



OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

MAKING PEACE OUR OWN

**Victims' Perceptions of Accountability,
Reconciliation and Transitional
Justice in Northern Uganda**



UNITED NATIONS 2007

Executive Summary

THE PURPOSE of this research study is to explore perceptions among northern Ugandans on themes of accountability, reconciliation and transitional justice. After a more than 20-year conflict between the Ugandan Government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), current negotiations in Juba, southern Sudan, represent the best-ever opportunity for a lasting peace. Central to the talks are questions of the most appropriate accountability and reconciliation processes to address crimes committed during the conflict and to help reconstruct the fabric of Ugandan society. This research study is designed to contribute to discussions on these themes in Juba, in Ugandan society and internationally.

Underlying the study is a belief that the Ugandan population's views – and especially those of victims of the conflict – have often been overlooked in debates about accountability, reconciliation and transitional justice. Consequently, many discussions have become disconnected from the needs and perspectives of the people most affected by the conflict, who are also likely to be key actors in any future accountability and reconciliation processes. This study aims to amplify victims' voices and to interpret the social, cultural and political significance of popular perceptions. Discussions on the northern Ugandan conflict have been dominated by analyses based on artificial dichotomies, including peace versus justice, local versus international responses to atrocities, and the population's desire for forgiveness and reconciliation versus punishment. The effect of this polarisation has been to cloud debates about the most appropriate ways to address conflict and its aftermath, implying either/or choices when combinations of these elements often better reflect popular perceptions and lead to more effective practical strategies. Furthermore, much of the analysis of the conflict so far has focused on Acholiland, neglecting the situation in other affected regions.

This qualitative research study, carried out by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) over six months from January to June 2007, involved the participation of 1725 victims of the conflict in 69 focus groups in Acholiland, Lango and Teso sub-regions, and interviews with 39 key informants to provide a degree of cultural interpretation of responses from the focus groups. The study is based on a sample of the views of those affected by the conflict, organised in ten clusters based on common experiences of harm (further divided by gender and age group), and is not meant to be a poll of all persons in northern Uganda. Employing a narrative-based approach gained the broadest and deepest possible understanding of victims' views of accountability and reconciliation. The report is built on a numerous accounts of memories, oral histories and lessons expressed by the respondents. It analyses these perceptions across regions and clusters, and within the northern Ugandan cultural, social and political context. These narratives are intended to inform wider public consultations on how best to redress past abuses, violations and deep-seated social and economic inequalities by engaging formal and informal processes of justice and reconciliation.

The report highlights that focus groups across the three sub-regions under consideration have experienced similar forms of harm, with similar long-term effects on individuals and communities. Overall, they are deeply traumatised and feel neglected and unprotected. Respondents' views diverge significantly on questions of accountability, reconciliation and transitional justice, in some cases even within focus groups in the same locations. This diversity

of opinion highlights the complexity and highly localised nature of the conflict. It also indicates that victims' characterisations of their experiences of the conflict and their views on the necessary redress are often unique to particular individuals and groups. There is no universal "northern Ugandan" view of who is accountable for causing harm to civilians nor of what form accountability should take, although certain trends do emerge in perspectives on these themes. Most notably, this research study shows that the population broadly believes that both the LRA and the Government – and specifically their leaders – should be held accountable for the harms they have caused during the conflict. The study also challenges the depictions in current debates that northern Ugandans are inherently forgiving, reconciliatory or willing to give amnesty to those who have caused them harm – an issue which merits further consideration. Sentiments of anger and vengefulness and a desire for prosecution abound in many communities, though there are still some perceived pragmatic advantages to amnesty, particularly to facilitate the return home of low-level LRA perpetrators (including former abductees), whom many respondents consider "children of the community." Where respondents expressed a readiness to forgive and/or to reconcile with perpetrators, it was rarely an automatic response but usually one informed by a range of personal and communal pragmatic considerations.

The respondents in this study expressed an overwhelming desire for reconciliation, particularly at the family, community and inter-regional levels. However, there was widespread scepticism about the potential for current transitional justice mechanisms – especially state institutions – to facilitate reconciliation. Respondents stated consistently that truth-recovery and reparation in the form of compensation are their principal needs in terms of transitional justice responses to the conflict. However, they provided highly variable accounts of which local, national or international mechanisms can best deliver truth and compensation. In particular, perceptions of the virtues of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and traditional practises – the two broad transitional justice approaches that have dominated recent discussions of the northern Ugandan situation – were greatly mixed. Many respondents argued that a multi-faceted transitional justice response, combining several processes and institutions to address different types of harm caused by different levels of perpetrators, is required.

The findings bear significantly upon current policy questions, particularly those being debated at the Juba peace talks. They should inform the broader public policy discussions at the time of devising concrete implementation processes and mechanisms. It will be important for decision makers to address the overwhelming need expressed by the victims groups for truth about past harms and consider the need for a systematic process of historical clarification mandated to explore the long view of the current conflict, even before 1986. As well, stakeholders will need to address reparations as a crucial measure to address past injustice since a compensatory policy may be seen by victims as the only measure that is explicitly and primarily carried out on their behalf. Policy makers may wish to consider the application of a strong monitoring and evaluation system to ensure such a compensatory scheme transparent and free of corruption.

Furthermore, the ICC must increase its outreach efforts to address most respondents' stated lack of information of its operations. This is important to create awareness about its potential contributions to both truth-recovery processes and compensation, particularly as it is administered by its Trust Fund for Victims. Effective sensitisation may help counteract widespread views of the failure of its publicly stated mission to prosecute and apprehend the perpetrators, and address the lack of trust in its ability to administer an even-handed justice, also a relevant

consideration for domestic judicial bodies. The research findings concerning the ICC's role and operations in Uganda have particular bearing on the States Parties to take up their responsibility under the Rome Statute to cooperate meaningfully with the Court's mandate to interdict serious violators of international law.

Finally the research study highlights the widespread view that the international community should play a central role in ensuring that decisions made in Juba regarding accountability and reconciliation cohere with the population's views and concerns alongside broader considerations of public interest and national and international law. Ultimately, in a more concrete sense, it also highlights that the international community must ensure that victims receive remedy and reparation they demand in response to the immense and lasting harms they have suffered.

Acknowledgements

IN ADDITION to its colleagues in Uganda, OHCHR wishes to thank the many dedicated individuals and organisations that supported and participated in the research over more than six months.

In particular, OHCHR would like to acknowledge the consultant for his indispensable role in the study design, analysis and report, Dr. Phil Clark. Dr. Clark is a post-doctoral research fellow at the Transitional Justice Institute, University of Ulster, and Senior Managing Editor of *Oxford International Review*. His knowledge and expertise extend to a range of topics related to transitional justice in African post-conflict societies, including national and community-level justice and reconciliation processes, particularly the *gacaca* community courts in Rwanda, and the complementarity of the International Criminal Court and domestic institutions.

This field-based study would not have been possible without the dedication of the national consultants who formed the research teams who implemented the research in Acholiland, Lango and Teso sub-regions. Each of them provided leadership, generously shared information and insights, and was deeply committed to the betterment of conflict-affected communities. OHCHR would like to extend sincere thanks to the research coordinators for their patience and leadership. Deep appreciation is extended to the moderators of the focus groups who brought their knowledge, inspiration and animation to the task. Much gratitude is expressed to the notetakers for their powers of observance and their precision in recording all the narratives. Many thanks go to the linguistic experts for their insights. OHCHR would like to extend special thanks to the actors of the four drama troupes from Lango, Kitgum, Gulu and Teso, for their spirit and creativity and to their drama coordinators for their vision.

OHCHR would also like to acknowledge the many community-based organizations in Lira, Gulu, Kitgum, Pader and Soroti districts that provided crucial support to OHCHR and the research team during the advisory phase and implementation of the project.

OHCHR owes special thanks to the many people who enthusiastically participated in the focus groups and interviews and who took the time to meet with the researchers to share so openly their thoughts, concerns and visions.

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Introduction

THE PURPOSE of this research study is to explore perceptions among northern Ugandans on themes of accountability, reconciliation and transitional justice. The more than 20-year conflict between the Ugandan Government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has devastated northern Uganda and the surrounding region. However, current negotiations between the Government and the LRA in Juba, southern Sudan, represent the best-ever opportunity for lasting peace. Central to the talks are questions of the most appropriate accountability and reconciliation processes to address crimes committed during the conflict and to help reconstruct the fabric of Ugandan society. This research study, produced by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the main UN entity working on issues of human rights and transitional justice, is designed to contribute to discussions on these themes in Juba, in Ugandan society and internationally. These narratives are intended to inform wider public consultations on how best to redress past abuses, violations and deep-seated social and economic inequalities by engaging formal and informal processes of justice and reconciliation. Such consultations will hopefully advance victims' perspectives together with the views of other relevant stakeholders to ensure that affected individuals and communities can come to term with the past and build a just society. The eagerness and enthusiasm of the participants to relay the narratives contained in this report underscored the importance of not neglecting their views.

Underlying the study is a belief that the Ugandan population's views – and especially those of victims of the conflict – have often been overlooked in debates about accountability, reconciliation and transitional justice. Consequently, many discussions have become disconnected from the perspectives and needs of the people most affected by the conflict, who are also likely to be key actors in any future accountability and reconciliation processes – and whose acceptance of any peace agreement is central to the sustainability of peace. This study aims to amplify victims' voices and to interpret the social, cultural and political significance of popular perceptions. Much of this report focuses on direct quotes from participants in focus groups, allowing them to express in their own words their views on the issues under consideration. The report is designed to illuminate and interpret key aspects of the population's narratives gathered during the field research. Due mainly to the richness of their language, the narratives alone often provide crucial insights into the effects of the conflict on individuals and communities in northern Uganda and how affected populations believe the conflict should be addressed. For this reason, each section of this report concludes with a collection of victims' narratives corresponding to the themes under analysis, which are randomly - in terms of victims' groups and geographic areas - organised within each sub-theme. The analytical and narrative components are intended to be complementary, as the analysis highlights the key themes and cultural underpinnings of the views expressed in the narratives and the narratives infuse the analysis with victims' verbatim perspectives.

Recent debates about the northern Ugandan conflict have been dominated by analyses based on artificial dichotomies, including peace versus justice, local versus international responses to harm, and the population's desire for forgiveness and reconciliation versus punishment. The effect of this polarisation has been to cloud debates about the most appropriate ways to address conflict and its aftermath, implying either/or choices when combinations of these elements often better reflect popular perceptions and lead to more effective practical strategies. What is

required are more nuanced interpretations of northern Ugandan experiences of, and responses to, harm during conflict. Furthermore, much of the analysis of the conflict so far has focused on Acholiland, neglecting the situation in other affected regions. The aim of this research study is to broaden and deepen understandings of the northern Ugandan conflict and perceptions of accountability, reconciliation and transitional justice, moving beyond simple dichotomies and an exclusively Acholi focus to show the complexity of current views across several sub-regions.

With this objective, the research team adopted the following methodology (described in greater detail in the Annex). The primary means of gathering information was through semi-structured interviews with 1725 victims in 69 selected focus groups and 39 key informants in three sub-regions: Acholiland, Lango and Teso. Focus groups comprised former LRA abductees, relatives of abductees and of people killed or maimed, victims of physical violence, internally displaced persons who have suffered economic loss, grassroots cultural leaders and elders, youths, recipients of traditional healing and members of victim and community-based organisations. Where relevant, the groups were subdivided in terms of gender or age. Field researchers visited locations several days before interviews to sensitise particular groups of victims regarding the aims and methods of the research project and, with the help of local community leaders, to identify participants. On the day of the focus group, short drama skits illustrating the main themes of the research project – namely, the nature of harms experienced by the community, notions of accountability and reconciliation, and transitional justice mechanisms – were performed before the focus group participants. The dramas helped introduce the topics of the project to respondents and generate discussion. Field researchers and members of the drama teams (who were all from the respective regions, fluent in the local languages and knowledgeable of local cultures) were encouraged to adapt their methods to the specific settings, for example by introducing relevant cultural elements in dramas or by pursuing different lines of questioning in focus groups as new issues arose. Key informant interviews were then used primarily to help interpret the cultural context of the information gathered from the focus groups and to collect the views of individuals who could not be interviewed in focus groups because of the sensitivity of the information in their possession. All interviews took place in February and March 2007, with most interviews tape-recorded and note takers keeping detailed records of all discussions. The identity of respondents and their specific locations have been kept strictly confidential by OHCHR for security reasons and do not appear in the report.

The research team adopted a qualitative approach in the gathering and analysis of field material. The team used qualitative methods because only a narrative-based approach could give the broadest and deepest possible understanding of respondents' experiences of the conflict and perceptions on accountability and reconciliation, particularly social and cultural nuances that could not be adequately captured in a quantitative analysis. Consequently, this report does not analyse focus groups participants' responses in terms of statistics and percentages but rather refers to broad trends of opinion among and within focus groups in different locations and seeks to embed these findings within the relevant social, cultural and political context.

The report focuses on local perceptions in a limited range of IDP camps and return areas in the three sub-regions. Nonetheless, as outlined in greater detail in the Annex, the research team took great care to interview a wide range of victims in different locations. Inevitably, despite the careful selection of focus groups, this study was affected not only by the geographical limitations of the research but also its timing. All focus group interviews were conducted during a period when the Juba peace talks had temporarily collapsed in early 2007. Widespread frustration with the

negotiations inevitably shaped many focus groups' responses to questions regarding accountability, reconciliation and transitional justice. This, however, never affected their desire for the peace talks to resolve and end the conflict.

The report is structured as follows: Part I explores the population's perceptions of the harms they have suffered as a result of the conflict and the long-term impact of harm on individuals and communities. Part II explores perceptions of accountability and reconciliation, focusing on which parties the population considers most accountable for the harms caused and the relevance of this for prospects for reconciliation. Part III investigates the population's views on the specific transitional justice mechanisms necessary to respond to crimes committed and in particular how they should deliver accountability and reconciliation. Finally, Part IV draws together various findings from the previous sections to provide an overview of the various perspectives on key issues that may inform current debates about transitional justice options.

Making Peace Our Own highlights the message of taking one's own place in the process of establishing peace in northern Uganda. This prevailing message was expressed by a great many of the respondents. The notion of peace, for the people who have been most adversely affected by the conflict, carries a strong sense of setting things right; encompassing the crucial yearning to end violence; a desire to return to their lands and to become self-sustainable; and a profound need for an accounting and redress of the misdeeds committed during the protracted cycle of violence. As they repeatedly voiced, these elements will go a long way toward restoring their human dignity.

I. Perceptions of Harms Suffered as a Result of the Conflict

THIS SECTION of the research explores the various harms suffered by the northern Ugandan population as a result of the 20-year conflict. The aim of the focus group questions under this heading was to identify the main types of harms suffered, which groups within the population have suffered most, and how individuals and communities have been affected in the long-term. In exploring the population's perspectives on harm, field researchers allowed the respondents to give detailed accounts of their experiences. Consequently, respondents described a wide range of harms and their effects at individual, family and community levels. The descriptions of their personal and communal experiences of violence and the identities they assumed, for example, self-identities of victim and perpetrator, informed their views on accountability, reconciliation and transitional justice, as explored in the following two sections.

Generally, the focus groups described very similar experiences of harm across the sub-regions of Acholiland, Lango and Teso. However, due to more sustained and extreme violence in Acholiland since 1986, respondents argued overall that the magnitude of harms among Acholi has been greater than in other affected sub-regions. The exploration of harms in this section highlights the immense suffering of the population which transitional justice processes must ultimately address. It also highlights that while describing the original harm they suffered, most victims focused equally on the impact it had on their current life, such as abductees' lack of education opportunities due to years in captivity or rape victims' stated inability to marry.

Nature and Impact of Harms

Focus groups in Acholiland, Lango and Teso indicated that as a result of conflict victims have suffered a wide range of physical, emotional, psychological, cultural and economic harms, both as individuals and communities. Broadly speaking, across the three sub-regions the most common forms of harm identified were murder, torture, abduction, rape, mutilation, arson, displacement of the population into IDP camps, and the theft or destruction

of property. As a result of these harms, the population expressed feelings of immense loss, sustained physical and emotional trauma, and severe psychological disorientation.

Many respondents provided graphic accounts of their experiences during conflict. One formerly abducted Langi boy from Lira district said, *“When we were abducted, [the rebels] made us sit on eight people who were killed. We were made to drink the blood of the corpses and some of the blood was rubbed into our chests... They cut people and cooked the bodies in drums. We were then made to eat the flesh that was cooked.”* An Acholi victim of economic loss in Gulu district said, *“Besides losing our relatives in mass killings at Lukodi, we have now been rendered economically helpless. I lost a whole kraal of cattle. The loss hurts me a great deal and when I see lorries full of cattle passing through here, I feel like committing suicide.”*

Just as victims have suffered a wide range of harms, the effects of the conflict have also been highly varied. In many cases, different harms have had a compounding effect. For example, some victims have suffered mutilation, maiming, gunshot wounds or injuries from landmines and are therefore disabled to the extent that they cannot participate in economic and other activities in the community. This poses great difficulties especially for victims in communities where the main economic activity is subsistence farming, in which all community members are expected to participate. Many victims stated in the focus groups that they have suffered not only individual physical and psychological harms but also subsequent social dislocation because of their inability to contribute meaningfully to the economic wellbeing of the community. Internally displaced persons were often confined within a boundary of a few kilometres, severely limiting their access to land for agricultural purposes. One Acholi who suffered economic loss stated, *“Hunger is a result of the violence because there are no fields for the IDPs to practice agriculture. There is even no land for burials as there was in the past when we buried our people in our ancestral lands”.*

As one Acholi female victim of physical violence in Pader district said, *“I am a very weak person now because of the severe beatings by the LRA. My children are not in school because I cannot do anything in the way of work for them to go to school and pay their fees. The poverty in my household is unbelievable.”* A formerly abducted woman from Lango district recounted her experience: *“The LRA robbed food from my house and beat me. I knelt pleading with them not to take me with them but the more I pleaded, the more they kicked me. They took me to their commander. I was abducted with my grandchildren for a month. For four days we did not eat food”.*

An Acholi victim of physical violence in Amuru district said:

I lost my son who was shot dead by the Government soldiers who thought he was a rebel and other family members were all burnt in their hut. Now I have no children and am physically disabled because I was tortured by the rebels. Currently I have no shelter because of strange happenings like huts that just start burning without anyone setting them on fire. I am really suffering.

Respondents in all sub-regions identified extreme poverty as a major effect of the conflict, exacerbating other harms they have suffered. Many respondents stated that they have lost property or been displaced from their lands and are therefore unable to meet the basic needs of their families. Particularly in Lango and Teso, respondents claimed that many children have been forced to live on the streets because of a lack of food and general care in

their homes. One Langi male victim of physical violence in Lira district said, *“Orphaned children who ran to other places like Lira town and Baala became street children and it is hard to bring most of them back home from the streets.”*

Several respondents in Teso described a lack of food as such a widespread problem that many people have been forced to eat cats, dogs and lizards. Descriptions of abject poverty were most common and vivid in Lango and Teso, possibly suggesting that development programmes have been less sustained in these sub-regions than in Acholiland.

Respondents in all sub-regions described severe emotional and psychological effects of the harms they have suffered during the conflict. A former female abductee in Pader district of the Acholi sub-region said, *“I know I am not normal. I am always haunted especially by the spirits of my grandfather who was axed into two parts. He was then placed on the granary to roast. Till death I cannot forget this terrible act.”* An Iteso man who was abducted by the LRA recalls: *I was abducted, battered and my daughter was also abducted. The rebels made me walk for long distances. When I tried to escape I was emotionally tortured and later when I escaped I joined the Arrow militia.*

An Acholi victim of violence in Amuru district said:

I was arrested by one UPDF Commander called [name withheld]. The UPDF tortured me terribly for failing to tell them where the rebels were. As a punishment, I was pushed back into my house and they set the hut on fire so that my family and I would all die. God willing, I did not die but later all my children were abducted by the rebels. My only son who had remained joined the army where he was later killed during the war. Now I am childless and heartbroken.

Many respondents indicated that high levels of psychological trauma in the community have seriously affected community relations, as manifest in domestic violence in the IDP camps and some reprisals against former abductees upon their return. Complicating community relations in this setting is the fact that many of the perpetrators of crimes in northern Uganda were themselves victims of abduction and forced to commit atrocities in their own communities, sometimes against their own families (a theme explored in greater depth below in the section on “Accountability and Reconciliation”). Similarly, some members of local militias, known as Local Defence Units (LDUs), such as the Arrow Boys in Teso or Amuka Boys in Lango, have caused great harm to their own communities. Consequently, there are often difficult social interactions in communities between victims and perpetrators who know each other intimately and because many perpetrators also consider themselves victims of atrocities. As one former male abductee interviewed in Gulu district said:

We now experience broken relations because of the revenge attitude of the people in the communities. Most community members don't know who in particular led the rebels to their communities or who was directly responsible for all the murder, torture and other crimes like destruction of property. That is why community attitudes are unforgiving towards all the returnees. There is a lot of finger pointing

and referring to us formerly abducted as killers.

