert, Investing in Peace No. 3. Available at <http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/publications/201009ChangingFortunesWomensEconomicOpp.pdf>

30 S. Tamale (1999). Op. cit.; International Alert (2007). *Women’s Political Participation in Countries Emerging from Conflict in the Great Lakes Region of Africa*. Report of the Consultation Workshop, Kampala.

female genital mutilation and trafficking.<sup>31</sup> There has also been collaboration between government and civil society to develop a National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 and the Goma Declaration.<sup>32</sup>

As far as gender in peacebuilding is concerned, two important concerns voiced to the research team by Ugandan gender activists are women's political participation (WPP) as Uganda emerges from conflict, and the WPS agenda, with a special focus on women's economic empowerment and on sexual violence.

Despite this policy climate, which is generally favourable to women's rights, and despite overall improvements to the health and education sectors, men and women continue to differ in terms of key development indicators illustrating their respective physical, social and economic positions. For example, government statistics from 2010 show the literacy rate for women as being 66 percent, as opposed to 79 percent for men.<sup>33</sup> Although women are economically active, representing 53 percent of the working population, their economic participation is officially measured as being less significant than that of men: women are more likely than men to be employed in the informal sector, spend a higher proportion of their time than men caring for their families, and have a higher unemployment rate than men.<sup>34</sup>

Based on its conversations with policy-makers and civil society activists, the research team made observations about the 'gender discourse', or the way gender is currently being discussed in Uganda. Two main points emerged from these observations. The first was that gender discourse in Uganda is predominantly about women, rather than gender. It is becoming more common than in the past to observe men working in government and non-government bodies addressing gender, and some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) recognise the relevance of involving men in their programmes on gender. Nevertheless, neither group (government or NGOs) has given much attention to addressing issues of men and masculinities in their work. Some women's organisations working on sexual violence report that survivors who approach them have included men; however, they feel they do not have the capacity to deal with them and so refer them on, including in some cases to the Refugee Law Project (see section 3.3 on page 36).<sup>35</sup>

Second, there is a strong heteronormative undertow to much discussion of gender in Uganda. We use this term to mean that heterosexual relationships – and one version of the heterosexual relationship in particular – are imbued with a perceived moral superiority, while other relationships are denied legitimacy. On the one hand, this results in public condemnation of homosexuality, as evidenced by the Anti-Homosexuality Bill recently passed by parliament. The Anti-Homosexuality Bill, which introduces harsh punishments for those who practise homosexuality, support homosexuals or fail to disclose them to the authorities, has been widely condemned by leaders of donor countries, who have threatened to cut back aid if the bill is ratified.<sup>36</sup> In January 2014, President Museveni refused to sign the bill which had been passed by parliament in December 2013, with the final outcome still unclear.

31 Interview, civil society leader, 6th February 2012.

32 The Uganda NAP is available at [http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/NationalActionPlans/uganda\\_nationalactionplan\\_december2008.pdf](http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/NationalActionPlans/uganda_nationalactionplan_december2008.pdf).

33 UBOS (2010). *Uganda National Household Survey 2009/2010, Socio-economic Module* (Abridged version). Kampala: Uganda Bureau of Statistics.

34 Ibid.

35 Interviews, civil society leaders, 6th–7th February 2013.

36 The draft bill's capital punishment component has been removed from the final bill in the wake of strong reactions at the local and international level. However, the current version would still impose life imprisonment sentences for consensual same-sex relations and includes measures to criminalise the 'promotion' of homosexuality, which it is feared will threaten the recent progress made on HIV/AIDS issues in Uganda (see: Human Rights House, 'Anti-homosexuality bill threatens fights against HIV in Uganda', 22nd January 2010, available at <http://www.humanrightshouse.org/Articles/13327.html>). The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has warned that "this bill stands in clear violation of the rights to liberty, privacy, non-discrimination and freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association protected by the constitution of Uganda, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ... and by the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights" (see: UNOHCHR, 'Press briefing notes on Uganda/Anti-Homosexuality Bill', 27th December 2013, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14147&LangID=E>).

On the other hand, the heteronormative discourse equally privileges conventional marriage, requiring deference to the male household head, as the desired state for both men and women. Just as people of alternative sexualities find themselves excluded, with severe consequences, so women are under pressure to conform to norms of respectability and deference within marriage. One of the ways in which this is reflected at the grassroots level (described further in sections 2 and 3 below) is the discourse around domestic violence. Here, women are advised by some anti-domestic violence campaigners to be suitably deferential in order to avoid provoking their husbands' attacks. The Anti-Pornography Bill, taking a similar moral stance, seeks to limit Ugandans' access to global popular culture via television and the internet, and to outlaw 'indecent' dressing by women as a means of protection against sexual violence.<sup>37</sup>

While such examples may seem exceptional, both of the above-mentioned bills were approved by parliament at the end of 2013 and it remains the case, in our observation, that the notion of respectability through marriage is a powerful one, which influences the life choices of many women and men. Moreover, some scholars perceive such attitudes to lie deep in Ugandan culture and to have wide-ranging repercussions. As Sylvia Tamale says, for example, describing her observations of homophobia in Uganda: "Political, cultural, and religious fundamentalisms have played a crucial role in suppressing and stifling sexual pluralism in Uganda ... The gendered politics implicit in these views are crucial, since sexual activities that go against the grain of mainstream ones subvert conventional gendered relations and hierarchies. Sexuality therefore becomes a critical site for maintaining patriarchy and reproducing African women's oppression."<sup>38</sup>

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37 See 'Uganda proposes ban on mini-skirts in move against women's rights', *The Guardian*, 5th April 2013. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/apr/05/uganda-ban-miniskirts-womens-right>

38 S. Tamale (2007). 'Out of the closet: Unveiling sexuality discourses in Uganda' in C. M. Cole, T. Manuh and S. F. Miescher (eds.) *Africa after Gender?* Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p.18.

## 2. THE ACHOLI SUB-REGION: A GENDERED OVERVIEW

### 2.1 The context

The Acholi sub-region (comprising seven districts: Agago, Amuru, Gulu, Kitgum, Lamwo, Nwoya and Pader) has been historically underdeveloped relative to the rest of Uganda. Investment in health, education and infrastructure has been relatively low when compared with the rest of Uganda. This has been primarily for two main reasons: on the one hand, the area has traditionally opposed the NRM, which is politically dominant at the national level; and, on the other, practical constraints imposed by the war discouraged government from investing in the north while the violence continued. Building in insecure areas was costly and difficult, and the risk was high that facilities would be destroyed in violence. An estimated 46.2 percent of the population in the Northern region as a whole – twice as high as the national average – is defined as “poor”, rising to 49 percent in rural areas.<sup>39 40</sup> Health and education indicators (for example, distance from school, percentage of posts filled in district-level health facilities) for the Northern region are low compared with other sub-regions.<sup>41</sup>

Two major war-related developments have added to the impoverished state of the sub-region. The first is the participation of able-bodied youth in the LRA (and to a lesser extent in the national army), with its attendant psycho-social consequences.<sup>42</sup> The second is the displacement of almost all the Acholi population, and some from other northern groups, into ‘protected villages’ or internally displaced person (IDP) camps. The first of these is dealt with in a later section (see page 23); suffice it is to say here that few families survived the war with no members being either killed, maimed or abducted. Although the main focus of international attention has been on the abduction of children, some sources assert that possibly around two-thirds of those taken have been adults, mainly but not exclusively men.<sup>43</sup>

The move into displaced camps began in the late 1980s and grew until, at the height of the crisis in 2005, almost two million people, around 95 percent of the population of the north, were living in IDP camps.<sup>44</sup> This continued until the LRA withdrew from Uganda following the ceasefire agreement in 2006, after which displaced communities began a gradual process of return to their original villages. By December 2011, around 30,000 remained in camps and transit centres.<sup>45</sup>

Camp life had a major impact on material wellbeing, as well as on social and gender relations. The physical conditions of the camps, which were generally dangerously overcrowded, facilitated the spread of disease and made privacy impossible.<sup>46</sup> Child-rearing practices of the past, when

39 UBOS (2010). Op. cit.

40 UBOS bases its poverty trend estimates on the cost of meeting caloric needs and some allowance for non-food needs.

41 UBOS (2010). Op. cit.

42 The Survey of War-Affected Youth reported that, of 741 male youth interviewed, all aged between 18 and 30, 44 had joined the Ugandan army, and of these three had been forcibly recruited. See J. Annan, C. Blattman and R. Horton (2006). *The State of Youth and Youth Protection in Northern Uganda: Findings from the Survey for War-Affected Youth*. Kampala: UNICEF Uganda. p.57.

43 J. Annan, C. Blattman and R. Horton (2006). Op. cit. By 2002, the UNICEF Abducted Child Registration and Information System had registered a total of 28,217 abducted, of whom 9,818, or around one-third, were under 18 (figures quoted in C. Dolan (2002b). ‘Which children count? The politics of children’s rights in northern Uganda’ in Lucima (ed.) *Protracted Conflict, Elusive Peace: Initiatives to End the Violence in Northern Uganda*. London: Conciliation Resources, ACCORD Issue No. 11).

44 Eighty-five percent of these were in Acholiland, and the rest in Lira and Teso.

45 IDMC (2012). Op. cit. These appear to be the most recent figures available.

46 Housing in the camps consists of round mud huts with thatched roofs, with just enough space for a person to walk between them. In addition to the health and social problems arising from this overcrowding, fire was a constant danger and hard to control because of the proximity of the huts to each other.

parents and grandparents of both sexes took an active role in the moral and cultural education of the new generation, disappeared. Courtship and marriage became less formalised, and casual sexual relations among young people more common. Marriage break-up became more frequent.<sup>47</sup>

Another major shift due to the displacement was that people were unable to fulfil their expected gender roles. In the camps, people could not carry out their traditional livelihoods such as farming because the conflict prevented access to fields. While women branched out into trading and other income-generating activities, there were fewer opportunities for men that equated with farming, so that many men were unable to fulfil their primary role as provider for their family.<sup>48</sup> Men's other key role in relation to the family, that of protector, was also denied them, since, at least in formal terms, the protection role was taken over by the army. In practice, despite this 'protection', there were high levels of insecurity in the camps, which men were powerless to overcome. This had a significant effect on gender relations.

*“Domestic violence became an overwhelming problem in the camps.”*

INTERVIEW WITH YOUNG MAN, GULU DISTRICT, FEBRUARY 2013

Men, especially older men, lost the power and prestige derived from their role as managers of the Acholi's two major resources – cattle and arable land – while new livelihoods offered women and youth opportunities for economic independence. These constraints for men, together with the general exposure to violence and the resulting trauma for all, led for many people – especially men – to intense frustration and to destructive behaviour, including high levels of alcoholism, domestic violence, criminality and suicide.<sup>49</sup>

The majority of IDPs have now returned to their villages of origin. Given the length of time the villages and their land have lain vacant, return requires both physical strength and psychological resilience, in a population that has been traumatised by the violence of the war years. The case studies below of *Roco Kwo* and the Community Education Project demonstrate how social and gender relationships, already impacted by the years in the camps, have now had to be readjusted again. This includes addressing tensions between older men, who often expect to regain their previous ascendancy once back in the village, and younger people and women, many of whom are unwilling to return to how things were.

Humanitarian and development assistance from government and non-governmental agencies generally tends to be more focused in urban centres than in rural areas. Many NGOs currently working in the Acholi sub-region are newcomers to the area and unaware of the complexities of the context; livelihood projects tend to work with those already relatively economically capable, ignoring the destitute or those most severely impacted by war.<sup>50</sup> Organisations working with youth tend to focus on returnees from the LRA, although there is little evidence that they are more vulnerable than other components of the youth population. Some specific groups (for example, child mothers) may need more intensive support.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, the national policy environment has changed during the displacement years, in ways that present new challenges for the rural Acholi population. For example, land access is affected by market liberalisation and by the growing power of commercial interests, which threatens to exploit Acholi land for oil extraction and timber production. Decentralisation and

47 For analysis of the social consequences of the war, see, in particular, C. Dolan [2002a] 'Collapsing masculinities and weak states – a case study of northern Uganda' in F. Cleaver (ed.) *Masculinities Matter! Men, Gender and Development*. London: Zed Books; J. El-Bushra and I. Sahl (2005). *Cycles of Violence: Gender Relations and Armed Conflict*. Nairobi: ACORD.

48 International Alert (2012). Op. cit.

49 C. Dolan [2009]. Op. cit.

50 K. Gelsdorf, D. Maxwell and D. Mazurana [2012]. *Livelihoods, Basic Services and Social Protection in Northern Uganda and Karamoja*. Secure Livelihoods Research Project Working Paper No. 4. London: Overseas Development Institute.

51 J. Annan, C. Blattman and R. Horton [2006]. Op. cit.; J. Annan, C. Blattman, D. Mazurana and K. Carlson [2008]. *The State of Female Youth in Northern Uganda: Findings from the Survey of War-Affected Youth (SWAY) Phase II*. Uganda: Survey of War-Affected Youth.

the creation of new districts (with new district capitals and their accompanying administrations being set up) have brought government closer to people, but with proportionately fewer resources and capacity to respond to people's needs.

Looking at each of the four themes in turn, we will assess the impact of the war on men and women in the Acholi sub-region.

