



# Youth participation in peacebuilding in post-conflict northern Uganda

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis herewith submitted for the PhD in Public Administration – Peace Studies, at the Durban University of Technology (DUT), is my original work and has not been previously submitted for a degree at any other university.

Charles Churchill Awici

## ABSTRACT

The study examined the role of youth in building peaceful, democratic and inclusive societies in post-conflict settings. This was in an attempt to rectify a situation in which, in war, youth and children are traditionally viewed as participants, witnesses and victims, but in post-conflict situations, they are left out in peacebuilding process. Using participatory action research, the research draws upon direct voices of youth to understand how youth perceive and relate to peacebuilding processes and outcomes in northern Uganda. Data was collected through review of secondary data, interviews, focus group discussion and observation. The study revealed that about half of the young people in the study had participated in peacebuilding interventions, and valued their participation because they were also victims of conflicts and disputes, and wished to self-discover, improve their self-esteem, and secure the future of their communities. Despite these positive perceptions, the majority of the youth believed that they lacked the space and support to harness their potential to build and sustain peace. The study identifies conflict and structural violence, youth's acceptance, internalisation and buttressing of the barriers to their participation in peacebuilding, and negative community perceptions and stereotypes of youth as having hindered youth action to positively change their lives. Together, these barriers help to explain why despite significant investment by government and NGOs, many youths fail to translate programmes and policies into long-term benefits for their communities, thus placing Lira District and northern Uganda in general perilously between war and peace. Additionally, the results of the peacebuilding project demonstrated that a youth-led initiative can be effective and a source of hope for peace if it is supported by a network of stakeholders. Therefore, the focus should be to take advantage of the capability and agency of young people to address the root causes of the inadequacy and ineffectiveness of youth participation, and to reflect on peacebuilding actions in order to realize and sustain positive peacebuilding outcomes. Finally, the study makes policy and practice recommendations, poses new questions, and points to possibilities for future work with youth.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the youths of northern Uganda who dare to use their strengths in the service of peace.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is a product of a partnership with youths, and consultations with resource persons from the Lango community, academia, civil society, business, and government, with immense knowledge and experience on youth and peacebuilding. I am, therefore, grateful to them for their time, ideas and other resources that they shared with me throughout the research process. Their generous support contributed, directly or indirectly, to making my PhD journey less lonely, more rewarding and educative than it would otherwise have been, and I owe them a debt of gratitude.

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<sup>1</sup> The action research team consisted of members and patrons of the Peace and Human Rights Club of Ogor Seed Secondary School in Otuke.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AAI:	Action Aid International
AIDS:	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ALC:	African Leadership Centre
AR:	Action Research
CAO:	Chief Administrative Officer
CAP:	Community Accountability Platform
CBO:	Community Based Organisation
CDO:	Community Development Officer
CEDAW:	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CESCR:	Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
DFID:	Department for International Development
DLB:	District Land Board
DUT:	Durban University of Technology
ESR:	Economic and Social Rights
FGD:	Focus Group Discussion
GBV:	Gender-Based Violence
GLOFORD:	Global Partnership for Development
GoU:	Government of Uganda
GOU:	Government of Uganda
HIV:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HRNJ- U:	Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda
ICC:	International Criminal Court
ICT:	Information and Communication Technology
IDMC:	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDP:	Internally Displaced Persons
IDPC:	Internally Displaced People's Camp

IFES:	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
IREC:	Institutional Research Ethics Committee
ISER:	Initiative for Social and Economic Rights
IYF:	International Youth Foundation
KII:	Key Informant Interview
LC:	Local Council
LDU:	Local Defence Unit
LEMU:	Land and Equity Movement in Uganda
LGA:	Local Governments Act
LNF:	Lira NGO Forum
LRA:	Lord's Resistance Army
MCC:	Mennonite Central Committee
MCF:	Mastercard Foundation
MGLSD:	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
MoJ:	Ministry of Justice
MoLG:	Ministry of Local Government
NDP:	National Development Plan
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
NTV Uganda:	National Television Uganda
NUSAF:	Northern Uganda Social Action Fund
NYC:	National Youth Council
NYP:	National Youth Policy
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAR:	Participatory Action Research
PHRC:	Peace and Human Rights Club
PPDA:	Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority
PPRR:	Principles, Practices, Rights and Responsibilities
PRDP:	Peace, Recovery and Development Plan
PSFU:	Private Sector Foundation Uganda

RD:	Restless Development
RoU:	Republic of Uganda
SDG:	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV:	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SOP:	Standard Operating Procedure
SRHR:	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
ToC:	Theory of Change
UBOS:	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UDHR:	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN:	United Nations
UNAI:	United Nations Academic Impact
UNCRC:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
UNCST:	Uganda National Council for Science and Technology
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA:	United Nations Population Fund
UNHRC:	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund
UN-IAN:	United Nations Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding
UN-IANYD:	United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSCR:	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UPDF:	Uganda People's Defence Force
YCS:	Young Christian Student
YLA:	Youth-led Action
YLF:	Youth Livelihoods Fund
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme



## CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Youth are considered as pillars of society, and the movers and shakers of the future on account of their ever-increasing numerical dominance, influence and potentials (Kasherwa 2020). The growing recognition of the role of youth in peacebuilding and development has been emphasised in the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, Uganda Vision 2040, the Peace, Recovery and Development Programme (PRDP) for northern Uganda, and in local peacebuilding interventions. However, there is little evidence on how peacebuilding scholars and institutions have understood and translated the different experiences and knowledge of youth into building theory and practice at the grassroots level, to enhance youth participation in the prevention and transformation of conflicts (Pruitt 2013). Therefore, this study interrogates how youth understand, experience and interact with policies and programmes meant to promote youth participation in a post-war context, with specific reference to northern Uganda, a region that has experienced armed conflicts for over two decades, and continues to struggle with the legacy of war and violence, while benefitting from a number of peacebuilding interventions.

In this study, the terms young people and youth are used interchangeably to refer to people aged 18-30 years. But, besides this age-based categorisation, youth constitute a diverse population segment, differentiated by gender, location, level of education, and education and employment status, among other factors. While the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995) defines a youth as a person aged between 18 and 30, the National Youth Policy (NYP) defines a youth as a person aged 13 to 30 years (Republic of Uganda 2001). I have used the Constitutional definition of youth because, legally, a person who is 18 years and above is legally an adult and therefore legally capable of playing an active role in issues that affect his or her community.

There are two reasons why youth participation (defined in terms of engagement) in processes, institutions and decisions for the prevention, response to, and transformation of, conflicts is crucial globally and in Uganda in particular. First, although youth constitute the largest segment of the world's human population, they are the least represented in key decision-making spaces. Secondly, the UNSCR 2250 calls on countries to document and learn from the contributions of youth to peace and security, and the UN expects youth to be the torch bearers of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The proposed study will build on both the history of conflicts in Africa and Uganda's turbulent experiences in which youth have not only contributed significantly to the struggle for independence, social justice and peace

through different means, but also participated in violence, leading to a narrative that presents youth as perpetrators, victims and witnesses of violence. The focus on youth provides a good basis for understanding community issues, drawing insights and proposals from different experiences, and seeking to empower and engage youth on critical issues that affect their communities and their ability to work for peace.

In this study, peacebuilding is conceived both as a response to the legacy of destructive conflicts and violence, and as a means to change unequal and unjust societies beyond the mere absence of war. As Richmond (2018) argues, inequality causes conflicts and is primarily responsible for other forms of violence, such as fear or threat of violence, torture, death, poverty and other negative elements to a peaceful society. Therefore, peacebuilding includes efforts to avoid relapse into conflict, and to create conducive conditions for socioeconomic and political development (Ball 2018). In this context, peacebuilding includes interventions to reduce or end both direct and indirect violence, promote peaceful resolution of conflicts and social cohesion, and engender participation and reconciliation, among other important elements of peace.

The study sought to contribute to the work of peacebuilding scholars and institutions by exploring how the global recognition of the potential of youth to contribute to peacebuilding can be translated into practical and context-specific peacebuilding interventions to serve the youth population at the grassroots. The study adopted an action research design, using qualitative methods, to explore the youth's perspectives of violence, participation and peacebuilding, and to draw upon direct voices of youth to generate evidence to inform policies and intervention strategies meant to serve conflict-affected youth populations in northern Uganda. This chapter presents the study context and a statement of the research problem, followed by research aim and objectives, the research questions and justification of the study. However, before all that, it is important that a word be said about the evolution of the title of this dissertation.

## 1.2 Context of the Study

### 1.2.1 Introduction

Building peace after war is a delicate endeavour, and all peacebuilding efforts seek to avoid relapse into new conflicts. One common thread that runs through these endeavours is the importance of meaningful youth participation as a foundation for a peaceful future. The UNSCR 2250 calls on states to promote youth citizenship engagement and to inculcate values for peace and good governance in post-conflict peacebuilding interventions. Furthermore, the SDGs, promulgated in 2015, focus on youth as the driving

force to the achievement of the goals by 2030. This study of the role of youth in peace and security is connected to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development because of the “symbiotic relationship between peace and security, development and human rights, and [it] specifically addressed the interdependence among peace, justice and inclusive institutions.” (Simpson 2018: 4). Youth has been defined severally: while for the UNSCR 2250 (2015) youth ranges from 18 to 29 years of age, the Constitution of Uganda puts it at 18-30 years, and the Uganda NYP lowers it to 12-30 years. I have opted for the Uganda Constitution’s age categorisation. Therefore, in this study, the terms young people and youth are used interchangeably to refer to people aged 18-30 years.

In peacebuilding, youth are considered both as enablers for more peaceful, democratic and inclusive societies (*IANYD Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding* 2016) and as potential spoilers of peace. Several studies (McEvoy-Levy 2001; UNDP 2007; Lohmeyer 2017) have documented this double-edged role of youth in violence and peace. Youth are enablers on account of their involvement in different phases of peace and conflict-resolution, especially in contributing to dialogues, disengagement and reintegration of former fighters. In post-conflict settings, youth have contributed to truth and reconciliation commissions, campaigns for disarmament, and awareness initiatives. But they are also considered spoilers because evidence suggests that unfavourable conditions, including lack of socioeconomic, cultural and political opportunities, act as drivers and triggers of youth’s participation in violence (Simpson 2018).

Conflict and violence are useful concepts for understanding the role of youth in peacebuilding because as Kasozi (1994) observed, without a legitimate conflict resolution mechanism in place, conflict can degenerate into violence. This observation is aligned to the argument by England (2012) for whom the end of armed conflict may lead to a rise in other forms of injustice or deprivation that give rise to violence. Therefore, in order to build and sustain peace, Boutros-Ghali (1992) argues, peacebuilding interventions need to create or strengthen institutions to prevent and to respond to violence, promote sustainable economic development, and empower citizens to tackle violence in all forms.

The Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) fought a war against the Government of Uganda from 1986 to 2007 when a ceasefire agreement was reached between the two warring parties. As the war intensified, the Government of Uganda designed and implemented a military strategy aimed at confining the rural population into protected camps in an attempt to conclude the war within six months. However, this strategy failed to protect the civilian population from LRA attacks; instead, it alienated the people from the Government (Hendrickson and Tumutegyeize 2012). It is also argued that the protection measures

that government put in place were suspect, particularly given the gross violation of the rights of the civilian population, reportedly by the Ugandan armed forces (Schulz 2020; Angom 2018).

To neutralize the LRA, militia groups, popularly known as Local Defence Units (LDU), were recruited along ethnic lines (*'Amuka'* in Lango, and *'Arrow Boys'* in Teso) to help protect their respective communities, thus militarizing the entire region and pitching communities against one another, especially against the Acholi community from which the LRA leader hails. The militarization of communities enabled some elements within the ethnic-based militia groups to occasionally use firearms to settle local disputes with neighbours and to access resources.

In spite of the Juba peace negotiations, the LRA leader Joseph Kony and his commanders did not sign the peace agreement, neither did they return to Uganda. Instead, they continued forcefully recruiting fighters in Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, and the Sudan. To date, the war against the LRA has not formally ended, although no hostilities are taking place on the Ugandan soil, and the Government of Uganda and other stakeholders have gone ahead to implement post-conflict interventions based on the provisions in the Juba Peace Agreement.

### 1.2.2 Children and youth in the LRA conflict

Beginning in 1986, the LRA conflict in northern Uganda led to massive recruitment of children and youth in violence by both the LRA and the Government forces. The conflict, which severely affected the districts of Acholi and Lango sub-regions of northern Uganda, also extended to other regions, including Teso and West Nile (Angom 2018). According to different sources, between 60,000 and 80,000 children were abducted by the LRA and forcefully turned into soldiers while some girls were forced to marry LRA commanders, or to perform war-related tasks, such as gathering intelligence, cooking and acting as porters (Republic of Uganda 2007, 2011; and Shanahan and Veale 2016: 72). According to Watye Ki Gen 2014 (cited in Denov 2019), about 10,000 girls ended up bearing and raising children in captivity. Additionally, Angom (2018) observes that the girls were forced to serve as wives to the commanders, and children in the camps lacked the basic necessities of life. These hardships changed the traditional structure of the community, and men and women were forced to perform roles that were traditionally not theirs while children took on adult responsibilities.

According to Twaibu (2015) boys and girls as young as 12-14 were targeted by the LRA on account of their assumed loyalty and the belief that they were less likely to escape; and on account of their impressive performance in battle. The LRA commander, Dominic Ogwen, was 9 years old when he was kidnapped, and he is an example of how children changed the dynamics of the conflict by committing atrocities and

performing war-supporting roles, including domestic duty and child rearing in the case of girls. As Twaibu (2015) observes, a second generation of child soldiers were born in LRA captivity.

Summing up the extent of young people's participation in the LRA conflict, Twaibu (2015: 4) writes,

Essentially, the war over Uganda has been deemed as “a war fought by children on children,” as children account for approximately 90% of the LRA's forces. No fewer than 50% of these recruits are girls and boys between the ages of eleven (11) to sixteen (16) .... According to a 2005 UNICEF report, an estimated 25,000 children had been forcibly recruited by the LRA. Phuong Pham's in country study conducted in (November and December 2010) put the numbers between 25,000–38,000 from 1986-2006, with 24% girls and 76% boys.

The above figures assume their true significance when we realise that, according to Twaibu (2015: 4), at the time, there were only 200-250 adult, LRA combatants. Twaibu (2015: 6) also argues that, just like boys, girls in captivity undergo abuse. Besides being offered as wives to top LRA commanders, they also participated as LRA combatants, and many were killed while others contracted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. On its part, the government recruited children rendered homeless or otherwise vulnerable to fight the LRA, and, more crucially, to spy on the LRA. While the children could have refused to participate, those who did not join the government forces were subjected to “insults and reproaches from their would-be recruiters.”

Citing a few examples of the key dates in the abduction and massacres in northern Uganda, Baguma (2012) draws our attention to April 20, 1995 when over 300 people were killed, and October 9, 1996 when 139 girls, aged 12 to 15 years, from St. Mary's College in Aboke in Lango Sub-region were abducted. Faced with such challenges, the International Criminal Court (ICC) intervened, and while some observers saw their efforts to hold top LRA commanders to account as an opportunity to get rid of the LRA and related violence against the civilian population, others regarded the use of ICC at the stage when conflict was ongoing as ill-conceived. In the opinion of the latter, who included religious and civil leaders, the use of ICC placed at risk the lives of abducted and other children with the LRA, and was potentially undermining the role Acholi culture and belief systems in conflict resolution.

Generally, as Angom (2018) aptly observes, the conflict exposed the community to an insecure and predatory environment. A significant proportion of the population were exposed to violence, about 1.8 million people were displaced into urban centres in and outside northern Uganda, and the entire societal fabric was weakened (Angom 2018: vii; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2010: 7). While the LRA rebels used the hit-and-run tactic of raids to abduct children at night, either from their homes or

while at school, the government strategies of confining internally displaced persons (IDPs) to camps purportedly to protect them, but more plausibly to deny LRA support, met with little success and mixed reactions. This is because the IDPs were subjected to poor health and living conditions; and thousands of people were killed or forcefully abducted by either the LRA or the Government of Uganda (Obika and Mogensen 2013).

The complexity of the different experiences of boys and girls in armed conflicts has raised questions regarding how they should be treated in peacebuilding processes. Cullen (2020) observes that, just like men, women are both perpetrators and victims of violence, and, therefore, emerge from war with different experiences. However, she argues that, in reconstruction processes, it is necessary to treat women and girls as victims because they become perpetrators by coercion, and they need to be supported to effectively reintegrate into their communities. Cullen's perspective contributes to the debate on the role of women during war, and underscores the dilemma associated with how abducted children who were coerced into committing crimes should be handled in the search for peace and justice. The reactions to the 2021 ICC ruling on Dominic Ongwen of northern Uganda are a case in point. The ruling was received by the community as a form of justice for the victims, and a warning to those who might want to perpetuate violence against communities. However, according to Ongwen's defence team, Ongwen is not guilty because he was abducted and forcefully conscripted when he was a child, and, as such, he was not responsible for his eventual action.

Indeed, despite strong arguments for holding children to account, some analysts have argued that adults are ultimately responsible for children's participation in armed conflicts, and, therefore, it is unfair to hold children responsible for actions they may have committed under duress (Steinl 2017). Perspectives from northern Uganda show that the role of both children and youth play in armed conflict is viewed with mixed feelings, and has significant implications for community cohesion and programming. For example, youth who have perpetuated violence, and their families, may be rejected or stigmatised by the community. In the Ongwen case, those who welcomed the verdict argued that it provided an opportunity for healing and for the community to accept him back given that he and his relatives would be freed by Ongwen serving the ICC sentence. But those opposed to the ICC involvement and verdict see it as denying them an opportunity to build peace on their own terms, in their own traditional setting. Essentially these differences of opinion reflect cultural differences in legal concepts of justice, especially of compensation and peace-making. That is why reintegration programmes must consider the varied conflict experiences of youth and their families in peacebuilding programming. That is why Stephen, a

journalist in Gulu, is right when he states that what is important is to translate the verdict into an opportunity for peace and healing. In his words: “From a victim’s perspective, Ongwen has been convicted. So what? Do victims understand and appreciate the meaning of that conviction? Will it ease their pain? What is important; is it the verdict or what comes after? Questions around reparations should now begin,” (cited by Ongora 2021: para. 18).

The dominant argument in discourses around the role of young people in armed conflict has tended towards regarding children and women as victims. Steinl (2017) agrees that in doing so, the discourse has often ignored the role of child soldiers in inflicting violence in war partly because the victim label protects them from blame and responsibility. Cullen’s (2020) argues for treating women and girls as victims, but Steinl (2017) regrets that promoting a passive-victim narrative of child soldiers results into “various adverse consequences, which can hinder the successful reintegration of child soldiers into their families, communities and societies.” Indeed, as Steinl (2017) notes, some form of accountability is necessary, in process that brings the ‘perpetrators’ and the communities together to accept the reality and live together. Moreover, it promotes their agency in rebuilding society and thereby fostering perceptions and attitudes for peace. The implications of these arguments is of particular interest because they have the potential to explain the nature and level of involvement of children and youth in efforts to restore peace and engender development in northern Uganda, and to rekindle discourses around the role of young people in the future of northern Uganda.

Twaibu (2015: 1) describes the civil war in northern Uganda as having caused untold suffering to children and youth who remain invisible and continue to be regarded as “passive, incidental victims or inconsequential actors.” He argues that by virtue of the role they play as soldiers and in other combat capacities, children and young people sustain fighting and political violence at the community levels. Building on evidence from northern Uganda, Twaibu avers that children and youth who have lost out in many aspects of life, including education and life skills are obstacles to peace, and are, therefore, sustaining the cycle of conflicts and violence. Given the devastating impact of the conflict on the lives of young people, their families and communities, he argues, understanding the experiences of these children and youth is vital to any short and long-term plans to build peace.

The conflict has led to the emergence of organized street children who are associated with violence and crime in the region. While some people stayed in camps and out of camps, some other people roamed the streets, and children separated from their parents roam the streets of towns and smaller urban centres to eke a living through begging and casual labour. Therefore, these young people go to the streets in order

to survive in relative safety. However, the street children phenomenon has gradually turned out to be a threat to peace and security in the region. Some youth have resorted to crime and violence, and formed organized groups to execute their agenda and make a living. Locally referred to as *Aguu*, the youth street gangs that emerged after the LRA conflict are regarded as a major source of insecurity, crime and violence. According to Divon and Owor (2021: 85), the *Aguu* phenomenon is born out of the two-decade war, and can be described as “a group assembled and transformed through the interaction between the processes of conflict, displacement, aid, reconstruction, and opportunity”. As the two authors note, this situation might have arisen out of social exclusion of stigmatised young people.