Many former abductees across all sub-regions expressed great doubts about whether they would ever be able to truly reintegrate into their home communities.

Most focus groups described the wide range of negative effects of the Government actions to forcibly displace civilians into IDPs camps. UPDF forces stationed near or within IDP camps were often described as the source of violence against civilians living in the camps. A victim of gender-based violence in Gulu district described her experience, *“There were four UPDF soldiers who gang-raped me and threatened to kill me if I reported it. I was frightened and I did not report it.”*

A male victim of violence in Gulu district identified the occurrence of gender-based violence against men perpetrated by the UPDF, *“The UPDF are currently raping our children. They had unnatural sex with other men.”*

A Langi member of a community-based organisation in Lira district described the impact of the UPDF presence in the camps:

Soldiers were enlisted and not properly paid. They were even not given food rations and yet they needed to survive, so in response they used our property that was left back home to survive. These soldiers were both the UPDF and Amuka boys, but leadership of both was UPDF command.

Respondents in all sub-regions described the various consequences of a lack of access to their ancestral lands, including limited agricultural activity and a sense of social and spiritual dislocation. Many respondents described cultural fragmentation and an overall loss of cultural norms and values as a result of life in the camps. Focus groups of young community members and elders consistently described forms of cultural breakdown as a major impact of other harms, including illiteracy and low levels of education, ignorance of important cultural rituals and forms of “immoral behaviour” such as infidelity and rape, which in their view resulted in the rampant spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Many elders complained of “wild” children who roamed the IDP camps and surrounding towns, showing no respect for their parents and leaders. Some of these children were former abductees but others were non-abductees who, the elders claimed, lacked moral and cultural guidance because their elders had been killed, incapacitated during the conflict, or in the case of male adults, deprived of their traditional role as bread-winner within the family. A former abductee from Amuru district described the current socio-cultural fragmentation:

There is moral degeneration in the camp and this is why the children do not have any respect for the elders as children had in the past. It is also because the parents are not the providers anymore. It is the NGOs and other humanitarian workers who are now our providers. Our parents are too poor to afford food, clothes and other basic needs. Therefore, the children look at them as not really important in the society.

Most Affected Groups

Respondents across Acholiland, Lango and Teso stated that different sub-regions suffered different magnitudes of harms during the conflict. Most focus groups in Teso and Lango claimed, for example, that they had suffered extreme harms but that the Acholi had suffered most. This acknowledgement reflects the broad history of the conflict in northern Uganda. Since 1986 when the National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A) came to power, several armed groups has caused major insecurity in Acholiland, beginning with the remnants of the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA), which transformed into the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA) and signed an accord with the Government in 1988. Conflict continued in Acholiland, as Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement and more recently Joseph Kony's LRA fought the Government. All of these armed groups used Acholiland as a base for launching offensives against the Government, although the LRA later relocated to southern Sudan, from which it launched multiple incursions into northern Uganda. Several other groups, principally the Karimojong, used this period of insecurity and lawlessness to conduct cattle raids in Acholiland, Lango and Teso.

In all three sub-regions, the specific geographic areas described as most affected by the conflict were invariably those that had suffered major incursions by the LRA. An Acholi woman who had been abducted by the LRA commented, *"The rebels used to set landmines which caused much harm to the people and many died as a result."*

A woman from Lira district described the LRA violence in her village:

Rebels attacked us in 2000 and killed so many people and abducted young people. The girls among them were turned into wives for the abductors. The old people were forced to carry looted items and were not allowed to rest along the way. If they complained that they were tired, they were killed.

Entire villages in Teso suffered the effects of LRA attacks, as one man recounted:

When the LRA rebels invaded Teso, in my village, nine people were killed...at the same time. When people tried to flee the village, they faced starvation. People who tried to take refuge in Soroti Town had to sleep on verandas. During that entire season, our children missed out on their schooling. The most painful thing was that our homes were all burnt by the LRA.

In addition to northern parts of Ugandan territory, some respondents, particularly former abductees, identified southern Sudanese communities as severely affected by violence. They claimed that local Sudanese children were also abducted, integrated into the ranks of the LRA and sent to loot their own communities. Such testimony highlights the trans-national impact of the conflict. Furthermore, it underlines that, of all the groups interviewed, former abductees have one of the broadest perspectives of the conflict because they have personally suffered and witnessed harm – often as direct perpetrators – in their home communities, in captivity (including in southern Sudan) and upon return from the bush.

The conflict has affected the entire population of northern Uganda and much of southern Sudan. However, some groups in the region have suffered more than others. Respondents in all sub-regions stated consistently that children (especially former abductees) and women have suffered most. In Teso, respondents claimed that two other vulnerable groups - people with disabilities and the elderly - were also among the most affected. As a male member of an LDU in Teso said, *“People with disabilities suffered most during the conflict. They were subjected to torture at the hands of the LRA and UPDF; as a result, they became disabled.”* A victim of violence perpetrated by the LRA in Teso said, *“Elderly people are weak and could not run, let alone look after themselves.”*

In all sub-regions, the vulnerability of children was associated with the fact that they were the primary target of abduction by the LRA. Former abductees have experienced various harms during their abduction and while in captivity. After their abduction, many of these individuals were forced to commit abuses. In the bush, they experienced torture, forced labour, starvation, rape and forced marriage. One female former abductee in Teso described life in captivity:

I walked for long distances, drank dirty water by the roadside, carried heavy luggage. I moved until my legs became swollen. I starved for many days. I depended on the stems of spear grass for food. The skin of my legs peeled off because of long distance walks from Teso to southern Sudan through Pader, Gulu and Kitgum. I was made to carry things like hot saucepans that were used for cooking...I was also made to carry LRA casualties of war. I was tortured psychologically when I saw people killed in my presence.

An Acholi girl said, *“I was abducted at the age of 11 by the LRA. While I was in the bush, I was made to carry several heavy loads and subjected to torture. One time when the UPDF attacked, I was also made to kill other children if they tried to escape. Then I was forced to have sex with a big man...”*

The plight of men when they were abducted by the LRA was also often referred to, as described by an Iteso man, *“If a man and a woman were both abducted, in most cases the man would be beaten to death, while the woman would not be.”*

Many former abductees reported that, after escaping or being rescued from captivity, they found it difficult to reintegrate into their communities because of discrimination and stigmatisation, especially from victims of LRA crimes. In Teso, several former abductees complained that members of the community labelled them *“ikonyiak”* (a term used to describe Kony and his commanders), because of the atrocities they were assumed to have committed. Former abductees’ feelings of alienation have exacerbated the trauma they experienced during life in the bush. Consequently, many former abductees in all sub-regions described experiencing depression and a sense of numbness toward other people and life generally.

Young female abductees in all sub-regions described the immense challenges they faced upon their return home, especially in cases where they had given birth in the bush, after having been raped by LRA fighters, including commanders, and the broader community later rejected their children. In most cases, rape victims experienced

stigmatisation as a result of bearing such children, and faced social and economic difficulties related to raising children without their fathers. As an Acholi female former abductee in Gulu district said, *“Our future is spoiled because they make us become second hand people when they rape us and we come back with babies and none of these boys may ever marry us.”* An Acholi female victim of physical violence in Amuru district said, *“Divorce is one of the things we women are facing in that after the rape, your husband might divorce you, not because he hates you, but because of fear of disease and the pain of having to live with a woman who was raped by another man.”* A young girl in Pader district said:

I am a hopeless girl who because of the war has never had access to education. While I was in the bush I was made to become a mother unwillingly. Now I have a number of problems that I cannot solve and I cannot even take care of my children. I am ignorant and this makes me feel very bad when I see my friends who are better off than me.

The regular identification of women and girls as among those most affected by the conflict was due primarily to their having to care for children, often without the support of their husbands, and having to cope with the loss of children abducted by the LRA. Furthermore, many women respondents in all sub-regions said they had suffered rape and physical torture by the LRA and UPDF. An Acholi girl from Pader district described her ordeal, *“I was abducted by the LRA and tortured severely yet I was only 14 years old. I was made to carry very heavy loads and I was also forced to accept an old man to be my husband while in the bush. I feel very disappointed in life.”* Several respondents in Pader district of Acholiland also described instances in which young women, some of whom had escaped captivity in the bush, were raped by UPDF soldiers, including cases of gang rape, when they ventured outside of the IDP camps to collect firewood and gather food.

Respondents also often described harms caused as a result of their lack of intervention to protect civilians from LRA attacks. As stated by a male victim of violence from Lira district, *“We blame the Government for not having deployed enough army men and yet they knew that we live in a war area. We had only 30 Amuka Boys and no UPDF soldiers. The few Amukas had few ammunition and uniforms. We think that the Government did it intentionally.”* A male victim of violence in Amuria district in Teso explained:

Museveni as the President of Uganda failed to stop the LRA war and yet Kony is his son. Museveni practices tribal segregation. He has failed to come into an agreement with Kony. He has turned the LRA war into a business where he uses it as a tool for lobbying and advocacy for continued funding from the outside world. He has failed to provide security in northern and north-eastern regions of Uganda and yet the Constitution clearly stipulates that: ‘The State must provide security to the citizens of Uganda.’

That respondents throughout Acholiland, Lango and Teso described similar harms resulting from the current conflict highlights the similar impact that the military operations launched by armed groups and the UPDF had on the civilian populations across northern Uganda. The conflict caused severe and lasting harm to all segments of the northern population but particularly in Acholiland, and especially among children and women. The harm

the population has experienced is the result of attacks on civilians and property during the conflict and their long-term, often compounding, effects. Every aspect of people's lives has been affected in some way. Consequently, respondents in all areas stated consistently that, even if sustainable peace were ever achieved in northern Uganda, it would still take many years for life to become bearable.

Narratives

Perceptions of Harms Suffered as a Result of the Conflict

Remains of persons killed by
LRA in Pader District



Nature and Impact of Harms

“I was abducted in 1995. My biggest problem was walking very long distances without water or rest. I was made to babysit another woman’s child. The mother of that baby became my co-wife. I gave birth to two children while in the bush. I drank urine a number of times because there was nothing to drink and we would force others to urinate in order for us to have something to drink. I was carrying guns on my shoulders, beans on my head and my child on my back moving towards Katakwi when I got wounded due to a bomb blast thrown by an aeroplane. This was when I escaped. When I returned home, I found both my parents dead. Now I am on my own. I am the father, mother, brother and sister of my family.” **(A former female abductee - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“The LRA threw my two children into a fire. One of the kids died and the other burned her head as she jumped out of the fire and tried to escape.” **(A victim of violence - Lira District, Lango)**

“The killings were carried out by those struggling for power. It has brought much suffering to all of us here. Because of the rebels, we have suffered killings, abduction and looting, but the UPDF has also done the same. The two groups must change their attitudes towards the civilians; they must see us as human beings. They must give us respect.”

(A grassroots leader - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“The war has caused the spread of many guns in the community. The soldiers and Arrow Boys should be disarmed. This causes a lot of fear in the community.” **(A victim of economic loss – Amuria District, Teso)**

“I was shot and I continued running even as they ordered, ‘Shoot!’ I was shot in the breast, but I ran and hid in the bush far away from them.” **(A female victim of violence - Lira District, Lango)**

“The conflict has caused families to break up because people were confined into camps where there was a lot of immorality.”

(A relative of a deceased - Amuria District, Teso)

“I was abducted with my children; the boys were tied up with ropes and were seriously beaten. One of them was later axed and they ordered my grandfather’s death. They then brought razors and inflicted cuts on all our ears and if my small baby had cried, they would have killed her.” **(A victim of violence with a disability - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“In 1986, I saw some rebels from a distance while I was in my garden. I tried to follow them so that I would go and tell the soldiers about their location, but unfortunately I stepped on a landmine and lost one leg. Now I use sticks to walk. I cannot even dig or protect myself from violence. I also lost my daughter in 1994 and up until now I know nothing of her whereabouts – if she is alive or not. It causes too much pain when I think of her.” **(A victim of violence with a disability - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“Our wives were taken away to become the wives of soldiers. My two sisters who were married at the time were forcefully taken away to become Government soldiers’ wives. Rebels also took our sisters and made them wives.”

(A male victim of economic loss - Kitgum District, Acholiland)

“I am a widow now because my husband was killed in one of the rebel attacks and I have many challenges and pains trying to raise my children. I am a single, frustrated widow and I cannot even morally shape them.” **(A widow - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“I was caught in a battle between the LRA and the UPDF, which made me flee and leave my cows. The LRA abducted my children and up until now they have not returned.” **(A parent of abductees - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Girls as young as 10 years get married as a way of increasing family wealth.” **(A youth - Amuria District, Teso)**

“I was abducted together with my whole family. We were tortured and as a result, some died. Later, we were released but our homes were burned. All of us who survived had serious injuries. Now I get medical help from Voice of Peace. I am a very weak woman. I cannot even farm to provide food for my children. As a result, they have also dropped out of school. I feel so bad to see my remaining children growing up in such a strange life.” **(A victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“My brother was hurt by a landmine during the liberation war. This has caused me to live in fear of even cultivating my garden.”

(A male victim of economic loss - Kitgum District, Acholiland)

“When we left our home, diseases such as cholera and HIV/AIDS started to spread. The Government is trying to control it but it has killed so many people.” **(A relative of a murder victim - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“There is high insecurity in the area because the Arrow Boys who are seen to provide security have deserted their jobs because they do not get paid.” **(A relative of murder victim - Amuria District, Teso)**

“I was abducted by the LRA at the age of 20. Later I tried to escape but was caught. The commander ordered my killing, but my other friends pleaded for me. I was instead beaten severely as a punishment. One time, I was made to beat my friend to death and up until now, her spirit haunts me. I live because I cannot kill myself. **(A former female abductee - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“Witchcraft and theft are on the increase. This is a bad practice in the community.”

(A person that suffered economic loss - Amuria District, Teso)

“My younger sister and I were both abducted by the rebels. My husband and other family members were all killed and now I have a child with the man who raped me. My ears were all cut. When the wind blows, I cannot hear anything. This is the life I live now yet I have children that I am supposed to raise. I am such a miserable woman and widow.”

(A victim of violence with a disability - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“The war has caused permanent fear because Kony has not surrendered to the UPDF” **(An Arrow Boy - Amuria District, Teso)**

“I lost almost all my property because the rebels looted it. Afterwards, the Government forces came and beat me. They administered forty stokes on me, demanding that I tell them where the rebels had gone because they thought I was collaborating with the rebels. My child was also abducted that same week.” **(A widow and member of a community-based organisation - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“Food is insufficient due to continuous raids by both the Karimojong and the LRA rebels.” **(A youth - Lira District, Lango)**

“There are so many cases of defilement in the camps. Children are involved in sex before getting married and this is so common here.” **(A former abductee - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“There were four UPDF soldiers who and threatened to kill me if I reported it. I was frightened and I did not report it.”

(A victim of gender-based violence - Gulu District, Acholiland)

“In 1988 my shop was looted. Two years later the LRA rebels abducted me, my children and my wife. My wife was then raped. Later in 1994, my house was burned, and my property looted.” **(A grassroots leader - Kitgum District, Acholiland)**

“Family conflicts and divorce have increased. There is a high increase in HIV/AIDS infection in the camps. This is caused by the soldiers who are deployed in the area.” **(A victim of economic loss - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Both the Government and LRA came and caused us problems. Sometimes the LRA came to conduct their operations, followed by the UPDF. The Government forces are currently raping our children. They had unnatural sex with other men. They take our children from school and take our daughters.” **(A victim of violence - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“My education has been interrupted because I was abducted by the LRA. All the time I was in captivity, I was not able to study. Therefore all the people I used to stay with have studied at higher levels and I have not been given the chance to catch up to them.”

(A former abductee - Pader District, Acholiland)

“There are now many single-headed families.” **(A member of a community-based organisation - Amuria District, Teso)**

“We do not have access to social services including health, accommodation and water. All these things have been destroyed by the rebels when the conflict started. Services cannot be brought here because the Government believes us to be too remote.”

(A former abductee - Pader District, Acholiland)

“Our daughters were abducted and raped in the bush. They gave birth to children who have no clan and when they return without the father of these children, they lack financial support and become destitute.” **(A former male abductee - Lira District, Lango)**

“We experienced many killings that were ordered by the LRA commanders. They would ask some of the captives to kill their colleagues who tried to escape, as a lesson to others who may have the same intention of escaping. Some of our people died when they encountered the UPDF soldiers, while others sustained serious injuries from stray bullets.”

(A former abductee - Gulu District, Acholiland)

“I feel very bad because I lost my home and land and now I am displaced to another person’s land. I have no access to my farmland. Poverty has become our friend. In addition to that, there is much congestion in the camp and we now are very vulnerable to diseases, especially HIV/AIDS. Illiteracy is also a problem. My daughter and I have a life which is not good at all.”

(A victim of violence - Pader District, Acholiland)

“My husband was killed and my child was shot in the legs. His legs had to be amputated.”

(A parent of an abductee - Lira District, Lango)

“I am an orphan and as a child who heads his family, I find it difficult to find the means to send my siblings to school.”

(A victim of economic loss - Kitgum District, Acholiland)

“Children became unruly because the elders who could instill good morals in the children were killed by the LRA.”

(A victim of violence - Amuria District, Teso)

“We have had problems for 21 years. As youths we did not have an education. I am 21-years-old and I received no education since the war started, just like many others in northern Uganda. We studied in the camps but that was not really education because we were always sick. We have no basic knowledge and we cannot read and write.” **(A youth - Lira District, Lango).**

“I fear anybody in uniform and I get frightened if a person bumps into me. This is due to the fear of LRA abductions.”

(A former abductee - Lira District, Lango)

“My wife and child were shot. My child survived but my wife did not. One of my children also died when our hut burned. The child who was shot was taken to hospital where a woman looks after her. They need things at the hospital which I am unable to provide.” **(A male victim of violence - Lira District, Lango)**

“When we were abducted, we drank urine since water points were guarded by Government soldiers. When we were moving, we were not allowed to stop to urinate or defecate, otherwise we were killed. Thus, people were forced to urinate and defecate on themselves as they travelled along.” **(A former male abductee - Lira District, Lango)**

“In 2003, the rebels looted the goats that my wife was taking to hide. As we were running away from the rebels they also raped her.” **(A grassroots leader - Kitgum District, Acholiland)**

“When the conflict intensified, all the roads were blocked. While in the camps, soldiers did not allow us to move freely in the night when we wanted to ease ourselves. Sanitation was poor because we did not have proper latrines to use.”

(A male youth - Lira District, Lango)

“When we decided to organise prayers to remember the deceased, our relatives travelling from elsewhere were stopped from attending by [name of a local official withdrawn]. This was done by the Government soldiers.”

(A member of a community-based organisation - Oyam District, Lango)

“I was abducted in 1999 and forcefully given as a wife to a man old enough to be my father. I was subjected to a lot of violence and torture. I was also starved for many days while in Sudan. As a result, I am now weak and cannot do certain things, even fetch firewood. The hospital also detected a bullet still located in my thigh.” **(A former female abductee - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“The rebels shot many people and destroyed the legs of many people, especially those who were riding bicycles. We the able men and women were ordered to carry the crippled ones.” **(A victim of economic loss - Kitgum District, Acholiland)**

“We the Langi did not have soldiers deployed to our region for a long time. Later only 15 Amuka soldiers were deployed, and they were supposed to fight against about 200 rebels. They were not sufficient to protect us. Some people were killed and their relatives thought that fellow brothers were directing the rebels to them. Yet it was a problem of insufficient deployment. What annoyed us even more during that time was that the Government said that ‘Kony’s war’ is a war between brothers, which made us believe that they did not want to intervene even though we were experiencing so much suffering.” **(A male youth - Lira District, Lango)**

“The following day, we were made to bury the dead. When we became tired and tried to rest, soldiers started beating us and forced us to continue burying. We were made to put mud blocks on the corpses so as to make the work faster, denying the dead and their loved ones the chance of a decent burial.” **(A male victim of violence - Lira District, Lango)**

“There is no peace since people are still confined in overcrowded camps. Diseases increased due to the concentration of persons in camps and poor balanced diets. This causes many children to die of malnutrition. People became individualistic as many people developed an attitude of self-centeredness. The abductions of children caused trauma which resulted in sickness.”

(A member of a community-based organisation - Amuria District, Teso)

“Moving in and out of camps was very difficult at the time of the LRA incursion. It prohibited business and other things.”

(A grassroots leader - Amuria District, Teso)

“In our village, we experienced a problem of contaminated water because dead bodies were thrown into the water source. When the soldiers who were deployed in the field went to fetch water, they pumped the hair of deceased persons along with water. When we the residents of the area started to return from the camps to the villages, we pumped water and filthy substances came out together with the water. Upon opening the borehole, we discovered dead bodies inside.”

(A relative of a murder victim - Amuria District, Teso)

“There are a high number of drunkards in the IDP camps. This is due to the fact that people are not occupied by any productive activity that could be a way to fight their boredom.” **(A former abductee - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“Many elders are going to die because they are subjected to heavy workloads. They are not supposed to do such work but they have to because there are no other able persons to help them.” **(A victim of economic loss - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Human rights abuses are mainly committed by the UPDF. The LRA do not rape women, it is the UPDF, and therefore the Government and the UN must put in place strict laws to stop the human rights abuses and oppression.”