## 2.2 The economic dimensions of peacebuilding seen through a gender lens

### Economic impacts of the war and displacement, and their significance for men and women

Vast tracts of fertile arable land dominate the topography of Acholiland. Agriculture, supplemented by hunting, and in recent decades by animal rearing, has for centuries been the principal means of livelihood in the region.<sup>52</sup> These activities were substantially reduced during the war, requiring many to depend instead on a combination of casual labour, petty commerce and food aid.

The Acholi lost almost all their cattle during the war, mostly to looting; in some cases, herds of several thousand head were reduced to nothing.<sup>53</sup> Hunting was difficult to practise in the camp setting. People varied in the extent to which they were able to practise agriculture. Although 80 percent of the population continued to do so, access to land was limited.<sup>54</sup> In some camps, people had access to small plots nearby, or hired plots from local people. However, only an estimated quarter of the displaced population managed to farm their home lands.<sup>55</sup> While some displaced communities were within a few miles of their original homes, and were able to return to tend and gather crops or to go hunting from time to time, others were displaced far away, or feared to return because of frequent attacks in remote rural areas by both the LRA and the UPDF. The latter frequently imposed curfews, while the LRA prohibited working on Fridays and Sundays, disrupting the local economy.<sup>56</sup>

Given the lack of investment in education throughout the north, the main opportunities offered by the labour market were petty trade and casual labour. Those with some disposable income employed others as labourers on their farms, to cut grass or to carry water.<sup>57</sup> The most usual occupations for men were brick-making, acting as guards and charcoal-making. For women, they were mainly brewing, food-selling and firewood-selling. Despite the limited scope for agriculture, some surplus produce was commercialised, to the benefit of traders who had some capital and storage facilities. Women tended to travel between camps buying up small items of produce, and retailing it to larger-scale, generally male, merchants.<sup>58</sup> In addition to commerce, women continued to carry out their domestic tasks. In some cases, men and women, young and adult, were reported to have adopted the economic survival strategy of entering into sexual relationships with others who could support them financially.<sup>59 60</sup>

The breakdown of traditional authority patterns, as women became more economically independent, has been supported by urbanisation and the activities of civil society organisations encouraging women's participation in business. Many women have gained access to loans

52 R. Atkinson (2010). *Op. cit.*

53 PVP (no date). *Men and Armed Conflict: Gulu District Northern Uganda 1986–1999*. Gulu: People's Voice for Peace.

54 K. Gelsdorf, D. Maxwell and D. Mazurana (2012). *Op. cit.*

55 *Ibid.*

56 C. Dolan (2009). *Op. cit.*

57 *Ibid.*

58 *Ibid.*

59 J. El-Bushra and I. Sahl (2005). *Op. cit.*

60 This included young men and women forming relationships with older, wealthier 'sugar daddies' and 'sugar mummies', and older people marrying a person wealthier than themselves.

and become owners of buildings, land and their own businesses.<sup>61</sup> NGOs and human rights organisations have provided training and credit for many women. However, changes to women's economic status should not be overestimated. There is widespread mistrust among women of both government and non-government initiatives to support them economically: complaints include corrupt management of government schemes to support economic projects, and training offered by NGOs in income-generating activities that turn out to be unviable.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, few women have been able to take on leadership roles in commerce, or capitalise on economic success to raise their profile in political or decision-making bodies, since they are still working mainly to meet their practical needs and ensure the survival of their families.<sup>63</sup>

### The return from the IDP camps

People began returning to their homes in 2006, which had picked up by 2008. Not all went back together – adult men, accompanied by some able-bodied youth and women, tended to return first, to prepare housing and start clearing land. The process of return to previously abandoned villages presented a new set of difficulties, especially early on in the process, to which individuals and families have had to make both practical and psychological adjustments. For example, most returning households suffered from an almost complete absence of assets, including basic items such as household utensils and radios. Household labour was in high demand and people had to take up unaccustomed activities. In some communities, women were expected to help with land clearance, which had previously been seen as men's role (see section 3.2 below). Infrastructure development and investment in services have not kept pace with the population: many villages are without water-points, schools or roads.<sup>64</sup>

A number of new problems have arisen in relation to land ownership and use. In most cases, when people return from IDP camps to their farms, overgrown bush has to be cleared for farming, requiring intensive labour. According to community members interviewed in connection with this research, some lands are no longer available, having been allocated to commercial farmers.<sup>65</sup> In areas where oil and gas exploration is ongoing, there have been suggestions that agricultural livelihoods are being affected by the secondary impacts of exploration. This might take the form, for example, of crop spoilage by animals disturbed by drilling, and of oil companies dumping waste products on farmers' land.<sup>66</sup> Land-grabbing is common, partly because some early returnees took advantage of the situation to adjust boundaries with their neighbours' fields, but also because powerful individuals have often attempted to browbeat their neighbours into relinquishing their land.<sup>67 68</sup> Between 30 and 60 percent of returnees in different locations are estimated to have been involved in recorded land conflict, with a further unknown number of disputes being unreported or settled amicably.<sup>69</sup>

Most Acholi land is either communally owned or owned by families or individuals under customary tenure, i.e. they have rights of use but disposal must be agreed by chiefs and elders and by other family members. The basic principle is that land is for the benefit of the clan; any changes in ownership or use rights must be agreed by the clan and sanctioned by the elders.<sup>70</sup> Chiefs have a

61 A. Branch (2008). *Gulu town in war and peace? Displacement, humanitarianism and post-war crisis*. Working Paper Series 2, No. 36. London: Crisis States Research Centre, London School of Economics.

62 P. Kabahesi (2009). 'An exploration of peace-building challenges faced by Acholi women in Gulu, northern Uganda', Masters treatise, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

63 International Alert (2012). Op. cit.

64 Field trip observations, March 2013.

65 In 2012 the High Court turned down an appeal by Amuru district community leaders against a decision to award 20,000 hectares of land to a sugar-producing company. The High Court's decision turned on its view that the land in question was public land and not customary land as the community leaders had argued. ACCS (2013). *Northern Uganda Conflict Analysis*. Kampala: Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity.

66 International Alert (2013). Op. cit.

67 C. Burke and E. Egaru (2011). *Identification of Good Practices in Land Conflict Resolution in Acholi*. Kampala: United Nations Resident Co-ordinator's Office.

68 The latter problem is of course not a new one.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

traditional responsibility to mediate in land disputes: in the small proportion of cases that require adjudication rather than mediation, these are referred to LC1 and LC2 courts,<sup>71</sup> or in extreme cases to magistrates' courts. Land disputes currently account for most of the cases handled by chiefs and LC courts, and most people are satisfied with their handling of them.<sup>72</sup> However, customary and statutory systems operate in parallel, and both may be accessed to resolve land disputes: both are poorly understood at the local level, and this enlarges the scope for abuse.<sup>73</sup>

The lack of clarity and knowledge about land law opens the way for intimidation of LCs by those representing powerful interests. The interests of less powerful groups tend to be the least often respected. Among these are women, especially those who have lower educational levels and/or limited economic resources, and to a lesser extent young men.<sup>74 75</sup> The most affected tend to be widows, orphans, child mothers and returning abductees, i.e. those who have for whatever reason lost contact with their husbands or parents who could vouch for them and protect their interests.<sup>76</sup> Women do have customary rights to own land, and as wives should be consulted in decisions about land sales. However, in practice, 73 percent of women across the Acholi sub-region have no formal land ownership.<sup>77</sup> Many formerly abducted or displaced people have lost papers which might reinforce their case for legal recognition of their land rights. In addition to formal ownership, women and young women and men may have rights in family land, which they currently have difficulty claiming because of the lack of substantiating evidence. These factors make it relatively easy for their relatives or other community members to intimidate them and deny them access to land they need for their survival, or simply to sell the land, having claimed ownership of it themselves.<sup>78</sup>

Rural LC2 courts must, by law, be composed of five people, of whom two must be women. However, this may not be sufficient to protect women's interests, especially considering the relatively low literacy level among women in northern Uganda.<sup>79 80</sup>

### 2.3 The continuum of gendered violence<sup>81</sup>

After the Ugandan civil war ended in the NRM victory of 1986, people in the Acholi sub-region continued to witness extraordinary violence as the war carried on between the national army, the UPDF and a succession of resistance movements culminating in the LRA. Violence perpetrated by the LRA and by the UPDF has been mirrored by interpersonal violence within households and communities, and by the institutional violence of discrimination and neglect, in what Chris Dolan describes as "social torture",<sup>82</sup> with the roles of perpetrators, victims and bystanders all played out on a mass scale.

Gender has implicitly and explicitly figured in this violence, both in terms of differential impacts and as a causative factor. LRA violence took different forms for men and women, boys and girls (see below on inter-generational dynamics). Research by the Refugee Law Project (RLP) revealed a high incidence of sexual violence against men, with the majority of cases surfacing having

71 Local Councils at the ward and parish levels (LC1 and LC2) have some limited decision-making powers in local dispute resolution. Both have the capacity to deal with land disputes, but which of the two is the more usually accessed varies from place to place.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Young people generally are said to be less interested than their elders in pursuing land claims, a reflection of the frequent feelings expressed by youth of alienation from the rural environment.

76 P. Kabahezi (2009). Op. cit.

77 C. Burke and E. Egaru (2011). Op. cit.

78 P. Kabahezi (2009). Op. cit.

79 C. Burke and E. Egaru (2011). Op. cit.

80 UBOS (2010) gives the literacy rate as 66 percent for women and 79 percent for men.

81 Detailed information and analysis for this section are largely taken from C. Dolan (2002a). Op. cit.; C. Dolan (2009). Op. cit.; and A. Branch (2011), Op. cit., with further elaboration drawn from interviews with communities for this research.

82 C. Dolan (2009). Op. cit.

been perpetrated by members of the UPDF.<sup>83 84</sup> While openness about male survivors of sexual violence during the conflict seems to be increasing, sexual violence after the conflict or within a community remains a taboo subject. At the interpersonal level, the larger part of incidents of domestic violence appears to have been carried out by men on women, although the reverse also happens. For example, CARE's monitoring of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) revealed a substantial proportion of female perpetrators (16 percent), while 25 percent of the survivors were men (see section 3.2 on *Roco Kwo* case study).

As a causative factor, the case is not hard to make for links between the frustrations of life in the war zone and levels of destructive interpersonal behaviour. The 'ideal man' is expected to provide for the material needs of women and children, but the reality of life in the displaced camps – the limited livelihood opportunities, the loss of Acholi cattle and the dependence on (irregular) food aid – prevented them from doing so. While the ideal man is characterised by being married and begetting children, many men were unable to put together the bridewealth – either in cattle or in cash – which was required for marriage to be formalised. This meant that they could not be accorded the status of 'adult'.<sup>85</sup> 'Ordinary' men were unable to provide protection for their families from attacks by the LRA and the UPDF. Skill in the use of dialogue rather than aggression as a means of solving problems – another marker of 'ideal' masculinity – became impossible, given the intractable nature of many problems facing people. Thus, Acholi men were 'thwarted' at every turn,<sup>86</sup> directing their frustrations at those around them and at themselves, in the form of domestic violence, criminal violence, alcoholism and suicide.<sup>87</sup>

*“My parents threw me out because they said I had a demon inside of me.”*

TRANSGENDER INTERVIEWEE, KAMPALA, NOVEMBER 2012

Violence is not confined to northern Uganda. At the national level, deep divisions can be seen between different ethnicities and religions, between Ugandans and refugees, and between political factions, and these often erupt into violence. The move to increase the criminalisation of homosexuality through the Anti-Homosexuality Bill (see page 15 above) has enhanced the risks of different forms of violence against lesbians, gays, bisexuals as well as transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons. The work of RLP (see section 3.3 below) has highlighted an undercurrent of male vulnerability to violence throughout the country, with certain particular groups of men (for example, refugees, sexual and gender minorities) particularly at risk. Moreover, Uganda's military ventures in Somalia, DRC and Sudan place the country within a regional environment that normalises violence, and this too is evidenced through RLP's work with refugees. Refugees display the traumatic effects of violence experienced both in their home countries and in Uganda, and this includes sexual violence against both women and men.<sup>88</sup>

## 2.4 Inter-generational dynamics

Uganda is a young population: nationally, children under 15 years represent 51 percent of the country's 30.7 million population<sup>89</sup> and life expectancy is 50.4 years.<sup>90</sup> The most significant

83 S. Finnstrom (2008). *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda*. Durham: Duke University Press; C. Dolan (2009). Op. cit.

84 The Refugee Law Project film *They Slept With Me* contains testimonies from survivors. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dxaFqezrXg>

85 C. Dolan (2009). Op. cit.; J. El-Bushra and I. Sahl (2005). Op. cit.

86 The 'thwarting' of gender identities is often thought to be a factor contributing to violence. People who are unable to live out their gendered identities in a satisfactory way, because of circumstances they cannot control, are more likely to resort to violence because of the frustrations this generates. See H. Moore (1994). *A Passion for Difference*. London: Polity Press; C. Dolan (2002a). Op. cit.; C. Dolan (2009). Op. cit.

87 Ibid.

88 See, for example, the RLP film *Gender Against Men*. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJSI99HQYXc>

89 UBOS (2010). Op. cit.

90 K. Gelsdorf, D. Maxwell and D. Mazurana (2012). Op. cit.

concerns around age issues in the current Acholi context are the impact of the war on young people and on the outlook for their future, and challenges to the position of the elders that have come to light as a result of the war.