### 1.2.3 Ceasefire and the hope for peace

The ceasefire agreement of 2007 ‘silenced the guns’ and marked the beginning of a massive return of IDPs to their villages. However, the IDPs returned to damaged or destroyed homes and infrastructure, lack of basic services, and tensions among communities and families, arising from atrocities committed during the conflict. These tensions were aggravated by lack of economic opportunities, competition for scarce resources, and weakened governance structures, among other issues. The resultant disputes and violence have pervaded the return and recovery processes in northern Uganda, and the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) for northern Uganda was developed to respond to these and many other related challenges.

Implemented from 2007 to 2015, the PRDP was a Government of Uganda-led plan for the stabilisation, recovery and development of northern Uganda in order to bridge the socio-economic gap between northern Uganda and the national average. The Programme presented immense opportunities to rebuild northern Uganda and to respond to conflict dynamics, triggers and drivers. It also prioritised the reintegration of former child-soldiers and the plight of young people who had missed out on education and other aspects of life. PRDP was implemented as Uganda was implementing the decentralization policy, which meant that the IDPs returned to a new governance dispensation. District Local Governments (DLGs) became the direct employers of most civil servants in each district, and took over service delivery in most sectors. As the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) (2019) notes, this implied that, in principle, ordinary citizens would be able to access services more efficiently, as well as participate in local decision-making on issues that affect them.

However, northern Uganda remains the most underdeveloped part of Uganda, with a poverty level at over 60% below the national average since independence (Republic of Uganda 2011: 1). As Esuruku (2018) observes, besides poverty, the communities of northern Uganda are yet to overcome daily worries



over trauma, reintegration of ex-combatants, children born in captivity, land conflicts and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the post-war era. The region also has the highest crime rate in the country. Indeed, Lira District, the selected site for this study, has the highest crime rate in Uganda. A Uganda Police Annual Crime Report (2018: 11-42) indicates that, with 6,726 cases in 2018, Lira District recorded the highest number of crimes in the country, and leads in particular crime categories, such as economic crime (640 cases), homicide (79 cases) and burglary (390 cases). Lira also ranked second in domestic violence (525 cases) and fourth in robbery (265 cases).

From 2016 to 2019, Uganda's Annual Crime Report (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019) indicated that, of all the country's then 126 districts, Lira District, the study area, (Appendix D: 1) consistently recorded the highest number of crimes. In this, the district typifies the 38 districts of northern Uganda (Appendix D: 2) that experience high levels of different of violence which, unfortunately, goes unnoticed and/or unreported. The low levels of reporting violence, and the normalization of some form of violence, make it impossible to know the true magnitude of the violence. However, Figures 3.1 and 3.2 below give some indication of the relative levels of violence, and the diversity of crimes, in Uganda and Lira District. By comparison, for the four-year period (2016-2019), Lira District accounted for 2.6% of all the crimes reported in Uganda, and reported the highest number of crimes from 2016 to 2018.

*Table 1: Uganda's and Lira District's annual crime statistics*

<b>Years</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
National annual number of crimes	<b>243,988</b>	<b>252,065</b>	<b>238,746</b>	<b>215,224</b>
Crimes recorded by Lira District	6,509	7,892	6,726	4,256
Lira District's % age of national crime cases	2.7%	3.1%	2.8%	1.97%
Lira District's national crime ranking	1	1	1	2

(Source: Annual Crime Report 2019: 65; 2018: 12)

*Table 2: Lira District countrywide ranking by type of crime*

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Type of crime</b>	<b># of reported cases countrywide per year</b>		<b># and % of Lira District cases per year</b>		<b>Lira District yearly ranking per crime</b>	
		<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
1	Theft	61,533	55,704	1,810(2.9%)	1,123(2.0%)	-	4

2	Assault	36,323	31,895	498(1.4%)	153(0.47%)	-	4
3	Sex-related crimes	17,521	15,638	445(2.5%)	197(1.25%)	-	3
4	Domestic violence	13,916	13,639	525(3.77%)	399(2.9%)	2	2
5	Economic crimes (private sector fraud)	15,099	13,264	640(4.2%)	258(1.9%)	1	6
6	Breakings	14,018	12,919	390(2.78%)	289(2.2%)	1	1
7	Threatening violence	13,357	11,592	401(3%)	218(1.88%)	3	6
8	Child-related offence	11,589	10,596	559(4.8%)	254(2.39%)	-	1
9	Criminal trespass	9,500	7,920	-	149(1.88%)	-	3
10	Robbery	7,354	6,761	265(3.48%)	211(3.1%)	4	2
11	Homicides	4,497	4,718	79(1.75%)	97(2.05%)	6	4

(Source: Annual Crime Report 2019)

Figures in the annual crime report show that Lira District, one of the 38 districts of northern Uganda accounts for the highest number of crimes recorded countrywide, and reported the highest number of crimes from 2016 to 2018, and the second-highest number in 2019.

Studies of crime in post-conflict conditions attribute crime to poverty, the disintegration of families, and desperation among vulnerable community members, all of which lead people to resort to engage in crime and other risky behaviour without regard for the consequences. These behaviours include rape, child abuse, defilement and prostitution, and they contribute to the reported high crime rates.

Studies in Sociology and Criminology attribute violence to “structural barriers to success, lack of social control that regulates communities, and...social and cultural forces” (Oselin 2016: 203). It is also argued that, in some instances, men living in marginalized settings are likely to participate in violence, and that, in some instances, the use of violence is taken as an opportunity to increase “social and economic capital”, while in other cases, people may resort to crime to promote their masculinity (Oselin 2016: 203).

In analysing the prevalence of crime in Lira District, Breen-Smyth’s (2018) analysis of suffering, victims and survivors is interesting for an analogous interpretation of crimes and the manner in which they are

viewed and addressed, especially in a condition of post-conflict vulnerability. According to Breen-Smyth, visibility is not a sufficient tool to make all suffering an issue that matters to us; rather, it is lives that are regarded as grievable that matter to us, especially those lives that are counted as valuable, lives that matter and are worth-protecting. This argument echoes the street joke according to which “when the rich rob the poor, it is called business; but when the poor fight back, then it is called violence.” However, crimes cannot be reduced or eradicated without reversing the plight of vulnerable groups of young people who continue to struggle for survival, and who remain onlookers to the challenges of their own communities. In this case, peace can only be built or sustained when peacebuilding initiatives invest in enhancing youth’s capacity to participate in all the phases of crisis, peace and development.

Lira District is one of the 38 districts that constitute northern Uganda. It is one of the traditional Lango districts, situated in central northern Uganda, and it was originally made up of seven (7) counties: Erute North, Erute South, Moroto, Otuke, Dokolo, Amolatar, and Lira Municipality. The district is predominately inhabited by the Langi people who belong to the Nilotic ethnic group. In 1974, Lira District was split into two districts: Lira and Apac, and again into more districts in recent decades. During the LRA conflict, most of the displaced populations in the Lango sub-region took refuge in Lira urban centres and in the neighbouring sub-counties.

Lira District is still grappling with the impact of the war, and registering slow progress in most aspects of the economy, with limited opportunities for decent work. The youth working in the informal economy in Lira District are exposed to “a range of exploitations, from the economic to the physical to the sexual” (Mallett, Atim and Opio 2016: iv). Mallett, Atim and Opio (2016) also established that many of these young people were school dropouts, had experiences of broken families, negative social attitudes directed towards them, exposure to ‘bad work’ and other exploitative work ventures, and lacked the personal connections required to secure good jobs. This generation was born and raised during the LRA conflict and, therefore, has experienced displacement and return challenges. These challenges are likely to have far-reaching implications, extending beyond the current generation.

As Ben-Porath (2011) and Oosterom (2016a) observe, violent conflicts erode the social fabric of society, the culture of good governance, and spaces for citizen engagement. In northern Uganda, the LRA conflict limited the ability of local institutions to impart knowledge and values for responsible citizenship among children and youth (Oosterom 2016b). The erosion of cultural norms, and the absence of normal economic activities in displacement, weakened the traditional institutions, so that the new generation

does not know or respect those institutions. As Suchowerska (2013: 90) observes, people “are crucially influenced by the predominant socio-historical context of their youth: they are fixed in qualitatively quite different subjective areas [and] each generation has a distinctive historical consciousness.”

To understand the triggers and drivers of violence in post-conflict situations, it is important to begin by understanding the legacy armed violence leaves in people’s lives and ability to cope with the new circumstance of ‘peace’ and economic challenges in their communities. According to Bird et al., (2010), conflicts destroy lives and destabilize communities, posing serious challenges and concerns for people, regardless of gender, and affecting children and women even more adversely. The violence of war often disrupts livelihoods, results into loss of life, changes in daily routines and community values, and a long-term impact on parents and children. Conflicts also exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities among members of conflict-affected communities. Uganda’s contemporary political history of conflict and violence has left lasting, negative legacies that continue to define and shape the country’s development potential. The country has underlying issues and challenges, characterized by widespread poverty and violence in the form of land conflicts, violent crimes, terror threats, GBV and domestic violence among other challenges. Despite efforts by government and civil society to address these legacies of conflict and insecurity, there has been a surge in violent incidents over the past five years.

Street children in Uganda are discriminated against and violently treated by the police, local governments and members of their communities, but we still have to answer the question the Speaker of Parliament asked during the funeral of a lady killed by street children in Gulu: ““What are we doing in our households and communities to ensure that we raise children who respect lives?” Divon and Owor (2020: 83). This and many other questions impose themselves when reflecting on the situation of the youth who find themselves in the streets during and after the war. Divon and Owor (2020: 83) succinctly capture the situation of street children with reference to the ‘aguu’ (people who can do anything to survive) group in Gulu City of northern Uganda:

They can be viewed as children and youth, victims of dire circumstances, that find themselves living in and/or off the streets of Gulu. They can be viewed as youth/children who made a conscious choice to leave their homesteads for various reasons and head to the streets of Gulu. They can be viewed as individuals who resorted to illicit activities as a livelihood strategy; as thugs who prey on by-passers and snatch their valuables; or as organised gangs that engage in coordinated criminal activities, and as criminals-for-hire, used as pawns in a variety of small and large conflicts for purposes of coercion, punishment, self-interest, or revenge. In a theoretical sense, the Aguu can be conceptualised as a group living on the boundary between what is considered normative and non-normative social behaviour in Acholi society and Gulu town.

However, dealing with crime tends to focus more on strengthening law and order-enforcement institutions than on the reasons why people engage in crime in the aftermath of conflicts. Northern Uganda's infrastructural systems are notoriously ill-equipped, the public governance system and the formal and informal justice systems are underfunded and underequipped. Moreover, the local population do not trust these systems to address disputes and deliver justice in a fair, transparent and efficient manner.

As reported in Oryema (2017), recovery from disrupted livelihoods and poverty can be slow. The situation in northern Uganda is characterized by the many orphans created by the conflict, helpless elders, female-headed households, growing youth unemployment, and weakened social support networks. In Uganda, 80% of the unemployed are youth, and urban youth are more likely to be unemployed than their rural counterparts, while female youth are twice as likely to be unemployed as their male counterparts (International Youth Foundation 2011). According to Uganda's Labour Force Report (UBOS 2013), northern Uganda is significantly behind the rest of the country in terms of wage employment. Moreover, a study by International Alert (2014) reveals that about 70% of youth in northern Uganda reported being discriminated against while searching for work on account of incompetence (49.3%), lack of connections for the job (37.3%) and lack of money for bribing one's way to the job (7.8%).

Crime affects the state, individuals and communities, but, as Aitken et al. (2012) argue, although the process of attaining justice results into a winner and a loser, it does not necessarily address the causes of the crime or improve relationship among the parties involved (Zehr and Mika 1998). This is because crime is committed for a number of reasons, including the need to earn respect and self-worth, and to dominate others (Gilligan 2001), revenge or a search for justice for the wrong committed against the offender, and a breakdown in social bonds, often caused by societal inequalities and power imbalances among other structural problems (Towes 2006).

It is arguable that unless the justice system assures justice, deters crime, and addresses practical and structural causes of crime, the motivation for crime will continue to exist. Richmond (2018:300) argues that "If legal and material inequality are at the root of some dimensions of conflict—especially as related to power, resources, and identity—then the state being built according to the neo-liberal approach is already a failure by design. Legal rights, though important, do not inevitably secure material needs in practice."

#### 1.2.4 Youth in northern Uganda

The Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS 2016:14) indicates that more than 75% of the Ugandan population is under the age of 30. In Lira District, young people aged 30 years and below constitute 78.5% while those aged 18-30 years account for 24.6% of the total population (UBOS 2017: 20), representing a burgeoning youth demographic. However, most (77.4%) of the youth aged 18-30 years are unemployed, while 14.4% neither attend school nor work (UBOS 2017: 23). Moreover, many youths drop out of school and struggle to secure employment. Even those who secure some form of work barely eke out a living. A study by Mallett, Atim and Opio (2016) reveals that half of the young people active in the informal economy surveyed in Lira District earned less than the poverty line of USD 1.25 per day, further highlighting the consequences of both excluding young people from employment and the manner in which they are included.

The worldwide use of children and youth in violence has tended to promote a negative narrative, translating into the exclusion of youth from post-conflict peacebuilding. As Lohmeyer (2017:1070) argues, the portrayal of youth as a uniquely violent group, and of youth as a transition period to adulthood, has persisted and is often used to justify governing youth to conform to violence in a sanctioned form. Therefore, "...the physical, structural and symbolic violence done to young people, shapes the violence done by them." Moreover, as Butti (2017) aptly concludes in her study of outcast youth in Colombia, stigmatisation of young people moderates the way they perceive themselves and relate to society during their youth. Therefore, the abduction and use of young people in combat, like their experience of violence in general, is worth exploring in order to understand how youth in northern Uganda construct and relate to structures and processes in their communities.

At the same time, youth generally, and a large youth population in particular, constitute a unique demographic dividend, which can actively complement inclusive decision-making in post-conflict reconstruction interventions. With young people aged 30 years and below making up 75% of the population of northern Uganda, the youth are key stakeholders and major potential actors in rebuilding the region, reconciling communities and fighting violence in all its forms. Moreover, it appears to be generally agreed that if young people are to effectively contribute to building and sustaining peace at different levels of their communities, their participation has to be meaningful. As Oosterom (2009:18) asserts, "The ability to engage as active citizens in the wider social-political community and public sphere requires a sense of civic agency." And, as the United Nations (UN) Major Group for Children and Youth

(2017), aptly states, meaningful youth participation should be non-prescriptive, based on actual recognition of youth's contribution, and exercised in authentic and enabling spaces.

### 1.2.5 Youth in peacebuilding interventions

Some authors, like Drummond-Mundal and Cave (2007:72), argue that peacebuilding should be based on the realities of young people; and as Becker (2012) notes, the lived experiences and realities of youth need to transcend mere involvement and include spaces and places that offer youth opportunities to frame and direct their agenda to different challenges that affect them and their communities. "Ultimately, youth participation is not only about creativity and belief in youth. It is also about power. How much decision-making are we willing to let grow out of the voicing of concerns?" (Noam 2002: 2).

Noam's argument captures the challenging reality of what essentially constitutes meaningful youth participation. Indeed, this challenge is well articulated in the Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security (2015: Article 1) which states that youth's efforts in "transforming conflict, countering violence and building peace" often suffer from lack of "participatory and inclusive mechanisms and opportunities" necessary to empower youth to meaningfully engage and to change negative and reinforcing perceptions about youth as violent and as a period of transition, thus ignoring youth agency in peacebuilding.

The challenge of engendering an inclusive and participatory framework for youth also suffers from lumping youth as a homogeneous group. Butti (2017) argues that targeting youth categories needs to transcend the temptation of going for elite groups who are often activists, and socioeconomically better-off than their less privileged and often marginalized counterparts. This is because the elite groups do not necessarily represent youth in general, and neither do they act as role models for marginalized and non-organised groups. For instance, youth in Uganda manifests itself in a diversity of categories distinguished by age-group, gender, location, socioeconomic status, lived experiences, and level of education among other criteria, and an effective programme for youth needs to be responsive to those youth categories.

### 1.2.6 Theoretical foundations: conflict transformation and the theory of change

Youth participation is better appreciated when the underlying relationships and structures that moderate their social realities are understood. Conflict transformation theory and the theory of change offer appropriate lenses for "reflecting on the role of youth in peacebuilding from a generalist point of view" (Kasherwa 2020: 125). This is because conflict transformation, mostly based on the works of John Paul Lederach, and the theory of change help to understand how youth relate to peacebuilding processes and outcomes, and how effective youth participation can be achieved. Conflict transformation theory is important in this study which sought to understand the underlying relationships and social structures that

moderate youth participation in socioeconomic and political life and the strategies for transforming such relationships and structures into constructive positive processes for youth engagement. For its part, the theory of change provides a framework within which to understand how the different strategies for transforming conflicts can be implemented and evaluated for their outcome in the short, immediate, and long-terms.

As Lederach (2003) observes, the use of the terms conflict management and resolution fell short of community expectations. The communities feared the models were aimed at simply ending conflicts as opposed to addressing the grievances that had led to the conflicts in the first place. As a result, the models focussed on interests of elites at the negotiation table, thereby denying conflict-affected communities a chance to address real-life problems and to improve their conditions. In doing so, it is argued, efforts culminated into quick fixes at the expense of the deep-rooted socio-political problems. Therefore, from the perspective of the communities, such approaches were unable to build and sustain peace. Conflict transformation was conceived in an attempt to bridge this gap. According to Lederach (2003), the use of conflict transformation terminology has gained prominence among peacebuilding practitioners and academicians over the past decades, evolving out of an examination of trends in conflicts and related peacebuilding models over the years. This development depicts the failure of conflict management and conflict resolution to meet the expectations of conflict-affected communities, and to build and sustain peace. By relating the trend of conflicts and peacebuilding to real life experiences of conflict-affected communities, especially in Latin America, Lederach argues, the perspectives of those directly affected by the conflicts was gained, and a framework through which to appreciate conflicts as a normal aspect of human relationships, and the basis to cause positive changes in relationships and social structures to enable respect for human rights and life were built. This analysis underscores the importance of understanding conflicts and civil wars as legitimate concerns, and conflicts as a catalyst for change. As Cramer (2006) observes, because conflicts happen for reasons, any attempt at resolving them should address those reasons. Therefore, conflict transformation seeks to improve the understanding and practice of peacebuilding by focusing on a change process that creates a positive outcome from a negative destructive situation. It is a model that pursues an understanding of the underlying relationships and structural patterns both as a process and an outcome.

Thus, conflict transformation focuses on “creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships” (Lederach 2003: 15). Therefore, it helps to explain the different structures and processes



that moderate old and new social realities of youth experiences, and how they influence violence, justice and real-life challenges. As Abbas, Dressler and Rieber (2019) argues, it forms the basis upon which the study interrogates violence beyond armed conflict to include structures and processes within the informal and formal setting in order to transform barriers and violence into effective and constructive engagement spaces. In doing so, the theory provides a broad-base spectrum upon which to harness youth participation from the different dimensions of human rights, economic, socio-political and socio-cultural, thereby accounting for multiple approaches for youth participation (UN-IANYD 2014).

While the conflict transformation theory lens helps to analyse the conditions within different structures that moderate youth participation in peacebuilding, it does not explain how youth will be empowered to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from, peacebuilding interventions, within some minimum conditions. Therefore, the theory of change is used as a guide to actions for a contextualised peacebuilding project and as a framework to evaluate both intended and unintended change.

The theory of change is now widely appreciated and regarded as a critical model for predicting change because it relies on “considerable knowledge, experience, research, and practice” (Knowlton and Phillips 2013:28-29). This is partly because the theory of change explains the trajectory along which conflict transformation strategies build into implementable programmes that foster youth participation. It explains the linkages in activities, outcomes and context of the intervention, and how those linkages lead to change at individual and group levels at a given point in time (Connell and Kubish 2016). Moreover, the application of the theory of change helps to guide actions intended for a particular desired outcome (Allen Cruz and Warburton 2017) in a specified setting (Yearwood 2018), with a range of stakeholders, with the potential for the target groups to own and improve attribution (Sullivan and Stewart 2006). The theoretical perspective is discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

### 1.3 Statement of the Research Problem

Ideally, all peacebuilding interventions should be conceived and implemented in a participatory framework. In particular, active youth participation is important in building more peaceful, democratic and inclusive societies (Berents and McEvoy-Levy 2015; UN-IANYD 2014). Moreover, the recent shift by the UNSCR 2250 (2015: para 3) on Youth, Peace and Security acknowledges, and calls for the recognition of the “important and positive role young people play in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security” also highlight the importance of youth participation in peacebuilding and sustenance. Similarly, youth are viewed as torch bearers of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Moreover, previous studies have indicated that, by virtue of their position in society, young

people are most vulnerable to, and affected by, conflicts (Cox et al., 2017; Berents and McEvoy-Levy 2015).