(A grassroots leader - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“Many of my children dropped out of school because my source of income was sabotaged. Many of my sons were abducted and up until now one of them is not back.” **(A member of a community-based organisation - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Families have been broken because of difficulties in obtaining food. Women are forced to go with other men to put some food on the family table.” **(A grassroots leader - Amuria District, Teso)**

“The spread of HIV/AIDS infections is as a result of a high influx of the UPDF in the area. People in the camp became involved in prostitution in order to earn a living. There is also a problem of many divorces.” **(A victim of violence - Amuria District, Teso)**

“There is moral degeneration in the camp and this is why the children do not have any respect for the elders as children had in the past. It is also because the parents are not the providers anymore. It is the NGOs and other humanitarian actors who are now our providers. Our parents are too poor to afford food, clothes and other basic needs. Therefore, the children look at them as not really important in the society.” **(A former abductee - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“Some people are left without a decent burial because they were abducted and killed in distant places where it is very difficult to recover their bodies.” **(A victim of violence - Amuria District, Teso)**

“We are living in constant fear because we think that we could be abducted and harmed by those who committed atrocities in the region.” **(A victim of economic loss - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“They abducted my wife and me. My wife was killed that very day. I am now confined to the IDP camp in Amuria District, Teso. My two children were abducted. One has come back but the other, not yet.” **(A widower and father of an abductee - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Poverty has become my brother. I cannot run away from it. This is all because of this war.”

(A victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“The LRA abducted my two children and killed my wife. This caused me to come to an IDP camp but this led to famine. Many children in the camp eat dogs and lizards. My children who returned from the bush are now mentally disturbed.”

(A widower and father of former abductees - Amuria District, Teso)

“I am now disabled. My arm is damaged because of the way I was tied up with a rope while in the bush. Now, I can only use my left hand to do almost everything because of this torture. I am now a very poor, unhappy man with limitations on what work I can do.” **(A parent of an abductee, who also suffered from a disability - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“The UN should focus on people’s suffering so that they use the findings to communicate with Kony and convince him to listen to the voices of the suffering people.” **(A wife of a soldier - Kitgum District, Acholiland)**

“My husband was killed leaving me with six children. I am given no help to raise my children. The children cry because they are hungry, but there is no food and we also do not have medicines. You have to beg neighbors to feed your children. I cannot be helped now that my husband has been killed.” **(A widow - Amuria District, Teso)**

Most Affected Groups

“Young girls are abducted and given to the rebels as wives. When they return, the community points a finger at them since in most cases they come back with children.” **(An internally displaced person - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“Men were more at risk because once taken by the LRA, the LRA had no mercy on them, except to kill them.”
(A youth - Amuria District, Teso)

“When there is a war or an attack, women always give up their lives for their children and they also take responsibility for defending the family by pleading.” **(A widow and member of a community-based organisation - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“Children have been severely affected by the conflict because they have been the main target of the rebels. They are abducted and not released and so they form the bulk of the LRA. The adults are not the primary targets of abduction. On many occasions, the adults are permitted to go back home but a child is not allowed to go back home.” **(A former abductee - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“I say that girls have suffered the most because when we were abducted, we were seriously tortured, raped by different men old enough to be our parents and we ended up with fatherless children when we returned home.” **(A female former abductee - Gulu District, Acholi)**

“Women suffered because many times their husbands ran away ahead of them or were killed, leaving them to look after the family. Yet many of them are not in a position to do so.” **(A male youth - Lira District, Lango)**

“Children, both boys and girls who are abducted and trained to become militias, are the main victims.”
(A former male abductee - Lira District, Lango Main)

“Child-headed families were usually asleep when the rebels attacked so they were abducted. There was no one to wake them up.”
(A member of the LDU - Kitgum District, Acholiland)

“What is very painful is the suffering of women. They have to make sure that their children are not abducted and as a result, they end up being abducted, killed and on many occasions raped by the UPDF.”
(The relative of a murder victim - Gulu District, Acholiland)

“The aim of the LRA incursions in Teso was to abduct children because children are easily trained and their minds easily changed.”
(A youth - Amuria District, Teso)

“When I returned from the bush, I had terrible wounds on my leg, which does not allow me to move over a long distance. In the bush, I had become pregnant at a very early age - 11 years. The doctor advised me never to produce children again.”
(A female victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“As young women we have suffered most and are the most vulnerable because we are the last to run when the rebels invade a village because we remain behind to make sure that the children run to safety and avoid abduction by the rebels. Children who are orphaned are mistreated and sometimes their foster parents rape the girls and abuse and over work the boys.”
(A female former abductee - Lira District, Lango)

“There is high rate of immorality within the camp. Even women have taken to drinking alcohol in order to nurse their frustrations. This has made very many women lead useless lives today.” **(A female victim of physical violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“A number of women have mental illnesses as a result of the torture and beatings we suffered when we were abducted by the LRA. Most of us have physical disabilities and this has affected our capacity, so much so that our lives at some level have less meaning.” **(A female victim of physical violence - Amuru District, Acholiland).**



II. Perceptions of Accountability and Reconciliation

THE PURPOSE of this section of the research study is to explore the population's views on accountability and reconciliation, themes which constitute the third agenda item in the Juba peace talks. Research questions here centred on identifying the individuals and groups whom respondents considered most accountable for the harms discussed in the previous section, based on their own expressed criteria for determining accountability. It was left open to the focus groups to distinguish between the responsibility and accountability they ascribed to particular parties. For example, some respondents stated that all members of the LRA or UPDF were responsible for causing harm to the population but, for reasons explored below, only certain members of these forces should be held accountable for their actions. Field researchers also gathered focus groups' descriptions of instances of, and perceived motivations behind, perpetrators' public acknowledgement of wrongdoing in the community, the population's responses to these, and their views on reconciliation.

Similar to the previous section, the descriptions of accountability and reconciliation gathered across the three sub-regions were vivid and highly nuanced. Unlike the previous section, however, responses to questions of accountability and reconciliation showed significant variance of opinion among and within sub-regions. It is necessary therefore to reflect the full range of views on these themes and to interpret some of the social and cultural reasons behind them and – in the next section – their implications for formulating transitional justice processes. The variance in responses points to a situation more complex than that depicted in many stakeholder discussions and in particular highlights the crucial entanglement of individual and communal identities and concerns in the population's responses to harm.

Juba Peace Talks

The peace negotiations in Juba formed a crucial backdrop to focus group discussions of accountability and reconciliation. Although field researchers did not pose direct questions regarding the status of the negotiations,

all regions surveyed emphasised that the Juba talks represent the best-ever chance of achieving lasting peace in northern Uganda and expressed a hope that there may yet be genuine accountability for those who most warrant it and effective reconciliation processes in fractured communities. As one Acholi youth in Pader District said, *“The Government has the key role in bringing peace and now Juba is the right moment.”* Respondents in all three sub-regions, however also expressed general scepticism toward the talks, largely as a result of the study occurring during a breakdown in the negotiations between February and March 2007. Respondents across the sub-regions expressed concern in particular that the parties in Juba would not reach a substantive agreement on accountability and reconciliation processes. Reluctance about the negotiations was more explicit in Acholiland and Lango, where respondents were unconvinced about the legitimacy of what they perceived as unelected negotiators in Juba not representing their views and needs and suspicious of the negotiators’ motives. A grassroots leader in Amuru district said that, *“the peace negotiations in Juba are not effective due to the lack of representation or our people. Our community is not represented at the negotiations. Our community should elect someone to represent them in the peace talks.”*

A Distinction between Responsibility and Accountability

Most focus groups were careful to distinguish between notions of responsibility and accountability, identifying a wide range of parties they considered responsible for the harms caused during the conflict but only a few select parties – usually senior LRA and UPDF figures – as accountable. This differentiation is important for considerations of transitional justice processes, as most respondents emphasised that not all those responsible for causing harm should be brought to account, for example through prosecution or some other form of recourse. In this sense, the notion of responsibility was not understood by respondents to mean liability in any legal sense. Rather, responsibility was attributed to those actors who respondents felt were to blame for having caused the harms. Across the three sub-regions, the majority of respondents identified both LRA and Government leaders as responsible for harms caused *and* accountable for their actions. These findings are significant, as they highlight the blame and anger victims direct toward the rebels and the Government for their respective involvement in the conflict. Some respondents referred to the broader categories of “the LRA” or “the UPDF” when discussing responsibility. However, discussions of accountability were more personalised, emphasising the role of particular leaders in causing harm.

The focus groups with the most variable views on the persons they considered accountable were those who had suffered less direct or brutal harm. In particular, across the three regions, non-abducted youth, victims of economic loss and members of LDUs provided highly mixed views of accountability. Those who had suffered harms directly often connected issues of accountability with their own personal experience. Their tendency was to choose one or the other of the leaders, but not both, as the most accountable. They also identified other lower-level leaders as most responsible, again linking their personal experience of harm to the question of who they considered most accountable. However, as shown above, most focus groups identified others as having been most affected by the conflict. Respondents may have interpreted key questions such as those regarding accountability through a highly personalised lens, but this does not mean they were blind to others’ suffering.

Parties Identified as Responsible for Causing Harm

Victims who participated in the focus groups across the regions identified a wide range of parties as principally responsible for the harm done to their communities, including the LRA and the UPDF, their respective commanders and local collaborators within the communities who provided intelligence to the conflicting parties, Karimojong raiders, national politicians, and the international community for having remained silent over the conflict for so long. However, an overwhelming number of respondents blamed the LRA leader and the Head of State for *instigating* the conflict.

Perspectives on responsibility differed slightly across the three sub-regions. The majority of Acholi and Langi respondents stated that the parties to the conflict were *both* to be blamed for harms caused. The following statements are illustrative of broad views in Acholiland and Lango:

“It is hard to differentiate since all of them put on uniforms – both the LRA and the UPDF. I think all of them commit atrocities.” (Victim of economic loss, Gulu district)

“The way I see it, the UPDF must be counted among those who have done harms to our society. The second lot are the LRA who are abducting and looting people everyday.” (Grassroots leader, Kitgum district)

“There are two bad people in the war, Museveni and Kony. These two people are responsible for the harms and sufferings of the people in northern Uganda.” (Relative of a murder victim, Gulu district)

Respondents in all three sub-regions also identified a wide range of lesser parties as responsible for harms they have experienced. These parties include current and historical figures, demonstrating that much of the population holds a long-term view of the conflict. Recent atrocities were viewed in an extended context, which influenced how respondents interpreted accountability and overall responses to harms suffered. In Acholiland, victims of physical violence from Gulu district named Vincent Otti, Onen Kamdulu and Okello Odhiambo as responsible for atrocities and particularly Otti *“because he influences Kony”* and, as formerly abducted person in Kitgum district said, *“for being a very bad advisor to Kony.”* Many female victims of violence in Amuru district identified Tito Okello for *“starting an irresponsible fight and war against the Government which sparked the other conflicts”* and Alice Lakwena and her father Sevarino Lukoya who was, according to some respondents, *“the first to kill people like a machine before Kony and Alice.”* Several Acholi victims of economic loss in Pader district identified the Karimojong and their leaders as responsible for having *“done nothing to stop their communities from waging attacks against the neighbouring tribes.”*

In Lango, respondents in Oyam district named LRA commanders such as Otti and Odhiambo as responsible for harms suffered by the population. Like the Acholi, many Langi blamed Lakwena *“because she started the conflict”* and was *“the first leader of the Holy Spirit Movement in 1986 and was succeeded by Joseph Kony and the LRA.”* Respondents from Lango also named local members of parliament who *“deceive us during the campaigns saying that they will stop the war. But after the election they do not.”*

Youths in Teso named Otti as responsible, “*for he is the one who came and abducted us,*” and “*international collaborators,*” including “*external supporters of the LRA because the weapons they have are powerful and cannot be afforded by the LRA alone.*” It was also clear from several focus groups in Teso that respondents perceived a degree of collusion between the LRA and the UPDF. For example, among those whom Iteso respondents blamed were “*UPDF commanders like a particular Acholi commander who was in Obalanga at that time, who was collaborating with the LRA*” and “[*name withdrawn*], a former UPDF commander who did not allow his soldiers to confront and shoot the LRA rebels.” The UPDF was blamed for “*not responding immediately, allowing the LRA to inflict much harm and damage in the region,*” and “*because they killed many people, raped our wives and stole our property.*”

Respondents in Teso sub-region expressed the most varied views on responsibility, probably due to an overlap of the Government-LRA conflict with other conflicts such as that involving the Uganda People’s Army (UPA). Among those whom Iteso respondents considered responsible were the Karimojong “*because they raid the cattle of Teso ... raid our property, lower education standards, causing high school dropouts, and kill many people*” and, specifically, “*the leader of the Karimojong who encourages the warriors to come and raid Teso.*” Iteso respondents also linked Karimojong raids with the Government’s failure to protect civilians, as described by a victim of violence in Amuria district in Teso, “*Museveni as the President of Uganda has failed to disarm the Karimojong.*” Focus groups in Lira and Pader districts, especially close to the border with Karamoja sub-region, expressed the same views regarding the Government’s failure to prevent abuses and protect civilians.

Parties Identified as Accountable for Causing Harm

Important regional differences were apparent in responses regarding parties considered accountable for the harms experienced during the conflict. In Acholiland and Lango, opinion was divided relatively evenly over whether the LRA or Government leadership was most accountable for harms caused.

An Acholi female who was formerly abducted explained:

For me it is Kony and Otti whom I hold most accountable for killing our loved ones, sending their men to abduct us and when they take us to the bush, they make us carry so many things beyond our capacity. They torture us, beat us and force us to sleep with big men. And it is because of these two main people that we are in this kind of pain, suffering and poverty.

Other Acholi respondents held Kony accountable for his refusal to return from the bush, despite the Government’s offer of amnesty. As one formerly abducted person said:

Joseph Kony as the leader of the LRA should be held accountable for the harms caused to the people in the north. This is because he does not want to honour and come out of the bush despite the amnesty law. If he came out, it would end the rebellion and the sufferings of the people

Some Acholi respondents described President Museveni as most accountable because his actions had been calculated. Other Acholi respondents emphasised the tribal origins, seniority and the respective education levels in determining accountability. A relative of a murder victim in Gulu district said:

Museveni is not one of us Acholi. How do you think he can care for the suffering in this region? But he must be held accountable because as the most learned president, he should not be doing these bad things to the people of the region. Kony has not gone to school, so his actions are those of an illiterate.

Where Langi respondents felt that Kony was most accountable for harms during the conflict it was due to his brutal actions against civilians. As one Langi IDP said, *"Kony is most accountable because he kills civilians instead of UPDF."* Another IDP said, *"Kony is most accountable because he started the war and his ordered the rebels to inflict untold harm on the civilians."* Those Langi respondents who argued that President Museveni alone was most accountable for harms during the conflict based their claim on the view that he had started and continued to actively fuel the violence. One relative of a murder victim in Lira district argued that the Government and the UPDF were most accountable for harm to the population *"because they failed to protect us in the camps."* A wife of a UPDF officer in Oyam district said, *"[the UPDF] solve the foreign conflicts in Liberia and Somalia, but they have failed to stop the northern conflict for this long."*

Langi respondents also referred to long-standing tribal animosities in describing those accountable for harms caused in the region. One male youth in Lira District explained, *"We the Langi consider the Acholi to be the ones who started the war. They are the ones who started the rebellion and killed us. This has caused a rift between us and them."* Another Langi respondent explained, *"Museveni is the most accountable because he said, 'When they are caning your co-wife you should not laugh because next time, the same cane can be used against you'."* This statement, repeated by several Langi respondents, translates as, "When something bad is happening to your neighbour you should not be happy because the same thing could happen to you." Some Langi respondents interpreted this as mocking them for past events. More specifically, it referred to the view among many Langi that the Government was complicit in LRA massacres during Operation Iron Fist and that the murder of Langi was revenge for the killing of Yoweri Museveni's forces in the Luwero Triangle in the early 1980s during the conflict with the forces of President Milton Obote, a Lango. As one respondent from Lira District recounted, *"I was abducted on the day of the massacre. I am not happy because when President Museveni came to commemorate the massacre, he said 'When they are caning your co-wife you should not laugh because next time, the same cane can be used against you.' This shows that he knew something about the massacre."*

Views in Teso regarding the most accountable parties generally differed from those in Acholiland and Lango. In particular, many Iteso respondents identified President Museveni as most accountable for harms to the population during the conflict, because of the failure of the Government to protect civilians. Only a few Iteso respondents claimed that Kony or the LRA should be considered most accountable. As an Iteso respondent said:

Kony is accountable because he confined people and caused low education resulting in high school drop out, damage to people's property, schools and health centres. He caused relationships to break, hunger and starvation and young girls and women to be raped.

In Teso, respondents based these views on the Government's perceived failure to intervene effectively when the LRA invaded the sub-region in 2003-04. One Iteso respondent in Amuria district said, "*Museveni is accountable because he never responded by sending soldiers and heavy ammunition yet there was a written note from the LRA rebels that had been delivered to our camp threatening us.*" In this regard, respondents felt that President Museveni's position made him more accountable for his actions than a rebel leader such as Joseph Kony.

Perceptions varied between types of victim groups on the question of who was the most accountable for the harms suffered. A notable difference in views was found between formerly abducted females and males. Female abductees across the three sub-regions argued that the LRA and Kony should be held accountable, while their male counterparts more often identified the Government in this regard. An Acholi girl who was abducted by the LRA said, "*For me Kony is most accountable because he tells his men to kill us and even our parents. They abduct us and take us far away from our homes so that you may never come back. His men rape us when we are in the bush and we are tortured each time we are abducted.*" A Langi male former abductee said: "*President Museveni is accountable because he should have improved on his leadership by accommodating the needs and terms of the rebels. This could have stopped the war.*"

This difference may be explained by the fact that male abductees were forced to commit more crimes than female abductees during their time in the bush. Therefore, they wished to distance themselves and the entire LRA from crimes committed and accountability and instead identify the Government as accountable for harm caused to the population, mainly for having failed to protect civilians. The males often referred to seniority and age factors that in their view should determine who is accountable. A young male former abductee argued that "*age should be considered as an important factor in determining the degree of accountability. The younger the perpetrator, the less accountable is the perpetrator.*" Another young man who was formerly abducted said that "*the chain of command should be considered because those who were under orders to commit the crimes cannot be accountable to the extent of the ones who ordered them.*" Female abductees, on the other hand, perhaps having committed fewer crimes, viewed themselves less as perpetrators and more as victims of LRA crimes and therefore identified Kony and the LRA as accountable. As one female Acholi who was formerly abducted said, "*I hold Kony and Otti very accountable for most of our sufferings because they have done so much harm to our society including massacres, abduction, rape and so many other things.*" Another female former abductee from Acholiland said:

For me, it is Kony and Otti whom I hold most accountable for killing our loved ones and sending their men to abduct us. When they take us to the bush, they make us carry so many things beyond our capacity, torture us, beat us and force us to sleep with big men. It is because of these two main people that we suffer these kinds of pain and poverty.... This is so painful.... They are the brains behind these bad acts - if they would not think of killing, then their men would not kill.

Similarly, across the three sub-regions direct victims of LRA crimes, such as victims of physical violence, tended to view Kony and the LRA as most accountable, reflecting the importance of respondents' individual experiences of harm for their interpretations of accountability.

Criteria for Determining Accountability

Across all sub-regions, respondents pointed either to the *seniority* of the individuals concerned or the *gravity* of the crime they had committed, and sometimes jointly, as the two main criteria used in determining accountability of the parties. As explored further in the next section, issues of seniority and gravity are central to questions of the most appropriate transitional justice processes to address past crimes. In particular, a likely reason that many respondents highlighted seniority when determining accountability was that they regarded many perpetrators as "children of the community" who were abducted and forced to commit atrocities. Consequently, many respondents wished to distance their "sons and daughters" from claims of accountability and to focus instead on the need to hold senior figures accountable.

Many respondents across the three regions identified Joseph Kony as an accountable party because of the sheer brutality of the LRA's actions imposed on civilians. A boy who was formerly abducted from Amuru District said:

Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA, should be held accountable for the extreme harms caused to the people in the north. This is because he does not want to honour the Amnesty Act and come out of the bush. This would end the rebellion and the sufferings of the people.