Although the official definition of 'youth' in Uganda refers to the age range 18–35 years,<sup>91</sup> the concept of 'youth' is applied differently in different cultural settings. For example, in some contexts, a person is defined as a 'youth' until he or she marries. Lack of a precise definition of 'youth' and 'children' affects discourse around the issue of abductions by the LRA, and it is difficult to say definitively how many children, youth or adults were abducted or how many have returned.<sup>92</sup> The Survey of War-Affected Youth (SWAY) estimates that up to 66,000 people between the ages of 13 and 30 were abducted, constituting one third of male youth and one sixth of female youth.<sup>93</sup> By 2004, 22,000 children had returned through reception centres where they received rehabilitation support; after this date, the numbers recorded in the centres fell sharply.<sup>94 95</sup>

While the LRA tended to release young children and adults within a few days of their abduction, adolescents were often kept for weeks or sometimes years. Abducted children, both girls and boys, were forced into service by the LRA, first as porters and later as fighters. An estimated quarter of the girls were allocated as wives to LRA officers, and, of these, half gave birth to children.<sup>96</sup> Many abducted children were obliged to witness or carry out acts of extreme violence, partly to instil fear and discipline, partly to inure them to fighting, and partly to limit their options to return.<sup>97</sup>

In the beginning, girls returning from the LRA with children – and their children – suffered significant discrimination, from their own families and from the authorities.<sup>98</sup> In general, however, the reintegration of returning abductees appears to have become less problematic over time. This was particularly the case in rural areas where abductees contributed their labour to the rehabilitation of their communities. In 2008 the SWAY study concluded that few differences could be seen between abductees and non-abductees in terms of employment, education and income, which were at crisis levels for all categories of young people. Further, it observed few differences overall in these indicators between male and female youth. However, it did find that girls who had spent long years in forced marriage had witnessed the most serious violence, were the most vulnerable category of young people to sexual and other forms of violence, and displayed greater levels of distress.<sup>99</sup>

The international community was for several years preoccupied with providing support to abducted children. However, this concern overlooked the poor conditions in which young people generally in the north were living, including limited education and employment opportunities and poor health indicators. Abducted girls forced into marriage in the bush, for example, might well have expected early withdrawal from school and early marriage and child-bearing, had they

91 Republic of Uganda (2001). *The National Youth Policy: A Vision for Youth in the 21st Century*. Kampala, Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development.

92 Main sources on abducted children are C. Dolan (2002b). *Op. cit.*; Parliament of Uganda (2004). 'Report of the Select Committee on humanitarian and security situation in the Acholi, Teso and Lango sub-regions'; Child Soldiers International (2008). 'Uganda' in *Global Report 2008*. London: Child Soldiers International, pp.387–91; and documentation from the Survey of War-Affected Youth (SWAY) (summarised in J. Annan, C. Blattman and R. Horton (2006). *Op. cit.* and J. Annan, C. Blattman, D. Mazurana, and K. Carlson (2008). *Op. cit.*).

93 Sixty-six percent and 46 percent of male and female abductees respectively were taken for at least two weeks. About one-fifth of young people abducted were aged between 18 and 30. Twenty-two percent of males and 7 percent of females abducted had not returned by the time of the survey. J. Annan, C. Blattman and R. Horton (2006). *Op. cit.*

94 Parliament of Uganda (2004). *Op. cit.*; J. Annan, C. Blattman and R. Horton (2006). *Op. cit.*

95 The main reception centres were run by civil society organisations – principally World Vision and the local Gulu Save the Children Organisation (GUSCO) – and funded by international donors.

96 *Ibid.*

97 J. Annan, C. Blattman and R. Horton (2006). *Op. cit.*

98 K. Aciro (2007). 'Child mothers in the northern Uganda conflict' in *A Lost Generation: Young People and Conflict in Africa*. Nairobi: ACORD and DCI.

99 J. Annan, C. Blattman and R. Horton (2006). *Op. cit.*; J. Annan, C. Blattman, D. Mazurana and K. Carlson (2008). *Op. cit.*

not been abducted. In 2008, one in five girls was estimated to have received no education at all, and one in three to be functionally illiterate.<sup>100</sup> The SWAY study recommended raising service standards for all young people in the region, while prioritising those most vulnerable, whether abductees or not.<sup>101</sup>

More recent studies emphasise the continuing lack of opportunity for young people, and particularly the lack of opportunities for employment (jobs, skills) or capital for self-employment. This appears to be considerably more marked for female youth than for males. A recent study by Alert, for example, found that 40.3 percent of Acholi youth had no income of any kind, and in Acholi and Lango less than 2 percent of youth had jobs. Of those employed, most worked in agriculture. Two-thirds of those without income were female youth; young women were twice as likely as young men to be dependent on the informal sector, and less than half as likely as young men to find work in agriculture or vocational employment.<sup>102</sup>

Life in camps had serious impacts on young people who were not abducted. Many have become alienated from rural life and have refused to return to it, because the facilities and opportunities existing there are so limited. Some young people have half-returned, dividing their time between their rural community and town. Older people express concern that rural productivity, and the rural lifestyle generally, are at risk of dying out, with increasingly few young people willing to take it up.<sup>103</sup>

*“In the camps, we didn’t respect each other. Now we have learned to respect each other again.”*

YOUNG MALE INTERVIEWEE, GULU DISTRICT, FEBRUARY 2013

This also reflects changing relationships between younger and older people, especially among men. In essence, both older and younger people perceive the war to have impacted negatively on their social status. Older people express regret at the demise of the ‘firesides’, a daily evening coming together of family members in which events of the day were talked over and lessons for the young emphasised. Firesides had a critical function in gender socialisation, now almost totally defunct. Older people also believe that the youth learned ‘bad’ habits in the displaced camps, and that they have abandoned respect for elders and tradition.<sup>104</sup> The move at the turn of the millennium to reinstall the Acholi chiefs and reintroduce cleansing and reconciliation ceremonies, ostensibly as a peacebuilding measure and a means of attracting abducted youth to return from the bush, has been interpreted by some as an attempt to re-establish the power of the older men, which years of living in camps eroded.<sup>105</sup>

Older people often consider the pre-war period as being the ideal state of Acholi culture, where gender roles were known and accepted by all, women and young people were obedient to their fathers and husbands, and people lived in harmony and prosperity. This regret for the passing of the ‘golden age’ is not confined to older people: the young also feel let down by a situation in which the older generation is no longer equipped to provide for and protect them, but in which they have instead been catapulted into a situation of material and economic autonomy and insecurity.<sup>106</sup>

100 J. Annan, C. Blattman, D. Mazurana and K. Carlson (2008). Op. cit.

101 J. Annan, C. Blattman and R. Horton (2006). Op. cit.

102 International Alert (2013). *Youth Perceptions on Economic Opportunity in Northern Uganda: Findings from Acholi and Lango*. London: International Alert, Investing in Peace No. 4.

103 Interviews, community members, 31st January to 2nd February 2013.

104 For example, traditional dances, performed by older people who had the requisite knowledge, were not normally performed in front of children. However, in the camp setting, they were performed (if at all) in confined settings where all could see. El-Bushra and Dolan describe how witnessing adults dancing was considered to have exposed young people to unsuitable behavioural role models. [J. El-Bushra and C. Dolan (2002). ‘Don’t touch, just listen! Popular performance from Uganda’, *Review of African Political Economy* 29/92.]

105 C. Dolan (2009). Op. cit.; A. Branch (2011). Op. cit.

106 J. El-Bushra and I. Sahl (2005). Op. cit.

For older men, the rising independence of women and youth is not simply a regrettable social change brought on by the conditions of the war: rather, both the social change and the war have been seen by some as a product of the Acholi's precarious identity within the Ugandan polity. Many perceive equal rights legislation – alongside the abandonment of the Luo (Acholi) language as a medium of instruction in schools and land privatisation – as a deliberate attempt to undermine Acholi culture and values.<sup>107</sup>

The position of elders, who are almost exclusively male, has been compromised, on the one hand, because of poverty (their decision-making power was in the past based on the resources they had amassed and the consequent dependency on them of youth and women), and, on the other, because of their perceived co-optation by government. Men interviewed by the Ugandan NGO People's Voice for Peace (PVP) testified that for them the war was itself a consequence of the elders failing either to stand up to central government or to keep up effective communication with the LRA ('our children in the bush'). Furthermore, they believed that the elders, living an easy lifestyle because of official subventions (travel allowances to attend meetings for example), are now in government's pocket and too far removed from the grassroots to represent their fellow clans-people as they claim to do.<sup>108</sup>

## 2.5 Access to justice

The major justice concerns in Acholiland currently are two-fold. On the one hand, there is the issue of accounting for what happened during the war; on the other, there is the need to regulate the new environment people find themselves in as a result of the return from the bush and from the displaced camps.

Many people have undertaken cleansing rituals and other ceremonies to absolve themselves from the ritual stain of events during the war.<sup>109</sup> These are restorative rather than retributive mechanisms, and are intended to overcome the breakdown in relationships that resulted from violence. Examples include stepping on eggs undertaken by returning abductees who had killed or otherwise abused members of the community, prior to re-entering their community of origin, and the shared drinking of bitter liquid to signify penance and reconciliation after a murder. Many people believe that undertaking these rituals has a positive impact both on the mental health of individuals and on the general state of conflict and peace in the region.<sup>110</sup> However, not everyone holds such a rosy view, and those who undertook these rituals did not necessarily find solace as a result. For example, abducted children have found that acceptance back into their community is not guaranteed by this means.<sup>111</sup>

Some ceremonies reflect a rigidly patriarchal view of gender roles and identities, such as the cleansing ceremonies undergone by female survivors of sexual violence, the aim of which is to cleanse the woman, thereby implicitly holding her responsible. If the perpetrator is known, he is expected to compensate the woman's family, rather than her directly. Likewise, domestic violence against women is dealt with in the 'traditional' code by truth-telling before the (male) elders, the aim being to preserve family unity rather than to sanction abuse. The moral imperative to uphold the patriarchal family is not exclusive to Acholi cultural institutions. It also motivates the work of some civil society and government organisations and campaigners against domestic violence, for whom women bear responsibility for their treatment by being insufficiently deferential to their husbands.<sup>112</sup>

107 Ibid.

108 PVP (no date). Op. cit.

109 J. Annan, C. Blattman and R. Horton (2006). Op. cit.

110 Based on our interviews, Acholi former UPDF soldiers also underwent cleansing ceremonies following their discharge from the armed forces. However, this was not considered as pressing as the case of the abductees, as the community felt that the latter were more haunted by the traumas of conflict (and thus potentially more dangerous) than the former soldiers.

111 Annan et al (2006); J. Annan, C. Blattman, D. Mazurana and K. Carlson (2008). Op. cit.

112 For example, comments made by a female LC5 member to a focus group discussion in Nwoya, 31st January 2013.

Moreover, there are a number of abuses that the existing range of rituals does not cover. These include mass murder, sexual violence against men and LRA-enforced intra-familial violence by children, all actions that people believe were not known before the war.<sup>113</sup> It also includes abuses carried out by non-Acholi, including most particularly non-Acholi members of the UPDF. Amongst northerners, there is much resentment that the PRDP allocated funding to road and infrastructure projects and relatively little for reconciliation and transitional justice. Despite various national-level discussions on a possible truth and reconciliation process, and the recent publication of a draft national transitional justice policy, to date no decision has been reached on what form that process should take, a fact that has engendered much resentment and impacted negatively on people's trust in the formal justice system. Whatever the outcome of the truth and reconciliation debate, it is clear that the mere existence of cleansing and reconciliation rituals will not satisfy the deep-seated emotions generated among northern Ugandans at the abuses they have suffered during the war.<sup>114</sup>

The government's amnesty for insurgents (among whom LRA members are included) applies to all, including officers.<sup>115</sup> This occasions considerable resentment, as it implies impunity for those who have been responsible for serious abuses.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, some are supported by the state and given privileges,<sup>117</sup> in contrast to the rank and file who have to make their own way. Some senior men have continued to live with their 'bush wives' and to support their children financially, while others refuse to acknowledge them.<sup>118</sup> Other forced wives are unwilling to return to their 'bush husbands'.<sup>119</sup>

Apart from LRA-related issues, other widespread justice concerns include land conflict (see section 2.2 above) and domestic violence. Husbands are widely understood to have both the right and the duty to chastise their wives – a view held by men and women alike. Violence by women against men is also common.<sup>120</sup> However, while in the past many women accepted beatings as the norm (and even a proof of commitment), they are increasingly disinclined to do so; younger women appear to reject it.<sup>121</sup>

The key actors in local dispute resolution are elders and local councillors (LCs).<sup>122</sup> These operate customary and statutory legal systems, and people seeking redress in principle have a choice of which system to use. In practice, formal processes tend to be inaccessible, expensive and lengthy, and to result in a formal judgment, while traditional processes are more accessible but are focused on repairing relationships rather than addressing rights. LCs are more likely to have some women members; the possibility of female elders is not excluded, but, in practice, this is not common. Both LCs and elders are mainly older people, although young men have a semi-formal role as *askaris*, tasked with executing the decisions of the LC courts.

113 Interview, civil society activist, 30th January 2013.

114 United Nations (2007). *Making Peace our Own: Victims' Perceptions of Accountability, Reconciliation and Transitional Justice in Northern Uganda*. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

115 Joseph Kony and his main lieutenants, all indicted by the International Criminal Court, are excepted from the amnesty.

