



“Prosecution Will Not Solve My Problems:” Women’s Senses of Justice and Reparations After Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Northern Uganda

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Women’s Advocacy Network (WAN) members march on International Women’s Day in Gulu (Photo by Justice and Reconciliation Project)

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Executive Summary

- This policy brief is about justice and reparations for women who were abducted as young girls (ages 7-16 years) by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels during a 1986-2006 war with the Ugandan government and forced to serve as wives, porters, fighters, spies, and mothers in captivity for 1-15 years.
- More than a decade after escaping abduction and returning home, these women are still stigmatized, rejected, live in poverty, are unemployed, and feel ignored by the government. No meaningful justice and reparations have happened, and these women's voices remain marginal to policy debates in Uganda. The situation has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- This brief is grounded in the first author's 5-year qualitative doctoral research, 7-months of data collection in Gulu district, and 15 years' experiences working on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) issues in Uganda. The brief is also informed by the incredible work of the second and third authors who founded community-based organizations for survivors of SGBV and their children. We situate ourselves as survivors' advocates, but also as Acholi women with lived experiences of the war.
- Three questions guided the research: 1-Why do mothers decide to reunite, or not, with the fathers of their children born of forced marriage and sexual violence? 2-What are the circumstances under which they make these decisions? 3-What are the prevailing senses of justice and reparations for women who bore children from forced marriage?
- Key findings of the research show that justice is holistic, relational, and lived in the everyday. Lived justice has 4 intersecting themes: 1-place-based justice, 2-needs-based justice, 3-relationship-based justice, and 4-compensation-based justice. These senses of justice articulated by women are driven by the cumulative impact of abduction, sexual violence and forced marriage.
- The research also found that, while some women reunite with the fathers of their children due to love, rejection, children's identities, and access to land, the majority do not, due to lack of consent, men's perceived responsibility for wrong, hate, torture, and that the men are dead or still missing.
- On May 31st and June 1st, 2021, the first author partnered with the Women's Advocacy Network (WAN) and Watyer Ki Gen (WKG) to validate, and disseminate results of her study, and discuss actionable recommendations for policy and programs in Uganda, a collaboration funded by the University of British Columbia's (UBC) [Public Scholar's Initiative](#) (PSI). Key issues and recommendations from this workshop are presented in the last 2 sections of this report.



WAN members after a storytelling session (Photo by Ketty Anyeko)

I. Introduction: “The Survivors Are Dying.”

Others [survivors] are dying from the injuries that they returned home with from captivity as they cannot access proper medical services to help remove bullets from their bodies... We request them [the government] to ensure that mothers receive reparation and children born in captivity are given proper formal education.²

It has been twenty-one years since the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR 1325) on women, peace, and security (WPS) (UN 2000) and women’s rights are still violated during and after conflict. The absence of robust justice and reparations mechanisms for sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the aftermath of war, as was the case in Northern Uganda, amounts to a violation of women’s rights and well-being as valuable Ugandan citizens. Despite its commitment towards implementing the WPS agenda, including the UNSCR 1820 on Sexual Violence in Situations of Armed Conflicts (UN 2008), Uganda has lagged behind in meaningfully realizing the dreams set out by member states in the UNSCR meetings of 2000 and 2008 especially on justice and reparations needs of women who were abducted as young girls and subjected to various SGBV. In a survivor’s words:

The government has forgotten about us the mothers and our children that were violated in a very inhuman way... Some of the children living on the streets are children born in captivity. There is still a lot of stigma and we feel [that] we are still not yet free. What are you going to do for us?³

Survivors remind the government of its obligations set out at the UNSCR 1325 operationalized by its National Action Plan, to act fast before survivors die. The conflict in Northern Uganda happened between the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) rebels and the Ugandan government from 1986 until a 2006-2008 peace process was conducted, ushering in fragile peace. The rebels remain active in South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Central African Republic. More than sixty-thousand people, the majority of them children, were abducted during the conflict and many remain missing (Blattman and Annan 2010). Over ninety percent of the population were displaced into internally displaced person camps, with thousands massacred in several areas like Barlonyo, Atiak, Acolpii, Lukodi and Mucwini (Justice and Reconciliation Project 2009; Owor Ogora and Baines 2007; 2008) Women and girls were abducted and forced into ‘marriages,’ unwanted pregnancies, fighting, laboring, and torture resulting into poor health, children born in captivity, poverty, trauma, rejection, and social stigma upon returning home (Acan 2017; Amony 2015; Baines 2014; Bunting 2012; Denov and Lakor 2018; Denov and Piolanti 2020). A women’s rights activist notes:

The women that I met who really suffered in the bush did several roles. They were women captives, soldiers, fighters, some of them were murderers, they had children and continued to play the role of wives. With all these contexts, the issue of women war victim and reparations cannot be underrated. That’s why the packaging of the programming to support women needs a very big holistic, comprehensive gender sensitive [and] transformative approaches.⁴

In the words of a survivor:

We have the vulnerable survivors who are dying silently, and they are in hard-to-reach places. We have survivors who are already dead, and others are having chronic illnesses.... We have

² Validation, and dissemination workshop, Gulu district, June 2021

³ Validation and dissemination workshop, Gulu district, June 2021.