Paradoxically, though, youth are often forgotten in peacebuilding processes (Cox et al., 2017; Berents and McEvoy-Levy 2015), and youth's "experiences and knowledge are often ignored, both in attempts at theory-building and in efforts at understanding peacebuilding practice at the grassroots level" (Pruitt 2013: xiii). As Ssentongo (2013) aptly observes, the failure to include youth creates a knowledge gap, and undermines youth agency and possibilities of peace. In Uganda, despite the many policies and programmes aimed at post-conflict recovery, peace and development of northern Uganda, highlighting the importance of youth participation in peacebuilding, youth remain largely invisible and marginalised in most aspects of life (Ssentongo 2013; Mallett, Atim and Opio 2016). As a result, there is limited data on how the youth's numerical dominance, influence, and potential are being utilised in decision-making processes and peacebuilding programmes to prevent, respond to, and transform, conflicts. In addition, scholarly literature on the youth of northern Uganda has focused on the situation of the youth in relation to the unaddressed legacies of war, and the general state of neglect and exclusion in the context of the LRA conflict. Few studies have examined how peacebuilding scholars and institutions translate peacebuilding agenda into practical and context-specific peacebuilding interventions to serve the youth population in northern Uganda. Moreover, most studies have mainly focused on Acholiland, ignoring the contiguous area of Lango that, in addition to the LRA conflict, was also affected by inter-ethnic conflict with armed nomadic Karimojong pastoralists, and continues to experience violence. In particular, little is known about how Langi youth relate to peacebuilding processes and outcomes, amidst evidence of limited youth involvement in post-conflict peacebuilding. This sad situation raises four questions. First, what is stopping youth from playing an active role in rebuilding their society? Second, what are the implications of the marginalisation of youth for northern Uganda's recovery and development given the high number of excluded young people? Thirdly, what do peacebuilding actors need to do to effectively engage youth in peacebuilding interventions? Fourthly, how can the recognition of the role of youth be understood and acted upon in practice, in a meaningful and context-specific manner relevant to the youth of northern Uganda?

This study sought to answer these questions and to examine how Langi youth understand, experience and interact with policies and programmes meant to promote youth participation in a post-war context, by means of a youth-led peacebuilding initiative in order to generate evidence to inform policies and intervention strategies meant to serve conflict-affected youth populations in northern Uganda.

## 1.4 Research Aim and Specific Objectives

### 1.4.1 Research aim

The overarching aim of this action research was to establish the ways in which:

- (i) youth perceive, and relate to, peacebuilding processes and outcomes; and
- (ii) a needs-based, youth-led peacebuilding project can contribute to sustainable peace in northern Uganda.

### 1.4.2 Specific objectives

To achieve the overarching aim, the study pursued four specific research objectives, that is, to:

- (i) Explore youth perceptions of the nature and value of their participation in peacebuilding initiatives;
- (ii) Identify the constraints on youth participation in peacebuilding in northern Uganda;
- (iii) Develop and implement a needs-based, youth-led peacebuilding project through participatory action research; and
- (iv) Evaluate the needs-based, youth-led peacebuilding project.

## 1.5 Research Question

Interrogatively stated:

- (i) How do the youth of northern Uganda perceive and relate to peacebuilding processes and outcomes?
- (ii) And in what ways can a needs-based, youth-led peacebuilding project contribute to sustainable peace in northern Uganda?

### 1.5.1 Subsidiary questions

The subsidiary research questions are:

- (i) How do the youth of northern Uganda perceive the nature and value of their participation in contemporary, post-conflict peacebuilding initiatives?
- (ii) How do constructions and experiences of post-conflict violence constrain participation of youth in peacebuilding in northern Uganda?
- (iii) What needs to be done to enable youth to play a leading role in the development and implementation of a peacebuilding initiative?
- (iv) Can a needs-based project developed and implemented with youth build sustainable peace?

## 1.6 Justification of the Study

Today's peak youth (UNFPA 2014), and the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth Peace and Security, represent a shift in the global trend, calling for efforts to translate the demographic dividend into social transformation and economic development (Naidoo 2001), and encouraging countries to document and learn from the experiences of youth in peacebuilding. Out of the 1.3 billion young people aged 15-24 worldwide, about one billion reside in developing countries where armed conflicts have occurred and continue to occur; and in 2015, about 226 million youths of the same age category lived in Africa, accounting for 19% of the global youth population (Kasherwa 2020: 124). Uganda has the youngest youth population in the world, with 75 per cent of population below the age of 30. (UBOS 2016:14). In Lira District, the study site, 78.5 per cent of people are aged 30 years and below (UBOS 2017:20). Meanwhile, the contemporary history of northern Uganda is replete with political turmoil and conflicts, and the region is just emerging from over two decades of hostilities between the Government of Uganda and the LRA. In addition to the LRA conflict, Lira District was perennially a central actor and victim of cattle rustling and other ethnic conflicts in Uganda, and thousands of young people in the district have participated in the conflicts as combatants, intelligence gatherers and porters on one hand, and in efforts to restore peace on the other.

Therefore, Lira District, just like any other district in northern Uganda, presents youth as an important category in peacebuilding. Moreover, the district has received considerable attention, and provided young people with platforms to engage with policies and programmes for peace in their respective communities. However, over a decade since the Juba Peace Agreement in 2007 and the implementation of the PRDP, there is evidence to suggest that youth in northern Uganda remain invisible and marginalised in most aspects of life. (Ssentongo 2013; Mallett, Atim and Opio 2016). In the same vein, Esuruku (2018) observes that the entire region continues to lag behind the rest of the country, painting a gloomy picture of high youth unemployment, poor basic service delivery, high crime rates, and a growing phenomenon of street kids among other vices. This context presents immense potential for offering insights into youth experiences in order to understand how conflicts have shaped youth perception and reconstruction of their primary responsibilities, if any, and how programmes targeting youth should be packaged to address their contextual realities.

Moreover, the increasing calls for meaningful youth engagement in key aspects of socioeconomic and political life have seen governments, donors and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) commit to the youth sector through financial and capacity-building support. Therefore, the focus on youth can be

expected to persist and intensify in the future, making it necessary to document experiences so as to provide insights into future youth-citizen engagement. Moreover, having worked for a youth-focused organisation, and spearheaded youth programming at local and national levels, I have a special interest in youth-citizen engagement. Researching on the subject matter and narrowing the focus on northern Uganda opened the space to interrogate the complexity of issues from the perspectives of conflict-affected communities, and helped to cover the subject matter beyond Uganda's media platforms and NGO reports. The study provided the space for me to dig deeper into the intricacies of youth participation in peacebuilding, from the on-the-ground experiences of the youth themselves, in order to gain insights into the relevance of action research for peacebuilding with youth.

### 1.7 Outline of the Thesis

The thesis is structured into eleven chapters. Chapter One is the general introduction. Chapters Two to Four constitute the literature review which is presented under three themes: theoretical perspectives on peacebuilding; community experiences and discourses of violence; and youth participation: an overview of theory and practice. Chapter Five presents the methodology. From Chapters Six to Nine present the findings in respect of the four subsidiary research questions: youth perceptions and experiences of peacebuilding in northern Uganda; constraints of youth participation in peacebuilding; youth experiences of implementing a youth-led, needs-based peacebuilding project in northern Uganda; and an examination of what works and what does not work in youth-led, peacebuilding initiatives. In Chapter Ten, I discuss the findings; and in Chapter Eleven, I present conclusions and recommendations. The details of each chapter are outlined below.

Chapter One presents an overview of the study context, and the research problem and its central and subsidiary research questions on youth participation in peacebuilding. It provides justification for the study and highlights the situation of youth in relations to the legacy of conflicts and violence in northern Uganda. It also outlines briefly some theoretical perspectives on peacebuilding.

Chapter Two examines in detail the theoretical perspectives on peacebuilding. Guided by the conflict transformation theory and the theory of change, the discussion highlights the main debates and the key aspects of the theories that relate to the study context.

Chapter Three is a review of community experiences and discourses of violence. The chapter examines literature on violence from a community perspective, drawing on community narratives and discourses of violence and how such narratives shape and direct subsequent community responses to socioeconomic and political realities. The focus on post-conflict situations provides a nuanced understanding that helps

appreciate violence as ubiquitous during and after war, and therefore draws attention to the need to examine formal and informal structures that influence efforts to build and sustain peace.

Chapter Four presents the theoretical and practical aspects of youth participation in peacebuilding. It focuses on the four theories of, or approaches to, youth participation in peacebuilding: the human rights-based; economic; socio-political; and socio-cultural approaches. The broad-based spectrum touches on human rights, economic, socio-political and socio-cultural factors that account for multiple approaches to youth engagement. It also touches on the intersection of the four approaches to youth engagement in practice.

Chapter Five, on methodology, presents strategies that I used to obtain, process and analyse the data required to answer the research questions related to youth perceptions of, and relation to, peacebuilding processes and outcomes in post-conflict northern Uganda.

Chapter Six relates to the first subsidiary question and seeks to understand how youth perceive their participation in peacebuilding. In particular, it presents voices of youth from northern Uganda on a range of issues that moderate actions for peace in their communities. This is in keeping with the argument that for youth to take a lead role in issues that affect them, the youth themselves need to be part of the conversation.

Chapter Seven discusses barriers to youth participation in peacebuilding. In particular, it seeks to answer the following questions: Why is the number of youth participating in efforts to build and sustain peace in northern Uganda still limited despite years of peacebuilding interventions? What are the implications of limited youth participation for the peace, recovery and development of northern Uganda? This section documents barriers to youth participation from the perspective of youth themselves

Chapter Eight is an account of youth experiences of implementing a youth-led peacebuilding project in northern Uganda. This section is aligned to the global call to promote youth initiatives in fostering peace, which has led to local, youth-led initiatives in peacebuilding in communities. This study supported youth to plan and implement projects in their respective communities, and this section describes the projects and the experiences of the youth who implemented them.

Chapter Nine documents the outcomes of the youth peacebuilding experiences. Two questions impose themselves: What works and what does not work in implementing a youth-led, needs-based peacebuilding project to build and sustain peace? And what implications does this experience have for effective youth engagement? Based on the theory of change, this section answers these questions by

presenting findings of the evaluation of the peacebuilding project implemented by the youths, focusing on the linkages between activities and intended and unintended outcomes of the project. It also analyses challenges and opportunities of effective youth engagement.

Chapter Ten discusses the findings of the study in relation to the four research objectives.

Finally, Chapter Eleven provides concluding reflections on the study findings, and presents recommendations regarding broad theoretical and practical issues as well as further research.

## CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PEACEBUILDING AND EVALUATION OF PEACEBUILDING INTERVENTIONS

### 2.1 Introduction

Peacebuilding scholars have advanced a number of theoretical explanations for understanding and addressing conflicts, and for evaluating the outcome of peacebuilding interventions. These frameworks have evolved over time while responding to the dynamic realities on the ground, and on the basis of their abilities to explain conflict phenomena and peacebuilding strategies. Two theoretical frameworks are particularly relevant to the nature of this exploratory and action-based inquiry: the conflict transformation theory, mainly based on the works of John Paul Lederach, and the theory of change.

As an agent and an outcome of change, conflict transformation provides insights into conflicts. Therefore, by focusing on youth, the model provides a good basis for understanding community issues, and empowering and engaging youth on critical issues that affect youth in their respective communities (Kasherwa 2020). Meanwhile, the theory of change acts as a guiding framework that explains the change process in a peacebuilding initiative, and in particular, how the action component of an intervention effects change and measures its outcome.

The theory of change is in line with the action research approach that is employed as a peacebuilding tool to allow communities to participate in, and benefit directly from, the study (Kaye and Harris 2017) in order for them to appreciate conflict as both an agent and an outcome of change, a change process that is intertwined in the form of an intent, an act and a review spiral (Dick 1993). This cyclic nature of action research seeks to explore, plan, act, and evaluate an intervention (Kaye and Harris 2017) to allow space for evidence-based learning and for further research and action. Yearwood (2018: 91) argues that evidence-based policies and programmes are better implemented through a strategy that is “applied and evaluated in specific settings.” That is why the theory of change has great potential to map the process of change and to explain the linkages among the activities, outcomes and context of the intervention (Allen, Cruz and Warburton 2017; Biggs et al., 2017).

### 2.2 Conflict Transformation Theory

#### 2.2.1 Introduction

Just like every other discipline, peace studies has its own jargon. For example, the term *conflict transformation* is used in two ways: one which puts emphasis on addressing the underlying causes of conflict, including inequality (Miall 2004); and the other which focuses on the relationship between the



parties (Lederach 2003). While this study acknowledges the importance of addressing the underlying causes of conflict, it also focuses on Lederach's conflict-transformation lens from the perspective that the outcome of any intervention should emphasise the best for all the parties involved, including opponents and enemies. Lederach outlines three key concepts to explain conflict transformation: conflict, violence and peace. To start with, Lederach views conflict as an incompatibility of needs or interests between two or more parties (individuals, groups or countries), and it is so common that it is regarded as inevitable. Due to the incompatibility of needs or interests, conflict may result in violence, or it may be managed, resolved and/or transformed. Meanwhile, conflict management involves the imposition of peace, but it does little to deal with the causes of the conflict. For instance, conflict management may consist in simply separating the individuals involved in a conflict, or deploying military forces to 'keep peace.' On its part, conflict resolution involves the collaboration of the parties to a conflict, sometimes with the help of a mediator, in the hope of finding an outcome which satisfies each party. However, even when a conflict is resolved, the parties to it may remain ill-disposed towards each other. That is partly why conflict transformation, as developed by Jean Paul Lederach (1997), focusses on the relationship between the parties, in the hope of building forgiveness and reconciliation.

The key argument of the proponents of conflict transformation is that the theory seeks to transform relationship between parties in a conflict; and it brings about the social and political changes necessary to correct inequalities and injustices. This is based on the premise that without good relations, peacebuilding can fail, and the issues that supersede or beget violence may not be addressed. This argument was advanced by John Paul Lederach in the 1980s after the realisation that conflict management and resolution were understood by communities as approaches merely intended to contain and end conflicts, but not to address the real-life challenges that parties to the conflicts were facing. Therefore, by ignoring legitimate causes of conflicts, and opting for quick-fix solutions to the detriment of deep-rooted socio-political problems, conflict management and resolution demonstrate little evidence of building and sustaining peace.

The emergence of conflict transformation presents a shift, and a difficult, though not insuperable, problem in the attempt to impose theoretical boundaries in the use and application of peace theories. In particular, as Botes (2003:1) notes, the very possibility of conflict transformation bringing about "new theoretical notions and applications for practice to peace and conflict studies" is challenged, as is the definition, which must draw boundaries with conflict resolution as a useful attempt to delineate its distinctiveness. However, despite the debate over the "semantic nuances and operational differences"

between conflict transformation and conflict resolution, Botes (2003:1-3) argues, there seems to be a shift to conflict transformation because unlike resolution that focuses on ‘ “changes[s] in the characteristics of a conflict”’, conflict transformation embodies broader concerns, including methods for change in relationships, systematic change and peacebuilding, and specific approaches to practice and training.

The proponent of the theory, Lederach (1995), suggests that conflicts need to be understood as part of normal human relations, as having potential for constructive changes, and as an opportunity to reflect on conflict as embedded in societal relationships. Therefore, this understanding allows us to: respond to the real challenges, needs and realities on the ground; work towards reducing violence; develop capacities to engage in change processes at interpersonal, intergroup and social structure levels, and it expands our understanding to include the cultural patterns that contribute to conflicts, as well as to identify and build on cultural resources to handle conflicts. Hence, by emphasising relationships in structures and processes, the theory is well-grounded in Galtung’s (1969) concept of negative and positive peace, in which peace should be understood beyond the absence or reduction of violence, to include creating conditions that eliminate the cause(s) of direct, cultural and structural violence.

This study was grounded in Lederach’s (1995) stream of conflict transformation theory according to which conflicts in human relationships is normal, inevitable and dynamic, and human efforts should be directed to understanding conflicts and building a healthy relationship and communities, based on a transformative practice in the structure of relationships. Kaye (2017) adds that since peacebuilding seeks to transform, change and foster solutions that result into harmony and peace, the conflict transformation theory provides a broad lens through which one can view different experiences and harms done to a community during and after armed conflict. As such the theory accommodates a range of culturally and historically informed conceptions of violence, including structural violence (Galtung 1990), helps to catalyse interventions, and seeks to embrace “conflict as both an agent and outcome of change, recognising the demands of justice and the realities of power” (Francis 2002: 27).

The conflict transformation theory provides an “accepted” and nuanced understanding of and lenses to address conflicts for two reasons. First, it recognizes that conflicts in human relationships are normal and inevitable, and therefore, the human efforts should be in understanding the conflicts and building a healthy relationship and communities at different levels of society. Second, it views conflicts as “a motion of change” (Lederach 1995: 5), implying that our approach to conflicts should transcend co-option and silencing critical voices, and adopt dialogue and actions that lead to real change in the ways in which

individuals and communities relate. This approach is particularly relevant to the conflict in northern Uganda because it allows for interrogation of how the traditional approaches to youth participation interact with conflict dynamics in order to address the context, content and structure of the relationship.

Lederach (1995: 17) specifically defines conflict transformation as:

To envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in indirect interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships.

Conflict transformation focuses on qualities such as human interactions through structures and processes in order to reduce violence, increase justice and respond to real life challenges. These qualities help to explain a transformative practice in the structure of relationships to bring about social change in the political, economic and cultural arena. The theory helps in devising and analysing strategies that can transform different forms of conflict, and, therefore, acts as a catalyst for engagement and growth. It transcends the negative definition of peace as absence of war to interrogate positive peace from all forms of violence, including direct, structural and cultural violence. In particular, the conflict transformation theory allowed me to reflect on legacies of past violence, and to examine harms done as well as the history of tensions and violence that shape old and new social realities of youth experiences. The theory also seeks to locate spaces for positive engagement for peace, and it helps to situate the discussion on the nexus among processes, methods and outcomes of peacebuilding. Finally, the theory helps researchers to identify practical gaps and foster participation based on the principles of greater equity, social justice and non-violence.

However, the theory has been criticised for its failure to outline specific measures or tips for participation of key stakeholders, including young people, and for its reliance on religious or spiritual inclinations, of individuals (Kasherwa 2020). Despite the criticism of the methodological weakness of elicitive conflict transformation, Kasherwa (2020) argues, the theory still remains the most appropriate for the study of the role of youth in peacebuilding as it provides the flexibility for peace workers to breakdown, plan and implement initiatives that are contextually relevant for effective youth participation. In the context of northern Uganda, conflict transformation is relevant because it provides the opportunity to interrogate peacebuilding initiatives from a perspective that recognises coherent youth participation, and integration of context-specific realities in efforts for peace. In the next sub-section, I examine how violence and conflict transformation relate, in order to contextualize the conditions of violence in northern Uganda.

### 2.2.2 Violence and conflict transformation in post-conflict situations

The concept of violence is used extensively to refer to both direct and non-direct forms of violence in the context of a post-conflict setting. Throughout this study, I use the term violence to mean “harmful and damaging behaviour of a physical, structural or cultural nature, which prevents human beings from reaching their full potential” (Abbas, Dressler and Rieber 2019: 13). Galtung’s (1969) conceptualisation of violence departs from the generic view that only direct forms of violence tend to be visible and recognised as violent, leaving other forms of violence unacknowledged and invisible. According to Galtung, violence is both structural and cultural. In his view, structural violence manifests itself in actions that are built into the structure of society, and that manifest in unequal power and unequal life chances. On the other hand, Galtung explains, cultural violence refers to actions that are symbolic aspects of culture, and that are often used to justify and legitimise direct and structural violence. Galtung’s construction of violence implies that explicit or implicit forms of structural and cultural forms of violence determine what is legitimate and illegitimate, what society regards as permissible and sanctionable or not, and what authorities regard as legitimate violence against its citizens, thereby normalising and routinising certain forms of violence as part of everyday life.

Therefore, the scope of violence requires that we examine community perceptions and experiences of violence that shape collective narratives and engagement to understand their context-specific realities and the ways in which they relate to available options, including laws, to effect change. As Crawford (2015: 2) argues, when researching violence, “—it is important to reflect on the social, legal, and economic context” where the people live. Such an analysis, it is argued, is necessary to provide a comprehensive picture of violence and its manifestations in all forms as well as strategies to build peace. In categorizing violence, Galtung (1969) reminds us that a complete analysis of direct, cultural and structural violence is necessary in peacebuilding interventions. This is because the transformation path involved in addressing cultural and structural violence requires awareness and complete change in individual and community attitudes, and involves nurturing value systems that do not adore violence, but that seek to dismantle the culture of violence and nurture a culture of peace.