Many respondents argued that Kony's role in ordering the commission of atrocities rendered him accountable for harm to the population. In Teso, one respondent said, "*Kony should be held most accountable because he entered the bush and abducted children, killed and maimed people, looted people's property and brought poverty and famine, confined people in camps and reduced our people, by killing.*" Some respondents considered Kony and the rest of the LRA senior leadership equally accountable for harms suffered by the population. As one male Langi formerly abducted person from Lira District argued, "*Kony and his commanders who pass the orders to the rebels for attack...all of them, are bad.*"

In all regions, respondents also expressed a sense of betrayal by the Government specifically for the failure to protect them from harm in line with the constitutional duty to protect the population. An Iteso male respondent from Amuria District who was a victim of violence stated, "*Museveni has failed to provide security in the north and north-eastern regions of Uganda and yet the Constitution clearly stipulates that the state must provide security to the citizens of Uganda.*" A male recipient of traditional healing from Amuru district in Acholiland said, "*The Government of Uganda should be held accountable because it is an elected Government mandated to protect the citizens. But they have failed to bring the lost sheep back home.*" A respondent from Lango said, "*The most accountable party is the Government because it was supposed to protect us and our property and yet it is the very one that destroyed what it was meant to protect.*"

Public Acknowledgement of Wrongdoing

Respondents were asked to discuss instances of public acknowledgement of wrongdoing they had witnessed in the community, as there have been widespread reports of perpetrators making such admissions publicly to crimes committed during the conflict. The 2000 Amnesty Act that governs the amnesty and reintegration process for former combatants does not require perpetrators to confess their crimes in exchange for amnesty. It is important therefore to explore how the population interprets cases of voluntary public statements and their significance in terms of accountability, reconciliation and transitional justice. Questions in this section focused on individual and community responses to public acknowledgements of crimes and the perceived motivations of those who made such acknowledgements, for example whether their disclosure stemmed from genuine remorse, an attempt to secure a smooth reintegration into the community or coercion.

Respondents indicated that these public acknowledgements have occurred more regularly in Acholiland and Teso than Lango. After the Amnesty Act was enacted in 2000, there was a concerted effort in Acholiland to encourage the LRA to return from the bush. For example, local radio stations featured programmes for returnees which aired their concerns in an attempt to sensitise the community around the reintegration process. Local political and cultural leaders often encouraged returnees to disclose their crimes publicly in order to help build better relations with their communities.

In Acholiland, those who have made public disclosures have been mainly high profile individuals such as Kenneth Banya, Sam Kolo and Onen Kamdulu who were former commanders of the LRA. After these individuals' surrender or capture, the Government encouraged them to give radio interviews to encourage other combatants to return from the bush and take up the offer of amnesty. In most instances, they were asked to describe what they had done to their victims and responded in very general terms, saying they had killed civilians and ordered abductions and attacks on vehicles. An Acholi woman from Amuru district who was a victim of physical violence expressed deep dissatisfaction with such statements, *"I only hear people who come back from the bush and they confess from the radio station that is Mega FM, but they do not say the crimes they committed, but they only say they are sorry to the community, and beg those in the bush to come back."*

Most Acholi respondents who witnessed high profile perpetrators acknowledge their crimes in person expressed similar dissatisfaction and said they believed these statements were intended only to win favour from the Government and to appease victims, rather than expressing genuine remorse.

In Teso, individuals who acknowledged their crimes publicly were usually local and low-level perpetrators, whom respondents named during interviews. These acknowledgements at times were received by the community members to be genuine confessions, in particular in a religious context. Community members had following to say of these confessions:

[Name withdrawn] killed one of her friends by battering the person to death. The community excused her because she was responsible but not accountable for the crime. (Female victim of economic loss, Amuria district)

[Name withdrawn] explained how he killed people and stole their property. I felt hurt but children were also forced to kill. (Member of a community-based organisation, Amuria district)

[Name withdrawn] killed and maimed many people, but he is now friends with the relatives of the dead and maimed and they stay together. (Relative of a murder victim, Amuria district)

Some Iteso respondents described rare instances in which high profile individuals came to the region to publicly acknowledge their crimes. The majority of public admissions in Teso were made by former members of the UPA, which signed a peace agreement with the Government in 1988. The fact that members of the UPA were from Teso, had already signed an agreement with the Government and their conflict had ended nearly 20 years ago no doubt aided their ability to admit their crimes publicly.

Many respondents, particularly former abductees, expressed serious concerns about going public with their crimes. One respondent in Acholi said, *"Those in the bush cannot confess because even your sisters or sons can kill you or your children. Nobody has come out and confessed in this community. You cannot pierce your own eyes. This is why those who have committed atrocities cannot confess. If you do so you would be killed."*

Across the sub-regions there were many descriptions of disclosure ceremonies at which people felt extreme anger and a desire for revenge. A formerly abducted girl in Anaka district of Acholiland described her reactions to one such instance:

Odongo Acelam, Onen Kamdulu, Sam Kolo and Kenneth Banya all came to Anaka to talk to us. All of them of course confessed to having abducted, killed, ambushed vehicles and they also said they raped some girls and women including some from Anaka. They accepted responsibility for these crimes. To me as a former abducted, I felt so bitter and provoked while they said their nonsense. Even that local community threw a number of direct insults at them but we were under the guard of soldiers. Otherwise they would have also tasted the pains of torture... Of course as we were also forgiven, we were advised to forgive them, since that was the only way we can find true peace.

Statements like this question a romanticised view of all northern Ugandans, especially the Acholi, as inherently forgiving and reconciliatory, an issue which merits further consideration. Many focus groups in all sub-regions stated that anger toward perpetrators ran deep in the community. As shown in the previous sections on perceptions of harm, many former abductees described their fear of reprisals upon return from the bush. Among relatives of murder victims, for example, the angriest responses to public admissions of wrongdoing were recorded in Acholiland, perhaps due to the fact that most of these acknowledgements in the sub-region were made by high-level former combatants such as Banya and Kolo, as opposed to Lango and Teso, where confessors were usually low-level LRA returnees, considered "children of the community" or from other groups such as the UPA which had already signed a peace deal.

Importantly, in all three sub-regions former abductees expressed anger toward, and a desire for revenge against, other abductees, if they had caused harm to them or their families. Such statements indicate that there is not an inherent sense of solidarity among former abductees, even though they may have had similar experiences of abduction, life in the bush, and being forced to commit crimes. In Acholiland in particular, many former abductees expressed great scepticism toward other abductees who admitted publicly to their crimes, stating that such statements were coerced or motivated by a desire for smooth reintegration into the community or to avoid accountability for their actions and benefit from amnesty. One formerly abducted boy in Acholiland said, *“There was a boy who confessed here, I do not remember his name... The boy’s confession was forced as a way for him to get amnesty and as a show of goodwill from the Government and UPDF.”*

Most respondents across all the sub-regions who had personally witnessed public admissions of wrongdoing said that they could forgive and reconcile with the perpetrators. However, this was not always an automatic response. Many respondents stated that they doubted the sincerity of the disclosures and at times felt coerced by Government officials to forgive or reconcile with the confessors. Across all sub-regions, female former abductees expressed greater hesitancy than their male counterparts to forgive their abductors. Many formerly abducted women explained that if they returned to the community with a child, they faced severe stigmatisation that decreased their opportunities to secure a livelihood. This caused them to resent their abductors who forced them into a life of misery both in captivity and upon return to the community.

Forgiveness

This research study shows that attitudes among victims are more complex than characterisations of inherently forgiving and reconciliatory cultures in northern Uganda suggest. In particular, the findings of this research provide a clearer picture of people’s *motivations* for forgiveness. Focus group responses show that for most people who have suffered harm, forgiveness is not automatic but rather a conscious choice shaped by a range of individual and communal factors.

Respondents commonly stated across all sub-regions that they were willing to forgive or, especially in Acholiland, had already forgiven, perpetrators because “they are our children.” For many respondents, forgiveness was necessary to rebuild relations within families and to re-establish social cohesion generally. Respondents described incidents of what is known in Lwo as *timo-kica* or “doing forgiveness” between individuals where the act of forgiveness is supported by a willingness to show compassion toward the offender and may be influenced by factors such as religious or spiritual beliefs or relationships with the offender, for example if he or she is a friend or clan member. This type of forgiveness has occurred most often after minor offences. As one respondent in Teso (where a similar term for individual forgiveness is used) said, *“We forgave the person because she is from the same community and we regarded her as traumatised.”* Another respondent in Teso said, *“He ate my entire cassava garden. I forgave him because it was hunger that had driven him to it.”* Some respondents – especially in Teso – claimed that, on the basis of their religious beliefs, they believed forgiveness was necessary. As one respondent in Teso said, *“Jesus also forgave the ones who killed him, thus we are also supposed to forgive the war perpetrators.”*

Respondents associate the 2000 Amnesty Act with *timo-kica lumuku* which carries the notion of “forgiveness for entire groups of offenders”. This refers specifically to an act of blanket amnesty or an act of oblivion of crime

rather than an act of forgiveness for the perpetrator. The two terms, *timo-kica lumuku* and *timo-kica* contain the same root word “forgiveness”, which may have led to the understanding that Acholi are all forgiving of every kind of crime, while they at times were expressing the need for an amnesty without being ready to forgive.

Respondents were more at ease with the application of amnesty (*timo-kica lumuku*) to low-level perpetrators. Many respondents stated that they found it problematic that the Amnesty Act pertained to individuals accountable for serious offences. A respondent from Pader district in Acholiland described his reaction to a returned LRA commander:

Kenneth Banya came here and confessed publicly in [location withheld]. He confessed that he abducted many children, youth, even women and even ambushed vehicles... As a person who has been offended by these people, I cried so much as he talked about those atrocities because I lost my daughter in one of the killings... For me I felt like going to fight him but despite our cruel reactions toward him, we have to forgive them, not willingly, but because we want the best for our futures and for our children.

Similarly in Teso, a grassroots leader from Amuria District said, “*Banya was a person who came back and confessed his deeds – murder and maiming of people in Teso and other areas. We felt grieved but people have to forgive him since he was a beneficiary of amnesty.*”

Forgiveness for major perpetrators seems to be motivated by adherence to notions of group responsibility, tribal ties and a desire to maintain social cohesion. One Langi wife of a soldier from Oyam district explained:

Vincent Otti is another terrible one and he is equally accountable as Kony. But any human being is fallible... These two should just accept to come out and return home and stay peacefully. We are ready to forgive them so that we return to our normal way of life and rebuild ourselves again. But the Acholi people are also responsible because Kony is their son and they blessed him and also have the responsibility to discipline him as a child of their household.

Such views indicate that a range of pragmatic and principled factors underlies a widespread desire to forgive perpetrators. Such findings de-romanticise northern Ugandan, and especially Acholi, culture, showing that forgiveness is far from an inherent or primordial aspect of society but rather a deliberate, often reluctant, choice. Crucially, many respondents across all sub-regions expressed a simultaneous desire for forgiveness and revenge, showing the breadth and complexity of people’s emotional responses to the harms they have suffered.

Reconciliation

In keeping with the view explored earlier of social and cultural breakdown and damaged relationships as important long-term effects of conflict in northern Uganda, every focus group across the three sub-regions stated that there was an immense need for reconciliation in the community. In particular, most respondents argued that

reconciliation was necessary between groups, especially different clans and regions, with some mention of the need for intra-family reconciliation. Only respondents in Lango referred regularly to forms of individual reconciliation and claimed, albeit rarely, that *“reconciliation has already taken place among the people here.”* The vast majority of respondents claimed that reconciliation had not yet occurred but that it was critical for their wellbeing in the community. Groups most readily identified as needing reconciliation included the following broad categories: Acholi, Langi, and Iteso; the populations of northern, southern and western Uganda; and the Government and the general population. Respondents in Teso gave the most varied responses, including that reconciliation was necessary between the ruling National Resistance Movement and the opposition Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) and their respective supporters.

The importance of family and clan identity in the northern Ugandan cultural context explains why respondents considered group reconciliation as most necessary. It is also likely that many respondents emphasised group reconciliation or other broad, general forms because they wished to avoid the fact that, in many cases, their own loved ones were perpetrators. However, some focus groups, especially in Acholiland, acknowledged the impact that loved ones’ crimes had on questions of reconciliation. One relative of a murder victim in Gulu District recounted his experience:

A boy from Pobec clan escaped from the bush with a gun. He told his people to run away from home. When he was abducted, he was asked about his particulars and unfortunately the name of his father belongs to the Pajong clan, our clan. That is where the rebels started their killings and extended their actions to the rest of Pajong parish. As a result, our relationship with the Pobec clan is broken and it will not improve.

Some respondents further described the need for reconciliation within families, for example between husbands and wives, and between parents and children, emphasising the degree of family breakdown as a consequence of the conflict and the effect of individuals often being forced to commit crimes against their own relatives. As a community-based organisation member from Teso said:

Many women were forced to poison their husbands because they were not able to sustain their family and relief from NGOs was given to widows only. Men decided to leave their women and join the ones who had no children because it was easy to feed one person rather than many. The women also decided to leave the poor men in favour of those who can afford things. They must now reconcile.

As with forgiveness, respondents expressed a range of motivations for their desire for reconciliation. In many areas, respondents longed for the end of the conflict and reconciliation so that they could reunite their scattered families. However, some respondents also recognised that not all the missing would return to the community. A male former abductee from Amuru district said that this led to *“broken relationships between the formerly abducted and the families of those whose children were abducted but have not returned ever since they were abducted.”* Echoing their views on forgiveness, a minority of Acholi and Langi respondents connected reconciliation

with Christian doctrine, arguing that it was their religious duty to reconcile with those who had harmed them. However, most respondents in these sub-regions emphasised the need for reconciliation in order to help rebuild communal social structures and identities, given the immense social and cultural breakdown experienced in their communities relative to Teso.

Generally, respondents in all sub-regions stated that reconciliation was reliant upon prior public acknowledgement of the crimes and compensation from perpetrators. As an internally displaced person from Gulu district argued, *“Reconciliation can only take place after compensation for lost lives and property.”* As with statements regarding motivations for forgiveness, this raises further questions about the view of northern Ugandans as inherently or automatically forgiving and reconciliatory. Many respondents stated that they wanted to see certain personal criteria fulfilled before they could consider reconciling with those who had caused them harm. One Acholi respondent in Gulu district said, *“Reconciliation can only take place after compensation for the lost lives and property. Without compensation, there can be no reconciliation”*. A victim of economic loss from Kitgum district said, *“Truth telling leads to emotional healing which can be followed by reconciliation and compensation.”* Many respondents in all sub-regions argued that mediation by local elders, especially cultural and traditional leaders, was necessary for reconciliation because only the elders could convince perpetrators to confess to their crimes and to compensate their victims.

The wide range of perspectives on accountability and reconciliation in this section lays the foundation for the exploration of perceptions of transitional justice options in the next section. Crucially, the highly varied views on themes such as confession, forgiveness and reconciliation – and the combination of individual and communal, and principled and pragmatic motivations behind many of these views – show the diversity of interpretations of necessary responses to harms, even though the population across all sub-regions described similar effects of harms. The wide variance in perspectives on accountability and reconciliation highlighted by this research study underscores the complexity of the social, cultural and political landscape in northern Uganda as a result of the conflict. As shown in the following section, the diversity of views on these issues leads to even greater diversity of perspectives on the transitional justice mechanisms required to respond practically to the harms suffered by the population.



Perceptions of Accountability and Reconciliation

Theatre troupe performance in IDP camp, northern Uganda

Juba Peace Talks

“Reconciliation should start with the peace talks and succeed.” **(A female relative of murder victims - Lira District, Lango)**

“Peace dialogue encourages the parties at war to express their opinions.”
(A male recipient of traditional healing - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“If it were possible, issues being discussed in Juba need to be brought down for us to discuss them as well and be part of the process aimed at bringing peace back to our region.” **(A victim of economic loss - Kitgum District, Acholiland)**

“The UN should focus on people’s suffering so that they use the findings to communicate with Kony and convince him to listen to the voices of the suffering people.” **(A wife of a UPDF soldier - Kitgum District, Acholiland)**

“The Government together with Kony’s people should allow the peace process to end successfully, so that we can also have peace and enjoy this country that the Lord has given us.” **(A male former abductee - Lira District, Lango)**

“The Government should do everything possible for the peace talks to succeed so that people can reconcile their broken relations. We need a better tomorrow.” **(A widow from a community-based organisation - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“The international community should help in mediating the peace talks, because Museveni cannot even listen to us, the grassroots people.” **(A victim of physical violence - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“Mediation by the leaders can be effective in bringing perpetrators to account if it is not publicised and politicised.”
(A male former abductee - Amuru District, Acholiland)

"I think those who are negotiating the peace talks should accept any proposal made by Kony - whether good or bad so that he signs an agreement." **(A female former abductee - Pader District, Acholiland)**

"We are of the view that people on the mediation team should be elected by the community. They should be people who have a feel of what the community has suffered. They should be good orators and be trusted by the community."

(A member of a community-based organisation - Oyam District, Lango)

"Religious leaders and traditional leaders can be very good mediators since they are not from Government institutions."

(A male victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)

"Religious leaders are good because they also pray as they mediate." **(A former female abductee - Pader District, Acholiland)**

"If you monitor what some of these mediators say in Juba talks, it is heartbreaking and it makes you feel like going there yourself. Yet you wonder how they were elected to be the ones to negotiate --it is so unjust. Take the example of the fact that the negotiators are so overpaid yet they neglect the main issues that they are supposed to address."

(A member of a community-based organisation -Oyam District, Lango)

"The traditional leaders can still be very helpful in that they could go and plead with the LRA and even consult with Kony. They are well-versed with the problems facing the communities." **(A wife of a soldier -Kitgum District, Acholiland)**

"Politicians cannot negotiate properly because of party politics. Those on the Government side will always choose to remain at the negotiating table." **(A relative of a deceased - Gulu District, Acholi)**

"Why does Yoweri send Kampala people to conduct the peace talks when they have not experienced the suffering we are going through?" **(An internally displaced person - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

"Mediators in the Juba talks are on the Government side and they always speak in favour of the Government."

(A male victim of physical violence - Gulu District, Acholiland)

"Community elected leaders should represent us in Juba since we will not be present."

(A female member of a community-based organisation -Oyam District, Lango)

"Since Kony is an Acholi, he can best understand our traditional leaders. At the moment, only foreigners who do not know the language are present at the peace talks." **(A relative of a murder victim - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

"Even the former abductees tell us that the Government does not want peace talks because they are gaining so much from the war. This clearly shows that the Government is to blame. Those who normally attend the peace talks are given money and this makes them side with the Government." **(An internally displaced person - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

"The elected negotiators are interested in money not peace because they spend most of their time in Kampala without reaching out to the local people." **(A male grassroots leader - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“The Government should do everything possible for the peace talks to succeed so that people can reconcile their broken relations. We need a better tomorrow.” **(A widow from a community-based organisation - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“The Government has the key role in bringing peace, and if possible, to defeat Kony militarily.”
(A male youth - Pader District, Acholiland’)

“Our greatest fear is that the peace talks are not going well. The Government needs to abandon corruption because when someone identifies an area with lots of money, they do not want to leave such an area. There are some people gaining financially and they are not willing to see the war end. Corruption therefore needs to be dealt with and everyone should see the other as a human being with value.” **(A male youth - Lira District, Lango)**

Parties Identified as Responsible

“Kony and his commanders, if they wanted power, should have gone to attack Kampala which is the administrative headquarters of the country -- not Amuria District. Here he only killed our people.” **(A youth - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Museveni and Joseph Kony should be taken to court because they are fighting each other at the expense of the population.”
A former male abductee - Gulu District, Acholiland)

“I hold the whole LRA, Kony and Otti responsible for most of the harms inflicted on us. They displaced us into camps, looted our properties and even abducted our children and relatives, depriving us of our rights to a decent life.”
(A victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“Kony is responsible because he has overall command of the LRA.” **(A former abductee - Amuria District, Teso)**

“The Government is responsible because of its bad governance that gave birth to the LRA war.”
(A victim of violence - Amuria District, Teso)

“To me the peace negotiators are responsible, because they are just looking for personal gain and to become rich. They do not care about the consequences of the peace talks.” **(A relative of a murder victim – Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“The United Nations solves other conflicts but failed to solve the northern Uganda conflict.”
(A grassroots leader - Kitgum District, Acholiland)

“The UN is responsible for not taking appropriate action during the Rwandan genocide, Darfur massacres and for not intervening in catastrophic situations like Uganda.” **(A grassroots leader - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Some people in the camps are contributing to the suffering of the people because they play on two sides at the same time. They collaborate with the rebels, meanwhile they give wrong information to the Government army.”
(A relative of a murder victim – Amuru District, Acholiland)

“The Sudanese Government, especially President Bashir, is responsible for allowing the LRA to stay in his country.”
(A grassroots leader - Amuria District, Teso)

“To me, those responsible are Museveni and the big men in the Government who do not want to lose the big money they are making from the war. They are collaborating with the rebels in order to continue the war.”

(A grassroots leader - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“What about foreign collaborators who supply the LRA with sophisticated arms ...the manufacturers and sellers of firearms?”

(Two grassroots leaders - Amuria District, Teso)

“The Karimojong raid the cows of Teso people. They were the first to introduce raids and looting in Teso.”

(A relative of a deceased - Amuria District, Teso)

“The Government tells the international community that there is no problem in northern Uganda. If it had played its part properly, Kony would not be a problem. This Government is like a parent that has abandoned his children. As a parent, if you fail to properly train your children, they become bad people. The Government failed to train Kony and his people and that is why they became bad people.” **(A former male abductee - Lira District, Lango)**

“Kony is not fighting for leadership; rather his war is waged on civilians.”