⁴ Validation and dissemination workshop, June 2021.

cases that we receive [requiring] a gynecologist to support the women. Women are dying silently with chronic illnesses in their uterus, as they could not afford to access treatment.⁵

In this brief, we note that there is limited understanding on what happens to these women after abduction as more focus has been on wartime experiences and legal justice after war. Women's voices on justice and reparations are marginalized at all levels. The cumulative impact of abduction and sexual violence as noted above are prevalent in survivors' lives today that warrant redress, yet they are silenced and ignored in their struggles for justice and reparations. For example, a survivor notes:

We met with the Speaker of Parliament, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, and the different members of Parliament... We shall follow up again as we have been doing for the past ten years. I know one day they will hear our voices and act upon our needs I want peace in our country, and I want the president and the people to listen to us and understand what we are going through.⁶

This brief invites all stakeholders to listen and act on the justice and reparations needs that survivors articulated during the research. The report has five sections. Section one discusses the literature and policy landscape in Uganda. Section two describes the methods and collaborations leading to the writing of this brief. Section three presents a summary of research findings. The fourth section highlights issues discussed during the justice and reparations workshop in June 2021 and the fifth outlines recommendations advanced by participants at this workshop and concludes.



WAN members convening for a storytelling session (Photo by Ketty Anyeko)

II. Reviewed Literature and the Policy Landscape in Uganda

Literature indicates that fighters deliberately abduct women for labour, combat, rape and procreation (Akello 2013; Apio 2016; Baaz and Stern 2013; Boesten 2007; Carlson and Mazurana 2008; Kramer 2012; McKay and Mazurana 2010; O'Brien 2016). For example, in Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge regime had a forced marriage policy premeditated to reproduce and increase the population to meet

⁵ Validation and dissemination workshop, June 2021.

⁶ Validation and dissemination workshop, June 2021.

the labor needs of the agrarian revolution (Toy-Cronin 2010) while militia leaders of the 1994 Rwandan genocide forcefully targeted women for wives and rape (Kalra 2001). In northern Uganda, sexual violence, forced marriage and forced pregnancy by the LRA were envisioned to create a new Acholi generation (Baines 2014; 2016). An estimated 10,000 girls became forced young mothers due to LRA abductions between 1988 and 2004 (Akello 2013). Another research on northern Uganda found that eighty-two percent of girls in the sample were forcibly given to commanders as wives (Kiconco 2015). Joseph Kony, the rebel leader alone allegedly had over forty wives while his commanders had an average of five wives each (Carlson and Mazurana 2008), acts that contravene customary marriage and courtship practices in northern Uganda (Apio 2016; Baines 2014).

Worldwide, formal, and informal justice mechanisms have been implemented by states and civil society at grassroots, national and international levels to address conflict-related sexual violence. The Guatemalan 2010 Tribunal of Conscience for Women Survivors of Sexual Violence (Crosby and Lykes 2011) and Women's International Tribunal on Japanese Sexual Slavery (Chinkin 2001) illustrate civil society-led initiatives. The Special Court of Sierra Leone (Oosterveld 2011), the International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda (ICTR) and truth commissions in South Africa (1995) and Liberia (2007) (Scanlon and Muddell 2010) and the 2021 conviction of LRA commander Dominic Ongwen by the International Criminal Court (ICC) demonstrate international level formal mechanisms. Yet, reports also show that formal justice and postwar processes including truth commissions or prosecutions perceive sexual violence as a women's issue, presenting women as docile victims in need of masculine saving, and focus on sexual violence more than other gendered harms (Buono-Hansen 2010; Buckley-Zistel and Stanley 2011; Franke 2014; Patterson-Markowitz, Oglesby, and Marston 2012).

Still, legal anthropologists emphasize that justice should involve informal ways of resolving violence noting that 'the idea of justice is not a singular, universal idea, but a complex, locally variable, and ever-changing concept' (Brunnegger and Faulk 2016, 4). They called this variability "justice pluralism." Justice pluralism, according to them is 'the co-existence of a plurality of meanings, ideas, and experiences attached to justice within spatial settings, scales, and layers' (2016, 4). The meanings, ideas, and experiences of justice to the northern Ugandan women, as we shall elaborate later, are intertwined with land, basic needs, compensation, and peaceful relationships. Relatively, Kimberly Theidon (2007), in her work with women in Peru proposed that justice can be a reallocation of resources considering women who needed scholarships for their children, housing, and food.