Galtung’s argument shifts additional focus to often-overlooked forms of violence, which are closely tied to the norms and practices regarded as normalized ways of life in society, contrary to the popular perspective that violence ends in violent conflicts. It also opens up a new dimension that links post-conflict violence with interactions in conditions and societal structures before, during and after conflicts, to increase in violence in post-conflict settings. Over the past few years, researchers have presented

evidence to suggest that there is a connection between the end of armed conflict on one hand, and the continuation and aggravation of violence in post-conflict settings on the other (van Baalen and Höglund 2017; England 2012). It is argued that after conflicts, a number of maladjustments occur, including failed reintegration of ex-combatants, heightened risk of violence due to exposure to torture and human rights abuses, and the challenges of ex-combatants having to cope with a “non-violent society”, moderated by changes in power dynamics and the aspiration to maintain their pre-war status quo as breadwinners and decision-makers. (Bradley 2018: 125). All these risk factors interact with existing norms and practices to reinforce or escalate violence.

Studies on violence in post-conflict settings have uncovered manifestations of forms of violence that affect different categories of people, and reinforce traditional and cultural norms that are responsible for excluding youth and/or restricting their roles and responsibilities in recovery and peace efforts. Although peacebuilding scholars and practitioners have demonstrated that violence is a set-back to reintegration and effective community participation in issues that affect communities, peacebuilding policies and programmes continue to ignore certain forms of violence.

That is why conflict transformation is important: while conflict management and resolution merely seek to contain conflicts and attain positive outcomes respectively, conflict transformation envisages a holistic approach to peace beyond management and resolution. Conflict transformation seeks to transform relationships that support violence, and to create constructive change processes. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse the different forms of violence, the narratives communities attach to violence, and structures that sustain and legitimize violence to be able to understand the overlaps and proximities between cultural attitudes, past and desirable social and legal transformations, and the history of violence against youth in northern Uganda.

### 2.2.3 Conflict transformation: a youth perspective

Earlier studies have portrayed male youth as mainly perpetrators, and female youth as mainly victims, of conflicts and violence, which partly explains why youth have for long been “overlooked and marginalized in peace processes” (Abbas, Dressler and Rieber 2019: 94). Arguably, the failure to recognize the contribution of youth in formal peace processes originates from the way youth is viewed in life, especially from the belief that youth should take instructions from elders. Worse still, elders often stigmatise and discriminate against youth who, moreover, receive limited institutional support to operate. With peacebuilding also tied to funding, and controlled by particular adult-controlled entities, budget constraints tend to fail initiatives for youth to contribute to peace (Kasherwa 2020).

The Sustainable Development Goals, like 2015 UN Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security, have focused attention on the participation of youth in the development process, and generated more ideas on the concept of youth participation. As a result, more efforts are being made to promote meaningful youth participation in the promotion of peace and security. This focus on the role of youth in peacebuilding is important because it provides a framework within which to engage youth's "unique experiences of conflict and violence in order to meaningfully include their voices and change perspectives" (Abbas, Dressler and Rieber 2019: 94).

As Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2004: 84) note, the focus on youth participation might cause a "paradigm shift" in the ways in which adults know about youth, and young people know about themselves. In particular, this focus on youth highlights the relevance of active youth participation in inculcating values to promote peace and good governance for the recovery and development efforts in countries emerging from conflicts. Similarly, the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security emphasized the importance of meaningful involvement that transcends youth sharing space with adults to ensuring their voices matter in decisions that affect them (Simpson 2018). This perspective is a call for meaningful youth participation that departs from a perspective that defines the rights and obligations of youth as subjects and citizens, and as people capable of challenging the standards imposed by customary and formal governance structures, (Burgess 2005) and aspiring to institutions of governance that transform youth into agents of change for greater equity, social justice and non-violence. For Keenan (2007: 199), this argument is a call to go beyond a social construction of youth that denies them the rights to "advocate on their own behalf, and tell their own stories. That is why, Kennan believes, "the silencing of [the] unique voices" of the youth needs to be understood so that efforts are directed at youth participation. According to Kennan (2007: 210), these efforts include "voluminous declarations, conventions and agreements... and future documents must be prepared with, rather than for, youth. They need to be tailored to specific contexts, mindful of local cultural values."

Echoing Kennan's opinion, Ssentongo (2013: 34) argues,

The youths must be in a position to understand the dynamics and evolution of the conflict that they are faced with. But this is not to say that they should only be on a listening end as audiences for lectures from elders who often make an exclusive claim to community memory. They should be part and parcel of the peace initiatives, with their voices and aspirations brought on board. They should be participants in shaping the future.

That is why the United Nations General Assembly (2012) departs from an angle that meaningful engagement of youth entails appreciation of their diverse backgrounds and sectors, including informal

groups, investing more in young people, and forging equal partnerships with youth-led civil society actors at the local level, to build and sustain peace.

Youth perceive conflict transformation as an opportunity to understand the “causes and effects of (violent) conflict and [to identify] means for their transformation.” In particular, Abbas, Dressler and Rieber (2019: 95) points out that on a macro level, by considering “patriarchal and gerontocratic structures and the resulting (in)equalities to be root causes of conflict”, we appreciate the underlying reasons around traditional and cultural norms that establish hierarchies that exclude women and young people from actively participating in political spheres and other decision-making spaces. A case in point is the standard, formal peace process that is normally a preserve for older males, as opposed to women and young people who are regarded as victims and associates of violence respectively, a stereotype “that leads to their marginalisation in the first place, which risks certain groups resorting to violence as a means of resolving conflict” (Abbas, Dressler and Rieber 2019: 95).

Abbas, Dressler and Rieber (2019: 96) further argues that on a micro level, the perception of “young men as perpetrators of violence and spoilers of peace”, and the focus on women as victims, promote the negative stereotypes, and are projected on to peers, thus lumping youth as a homogeneous group of destructive citizens. Viewing young men as perpetrators, and young women as victims, risks ignoring the different experiences men and women go through both as fighters and as victims. It also ignores the prominent roles they play as breadwinners, head of families at an early stage (as a result of conflict), and as community leaders in other contexts. As Pruitt (2013) argues, limiting the concept of youth to a rigid age category further complicates the challenge of recognizing the diversity of conditions and experiences among youth, even within the same spatial context.

The long-standing perception of youth as victims and perpetrators of conflicts and violence has partly led to the failure to fully recognize the many positive contributions that young people make to peacebuilding in their different communities. Moreover, as the Abbas, Dressler and Rieber (2019: 96) rightly notes, “the vast majority of young people are not involved in violence.” Indeed, young people have played some positive roles in peace processes, thus providing a positive space for youth in conflict transformation (Abbas, Dressler and Rieber 2019: 96).

A transformative approach seeks to broaden the positive contributions by all categories of people while at the same time highlighting “the constricting consequences of certain roles and ascriptions” (Abbas, Dressler and Rieber 2019: 94). Youth constitutes “a hard and a soft conceptual category” that presents youth not just as “a phase in the life cycle but as an historical cohort”. Therefore, the transformative

approach places value on age, community, reproduction, and security” (Burgess 2005: x). In the context of northern Uganda, for example, although youth are legally and collectively defined as being aged 18-30 years, there are significant sub-categories of youth according to gender, location, language, school status, level of education and employment status among other factors. More interestingly, for northern Uganda, youth can also be represented as a conflict-affected historical cohort. While the age-based conceptualisation of youth considers youth as a formative category or stage between childhood and adulthood, marked by increasing independence and transition in work, education and social relationships, it also implies that the process of transition for the historical cohort of youth in northern Uganda could have been affected by the conflict and legacy of violence. Therefore, the categorisation remains fluid on account of the prominent roles youth play as breadwinners and head of families at an early stage.

The challenge to understand youth diversity is further articulated by Burgess (2005: xvii-xviii) when he poses the following questions:

How can youth be defined? How is the category constructed? Is youth a primary or secondary identity? Are young people to be known as “youth,” or by some other name? What is the relationship of youth not only with their elders, but with women, workers, farmers....? Do youth share certain interests and distinct characteristics as a stage in the life cycle? Do we simply note the youthful importance to their age?

Using Resolution 2250 on youth, peace, and security and the associated guiding tools and lessons learned over the years provides a starting point from which to understand and meaningfully include youth in peacebuilding interventions. This calls for a nuanced understanding of how to make conflict transformation a youth-inclusive endeavour (Abbas, Dressler and Rieber 2019: 98) in ways that include participation of the diverse categories of youth and recognize their context-specific realities. Moreover, this nuanced understanding must take into account the barriers that render the contributions of youth invisible, and unveil, and engage with, the “spaces of the everyday where these actors work for peace” (Abbas, Dressler and Rieber 2019: 98).

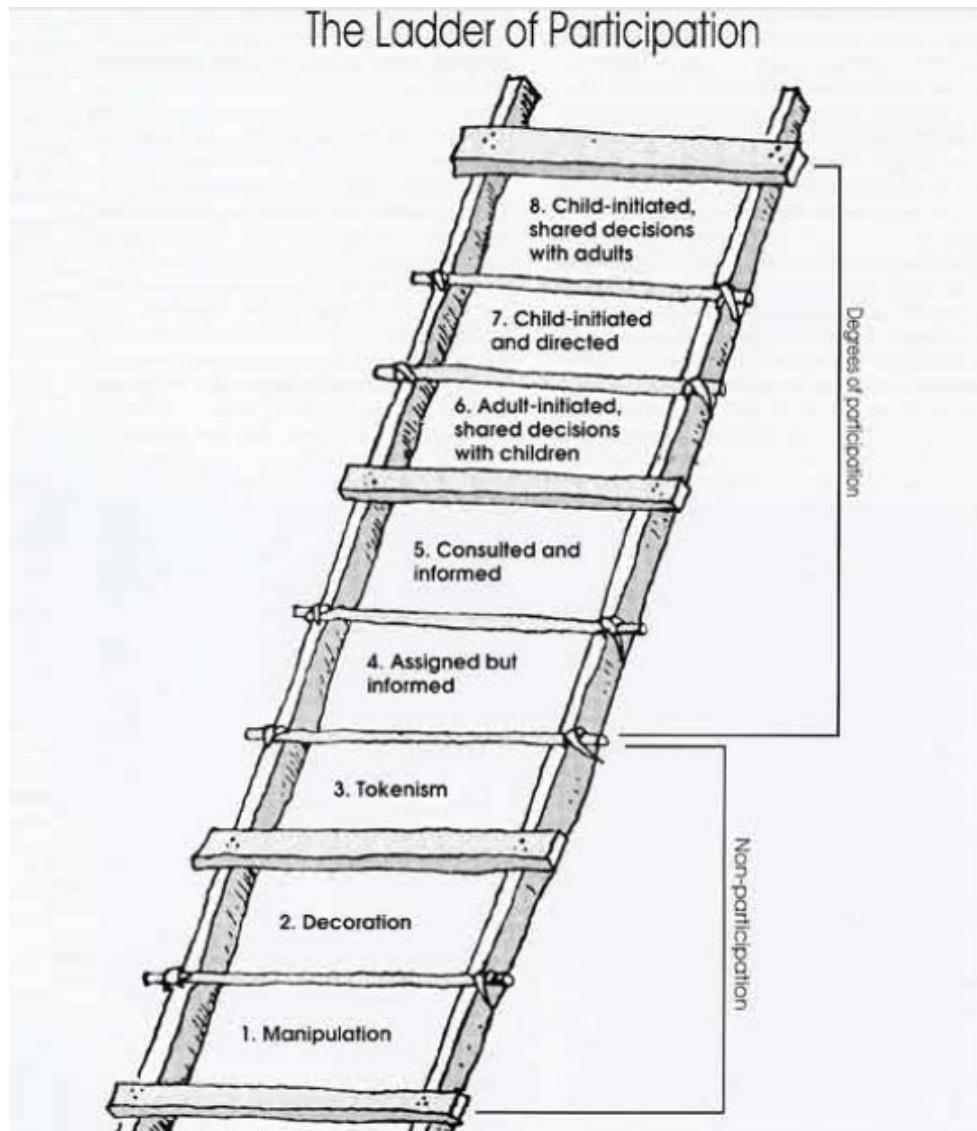
As observed in the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security (Simpson 2018: 4),

Although some young women may acquire the status of adulthood more quickly, as a result of childbearing or marriage, many experience the same struggles to transition as young men. Factors inhibiting young men’s ability to marry, including financial constraints, may add to their problems in attaining adult status. For both young men and women, difficulty in acquiring land, jobs, education and a home mean many find themselves trapped in youthhood, affecting their status in society and potentially contributing to a sense of frustration.



In the context of northern Uganda, an analysis of youth participation in peacebuilding needs to consider whether or not participation is meaningful (Hart 1992). The figure below illustrates Hart's ladder of participation.

*Figure 1. Hart's ladder of participation*



(Source: Hart 1992)

Using the metaphorical ladder helps us to appreciate the concept of youth participation, be it tokenistic (non-participatory) or meaningful (participatory) in nature. The first three stages from the bottom (manipulation, decoration, and tokenism) are considered to be non-participatory on account of their pretentious approach to participation. By contrast, the other five stages (assigned but informed, consulted and informed, adult Initiated, shared decisions, youth Initiated and directed, and child- initiated, shared

decisions with adults) are regarded as progressive levels of participation. To illustrate the significance of the ladder of participation to young people's engagement, we describe each step in detail:

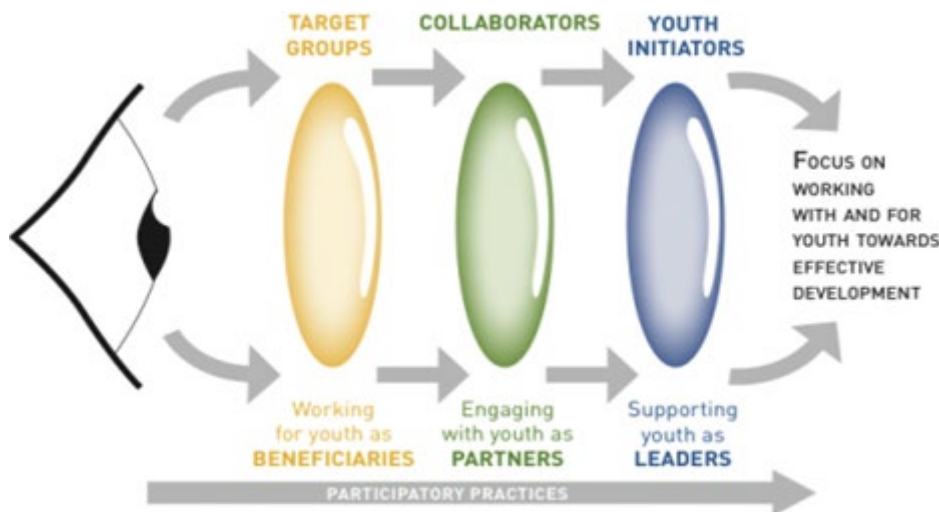
1. **Manipulation:** regarded as the lowest step of participation, it entails youth engaging with initiatives at a superficial level, and being excluded from the planning and implementation stages, but the adults still describing their participation as participatory.
2. **The decoration stage:** young people are involved in the initiative as a visual tool to bolster the adult's cause, but are not directly linked with the cause or efforts to create solutions to the challenges that the initiatives seek to address.
3. **The tokenism step:** this is where young people are seemingly given a voice, but in reality their voices don't add value to the issues being addressed, simply because they have very little or no choice on the subject or communication style; and have no chance to formulate their own opinion on the subject.
4. **Assigned but informed:** this is the level of participation where young people understand the intentions of the project, and know who made the decision on their involvement and why. They also have a meaningful role to play in the project, and can volunteer for the project due to the clarity of the project and their role therein. However, their role is still *assigned*, and they have limited choice regarding their specific role in the project.
5. **Consulted and informed:** involves adults designing and running the project. However, young people understand the process involved, and their ideas, solutions and priorities are incorporated in the project through consultation at the initiation and implementation stages.
6. **Adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth:** this is regarded as the first step of true participation. At this level, the projects are initiated by adults, but the decision making is shared with the young people.
7. **Youth initiated and directed:** this is the step where young people conceive, establish and implement their own initiatives without adult interference. This level strongly occurs in youth-led movements and organisations.
8. **Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults:** this is the top level is where young people conceive and start initiatives that are then supported by adults.

In designing the ladder of participation, Hart (1992) recognises the barriers posed by power relations and the struggle for equal rights. Therefore, he argues, the participation of young people in issues that affect them entails overcoming those barriers, including discrimination and repression; and necessitates young people working in solidarity with other young people and adults.

According to the Department for International Development (DFID 2010, cited in the Republic of Uganda 2010), meaningful participation entails a range of activities, including encouraging youth to volunteer in projects, empowering youth to voice their perspectives on issues that affect the world, assembling youth as members of advisory boards, acting as peer mentors, and supporting youth to lead in profit and non-profit organisations. DFID (2010) uses a three-lens approach to youth participation in development to illustrate best practices in meaningful participation. According to the three-lens approach development programmes should work for the benefit of youth as target beneficiaries, with youth as partners, and should be shaped by youth as leaders. The three lenses are not mutually exclusive, as youth participation in development is often a combination of all three lenses. The aim of understanding youth participation through the three-lens approach is to be conscious of the different ways young people can participate in creating change: as beneficiaries of, partners in, and shapers or leaders of projects. The intention is to assess which lens or combination of lenses should be used in a certain context to facilitate the empowerment and agency of young people, for their own benefit and for the benefit of their society. Working with youth as partners and leaders may take more time, resources and capacity building in the short term, but have greater overall benefits and impact in the long term. It is such meaningful participation that empowers young people to play active roles in building their societies and a better future. The figure below illustrates **the three-lens approach to youth participation in development**.

The two approaches to youth participation discussed above reveal that for effective participation to occur, both the youth and development practitioners have roles to play, values to uphold and behaviour to exhibit. In the context of Hart's (1992) ladder of participation and the three-lens approach (DFID 2010), meaningful participation requires that both young people and development practitioners recognise and own their respective roles, and internalise the values and behaviour associated with the cause they envisioned in order to enable effective youth engagement.

*Figure 1: The three-lens approach to youth participation*



(Source: DFID 2010)

In this sense, the role of development practitioners is to ensure that there is an enabling space for young people to meaningfully participate and bring their ideas to the table, and where their ideas are recognised in decision making, in a youth partnership and leadership framework. For youth to make the best use of those spaces, intervening organisations need to provide capacity-building support to increase young people's confidence and skills to engage within their communities. Similarly, young people need to access one-on-one or individual support to ensure that their engagement is fully tailored and accessible. that is why development **practitioner values and behaviour** should reflect the cause they envisage for young people by providing space for young people to bring their unique perspectives, experiences and ideas to bear on development initiatives. In doing so, practitioners do not necessarily ignore their own expertise or evidence provided by research, but use the opportunity to guide youth as part of their capacity building and support.

In terms of young people's roles, values and behaviour, participation will be meaningful when young people are involved throughout the entire programme cycle, from agenda setting, to planning, designing, implementation, storytelling, and monitoring and evaluation. Involvement in the entire process enables young people to voice their priorities within an initiative, and those priorities to be visible and acted upon by allocating time, money and other resources needed to address challenges and opportunities. In addition, involvement in the entire process enables young people to tell their own stories as well as review results, and learn and share. Regarding young people's values and behaviour, it is important to define clear roles and responsibilities to ensure that a young person's presence in a development initiative does not feel tokenistic or empty, and for them to understand the contribution and results that are expected of

them. Similarly, this understanding helps to promote ownership and a sense of belonging in which young people make the best use of the spaces available to them to act on issues that affect them. This is in line with the idea that young people are working in partnership with intervening agencies and are therefore fully consulted and informed, and partake in certain decision making in the initiatives. Finally, youth need to exercise leadership by conceiving and leading direct interventions within an initiative as well as leading on decision making within existing structures, systems and processes (DFID 2010).

Therefore, devoting the analysis to the conditions and structures for youth development and the different layers of youth participation, as informed beneficiaries, collaborative partners and leaders of peacebuilding interventions, allows for a better understanding of how strategies applied in support of youth empowerment lead to increased participation, and how such efforts in the form of policies and practice are beneficial and accountable to young people.