(A member of a community-based organisation - Amuria District, Teso)

“[Name withdrawn] who was once a UPDF commander did not allow the soldiers to confront and shoot at the LRA rebels.”

(A member of a community-based organisation -Amuria District, Teso)

“I hold Alice Lakwena responsible for our suffering because she started most of the fights within Acholi and after she left the battle for Kony, who is now making us suffer a lot.” **(A victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“Museveni uses intelligence, so he has power. Kony lacks intelligence, so he uses force.” **(A grassroots leader - Kitgum District, Acholiland)**

“Museveni does not practice democracy and causes conflict with neighboring countries. He practices poor governance by not following what the Constitution stipulates. For example, the Ugandan Constitution of 1995 stipulates that the President is supposed to contest for presidency for only two terms; yet Museveni violated the law. The Constitution further stipulates that the State must provide security and protect people’s lives and property, which is not the case in Uganda. Museveni compromises with the LRA which makes us believe that he has turned this war into a business that he uses as a tool for lobbying and advocating for funds from the outside world.” **(A member of a community-based organisation - Amuria District, Teso)**

“We should also look at the external supporters of the LRA because the weapons they have are powerful and cannot be afforded by the LRA alone.” **(A youth - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Sometimes our attackers came in uniforms that look like those of rebels and at other times, they dressed looking like Government soldiers, making it difficult for us to differentiate between them. The UPDF have at times caused violence under the disguise of being rebels.” **(A male former abductee - Lira District, Lango)**

“I hold some of our relatives responsible for our abduction and suffering because they are the ones who gave their fellow rebels details about the families to be targeted.” **(A former abductee – Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“Human rights activists tend to always protect criminals claiming that they too have their rights.”

(A member of an LDU - Amuria District, Teso)

“The LRA burned all our huts. They hit my head with a short club and I fell down and said to myself: ‘Today I am dead.’ I threw my child down and they left. However, they were still in the vicinity and I crawled and picked my child.”

(A victim of violence - Lira District, Lango)

“The superpowers are also to blame; for instance the United States and others who have been supplying the rebels. Museveni is also to blame.” **(A former male abductee - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“Kony raped young girls and women. His intention is to kill the civilians, abduct young children, and spread HIV/AIDS.”

(A victim of violence - Amuria District, Teso)

“Museveni and Joseph Kony are fighting each other at the expense of the people who are dying. Neither of them deserves to be the President.” **(Former male abductee - Acholiland)**

“The insurgency from the Acholi started as something small and if the Government wanted to, it could have stopped it. But it left the insurgency to grow until it became so complex. I realise that the Government used the LRA as the easiest way to kill us. What really annoys us and what we blame the Government for, is the fact that its intervention in Teso was successful, but it neglected the Acholi and Lango areas. The Government kept looking at the conflict between us, the Acholi, as one between brothers. The Acholi thought that they were going to topple the Government. If the Government had intervened to stop it earlier, this war would not have lasted 21 years.” **(A member of a community-based organisation - Oyam District, Lango)**

“Our children who picked up arms against the Government and directed their aggression against the communities are responsible for what happened to us. They use anyone and any resources by force to facilitate their goals. This is why they are looting and killing.” **(A relative of a murder victim – Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“Kony did not control the sanity of the LRA members. Countries collaborating with the LRA and supplying them with arms are also responsible.” **(A member of a community-based organisation - Amuria District, Teso)**

“We blame the Government for not having deployed enough army men to protect us and yet they knew that we lived in a war area. We had only 30 Amuka Boys and no UPDF soldiers. The few Amukas had little ammunition and uniforms. We think that the Government did this intentionally.” **(A male victim of violence - Lira District, Lango)**

“President Museveni is to blame because when he came to power, his soldiers took away all the wealth that the people had. All the cattle were looted from the people in the region. This made the people and other police officers in the region discontented. That is why Alice Lakwena and other rebel groups including Joseph Kony started a war to oust him from power.”

(A recipient of traditional healing – Amuru District, Acholiland)

“Rebels have killed people just like the Government has. I perceive that this war was designed to make us go backwards. If I can recall a story: the President once said that northern tribes were economically advanced during the time of the British, while his own tribe was like animals. Therefore, he has brought development to his people. Now if you see his people, they have developed. The

President mentioned that he was so bitter because Amin delayed development for his tribe for nine years and he made him spend six years in the bush - time which he would have used to develop the people of his tribe. So in retaliation against us, he delayed our development in order for his own people overtake us.” **(A member of a community-based organisation - Oyam District, Lango)**

“Besides Museveni and Kony, the international community is to blame for having kept silent on the war and must be held responsible for the harms done to the people of northern Uganda.” **(A relative of a deceased - Acholiland)**

“The then chairman LC V [name withdrawn] dismissed reports of the LRA invasions here and called them mere thieves. He is responsible.” **(A youth - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Kony and his group need to take responsibility for the killings that they have committed because they did not respect the law.” **(A former male abductee - Lira District, Lango)**

“Kony is responsible and he should listen to the people and return home. We are ready to forgive him if he releases all our abducted children and also accepts to come back home. We shall not hurt him.” **(A wife of a soldier - Kitgum District, Acholiland)**

“UPDF commanders are to be blamed because they did not respond immediately allowing the LRA to inflict much harm and damage in the region.” **(A youth - Amuria District, Teso)**

“I hold [name withdrawn] responsible for my abduction, torture and rape because he knew me all along and had always wanted to have revenge on me for refusing him before.” **(A formerly abducted woman - Acholiland)**

“Kony and Museveni are both enjoying their lives while we suffer.” **(A member of an LDU - Kitgum District, Acholiland)**

“It is hard to differentiate since both the LRA and the UPDF put on uniforms. I think all of them commit atrocities.” **(An IDP - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“It is difficult to know who is responsible, because we lack evidence pinning down perpetrators.” **(A victim of violence - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Those collaborating militarily with the LRA are responsible for the fact that Uganda cannot arrest Kony and accuse him publicly in the international community.” **(A person that suffered economic loss - Amuria District, Teso)**

“President Museveni is responsible for not having allowed the international community to arrest Kony.” **(A grassroots leader - Amuria District, Teso)**

Parties Identified as Accountable

“Vincent Otti is a very bad advisor to Joseph Kony. Therefore he is to be held accountable for all the crimes committed against the communities in the North.” **(A former abductee - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“There is no way you can say that only Kony is accountable for the different harms and crimes committed here; both Kony and Museveni are accountable.” **(A relative of a person killed -Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“The different groups that disguise as rebels are to be held accountable for all the crimes committed during the 20 years.” **(A former abducted youth; male - Acholiland)**

“Museveni should be held accountable for the harms because during other Government administrations, there was no insecurity in Teso. All these problems have happened during his regime.” **(A youth - Amuria District, Teso)**

“The other group I think are accountable is the Acholi who are abroad, with their greed. They are keeping the war going by helping Kony and his groups. This is the reason why the war is not ending.” **(A grassroots leader - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“The leaders in Karamoja also have to be accountable since they have done nothing to stop their communities from waging attacks against the neighbouring tribes. However, the Government of Uganda, Joseph Kony and the Karimojong are accountable, in order of more accountable to less.” **(A victim of economic loss – Pader District, Acholiland)**

“The Head of State should be accountable and should compensate us because he came to power through the armed struggle that has continued over the years and caused a lot of death. Museveni blamed the past Government for the massacres in Luwero, but the present Government is to blame for this current war. If that is not the case, why has the President failed to end the war? And not only that, if ending the conflict is beyond his capability, why does he refuse other nations to come and help?” **(A member of a community-based organisation - Oyam District, Lango)**

“Kony should be held most accountable because he entered the bush and abducted children, killed and maimed people, looted people’s property, brought poverty and famine and confined people in camps.” **(A member of a community-based organisation - Amuria District, Teso)**

“For me, the thing that makes Kony more accountable than others is his resistance to the peace talks and reconciliation despite the efforts by different people and institutions.” **(A widowed member of a community-based organisation - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“Kony should be held more accountable because he came to abduct children and killed and maimed our people. He is not fighting for political leadership, but rather his war is one that is waged on civilians.” **(A member of a community based organisation - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Museveni should be held most accountable because he has the power to stop the war, but he is reluctant.” **(A victim of physical violence - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

Criteria for Accountability

“The Constitution says that the State has to defend the property and lives of the civilians. Yet Museveni is not doing that.”

(A member of a local militia - Amuria District, Teso)

“Those who were ordered to commit atrocities should be held less accountable than those who gave the orders. (...) The level of understanding and knowledge of the perpetrator should also be considered in determining whether he is responsible. The one who is well educated and knows more about human rights issues should be held more accountable if he committed crimes. (...) The level of involvement in the conflict should be considered. For instance, Kony was himself physically involved in causing harm but Museveni causes harm through his soldiers. A person who is actually physically involved in causing harm should be held more accountable than the one who does not.” **(Relative of deceased persons - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

Public Acknowledgement of Wrongdoing

“In my opinion if you have a broken relationship with someone it is very difficult for the affected parties to reconcile all by themselves. If I look back to previous times when man's relationship with God was broken, Jesus, who had no sin, was sent and he shed his blood in a bid to reconcile people back to God. Therefore if confession is being made, this should start from the Government coming down to the people. It is necessary for neutral people to come and mediate between the two parties. Also, someone who offends you may ask you for forgiveness in such a way that you do not like. He or she may confess in a way that they understand, but you may find that this confession is not convincing to you so you may decide not to forgive them.”

(A member of a community-based organization -Oyam District, Lango)

“[Name Withdrawn] and other LRA commanders confessed... These confessions did not reveal the atrocities they have committed. The Government just came to show us these people without telling us the nature of the atrocities. We do not understand why these people confessed. One member in the community said that these people are not asking for forgiveness, but are celebrating the killings they committed against civilians...” **(A grassroots leader -Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“Confession has not yet happened here ever since the conflict started. It could lead to serious revenge from the families who have been affected. Such information can only be told to close family members and cannot be easily shared openly.”

(A male recipient of traditional healing - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“There was a 13-year-old girl who escaped from the bush. She became possessed and climbed a tree. When asked why she climbed the tree, she said she was haunted by the ghost of the people she had killed: three had been beheaded and four clubbed to death. This keeps disturbing her and that is why she decided to escape from the bush. Now she wants to return home. She asked for forgiveness. After her confession, she was helped and was well received by the community so that others in the bush will be encouraged to return home. She was abducted when she was too young.” **(A victim of physical violence - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“Confessions have not yet taken place here in Pader District. The consequences can be very bad because people are still not very organised with the traditional ways of cooling their tempers and the cultural practices are not well known. The perpetrators feel uneasy about confessing publicly because there are still attitudes of revenge in the communities. So they fear for their lives.”

(A person that suffered economic loss -Pader District, Acholiland)

“All those who return do not tell us what they did. They have never confessed any act but insist that they were forced. If the returnee is to confess, he may confess to committing atrocities but in a very faraway place. They fear confessing because they think about the possible retaliation against them. People in the community have already been sensitized through the radio about returnees and amnesty, and about forgiveness.” **(A widow and member of a community-based organisation - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“[Name withdrawn] confessed that she was forced to drink blood after having slaughtered a person. I was emotionally stressed, but the community after her confession forgave her and welcomed her.” **(A victim of violence - Amuria District, Teso)**

“There has been no such confession, instead we were only mocked. The Government mocked us, the rebels also mocked us”.
(A member of a community-based organisation - Oyam District, Lango)

Forgiveness

“Hanging after prosecution should be administered, but if he comes out voluntarily, he can be forgiven.”
(A person that suffered economic loss - Kitgum District, Acholiland)

“We need to forgive the perpetrators in order to reintegrate them in our community as well as engage them in cultural activities.”
(An internally displaced person - Gulu District, Acholiland)

“We only need peace. We forgive Museveni and he should also forgive us and give our children a future.”
(A relative of a deceased - Lira District, Lango)

“Attitudes of revenge have come up because sometimes people think that because I was in captivity, it is possible that I could have contributed to the atrocities that were committed in northern Uganda.” **(A recipient of traditional healing - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“Mediation between the perpetrators and the victims can compel the perpetrators to tell the truth about the crimes they committed. Then they can ask for forgiveness. This can then help the mediators to talk to the victims who can forgive them. An agreement can be reached to discourage revenge.” **(A former male abductee - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“Forgiveness and reconciliation should only be between the lower ranks of the LRA and their victims.”
(A member of a local militia - Amuria District, Teso)

“Those who openly confess should be forgiven.” **(A male victim of violence - Ogur Barlyono, Lango)**

“Those people cannot ask for forgiveness from us because they are armed. There is need to remove the weapons that the attackers possess and use against us. Only then, can we ask them to seek forgiveness -- when we know that they do not have any weapons to use against us.” **(A former male abductee - Lira District, Lango)**

“We find it so hard to forgive the rebels because they fight against civilians and not the Government, abduct our children and destroy our property.” **(A male victim of violence - Ogur Barlyono, Lango)**

“Those who joined the rebels voluntarily need to be forgiven but not allowed to rejoin society. They should go and stay with their leaders since they may pose a threat to the community if they are allowed to reintegrate.”
(A former male abductee - Lira District, Lango)

“In order to start reconciliation, there must be forgiveness not prosecution. But those who returned from the bush should confess and ask for forgiveness. Later, if someone who has been forgiven starts disturbing the community he should be prosecuted.”

(A victim of physical violence - Gulu District, Acholiland)

“I am a leader in one of these communities and the people are willing to forgive everyone including Kony. However, one of the problems that we are experiencing is handling ex-combatants. These are people who have returned from the bush and were armed at one time and they do not want to be cautioned. When anything comes up, they use a lot of force in dealing with it. People have to be cautious about what they say to them.”

(A member of a community-based organisation - Oyam District, Lango)

“There is a need for community mobilisation and sensitisation on issues of transitional justice and forgiveness.”

(A person that suffered economic loss - Kitgum District, Acholiland)

“We who are disabled need to forgive so that peace comes and people following us do not go through the same thing we went through.”

(A disabled relative of a murder victim - Lira District, Lango)

Reconciliation

“We are isolated because all the tribes regard us as rebels. If you board a vehicle anywhere and speak Acholi, you will be referred to as LRA.”

(A male victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“When this war intensified, soldiers concentrated on it and ignored attacks from the Karamojong. Therefore we are not on good terms with them either.”

(A male youth – Lira District, Lango)

“When a husband fails to provide the basic needs, a woman tends to take him wrong. Men also look at their women and children as a burden to them. They prefer to stay alone and to abandon them.”

(A person that suffered loss - Amuria District, Teso)

“People from Lango blame all Acholi for killing them.”

(An IDP - Gulu District, Acholiland)

“The way I see the relationship between Kony and the neighboring Madi tribe, is that it has deteriorated a lot. Madi now consider all Acholi as rebels, and they just want to kill us. When we go to Madi they kill us; but when they come here we do not kill them. Secondly, when we go to Sudan they call us ‘LRA’ and they kill us. We are in conflict with all these neighbours.”

(A grassroots leader -Amuru District, Acholiland)

“The UPDF are paid and yet the Amuka Boys have not been paid for over ten months. Amuka’s salary is only 60,000 shillings. They are hungry and do not have uniforms. This situation causes them to loot our food from the gardens. This has caused also a break in relations between the militias and the civilians.”

(A victim of economic loss - Kitgum District, Acholiland)

“There are broken relationships between the formerly abducted who have returned and the families of those whose children were abducted but have not returned.”

(A former male abductee - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“Almost everyone in Uganda regards us as bad people and to be violent, cruel killers. We are misunderstood due to the atrocities committed by the rebels.”

(A widowed member of a community-based organisation - Pader District, Acholiland)

“I think we have broken relationships with the LRA, Kony, and Otti since they killed our families, abducted us, looted our possessions, and damaged our properties.” **(A parent of an abductee - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“We the people of Kitgum are not happy with the people of Gulu for taking to the bush. This has brought us all these suffering.” **(A relative of a deceased - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“Nowadays, the relationship between Jonam and Acholi has improved. They come and dig across the river, we do business with them as well as inter-marry, and they have now understood that the problem lies not with the civilians.”
(A male victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“The UN should help us reconcile with the Government so that we can have a peaceful relationship with it.”
(A male youth - Lira District, Lango)

“If my son marries an Acholi woman, then when I go to visit him, I will see Acholi people as my in-laws and this encourages reconciliation. We encourage inter-marriages for example, the young men in Lango marrying young women in Acholi and vice versa. This will help us look at each other as brothers.” **(A male youth - Lira District, Lango)**

“The relationship between the Karamojong and our community can only be restored if the Karamojong are disarmed, which the Government is failing to do.” **(A young male - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“Children must learn how to respect their parents because children have now developed bad morals.”
(A person that suffered economic loss - Amuria District, Teso)

“I think the Sudanese Government has a broken relationship with Uganda because the LRA hides in their territory and causes misunderstandings between our two Governments. The rebels also cause suffering to some people of the Sudan.”
(A former female abductee - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“Because Gulu is the place of origin of the leader of the LRA, and because he committed crimes against the neighbouring district of Pader, we need the two districts to reconcile.” **(A person that suffered economic loss - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“Reconciliation is only possible after removing the guns.” **(A former young female abductee - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“The Acholi and Iteso people should reconcile because the Acholi invaded Teso - killing people and abducting children.”
(A former abductee - Amuria District, Teso)

“The relationship between the civilians and the military men is breached. This is because the civilians lost their women to the military men.” **(A former male abductee - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“I remember when the Rwot of Acholi went to meet with that of Lango. Now people move freely. We used to be beaten at Kamdini corner.” **(A male victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“Couples are unable to sustain their marriage as a result of the displacement into the camps. They need to reconcile.”

(A relative of a deceased - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“Many families were confined in camps where people of different cultures were found; this caused moral degeneration which resulted in divorces.” **(A person that suffered economic loss - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Teso people must be united, because their relations are based on political party affiliations where NRM supporters clash with FDC supporters.” **(A victim of violence - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Teso people must reconcile with the UPDF because they snatched our wives.” **(A grassroots leader - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Reconciliation will bring peace. People will resettle in their home areas. Fear will be removed if there is reconciliation between the offended and the perpetrator. Reconciliation will act as a prod for development.” **(A person that economic loss - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Reconciliation brings sharing of aid. (...) It also leads to development.” **(Two victims of economic loss - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Reconciliation between the killers, both UPDF and LRA, and the victims will depend on reconciliation between the LRA and the Government. Let them show us the way and then we shall follow.” **(A relative of a deceased - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“Acholi against Langi must reconcile to avoid mob justice. In Lira town, there was mob justice against Acholi that in turn brought reciprocal action in Gulu town as well.” **(A youth - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Kony and Museveni should be brought personally to reconcile with the communities.”

(A member of a local militia - Amuria District, Teso)

“There was a time when if you were an Acholi-speaking person among Langi, you would be killed under suspicion of being a rebel, since the people who harmed us were Acholi. This was because people’s emotions were heated up.”

(A parent of an abductee - Lira District, Lango)

“We the Langi consider the Acholi to be the ones who started the war. They are the ones who started killing us and the rebellion. This has caused a rift between us and them.” **(A male youth - Lira District, Lango)**

“The Government should ask to be forgiven because it refused to believe reports of LRA invasions into the region.”

(A former abductee - Amuria District, Teso)

“There are people who were deceived by the rebels. The rebels promised them high positions in a new Government after they toppled the present one. These people decided to coordinate with the rebels in carrying out their activities among us. The war has taken so long and the rebels have never been able to take over the Government. Thus, there are bitter relations between those who were deceived and the rebel leaders in the bush.” **(A victim of economic loss – Kitgum District, Acholiland)**

“The Government representatives tell lies to the local community. We do not trust them anymore.”

(A member of a community-based organisation - Amuria District, Teso)

“The Acholi started killing us as far back as the time of Alice Lakwena, after which Kony also began operating. Living together means that they need to reconcile with us. The Acholi have a bad heart towards Langi and yet we the Langi do not harbor the same heart towards them. They need to abandon their spiritism and witchcraft that causes them to commit their atrocities.”

(A former male abductee - Lira District, Lango)

“Even the Baganda have broken relationships with us because when you go to Kampala and speak Acholi they refer to you as Kony.” **(A female victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“Reconciliation must take place within our communities -- between those who were abducted and those who stayed. This is so because those who stayed claim that it is the abductees who made the rebels to attack them.”

(A male victim of violence – Lira District, Lango)

“We think that the rift between the Langi and the southern Ugandans is because they still remember what happened at Luwero Triangle. Even the composition of Government officials is predominantly that of people from the South.”

(A male victim of violence –Lira District, Lango)

“Because of cattle rustling and the killing of people, there are problems between the Iteso and Karamoja people.”

(A former abductee - Amuria District, Teso)

“For me, I say the Acholi have breached the relationship with the western people of Uganda. This is because Museveni is from the west. We in the north are suffering, yet the Banyankole live in peace.” **(A female victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“If my child and yours were both abducted and taken by the rebels and then later on mine returns and yours does not, you will tend to feel bad towards me and this will cause a misunderstanding between the two of us.” **(A male youth - Lira District, Lango)**

“If reconciliation is realised, war and conflict will to come to an end.” **(A victim of economic loss - Amuria District, Teso)**

“We think that reconciliation should take place since people in the north are Ugandans. Reconciliation will prevent future violence.”