Further, despite reparations goals of public acknowledgement of wrong, restoration of the dignity of survivors, compensation, restitution, rehabilitation, and guarantee of non-repetition (Duggan et al. 2008; Rubio-Marin and de Greiff 2007), most transitional justice (TJ) resources have been spent on the rehabilitation of ex-fighters, truth commissions and courts (Walker 2016). Cognizant that states have the primary responsibility to provide reparations (Nairobi Declaration 2007), Reparations remains underfunded in TJ yet critical to gender justice (Scanlon and Muddell 2010). Still, Ugandan SGBV survivors have been ignored by the state. For example, in 2014 the women petitioned Ugandan Parliament for reparations⁷ but nothing has been done to-date despite a promise to act by the government.

Nonetheless, literature on gender sensitive reparations suggest that it should address structural barriers prior to the war and shouldn't only restore, but transform (Duggan et al. 2008; Nairobi Declaration 2007). 'Transformative reparations insists that reparations must aim at reconstruction of economic,

⁷ The Women's Advocacy Network, with support of local organizations, cultural and religious leaders presented a petition to Ugandan Parliament for reparation for them and their children. Their demands included similar issues raised in this research such as compensation, children's education, and medical support among others.

social and political relations that oppress and expose women to violations’ (Walker 2016, 109). These relations are conditions that do not only expose women to sexual violence during war, but also intersect to influence their decision making with state’s political will to address their suffering post war.

Against this literature, we note that several policies and legal frameworks have been formulated and adopted in Uganda to prevent and respond to SGBV. Nationally, besides the Penal Code, Uganda has the Domestic Violence Act of 2010, Uganda Gender Policy of 2007 aimed at gender equality and women’s empowerment including access to justice (MoGLSD 2019) and the National Policy on Elimination of GBV in Uganda of 2016 (MoGLSD 2019). Uganda was the first in the African continent to create a National Transitional Justice Policy. Internationally, Uganda developed the Uganda Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 and 1820 following the UN resolution in 2000 on Women, Peace and Security, is a signatory to the 1948 Universal Declaration for Human Rights (UN 1948), Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)(UN 1979), the ICC Rome Statute, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995. All these conventions and policies condemn sexual violence and forced marriage. Despite its commitment to these conventions, Uganda has done little to alleviate the suffering of women abducted by the LRA. We note that enforcement of these policies and laws remain a gap in meeting their goals. Some have been criticized for their top-down approach in formulation (Mwije 2012). These policies demonstrate the existence of frameworks to ensure justice and reparations for survivors of sexual violence in northern Uganda, but enforcement, further consultation and amendments are necessary to ensure the achievement of justice and reparations women articulated in this report.

III. Methods

This policy brief is informed by a PhD qualitative research (referred to as ‘the research’ henceforth) conducted between 2016 and 2021. The following questions guided the study: Why do mothers decide to reunite, or not, with the fathers to their children born of forced marriage and sexual violence? How do women make these decisions? What is the prevailing sense of justice and reparation sought by women who had children from forced marriage? Data was collected over seven months in 2019 but the analysis was informed by over 15 years’ work experience in northern Uganda by the first author and lived experiences of all the authors. The second and third authors are direct survivors of SGBV and leaders of survivor organizations. As part of her research, Ketty collaborated with Women’s Advocacy network (WAN) and Watyer Ki gen (WKG) with funding from Public Scholar’s Initiative (PSI) at the University of British Columbia (UBC)-Canada. Four focus group discussions, ten oral history interviews, nine key informant interviews, and two storytelling circles were conducted with 68 total participants. Data was transcribed and inductively analyzed to generate results. Having written the dissertation over a period of two years, the first author partnered with WAN and WKG in May-June 2021 to conduct validation and dissemination workshops. The two-day event (elaborated later) was attended by over 70 stakeholders and survivors, leading to the writing of this report.



Members of WAN during a storytelling session (Photo by Ketty Anyeko)

IV. “Just Pay Us:” Summary of Research Findings

The study found several factors that influence women’s decision making on what to do with forced marriages started in rebel abduction when they return home, and that these decision making are intertwined with survivor’s senses of justice and reparations as elaborated below:

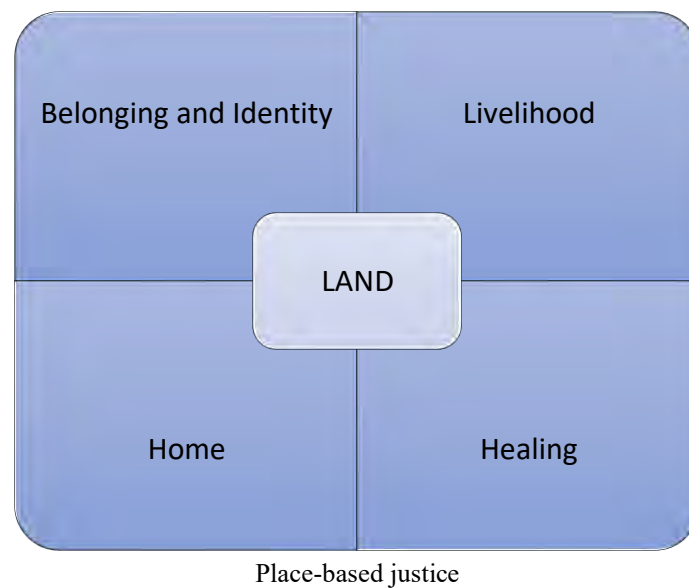
1. The majority of women, despite giving a trial reunion upon returning home, do not continue with the relationships arguing that: “I was forced,” “he was a killer,” “he tortured me,” “he was too old,” and “he remained in the bush.”⁸ These narratives denote lack of consent, perceived responsibility for wrong and their consequences on kin (killing), hate, torture, and the men who either died or still missing.
2. For women who decided to continue forced marriages, their narratives revolved around love with mercy, forgiveness, sympathy, helplessness due to rejection, land access, identity and belonging of children born in captivity. In the women’s words: “he was also just abducted,” “he took care of me in captivity,” “I was rejected by my mother,” “I wanted land for my children,” and “he is the father of my children.”⁹ Women argued that this love is not any ordinary one as they had to go through a slow process of first accepting that they were under captive; followed by anger towards the commanders, forgiving them for the harm and falling in love with them-materialized through the birth of children. Forced pregnancy was for the first time in history recognized as a war crime and crime against humanity by the ICC in the recent

⁸ Excerpts of women’s narratives collected in 2019 and detailed in a doctoral dissertation presented at the workshop in 2021.

⁹ Ibid.

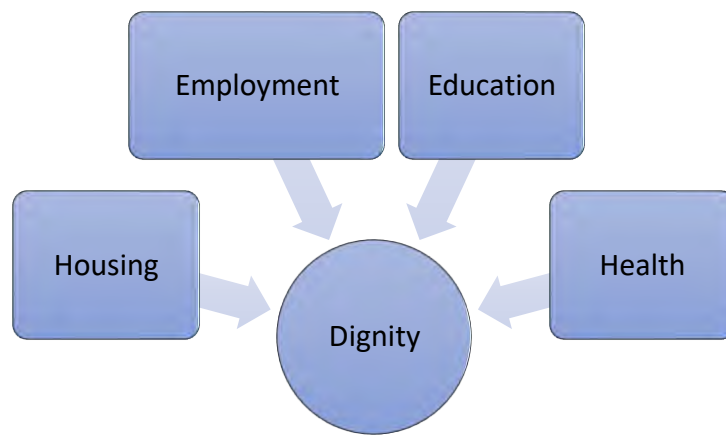
sentencing of former LRA commander Dominic Ongwen (The International Criminal Court 2021; Maliti 2021).

3. The research found that justice is relational, holistic, and lived in the everyday realms of society. Moving beyond a legalistic approach to justice, the research developed a theory of lived justice. Live justice is holistic and an everyday sense of justice that has four overlapping themes that allow women live lives of dignity as follows:
 - **Improved access to land (place-based justice):** It is a sense of justice achievable when survivors own land to live on. Women’s articulation that land is justice is backed by their arguments that land is home, livelihood, a cultural identity, and a place to belong for them and their children born in rebel captivity.



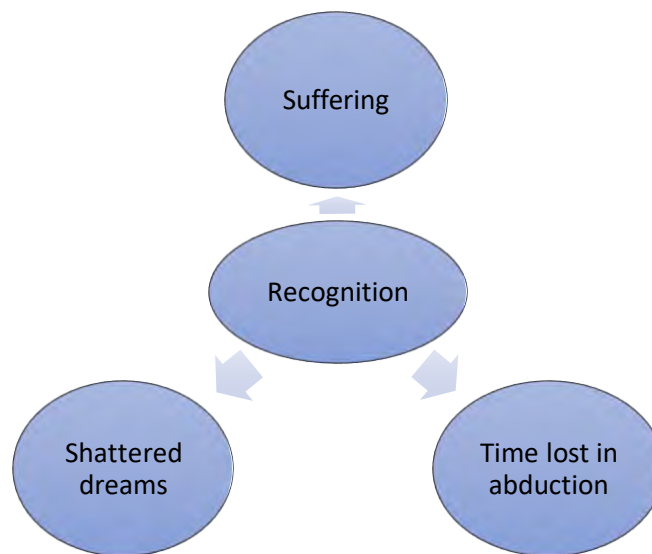
- **Enhanced ability to meet basic everyday needs (needs-based justice):** women expressed the needs for economic empowerment, descent and durable housing, medical care, education support for their children born in captivity, and employment for women with employable skills. In the words of one woman, “prosecution will not solve my problems...I need a job and livelihood to take care of my family.”¹⁰ This survivor further notes ‘I cannot become a girl again,’ reasoning that she needs to be given reparations that enables her to live a live comparable to what she had dreamt of when she was a little girl.