A conflict transformation outlook critically addresses some of these presuppositions. From a youth perspective, five changes are necessary in our analysis of effective youth participation. First, instead of simply trying to understand violence and barriers to youth involvement, we should also focus on creating enabling spaces for youth participation. Second, rather than simply ensure youth involvement in development projects, we should also address barriers to effective youth participation. Thirdly, instead of simply relying on laws and policies to promote effective youth participation, we should take personal responsibility to ensure compliance. Fourthly, rather than consulting youth when planning development projects, we should mutually collaborate with youth in addressing issues that matter to them. Finally, instead of simply assigning tasks to youth and informing them about development projects, we should engender the direct involvement as leaders and initiators of action and decision-making.

Scholars, such as Funk et al., (2012: 288), have noted that the nature of involvement of youth as tokens or research subjects is responsible for “low levels of youth self-advocacy and empowerment”. This argument provides a point of entry for a conflict transformation approach to the study of youth participation in peacebuilding. As Kaye (2017) points out, action research aims to empower participants and direct beneficiaries. This is in line with the growing concern that the failure to engage communities as active participants and contributors to shaping interventions for them risks excluding communities from the opportunities that such efforts present (Hart 1992). This study sought to eschew this risk by harnessing the potential of the youth to build and sustain peace.

#### 2.2.4 Intervention, gaps and practice of conflict transformation

In recent decades, peacebuilding scholars and practitioners have turned to legal, political, policy and programme interventions to break the grip of violence and to build peace. These options are motivated by the need to hold perpetrators of violence and leaders to account, improve the performance of government authorities, build the capacity of ordinary citizens and respond to emerging challenges to peacebuilding. It is argued that the opportunity to address critical issues to peacebuilding is sometimes missed in peacebuilding agenda and in practical interventions. According to Bradley (2018), the failure to address some of the critical issues, including domestic and family violence, is due to four factors: poorly-equipped, post-conflict communities that are unable to prioritise and meaningfully address violence; the exclusion of critical stakeholders, in this case women and youth, in peacebuilding agenda; the failure to criminalise certain forms of violence; and the inability to deal with the stigmatisation that comes with attempts to seek redress to some forms of violence. Bradley (2018: 128) argues that the solution lies in creating an imperative for measures to protect women and children to be built into the peacebuilding frameworks, so that states that fail to implement them are in violation of key “human rights norms”.

Related to Bradley’s argument is the idea that certain forms of violence are regarded as normal features of day-to-day relationships, that affect women, youth and vulnerable members of the community. Therefore, efforts to address violence in post-conflict situations should focus on how local communities make sense of their situations and the degree to which their understanding of their context-specific challenges may promote or inhibit different forms of violence. It is equally noteworthy that while strengthening and incorporating legal mechanisms into peacebuilding initiatives provides a framework for the protection of different categories of people, the enforcement of those legal mechanisms needs to ensure that communities are able to exercise their rights and fulfil their obligations. These require political will, active participation of the affected community and internalizing the values and attitudes associated with peace. This is where conflict transformation comes in: conflict transformation theory is essential to a complete understanding of conflicts and violence, and to the effectiveness of policies and programmes meant to build peace. This study draws on this theory to understand youth’s perceptions, attitudes and behaviour in relation to peacebuilding efforts, within the existing structures; and it seeks to promote understanding, cooperation and actions to enhance participation for peace.

## 2.3 Theory of Change

### 2.3.1 Introduction

In addition, to the conflict transformation theory, the theory of change will be applied to a contextualized, peacebuilding project for conflict-affected youth in northern Uganda. The theory of change helps in articulating the change that an entity or a project envisages. It is a process of mapping out change through conceptualisation, implementation and evaluation of the project. In particular, it builds models of processes that can be “conceptualised and observed,” and aims to explain linkages among activities, outcomes and context of the intervention (Allen, Cruz and Warburton 2017; Biggs et al., 2017). More specifically, the theory of change forms the basis for measuring and checking whether what the project believes or assumes about the process of change actually happens in various forms, including through “thoughts, perceptions, feelings and attitudes” (Connell and Kubish 2016: 1) at individual and group levels.

The growing quest to strengthen the use of research to inform evidence-based policy and programmes is well-documented, and is better implemented through a strategy that is “applied and evaluated in specific settings” (Yearwood 2018: 91). Moreover, as Arensman, Van Waegeningh and van Wessel (2017: 1) argue, the “recursive nature of complex interventions” does not fully blend with the conventional cause-effect logical application of the theory of change as used in international development. Therefore, the peacebuilding project of this study focused on “recursive interactions, with outcomes that are emergent rather than predictable.” This perspective emphasizes human interactions as the basis for appreciating on-the-ground reality. The theory of change helped to guide and evaluate actions, and offer guidance to institutions and individuals that wish to explore the use of youth-led peacebuilding in promoting participation in community life.

The theory of change also provides guidance on involvement based on the expectation that “all affected stakeholders will be involved in developing, agreeing, monitoring and evaluating a relevant theory for the proposed intervention, and the assumption that widespread stakeholder involvement will extend ownership of the intervention to achieve ‘total ownership’ and improve attribution” (Sullivan and Stewart 2006: 179). The suggested framework was used for the methodological purpose of understanding approaches that have been used in youth engagement and to support me to answer the research questions.

### 2.3.2 Theory of change for a needs-based, youth-led peacebuilding project

The overall goal of applying the theory of change to action research is to enhance participation of youth in peacebuilding. Achieving this goal requires that youth are empowered to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from, peacebuilding interventions. This, in turn requires that at least some minimum conditions are met. First, youth and communities must be sensitized to develop favourable attitudes to young people's participation in peacebuilding. Second, youth must acquire the capacity to identify and respond to conflicts and violence by engaging with the different spaces for peace. Finally, youth initiatives for peace must respond to context-specific challenges, and be in harmony with ongoing initiatives for peace, including the northern Uganda's peace, recovery and development agenda. This study was based on action research as a peacebuilding tool which regards research, dissemination of research results, training, and coaching as important ingredients in empowering individuals with appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes for them to appreciate their situations, in an effort to build peace and engender development.

The needs-based, youth-led peacebuilding project was built on the assumption that if youth understand and appreciate the barriers to their participation in a participatory peacebuilding process, and are trained and coached on peaceful resolution of conflicts, then they will have the ability to exercise knowledge, skills and power to pursue peace, through the different structures in their respective communities. To achieve this objective, the project envisaged the following actions: exploratory research to examine youth's perspectives of violence, participation and peacebuilding, providing rights-holders and duty-bearers with information on barriers and opportunities for effective youth participation, and training and coaching selected youth beneficiaries on peaceful resolution of conflicts and conflict prevention in order for them to implement peacebuilding projects in their communities.

To better understand the causes of conflict or issues of contention, we conducted exploratory research to generate evidence on barriers and opportunities for youth participation in peacebuilding. The evidence/information generated was then disseminated to rights-holders and duty-bearers to increase their knowledge and understanding of the role of youth in peacebuilding. The research helped us to understand and take into account the lived experiences and realities of young people. Through the data gathered in a participatory process with the community, the challenges and potential solutions were identified and better understood by the affected communities. In this case, research was not only a means to gather data, but also an intervention, especially through the research process, including data collection, analysis and interpretation, and the dissemination of the research findings at both policy and practitioner



levels (D’Amico et al., 2016: 529). In line with this, Kaye (2017), advocates action research to allow for the participation of respondents in different processes, from data collection to developing and testing an intervention. In addition, action research educates and liberates respondents by transforming them into researchers who are actively involved in their own socio-economic transformation. This action contributes to filling the gap that exist in “translating and disseminating research results at the policy and practitioner level” (D’Amico et al., 2016: 529). As Kaye (2017) notes, the gaps in theory and practice can be filled through researching with the community. Therefore, research, as a form of intervention, enables participating communities to acquire desirable knowledge and skills of lived experiences and realities of those communities.

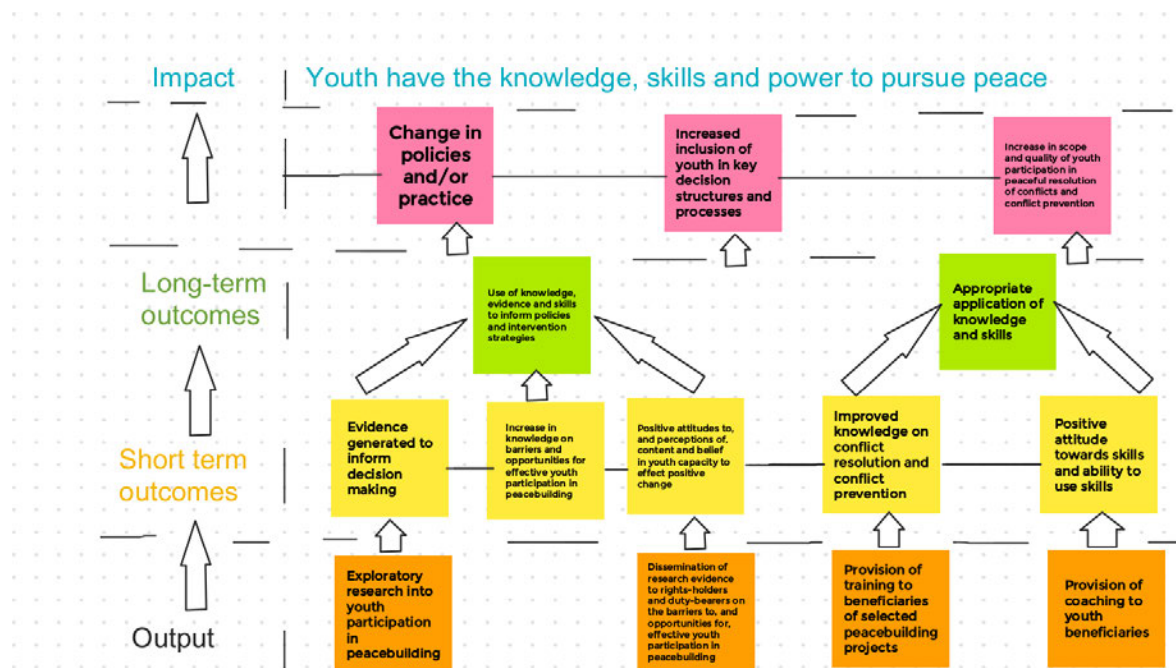
Similarly, based on the findings of the exploratory research, a group of youth was identified, trained and coached to help them improve their knowledge and skills of peaceful conflict resolution and conflict prevention, and inculcate in them positive attitudes to those skills.

As a result, the participating youth experienced an increase in their knowledge and skills, and an improvement in their attitudes, and the research produced evidence to inform policies and intervention strategies for enhancing youth participation in peacebuilding. By the same means, more people developed positive perceptions and gained a better understanding of the value and benefits of youth participation. Moreover, increased inclusiveness of youth in key decision-making structures and processes was realized, and the scope and quality of youth participation in peaceful conflict resolution and conflict prevention was increased.

### 3.3.3 Graphic Illustration of the theory of change for a peacebuilding project

The figure below illustrates the major parts and pathways that constitute the theory of change for the youth-led, needs-based project, including the causal relationships among the components.

*Figure 2: Illustration of the theory of change for a peacebuilding programme*



(Source: The author).

**Exploratory research into youth participation**– This activity relates to the exploratory study that is conducted to gain a better understanding of the realities and experiences of youth in relation to peacebuilding. The results of this research are aimed at influencing a specific change in policy or practice/enforcement as part of an advocacy strategy. The research report will be disseminated in a number of ways, including one-on-one briefs, meetings or presentations to various stakeholder audiences.

**Dissemination of research evidence**–This data will be analysed to determine specific challenges or barriers that impede youth participation in peacebuilding, and that necessitate changes in current intervention frameworks or policies or in practice/enforcement. The emerging information will be used to influence decision-making on youth participation as part of an advocacy strategy.

**Building the capacity of youth**– The concept of capacity-building as used by United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI) refers to building the “skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organisations or communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world” (UNAI: para 1). This goes beyond training to include coaching, mentoring, technical support, learning exchanges or sharing and learning. Capacity-building activities are undertaken in order to enable the youth peacebuilders implement their projects, and to use their knowledge and skills to inform, demand for their dues, and fulfil their obligations as young people.

**Improved knowledge on peaceful resolution of conflicts and management of peacebuilding projects through capacity-building support**– This outcome relates to youth having improved knowledge of peaceful resolution of conflicts and related issues, as a result of some form of capacity- building. It is knowledge about the situation of youth in northern Uganda, acquired in the process of participating in action research, and imparted during the dissemination of the research findings. In particular, the knowledge includes some of the barriers to the ability of youth to contribute more effectively to peace.

**Increase in skills of peaceful conflict-resolution and management of peacebuilding projects** – This outcome relates to the ‘knowing how’ to resolve or prevent conflicts peacefully and manage peacebuilding projects effectively. It consists in the participants or beneficiaries acquiring or strengthening, the practical and technical skills required to resolve conflicts peacefully and to manage peacebuilding projects effectively. These skills were imparted to the participating youth through individual advice, training and mentoring on how to start, manage and evaluate a peacebuilding project.

**Positive attitudes to, and perceptions of, content and belief in youth capacity to effect positive change** – This outcome relates to the positive attitude, among participating youth, to the ability of youth to resolve and prevent conflicts, an attitude generated by the capacity-building efforts of the peacebuilding project. However, there are additional interventions, including incentives and coaching, to create positive attitudes and perceptions.

**Appropriate application of knowledge and skills** – This outcome (the application of the skills the stakeholders have acquired) is the intended objective of the capacity-building efforts. Acquired knowledge and skills are appropriately applied when they are suitably used in a proper and pertinent way by the primary beneficiaries and other stakeholders. For example, NGOs and CBOs may apply acquired knowledge and skills appropriately by conducting information sessions for target populations (rights holders). During these sessions, the NGOs or CBOs apply the skill of imparting appropriate knowledge to sensitize and/or mobilize the target populations. Two basic assumptions underlie this process: first, it is assumed that if knowledge-holders share information with rights-holders (youth), there will be improved knowledge among local communities; and second, when local authorities and traditional and religious leaders appropriately apply the skills, resources, and knowledge they gain through capacity-building support, they contribute to improving the operating environment for youth participation.

**Change in policies and practice** – This outcome relates to the actual changes made to policies at the local, regional or national levels. For instance, the changes could involve revisiting the peacebuilding frameworks for youth participation, or the nature and level of involving youth in peacebuilding projects

in their respective communities. At the practice level, it could involve effective execution of policies through formal and/or informal institutions. For instance, the change could consist in establishing a monitoring mechanism to ensure the ongoing peacebuilding programme is sensitive to youth needs and aspirations. All such changes are expected to improve the operating environment for youth participation, and enhance the capacity of youth to pursue peace in their respective communities. Changes in practice can also contribute to broadening the scope, and improving the quality, of youth participation in peacebuilding.

To sum up, the theory of change provides a sense of direction for the conceptualization of linkages among the activities, outcomes and context of an intervention. The theory also demonstrates how those linkages lead to change at individual and group levels at a given point in time. In relation to the youth-led, needs-based project, the theory of change guides the direction of actions and intended outcomes. Therefore, to ensure that the youth are empowered to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from, peacebuilding interventions, it might be necessary to undertake interventions that are focused on creating or strengthening an enabling environment beyond directly providing services to youths (rights-holders). Such interventions can include capacity-building to develop or strengthen an array of “skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organisations or communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world” (UNAI: para 1). Similarly, the advocacy component of the project seeks to influence decision-makers and other stakeholders to support and implement actions for the attainment of peacebuilding objectives.

## 2.4 Conclusion

The two selected theories provide a lens through which to understand open (policy, programme) and hidden (structural) issues that moderate the participation of youth in peacebuilding. They offer an account of how youth perceive their participation in peacebuilding, explore barriers to that participation, and establish the circumstances under which effective youth participation is made possible through initiating, implementing, and evaluating a needs-based, youth-led peacebuilding project. Both theories are appropriate for the study on youth participation in peacebuilding from “a generalist point of view”, and they are adequately flexible for peace workers to explore various options and plans to foster effective youth participation (Kasherwa 2020:125).

## CHAPTER THREE: EXPERIENCES AND DISCOURSES OF VIOLENCE IN POST-CONFLICT SETTINGS

### 3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter established that the framing and experiences of conflicts and violence have shaped the emergence of the conflict transformation theory to explain the importance of examining conflicts and violence in all their manifestations as part of normal human relations, from the perspectives of the affected communities. This helps us to appreciate how community narratives and discourses shape and respond to socioeconomic and political realities that mediate their understanding of the realities on the ground as well as inform their efforts to cause positive social and political changes for equity and justice in their communities. This chapter focuses on community experiences and discourses of violence in post-conflict situations, a reality that has historically received little attention because violence tends to be closely tied to war or armed conflicts. However, there is evidence to suggest that violence continues and increases in post-conflict situations, and interacts with pre-existing and new forms of injustices and inequalities, within the formal and informal structures of society, to influence efforts to build and sustain peace.

The chapter begins with an overview of violence as a prevalent phenomenon even after the formal end of the conflicts (van Baalen and Höglund 2017). The chapter argues that conflict leaves a legacy of violence, with far reaching implications for living with conflict-related sexual violence, vulnerability and crime. The transformation of armed conflict to land conflicts is explored in relation to the role of land in peacebuilding. It also explores the relationship between violence and youth citizenship, as well the public spaces (both formal and informal) for citizenship engagement and conflict resolution. The diverse experiences of violence raise the issue of the ability of conflict-affected communities to respond to a crisis, in this case the COVID-19 pandemic that has undoubtedly triggered an increase in domestic and other forms of violence while at the same time exposing weaknesses in the efforts to cope with stress of any kind, in a relatively poor, conflict-ridden region, and amidst restricted spaces for exercising democratic rights and in the context of the 2021 elections that were marred by violence. Moreover, the implications of COVID-19 and electoral violence also focus the limelight on the ability of the institutions and policies for the recovery of northern Uganda to fill gaps in the public spaces for general citizen and youth engagement.

### 3.2 An Overview of Violence in Post-conflict Settings

Experiences of violence vary in shape and form during war and peace. In her book reviews titled *"Worse than the war": experiences and discourses of violence in postwar central America*", England (2012: 245) captures experiences from Latin American countries, that demonstrate that violence can be more prevalent in peace time than during war. Indeed, as van Baalen and Höglund (2017) argue, violence usually continues "for years after the formal end of the conflict." England cites the cases of Guatemala in the 1980s and El Salvador, where more people were killed during peace time than during the war. England (2012: 245) also cites the example of Honduras that had no official civil war, and still recorded an estimated "80 deaths per 100,000" people in the 1980s. Worldwide, "an estimated 408 million youth (aged 15–29) resided in settings affected by armed conflict or organized violence" in 2016 (Simpson 2018). The same report indicates that about 90% of casualties were young males. In other organised settings of violence, young people account for more deaths and overall suffering due other forms of violence. In addition, young people suffer from the effect of violence and organised crime in different ways, including "repeat victimization to psychological trauma, identity-based discrimination, and social and economic exclusion." (Simpson 2018). Currently, poor data makes it difficult to accurately estimate the number of young people living in situations exposing them to those diverse forms of violence and violation (Ibid: 5).

While the official records of violence-related death may not be readily available to the public, or remain unreported or undocumented, in northern Uganda, many deaths in the region are associated with crime and confrontation between the military and civilians over civilian demands for social accountability and related issues, as well as during protests for service delivery and conflicts in communities. As Galtung (1990:291) argues, certain normalised practices, including cultural violence, legitimise both direct and indirect or structural violence. This implies that violence need not be institutionalised as war for it to affect society and individuals at all levels. That is why it is necessary to examine violence beyond armed conflict, and to realise that although certain forms of violence may be normalised, we need to always "be shocked by them in order to avoid their ideological normalization and justification and to continue to fight for effective policies to deal with them" (England 2012: 246). This is because, more often than not, the dominant discourses of violence silence alternative discourses and act to the detriment of certain categories of people, especially the marginalised groups, thereby leading to policies that explain and justify forms of violence perpetuated by the dominant actors.

As noted by the former UN Secretary-General, Boutros-Ghali (1992: para. 5), in his *An Agenda for Peace*,

The sources of conflict and war are pervasive and deep. To reach them will require our utmost effort to enhance respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to promote sustainable economic and social development for wider prosperity, to alleviate distress and to curtail the existence and use of massively destructive weapons.

Such efforts will need to transcend the sequencing of activities that range from ceasefire to ensuring former enemies become friends, and view peacebuilding as navigating through “diverse contexts with different types and levels of conflict. [Such efforts also include] “grassroots processes that can... aid in restoring and healing relationships in communities affected by conflict; create institutions to prevent both social and political violence; and empower citizens working for social change across religious, ethnic, and political divides.” In advocating for a bottom-up approach, Pruitt (2013) underscores the urgency of working with the grassroots to tackle all forms of violence, including structural violence in order to build and sustain peace.