116 See, for example, 'UGANDA: Amnesty or prosecution for war criminals?', *IRIN Humanitarian News and Analysis*, 17th May 2012. Available at <http://irinnews.org/Report/95476/>

117 Privileges may include housing and vehicles, as well as impunity from prosecution.

118 K. Aciro (2007). Op. cit.

119 J. Annan, C. Blattman, D. Mazurana and K. Carlson (2008). Op. cit.

120 CARE International's counselling units received high volumes of sexual and domestic violence cases; it estimated that at least 25 percent of survivors presenting were men [see *Roco Kwo* case study below].

121 J. Annan, C. Blattman, D. Mazurana and K. Carlson (2008). Op. cit.

122 International Alert (2012). Op. cit.; C. Burke and E. Egaru (2011). Op. cit.

### 3. SELECTED PROJECT CASE STUDIES

This section describes three projects that approach peacebuilding through a gender lens. Two are community-based projects located in northern Uganda, which aim to contribute towards reshaping gender relations in the context of post-war recovery. The third is Kampala-based and addresses issues of forced displacement both into and within Uganda, working at both the practical and the policy levels.

Although they vary in terms of their institutional character, and even though each is based on a different interpretation of gender, together they highlight the 'relational' dimensions of a gender approach.<sup>123</sup> All three grapple in different ways with the issue of men, masculinities and gendered vulnerabilities. In the case of the Community Education Project and *Roco Kwo*, community development methodologies are applied, which seek to establish equality between men and women through dialogue. Both acknowledge the importance of linking gender analytically to other factors – most particularly, age in the case of the Community Education Project and economic status in the case of *Roco Kwo*. RLP, based on its experience with refugee populations, raises questions about the vulnerability of men and of sexual minorities, thus pushing for an inclusive understanding of gender at both the policy and the practice levels.<sup>124</sup>

#### 3.1 Community Education Project, Gulu district<sup>125</sup>

##### Summary

This project, which took place in two villages (Abwochguna and Jengtong, situated in Koro and Bungatira sub-counties, respectively) from 2008 to 2010, was based on the hypothesis that psycho-social education supports post-conflict reconstruction more effectively than humanitarian aid or materialistically focused projects. The project started with a year of ethnographic research, and was followed by a further year in which the education project itself was implemented, based on evidence from the research.

The education project used discovery-based pedagogies focusing on topics chosen by participants: family and community relations, gender power relations, trauma and post-war grief, domestic violence, participatory planning and decision-making, conflict resolution, social support, HIV and AIDS, reproductive health and sanitation education, forced sex, and reintegration of rebel fighters. It worked with groups of men, women, and male and female youths, with its major focus on deconstructing gender identities. An auto-evaluation identified the project's impacts as including: greater egalitarianism within families along with warmer relationships, increased participatory planning and decision-making within families, increased community integration, significantly reduced levels of violence, and greater responsibility in sexual relations. Improved economic wellbeing was an additional benefit, as a result of increasing levels of participation in economic activities in place of dependence on relief supplies.

<sup>123</sup> Selection of the projects was carried out by the research team in collaboration with Alert's Kampala office, following an internet search.

<sup>124</sup> Further reflection and analysis on the implications of these different approaches will form part of the final synthesis report of the four-country project.

<sup>125</sup> This report is adapted (with the author's permission) from Colette Harris (2012). *The Importance of Post-conflict Socio-cultural Education Programmes: A Case Study from Northern Uganda*. MICROCON Research Working Paper 64. Brighton: MICROCON, with the addition of notes from Alert's field visit to Uganda in January–February 2013. The project was funded by the EU's MICROCON programme.

## Background

The project took place in villages from which people had been displaced and to which they had started returning shortly before the project started. As described in section 2 above, on their return to the villages, residents encountered much physical hardship, and with it social tensions resulting from the adjustment to a new and stressful situation.

Tensions existed between older and younger people, and between men and women, around decision-making power and privileges. In the past, older men controlled most resources, which was seen as entitling them to the deference and respect of wives and children in all decision-making; in the new situation, these groups could no longer rely on their husbands and fathers for material support and so withdrew this deference, which the men deeply resented. Women complained of having to work in the fields, and that their husbands often spent the proceeds from sale of the crops so produced on their own needs, rather than on family requirements.

*“In the past, we used to think that the ideal man was one who was a hard worker, a warrior and promiscuous. Now we don’t believe in being promiscuous and being warriors, but we should still work hard.”*

YOUNG MAN INTERVIEWED IN ABWOCH GUNA, FEBRUARY 2013

The project was conceived both as a practical intervention and as a way of adding to material gathered through similar interventions carried out by the project director in Tajikistan, aimed at demonstrating that psycho-social recovery is as important as material support or economic development in the context of post-conflict reconstruction. This was considered to be in contrast to the standard aid paradigm, in which market stimulation is a dominant concern. The educational approach adopted by the project was based on Freirean methodology, in which facilitators lead participants through a process of reflection and learning, based on problem-solving dialogue.<sup>126</sup>

## Activities

The first year of the project was taken up with ethnographic research: two locally based researchers (one male and one female)<sup>127</sup> went to each village one day a week. They observed how people were coping with the new situation, and noted changes in interpersonal relationships resulting from adaptation to this new situation. This information later enabled the researchers – their role changing to that of facilitators of the education project – to engage in informed debate with community members about how well they were dealing with the issues confronting them.

The education project itself followed in the second year. Each week for a year, community members – in four groups according to age and sex – held discussions for around 90 minutes. Subsequently, each group reported a summary of their discussion to the other groups.

Not all community members took part,<sup>128</sup> and attendance was slow at first, but a momentum built up as those attending spread the news that the discussions were important and useful. The researchers/facilitators followed up each session with household visits to get to know participants’ situations more closely. The trust generated through this process enabled the researchers to become close to the participants and broach deeply sensitive issues with them. The facilitators, one of whom was a trained counsellor, offered counselling when they encountered people with serious problems, and sometimes arranged group counselling or identified sources of professional mental health care in more serious cases.

<sup>126</sup> The method used here has much in common with Participatory Learning and Action, REFLECT, and Stepping Stones.

<sup>127</sup> One of whom is a staff member of RLP.

<sup>128</sup> There was a core group of around 40 people in each village.

The initial focus of discussion was problem identification. Material problems identified included food insecurity, lack of boreholes, cash for school fees,<sup>129</sup> and how to care for the many vulnerable people including those with disabilities, AIDS orphans and child-headed households. Health-related problems included sexual dysfunctions especially among men, sexually transmitted diseases/infections (STD/Is), malnutrition, diarrhoeal diseases, malaria, reproductive health issues (including HIV and AIDS), sickle-cell anaemia, tuberculosis, hepatitis, trauma, hypertension and other unexplained sicknesses that had not been medically diagnosed.

The project's aim was not to provide material support, or medical care other than some minor help with contraception, but rather to support the population in a process of critical thinking aimed at improving their management of their environment. For instance, regarding health issues, the aim was for them to learn the causes and symptoms of diseases and especially to encourage a proactive approach to maintaining good health. The main emphasis, however, was on social problems. These were many, summarised by the project as follows:

1. Lack of overall community cohesion;
2. Alcohol abuse (a major trigger of fighting and domestic violence);
3. Interpersonal friction and violence, including domestic violence;
4. Poverty as a result of dependency syndrome;
5. Poor access to information about available services;
6. Other problems with family relationships, both marital and parent-child, including men's attempts to impose their authority on other family members;
7. Other gender-related problems, including forcing sex on (underage) girls and keeping girls (but not boys) from school;
8. Obstacles to the reintegration of LRA returnees;
9. Loss of trust in themselves (self-respect) and each other.

Inter-generational gender tensions underlay these problems: in brief, older people (and especially older men) sought a return to an imagined 'golden' past in which women and younger men obeyed them, while in present-day reality this could no longer be taken for granted. Gender-age issues were at the root of many quarrels, especially the desire of older men to retain their controlling position. However, they lacked much of the authority of their fathers and grandfathers as a result of the loss of the resources that had formed the basis of patriarchal power in the past.

With limited capacity to cultivate such land as was available, food production was reduced compared with the past. Moreover, with no animals or other form of traction for ploughing, it was necessary for male household heads to mobilise all available labour for land preparation, while previously this would have been done by men alone. This meant that children's time was diverted from school attendance, and women's from other productive activities. However, the male household heads were not willing to provide any form of compensation to them for doing this, nor did they allow others to share in decision-making about resource allocation. Older men's feelings of vulnerability often led them to indulge in violence, verbal and/or physical.

When people first returned from the camps, distrust was high between both genders and generations. Women blamed men for the war. Women and men were both keen to get back to the villages, but accused each other of dragging their feet and preferring dependency in the camps. The elderly felt disrespected by the youth, while youth felt the older generation had let them down and had little to offer. Young people also blamed the elders for the war, while elders accused youths of criminal behaviour and lax sexual conduct.

<sup>129</sup> Education in state primary schools (and in some pilot secondary schools) is free in Uganda, but parents must pay for uniforms, school meals, Parents Association membership, and some books and writing supplies.

The first step in addressing these problems was to develop a gender analysis. Groups were asked to define the ideal man and the ideal woman, to spell out gender roles within the household (and their seasonal variations) and to describe patterns of access to and control of resources. From this, it became clear to participants that, while older men had most decision-making power and material assets, women did most of the labour, both in the home and in the fields. This included clearing fields, normally a man's job, since in the absence of ploughs or oxen men were unable to clear fields on their own. However, this did not give women power since they had no claims on their husbands' land. Moreover, the fact that the latter had paid bridewealth made men insist they owned the women and anything they produced, including any fruits of their labour, whether crops or children. In developing this analysis with the groups, the facilitators cross-checked between the men and the women, thus enabling each to challenge the other's perspectives.

Initial discussions arising out of this analysis were intensive and often involved contention. Eventually, the older men's groups agreed that, in the current circumstances, they could not expect to have unalloyed decision-making power as they had done in the past, and that they would have to allow women and youths more say, especially about things that concerned them such as school fees. Discussions between young men and women about the impact of rape on girls led, after some months of debate, to the young men becoming aware of the suffering caused and vowing to defend girls' interests.

Once these most contentious gender issues were out of the way, the groups felt more able to turn to other concerns, such as the treatment of HIV positive people or LRA returnees, alcoholism and responsible parenting. The project did not determine the agenda of discussions in advance, but developed them on the basis of the problem identification exercise and based on participants' requests to address specific issues. Topics requested included sexual and reproductive health advice, land rights (including widows' rights to land), leadership and politics, and domestic violence. Facilitators were able to call in experts from NGOs working locally to address specialist topics.

The young women's group was difficult to facilitate since young women faced real issues in speaking out in public fora, especially in front of their in-laws. They talked freely in their own group, but plenary feedback was difficult for them, and some men laughed at their presentations. The facilitators dealt with this by actively seeking out their views and by giving them time and encouragement. Members of the youth groups who were still at school – especially girls, who also had to help in the house – found it difficult to keep up attendance; family visits enabled the facilitators to brief them on discussions and find out more about their views.

### Impact

The project led to marked improvements both in social relationships and in material wellbeing. The project's own final self-evaluation found that the most important sessions – the ones that seemed to have created the greatest impact and to have been most taken up outside as well as inside the target villages – were the ones on masculinities, particularly that of the older men. The project concluded that this was because their attempts to restore former levels of power had become a major obstacle to general wellbeing. This changed when the men were encouraged to tackle this issue head on and could discuss it at length with the support of a male facilitator from their own cultural group. Above all, however, the decision to make a change occurred within groups rather than individually, which to some extent shielded them from ridicule from their immediate peers.

The evaluation also found that compared with the initial situation, people were more inclined to listen to each other – most significantly, men started listening to women, and older people to youths – and were less conscious of status than before.<sup>130</sup> The two villages became the focus

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<sup>130</sup> In interviews, community members spoke about learning to appreciate the importance of communication and of being a community, in contrast to the survival mode in the camps.

for other projects, for example the government's vaccination programme. Officials regarded inhabitants of these villages as more responsible than those in neighbouring villages. LRA returnees were more accepted and integrated. A major impact was an increase in the quantity of food produced. Meetings led in some cases to spontaneous initiatives, such as men and women forming agricultural work parties.<sup>131</sup> People set up new committees, including one to prevent violence at community and household levels. The evaluation also found that levels of domestic violence appeared to have reduced significantly.

Other impacts noted by the evaluation included better child nutrition, improvements in sanitation, awareness of the environment, higher sales and usage of contraceptives, and men being less inclined to seek sexual partners other than their wives. Most of the problems identified at the beginning of the process were found to have at least lessened, if not stopped. Some improvements came about because of the information (on sanitation and basic healthcare, for example) provided by the facilitators. Improvements that depended on better communication and collaboration, on the other hand, were largely the result of the facilitated dialogue.

Alert visited the two villages in February 2013 and found that, even after a lapse of three years, memories of the project were still very vivid in the minds of the residents. Those who had participated said that they had been permanently changed by the experience,<sup>132</sup> while those who had not were keen for the discussions to restart so that they could benefit. In defining the benefits of the project, in addition to those mentioned above, villagers emphasised:

- The material benefits of cooperating (in food production for example);
- Men supporting women in their household tasks;
- Joint decision-making on family matters by husband and wife;
- Older people and young women feeling more valued and respected;
- Suicides being prevented, as people gained more self-respect and felt more valued;
- Increased school enrolment rates for both boys and girls;
- Increased acceptance of family planning, which contributed to improvements in socio-economic indicators by improving women's health and their productivity.