¹⁰ Focus group discussion, Gulu town, 2019



Needs-based justice

- **Compensation should be paid to survivors by the government (compensation-based justice):** Calls for tangible (land or housing) and monetary payments were articulated by women arguing that compensation will recognize three things: 1) suffering endured in captivity, 2) career and future dreams that were shattered by abduction and SGBV experiences, and 3) youthful time lost in abduction. When asked what reparations means to them, most women responded: “just pay us.”



Compensation-based justice

- **Acceptance, recognition and peaceful-co-existence for women and their children (relationships-based justice).** Women argued that they want their citizenship to be recognized and affirmed by the Ugandan government as continued inaction and government’s silence towards their needs make them feel as though they are not Ugandan citizens. In the words of one woman who had been thought to be dead after a long time in captivity but reappeared, “the government has forgotten about these mothers. It is as if you were already dead.”¹¹ The reintegration and recovery challenges, poverty, absence of state

¹¹ Focus group discussion, Gulu town, 2019

recognition, reparations and justice makes this woman feel that she is being treated as though she is already dead. Women argued that a recognition of their victimhood by the government and community members who often blame, reject, and stigmatize women for the war is another sense of relationship-based justice. Studies show there is stigma of being labelled “rebel women,” blaming women for complicity with the rebels and viewing them and their children born of war as guilty of crimes rebels committed (Akello 2013; Baines 2014; Coulter 2008; Jain 2008). Women demand an official apology from the government as an acknowledgement of its failure to protect them from being abducted, and to be fully accepted, peacefully co-exist, and feel loved and cared for by their families, communities, and leaders at all levels. As a stakeholder at the workshop noted:

*So many years those people are suffering here as if they are not part of Uganda. Their children are not given the citizenship of Uganda. So, they are not [citizens], according to government of Uganda, they are stateless. These are very serious.*¹²

The above results were presented at the workshop organized by WAN, WKG and UBC as elaborated next.



His Grace Dr. John Baptist Odama and Ketty Anyeko in 2019 after an interview in Gulu (Photo by Sister Kevin Anyeko)

V. The Workshop

The workshop had three **objectives**: 1) to disseminate and validate results of the doctoral dissertation focused on senses of justice and reparations for women who survived wartime sexual violence and

¹² Validation and dissemination workshop, Gulu town, June 2021

forced marriage in northern Uganda; 2) to dialogue and spur debates, and action on justice and reparations for these survivors; and 3) to collectively generate recommendations for justice and reparations for survivors.



Participants at the validation workshop in Gulu 2021 (Photo by Moses Komakech)

The workshop was conducted both virtually through zoom and face to face at the African Roots Hotel in Gulu-Uganda. It had two separate sessions: Session one happened on May 31st, 2021, exclusively with survivors for confidentiality purposes and to provide a free environment for women to share their views. Session two (June 1st, 2021) was the stakeholders' workshop attended by policy makers, civil society organizations, government, religious and cultural leaders, SGBV survivors and their representatives from five survivor-led organizations. See appendices for agenda, and participant list.¹³ A video recording can be accessed by emailing the authors. Below, we provide a summary of **participants' deliberations** at the workshop.

- The political will of Uganda's government to act on the justice, reparations, and recovery needs of SGBV survivors remains absent. As a participant noted: "up to now the government has not done anything... We took them [women's petition] to parliament [in 2014]. They lied. Up to now, the parliament has done nothing."
- The war in northern Uganda was fought on women's bodies yet a gender-just and victim-centered transitional justice system is deficient. Moreover, as a speaker noted: "participation of women and girls' victims in transitional justice processes is essential [and] has reparatory value because they are able to speak and be part of the design, and implementation of every process." Participation of women and girls in conflict resolution, recovery and peacebuilding is a key pillar in the UNSCR 1325 (2000) on women, peace, and security.
- The need for a transformative reparatory process was also raised. For example: "apart from holistic, ...women's sense of reparations, [reparations] must focus beyond violence and look at economic, social, and cultural rights of these women. We have always done so much around

¹³ Participant list for the survivor's session has been excluded for confidentiality purposes.

addressing violence and mitigating the GBV aspect, but we have not focused on economic, social and cultural rights perspective.”