Violence in northern Uganda is multi-faceted, and is triggered by myriad factors, including inter-ethnic tensions, cattle rustling, crime, land disputes, and tensions between ordinary citizens and the military forces often over dissenting views and actions. Clashes between local communities and the military have escalated in recent years. In particular, the military has been accused of harassing supporters of opposition presidential candidates during election campaigns and when ordinary citizens express dissenting views on lack of accountability and poor governance. Military harassment has also been reported during peaceful citizen protests against poor service delivery, and in the implementation of COVID-19 measures, translating into countrywide violation of human rights, and resulting in injuries and death. This form of violence is an increasingly expected part of Uganda’s military response to dissenting views, and it is becoming normalised. Yet the injustices against which people protest are deeply embedded in the country’s history of social inequality and lack of a legitimate conflict resolution mechanism (Kasozi 1994). This pattern of violence is an important aspect of the dynamics of the conflicts, and it must be considered in peacebuilding approaches in northern Uganda. Therefore, peacebuilding interventions need to bridge this gap and to provide insights into the different ways in which communities experience and perceive violence.

### 3.3 Living with Conflict-related Sexual Violence in Post-conflict Settings

Boesten and Fisher (2012: 1) observe that “Sexual violence precedes and survives conflict, which creates a continuum of violence.” Schulz (2020: 36) broadly defines conflict-related sexual violence “...as acts



or threats of violence of a sexual nature perpetrated directly on and against victims, which the victim may be forced to perform or watch being performed on others within the family or community.” Luedke and Logan (2018), further observe that conflict-related sexual violence is common in all battlefields around the world, and while it affects both men and women, very little attention and recognition is paid to its ramifications on men and boys at both at policy and programme levels. Therefore, “Focusing solely on female victim-survivors of violence reinforces the idea of weak women and violent men and fails to consider other victims of sexual violence. In addition, it overlooks how perpetrators are drawn into using such violence” (Boesten and Fisher 2012: 3). Evidence from northern Uganda confirms this. The LRA conflict was characterized by “brutal sexual violence against women and children that ...resulted in more psychological trauma, devastating the entire northern Uganda communities” (Angom 2018: 3). According to Schulz (2020), despite the well-known fact that men and boys are victims of sexual violence during war and in the post-war era, the issue is overlooked and often ignored, thus concealing the experiences of male survivors of sexual violence.

Angom (2018: 1) points out that sexual violence against men during armed conflict is used to “shatter male power”, but, in spite of their predicament as victims, the community still expects men to be heroes in denial of their realities. In the case of Former Yugoslavia, the construction of the definition of a victim was dictated by the labelling and the power relations during and after the conflict. Justifying the use of violence against certain groups of people often reinforces norms and practices that promote violence, and leads to normalization of such practices, and, in the context of peacebuilding, it delays reintegration, healing and reconciliation.

Researching on sexual-related violence in northern Uganda, Schulz (2020) found that while the crime was widespread across the war-torn region, the victims could not share their experiences or report the crime due to shame, dehumanization, stigmatization, and fear. The fear was compounded by the fact that the victims did not have the voice to report perpetrators who happened to be soldiers of the government in power, thereby limiting their hope of being listened to, and attaining justice and redress in a system was arguably responsible for their predicaments. After two decades of war, Schulz (2018) and Mogi (2020) argue, there is still little attention to, and recognition of, male victims of sexual violence at policy and programme levels. This situation is further compounded by a lacuna in the legal definition that views sexual offences as more applicable to female than to males. This view makes men and boys shy away from reporting and adjusting when faced with sexual violence. To illustrate this argument, a male victim confessed having failed to seek support from a medical doctor, fearing to talk about his experiences,



because he did not know how to do so. In most communities of northern Uganda, men were not expected to be sexually violated, and it was shameful for a man or boy to be sexually assaulted. Testimonies from both victims and perpetrators show that sexual violence was used “opportunistically, [and] preceded and survived the political conflict” (Boesten and Fisher 2012: 3). Drawing on an extensive field survey, Schulz (2020) argues that rape of men was a systematic part of the military operation against the Acholi population of northern Uganda, as an act of revenge.

This argument highlights multiple experiences of violence and how the interpretation of the pain and shame afflicts as well as discourages men and boys from seeking help. It also poses additional challenges for service access and uptake, and for community recovery and healing (Schulz 2018). This experience reveals the difficulty of reporting and seeking medical help and legal redress in a socio-cultural context in which men are not expected to be raped, and where there are no safe spaces or well-trained and experienced psychosocial or medical personnel to run to. moreover, this happens in situations where victims of sexual violence are generally stigmatised, even by law enforcement and medical personnel. As a result, for the victims, post-conflict recovery and healing becomes almost impossible. Recognising the challenges of overcoming barriers to post-conflict challenges, especially those affecting women and children, Bradley (2018:123) advocates for a public policy intervention that protects women and children, as a “non-negotiable facet of peacebuilding agendas.” This underscores the importance of addressing sexual and gender-based violence in order to deter further human rights violations against women and men, as well as girls and boys, in post-conflict settings. Using the case of Peru, Boesten and Fisher (2012:1) note that specific programmes targeted at conflict-related, sexual and gender-based violence are “essential for breaking cycles of violence.”

As Schulz (2020:3) observes in his study of sexual violence against men and boys in northern Uganda, “survivors had no actual opportunities or spaces to share their stories or narrate their testimonies.” The silence could arguably prolong community acceptance of the violence, delay interventions and community recovery and healing. Conflict-related violence has drawn the interest of scholars and practitioners (Luedke, Lewis and Rodriguez 2017). The Refugee Law Project’s documentation of conflict-related sexual violence, permitted understanding of the experiences of the unheard voices, and paved way for the victims to receive remedial attention. The voices of male survivors have increasingly attracted local and international attention, raised awareness of conflict-related sexual violence against men, and elicited support to male victims of sexual violence to find justice and redress.

### 3.4 From Armed Conflict to Land Conflicts: Land in Post-conflict Peacebuilding

This section seeks to explain the movement from armed conflict to land conflicts as a symbiotic relationship among land and human rights, peace, security and development. It underscores the fact that the end of armed conflict and displacement has paved the way for conflicts over a resource that is an important asset for rebuilding the life and securing the future of the people. In northern Uganda, land is such a key livelihood resource that any attempts to promote peace and development must consider land rights issues. This is because many of the accounts of peace, justice, healing, reconciliation, governance and development have elements of land in them. Therefore, land is a peacebuilding tool that needs to be used to improve access to economic opportunities, which in turn is essential for youth participation in development. The proceeding discussions demonstrate that land can facilitate or limit the ability of communities, and by extension the youth, to undertake opportunities necessary to rebuild their lives and communities.

Hartmann (2016: 22) argues that land-related conflicts were at the centre of the resettlement process because land in northern Uganda is linked to “identity, social class and social relationships of the people.” Faced with such important issues, communities turned to traditional leaders for solutions. However, the traditional leaders’ control of the governance of natural resources has also been weakened, leading to resource-based conflicts, and undermining social cohesion, reintegration and peace in northern Uganda. For instance, land access issues have become a major factor in socio-economic and political reintegration of communities as they struggle to survive. While land conflict is a generalised problem in northern Uganda, some groups are more vulnerable than others. A study by McKibben and Bean (2010: 8) reveals that 90% of former LRA males in Acholi had experienced isolation, and expressed fear of revenge upon return. These experiences translated into many being unable to access land and therefore failing to successfully reintegrate as lack of access to land meant their inability to access social and economic means for livelihoods. These issues can be addressed if there are strong regulatory mechanisms in place. However, as Oosterom (2016a) observes, the conflict disrupted the traditional institutions and led to loss of their legitimacy among today’s youth. Local communities and their leaders were displaced to areas where they resided as guests and relied on a different governance structure and securitised pattern of life. Additionally, the camp setting saw the emergence of another power structure, managed by camp commandants and facilitated by International Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Therefore, the communities returned to their homes with a new reality, in which young people trusted non-traditional sources of power more than the traditional ones which they did not regard as reliable sources of protection. Moreover, politicians interfered in the decision-making power of traditional authorities,

which led to power centres shifting to external forces. The militarised environment, with an unpredictable security situation, meant that the traditional structure failed to protect itself and its subjects from violence and atrocities committed by armed forces. This precarious situation left communities vulnerable and challenged the power and authority of traditional leaders some of who died along the way and were not there to help guide the young generation during land boundary disputes or to enforce traditional norms and practices associated customary land. Moreover, for decades, the majority of the local communities and their leaders had no physical access to their land, and, in addition to the fear of losing their land, most internally displaced people returned to a new reality in which conflicts over land emerged. In addition, new levels and groups of vulnerability emerged during the conflict, and returnees had to grapple with return and its challenges. According to Angom (2018), people returned home with broken families and new heads, including child-and woman-headed ones. Some households were headed by divorcees, widows, widowers, single parents or even children, who faced the burden of having to take care of their families amidst other challenges, including those associated with access to land.

The magnitude of land conflicts in northern Uganda has cast doubt on the prospects of recovery, peace and development in the region. Indeed, without tackling land issues that affect the ability of youth to contribute to their communities, and of communities to realise their aspirations, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve and sustain peace and development the region. Some scholars have argued that claims to land are a way of expressing conflicts in the region: they are about rights and identity, and future possibilities that are also associated with the ability to forgive rather than rekindle past grievances. Therefore, boundary disputes may actually be manifestations of a bigger problem. As Whyte, Gausset and Henriques (2013: 4) observe,

Today land rights and land conflicts – actual and potential – form a pervasive discourse north of the Nile. Brothers quarrel over portions; widows and orphans seek land access and recognition; neighbours suspect each other, bearing silent grudges for current and past encroachments; clans make competing claims to territory. And it often seems everyone suspects the wealthy and the politically powerful of grabbing land or enabling “investors” to do so. But the conflicts that typically find expression through claims to land ... are not simply about plots and boundaries. They are multi-level conflicts, embedded in history, social identity, economy and politics. Land conflicts must be unfolded and explored in order to be understood.

The case of northern Uganda shows that land plays a significant role in efforts to restore peace, and promote forgiveness, healing and reconciliation in the region. This is because land plays a role in identity and belonging, and is an asset for development that also moderates relations and different aspects of life

after the conflict. Moreover, the motivation for land conflicts will always exist unless effective regulatory frameworks are instituted. As Whyte, Gausset and Henriques (2013: 7) point out, land conflicts are a result of the pluralistic, legal institutions and practices of governance that promote the already insecure land tenure systems. That is why, the United Nations (2019: 4), warned that:

Competition and conflict over land is likely to intensify with the growing pressures of climate change, population growth, increased food insecurity, migration and urbanization. Mounting pressure on land resources will drive conflict dynamics at global, regional, national and local levels and there is growing evidence of the link between land, armed conflict and human rights abuses. There is increasing acknowledgement that land can be a root cause or trigger for conflict, a critical factor causing its relapse, or a bottleneck to recovery. Evidence from the field demonstrates the significance of resolving land-related issue in the achievement of sustainable and durable peace.

As the United Nations (2019) articulates, land plays a significant role in peace and security, human rights and development. This is because it can not only cause conflicts and human rights abuse, but also help build resilience and sustain peace, facilitate recovery and end displacement. Therefore, for a community that is largely rural and for which land is a premier resource and source of livelihood, addressing land-related conflicts and issues has the potential to prevent conflicts, and build and sustain peace. Drawing on cases and observations relating to the practice of forgiveness in northern Uganda, Obika and Mogensen (2013) argue that insecure land tenure and mistrust regarding land justice lead to land conflicts and complicate post-conflict peacebuilding. This assertion underscores the central role of land in the peacebuilding processes, and the importance of understanding and addressing land conflicts as a key factor.

Rampant conflict results from weaknesses in the justice and land administration systems. As Van Leeuwen (2017) notes, the decentralised form of governance has brought into equation new and multiple dimensions on how land should be governed and land disputes resolved. However, as he argues, this transformation is a source of new tenure insecurity and it delegitimizes traditional mechanisms of land management, thus reinforcing tenure insecurity for the poor. The PRDP acknowledges access to land as an important component of the peace-restoring efforts, and sought to design strategies to address land access issues. As Republic of Uganda (2007: 97) notes, "...most land-associated conflicts originate from unsolved tenure and displacement problems, compounded by limited awareness of land rights and political interests. Mechanisms are needed to resolve conflicts and promote community reconciliation, especially in areas of high return." In the context of northern Uganda that is emerging from armed conflict, land conflicts and disputes manifest themselves with a degree of peculiarity as discussed below.

Most of the land in northern Uganda, including Langoland was not occupied due to forced displacement that spanned over 15 years as part of the LRA and Karimojong conflicts. This led to some people taking advantage of the absence of others to claim unoccupied land that did not belong to them. In the absence of reference maps showing land ownership, the District Land Boards (DLBs) find it difficult to ascertain claims over land. In cases of intimidation, it is difficult to challenge to land seizures, even with clear legal proof of ownership. Such violations of land rights occur elsewhere, but are especially severe in northern Uganda because of displacement and the militarized context and approach to resolving disputes, especially when powerful individuals are involved. In the post-conflict era, some powerful individuals and companies are also taking advantage of the high commercial value of land in northern Uganda by fraudulently acquiring it cheaply from poor people. On their part, the locals have conflicts over land, which are often violent and leads to human rights violations, including death. Land that was originally owned ‘communally’, especially for grazing and hunting purposes, is now being claimed as personal property by both individuals from within the land-owning group and ‘powerful people’, including ‘investors’, from outside. Because of displacement, and for reasons related to authority and legitimacy, the structures which used to manage these lands are no longer in place or functioning.

In this situation, power manifests itself in a variety of forms. For example, a person may use village, district or national-level connections to fraudulently acquire land. Power can also take the form of physical strength, for example, when a young man is locked in a land conflict with an old woman. In some cases, power expresses itself in armed strength, money, knowledge of English or of the law, or even mastery of how to ‘play the system’. In yet other cases, power manifests itself in the form of socio-political connections, especially being connected to people in high places, or in personal disposition, for example, whether one tends to face up to challenges or to run away from them. Finally, in the patriarchal communities of northern Uganda, power also manifests itself in terms of gender. These are some of the hard realities that local communities have to deal with, and when individuals are left with few or no options, they resort to violence. For the youth, it means being deprived of resources to contribute to their well-being and that of their communities.

Retroacted land gift is yet another dimension to land conflict in northern Uganda, challenging the customary norms and practices of land management. In the past, it was common for one to ‘give’ land to another person from another place who came to the village for settlement and farming, or to donate land to the State for building public service utilities, such as schools and healthcare facilities. Since the person receiving the ‘gift’ could not even contemplate selling the land, it was always understood that the land

was given ‘for as long as the person or their children needed to stay there’. In other words, customarily, such gifts of land were essentially or potentially permanent in that the beneficiary could stay on the land or use it indefinitely. However, in the modern dispensation, descendants of the land donor can interpret the donation as having been temporary, and claim that ‘the land was not given, it was only lent’. There are now many cases of people being evicted from land which others are claiming ‘really’ belonged to their father or grandfather. These claims are usually only made when the parties involved in the land gift or loan have died. Given that, traditionally, such land gifts or loans were not documented, it is difficult to establish the veracity of the claims of parties to such land conflicts. While there are customary principles that can serve as a basis for resolving such issues, customary leaders are susceptible to bias, and Local Councils and Magistrates do not always understand these principles sufficiently to use them to deliver justice.

The districts of Lango and the Karamoja sub-region have often experienced individual violence related to cattle theft when Karimojong return after their seasonal movement with their livestock to parts of Lango and Acholi for grazing. While people in the Langi have returned to their locations after the LRA conflict, the fear of the armed Karimojong raids often prevents them from investing in livestock and farming, and it hinders the possibility of good neighbourliness between the Langi and the Karimojong.

Men and women who had been with the LRA, many returning with children, are often resented, particularly if they had been involved in attacks. A marital union between an ordinary person and a former LRA man or girl is not always accepted in good faith; and when a former LRA woman returns with children, but without the father of the children, the children may not be accepted by her family. Moreover, while all the returnees have land rights, many LRA returnees have been denied their land rights on account of their having participated in atrocities against their own communities. It is also probable that people greedy for land use this as a pretext for taking land rightfully belonging to LRA ex-combatants. Studies by Awici (2012), McKibben and Bean (2010) provide evidence of land access challenges linked to the inability of LRA ex-combatants and associates to reintegrate in communities in northern Uganda.

Individuals and households usually lose their land to someone within the community, often within the family, including in-laws, and the victims are usually ‘the weak’ (the old, infirm, children, the poor, widows, ‘outsiders’ from other clans, etc.). This form of abuse of land rights is probably the most common problem, though statistics are extremely hard to come by. Research in Lango has shown that the majority of widows, and over 80% of divorcees, have experienced attempts to grab their land. Land-

grabbing of this kind is fairly easy, partly because the land in question has been vacant for so long, and partly because war has created many vulnerable population groups, including widows, unmarried mothers, and children without fathers. Moreover, although it is generally agreed that land boundaries can nearly always be identified even after displacement from the land, difficulties of identifying land boundaries can easily be ‘created’. In addition, many of the ‘weak’ (women with children in school, the old, those who find it hard to build houses) are also the least able to return early, further exposing their land to grabbing. Women who co-habited, and had children, with men while in Internally Displaced People’s Camps (IDPCs) are similarly vulnerable. According to a widespread line of argument, because they are not officially married, neither they nor their children can claim land from their unofficial husband’s family. Such women are often forced to return to their parents’ homes, together with their children.

However, according to another line of argument, if a woman co-habited with a man, and the two were socially accepted as having lived together for a long time, they are considered married and the mother and her children have a legal claim to land from her ‘common-law husband’ rather than from her parents. In most cases, each side (the family of the co-habiting man and that of the co-habiting woman) uses the argument which allows it to deny the woman and children land rights. Given that husband and wife normally belong to different clans, a ‘meta-clan’ platform would have been the best forum for resolving such disputes. Unfortunately, no such platform exists, and traditional leaders are constrained in their ability to solve such a problem. These are some of the drivers and triggers of conflict that communities are grappling with.

In yet other cases, because people have realized the value of land in present-day Uganda, some people have returned from displacement to their ancestral villages and claimed land, including that which belonged to other people, including land that was meant for communal purposes, thereby distorting traditional life. An NGO worker, Mr. Robert Ojok of Land and Equity Movement in Uganda (LEMU), reveals the changes that have occurred in land use and administration in his local area. In his words “I grew up benefiting from my village’s community land and I have experienced what happens when it is lost...The work that we do is not just about getting a title to land – it is about preserving a way of life that is at risk of dying off if we don’t do anything about it.”

Conflicts in northern Uganda are deeply rooted in the impoverishment of communities in the region and they have adverse consequences for biodiversity. The high levels of poverty and vulnerability, poor public health service delivery, low-income levels, and many other challenges have a bearing on the

environment and the ability of local communities to live in harmony with nature (Whyte, Gausset and Henrique 2013). Some of the economically valuable and globally important plants are being depleted. For instance, Iddrisu, Didia and Adam (2019) argue that the shea tree, *Vitellaria paradoxa*, subspecies *nilotica*, in northern Uganda is an important species globally but an endangered species locally due to deforestation, limited local awareness of the global importance of the tree and its economic importance in the local economy. Yet Shea butter is used as edible oil and as an input in food, pharmaceutical, cosmetic and antimicrobial products as well as moisturisers. Its annual market value is estimated at United States \$120 million for African countries. Otuke District was over the years adversely affected by armed cattle rustling by Karimojong warriors, followed by armed attacks by the LRA, and forced displacement of the people into urban settlements and internally displaced people's camps. All this turned Otuke into one of the poorest districts in Uganda, where, in the post-conflict period, the local communities returned to home areas that lacked basic necessities of life. As a result, the people have resorted to cutting down the Shea tree in order to produce charcoal for domestic use and sale to meet their basic needs. This unfortunate development is partly supported by the high demand outside the district for high-quality, Shea tree charcoal. This is a challenge that conflict-affected communities in northern Uganda have to live with for some years to come. Unfortunately, without an effective dispute-resolution structure, in which young people have confidence, and which is capable of enforcing good practices, and restoring a sense of environmental responsibility among local communities, environmental degradation is likely to continue, paving the way for even more conflicts in the future.

The land challenges mentioned above reflect symptoms and not causes of land conflicts. The real problems lie in the lacunae of land justice and land administration, in the poor functioning of the traditional and civil service systems, and in poor governance in northern Uganda generally. The prominent roles that traditional structures played before the conflict, especially their ability to promote norms and practices that promote rights and responsibilities, and to address conflicts that arise in the community, have been put to the test. Changes in the legal framework for community governance, a new reality that communities returned to after displacement, have aggravated the situation.