In one village, Alert found that project participants had gained such confidence in the new behaviours they had agreed to mainstream them throughout the village. All residents were asked to sign a 'by-law' prohibiting anti-social behaviour, such as stealing and drunkenness, as well as perceived sexual misconduct, on pain of punitive and non-punitive sanctions. Although taking this initiative evidenced the self-confidence the villagers had acquired as a result of the project, the punitive approach had not been envisaged in the project design.

In the other village, people seemed to have taken up the spirit of self-reliance promoted by the project, and had started to build primary school facilities in their village with their own means and labour rather than waiting for government action.

In many communities in northern Uganda, people have sold off village land to provide for alcohol consumption and marriage. This practice has not been evidenced in the two villages. Residents appreciate land as one of the few factors of production left after the prolonged war, and seek to utilise it appropriately to fight food insecurity and cater for the growing population. However, they are willing to make land available free of charge to someone intending to establish a project of benefit to the community such as a school or health centre.

<sup>131</sup> These work parties, which were formed once the community members started to trust each other again, are still operating, showing the lasting impact of the trust generated. The young women's work parties were so successful they had to split into four separate groups.

<sup>132</sup> As one participant put it, "you can always tell who was in the discussion groups, they are somehow different from other people".

## 3.2 *Roco Kwo* ('Transforming lives'), northern Uganda

### Summary

*Roco Kwo* is an integrated development programme run by CARE International since 2009, supporting Acholi communities returning to their villages from displaced camps.<sup>133</sup> It aims to effect change in the areas of gender, livelihoods and peacebuilding through interventions in economic, social and psycho-social fields. It explicitly focuses on women – especially women from the more vulnerable families – as leverage points for lifting communities out of poverty, creating opportunities for women's empowerment and equality in decision-making. Believing that the burden of change has to be shared by women and men together, it recruits 'role model men' (RMM) as change agents in the fight against violence against women. This strategy aims to validate and support positive behaviour by men, in preference to a more confrontational approach.

*"No one is born as an ideal man or woman; one has to work towards becoming one."*

YOUNG MALE INTERVIEWEE, GULU DISTRICT, JANUARY 2013

A mid-term review of the project<sup>134</sup> found that it had begun to enhance livelihoods for the poorest, thereby reducing their vulnerability to shocks.<sup>135</sup> In doing so, it had strengthened women's position in relation to decision-making at household and community levels, and reduced conflict and violence within the household. However, the review identified challenges faced by the communities in question, which the programme still needs to address.

### Background

The *Roco Kwo* project grew out of two projects managed by CARE International during the early 2000s in displaced people's camps in northern Uganda. The first, the Social Mobilization of War Affected Communities (SMOWAC), introduced into northern Uganda the Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) methodology, which CARE had already started implementing elsewhere in Uganda. The purpose was two-fold: on the one hand, to encourage savings in a setting where, in the absence of accessible arable land, people's main livelihood option was petty commerce; and, on the other, to encourage women's economic empowerment. The proportion of male group members was limited to 30 percent. The second project was an SGBV project, which ran awareness-raising activities and provided psycho-social counselling. CARE staff realised that both projects were often found in the same villages, and the same members were often active in both groups.<sup>136</sup> The current phase of CARE's northern Uganda programme combines and extends these two separate but overlapping elements.<sup>137</sup>

In 2009, when the return from the displaced camps was under way, CARE International Uganda undertook a study to assess the underlying causes of poverty and vulnerability in northern Uganda. The study identified gender inequality and discrimination against women as key factors underpinning poverty, requiring a long-term intervention.<sup>138</sup> *Roco Kwo*, which was designed in response to these findings, aimed to transform communities affected by conflict, and decrease the vulnerability of both women and men in the sub-region. It aimed to do this by addressing four interlinked 'domains of change' – socio-economic livelihoods, social protection and peacebuilding, governance, and service delivery. The primary impact of the five-year programme was expected to be on 45,000 people affected by conflict, of whom at least 70 percent were to be women and girls.

133 The programme, running from September 2009 to October 2013, is implemented in northern Uganda by CARE International Uganda through seven local partner organisations – Voluntary Initiative Service Organisation (VISO), Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative (ARLPI), Diocese of Northern Uganda, Forum for Kalongo Parish Women Association (FOKAPAWA), Women and Rural Development Network (WORUDET), Gulu District Farmers' Association (GDFA) and Kitgum Women's Peace Initiative (KIWEPI).

134 CARE (2012). *'Roco Kwo: Mid-term review'*. Kampala: CARE International in Uganda.

135 Shocks are events that negatively affect the physical and economic sustainability of the household. They might include natural disasters or personal crises such as a death in the family.

136 Richard Businge, personal communication, 8th February 2013.

137 CARE (2012). *Op. cit.*

138 B. Bode et al (2009). *'The causes and conditions of poverty in Acholiland'*. CARE International in Uganda.

As this would benefit household members too, *Roco Kwo*'s ultimate beneficiaries were expected to be around 270,000 individuals,<sup>139</sup> amounting to around 15 percent of the population that had been displaced at the height of the conflict.<sup>140</sup>

All of CARE's interventions in northern Uganda have now been realigned under its Northern Uganda Women's Empowerment Programme (NUWEP), which operates in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions. NUWEP is a multi-year and multi-donor recovery and development framework, currently composed of eight projects, of which *Roco Kwo* is one. NUWEP uses what it terms the "unifying framework for empowerment", which seeks to effect change at three levels:

- Agency – changes in the women's own capabilities and aspirations;
- Structure – changes in the environment, the societal rules and customs that shape women's possibilities in life and conditions their choices; and
- Relationships – the nature of relationships and power dynamics that a woman navigates throughout her life.

NUWEP, which is premised on the rights-based approach, has adopted as strategies VSLA, capacity building, gender mainstreaming, engaging men, partnership and knowledge management. This in turn means changing the mindsets and behaviours of men towards women, as well as working with state organs to ensure their accountability and responsiveness to resulting demands.

A major motivation for working with men was the high incidence of SGBV, including domestic violence, revealed by data from CARE's counselling units across northern Uganda.<sup>141</sup> Around 75 percent of the recorded survivors were women, and 25 percent men. The latter are often stigmatised in the community and *Roco Kwo* did its best to support them through counselling and referral to specialised service organisations (such as the police for legal redress and health centres for medical care). On the other hand, 84 percent of recorded perpetrators were men, and this figure persuaded CARE to raise men's awareness of the need for women's empowerment, given their positions of power within the society, and to target men as partners and change agents.<sup>142</sup>

*Roco Kwo* modified the VSLA model to enhance its impact on women's empowerment, creating more groups at the village level in order to speed up the process of achieving a critical mass for change. A further adaptation took place after an exchange visit by project participants to a similar project in Burundi. As a result of visiting the Burundian *Abatangamuco*, the 'role model men',<sup>143</sup> the Ugandan visitors decided to initiate a similar approach.

## Activities

*Roco Kwo* has five components: gender equity; sustainable livelihoods; psycho-social support; conflict transformation, peacebuilding and conflict resolution; and good governance. Each of *Roco Kwo*'s seven local implementing partners designs its own range of activities within the above framework, and implements them in a specific area.

Three sorts of groups are commonly set up at village level as vehicles for the implementation of these activities:

<sup>139</sup> Average household size in northern Uganda is estimated to be six persons.

<sup>140</sup> CARE (2012). Op. cit.

<sup>141</sup> CARE collaborates with other organisations present in northern Uganda as part of the response to SGBV; it helps in setting up monitoring and in clarifying referral roles and pathways, enhances information-sharing among the agencies involved, and refers cases to legal assistance projects where appropriate.

<sup>142</sup> CARE (2012). Op. cit.

<sup>143</sup> For a description of this initiative, see H. Wallacher (2012). 'The Abatangamuco: engaging men for women's empowerment in Burundi'. PRIO Policy Brief; and the Burundi case study 'Regaining a quiet sense of dignity – Gender in peacebuilding in Burundi' forthcoming as part of Alert's 'Gender in peacebuilding' research.

1. VSLAs form part of the livelihoods component, through which members receive training and information for income-generation, financial literacy, conflict and dispute resolution, and counselling. VSLAs also hold weekly meetings in which participants' stories are shared and the issues arising discussed. Meetings permit further needs (for example, medical support for male and female survivors of SGBV) to be identified and cases referred to the relevant medical or legal practitioners.
2. Role model men (RMM – *lacmo kweri* in Luo) exhibit 'positive masculinity', for example zero tolerance of gender violence. They are elected by the community and commit to sharing domestic chores with their wives, staying faithful to them and denouncing SGBV. They contact other men to persuade them to do the same, in their daily lives, at meetings and in house-to-house campaigns.
3. Sub-county advocacy groups: although membership is not confined to men, this is seen as a vehicle for mobilising male opinion leaders (cultural leaders, teachers, officials, for example) to accept and advocate for change in women's status. They advocate within the community, as well as transmitting the views of community members to decision-makers.

### The Voluntary Initiative Service Organisation

The Voluntary Initiative Service Organisation (VISO), one of CARE's partner organisations in *Roco Kwo*, operates in Alero and Koc Goma, both in the newly formed Nwoya district. The problems faced by the district include a high prevalence of land conflict and gender violence, the reintegration of LRA returnees, especially girls who returned with children, and inter-generational conflict. The district authorities are in the process of being established and do not as yet have adequate facilities or capacity to provide services.

VISO was founded in 2004 by a group of unemployed university graduates who started delivering educational services (schools monitoring) on a voluntary basis to gain experience for employment. They have since developed funded projects, including with Alert (managing stakeholder dialogues on oil exploration and exploitation) and Save the Children UK (supporting agriculture in the context of the return from displaced camps).

VISO's core target group within *Roco Kwo* is 2,100 women from the most economically vulnerable households. Projects are effected at village level by community-based facilitators – community members who play a part-time role in the project in return for a small stipend and some exposure visits to other CARE projects elsewhere.<sup>144</sup>

VISO's current activities under *Roco Kwo* include the following:

*Sustainable livelihoods:* There are currently 45 active VSLAs in VISO's portfolio, comprising 839 women and 388 men.<sup>145</sup> For example, the VSLA in Alero has 30 members, all but one of whom are women. The group received training in jewellery-making in 2012, but this has not generated much income because of supply and marketing constraints. Members of this group use savings and loans to fund school fees, to purchase basic necessities (including clothing, food, salt and contingency funds for sickness) and to invest in small livestock or other income-generating projects.

VISO has also distributed goats to the most vulnerable households, multiplied and distributed seeds and cassava cuttings, and helped communities deal with elephant encroachment.<sup>146</sup>

*Good governance and peacebuilding:* The project offers training in conflict management, peacebuilding and dialogue, and in UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820. Sub-county

<sup>144</sup> Field notes, 31st January 2013.

<sup>145</sup> Field notes, 31st January 2013.

<sup>146</sup> Encroachment by elephants is a recent phenomenon in communities located within the oil exploration zone, and is believed to be the result of prospecting. Elephants intrude into fields and houses, destroying crops and sometimes killing people. The project dug a trench several kilometres long, reducing the incidence of the attacks.

advocacy forums were set up, whose members are local people with education and experience, accepted as having an advisory role within the community (including politicians, technical staff, teachers or police). The role of the forums is two-way advocacy: they inform the communities, and also take issues identified by community up through the local government system, linking the grassroots to national fora. In response to poor exam results, one of the sub-county advocacy groups has developed a by-law aiming to improve the quality of education services (for both boys and girls), which was due to be gazetted by the Attorney-General in February 2013.<sup>147</sup>

*Psycho-social support:* Activities include discussions around mental health and gender violence. Drama groups are used to attract people to meetings and start meetings off with a play on the topic to generate discussion. Football games are organised in schools to provide recreation. VISO has a counselling centre, which gathers data to feed into CARE's gender violence monitoring work, as well as referring individuals to mental health services where appropriate.

*Gender equity:* The project collects data about SGBV, carries out safety audits with communities (to identify danger spots for girls and women) and forms schools clubs, including providing training to teachers on how to address SGBV. It has identified 18 RMM, who aim to reach 10 households each, i.e. 180 households in total.<sup>148</sup> The project has started holding 'couples seminars', in which pairs of husbands and wives participate in facilitated discussion around rights, roles and responsibilities in the household and in the community, and what can be done to stop domestic violence.

#### Role model men (RMM) in Alero and Koc Goma

OC<sup>149</sup> became an RMM in 2011. It started when he began to realise how tired his wife was when they came home from gardening; while he then rested, she would continue with her housework, cooking and childcare. He now treats his wife differently, helping with fetching water and cooking food if she is sick or away, and there is now mutual respect between them. He and the other RMM now work to effect change in attitudes and behaviour by mobilising and sensitising communities in the parish (both men and women) about the importance of gender equality and transformation.

The main benefit OC and other RMM have perceived in their own lives is greater harmony within the family. At the community level, there has been a noticeable reduction in SGBV and in fighting between men and their wives and children. They are proud of their achievement in persuading some other men to pay their girls' school fees, in spite of initial resistance (on the grounds that men had the 'right' to spend their money on alcohol). At first, other men ridiculed them and suggested they were no longer in control of their households. Approaching their 'target' men continues to be a challenge, since some suspect the RMM of wanting an affair with their wives. However, they have learned to approach them carefully at first, sometimes going through a trusted intermediary such as the man's father.