- Despite the ICC conviction of Dominic Ongwen for crimes including SGBV, a lot remains to be done about other SGBV cases within the Ugandan judicial system and other development programs like peace, recovery, and development plan (PRDP) and wealth creation. Female war victims are not listed as priority beneficiaries for these programs. While the Ongwen case was well received as a testament of justice by direct victims including some SGBV survivors, it remains contested. For example: “Ongwen should not be regarded as a murderer because Ongwen is a victim of circumstance. I am not saying that Ongwen did not kill, Ongwen naturally was subjected and conditioned to become a killing machine in the hands of the LRA as an organization ... Ongwen is like the gun, the knife, the spear that he used You don't take a knife to court. If I kill somebody with a knife, you take me to court because it is me. So, in this case, it's the LRA, not those who were subjected and conditioned to become killing machines in the hands of the LRA.”
- The ICC and the International Crime's Division of Uganda's High Court (ICD) work is perceived as selective justice given its focus on particular cases within Uganda and the African continent.
- Participants also noted that the selective compensation schemes by the government will affect the trust that war-affected communities have in the government. For example, bomb victims of the Kyadondo Rugby Club¹⁴ were compensated while the war-affected in Northern Uganda remain ignored. This compensation has been documented by other writers (Odongtho 2010).
- The ICC reparations in the Ongwen case will only focus on victims of crimes Ongwen directly or indirectly committed in the Sinia Brigade¹⁵ after 2002, and not all LRA victims. This may cause divisions in the community because not every war-affected person will receive reparations. For example, “the reparation of the victims as in the case of Ongwen is going to cause problems... a victim in the case of Ongwen receiving... compensation and another victim of a similar situation missing in the neighbourhood because she is not a victim in the case of Ongwen. How are we going to handle this kind of people in the same community? I think it is going to be understood as selective justice.”
- Absence of the gun does not equate to peace: in the words of a participant, “the post war conflict is more than the war itself, we may think that the gun is silent but this is the real war that the survivors and the children born in captivity still experience up to today. So, it still needs us all to fight for justice.”
- Women never understood the essence of amnesty cards, while those who did, rejected it. For instance, “they didn't know the reason why they were given that card. Personally, I was abducted ... but I didn't get that Amnesty [card] because I knew, why should they give me and yet ... I didn't call for that abduction. May be if I am to return it back, it was me [supposed] to give Amnesty to the government. [Government] should come to us to apologize, [and] acknowledge that it was wrong to do this to us.”
- Lack of funding for CSOs working with SGBV survivors: Unless the government of Uganda recognizes the need for redress of conflict-related harms including SGBV, and that this is still a

¹⁴ In 2010, terrorists planted bombs that exploded at Kyadondo Rugby Club in Kampala, Uganda's capital injuring and killing many Ugandans who were watching World Cup Football Championship.

¹⁵ Sinia was the name of one of the major LRA brigades, a structure of their group's organization. Each commander of a Brigade reports to the Joseph Kony, the LRA rebel leader. Ongwen was the commander in charge of Sinia.

problem, external donors may not give funding. A speaker noted, “as we continue with the struggle for reparation, the government needs other agencies to comebut the funding that they get is limited compared to the numbers of victims. So, they need long term funding.”

- Religious and cultural leaders still need to do more to fight stigma, advocate for women’s land access, and enable acceptance of women and their children. The voices of these leaders have the power to transform the way the community views them, women argued. At the same time, the justice and reparation needs of the broader war-affected communities need to be addressed for smoother relations between women, their children and the community.
- While culture is good, it sometimes plays a negative role. For example, it impacted the reception of women and their children born in captivity as they were considered taboos and rejected by their own kin. As noted at the workshop, “the parents and our own people here in Acholi and Lango rejected their own children when they came back with children born in captivity. They regarded those children born in captivity as a taboo and a curse that culturally is very bad. You see, culture is sometimes very bad.” An unanswered question a participant asked was, “what type of justice are we looking for if our own families reject us?”.
- Justice remains inconclusive if spiritual elements are not addressed. In the words of a cultural leader, “we could be talking about place-based, needs-based, compensation, relationship, but there is a lot left out which have to be handled through the elaborate system which have been developed over the years. There’s a lot that we must do to repair the divine bridges that happened around these women with the children or everybody who have been involved directly or indirectly in the conflict. Handling them at material level ... may leave a lot of glaring gaps which continue to become a vacuum dealing conclusively with the question of justice.”
- Past harm is present in women’s current lives materialized in stigma. For example, some participants noted that, “I remember even during the political campaign a woman approached us and said they asked her when she decided to campaign ...and register as one of the councilors they asked her, ‘do you think leading people is like leading people in the LRA? Do you think you can be a commander here while becoming a woman leader?’ There are so many painful things that these women are being reminded with every time they want to pick up their lives.”
- The ministry of gender has a social protection fund and mechanisms for various categories of people like the elderly, youth, and women. A participant wondered why the government is not coming up with a similar mechanism for war-affected women and children in northern Uganda.
- Who are the war victims? There is a limited understanding on what victim categories exist in northern Uganda including formerly abducted women as their number remains undocumented.