### 3.5 Violence and Youth Citizenship in Post-conflict Northern Uganda

Armed conflicts have both direct and indirect effects on communities, especially young people, with long-lasting effects in the political, social, economic and national environment spheres. Oosterom (2016a: 76) notes that “conflict [and/or violence] affects citizen agency and the sense and practice of citizenship”. According to Naidoo (2001: 80), African countries are grappling to ensure that “active youth



citizenship is a demographic imperative.” For example, Burgess (2005) uses the term “youth crisis,” to summarise the unprecedented challenges, including HIV/AIDS, unemployment, political turmoil and conflicts, that the youth in Africa have been facing since the late 1980s.

According to Porto, Alden and Parsons (2007), conflicts weaken social fabrics by disintegrating family and community structures and networks as well as traditions and social norms that are responsible for learning and practicing active citizenship. As a result, the culture of good governance also disintegrates. As Oosterom (2016b) observes, militarized conflict situations are often used as the opportunity to instill in the population fear of the state, and to encourage use of politically correct language and connotations with reference to the state, thereby undermining the people’s sense of belonging. All these developments negatively impact on people’s sense of citizenship and diminish the level of citizen engagement.

The central argument of both Porto, Alden and Parsons (2007) and Oosterom (2016b) is relevant to the turbulent political history of Uganda. According to Ssentongo (2013), the circumstances facing youth hinder youth initiatives, especially in conflict, and Uganda’s turbulent contemporary history is replete with such circumstances. These circumstances are characterised by marginalisation, neglect and sham participation. In northern Uganda, the history of violent conflicts that plagued the region for decades has eroded the social fabric of society, the culture of good governance, and spaces for citizen engagement (Oosterom 2016b; Ben-Porath 2011). Oosterom (2016b), in his study on the effect of internal displacement on the construction of citizenship in northern Uganda, found that local institutions were unable to impart knowledge and values for citizenship during the conflict.

With over two decades of encampment, the camp approaches of service provision and leadership completely replaced the traditional system of food production and people governance in which everyone was expected to work hard and the chiefs and elders were in charge of their subjects. Instead, reliance on food aid led to the development and entrenchment of a dependence syndrome, and undermined men’s traditional and precious role as family breadwinners and protectors. Similarly, the previously powerful status of chiefs and elders was reduced to that of an ordinary person in the camp, and chiefs and elders began to lose the grip on communities they once led with authority and great honour. If the youth of today have less regard for the traditional system, it is partly because of their encampment experiences did not expose them to that system.

Citizen engagement is viewed as an opportunity to learn and practice citizenship, and is passed from one generation to another. Oosterom (2016: 77) argues that “active citizenship is ‘learnt’ in local institutions and social interactions, often through participation in activities, or through exposure to them.” However, the war in northern Uganda did not offer any opportunities for meaningful citizen engagement as the local institutions responsible for imparting knowledge and values for citizenship were securitized, altered and distorted. Therefore, youth’s sense of citizenship is precarious, and presents both social and political anxieties. In Sierra Leone’s post-conflict era, for example, youth are reported to have played a significant role in driving the conflict because many of them were involved in the armed conflicts since childhood, and had known nothing apart from war, a situation that drew the attention of scholars of African Studies, politicians, social workers and African communities in general (Shepler 2010).

In northern Uganda, people experience and exercise citizenship through state and non-state institutions (including traditional values and codes) both of which have considerable effects on day-to-day life. In the traditional setting, chiefs and elders take decisions on matters of importance to their communities. In Sierra Leone, just like in Uganda, youths are viewed as a group of people who are yet to be big men [or women], people who are in waiting for opportunities to marry and start a family, and, therefore, people who are yet to be independent from their parents (Shepler 2010). This implies that youth are supposed to take instructions from elders, and may not act independently regarding issues of importance to their communities.

But, as it has already been noted, the authority of traditional institutions has been weakened by the conflict throughout the Acholi and Lango sub-regions of northern Uganda. During the war, elders did not have the opportunity to teach youth the norms and practices of social order. The famous “wangoo” (fireplace), an evening communal sitting place used to impart norms and values for social responsibility, was disrupted due to curfews, and this has undermined the status and legitimacy of customary leadership. The status of elders in the community was reduced to that of ordinary persons, partly because they had to line up for food like any other camp resident, and, due to their drinking, they no longer led an ‘exemplary life’” (Oosterom 2016a: 83). The actions of the customary authorities were contrary to the norms and expectations of the general public, and the institution itself failed to live up to the expectations of the people, which explains why today’s youth have little or no respect for traditional authorities.

In northern Uganda, the current generation of youth was born and raised during the LRA conflict (1986-2007), and has lived with the realities of displacement, atrocities, abduction and use of boys and girls as child soldiers. With respect to other Ugandan youth, young people in northern Uganda are a conflict-affected, historical cohort. Over 60,000 children (Republic of Uganda 2007) were estimated to have been abducted, and many abducted girls ended up bearing children in captivity. Many of these young people are today's youth, having gone through atrocious experiences and lost out in most aspects of life, including education. Therefore, this generation of youth needs to be transformed into agents for positive change, for a better future.

The conflict the people of northern Uganda endured for two decades complicated relations and influenced the nature and extent of citizen actions. It is likely that this conflict diluted the glue that binds these people together. That is why Ben-Porath (2011: 313) questions the composition of the glue that binds people of the same nationality, particularly whether it is made of emotions, actions, histories, blood or soil, and the central role of war in "the nature, and the consistency of this glue." Narratives during and after the conflict in northern Uganda have framed youth as war icons and victims. In this context, youth came to be seen as not only the embodiment of the conflict that is characterized by violence, defiance and criminality, but also as a generation undergoing the pain of loss, and that should, therefore, be treated as primary beneficiaries in programmes for recovery and development.

As argued earlier, war distorts the pre-war conditions, including patriarchal power, clientage, and the range of discourses that could emerge around youth citizenship and engagement. Likewise, war affects narratives around the extent to which conflict experiences influence youth to reconsider their primary responsibilities and reconstruct new meanings after conflicts. According to Burgess (2005: xiii), as the significance and agency of youth in a contemporary crisis becomes known, "youth engagement spaces need to be examined for their ability to facilitate or undermine opportunities for learning and practice of citizenship, and in particular, how institutions of governance are transforming youth into agents of change for greater equity, social justice and non-violence."

Moreover, as Gibbs et al., (2020a) observe, the advancement in digital technology is transforming the experiences and ways of engaging young people on issues that affect them. Therefore, digital technology cannot be ignored in current efforts to engage youth in northern Uganda, and this calls for re-examination of the traditional approaches as well as the adaptation needed by cultural institution to work with today's

youth. Zhang (2013: 73) observes that development in ICT has led to a generational shift in which the current generation also referred to as the “Net generation” is attracted to the use of the Internet and social media. Yet as Ooseterom (2016) observes, the *wangoo* (fire place) was a central space for elders to teach young people the principles or norms governing community life, and the rights and responsibilities of each community member. With the socio-cultural destruction caused by encampment, and the new pattern of life aided by science and technology, traditional leaders have to cope with a generation of young people who use online platforms to learn and engage with issues at different levels. The exponential increase in the use of digital tools and platforms, as a means of information exchange and communication, particularly amongst children and young people, provides unprecedented opportunities for young people to exercise their freedom of expression and civic rights directly. This is because young people can now bypass intermediaries and avoid the barriers to inclusion related to physical access, age-group hierarchy, authoritative or repressive systems, gender restrictions/discrimination or disability as well as skewed representation and tokenism. The growing recognition and use of online platforms by youth, to exchange ideas, provides an alternative space and voice for young people to engage on issues that affect them, and it helps young people to define citizenship in their own terms (Cuzzocrea and Collins 2020). Moreover, Cuzzocrea and Collins (2020: 413) argue that while online platforms have the potential for meaningful youth engagement in policy-making and social relations, they can be more successfully utilized if youth are engaged in both policy design and research within their communities where the actual issues lie. Therefore, the two authors note, networks have emerged “to unite youth practitioners, policy-makers and researchers, around shared commitments to supporting young people.”

Amidst this digital development, the traditional system has the challenge of ensuring that the digital divide does not exacerbate inequality among youth. The use of social media among young people continues to grow and is increasingly appreciated for promoting young people’s rights to participation, survival, health, development and protection. However, Rowsell, Morrell and Alvermann (2017) observe that the adaption of technology needs to take into consideration the technological gap between the rich and the poor, and between the young and the old, and the implications of these gaps for knowledge production and the future the world imagines. Failure to do so, they argue, could further widen the technological gaps and worsen inequality among youth groups. Moreover, other factors, such as location, gender, access to resources and level of education, have a significant effect on access to digital technology. For example, a study by Badran (2014) on the rural-urban divide among youth in Egypt shows that urban youth dwellers had more access to technology than their rural counterparts.

Therefore, social media risks increasing disparities in access to services and development opportunities for youth, resulting from structural inequities and discriminatory social norms. Youth access to information and technology has added a new layer of inequity acknowledged as the “digital divide” which is not only widening the gap between higher-and lower-income countries, particularly marginalized youth... There should be other means to engage non-digitised youth while ensuring digital “methods and approaches used to help individuals and communities to access and understand digital technologies.” (Pawluczuk 2020: 1). The use of social media is a new reality that cultural institutions need to explore in order to foster the participation of young people in decision-making and rebuilding the future of northern Uganda. Social media has the potential to tap and harness young people’s digital engagement on issues of concern to them, alongside other participatory and traditional media which can broaden creative means of cross-media communication and bring the voices of children and youth into the public mainstream. These opportunities need to be tapped at all levels, beginning with children and youth in their schools and communities, to promote youth participation in peacebuilding at district and national levels.

### 3.6 Public Spaces for Citizen Engagement and Conflict Resolution in Northern Uganda

#### 3.6.1 Local council (LC) system of governance

Uganda introduced administrative decentralisation in 1992 to promote active participation of communities in local governance (Ishii 2017), and the Local Council (LC), formerly called Resistance Council (RC), is the formal institution through which the Ugandan state engages with ordinary citizens. The Resistance Council (RC) system was introduced in 1986 when the National Resistance Army (NRA) of Mr. Museveni came to power, and the LC system came into force when the LRA conflict was ongoing and numerous northern Ugandans were in camps. Therefore, according to Oosterom (2016b), the LC system was the first state institution through which citizens actively participated in their governance. As such, the IDPs returned home to a new administrative system of decentralized governance, and they had to adjust to new governance structures. The decentralised system of governance is provided for in the Constitution of Uganda and the Local Governments Act 1997 (Cap. 243), and it applies to both urban and rural Uganda. In rural areas, the system begins with the “village (LC1) at the bottom, followed by the parish (LC2), the sub-county (LC3), the county (LC4), and the district (LC5) at the top. In urban areas, the system begins with the village (LC1), followed by the ward/parish (LC2), the municipal, town or city division (LC3), municipality (LC4), and the city (LC5) (Ishii 2017: 911).

These structures are responsible for service delivery in their respective communities, and they are managed by officers elected after every five years. The Local Governments Act 1997 includes a provision

that 30% of all the positions in these structures should be reserved for women. (Ishii 2017: 911) argues that the LC system was adapted to a non-party system in Uganda to reduce tendencies to promote ethnic and religious aspirations, and the structure envisages “a bottom-up planning and budgeting cycle”. However, little is said about the space being able to unite people of different gender, age, ethnicity and religious beliefs. Arguably, the re-introduction of a multi-party system of politics has sharpened and reshaped the political divide, with more focus on party supporters and regional preferences. It could also be argued that despite the gender, age, ethnic and religious differences, the LC system provides the space for communities to express their opinions and to inform programmes meant to serve them.

The Local Governments Act 1997 (Cap. 243) also empowers the Ministry of Local Government to formulate and supervise national policy and legislation on local governance, and the executive committee of the district council monitors the implementation of council programmes and NGO activities. The same committee also initiates and formulates policies, which are put before the full council for approval. However, the district councils prepare development plans based on submissions from sub-counties and municipal councils, which in turn prepare those plans based on plans generated from the parish/wards. Ideally, these structures should allow for enough consultation and the production of integrated development plans at all levels of the community as provided for under Section 35(3) of the Local Governments Act 1997 (Cap. 243). At the implementation level, based on felt-needs, communities are mobilised to access different services, and to take responsibility for projects of common interest to them. The Local Council at the village level is the unit closest to communities on important issues that affect them, and it provides an opportunity to understand and act on issues based on the experiences of the local people. Overall, the councils are responsible for service delivery, they provide guidance, and resolve disputes that arise within the councils. In relation to the community, these structures provide an opportunity for local communities to engage with the structures on issues that affect them, including planning, budgeting, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of programmes at different levels. These structures provide different layers for participation and community members have a chance to influence planning and budgeting right from the parish to district levels. As Ishii (2017: 908) notes, this process promotes collaboration and allows for “horizontal interactions among numerous collective actors, and individual participation is likely to occur through collective actors.”

However, Caparas and Agrawal (2016), in their study of the Philippine, argue that the great importance attached to citizen participation in local governance has not translated into active citizen involvement and engagement in governance in developing countries. According to Oosterom (2016b: 83), the level of

citizen engagement in northern Uganda is generally low, and generally, youth are not adequately involved in decision-making on issues affecting them and their communities. Moreover, the formal institutions of governance have been described as lacking the “participatory culture” needed for citizen engagement. A comparative study of the Philippines and Uganda by Ishii (2017) reveals that for community participation to be effective, three conditions need to be met. First, participation has to involve most community members instead of being limited to political, administrative and civil society leaders, and ideas adopted collectively must be drawn from individuals. Second, the leaders must both encourage their community members to participate, and promote partnerships with community-based organisations (CBOs). Third, the value of community participation needs to be understood and owned by the community members themselves because if community members are unaware of the value of their participation, participation may lead to apathy and mistrust of local governance platforms as in the case of Uganda.

### 3.6.2 Cultural institutions and post-conflict peacebuilding in Lango Sub-region

In this section, I explore the ways in which the traditional justice system contributes to peacebuilding by dealing with the wrongs inflicted upon parties to a conflict. I pay particular attention to the accessibility of the system to different population groups, including youths, allowing them to engage with issues that affect them, including conflicts.

From the smallest unit to the head of the entire cultural institution, the traditional structure coordinated its efforts to keep communities in check and balance, and to manage the affairs of communities. Life and work were organised along clan lines, and clans mediated “birth and marriage, property and inheritance. Clan leaders and village elders oversaw traditional rites, many of which were associated with the sacrifice or transfer of livestock, and enforced customary law provisions.” (Atim and Procter 2013: 3). For the Langi, the traditional system suffered a dual tragedy: the LRA insurgency came on top of the conflicts with armed Karimojong rustlers who have depleted the cattle herds of Lango, and continue to violate the rights of the Langi community. Because cattle play a central role in Langi livelihoods and socio-cultural life, including the traditional justice system, the loss of cattle undermined the traditional means of livelihood, social life and the traditional justice system. As a result, the ability of clan leaders and elders to perform rituals associated with sacrifice and enforcement of customary, justice practices was also undermined. In addition, conversion to Christianity meant that some of the traditional practices, including those associated with the justice system, were abandoned, making it necessary for the Langi to resort to

improvisation in order to deal with the unrepresented atrocities associated with the LRA insurgency and the Karimojong raids. As Atim and Procter (2013) observe, the traditional system has gone through a lot of changes over the years, following the influence of Christianity on some aspects of the traditional systems that were incompatible with Christian values.

In the past, unlike today, the Lango institution did not have centralised authority. In addition, the office of the paramount chief (*Won Nyaci*), the highest office in the Lango cultural institution (*Te Kwaro Lango*) was traditionally temporary and occupied by a martial leader in times of war. Actually, the different Lango clans only came together to achieve a particular, and occasional, common goal, usually associated with a raid or a war against a common enemy. As a result, grassroots or ordinary Langi do not have a real connection with *Won Nyaci* whose emergence is seen as a colonial imposition. Moreover, the office of the *Won Nyaci* has failed to deliver desired outcomes regarding such issues as compensation for victims of Karimojong raids and the LRA insurgency, and it has been exposed as ill-equipped, biased and not serving the interests of the common Langi.

As Atim and Procter (2013) aptly observe, the existence of a traditional system is premised on conflict resolution and peacebuilding between and among communities. The exercise of justice entailed knowledge of who the perpetrators and victims were, and remedies were provided. While the LRA and Government soldiers are arguably perpetrators, they are not necessarily willing to take responsibility for their roles, or the actual individual perpetrators remain unknown or are at large. This makes it impossible to implement the traditional justice system and restore the much-needed social ties and harmony in the affected communities. Field research findings revealed that most victims and their respective community members had limited knowledge of the role traditional mechanisms could play in addressing crimes and violations committed in northern Uganda. Others did not know the provisions within the Juba Peace agreement, relating to the role of Lango traditional leaders and their justice system. The negative perception of *Won Nyaci* is also compounded by the fact that traditional leaders lack the capacity, including knowledge, skills, and other resources, required to competently adjudicate crimes committed by the LRA and Government of Uganda.

These changes have had implications for the community, and while elders/leaders were not necessarily elected, they were respected by virtue of their position as elders. However, the trend has changed over time, and traditional leadership positions are now elective, and often with some level of recognition or interference from the government, a situation that reduces the positions to the level or status of any elective position, subject to terms and conditions of service as well as popularity. Not surprisingly, the Lango



cultural institution has become a subject of discussion over the past decade or so, and its relevance to constructively addressing issues that affect communities, especially dispute resolution, healing and reconciliation in Lango, has been questioned. Generally, the LRA conflict has affected the “parameters and practices of traditional justice mechanisms within Lango sub-region” (Atim and Procter 2013: 3). As Oosterom (2016a) argues, unlike the old generation, the new generation of young people might not have felt the real value of cultural institutions in their lives. Therefore, as the cultural institutions rebrand themselves, they have the challenge of recovering the legitimacy and respect they enjoyed before the conflict. However, over the past decade, a number of cultural institutions, including that of the Alur of West Nile, *Ker Kwaro Acholi* and *Te Kwaro Lango*, have been entangled in some conflicts and disputes, including land disputes, political interference and rivalry over leadership positions. While the conflicts within the cultural institutions are beyond the scope of this work, the current standing of cultural institutions has a bearing on the ability of communities to recover, heal and reconcile. *Te Kwaro Lango*, which is central to this study area, has struggled to maintain legitimacy among its subjects for the last decade. This is mainly due to three factors: rivalry and factions in the leadership of the institution; political interference from the central government; differing or contradictory interpretations of the traditional leader’s terms and conditions of services; and frequent and unsuccessful recourse to courts of law and mediation from both political and NGO groups to resolve disputes in the institution once viewed as responsible for harmony and reconciliation among the Langi. In the opinion of a political leader, Molly Kia, the Chairperson of the Dokolo District NRM Women, “I am not in any way interested in those paramount chiefs who mean nothing to the people. Me, I am interested in the affairs of my father’s clan and of the clan I am married in.” (Musinguzi, August 15, 2018).

The above testimony reveals the inability of the institution to live up to its values and expectations, and to inspire confidence in young people and their respective communities, and yet the institution is seen as that which connects with the reality of the local people. Amidst such challenges, the cultural institutions sought to exert themselves in the process to attain justice and reconciliation in the LRA conflict. According to Vorhölter (2016), the post-war period has generated conflicting views on whether peacebuilding efforts should be based on the traditional norms and values of conflicting parties or on western ideals. The need for the choice is based on the dichotomy between the young and the old generations, with the young generation tending towards western ideals, especially given the failure of the traditional practices, and the benefits of western values. Unlike their young counterparts, the old generation seeks to re-traditionalise society by evoking past glories in an essentially patriarchal dispensation in which different gender and age groups performed culturally pre-determined roles, and

young people deferred to elders. Baguma (2012) observes that the Lira Declaration signed by cultural and religious leaders from Lango, Acholi, Teso and West Nile, following ten years of the Juba Peace Talks, was attempt by the old generation to highlight the commonalities in the traditional justice system as a basis for endorsing traditional justice practices as a potential means of bringing about forgiveness, healing and reconciliation.