In Koc Goma, RMM identified war-related trauma and poverty as their major challenges; they observed that these contribute to some men resorting to alcohol and domestic violence, and sometimes suicide. Another challenge is the long distances they have to cover in their outreach activities, some having to walk for 10 km in the absence of transport.

Source: Field notes from visit to VISO projects in Alero and Koc Goma, 31st January 2013.

<sup>147</sup> Presentation by member of Sub-County Advocacy Group, 31st January 2013.

<sup>148</sup> Field notes, 31st January 2013.

<sup>149</sup> Name withheld for reasons of confidentiality.

## Impact

Alert's visit to the VISO component of *Roco Kwo* in Nwoya heard from community members that in their opinion the project has led to a reduction in conflict, both in the household and in the community. There is greater mutual respect between men and women, and husbands and wives are more inclined to share the domestic burden and to discuss household decisions – including the disposal of economic assets – together. Women are starting to own assets such as radios, bicycles and even land, and are taking up positions of authority. Greater social cohesion is evidenced by the fact that some VSLAs have started up emergency funds for interest-free loans to persons in dire need. There has been some reduction in SGBV. However, there continue to be disputes at all levels, many about land issues, which *Roco Kwo* does not address.

CARE's mid-term review of *Roco Kwo*,<sup>150</sup> as implemented by all seven partners, found that it had registered nearly 22,000 VSLA members, of whom around 30 percent were men and around 70 percent from the core target group of vulnerable women. The review confirmed that almost 80 percent of loans had been to women, who, with these loans, had been able to purchase household assets and pay for education and health services, demonstrating an increased resilience to shocks.

Focus groups set up for the mid-term review expressed the view that participation of women in decision-making had generally increased. An increasing number of women are now standing for election; some of these are *Roco Kwo* participants and have acquired skills and confidence as a result. Within the programme, women held 60 percent of positions (chairpersons and treasurers), and made up around 60 percent of advocacy group members.<sup>151</sup>

The project had registered 192 RMM, and the review noted that involving men in the programme's activities had ensured its acceptance and reduced the risk of backlash. Reducing poverty is a necessary component of reducing women's vulnerability, and involving men contributes to this, provided it does not diminish the impacts in terms of women's empowerment. The review concluded that *Roco Kwo* had adopted a non-confrontational approach to gender programming, which had created avenues for dialogue, stimulated an interest in men to participate and minimised hostility.

The review noted that northern Ugandan communities face a number of constraints to which *Roco Kwo* has not yet given attention. These include the inadequacy of government services – especially support to SGBV and psycho-social programmes – to which participants can be referred, low levels of literacy within the community, and threats to livelihood from drought and from land disputes associated with the return from displaced camps.

## 3.3 Refugee Law Project

### Summary

The Refugee Law Project (RLP) seeks to ensure fundamental human rights for all forced migrants in Uganda: asylum seekers, refugees and IDPs. Although RLP's starting point was the provision of legal aid to asylum seekers and refugees, it expanded in several ways, as a consequence of identifying and acting on issues emerging from its caseloads. Its services now include counselling and psycho-social support, and medical referrals. It supports refugees on arrival in Uganda through its field offices near Uganda's borders with Rwanda and DRC. It has established a strong reputation in research and advocacy, and extended its thematic reach to address issues of forced migration and transitional justice within Uganda itself through the 'Beyond Juba' project.<sup>152</sup> It also provides training on a range of rights-related issues to key duty bearers interacting with forced migrants on a regular basis (police, prisons officers, immigration, etc.).

<sup>150</sup> CARE (2012). Op. cit.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> This refers to the 2006–2008 Juba peace talks between the Ugandan government and the LRA.

Within its work on gender and sexuality, RLP has taken up two issues of particular relevance to gender in peacebuilding. The first relates to male survivors of SGBV, a subject considered taboo in the cultural context and too often ignored or denied by many stakeholders. A second issue is the struggle for the human rights of LGBTI forced migrants, who are targets of social and legal discrimination, and who are often invisibilised both in the general discussion about LGBTI issues and in the field of forced migration studies. RLP hosts the Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Constitutional Law, which seeks to protect the human rights of the LGBTI community.

## Background

In recent decades, the history of Uganda and the wider Great Lakes region has been marked by conflict and displacement. This has resulted in large numbers of forced migrants, some displaced within Uganda and some displaced across state borders. Refugees in Uganda are currently drawn from DRC, as well as Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia and Sudan. The challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers are not dissimilar to those encountered by the internally displaced population in the Acholi sub-region of northern Uganda: high levels of insecurity, economic hardship, exposure to violence and torture, including SGBV against women and men, and consequent difficulty in fulfilling expected gender roles.

RLP seeks to ensure fundamental human rights for all forced migrants in Uganda: asylum seekers, refugees and IDPs. It was set up within Makerere University's School of Law in 1999, the outcome of research<sup>153</sup> demonstrating that, despite Uganda's strong international reputation for providing asylum to refugees, they did not always enjoy their rights in accordance with domestic and international law. RLP's original mission to provide legal aid to asylum seekers and refugees was extended, after experience showed that many refugees were unable to take advantage of legal assistance owing to intense levels of trauma. This prompted RLP to introduce counselling and psycho-social support, as well as a range of other services, including medical referrals. For refugee camp residents, RLP also provides support in custody cases; mediation with local communities; accompaniment to police stations and courts; drafting of legal documents, such as work contracts; detention monitoring; and drafting of expert opinions, statements and appeals related to determination of refugee status processes.

In 2007 RLP, in partnership with the Human Rights and Peace Centre (HURIPEC) of Makerere University Faculty of Law, initiated the Beyond Juba project, which conducts research and advocacy for a national reconciliation process, following the Juba peace talks and the move towards reconstruction in northern Uganda. A key objective of Beyond Juba is to contribute to the development of appropriate transitional justice mechanisms with which to address the challenges of national reconciliation. Beyond Juba is significant in RLP's development, as it signalled a move to expand its role from working with refugees to also working directly with IDPs (or former IDPs), as well as contributing to national and international debates on principles and practices of justice, peacebuilding, gender and sexuality, and how these relate to dynamics of forced migration. In accordance with this expanded view of its role, RLP now describes itself as "a centre for justice and forced migrants".

Through its work and research in Acholiland and the region, RLP found that among the many abuses suffered by the population during the years of displacement was SGBV against men. Within Uganda, testimonies gathered during research<sup>154</sup> showed that this was largely perpetrated by members of the UPDF, and targeted particularly at those with more resources or access to power. Although such allegations had been made informally before, few survivors had been willing to speak out. RLP researchers came across men who were willing to go on record with their experience, and this led to more survivors (both men and women) coming forward. Within the refugee community, it is known that many men also suffered sexual violence, either in their

<sup>153</sup> Led by Dr Barbara Harrell-Bond and Dr Guglielmo Verdirame of Oxford University.

<sup>154</sup> See under 'Activities' section – Research and advocacy (below).

country of origin or in Uganda, or both. Numbers are difficult to come by: as an indication, RLP's male refugee survivors' group is around 60 strong (see below).

SGBV as a weapon of war has a devastating effect on individual victims suffering physical violence and trauma, and the resulting medical and mental health consequences. In addition to its consequences for individuals, it impacts on the wider community by breaking down family and community bonds. The rape of men aims to destroy their masculinity, demonstrating their lack of power and denigrating the masculinity they were raised to perform by treating them as 'women'.<sup>155</sup> The highly traumatic experience affects the survivors for years afterwards, as many feel unable to talk about it, either with their families or with medical practitioners. The medical care required is unaffordable for many survivors.<sup>156</sup>

Based on client testimonies, RLP also came to recognise persecution of migrants due to their sexuality as an issue. Conflicts around the rights of LGBTI people exist, both in mainstream Ugandan society and in the refugee communities, with open discrimination at times descending into conflict and violence.<sup>157</sup> RLP aims to enable LGBTI clients to seek its services with confidence, and in the knowledge that they will be accepted and supported. In this connection, it has been important that RLP now acts as host to the Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Constitutional Law,<sup>158</sup> which was formed in response to the 2009 tabling before parliament of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, calling for capital punishment for homosexuality.<sup>159</sup>

The experiences of clients have also had an influence on RLP's internal management structures and processes. The need to create safe spaces for clients with a variety of support needs, including some whose needs may be difficult to articulate, has implications for staff recruitment and selection, and for training, all of which must emphasise openness, trust, acceptance of diversity, and the practice of innovation and of challenging debate. Furthermore, client experience has led RLP to identify gender and sexuality as a major component of its work. In a move that will enhance its advocacy capacity, RLP recently restructured from skills-based departments to four thematic programmes: access to justice; mental health and psycho-social wellbeing; conflict, transitional justice and governance; and gender and sexuality. The last two are of most pertinence to this case study.

RLP currently has 120 staff located in six offices: Kampala (headquarters), Gulu, Hoima, Kitgum, Kotido and Mbarara (sub-offices). While Kampala provides direct services to urban refugees, the Hoima and Mbarara offices work with a combination of settlement-based and urban refugees, while Gulu, Kitgum and Kotido work with conflict-affected Ugandan citizens.<sup>160</sup>

### Activities<sup>161</sup>

*Research and advocacy:* An active research and advocacy department supports this work; research provides the evidence base for policy debates and for RLP's advocacy, nationally and

155 UNOCHA (2008). 'The nature, scope and motivation for sexual violence against men and boys in armed conflict'. Discussion paper 2, Research meeting on 'The use of sexual violence in armed conflict', 26th June 2008, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

156 Interviews with RLP clients, November 2012.

157 RLP staff cited the example of one father who ran his son over with his car at a clan meeting called to banish the son for being homosexual.

158 The Coalition's members are 51 civil society organisations, ranging from LGBTI organisations to media, refugee and general human rights groups. It was awarded the USA's Department of State's Human Rights Defender Award for 2011 for defending LGBTI rights. Its primary objectives are to see the Bill dropped from the parliament's agenda, to proactively contribute to elaborating a positive sexual rights agenda for Uganda, and to strengthen the capacity of civil society to engage in and contribute to these debates. See also <http://www.ugandans4rights.org/index.php>

159 As of May 2013, the final wording of the revised bill to be debated by parliament has not been made public. However, it is believed that the capital punishment provision has been removed (see for example interview by Rachel Adams with David Bahati, initiator of the bill, 'I spoke to the author of Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill', 13th December 2012. Available at <http://www.vice.com/read/an-interview-with-the-author-of-ugandas-anti-homosexuality-bill>).

160 Interviews with RLP staff, November 2012.

161 RLP's website (<http://www.refugeelawproject.org>) gives further detailed information about the full range of its activities; this report focuses on the part of RLP's work that is relevant to issues of gender and sexuality.

internationally, on behalf of its clients. Without losing its core function of practical support to refugees, RLP has developed into an organisation recognised globally as a legitimate analyst and advocate on a variety of justice issues. All of RLP's research is published in issue briefs and working papers. Building on its experience in access-to-justice work with forced migrants, RLP was a founding member of the African Transitional Justice Network and set up the Institute for African Transitional Justice.<sup>162</sup>

RLP has advocated to raise awareness of the specific needs of male survivors both locally and globally. A success of this advocacy is a UNHCR practice note co-authored by RLP,<sup>163</sup> evidence of policy change and growing recognition of the issue.<sup>164</sup> There is currently little data or statistics available about male survivors, and an apparently general lack of consolidated data on SGBV across different countries and donors. RLP advocates against and raises awareness of SGBV against women and men, and plays an active role in the 16 Days of Activism against Sexual Violence campaign nationally.

In April 2013, on the basis of its work with individual male survivors, as well as three support groups of male survivors, RLP, in collaboration with First Step Cambodia and Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse Trust (New Zealand), initiated the first South-South Institute on Sexual Violence against Men and Boys in Conflict and Displacement. The Institute, which brought together 30 survivors with a range of service providers, tertiary students and media (a total of more than 150 individuals), addressed survivors' perspectives on existing services, the legal frameworks, which block access to justice for male survivors, gaps in medical training with regard to sexual violence, as well as broader needs assessments for service providers.

RLP is pioneering the use of video documentaries to open up new space for discussion.<sup>165</sup> These are produced in conjunction with research projects. RLP has found that documentaries, through the mix of image, sound and music, are an effective way of capturing people's views and analysis, and can reach people more effectively than research papers. This is especially true in contexts where people cannot read or write. Documentaries have proven particularly effective in opening up debate in advocacy work and in trainings, especially when dealing with normally taboo subjects such as sexual violence against men, where the initial response of many participants is one of denial. In this case, testimonial evidence from survivors presented in video form obliges viewers to address the existence of the phenomenon. For example, the two films mentioned below have both been used successfully in training duty bearers (police, immigration officials and prison officers, for example). In training, officers regularly deny that incidents of SGBV against men happen, but showing clips of testimonials quickly moves the discussion beyond these denials.

*Gender Against Men* is an example of a video documentary that has been widely used for advocacy and training. *Gender Against Men* has won awards and brought international attention to a previously underreported issue, namely the sexual abuse of men, and with it the widespread failure of assistance providers to recognise or provide for the support needs of survivors. As demonstrated in the video, much prejudice exists among health workers and other professionals against the notion of men being raped. This is especially marked in Uganda, a country where the British colonial regime criminalised male rape survivors in the Penal Code, an anachronistic legacy, which the current government shows signs of reinforcing rather than removing.