These were some of the issues arising from the workshop that we highlighted.

Next, we present a summary of recommendations.

VI. Recommendations



A WAN member speaks to community members in Gulu during an anti-stigma awareness meeting (Photo by Ketty Anyeko)

The research placed the issues, concerns, and interests of sexual violence survivors in post violence settings into a framework that informs program and policy actions on justice and reparations.

It is recommended that transitional justice (TJ) theory and practice channel its attention and resources to the living needs of survivors' and move away from the current focus on primarily prosecuting perpetrators, to understanding victims' senses of justice by adapting a bottom-up approach. TJ needs to revisit narrow definitions and categories of who is a perpetrator and who is a victim and develop justice mechanisms that seek to understand who plays what roles in a conflict, under what circumstances, and how they can be accountable for those roles. For example, how can men who fathered children during the war be held accountable to responsibilities of raising these children beyond legal prosecutions.

Lived justice and TJ processes complement each other. For example, ensuring part of TJ resources go to meet the basic everyday needs of survivors so that they live dignified lives, could make them more interested and understanding of how other forms of TJ mechanisms sustainably address their suffering. Arguably, if the legal justice system in Uganda was working effectively, in a timely manner, and in ways that do not further disempower survivors, perhaps women's senses of justice would have called for more of such initiatives as they all intersect to ensure meaningful justice is achieved.

There needs to be a balance in how formal justice mechanisms are undertaken with what senses of justice mean for survivors of wartime sexual violence. A balance between pursuit of lived justice and other forms of justice, including formal and cultural mechanisms like Acholi traditional justice systems, in complementary ways. Let justice be lived and experienced before one grows old or even

dies. We present the following policy and program recommendations generated by participants at the two-day validation and dissemination workshops below:

To the Government of Uganda and its Parliament:

- Offer an official apology for harms women endured, and for the failure to protect.
- Provide interim reparations for women and their children born in captivity. Some survivors are dying, and many are unable to afford their very basic needs such as housing, food and school fees for their children who need not miss their youthful education years.
- Create a comprehensive reparations law and provide gender-sensitive and transformative reparations following the interim reparations. This should be conducted as part of the current TJ policy. An Act of Parliament should be created to operationalise the TJ Policy. Reparations should involve provision of specific livelihood initiatives, land, education, and vocational skills training for children born in captivity and their mothers.
- Table a motion on stigma in the Parliament. As noted in this report, stigma remains one of the biggest reintegration challenges for women and their children. It is imperative for the government to find a lasting solution to this problem through policies.
- Conduct a robust reparations program for all war-affected persons in northern Uganda as the ICC reparations will be limited to Ongwen's case and crimes committed after 2002.
- Intentionally package development programs to include and meet specific needs of women and their children. These programs include the National Agriculture Advisory Services (NAADS), the Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan (PRDP) and others.

To the International Criminal Court and the Trust Fund for Victims in Uganda:

- Pay reparations and consider children born in captivity as a special victim category.
- Ensure reparations go directly to survivors and their representatives without bureaucracy.
- Reparations should include provision of medical services to the women and their children, and the communities they live in to avoid deepening divisions and the already endured stigma.
- Include all victims of SGBV in its reparations program.

To Ex-LRA Combatants and Fathers:

- Take full responsibility of caring for and raising their children including payment of their school fees. Mothers reported that girls have become victims of early marriage and pregnancy due to limited opportunities to live decent lives with support of both parents and the communities. In the words of one mother during the workshop, 'we need justice from our children's fathers too.'¹⁶ This responsibility should not be used to claim full custody of children by their fathers who for a long time abandoned them. Ker Kwaro Acholi (KKA) should come up with a bylaw that regulates this responsibility of fathers.
- Apologise to the women they forced to be their wives and mothers to their children.

To the Acholi Community with Leadership of *Lawirwodi*, Rwot David Onen Acana II:

- Ensure total acceptance of women who survived sexual violence and forced marriage in rebel captivity, with their children. This should involve championing awareness and attitude change campaigns at grassroots and national levels.
- KKA should ensure spiritual redress as justice is unachievable without spiritual aspects. KKA should embrace evolutionary and innovative approaches to accommodate specific justice, reparations, and healing needs of the women, including those connected to land.

¹⁶ Validation and dissemination workshop, Gulu town, May 31st, 2021

- *Lawirwodi* should take the lead in recognition and full acceptance of women and their children born in captivity by communities they live in and the government.
- KKA should take lead in advocating for improved land access and ownership by women and their children as this enables place-based senses of justice. This can involve coming up with a bylaw that calls upon each clan to apportion land for women and their children instead of rejecting them.