(A male youth – Lira District, Lango)

“There is also need for reconciliation between clans that have experienced broken relationships within our communities. Clan leaders need to take part in this.” **(A person that suffered economic loss - Lira District, Lango)**

“We have elders in Acholi, Lango and Karamoja. They need to sit down and see how to reconcile the different parties.”

(A former male abductee - Lira District, Lango)

“The affected community should be used as advocates for peace and not people who have not been affected.”

(A former male abductee - Lira District, Lango)

“The rebels and the remaining people at home are not friends because of the several atrocities that the rebels have caused for us.”

(A female victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)

III. Perceptions of Transitional Justice Options

THIS SECTION explores popular perceptions of transitional justice options, specifically in response to the forms of harm that respondents identified and the parties they considered most accountable for causing harm. Of the themes explored here, transitional justice evoked the most mixed views from respondents among and within sub-regions, underlining a general difficulty in identifying processes appropriate for the specific conflict situation in northern Uganda. During the dramas preceding focus groups, participants were introduced to a range of transitional justice “options,” comprising all currently existing processes of accountability and reconciliation in Uganda, including the civilian and military courts, the ICC and local cleansing and reconciliation practices. The dramas highlighted potential virtues and pitfalls of the different approaches to transitional justice, enabling focus groups to discuss these in detail. What became clear across all sub-regions was that debates about accountability and reconciliation in Juba and elsewhere had, to varying degrees, filtered into everyday discussions among the population. However, respondents emphasised that they needed more information regarding potential mechanisms of accountability and reconciliation. In particular, many focus groups stated that they wished to learn more about reconciliation processes used by different tribes and sub-regions affected by the conflict.

At the outset, focus groups across all sub-regions expressed general distrust of existing Government institutions that could be used to address harm. In particular, most respondents argued that the civilian, LC and military courts were corrupt. One Acholi female victim of violence said, *“The LCs, civilian or military courts cannot help in any way bringing perpetrators to account for their crimes.”*

An LDU member in Teso indicated that most people in his community believed that *“corruption in the country may tamper with fair trials.”* A grassroots leader and relative of a murder victim in Acholiland said, *“How can we comment on military courts? Whenever we report culprits to the UPDF, if we do not receive beatings, then in a few weeks the culprits are transferred.”*

Primary Needs after Conflict: Truth-Telling and Compensation

Apart from corruption, respondents in all sub-regions identified two further deficiencies in current Government institutions: the lack of truth about past atrocities and insufficient compensation for victims. Respondents described truth and compensation as the elements they lacked most as a result of the conflict and which they most expected transitional justice mechanisms to provide.

An Acholi male former abductee discussed the lack of truth emanating from current judicial institutions, “*We know that Uganda has a justice process and yet throughout the years, no record has been taken of any small or big case. This poses a challenge to the justice system in Uganda.*” Many respondents across all sub-regions stated that they did not know the truth about the harms they had suffered, particularly the identity of perpetrators, and that therefore the country needed some form of historical clarification mechanism to produce a public record concerning harms caused during the conflict. One respondent from Teso explained that such a mechanism “*would expose the views of the voiceless to both national and international bodies.*” One local official of an IDP camp in Pader had meticulously documented the LRA massacre that took place in his village. He emphasised that his community would like to have a record of the incident in order to respect and commemorate each person who had lost their life or had been abducted. He said:

We also have photos taken on the day of the massacre. We would like to keep these photos for memory and also use it to let people elsewhere know what happened here. The photos were given to Acholi Religious Leader Peace Initiative and they are to get it back to us. They requested that they want to make copies.

As discussed in earlier sections, many respondents described a long-term view of the current conflict and identified historical characters such as Okello and Lakwena as responsible for harms caused to the community. This suggests that any truth-recovery mechanism in Uganda would need to explore events before the beginning of the current conflict in 1986 in order to account for the population’s longer historical view. Furthermore, it would need to address the trans-national nature of the conflict which many respondents also emphasised in their descriptions of harm, accountability and reconciliation.

Respondents commonly identified compensation as a necessary response to harm, both as a form of accountability for perpetrators and a means to improving the material conditions of affected communities. An Acholi male former abductee explained, “*Compensation given to those who have suffered losses can restore their hope and reduce grievances they hold toward the perpetrators.*” An Acholi cultural leader in Gulu district said, “*The Government must pay for war damages before any reconciliation process can take place.*” An woman from Acholi who had suffered violence said, “*I want the Government to compensate me for my properties that were destroyed by the rebels. It may not reverse the harms done but it will help me re-establish my life.*” Respondents usually argued that it was the Government’s responsibility to compensate victims, even if they identified the LRA as responsible for causing harm. This was due probably largely to the view, as expressed by one Acholi respondent, that “*Kony is too poor*” to compensate victims of LRA crimes. As an Acholi grassroots leader in Amuru District expressed, “*I know the Government has more capacity to pay than everybody else, including Kony. This means that Government must take responsibility to compensate people.*” Many respondents in all sub-regions argued

that the international community should monitor any Government compensation scheme to avoid corruption. As a parent of an abducted children said in Lira District, *"The international community must witness the reparations by the Government and ensure that the Government complies with the reparations."*

Within these broad perspectives on truth and compensation, some important regional distinctions emerged. Many Acholi respondents, while stressing the need for truth about the past, also expressed concerns about the effects of truth-telling in the community. *"Truth-telling is like opening a rotten wound,"* said the relative of a murder victim in Acholiland. *"It will not lead to anything."* An Acholi cultural elder in Gulu district said, *"Truth-telling and recording is possible in one way only: the LRA should only tell of general atrocities, but not the specific harms. Telling details of atrocities will only hurt those whose relatives were killed."* These views probably stem from the greater regularity in Acholiland of divisive public acknowledgements of wrongdoing and other forms of truth-telling mentioned in the previous section, particularly involving senior LRA figures such as Banya and Kolo. Such events often exacerbated feelings of anger and a desire for revenge among many victims. Consequently, one Acholi victim of violence in Amuru district said, *"No one has ever come out to confess and I think it will never happen because people fear doing so."*

Several Langi respondents argued that psychosocial support would be needed if people were to learn the truth about past crimes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, victims of direct harm expressed these concerns more readily than those less affected. Such views reflect the degree of psychological trauma many victims have suffered and their concerns that hearing public disclosures and other forms of truth-telling may force them to confront painful memories. Implicit in these views is the fear that transitional justice mechanisms that emphasise truth-recovery may in fact worsen victims' plight if they are not adequately managed. Nonetheless, the majority of Acholi respondents stated that discovering the truth about the past was imperative. As an Acholi victim of violence said, *"There have been a lot of secret killings. If we were to practice truth telling, we would know [who committed these crimes]."*

Amnesty

As already stated, many stakeholders currently emphasise the inherently forgiving and reconciliatory nature of the population, especially the Acholi. Often connected to this assumption is the view that the population has a natural affinity for amnesty, and readily accepts that those who have committed crimes are not punished. The study, however, shows that the population's views on amnesty are more varied and complicated than usually portrayed. Their perception generally did not reflect an understanding that international law permits amnesties with respect to specific offences and levels of perpetrators. Respondents however had a fair knowledge of the scope of, and rationale behind, the 2000 Amnesty Act. During focus groups, Acholi respondents were generally more supportive of the use of amnesty in the current conflict than the Langi or Iteso, probably because more Acholi have loved ones who have committed crimes and wish to see them reintegrated quickly into the community. An Acholi relative of a murder victim in Kitgum district said, *"We should not take these rebels to court; otherwise those who are still in the bush will never come out. The best thing is to offer them amnesty as is being done."*

Many Langi and Iteso respondents, however, stated that the amnesty process had delivered few benefits to the community. A member of an LDU in Teso said, *"There is no need for amnesty because it has taken many years but we have not seen the results of it."*

In none of the three sub-regions, however, was there unqualified support for, or opposition to, amnesty. Many Acholi respondents expressed discontent with the current amnesty process, especially its failure to deliver compensation to victims and reintegration packages to returned combatants who, in many cases, were respondents' relatives. While many Langi and Iteso were opposed outright to any use of amnesty for perpetrators in this conflict, some expressed support for *conditional* amnesty, particularly when predicated on perpetrators' telling the truth about their actions. In Lango and Teso, many respondents said that amnesty should be offered to perpetrators in order to entice them home from the bush and to encourage them to admit to their crimes. However, these respondents argued that if the perpetrators remained unrepentant or refused to return, they should be prosecuted. As one Langi respondent said, *"Courts work for those who choose to reject the amnesty option and continue to stay in the bush to carry out their operations."* This view was echoed by a minority of Acholi respondents. *"The first option should be amnesty and then prosecutions,"* said an Acholi victim in Amuru district whose property had been looted.

Similar to the discussion of forgiveness in the previous section, these statements indicate that, for many northern Ugandans, amnesty is not an automatic response to crimes but rather motivated by various pragmatic considerations, including a desire to see perpetrators – especially local abductees – return from the bush. The dual identity of many abductees, both "children of the community" and often perpetrators of serious crimes, leads to complex and sometimes seemingly contradictory popular perspectives on accountability and reconciliation. Some respondents in all sub-regions stated that both amnesty and prosecution were necessary responses to the harms they had suffered. The most likely reason for such views is that respondents wished to distinguish between the parties they considered responsible and accountable for causing harm. As explored in the previous section, most respondents in all sub-regions identified either the seniority of perpetrators or the gravity of their crimes as the primary factors determining accountability, often mentioning both in the same focus group. On this basis, many respondents distinguished between different *levels* of perpetrators and crimes, seeing amnesty as appropriate (at least initially) for low-level perpetrators, especially young abductees, and prosecution as appropriate for high-level perpetrators. Much of this nuance is absent in current debates over issues of accountability and transitional justice in northern Uganda.

Prosecution

Even though respondents identified truth and compensation as the primary benefit they expected from transitional justice mechanisms, none claimed that they expected these from domestic courts or the ICC. As one member of a community-based organisation in Lango explained, *"An institution needs to come here and investigate what has happened between the two parties."* To which is echoed in the statement of a woman who had suffered economic loss in Kitgum district, *"All forms of prosecutions breed hatred and block reconciliation."*

On the other hand, the relationship between amnesty and prosecution permeated the discussions of respondents on the prospects of prosecution to hold perpetrators accountable. Respondents pointed out the need to prevent those engaged in violence from continuing committing crimes through the application of either amnesty or prosecution. Both measures were seen as a way to stop the violence by forcing combatants to put down their arms, either voluntarily by submitting to amnesty or by the force of law through prosecution. A member of a community-based organisation in Lira district explained, *"...Otti Vincent and his team should be taken to court."*

This is a necessary measure in dealing with those who refuse the amnesty option.”

In principle, prosecutions were regarded, in particular by respondents in Teso and Lango, as a viable course of action, specifically with respect to perpetrators who were considered the most accountable in terms of seniority and gravity of harm (as described above), as they would lead to punishment, *“The courts are good because this leads to punishment and being jailed for some time, perhaps for three or seven years”*, said a relative of a murder victim in Pader district. A male youth in Lira district stated, *“Punishment is necessary. Whether the rebels or government are found to be guilty, they should be punished.”*

Those who favoured criminal trials often identified both preventing impunity and preventing further harm as the added-value of prosecution. As one Langi respondent whose family member was murdered stated, *“If you commit a crime and are not punished, it encourages others to do the same since the absence of punishment leads to impunity.”* A young former abductee in Lira district who linked the need for court with the need for societal order said, *“Courts are not something bad because they make someone to reap what they have sown. The use of courts enables people to make right decisions. If we neglect the use of courts, society will be anarchical.”*

Across the three sub-regions, those who dismissed trials as a useful option for accountability were most frequently from Acholiland, but not exclusively. Their concerns were, however, not usually related to prosecution in principle and its virtues, but to its operations and functions. These respondents voiced complaints about the ineffectiveness of current domestic justice institutions, civilian or military. *“All military and local courts do not function and cannot apply to the current situation,”* said one Acholi male youth who was formerly abducted. Not only did they question their legal authority, as one Acholi grassroots leader observed, *“LC courts cannot handle this problem because their mandates are limited”*, but also their impartiality, as a young woman who was formerly abducted in Pader district said, *“All courts, local and national are not effective in bringing to account the perpetrators of the war. They are biased.”* In addition, with respect to military courts, while few knew about their operations, those who did, found its procedures and punishment to be inappropriate, *“The military court is worse. This is a killing court – it cannot work at all”*, explained an elder in Gulu district.”

The negative assessment of domestic institutions of justice brought some respondents to consider international justice as a possible alternative. A female relative of a murdered person in Lira district explained:

If people who are begged over the radio to return under the amnesty option and they refuse, these people should be forwarded to court. There are always pleas on the radio for Kony and his commanders to come back home so that we can have peace. We have chosen to forgive them and have asked them to forgive us as well. But if they refuse to come, then the case is left to the Government. They should be forwarded to the International Criminal Court because our courts are useless.

Respondents in Acholiland stated that they knew little of the ICC, its aims and methods of work, *“We have heard of the ICC but we do not understand it properly,”* said one Acholi female former abductee. Views on the ICC among Langi and Iteso respondents were mixed, although generally more knowledgeable and supportive of the ICC than among Acholi. Most respondents in Lango and Teso who expressed support for the ICC did so because

they said it would be preferable to the domestic courts, *“If the courts in Uganda cannot solve the cases arising, we support the use of ICC with all our hands,”* said a young male IDP in Lango. Other Langi and Iteso respondents stated that the ICC should only come into play if the amnesty process were to fail to bring sufficient numbers of combatants home or if the Juba talks were to collapse entirely.

Positive views about international justice achieving just and fair outcomes for accountability were negated by parallel concerns about the lack of efficacy and legitimacy of the ICC. Many respondents opposed the ICC indictments on the grounds that they were not helping the peace process at a time they were afraid of a resurgence of violence. The fact that the Juba talks had stalled when the focus groups were conducted also undoubtedly fuelled this perspective. A Lango respondent said, *“The use of courts could deter the peace process, especially the ICC. The rebels may refuse to come back.”* An Acholi clan leader and relative of a murder victim said, *“The ICC is only worsening the war. We fear that even the present calm in northern Uganda will be spoiled by the ICC. These LRA children are ours, we can deal with them locally here. Let them come back to us here.”*

Two grassroots leaders in Pader district reflected:

No court is good. The reason why Kony has distanced himself is because of the hanging of Saddam Hussein. Kony knows that if he is arrested, he will also be hanged. (...) I also feel that the court is not good. What is said there are lies and everyone there just wants to win.

The perception that the ICC is inefficient points to a lack of awareness of the functioning of the ICC itself. Many respondents who blamed the ICC for not arresting its suspects were not clear that the ICC did not have its own enforcement mechanisms. A respondent from Gulu district whose relative was murdered stated, *“The ICC cannot work because they want to prosecute Kony but do not go to look for him to be arrested. If we are to rely on the ICC, we shall all die in the camps here and Kony will remain in the bush.”*

Victims in focus groups expressed a feeling of mistrust and disappointment about the ICC and the international community for having failed to deliver on their publicly stated mission to bring the perpetrators to account. Some respondents placed the responsibility to arrest Kony squarely on the shoulders of the international community. As an IDP from Gulu district said, *“The international community should assist and arrest Kony so that he can be taken to court.”*

In addition, respondents pointed to the ICC’s lack of legitimacy. This stemmed from a perception that the ICC had taken sides by not indicting anyone from the UPDF side. Several respondents in Lango and Teso argued that the ICC would not be a legitimate institution in northern Uganda until it also prosecuted UPDF crimes. One member of a community-based organisation in Lira district explained:

The Government itself has admitted that there is a criminal who is part of them. However, Uganda did not hand herself in as a criminal but reported to the ICC that only the rebels committed crimes against Uganda. And yet we who are here

have admitted that the perpetrators are two - one being those reported and the Government. If proceedings at the ICC should continue and one party is reluctant to comply, in our understanding, we think that both of them should be arrested. If you see, the Government took the crimes caused by Kony to the ICC and yet the crimes committed by the Government will not be known unless the ICC investigates them.

A former male abductee in Lira echoed these concerns, *“International prosecution will only work if both the Government and the LRA are prosecuted at the same time. Kony and Museveni should be prosecuted because Museveni has failed to protect people.”* Similarly, respondents challenged the fact that the domestic judiciary would be in a position to address these crimes. An Iteso respondent remarked that, *“The judiciary cannot prosecute the perpetrators from the Government side.”*

With respect to the ICC involvement in northern Uganda, the respondents' perceptions of what may *“spoil Juba”* was not limited to the commonly-heard allegation that the indictments are the main stumbling block but also to the ICC's perceived inefficiency and illegitimacy as described above. Due to these perceptions, victims questioned the way that impunity had been addressed, but did not reject the principle of fighting impunity.

Local or Traditional Practices

As with the ICC, debates over the possible use of local or traditional practices as a means of transitional justice in northern Uganda have fuelled binary discussions of the virtues of “local” versus “international” justice. In particular, debates in Juba and internationally have focused on the possible use of Acholi practices such as *mato oput* and *gomo tong* (see narratives for description of these various traditional practices), which the Government has considered codifying and extending across northern regions. Largely absent from the debate, however, has been a detailed analysis of popular perceptions of local practices. This research study shows that popular views on this theme manifest more diversity than any other explored here. Opinions regarding local practices vary greatly among and within sub-regions and often within the same focus group.

Generally, Langi and Iteso respondents offered the most detailed accounts of the various local practices used in their regions and how they might be employed to address serious crimes in the current context. Few respondents claimed any knowledge of practices used in other sub-regions, a significant finding given some northern Ugandan cultural and political leaders have discussed Acholi rituals such as *mato oput* and *gomo tong* as resonating beyond Acholiland and representing effective transitional justice mechanisms across all affected regions. Acholi respondents overall provided few detailed responses regarding local practices, most likely as a result of the greater cultural deterioration and fragmentation in Acholiland, as discussed in the earlier section on perceptions of harm, which have limited the population's exposure to local practices. In Lango and Teso, where the population has also experienced significant cultural degradation as a result of the conflict, though not to the same extent as in Acholiland, the notion of using traditional practices to address major crimes garners greater support. We should recall that Acholi elders and youth emphasised that cultural norms and knowledge of traditional practices had dissipated during the conflict and social structures had been greatly disrupted by the forced displacement of civilians into the IDPs camps. Many Acholi respondents, including youth who forms the overwhelming majority of the population, argued that they have had limited exposure to traditional practices because of living in a state of

flux during the conflict. An Acholi youth from Amuru District said, *“Nowadays, the youth do not even know the traditional marriage practices... In earlier days, our elders used to take the responsibility for these arrangements.”* Displaced from their ancestral lands and without a stable social setting, their links to local rituals – many of which rely on a notion of “home,” especially a stable clan environment – and scope for engagement with traditional practices are extremely limited. These cultural phenomena greatly affect many respondents’ views regarding the potential use of local practices in transitional justice terms. Consequently, many respondents argued that it was the primary responsibility of religious and cultural leaders to restore moral and spiritual values in the community and to sensitise the population regarding the most effective means to reconciliation. Another Acholi male youth from Amuru District stated:

What we want is for the elders, those who know the old ways, to teach the youth the best cultural practices. For example, we want to know the cultural practices that deal with reconciliation between groups like “culo kwo” (blood compensation) so that the children who the elders are leaving behind may be able to perform such rituals when the elders are no longer around.

Across all sub-regions, however, many respondents voiced scepticism about the long-term value of local practices. In Acholiland, some respondents argued that local practices were outdated, while others argued that each region had its own practices and that these could not be extended across regions and into other ethnic groups. *“Traditional rituals cannot be used across different regions since people have different cultures,”* said one Acholi victim of violence. In Lango and Teso, many respondents argued that local practices had been manipulated, warped or even banned by political or religious leaders, severing rituals from their original cultural meanings and rendering them debased in the current context. *“Teso has no cultural beliefs that can be used since the church has dominated the area,”* said one Iteso relative of a murder victim. *“The only principle that can be used [to help resolve the conflict] is prayer.”*

Where respondents did support the use of local or traditional practices to address crimes during the conflict, they invariably connected them with the provision of truth and compensation. Advocates of the practices often argued that, before perpetrators could be cleansed or reconciled through rituals, they first needed to confess to their crimes and to show a willingness to compensate victims. A relative of a murder victim in Lira district explained the use of local rituals in Lango:

When one child from one culture kills a person from another, the clan leaders meet and agree that the crime was committed. After confession is done, eight cows are paid as compensation out of which one is eaten by the reconciling parties as a symbol of union. It is the eaten cow that is called ‘Kwor.’