Attempts to engender programming for refugees and IDPs have at times translated into focusing support on women, in the belief that women are more likely than men to use any advantage for the family rather than for themselves. However, this rationale is rarely explained to beneficiaries

<sup>162</sup> See also [http://www.refugeelawproject.org/others/IATJ\\_Briefing\\_Note.pdf](http://www.refugeelawproject.org/others/IATJ_Briefing_Note.pdf)

<sup>163</sup> UNHCR (2012). *Working with Men and Boy Survivors of Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Forced Displacement*. Geneva: UNHCR in collaboration with the Refugee Law Project.

<sup>164</sup> See also <http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?docid=5006aa262>

<sup>165</sup> All RLP videos can be seen on <http://www.youtube.com/user/Refugeelawproject>

and can result in a backlash against the perceived preferential treatment of women. The observed increase in domestic violence in camps raises the question: how safe is an empowered woman with a disempowered husband?<sup>166</sup> There is the paradoxical assumption that men are strong, feel less pain and are in less need of psycho-social support, but sometimes targeting economic support at women leaves men unable to fulfil their culturally assigned gender roles as providers and protectors. This can lead to men seeking to re-establish their masculinity in the domestic sphere, at times through alcohol, promiscuity or violence against their wives or children.<sup>167</sup> RLP's advocacy work – through *Gender Against Men*, for example – has attempted to raise such issues within the humanitarian policy community.

RLP has also used video as a communications tool to generate debate in community settings. The foremost example of this is a video called *They Slept With Me*.<sup>168</sup> During research for a study on access to justice for survivors of sexual violence, the research team encountered several elderly men who had survived sexual violence at the hands of government soldiers in the late 1980s, and who (at least 20 years later) were willing to recount their experiences on film to open space for debate on this in the community. At their request, the video drawn up during this research was in due course played back to the community for comment. At this play-back meeting, a number of other survivors, both men and women, came forward and spoke publicly about their experience. These meetings were also filmed and incorporated into the final version of the video. Such was the cathartic impact of this event that RLP coined the term “social therapy” to describe it.

*Support groups:* As individual counselling can only have a limited impact, RLP encouraged the formation of mutual support groups, which permit the members to empower and help each other, replacing the negative, passive self-image of ‘victim’ with the positive, active one of being a group member. RLP supports the groups with trainings, such as legal rights awareness, and limited funds for transport and venue hire. Groups include the following:

- **Angels:** an LGBTI group whose members set themselves up originally as a sex-workers group, but who found their voice in the less stigmatised LGBTI discourse. There are around 45 members in Kampala and others in refugee camps. Their main challenges are discrimination (including by the medical profession), legal persecution, physical security, medical support and economic difficulties. They meet less often than the other groups but get together to assist each other in security emergencies (if members are imprisoned or raped, for example), which are frequent.<sup>169</sup>
- **Men of Hope:** a group of around 60 members, formed of male refugee survivors of SGBV. The group meets monthly. Their main challenges are isolation and depression, and telling their wives and friends about the SGBV they survived. They also face medical consequences, which prevent them from undertaking heavy labour (most available casual labour is physical), and encounter accusations of being homosexual when accessing medical help. The group has begun to sensitise key constituencies to the realities of sexual violence against men, holding awareness-raising sessions in local churches and refugee settlements, but also sharing their stories and perspectives internationally through global media such as the BBC World Service and Al Jazeera English.<sup>170</sup>
- **Association of Victims of Torture and Sexual Violence:** a group with over 300 members, of whom 135 are adult men and 150 adult women, with 15 youth. The whole group meets monthly, with weekly meetings for sub-groups divided by age and sex. As well as general support, the groups organise to carry out craft-based income-generating activities together and to sell their products in informal markets.

<sup>166</sup> Interview, RLP, November 2012.

<sup>167</sup> Interview, RLP, November 2012.

<sup>168</sup> Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dxaFqezrXg>

<sup>169</sup> Interview, group member, 27th November 2012.

<sup>170</sup> Interview, RLP, 27th November 2012.

- ASSOFRA (*Association de Femmes Réfugiées en Afrique* – Association of Women Refugees in Africa): a women's group of around 150 members, predominantly from DRC, which split off from a mixed group some years back as a result of the oppressive behaviour of the male members. Problems faced include insecurity and aggression from the Ugandan host community, limited livelihood opportunities, discrimination in employment and in health and education services. Members provide each other with both moral and practical support, and prepare crafts for exhibitions two or three times a year, usually in conjunction with other refugee groups.

*“In the beginning, we were ignorant but through the trainings we realised that being women does not stop us from having rights.”*

INTERVIEW, ASSOFRA MEMBER, KAMPALA, FEBRUARY 2013

There are also support groups for refugees with a disability and for children.

For Men of Hope, the group was vital in overcoming the biases ingrained in their cultures: men cannot have sex with other men; some believed they were “the only one this has ever happened to”. They find consolation in talking and sharing. However, the sharing is often only possible after a process of individual counselling support, as most are severely traumatised by their ordeal. Having been told by their violators “you are a woman”, they found that their very identity as men was called into question – as they put it, they found that they “didn't know how to *be* men anymore”.<sup>171</sup> This can have lasting impacts on the survivors and their family, including severe mental health consequences, such as depression, isolation, suicidal tendencies and withdrawal from their families.

Group members visit each other in hospital when sick, pulling together to support each other at points of crisis, similar to how as community members they might have supported each other in their places of origin. They offer each other counselling and help each other economically, for example with finding jobs or by pooling savings to support those with particular financial needs. They provide a space to open up and share what members had kept secret. These groups cannot reconstitute the old community bonds from their home communities, but they are visibly important to the refugees in substituting new social networks in the place of the lost family and community structures.

*Training and capacity building:* RLP provides English teaching for non-Anglophone migrants and trainings on refugee rights for its clients generally. It also provides training for duty bearers (including police, prison officers and border officials, teachers and community leaders) on refugee asylum and human rights. It further accompanies duty bearers after the trainings, often getting called back to support them with specific cases. Since Ugandan police may be deployed on African Union peacekeeping missions (often with little training), the training received from RLP enables them to spread good human rights protection practices to other countries.

## Impact

Over the last six years, RLP has registered just over 5,000 refugee clients, to whom it has provided, variously, legal assistance on status determination, resettlement and other legal processes; counselling; medical care; and training in English language and refugee rights. Assuming average family size to be six persons, around 40,000 refugees have directly or indirectly benefited from RLP's services over this period. In the context of Uganda's overall refugee population (UNHCR's August 2012 estimate was 190,000, expected to double during 2013), this number may not seem large. However, RLP's impact goes beyond the numerical.

<sup>171</sup> Interview, Men of Hope President, 26th–29th November 2012.

Firstly, RLP effectively targets and prioritises the most vulnerable refugees such as unaccompanied minors, female and male survivors of sexual violence, and LGBTI refugees, thus limiting a succession of care and protection problems for which they might otherwise require further support. RLP's support aims to remove the most immediate barriers to these refugees' enjoyment of rights, enhancing their ability to take advantage of services provided by others. For example, refugees who have successfully been through the status determination process, who have received counselling and who have been provided with English language training are more likely to be confident and articulate and able to assert their rights to, for example, medical treatment. RLP's support has enabled clients to become more resilient and make more effective life choices – to change from “being victims to being survivors”, in the words of one interviewee.<sup>172</sup>

Secondly, RLP has built on its experience of working with refugee clients to inform debates among service providers and raise their awareness of key challenges facing refugees in this context. In this regard, RLP has trained over 1,000 police officers, prison and immigration staff, teachers and community leaders in refugee rights. Its advocacy work has contributed to the introduction of changes in law and legal practice, to changes in local and international policy discourse (especially around men and boys as survivors of sexual violence<sup>173</sup>) and to more positive attitudes towards refugees on the part of Ugandan communities. Thirdly, RLP contributes to refugee protection in Uganda in various ways, but perhaps most significantly by addressing Uganda's legal discrimination against sexual minorities. RLP provides a space where those who face discrimination can feel free to articulate their problems without fear of judgement. It supports Ugandan efforts to challenge this discrimination, and it has worked to identify alternative legal and other protection solutions for these refugees.

Finally, RLP plays a significant role at the national level through Beyond Juba, which conducts research and advocacy relating to transitional justice and conflict transformation. The fact that RLP houses both national and refugee-related work enables cross-fertilisation to their mutual benefit. RLP's work in northern Uganda is opening up vital spaces for discussion of sexual violence against men and women during the conflict and displacement periods, discussion of which is only now becoming possible due to sustained awareness raising. This is likely to contribute to slowly reducing the stigma associated with this kind of violence, and to make it easier for victims to seek medical and legal support for non-conflict related sexual violence.

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<sup>172</sup> Interview with support group member, November 2012.

<sup>173</sup> These successes include the UNHCR (2012) practice note (Op. cit.) co-authored by RLP.

## 4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

### 4.1 Lessons from selected projects: policy implications for Uganda

The hypothesis of Alert's research on gender and peacebuilding is that an emphasis on 'relational' gender dynamics will have a number of positive outcomes. These will include, but not be limited to, increased gender equality and increased enjoyment of rights by women and girls. So what would be the added value of taking such an approach more consistently in the Uganda case?

As Alert's research on women's economic and political participation<sup>174</sup> has shown, there has been progress for women in the economic sphere as well as some increased opportunities for women in politics as a result of the reserved seats system. However, there are a number of important respects in which gender equality has yet to be attained. First, the gains for women should not be overestimated. Their access to economic power is still limited compared with men, and has not enabled them to counteract institutional resistances to their engagement in political decision-making at different levels.<sup>175</sup>

Second, the discourse around women's advancement in northern Uganda, as in much of the rest of the country, serves to perpetuate a patriarchal gender ideology rather than deconstruct it. Attention has been rightly drawn to some of the more egregious forms of abuse against women, such as high levels of domestic violence and the abduction of girls from northern Uganda by the LRA. Yet, in the absence of a wider debate about gendered power relations, the focus on these problems merely emphasises the underlying conception of women as a 'vulnerable group'. This conception, rather than a desire to play to women's strengths, often forms the basis of development interventions in favour of women. Separating women out for special assistance, even when marginal to the main intervention, may also help to generate a 'backlash' against women. The strong association of women with vulnerability has negative consequences for men too, since in this environment the notion of *male* vulnerability becomes unimaginable – and is hence rarely imagined. For men who have suffered physical deprivation during the war – including sexual violence – who have been displaced or have lost their land and animals, or who are themselves the objects of domestic violence, their suffering goes unrecognised year after year, with physical and mental consequences for themselves and their families.

A further aspect of this failure to challenge overarching patriarchal ideologies is the pervasive influence of a version of heteronormativity which privileges conventional marriage as the desired state for both men and women, despite the 'new' types of family arrangement that often emerge in the post-conflict context and despite high actual levels of domestic violence. This may explain the unusually ferocious condemnation in Uganda of alternative sexualities, as well as the reluctance of various organisations to deal directly with the phenomenon of sexual violence against men, despite being aware of substantial numbers of cases. It may also explain how campaigners against domestic violence can often direct messages to abused women rather than to their abusers, urging them to avoid provoking violence through 'unwifely' conduct.

The three projects highlighted in section 3 above suggest some of the potential advantages of adopting a more nuanced and integrated approach and one which challenges the prevailing normative

<sup>174</sup> International Alert (2012). Op. cit.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

paradigm dominating the current policy context. RLP's work on gender and sexuality underscores the human rights consequences of failing to acknowledge those who do not fit the norm. *Roco Kwo* appears to have had some success (albeit within a long-term perspective) in transforming women's poverty by privileging them within a broader anti-poverty approach, in preference to singling them out for special assistance. In addition, the Community Education Project suggests that material and social progress, to be sustainable, requires a 'total society' approach in which problems are solved by dialogue between all stakeholders, male and female, young and old.

## 4.2 Interpreting gendered themes: lessons from the Uganda case

This case study has sought to explore, in the specific context of Uganda, how a gender analysis might throw light on four peacebuilding themes, namely: gender and economic recovery, gendered violence, inter-generational dynamics and access to justice. This section aims to summarise tentative findings under each of these themes.

*"Now that we have learned about mutual understanding, we cannot go back to the ways of before."*

YOUNG FEMALE INTERVIEWEE, GULU DISTRICT, FEBRUARY 2013

### Gender and economic recovery

In the Acholi sub-region, the war has had a destructive impact on livelihoods. The depletion of Acholi cattle herds, and people's inability to access and maintain their arable lands, have required, on the one hand, adaptation to the labour market, dominated by casual labour and petty trade; on the other hand, they have necessitated the struggle to reclaim land and productivity after the return to the village.

Both of these processes have contributed to changes in the division of labour, whereby in broad terms older men have lost a great deal of their previous power to command labour and other resources. Meanwhile, women and young people have gained greater economic independence and hence a degree of decision-making power, at least at the household level. In the case of women, this has been encouraged by government's policy of reserving statutory positions for women, as well as by the intervention of NGOs in women's empowerment activities. However, older men's resentment of these changes is still strong, and the intense frustration they face, thwarted in their efforts to maintain their gendered identities, has arguably led in some cases to destructive and self-destructive behaviour. Younger men, though perhaps better adapted to the post-war environment, are frustrated too at being unable to either fulfil traditional role expectations (i.e. of cementing marriage with the payment of bridewealth) or become a 'modern man' with a job and position in the formal, urban economy.