To Civil Society Organizations:

- Increase momentum on TJ processes and scale up awareness on the policy in Uganda.
- Mobilize support of, and regularly follow up with the Acholi Parliamentary Group to rally behind national level justice and reparations advocacy efforts for SGBV and war survivors.
- Survivor groups and their leaders should unite and work together to advocate for a common cause. About five SGBV survivor-led organizations participated in the workshop and agreed to continue working together for justice and reparations for them and their members who survived SGBV.
- Scale up community awareness through dialogues in all avenues such as churches, schools, and other forums to end social stigma and encourage full acceptance of women and their children who had been rejected due to their abduction experience.
- Provide psychosocial support to address trauma women and their children still experience due to wartime SGBV.
- Document and record all victims of the conflict including SGBV survivors to inform reparations and development initiatives. This helps address the question: who are the war victims? Women victims should also be intentionally and systematically categorised.

To Academic Institutions and Scholars

- Develop a strategy for recognizing research participants and survivors of SGBV as key players in knowledge production by involving them in research formulation, design, analysis, validating and disseminating results to the affected community.
- Collaborate with grassroots communities and their representatives in translating findings of academic research to inform programs and policy planning, development, and implementation to better improve the lives of survivors of a phenomenon under study such as SGBV in this case.
- Carry out more research on issues of children born in captivity to inform programming and policies as this victim category has been left behind in post conflict programs and policies.
- Develop research projects focusing at SGBV the LRA committed beyond Ugandan borders like DRC, South Sudan, and Central Africa.

To The International Community, Including the United Nations:

- Condemn violence against women and children in war. As one survivor noted, “send our voices to the rest of the world so that they know that we are suffering because of the war in northern Uganda. The world should find a way to stop abduction of children and sexual abuse of women in conflict situations. Let’s stop violence against women and children.”
- Mobilise resources to support reparations and justice efforts in Uganda.
- Support efforts to end LRA activities in neighbouring countries so that sustainable peace is guaranteed for Uganda and its neighbours.
- Pressure states to assess and scale up its commitment and implementation of the UNSCR 1325, 1820 and other international conventions that prevent and provide redress to wartime SGBV harms.



Participants at the validation workshop in Gulu 2021 (Photo by WAN and WKG)

VII. Conclusion

In this policy brief, we presented a summary of findings of a doctoral research that indicated justice is relational, holistic, and lived in the everyday. It is a sense of justice and reparations that has four overlapping themes: 1-place-based justice, needs-based justice, relationship-based justice, and compensation-based justice. The brief also indicates that participants' senses of justice as lived departs from legally bound and TJ concept of justice as achievable by formal prosecutions. Lived justice extends from the administrators of justice both traditional and international, to the everyday. Research findings and deliberations at the workshop invite the reader to look at the issues of sexual violence in war anew and calls upon all stakeholders including policy makers, civil society organizations, state and non-state actors, cultural and religious leaders at all levels to respond to the women's calls for justice and reparations. In her closing remarks at the workshop, Woman MP of Gulu district, Honorable Betty Aol Ocan notes, "your concerns have been taken note of." It is our hope that this policy brief will contribute to improving the lives of SGBV survivors by informing policy and program development and implementation. We end this report with the following quotes from survivors during the workshop:

The struggle continues..... Let's continue working together to air our voices and then we shall achieve. At one point, we shall get our justice and reparation.

I encourage the different stakeholders and institutions not to get tired of us but to continue fighting along with us until the government acts and acknowledges that it's our right to receive reparations.

We shall fight for rights in our country until the government and the people in the whole world hear what we went through in northern Uganda during the war. We lost our dignity. We lost

many things. We lost who we were supposed to be in our country and in this world. But because God made it like that, we shall not keep quiet until our government hear the voices of the war victims in northern Uganda.We are not going to stop moving from door to door to the government and the civil society organizations until justice is served.



Focus group discussion with participants (Photo by Ketty Anyeko)

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Lawirwodi Rwot David Onen Acana II and Ketty Anyeko after an interview in 2019 (Photo by Simon Okello)

Useful Links

- Doctoral dissertation on women's senses of justice and reparation can be accessed [here](https://open.library.ubc.ca/soa/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0406097) {<https://open.library.ubc.ca/soa/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0406097>}.
- Lived justice podcast produced to disseminate findings of the dissertation.
- 2014 WAN petition to Uganda's Parliament can be accessed [here](http://justiceandreconciliation.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Womens-Advocacy-Network-Petition-24-February-2014.pdf) {<http://justiceandreconciliation.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Womens-Advocacy-Network-Petition-24-February-2014.pdf>}

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