A female victim of violence in Kitgum district said, *“In Acholi here, we also believe that ‘culo kwo’ – that is, compensation – is one way that harms done can be addressed as the offender pays the other person for the pains caused in any way with money, goats, cows or any other means available”.*

Implicit in respondents' descriptions connecting local practices with truth and compensation is the view that these practices represent important means of accountability for perpetrators. Such descriptions constitute a key element that has yet to be addressed by both critics and advocates of local practices as appropriate transitional justice mechanisms who characterise the practices as either synonymous with amnesty or further evidence of the inherently forgiving or reconciliatory nature of northern Ugandan cultures. In linking local practices with truth telling and compensation, many respondents argued that they could in fact be incompatible with the current Amnesty Act, which they perceive as failing to hold perpetrators accountable for the harms they have caused.

While truth and compensation were the most commonly identified virtues of local practices across all sub-regions, many respondents discerned a wide range of other benefits in these practices. Some former abductees in particular emphasised the importance of local practices for aiding forgiveness and reconciliation, as opposed to victims of violence who tended to emphasise truth and compensation. Two male former abductees in Teso described the use of local practices in their community:

A traditional ceremony was performed over one returned boy whereby a male goat was slaughtered and the boy covered with the fresh skin of the goat. A local brew was also made to celebrate his return...Another case was when two boys who returned were made to blow air into a goat skin that was intact. The goat had been specially skinned. Once the skin was filled with air it was put on fire till it burst, signifying the removal of bad omens. These kinds of rituals cleanse the minds of the perpetrators and calm the hearts of the victims, thus healing the harm experienced.

Such statements highlight the multifaceted nature of many local practices, which can have different meanings for different parties. They also underscore the importance of parties' personal experiences of the conflict – as victims, perpetrators or both – for shaping their views of appropriate transitional justice mechanisms.

Different Levels of Transitional Justice Mechanisms and Relevant Actors

Finally, respondents across the three sub-regions described the need for different *levels* of transitional justice processes to address different levels of perpetrators and crimes. Local practices, they argued, were appropriate only for the cleansing and reintegration of low-level perpetrators. In discussing the use of local practices, a male victim of violence in Lango said, “*We can forgive the rest but top officials involved in the war crimes should be taken to court.*” Most Langi and Iteso respondents opposed the use of practices for major perpetrators, such as senior Government or LRA figures, whom they argued should be prosecuted through court structures, including the ICC. “*Prosecution by the international court is applicable for high ranking war perpetrators like Museveni and Kony,*” said an LDU member in Teso. Two parents of abducted children in Lango said, “*Kony must be taken to the ICC...Museveni should also be tried by the ICC.*” Some abductees and their relatives in Acholiland argued along these same lines, underlining their desire to distance abductees from the rebel commanders who forced them to commit atrocities and who therefore, they argued, should be prosecuted. Such arguments reinforce the importance of perceptions of abductees' dual victim-perpetrator identity for interpretations of appropriate transitional justice mechanisms.

Respondents across all sub-regions also argued that different actors should play different roles in delivering transitional justice in northern Uganda. Most respondents claimed that the wider community was a primary actor in transitional justice, especially mediating local disputes stemming from the conflict and reintegrating returned combatants. The role of elected community leaders, most respondents argued, was to guide the population regarding reconciliation processes and to facilitate economic development activities, while cultural or traditional leaders were also expected to help facilitate reconciliation, especially by overseeing local practices. Most respondents interpreted the role of the Government as providing the necessary environment for transitional justice delivered by non-state sources. In particular, most respondents across all sub-regions argued that the Government should create an environment conducive to transitional justice processes by developing a comprehensive recovery plan for northern Uganda and maintaining security and general social services.

Narratives

Perceptions of Transitional Justice Options

Memorial stone for victims of LRA massacre, Pader District



Truth-Telling

“If someone commits a crime, it is better if he recognises it openly. This person will not repeat the same mistake if he tells.”
(A relative of a murder victim - Pader District, Acholiland)

“If killers tell the truth, people will fear committing the same crime because of public opinion since they will be known to everyone.” **(A former female abductee - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“If a person comes out of the bush, he must tell the society what happened, the wrongs he committed, and ask for forgiveness before you can accept him back into society.” **(A former female abductee - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

”We are happy when LRA rebels come out of the bush. If they could visit here at a time when they return, you would see people in the camp gather and clap for them.” **(An elder - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“Recorded information acts as a document for reference and helps unite the conflicting parties.”
(A victim of economic loss - Amuria District, Teso)

“As long as the people who comprise the truth telling commissions and who hear and record these truths are genuine, they can be of much help to us.” **(A victim of physical violence - Lira District, Lango)**

“Telling the truth and recording the truth about what happened is very strong evidence for proving someone is accountable. For example if we write the truth about what Kony has done to us, that will be our evidence for holding him accountable.”
(Female victims of physical violence – Pader District, Acholiland)

“Telling the truth and recording the truth about what happened is evidence that the crime was committed. So then there is no way that the perpetrator can deny his acts.” **(Female former abductees – Pader District, Acholiland)**

“You can not pierce your own eyes. This is why those who have committed atrocities can not confess. If you confess you will be killed.” **(A grassroots leader - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“I am aware of one person who came out publicly to confess his actions. He confessed having killed, abducted and even participating in rapes while in the bush. I personally became so bitter with him because I was provoked with what he confessed but when he continued confessing I had to find it in my heart to forgive him, though the reaction of the community was not good.”

(A female victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“A member of our clan escaped and came back with a gun and then the rebels came and killed people in their homesteads. He later confessed to the people. People gave him support and were comforted. Now he is okay and is not having many problems. The reason he confessed was because he realised that the people around him were so furious about what had happened. He thought that he would be a victim of their aggression. There was also stigma present in the community. He felt in danger.”

(A former male abductee - Pader District, Acholiland)

“I know [Name Withdrawn] who came to our camp and apologised to the people for the crimes he committed such as abduction and killing... Some people wanted to forgive him saying: ‘Your child can be drowned in water but you will still drink the water’... Some people asked the Government to hand him over... to them so that he could be killed... People were carrying stones.”

(A young former female abductee - Pader District, Acholiland)

“In Acholi, there is a proverb which says: ‘We need to find other means before starting to tell the truth’.”

(A relative of a murder victim - Gulu District, Acholiland)

“We are not in the camps because of all the Acholi. For forgiveness to take place, it is important that the initiator of the war, Kony, and his people come out and seek forgiveness ahead of the Acholi people to whom he belongs. Afterwards the Acholi can come out to seek for forgiveness from the Langi.” **(A male abductee - Lira District, Lango)**

“I saw a group of former rebel commanders who came and confessed to the people about crimes like killing, looting and burning of people’s homes. The reaction of the people was positive because they asked for forgiveness from the people who were affected by the crimes. They also said that they were under very strict instructions and orders to confess.”

(A relative of murder victim - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“The community received people who had confessed their crimes well and as their own people because they had repented. This is why we elected one of them as our Chairman.” **(A youth - Amuria District, Teso)**

“I only hear people who come back from the bush and they confess on that radio station that is Mega.fm but they do not say the crimes they committed, only that they are sorry to the community and only beg those in the bush to come back home.”

(A female victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“A man from Pader confessed to having abducted young children and even youths, and raping girls while in the bush. People were very angry with him. We were angry because when one talks about these things, one remembers what had been done to us. But we later had to forgive him just like we were forgiven.” **(A former female abductee - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“After my rescue from the bush, I was mentally disturbed. While back at home, a ritual was performed to welcome me back.” **(A former abductee - Amuria District, Teso)**

“I heard five people talking about how they killed people. I did not react badly because they were young children who were ordered to kill.” **(A member of a community-based organisation - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Telling and recording the truth about what happened creates awareness both locally and nationally. It helps to know who are perpetrators of the war and it serves as evidence. It also helps to document the history of Teso. It acts as an advocacy tool...” **(A member of a community-based organisation - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Accepting responsibility for crimes committed and asking for forgiveness from the community and Uganda at large will show that the perpetrators are ready to denounce their activities and be reintegrated into society.” **(A former male abductee - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Knowing the truth enlightens the public, shows the direction to follow when electing leaders and helps the communities avoid repeating the same problems in the future.” **(A male victim of violence - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Reconciliation should be unconditional. Truth telling should not be encouraged as it hurts and may breed hatred and more conflict.” **(A female youth - Lira District, Lango)**

“It’s important to find out the truth because the truth sets people free, especially the victims, and reconcile the affected parties.” **(A relative of a murder victim - Lira District, Lango)**

“I need to know why Kony and his group went to the bush and did what they did. I need them to explain their actions before they can ask for forgiveness. Forgiving them means that I know why.” **(A former male abductee - Lira District, Lango)**

“My child was ordered to kill. I developed fear after he testified. He was decently and well received by our community.” **(A parent of an abductee - Lira District, Lango)**

“Museveni blames Kony and Kony blames Museveni. We do not know who is guilty but God does. Both of them are guilty. Everyone agreed that in case someone comes out to confess, they would be forgiven.” **(A relative of a murder victim - Lira District, Lango)**

Reparation and Compensation

“The Government needs to lend victims such as the bereaved and victims of landmines some support through livelihood projects that can help them heal from what happened and so they can cope with life.” **(A male youth - Lira District, Lango)**

“The rebels want to come back but Museveni made a negative statement over the radio. He said, ‘Where will Kony get the money to compensate for the children he killed and abducted?’ Museveni should allow Kony to return first and sign the agreement, and then he can ask such a question.” **(A male relative of a murder victim - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“I am on my own. Even my children have all been abducted by the rebels. I have nothing. With time, the Government will propose compensation and I will have no one to share these things with and no one to stay with. Therefore, I am as good as nothing.”

(A victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“Compensation should be given as repayment for the harm caused in the form of cows.” **(A male youth -Amuria District, Teso)**

“There is a need to take former abductees through rehabilitation centres because of the changes they go through having been abducted and when they were made to participate in the militia, especially since they were abducted when they were still very young. It is after receiving psychosocial support that they can then be reintegrated in appropriate sectors of society. For example, those who can join the national army should be trained to do so.” **(A former male abductee - Lira District, Lango)**

“The international community must witness the reparations by the Government and ensure that the Government complies with the reparations.” **(A parent of an abductee - Lira District, Lango)**

“Kony and Museveni should pay for their killings.” **(A grassroots leader - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“Compensation for the loss of property should be properly managed as a way of making the children learn to avoid causing harm to others.” **(A relative of a deceased - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“The Government needs to compensate victims of abductions, lootings and killings. The UN needs to help out in this area. The Government cannot do it on its own since Uganda is a developing country. Compensation needs to be decided on a case-by-case basis. Where the Government can not carry it out alone, it should appeal for support from the international community. But some of our property was not registered, for example our lands had no land titles, so compensation may be hard to claim. There is a need for the international community to come in, especially because they have sent missions that have witnessed the destruction that has taken place. Such help should not come through the Government; otherwise it will not reach the beneficiaries.”

(A former male abductee - Lira District, Lango)

“Psycho-social support is needed for victims. It is just as if a woman, who is barren for several years and becomes frustrated, later has a child. This can make her forget her distress in the past.” **(A male youth - Lira District, Lango)**

“Compensation for loss of property is hampered by ignorance. I know that the Government has more capacity to pay than everybody else, including Kony. This means that the Government must take responsibility to compensate people. During political campaigns they tell us about good programs of compensation. Let them implement those programs.”

(A male grassroots leader and elder - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“Through the support of Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) a monument was erected on the other side of the road where people were killed and laid. This was to commemorate the incidence. However, the construction of the monument was not complete due to limited fund. ARLPI promised to complete the construction when they mobilized more resources toward the cost of completion. **(Local leader of an IDP camp - Pader District, Acholiland)**

Amnesty

“Amnesty bars the prosecution of perpetrators.” **(A grassroots leader - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Our brothers, who were in the bush, returned and accepted amnesty. Even those who are still in the bush want amnesty and that is why they accepted the peace talks.” **(A victim of physical violence - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“Amnesty is not transparent.” **(A member of a community-based organisation - Amuria District, Teso)**

“The Amnesty Commission can forgive me if I come out of the bush. But the accountability that I owe to the community is not mandated by the law. There is a need for the traditional rituals to be performed to restore the relationships I had with the people.” **(A recipient of traditional healing - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“Amnesty has to be complemented by the traditional practices that moulds and brings the perpetrators to answer all the complaints against them unlike the current system where the Government grants amnesty without the community’s participation.” **(A former male abductee - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“The Amnesty Commission first assists returnees with blankets, mattresses, and other requirements, and then they help us.” **(A widow member of a community-based organisation - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“People support amnesty because people believe that perpetrators who were abducted did not go on their own will. Even those who voluntarily joined and then returned should be given amnesty since they gave themselves in.” **(A male youth - Lira District, Lango)**

“Amnesty has become a delay tactic and has therefore expired as an appropriate method. The Government and the rebel forces use it to buy time to reinforce their military logistics to strengthen them for fighting later. Amnesty has not worked so well so far.” **(A member of a community-based organisation – Lira District, Lango)**

“Amnesty is a good option since it has encouraged a number of children to come back. It can encourage more to return from the bush. When the majority have returned and very few remain in the bush, these few- say if about nine in number - will find it so easy to escape from the bush and they will eventually come back as well. If there is no amnesty, those in the bush will not return because of the uncertainty of knowing what could happen to them” **(A member of a community-based organisation - Oyam District, Lango)**

“Amnesty only works for lower-ranking rebels since they may not fully buy into the vision of the top leadership.” **(A male youth - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Amnesty is effective because the perpetrator has accepted and shown that he or she is not willing to continue with criminal activities.” **(A former male abductee - Amuria District, Teso)**

“There is no need for amnesty now because it has taken many years and we have not seen good results.” **(A member of an LDU – Amuria District, Teso)**

“Amnesty is basically forgiveness; therefore it only helps the returnees reestablish better lives in the community and sometimes, to reconcile the crimedoers with the people they have wronged. At times it also helps to trace returnees’ relatives. It acknowledges criminal perpetrators, but it does not seek to punish them.” **(A former female abductee - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“Amnesty only satisfies the Government and not the local people who have been badly affected. It alone is not effective; therefore, it should be complemented by traditional rituals.” **(A relative of a murder victim - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“There is a need for forgiveness among us because we have suffered for many years and ever since amnesty was put in place, many rebels including leaders among them have returned. We therefore think that amnesty is effective.”

(A victim of economic loss - Lira District, Lango)

Prosecution

“Punishment will not help since both parties are armed and engaging in fire, for fire does not yield good results.”

(A member of a community-based organisation - Oyam District, Lango)

“People who refuse to take responsibility for their actions need to be punished.” **(A relative of a murder victim - Lira District, Lango)**

“The first option should be amnesty and then prosecution.” **(A person that suffered economic loss - Kitgum District, Acholiland)**

“Some rebel commanders and soldiers are not responsible because they grew into those positions during captivity. (...) The cause of the rebellion may also affect the degree of accountability. If the cause is not justifiable then LRA leadership will have no excuse.” **(Two youths - Amuria District, Teso)**

“We cannot use both the courts and amnesty. If the Government wanted to employ the courts, it would have started with it without necessarily introducing amnesty.” **(A male victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“We do not think prosecution can do anything. What we need now is peace and not prosecution. Let it come later.”

(A former female abductee - Gulu District, Acholiland)

“I see that court brings tension; those who go to court do not tell the truth.” **(A grassroots leader - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“Court is important. Those seeking mercy should do it before the courts of law.” **(A male former abductee – Lira District, Lango)**

“Court and amnesty are different; amnesty was granted for a certain category of people and not everybody. Courts should be left as a form of pressure against the perpetrators of violence.” **(A male former abductee – Lira District, Lango)**

“Court works for those who reject amnesty and continue to stay in the bush to carry out their operations.”

(A male victim of physical violence – Lira District, Lango)

“Prosecution is a good thing and can help if there has been injustice. But if there is an amicable settlement then there is no need to go to a court. Only disputes take people to court.” **(A grassroots leader - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“We should not take these rebels to court – otherwise, those who are still in the bush will never come out. The best thing is to offer them amnesty, as is being done.” **(A relative of a murder victim - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“Punishment needs to be applied to those who refuse to use the amnesty option, but the death penalty should be left out of the prosecutions.” **(A victim of economic loss - Kitgum District, Acholiland)**

“The judiciary cannot prosecute the perpetrators from the Government side.” **(A grassroots leader - Amuria District, Teso)**

“All prosecutions whether civil or military are not effective. They do not represent the views of the people and they do not consider community reconciliation and individual reconciliation.” **(A former male abductee - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“We do not know much about military courts.” **(A relative of a deceased - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“We can forgive the rest but the top officials involved in war crimes should be taken to court. If we forgive them and they lay down their arms, then they can reconcile with the community and peace will return.” **(A male victim of violence - Lira District, Lango)**

“The community is not well acquainted with their rights in court proceedings, for example their right to reparation.”
(A member of a community-based organisation – Amuria District, Teso)

“National and international prosecutions should be used depending on the level of atrocity that were committed by a given individual.” **(A male youth – Amuria District, Teso)**

“Use the law to hold the perpetrators accountable.” **(A member of a community-based organisation – Amuria District, Teso)**

“On prosecution: civil courts are good methods better than the Local Councils and the military courts.”
(A member of a community-based organisation – Amuria District, Teso)

“The court is a disciplinary act which keeps on reminding a person in case he wants to commit a crime again.”
(A former young female abductee - Pader District, Acholiland)

“National civilian courts will not work for President Museveni and other Government perpetrators but only for LRA.”
(A member of a community-based organisation - Amuria District, Teso)

“Our courts are effective for unrepentant perpetrators so that they will realize their wrongs.”
(A male former abductee - Amuria District, Teso)

“The Government should prosecute the perpetrators even after we have forgiven them.” **(A grassroots leader - Amuria District, Teso)**

“If the peace talks are successful, the LRA leaders can be taken abroad to face punishment.”
(A member of an LDU - Kitgum District, Acholiland)

“International bodies should stand for the rights of the affected people.” **(A female victim of economic loss - Amuria District, Teso)**

“There is a need for the intervention of the international community because this problem is ours as Ugandans but we are unable to handle it. Take for example the case that was referred to the ICC. This was done by Government that has more power than the accused ones. But this institution should be able to hold both parties accountable.”

(Member of a community-based organisation - Lira District, Lango)

“We have heard of the ICC but we do not understand it properly.” **(A former female abductee - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“The ICC is the thing bringing us more problems. The court can take up to 100 years to solve this case.”

(A male victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“To me we cannot have peace talks at the same time as the ICC. Kony may fear to sign an agreement because of the ICC.”

(A former female abductee - Pader District, Acholiland)

“The way I see it, prosecutions will only spoil the peace process especially because the ICC is only spoiling the peace in northern Uganda.” **(A grassroots leader - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“Government should play a leading role in the peace talks, especially by removing the ICC case against Kony and his commanders.”

(A male youth - Pader District, Acholiland)

“Kony is not yet arrested so it is difficult to prosecute him.” **(A grassroots leader - Amuria District, Teso)**

“The ICC is a good idea but it is creating more problems for us because the Government cannot capture Kony. Let the ICC come and arrest Kony.” **(A relative of a murder victim - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“The international court has worsened the situation in Uganda by hanging Saddam Hussein. This has given bad signals to the LRA. The Court must be independent.” **(A recipient of traditional healing - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“We should be using international troops to bring to account perpetrators of crimes.” **(A male youth - Amuria District, Teso)**

“The International Criminal Court and other courts at the international level are so far away that the people do not know the procedures and they do not mean anything to the communities in northern Uganda affected by the conflict. Their actions may not do anything to reconcile the communities.” **(A victim of economic loss - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“The ICC is only worsening the war. We fear that even the present calm in northern Uganda will be spoiled by the ICC. These LRA children are ours, we can deal with them locally here. Let them come back to us here.”

(An elderly clan leader and relative of a murder victim - Gulu District, Acholiland)

“I think a court like the ICC is effective since it can bring criminals to account for their actions.”

(A female victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“International prosecution will only work if both the Government and the LRA are prosecuted at the same time. Kony and Museveni should be prosecuted because Museveni has failed to protect people.” **(A former male abductee - Amuria District, Teso)**

“I think the Government should withdraw the ICC issue; for now peace is more important to us.”

(A widow from a community-based organisation - Pader District, Acholiland)

“Prosecution by the international court is applicable for high-ranking war perpetrators like Museveni and Kony.”

(A member of a Local Defense Unit - Amuria District, Teso)

“Kony must be taken to the ICC. (...) Museveni should also be tried by the ICC.” **(Two parents of abductees -Lira District, Lango)**

“If the courts in Uganda cannot solve the cases arising, we support the use of the ICC.” **(A male youth - Lira District, Lango)**

“The ICC does not cement relationships among the communities in the region. The Court does not help national reconciliation between the rebel leaders and the Acholi people.” **(A relative of a murder victim - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“The ICC case should be withdrawn since we the people of northern Uganda do not want the case to be tried there, for the sake of peace.” **(A former male abductee - Lira District, Lango)**

“ICC has not come to condemn, but to address the pleas for justice that have arisen over the years. There is a need for it to play its part just in case we fail to handle the conflict in future and regret why we rejected the ICC option.”

(A former male abductee - Lira District, Lango)

“This best works for those who committed the highest level of crimes who cannot be effectively tried under the national courts.”