The Uganda case demonstrates the interconnected nature of economic and psychological recovery, and the importance of the psycho-social and relational domains in reviving an economy after a long period of neglect and violent destruction. It highlights the economic vulnerability of socially and politically marginalised groups, including refugees, the displaced, sexual minorities, unemployed youth and ex-abductees (especially forced mothers), who are often – either in reality or in other people's perceptions – dependent on fragile or 'unsociable' livelihoods, ranging from casual labour to sex work and criminality. This vulnerability is a form of rights violation, but at the same time weakens the broader economy by disabling the full economic participation of the vulnerable.

From the point of view of intervention planning, a further question is raised about the appropriate role of external agencies in promoting economic revitalisation. *Roco Kwo* and the Community Education Project exemplify two different peacebuilding approaches. One is comprehensive in nature, addressing several different sectors and building up experience and reach over a long period. The other makes a rapid and strategic injection of critical thinking, which has a snowball effect, then

leaving the community to build on what they have learned in their own way. There are arguments in favour of both approaches, and both have had demonstrable impact. However, the key feature of both for our current purposes is that they have placed gender analysis at the heart of their design.

### The continuum of gendered violence

*Roco Kwo* and the Community Education Project both demonstrate the interconnection between domestic violence reduction and the general welfare of the community. The work of RLP brings to the fore the importance of acknowledging male as well as female vulnerability to violence, as well as recognising the use of male-on-male sexual violence as a tool of warfare. In this connection, it is important to acknowledge a pervasive heteronormativity as an impediment to openness about such vulnerability. The work of RLP highlights the unknown numbers of men in northern Uganda who have suffered in silence for years from the effects of sexual violence. Its work with refugee men who have undergone sexual violence similarly demonstrates the difficulty of survivors to speak out or seek help, but also the practicability and effectiveness of interventions to enable survivors to break those silences.<sup>176</sup>

Intervention from civil society in northern Uganda provides some support to survivors of violence. However, this tends to focus on the most obvious victims of the LRA, including amputees and forced wives and mothers. Support is weaker for victims of the UPDF or of ongoing SGBV, female and male. Male survivors of sexual violence, including those who experienced this as refugees and as victims of the UPDF, face rejection not only from their communities but also often from assistance providers, including health services, and have been generally overlooked in policy. However, there is some evidence that international organisations are starting to debate this stance, at least internally, and are beginning to acknowledge the need for a humanitarian response. In addition, NGO research projects such as the SWAY project have identified a need for civil society to base its interventions on improved knowledge of and respect for context, and on a sharper and more realistic understanding of which specific groups are most vulnerable.

### Inter-generational dynamics

The LRA war might arguably be seen, at least in part, as a war between generations: in one analysis, the older generation, seeking to perpetuate its privileges, failed to protect the younger from grave harm, while the youth allowed themselves and their strength and energy to be used as agents of violence against the community that raised them. Indeed, some of the older generation do still fear returning ex-combatants, believing them to be touched by evil spirits and stigmatising young men as criminals and young women as sex workers. At the same time, some young men have become alienated from the 'traditional' life and from the society that failed, and still fails, to protect them and meet their needs. Yet, such mutually demonising stereotypes could easily be countered by contrary examples. Many older people are deeply concerned about the lack of prospects for the new generation and seek to use all their influence to create a better life for them, while many young people have returned to their villages and are committed to making the best of what the current context offers. The discourse of youth vulnerability may be disenfranchising, failing to acknowledge their resilience.

Nevertheless, as the research team's visits to the *Roco Kwo* and Community Education Project villages revealed, the generation gap is not a negligible factor in the future evolution of Acholi society, as is also the case for much of Uganda outside the sub-region. In those villages, we heard much debate about the prospects for youth. If young people cannot be attracted to the rural lifestyle, what are the prospects for food security, let alone cultural tradition, in the future? Is this really the choice before people – village or town, virtue or corruption? Or is the debate itself symptomatic of the transformations the Acholi will have to make to find their way in a transformed world?

<sup>176</sup> Uganda is not exceptional in this respect: it has exported and imported cultures of violence to and from its neighbours (just as it has also both exported and imported lessons on reconciliation and peace).

Women and girls hardly figure in this discourse, except as victims of gender inequality or of LRA excesses – both ‘elders’ and ‘youth’ are spoken of as ‘default male’. Yet, the position of women and girls has not been an entirely neutral factor in the war – gender equality is understood by many older people to be a new thing, associated with a new generation, an import from Kampala and the West, which is bound up with everything that excludes the Acholi and devalues their traditions.

### Access to justice

Key justice issues in the Acholi sub-region include the reintegration of returning LRA members, domestic and sexual violence, and land conflict. Solutions to these problems are to some extent being found. For example, reintegration issues appear to be becoming less contentious, at the community level, with time. Dialogue-based projects such as *Roco Kwo* and the Community Education Project seem to be making some inroads into reducing levels of sexual violence. However, in relation to the justice system itself, there are a number of problem areas, which serve to limit its effectiveness in addressing these issues in a satisfactory way.

First, there are the specific vulnerabilities of women (especially child mothers and widows), children and male survivors of sexual violence in obtaining justice, whether it be reparation for past abuse or mediation in land disputes. Male survivors of sexual violence are largely unrecognised by assistance providers and fear persecution and ridicule (including from their wives and peers) if they come forward. Mothers of children born from forced marriage to LRA soldiers rarely can – and many do not wish to – locate their fathers and hold them financially responsible. The interests of women and children may be set aside in land cases if more powerful people seek to intimidate them or the courts.

Second, these vulnerabilities are enhanced by the way the justice system works. Customary and statutory systems operate side by side and the range of options may be confusing. The elders (usually the first point of call) may be less than sympathetic to youth and women. People need the power that comes from money, knowledge or contacts to make the system work for them. While the customary system, like other restorative justice systems, may be successful in promoting harmony, it may not give victims satisfaction or uphold their individual rights.

Third, a conflict resolution and justice gap still remains in Acholiland. While a PRDP was implemented, much of the funding was allocated to road and infrastructure projects and less towards reconciliation and transitional justice. There has been no truth and reconciliation process, and resentment towards the army and government lingers. This distrust in the government leaves many reluctant to access the formal justice system, yet there are few alternative options. The recent corruption scandal around the PRDP has done little to build trust in the government. A new further source of mistrust and potential conflict has been the oil discoveries and exploration concessions in the region.

## 4.3 Insights from Uganda for gender in peacebuilding

### Broadening the scope of gender in peacebuilding

Alert and other peacebuilding organisations have long espoused the idea that gender equality is an integral and necessary component of sustainable peace. While there may be several grounds put forward for this, the most favoured one is inclusivity, and the presumption that inclusive political settlements are more long-lasting and inured to violent conflict.<sup>177</sup> What our gendered analysis of key conflict themes in Uganda has shown is that this rationalisation only works if a broad and relational concept of gender is applied.

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<sup>177</sup> International Alert (2010). *Programming Framework for International Alert: Design, Monitoring and Evaluation*. London: International Alert.

An important conclusion emerging from the *Roco Kwo* and Community Education Project examples is that working on gender relations is key to economic recovery. This fits with two different mindsets, which are often held to be inconsistent with each other. First, it fits with an instrumentalist, 'efficiency' view of women's empowerment, which holds that women's improved condition and position – and the corollary, men's abandonment of wasteful personal behaviour – is necessary if a recovering economy is to make use of all available human capital. Using this approach, bringing men in is important likewise for instrumentalist reasons: men's powerful position can be used to lever support for women's empowerment, and providing them with positive affirmation as a reward for doing so helps sweeten the pill of any loss of prestige they may risk as a result.

However, the gender dimension is also key to livelihoods when viewed from a social capital perspective. Social capital in the form of relationships – whether between men and women, or younger and older – emerge as being not only a requirement for survival but also the ground on which new economic shoots can be planted. As an older woman in one of the Community Education Project communities said: "After we discussed the value of sharing and neighbourliness, I got together with another poor elderly woman and we went together to collect firewood to sell. With the small amount of money we made from this, we bought seeds to grow food. This was how I survived and am still surviving." In this context, the Uganda case study also brings out the importance of mental and sexual health for recovery, and the importance of relationships for this dimension too.

A second conclusion is that a period of violent and disruptive conflict such as that in northern Uganda provides a window of opportunity to find new ways of conceptualising gender itself, as well as rethinking actual gender relations. The RLP case study in particular enjoins new thinking about male vulnerabilities, about what constitutes sexual violence and domestic violence, and about the need to expand the concept of gender to include the sexual dimension. LGBTI rights are not usually an integral part of peacebuilding activities, even though a positive peace is one in which everybody has access to justice and to the services they require. A focus on a policy of mainstreaming *diversity* in the fullest meaning of the term might enable this broader view to be captured more effectively.

Lastly, gender identities contribute towards the meta-narratives of identity, and in this way are intricately entwined in the ideologies of identity and violence. For example, in the Acholi case, many informants associate the war with the destruction of a golden past in which women and men, young and old, knew their roles and respected 'traditional' values. Such discourses around identity provide peacebuilders with insights into how people view both their pasts and their future outlooks.

### Gender-relational peacebuilding

Finally, reviewing the cases described above reveals some key methodological issues for gender-relational peacebuilding. First, it shows that displacement is a major consequence of conflict, but generally under-theorised within peacebuilding. A gender analysis brings this out. As seen in Uganda, in both northern Uganda and in the stories of refugee flight, gender roles and relations affect, and are affected by, displacement. Many of the roles that are common in home communities change in a context of displacement. For example, in the home communities, it may be women's role to fetch water, but, in camps, it can become the men's role if the security situation prevents women from leaving the camp for fear of sexual assault.<sup>178</sup>

Camp life, for both refugees and IDPs, can also affect male privileges common in home communities, resulting in increases in alcoholism and depression among men, and increases in domestic violence. In cultures where men's roles centre around food provision and protecting the family, the camp setting does not allow men to live up to these expectations, especially if food

<sup>178</sup> Interview, RLP, November 2012.

and resources are distributed to women. There is increasing evidence that women tend to be more likely than men to find dynamic solutions, in spite of changed circumstances.<sup>179</sup> Anecdotal evidence from RLP clients illustrates ways in which survival strategies differed between men and women as a result of different roles. For example, in the context of the northern Uganda ‘protected villages’, some women were able to buy access to their gardens from soldiers with sexual favours, whereas men faced mutilation if caught in the gardens by the rebels.<sup>180</sup> This further contributed to women taking on more productive roles, and conflict sometimes resulting from these changes in roles. In such a context, attempts by agencies targeting women over men can be counterproductive in provoking a backlash.<sup>181</sup>

Second, the *Roco Kwo* and Community Education Project demonstrate the importance of dialogue for enabling people to articulate their concerns, especially when their concerns have long been suppressed or rendered ‘invisible’, and for reconstituting relationships, especially when those relationships have been damaged by war. Dialogue is an effective methodological approach, and one which is appropriate to socio-cultural and psycho-social interventions. It also emphasises the capability of communities to identify their own solutions to the problems they identify.

All three projects described raise the issue of men and masculinities. What role do men play in a gendered approach to peacebuilding – should they be seen as perpetrators of abuse against women, as victims of violence themselves or as gatekeepers of change? Or are women and men together the joint creators of a new post-conflict society?

The evidence suggests that in reality people are shaped by age, class and life experiences as well as by gender, and that all these factors are important in teasing out the relations of power and realms of agency that each deploys. This reinforces one of the conclusions of *Gender in peacebuilding: Taking stock*, that how a gender analysis is done is as important as doing it. A gender analysis that consists in asking a range of open-ended questions about the nature of gender relations and roles in the context concerned is likely to reveal the colours and complexities of how people actually live.

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179 J. El-Bushra and I. Sahl (2005). Op. cit.; C. Cockburn (1998). *The Space Between Us: Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict*. London: Zed Books.

180 Interview, RLP, November 2012.

181 In Kyangwaku and Kyaka II camps, UNHCR funded secondary schooling but for girls only. At an information session RLP held with the boys, the boys felt excluded and resentful – and revealed their plan to befriend and impregnate the girls to spite the funders. Within six months, there was a 60 percent drop-out rate due to pregnancy.

## Resources

### Additional sources and further reading

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## Web resources

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Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Constitutional Law: <http://www.ugandans4rights.org/>

Conciliation Resources Uganda: [http://www.c-r.org/resources?f\[0\]=field\\_conflict%3A79](http://www.c-r.org/resources?f[0]=field_conflict%3A79)

Department for International Development: <https://www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations/dfid-uganda>

European Union: [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/acp/country-cooperation/uganda/uganda\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/acp/country-cooperation/uganda/uganda_en.htm)

International Alert Uganda: <http://www.international-alert.org/what-we-do/where-we-work/africa/uganda>

Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development: <http://www.mglsd.go.ug/>

Refugee Law Project: <http://www.refugeelawproject.org/>

RLP videos: <http://www.youtube.com/user/Refugeelawproject?feature=watch>

Saferworld Uganda: <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/where/uganda>

Uganda Women's Network: <http://www.uwonet.or.ug/>

UNFPA Uganda: <http://uganda.unfpa.org/>

World Bank: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/uganda>

## Press sources

*Daily Monitor*: <http://www.monitor.co.ug/>

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