(A male victim of violence -Lira District, Lango)

“We do not blame Kony alone but both him and the Government. So if the ICC or any other court really wants to try the perpetrators, it should try both parties and if the power of the Government prohibits it from being tried, then Kony should be forgiven. Forgiveness is the way to go because if both parties are to be tried, who is going to pick them up and take them to court for trials?” **(A member of a community-based organisation -Oyam District, Lango)**

“International prosecution should be for Kony so that every aggrieved party will feel that Kony has paid well for his atrocities.”

(A female victim of violence - Amuria District, Teso)

“Withdraw ICC cases against Kony and his commanders and then pursue options presented by the Juba peace talks.”

(A grassroots leader - Amuria District, Teso)

Local or Traditional Practices

“The international community under the UN should monitor and observe the “*mato oput*” process.”

(A former female abductee -Lira District, Lango)

“Madi and Acholi must bend the spear (*gomo tong*) to symbolise the end of the war, but for the Dinka and Acholi it is impossible to reconcile.” **(A grassroots leader - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“All clan heads, whether they are or not united under the Uganda clan association have a method of conflict resolution. Therefore for uniformity, a united clan for Uganda should be set up comprised of all cultural leaders. They need to come out and test the method. Because when I look at it clearly, there is no clan that does not resolve conflicts arising among them. (...) I admit that all clans have their own methods of conflict resolution. However, according to my understanding, if you are going to debate with someone the implication is that you do so in order to resolve issues between the two of you. You will find that all people in Uganda hate us yet are we supposed to debate with people who hate us? I insist that it is our clan leaders from the various areas that should meet and resolve the conflicts between our communities.”

(Two members of a community-based organisation - Kitgum District, Acholiland)

“Some of the traditional rituals are useful, but in the past, these rituals were misused and led to the deaths of very many youths.”

(A male youth – Pader District, Acholiland)

“There are other cleansing and welcoming practices like ‘Kiirro Pii’ and ‘Wang Kac’ that can’t work now because religion has infiltrated our culture.” **(A male youth - Lira District, Lango)**

“We need ‘*remo cen*’ (i.e., cleansing process conducted by Acholi traditional leaders) to chase away the evil spirits as we move back home, so that we are not disturbed.” **(An IDP - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“If only Acholi traditional rituals could be made into laws of the country, it could function much better than the courts. For instance, Acholi people emphasise forgiveness. This is better than taking someone to court... I think the peace talks should be completed before performing any traditional ritual.” **(A male victim of violence - Amuru District, Acholiland)**

“In the past, ‘*Kayo cik*’ was practiced to reconcile parties that had broken relationships. The two parties bring charcoal to the place where reconciliation is taking place and are made to bite the charcoal after they reconcile.” **(A male youth - Lira District, Lango)**

“Elders from Acholi and Teso should come together and perform a ritual. They should enter into an agreement and make vows that the Iteso should forgive the Acholi and the Acholi should vow not to commit atrocities in Teso anymore.”

(A former female abductee female - Amuria District, Teso)

“The traditional practices that are mostly practised nowadays are ‘*culu kwor*’, ‘*tumu kir*’ and ‘*kwayo kica*’ in order to stop any further aggressions between the clans affected. For unity, there is the slaughtering of a goat to complete the process of reunification and repair of the relationships. The elders are the ones that perform most of those practices.”

(A former male abductee from Pader District, Acholiland)

“‘*Mato opul*’ should take place between Museveni and Kony. This should be followed by community reconciliation.”

(A male grassroots leader and elder - Amuru District, Acholiland)

“An abducted child who has returned from the bush is bathed with cold water far away from his or her home. The reason for this is to stop the spirits from following the returnee home. This is called ‘*ailongar*’.” **(A male victim of violence - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Traditional rituals are effective because it brings respect and restores good values and practices in which the Acholi as a tribe believe. They should also include the practices of the other tribes against which harms were also committed, and their people who also committed harms against the Acholi.” **(A victim of economic loss - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“Dialogue can be applied everywhere for reconciliation.” **(A grassroots leader - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“We are only familiar with our own culture in addressing harms and do not know much about other cultures in other regions.” **(A female victim of violence - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“We should form peace committees that are inter- and intra-culture based. (...) Regional exchange of visits should be conducted to ease the tension between tribes.” **(Two members of community-based organisations - Amuria District, Teso)**

“Among the Langi, our views should be collected and taken to the ‘*Won Nyaci?*’ (Paramount Chief of the Langi people) who will then follow up on them.” **(A male youth - Lira District, Lango)**

“*Neno yii dye?* was done to understand whether the abducted person was still alive or not. In this ritual, a goat is slaughtered and if the inside is black, it means bad luck, and red would mean blood.” **(A young female former abducted person - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“Basing on the extent of the conflict, holding celebrations to remember what happened and reconciling victims and perpetrators will be necessary.” **(A male youth - Lira District, Lango)**

“Lango culture has a system of counseling those who commit crimes. In these cases, elders sit down and counsel the perpetrator to avoid future occurrence of the same crime committed.” **(A person that suffered economic loss - Kitgum District, Acholiland)**

“The perpetrator asks for forgiveness from the victims and society. This is then followed by ‘*culu kwo?*’. However, if the accused denies the crimes that he committed, he or she is forwarded to the courts and dealt with under the law.”

(A person that suffered economic loss - Kitgum District, Acholiland)

“We have agreed that religion prompts us to forgive people and gain peace. Cultural rituals require us to cut, cook and eat Kony and all these people who have harmed us. But if we opt for religion, we will forgive.” **(A relative of a deceased - Lira District, Lango)**

“The Acholi have a way of reconciling with their neighbors: *gomo tong*. We are concerned that some people are underestimating this important traditional ritual. Let nobody play around with it... This process must be conducted between Acholi and Langi, Acholi and Madi, Acholi and the Dinka of southern Sudan, Acholi and Teso.” **(A relative of a deceased - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“‘*Wang Kac?*’/ ‘*Kiro Pii?*’ - When someone returns from the bush, water mixed with herbs is sprinkled around and behind them so as to send off the bad spirits that they may have returned with from the bush.” **(A relative of a deceased - Lira District, Lango)**

“‘*Ngolo romo?*’ is done to cleanse one of the curses or bad omens that cause more harm to the community. The offender is made to carry a sheep on their back and the traditional leaders will stab the sheep from behind. The blood that flows out is carried to a far place with the goat so that the curses are taken far away from the community in order to prevent more harm from occurring.”

(A female victim of violence - Pader District, Acholiland)

“Traditional rituals have been taking place here and they have worked. Elders have been reconciling victims with the perpetrators because we have been emphasizing that many of these children were forced to commit various crimes.”

(A male grassroots leader - Gulu District, Acholiland)

“In my view, I know that we have clan leaders in all these places. It’s the work of these clan leaders to come together first within their tribes then across tribes and work as a team in solving the issues.” **(A person that suffered economic loss -Kitgum District, Acholiland)**

“Slaughtering an animal ‘*aluconor*’ is a traditional ritual to put an end to the harm and bring forth reconciliation. It is done through mediation by traditional leaders of the two affected groups.” **(A male youth - Amuria District, Teso)**

“*Nyono tongweno*’ is a practice to welcome one who has been away from home for a long time. It re-establishes a better relationship among people.” **(A former female abductee - Gulu District, Acholiland)**

“In Acholi here, we also believe that ‘*culo kwo*,’ or compensation, is one way that harms done can be addressed. The offender pays the other person for the damages and pains caused with money, goats, cow or any other means available.”

(A female victim of violence - Pader District, Acholiland)

“*Mato opul*’ and ‘*gomo tong*’ are the two traditions that can be used across the different regions, but they need to be complemented by the ones used in the different regions by the indigenes.” **(A former male abductee - Pader District, Acholiland)**

“We can organise events such as games, riddles and cultural dances to foster reconciliation.”

(A grassroots leader - Amuria District, Teso)

Conclusion

THE FINDINGS of this research study challenge several key assumptions in current stakeholder debates about northern Ugandan culture and appropriate responses to harm resulting from conflict and suggest important policy measures for several key actors. In particular, focus group responses across Acholiland, Lango and Teso raise further questions about perceptions of northern Ugandans as inherently reconciliatory and forgiving and naturally favouring amnesty over punishment. Respondents described widespread feelings of anger and vengefulness in their communities and incidents of reprisals meted out against former combatants who had returned home. Although many respondents claimed they could forgive those who caused them harm during the conflict, such sentiments were often motivated by individual and communal pragmatic concerns, such as the need for forgiveness to ensure social cohesion in the community or a desire for their own relatives to be forgiven of crimes they committed so that they could return home. The identity of many northern Ugandan perpetrators as intimately connected to their victims and as victims themselves of abduction and other forms of harm impinges greatly on popular perceptions of accountability, reconciliation and transitional justice. Most respondents interpreted these issues through a localised, often individualised, lens, reflecting their personal experiences of the conflict rather than romanticised traits in northern Ugandan culture.

Respondents repeatedly expressed their need to discover the truth about the past, especially to shed light on the identity of the perpetrators and the nature of the acts that have been committed. Because of the nature of the crimes, many stated the need for the provision of psychosocial support to mitigate the negative impact of truth-telling and public acknowledgement exercises on the victims and the perpetrators who will have to be reintegrated into their communities of origin. Focus groups identified compensation as the primary response to harm, both as a form of accountability for perpetrators and a means to improving the material conditions of affected communities. Many considered it to be the Government's responsibility to compensate victims even where the harms were caused by the LRA.

Regarding favoured transitional justice options to address harms, respondents expressed highly mixed views, describing numerous virtues and pitfalls of amnesty processes, prosecution including before the ICC, and local and traditional practices. Contrary to many recent interpretations of victims' perceptions in northern Uganda, there was no universal support for, nor opposition to, any of these transitional justice options. The research found that the multifaceted nature of local and traditional practices as well as the victims' personal experiences of the conflict - as victims, perpetrators or both - shape views on their potential use as appropriate traditional justice practices. Victims clearly connect the potential use of local practices in transitional justice to the potential of these practices to facilitate the recovery of truth and deliver compensation. Many respondents expressed lack of knowledge of, or limited exposure to, local and traditional practices and particularly concerning the cross-regional application of these practices, undermining their potential as effective responses to harm. Local and traditional practices were not considered to be synonymous with amnesty. However, victims consider local practices valuable for aiding forgiveness and reconciliation, in particular for the cleansing and reintegration of low-level perpetrators.

The research study demonstrated that considerable variance exists among respondent victims on the question of whether amnesty is an acceptable response to crimes. Many focus groups saw the short-term benefits of the

amnesty scheme as an incentive to bring the LRA out of the bush, and thus to bring peace to their communities. Views differed depending on pragmatic considerations such as the desire to have abductees, “our own children”, return and to secure permanent peace. The dual identity of many abductees as children of the community and often perpetrators of serious crimes was often presented as a reason for offering amnesty to former LRA elements. At the same time, victims voiced widespread discontent with the current amnesty process in its failure to deliver compensation to victims and reintegration packages to combatants who had already returned. Many considered the unconditional amnesty as frustrating their need for truth recovery and historical record. Uniting most respondents instead was the view that state institutions could not be trusted to deliver truth and compensation, the transitional justice elements they desired most.

The research study revealed that the respondent victims consider both amnesty and prosecution to be necessary responses to harm. Their views on prosecutions shed light on the role and operation of domestic courts and the ICC. Various stakeholders have argued that there is either widespread support for, or outright opposition to, prosecutions, in particular those by the ICC, in northern Uganda. However victims’ perceptions on the issue are mixed, often accompanied by a lack of trust in domestic courts, and a lack of information about, or understanding of, the ICC’s presence or operations. Respondents expressed deep misgivings about the current capacity of domestic and international institutions of justice to effectively deliver on accountability in a fair and transparent manner. In particular, many focus groups underscored the failure of the ICC to follow through on the arrests of the LRA senior leadership, as well their perception that the ICC is one-sided for not having indicted any UPDF personnel.

Findings show that the desire to prevent impunity, a goal of both formal and transitional justice that many respondents value, exists among communities affected by the conflict. While respondents referred to traditional practices as fulfilling cleansing and reconciliation purposes, they also viewed them as encompassing an aspect of accountability. However, pending the return of peace and security to be formalised in a peace agreement, the fight against impunity is positioned in the minds of respondent victims as a concern that needs to be sequenced with the immediate need to end the cycle of violence. Similarly, the overwhelming need for an immediate end to the violence in the face of the ICC indictments having not yet resulted in any arrest and in the absence of any domestic investigations, has precipitated polarised discussions on accountability, particularly concerning the relative virtues of “international” and “local” transitional justice processes and “retributive” versus “restorative” justice. This is primarily apparent in the widespread perceptions that if amnesty is seen initially as an appropriate response for low-level perpetrators, prosecution is considered as a means of addressing serious crimes or harm committed by high-level perpetrators. In line with the widespread view that the **seniority of perpetrators** and the **gravity of their crimes** are the primary criteria determining accountability, different levels of justice processes should be considered to address different levels of perpetrators and crimes in delivering transitional justice.

In any case, however, individuals’ sense of justice as expressed in this study shall be balanced with the public interest as dictated by domestic and international law, which at times might be divergent. At all times, rule of law and human rights norms and principles should guide these processes.

These findings bear significantly upon current policy questions, particularly those being debated at the Juba peace

talks. They should inform the public discussions at the time of devising concrete implementation processes and mechanisms. Stakeholders must take into consideration that truth recovery and reparations, particularly compensation, are the two elements that most victims expect as results from transitional justice mechanisms. Therefore it will be important for decision makers to address the overwhelming need expressed by the victims groups for truth about past harms and consider the need for a systematic process of historical clarification mandated to explore the long view of the current conflict, even before 1986. As well, stakeholders will need to address reparations as a crucial measure to address past injustices since a compensatory policy may be perceived by the victims as the measure that is explicitly and primarily carried out on their behalf. Given a strong perception that many government institutions may be easily corrupted, the application of a strong monitoring and evaluation system to ensure a transparent and fair reparation scheme should be seriously considered.

Furthermore, outreach efforts need to address most respondents' stated lack of information of, or understanding about, judicial processes. Measures must also be taken to re-establish the trust of the public in these institutions, including by strengthening them and addressing allegations of corruption and perceived risks of political collusion. This would create awareness about their potential contributions to both truth-recovery processes and reparation.

In addition, the research findings concerning the ICC's involvement in Uganda have particular bearing on the States Parties to take up their obligation under the Rome Statute to cooperate meaningfully with the Court's mandate to hold perpetrators of serious international crimes accountable.

Finally the research study highlights the widespread view that the international community should play a central role in ensuring that decisions made in Juba regarding accountability and reconciliation cohere with the population's views and concerns alongside broader considerations of public interest and national and international law. Ultimately, in a more concrete sense, it also highlights that the international community must ensure that victims receive remedy and reparation they demand in response to the immense and lasting harms they have suffered.

Annex - Research Methodology

Study Design

THE RESEARCH team adopted a qualitative approach in the gathering and analysis of field material, as this represented the best means to a broad and deep understanding of respondents' experiences of the conflict and its aftermath. The team conducted focus group and key informant interviews to explore affected communities' perceptions of accountability, reconciliation and transitional justice. In total, the team interviewed 1725 people in 69 focus groups and 39 key informants over six weeks in February and March 2007. Interviews were conducted in the following sub-regions: Acholiland (Amuru, Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts), Lango (Lira, Apac and Oyam districts), Teso (Amuria district).

Local Advisory Groups

During the different stages of the project in each of the sub-regions, the research team consulted advisory groups consisting of local civil society organisations and local researchers with knowledge of war-affected communities and experience in researching on issues of accountability, reconciliation and transitional justice. The advisory groups were called upon early in the project to give guidance on the research methodology and training of the drama groups and researchers. They also provided insights on the locations where the focus groups should take place in accordance with the criteria devised in the methodology. The advisory groups were later consulted when the preliminary findings became available in order to gather further cultural and historical insights specific to districts and sub-regions. They will also assist in the dissemination of the findings of the study within their respective communities.

Focus Groups

Local researchers and coordinators helped select and invite participants for the focus groups in cooperation with and under the supervision of OHCHR field office staff. Invited participants were then asked to recommend others as focus group candidates.

Focus groups comprised the following categories of victims across northern Uganda:

1. Former LRA abductees. This group was sub-divided in terms of gender: a) female abductees, including child mothers, and b) male former LRA combatants to allow each gender group to describe their different experiences and distinct roles in their families and communities.
2. Parents of abductees.
3. Relatives of people killed or maimed.
4. Victims of physical violence. This group was sub-divided in terms of gender, in order to allow victims of sexual and gender-based violence to express themselves more freely.
5. Internally displaced persons and individuals who had experienced economic loss. This group was sub-divided in terms of gender to capture their different experiences of displacement and distinct roles in their families and communities.
6. Grassroots cultural leaders and elders.

7. Members of the UPDF and Local Defence Units (LDUs).
8. Non-abducted youth. This group was sub-divided in terms of age (10-13 and 14-18 years old) to capture the different experiences and distinct roles in their families and communities.
9. Recipients of traditional healing.
10. Members of community-based organisations. Organisations were chosen because of their direct experience of reconciliation processes and/or because they constituted groups of victims with a common experience, vision or mission related to the conflict. Examples of these groups include women's peace groups, concerned parents associations and night commuters.

The three main ethnic or linguistic groups selected for the focus groups were the Acholi, Lango and Teso groups.

The research locations where focus groups took place were selected according to the following criteria:

1. Sites of massacres or abductions.
2. Sites of truth-telling events.
3. Sites of traditional healing/reconciliation events.
4. IDP camps.
5. "Decongestion camps" (i.e., satellite camps between original "mother IDP camps" and the place of origin of IDPs).
6. Return areas for IDPs.

Key informant interviews

Key informants were invited to an interview by local researchers. Key informants are individuals with special knowledge about healing, reconciliation, accountability and truth-recovery. In some instances, key informants were also individuals who could not be interviewed in focus groups because of the sensitivity of the information in their possession.

39 key informant interviews were conducted, including with:

1. Ex-LRA combatants (middle and high-ranked commanders).
2. Members of the UPDF and LDUs.
3. Local political leaders
4. Police officers.
5. Sub-county Executive Committees Chairpersons.
6. Camp leaders.
7. Religious leaders.

The Use of Drama

Short drama sketches were developed and performed to stimulate and provoke discussion in the focus groups. Members of the drama teams (who were all from the respective regions, fluent in the local languages and knowledgeable of local cultures) were encouraged to adapt their methods to the specific settings, for example by introducing relevant cultural elements in dramas.

Drama sketches were used to:

1. Depict scenarios that potentially raised a need for individual or community accountability or reconciliation processes and mechanisms.
2. Introduce various accountability and reconciliation processes, including traditional cleansing processes, truth-telling, national and international prosecution, and reparation schemes, which formed the basis of many of the questions in the focus groups.

Research Teams

In addition to OHCHR-Uganda staff, local research staff, including moderators and notetakers for the focus groups, and research coordinators were recruited and trained before data collection and collation. Field researchers came from the respective regions and were fluent in the local languages. Special attention was paid to linguistic and translation issues, in particular to bring accuracy and consistency in the translation of concepts relating to accountability, reconciliation, justice, forgiveness, reparation and compensation. Three teams were formed to reflect the geographical sub-divisions in Acholiland, Lango and Teso.

An international technical advisor was hired to provide technical expertise to the research team concerning qualitative research design and analysis and to oversee, in conjunction with OHCHR staff, the drafting of the final report.

Finally, drama teams comprising local actors with experience performing in IDPs camps or return areas were trained and performed the short drama sketches developed during a workshop.

Training

The research team held a workshop in Gulu in February 2007 to finalise a questionnaire that provided the basis for all the research. During the workshop, drama teams from the three sub-regions devised a short sketch illustrating the main themes of the research project – namely, the nature of harms experienced by the community, notions of accountability and reconciliation, and transitional justice mechanisms – to be performed before the focus group interviews in each research site. The training programme for the research and drama teams focused on six main areas:

1. Understanding transitional justice mechanisms.
2. Understanding the research tools and relevant administrative and logistical issues.
3. Focus group moderation techniques and note-taking skills.
4. Linguistic/translation issues.
5. Sensitisation to victim issues in research.
6. Trial run of the research protocol and analysis/debriefing.

Recording

The field researchers sought participants' permission to record focus group interviews. Most interviews were tape-recorded and note takers kept detailed records of all discussions.

Any bio-data, including names and specific locations, collected that could present potential harm or risk to the security to the participants is held strictly confidential by OHCHR.

Analysis of Data

The data from the focus groups was analysed to identify trends concerning harm, accountability, reconciliation and transitional justice options in two stages: (1) the first stage identified key issues emerging from the data and compared them across the three sub-regions; (2) the second stage analysed the trends within same-type and different-type focus groups in each district and sub-region. The data was not analysed in terms of statistics and percentages but rather broad trends of opinion among and within focus groups in different locations. Key informant interviews were used to interpret cultural information gathered from the focus groups and to embed findings in the relevant social, cultural and political context.