Unfortunately, the role of ICC in northern Uganda divided the general population over the possibility of forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. While the cultural institutions opted for traditional approaches to justice and reconciliation, the ICC opted for indictment of top LRA commanders to deliver justice. The failure of the cultural institutions to agree with the ICC further alienated the cultural institutions from the international community which was not convinced of the effectiveness of traditional peacebuilding approaches. Moreover, according to Ongora (5 February 2021), as the cultural institutions grapple with the effect of the war, the recent conviction of Dominic Ongwen (on 4 February 2021) on “61 out 70 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity” opens old scars and rekindles memories of the LRA atrocities, with communities expressing mixed reactions. For some, the verdict is not only a recognition of the atrocities inflicted on the people of northern Uganda, but also justice for the victims of northern Uganda, setting a set a good precedent for future perpetrators. Yet others observed that the verdict was one-sided and ignored the government side that was equally involved in committing atrocities against the civilian population. Those who did not welcome the verdict argued that because Ongwen was abducted as a child and used in hostilities, and suffered just like any other child, the verdict amounted to victimisation of Ongwen and his clan, noting that there should have been space for forgiveness so people can heal. But how can traditional leaders work within the current reality to foster forgiveness and reconciliation?

However, it is argued that while the Juba peace process delivered physical peace in Uganda, it did not deliver justice and reconciliation, largely because it focused on the principles of truth-telling, confession, mediation and reparation. Moreover, the ICC is also seen as complicating an already precarious justice system, having come in with a justice system in competition with the traditional justice systems of northern Uganda. That is why the ICC is also accused of undermining the legitimacy of traditional leaders and distorting the tried and tested traditional justice systems of northern Uganda, that would have easily led to community recovery and reconciliation.

The conflict had far-reaching consequences for the traditional justice system beyond its ability to provide leadership in conflict-resolution: it also eroded cultural norms and led to the disruption of normal

economic activities during displacement. As Oosterom (2016a) has argued, the weakening of the traditional institutions means that the young generation does not know or respect those institutions. In reality, neither are traditional institutions immune to problems of bias and corruption in dealing with issues that affect their communities. While the 2008 survey of governance institutions showed that persons of all age groups trust cultural institutions much more than they do other political, legal or State structures, particularly in northern Uganda, some observers have warned against the failure of traditional system to win public trust and assure justice. Yet, while the customary courts hold great potential for ensuring social stability, they have to rely on government and donor support. The inability of traditional institutions to meet their needs without external support, and their failure to command respect, continue to influence their ability to control and manage community affairs transparently and effectively.

### 3.6.3 Civilian justice systems in Uganda

Customary and statutory systems are the two significant structures within the justice system that regulate land administration and justice in Uganda, and they were recognized by the 1995 Constitution of Uganda and the 1998 Land Act. The Constitution and the Land Act were notable changes that occurred during displacement, and to which former IDPs had to adjust. For the first time in the history of Uganda, the 1995 Constitution and the 1998 Land Act legally recognised customary land ownership, and gave legal force to customary rules and procedures of land tenure, including the right of customary authorities to determine land disputes. Because this legal recognition did not exist at the time of mass displacement, internally displaced persons (IDPs) returned to a new legal reality. Most of the land in northern Uganda is owned under customary tenure. Therefore, this recognition means that customary authorities have the right to determine land disputes.

However, Government policy has not adequately catered for administration of customary land tenure. No support has been given to institutions of customary tenure and there is a lack of policy, or even procedures, for support of the administration of land under customary tenure. There is a policy and legal vacuum on how the State and customary systems are supposed to work together, and very little funding has been made available to support customary land administration. However, though lack of funds is always the first excuse for failure of service delivery, the problem runs far deeper, and includes corruption, limited financial and technical capacities of cultural leadership, and legal and practical discordancy between customary and statutory land tenure systems. There are some signs that, for the first time, people are beginning to take customary tenure seriously, though the attitude of most policy makers and academics is almost uniformly negative to what they see as a 'primitive' tenure system, compared to

the ‘modern’, usually western system of freehold. Their attitudes are, unfortunately, based more on ignorance than analysis: it is still normal for land ‘experts’ to assert that customary law does not allow women to own land, despite the clearly written statement to contrary in the Acholi and Langi ‘land code (Contained in the Principles, Practices, Rights and Responsibilities (PPRR)). It is equally common for the same so-called experts to claim that the customary land tenure system is responsible for land fragmentation, despite the fact that this has more to do with land use and population growth than with tenure. Through Land and Equity Movement in Uganda (LEMU), a local NGO committed to land rights in the north and east parts of Uganda, principles and practices that facilitate access to land for communities have been documented to guide communities, traditional leaders and courts to enforce customs and traditions that uphold the rights of communities and promote customary land tenure in accordance with the recognition by the 1995 Constitution (LEMU 2008).

There are three (civilian) justice systems with a legal mandate within Uganda: the judiciary, the Local Council (LC) courts system, and the customary systems. The Local Council (LC) courts system begins at the village levels and ends at the sub-county level, under the Ministry of Local Government (regulated by the Local Council Court Act, and associated regulations (2006). For its part, the customary systems, whose legal authority over land derives from S3 and S27 of the Land Act, is mainly active in the greater northern Uganda. In theory, the LC court system comes under the supervision of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) system, through the Chief Magistrate’s Court, but this does not happen in practice, nor is it mandated, as the law only states that the Chief Magistrate’s Court ‘may’, rather than “shall”, exercise powers of supervision. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the Chief Magistrate’s Court does not exercise those powers. The distinction between the customary system on the one hand and the two statutory systems on the other is both legal and ‘sociological’. For example, legally, customary court system is not functionally linked to the statutory judiciary, and customary land courts have limited capacity to enforce their rulings. Although the two systems are linked in that cases go from the sub-county court to Chief Magistrate’s court, they should be considered distinct for several reasons. First, in practice, the linkages are unstructured in that cases can go on appeal, though ‘referral’ or as parallel fresh cases. Secondly, the functionaries of the statutory legal system have no respect the customary land court system. Finally, the laws they follow in practice are different. While the LC courts will incorporate some principles of customary law, Magistrates are less likely to do so. The LCs have no means of enforcing judgement without an order from the MoJ system; the rural population perceives the two systems differently, regarding the statutory legal system as biased, corrupt and time-consuming, and thus preferring the cultural which they understand better, and relate to more easily; while the LC courts fall

under the Ministry of Local Government, they are supposed to be supervised by the MoJ system most of whose functionaries do not consider the LC courts as courts at all; and the customary and statutory legal systems are each self-governing. In practice, the MoJ system does not even attempt to supervise or support the LC system most of whose judgements are struck down on appeal because of numerous procedural failures.

There is some degree of confusion over the justice system as it relates to land, with all three systems involved. According to the Land Act (S3 and S27), customary land is to be governed by the customary laws of each people, with disputes determined by the customary authorities. However, the Land Act also stipulates that the LC2 court (i.e. the LC2 executive committee sitting as a court) is the first court for land disputes on unregistered or untitled land, with appeal to the sub-county court and then to Chief Magistrates. In practice, it is normal to find customary land cases being brought as fresh cases to the sub-county court and the Grade 1 Magistrate's Court, although it is unclear why these courts accept to hear these cases rather than refer them back to lower courts. The Grade 1 Magistrate's Court is the first court for cases involving registered land. It is equally unclear how LCs or the State judiciary are supposed to determine disputes using a legal code (customary law) that they do not necessarily know.

This confusion takes place in a context of almost total absence of the rule of law. There are many reasons for the confusion in the way these structures function. These include impunity at all levels, corruption, lack of capacity and huge court-case backlogs, lack of technical competence at lower levels, weak procedures and the design and management of the system by people out of touch with the realities of the rural poor. Accessing the justice system at all is impossible for many, for reasons of cost, intimidation, ignorance of land rights and related legal procedures, and the fear of the social (and hence economic) consequences. Moreover, going to the LC or sub-county court instead of the clan council can be seen as a rejection of one's community (and 'washing one's dirty linen in public'), and for people who rely on their communities economically and socially – i.e. the 'weak' and most vulnerable to land grabbing – that is a very difficult step to take.

#### *3.6.3.1 The Local Council (LC) Courts in Uganda*

Experience from local communities in northern Uganda reveals that the LC courts function ineffectively, are corrupt and biased, and charge excessive fees either for personal benefit or to fund the LC office. Moreover, many LC courts do not follow laid-down procedures, do not base their judgements on either evidence or the law, and are unable to enforce their judgements. In addition, LC2 courts are not adequately funded and equipped to hear cases. Effectively, the LC2 court functions more like non-

binding arbitration. For example, when one party to a case does not accept the judgement, the LC2 court normally 'refers' the case, putting the onus on the complainant to take a fresh case to a higher court. Worse still, in such cases, the fees paid to the LC2 courts are not refunded. The costs of going to higher courts, particularly Magistrate's Courts, are beyond most people, causing them to drop actions. 'Costs' include fees for filing cases, and transport, multiplied many times over by successive adjournments. Moreover, the costs of enforcing judgements (court orders, court brokers, police, etc.), on average UGX 500,000 or USD 130, are met by the winner, and are simply beyond the means of an average Ugandan. Although, in theory, these costs may be recoverable through court, they still have to be paid upfront first. No wonder ordinary people have little trust in the court system, and almost always attribute any legal defeat to corruption, especially where they lose either on a legal technicality or because they failed to make their case properly. This context needs to be stressed because it presents an obstacle to any intervention in favour of land rights: how can these rights be upheld in a situation without the rule of law? Interventions to improve law enforcement through the court system, or legal aid, are unlikely to succeed.

#### *3.6.3.2 The customary judicial system*

The customary judicial system is also weak, and during displacement, it was side-lined despite the fact that land disputes occurred even in camps. As a result, the system has lost respect. The erosion of cultural norms and the absence of normal economic activities in the camps produced a young generation that not know or respect the system. Moreover, the customary judicial system is not immune to bias and corruption, although it has not been known to charge excessive fees so far. Although customary law is often regarded as being very discriminatory of women, this is not the case in northern Uganda where customary principles guarantee everyone's right to land. Land is usually owned by families rather than individuals, implying that men have no more right to treat land as individual property than women do. Moreover, in northern Uganda, women can be family heads. For example, a widow assumes all the rights and responsibilities of her late husband, and her in-laws have no claims on her family land at all. Even though widow-inheritance is still widely practiced, despite frequent claims to the contrary, the levirate does not have any claims on the widow's land (Adoko, Akin and Knight 2012).

#### *3.6.4 Implications of legal systems for peacebuilding*

The foregoing discussion reveals significant facts. First, on account of changes in the way of life of the people in northern Uganda, partly due to the LRA war, and given the weaknesses in the customary legal system, most people no longer regard the system as effective as it used to be although they still prefer it to the statutory one. Second, most people regard the statutory legal system as tediously cumbersome,

relatively inaccessible, biased and corrupt. As a result, some well-placed people are now taking advantage of the weaknesses of both legal systems to fraudulently acquire property, including land, and commit other crimes, with impunity. Finally, when victims of such fraud and crime find themselves helpless before the law, they often resort to illegal means, including witchcraft and violence, in pursuit of redress. This may explain the high crime rates discussed above.

### 3.7 Militarized Lockdowns, Fear and Violence in the COVID-19 Pandemic Response

In 2020, the world experienced the COVID-19 virus, followed by government measures to halt its spread. The COVID-19 has disrupted normal community life, made it difficult for many households to manage many aspects of socioeconomic life, and exposed layers of the divide in society. According to Peterman et al., (2020), like civil unrest and disaster, the pandemic presents an environment that exacerbates or sparks diverse forms of violence against women, children and other groups of people. Globally, the measures taken in response to the pandemic have reportedly led to increased violence in private and social spheres of life. In Uganda, the measures are characterized by militarized lockdowns and gross violation of basic human rights. Coinciding with the general elections in 2021, the measures have been used as a pretext to restrict spaces for the opposition candidates to campaign. Similarly, donations from donors and individuals, and government budgetary allocations have apparently been used to enrich individuals and for political campaigns. Therefore, the COVID-19 measures and their implications have renewed questions regarding the effectiveness of peacebuilding programmes in facilitating the transition from armed conflict to peace, recovery and development in northern Uganda, and what more can be done to strengthen peacebuilding efforts.

In the post-conflict setting of northern Uganda, communities that are fresh from war are reminded of the anguish of violence they went through for decades. The use of the military to determine political decisions, in an attempt to resolve political contradictions, capture and retain power in Uganda, has led to numerous conflicts since the post-independence era. As Wilmot (June 26, 2020) observes, the tendency to authoritarianism and resistance, in which the government attacks starving women and youth with impunity for protesting in demand for food that they have been promised but have not received, exists because the government failed to deliver on its promise. Moreover, in places where the government kept its promise, it delivered food to a few households and individuals. Paradoxically, while fatal COVID-19-positive cases have been relatively few, the autocratic measures to contain the spread of the virus have been fatal. This is because pregnant women and sick people could no longer access health centres to get professional care for basic curable diseases, like malaria; poor people could no longer feed

themselves; and inadequate amounts of food were discriminately distributed to government supporters, and used to persuade opposition districts to vote for the party in power. To make matters worse, opposition politicians were not allowed to distribute food to their starving communities and were threatened with murder charges if they tried to intervene. In northern Uganda, as Wilmot (June 26, 2020) notes, after nonviolent action out of desperation propelled Gulu and Lira Districts to distribute food to sex workers who had threatened to expose the identities of their clients, especially government officials. Securing permission to travel to hospital during curfew hours, for example, was a nightmare for most people, and it is estimated that more Ugandans died from the harsh lockdown measures than from COVID-19. As Wilmot (June 26, 2020) argues, the COVID-19 merely exposed the underlying inequality and militarized approach to issues in the country.

The virus and associated measures, including lockdown and stay-at-home, impacted significantly on people, health systems, education, food security and movement, and exerted high pressure on poor and fragile communities. Moreover, the pandemic hindered the ability of health institution to address other diseases. The COVID-19 measures added unprecedented layers of complexity and challenges, rendering vulnerable communities even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The unemployed and poor, young people who now have difficulty coping with loss of income and livelihood, are further exposed to different forms of violence and risks, including exploitation and abuse, neglect, sexual violence, prostitution and/or survival sex. In some cases, prostitution and/or survival sex are reportedly being used as negative coping mechanisms during the COVID-19. As a result of the anti-COVID-19 measures, most vulnerable persons could not afford basic needs of life. The pandemic has added new challenges of frequent washing of hands, wearing masks and social distancing to living with the daily challenges of accessing food, shelter and medicine.

Additionally, while the pandemic is affecting all people and communities, unfortunately, it is especially hard on young people, who are unemployed or lack funds, and whose families are unable to provide them with the support they need. Even those with some support from their families have faced ongoing difficulties to access the necessary technology, including free and reliable Internet and laptops to follow online teaching or to study. Similarly, online and offline spaces, where young people can leverage and contribute to campaigns, access decision-makers and connect to thousands of other young people, have been restricted by COVID-19 measures and other limitations. As a result, some young people cannot connect with other like-minded young people, or do so effectively. Referencing a Brookings Institution report, Mao (2020) indicates that less than 25 per cent of children in African countries have access to



remote learning compared to an access rate of 90 per cent for children in developed countries. While people elsewhere increasingly rely on the Internet for work, learning and other activities, most young people in northern Uganda have no access to the Internet, further limiting their ability to develop. The full impact of the pandemic is likely going to be felt in the years to come, with the possibility of poor learners dropping out of school, thus putting an end to their hopes and aspirations for the future, and the possible impact they would have had in their respective communities as ‘future’ leaders and change agents. For Mao (2020), the prospect of losing out in learning is scary for life, and its impact on the future of learners may be irreversible.

The crisis also tested the ability of community members to support one another. Many well-wishers, including religious leaders, provided support to the less privileged in society. This was in the form of assorted donations and helping the poor in their various needs, including medication. Might this crisis and the spirit of giving/helping it resuscitated alert the general public to the need to address inequality and nurture the attitudes, values and behaviour for a fair, just and peaceful society? While the Government of Uganda allocated itself huge sums of money from taxpayers, and has gained access to aid funding and individual donations to fight the COVID-19, the effect of the fund is not felt on the ground, and risks undermining the efficacy of the responses as well as dent government legitimacy. Indeed, the level of misery in northern Uganda has exposed the ineffectiveness and unequal access to the services related to COVID-19. National data in Uganda confirms that northern Uganda has high incidents of poverty (Atekyereza 2014). According to the Government of Uganda report (Republic of Uganda 2007: vii), the monthly per capita income for war-affected northern Uganda is between UGX 15,300 (about USD 4) and UGX 17,500 (about USD 4.6) compared to the national average of UGX 47,500 (about USD 12.5). Similarly, literacy levels in northern Uganda range from 38% to 60% compared to 70% for the entire country. Moreover, the region leads in annual crime rates and is, therefore, highly vulnerable to the COVID-19 measures and their implications in Uganda.

Writing about the nature and scale of the crisis created by COVID-19, Ewing (2020) argues that the burden of the crisis is not shared equally and it is upon the government to empower the less fortunate and to account to the communities. Despite the millions allocated to the COVID-19 response, people continue to starve and fail to access basic services in Lira District. This has raised questions as to whether the fund is being put to its intended use in a country where misappropriation of public funds is commonplace. The COVID-19 pandemic has therefore increased the burden that communities have to bear as individuals and households, including financially sound ones, lose their sources of livelihood. These multiple

stressors generated by the pandemic reveal additional gaps in the recovery and development efforts for northern Uganda, and they are likely to undermine social cohesion and lead to conflicts.

As communities become more aware of the large sum of money that the Government has received, and of the promised but undelivered public services, people are beginning to suspect that the government is using the pandemic to control a greater portion of aid-funding, gain greater access to public resources, and control public spaces to its advantage. For example, the selective distribution of food items to the population of only two anti-government districts of Kampala and Wakiso out of the 126 districts of Uganda was perceived as a political move by the government to win the support of in the then impending general elections. At the same time, the drastic implementation of the stay-at-home measure by the government security forces, coupled with deep uncertainty about the future, spawned violations of human rights, distress, and denial of essential services to particular groups of people, including pregnant mothers and sick people. In Lira Municipality, dozens of fruit vendors, mainly poor women, were brutally arrested and summarily imprisoned without due consideration of the need for them to fend for their families and their understandable inability to understand the government directives on Covid-19 and the lockdown. The unfortunate consequences of the lockdown measures were partly captured in newspaper article headings: “*COVID-19: Mother delivers baby in a toilet on her way to hospital*”; “*Delayed treatment puts cancer patients at risk*”; “*Over 3,600 arrested for flouting presidential directives*”; and “*COVID 19: HRAPF worried about human rights abuse*”.

Violence and harassment have characterized the enforcement of the COVID-19 lockdown measures which are also being used to curtail the freedom of expression against the often brutal manner in which the COVID-19 measures are being enforced. According to The Guardian Newspaper (2020), arbitrary arrest, beating and shooting of civilians began immediately with the restriction measures. The paper carries a photograph of a woman badly burnt by hot cooking oil after a police officer kicked the saucepan filled with hot oil that she was using to make chips. But brutality by law enforcement officers is not a new phenomenon in Uganda. In northern Uganda’s two decades of conflict, the military presence pervaded the entire region, and the use of force on the civilian population has persisted since then. The use of violence while arresting poor women would appear to confirm the community and media suspicion that the government has resorted to violence to create fear and silence community voices for positive change in order to achieve compliance and social order.

Similar force was used to restrict the movement of opposition candidates as they tried to distribute food to their constituents during the COVID-19 lockdown, and canvass for votes in the 2020/2021 general

electoral campaigns in Uganda. According to Sengooba (08 December 2020), in Uganda, the electoral process attracts the highest level of police brutality against the opposition political parties and violent clashes between police and the civilian population. With the added pretext of the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, the electoral violence reached an unprecedented peak, with 54 people killed and several others injured in just two days of protests following the arrest and incarceration of opposition presidential candidates. Routinely, the police justify the use of violence as their duty to enforce the law and maintain order while some civilians claim their freedom can only be achieved through bloodshed. (Human Rights Watch 2021; Draku 04 December 2020a).

As a result of the violence visited upon civilians and the threats that followed, many people must have feared for their lives. A survey by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), a non-profit American organisation, notes that it was highly probable that the voter turn-up in northern Uganda would be low. While, nationally, 66% of the respondents were very likely to vote, in northern Uganda only 56% of the respondents were in the same category. During the actual elections, this prediction turned out to be true, especially in Lira District. According to Daily Monitor (21 January 2021), Lira District recorded a very low voter turn-out during the LC elections, reportedly due to lack of transparency voters had witnessed during the presidential and parliamentary elections. Earlier, a survey by the same organisation had indicated that six out of every 10 Ugandans were worried about violence during the elections. Indeed, 59% of the 1,000 Ugandan respondents aged 18 years and above, who participated in the survey, were concerned about election violence while 18 per cent were “somewhat concerned”. (Daily Monitor, 21 January 2021, Draku 04 December 2020b).

Across the country, the overwhelming majority of participants are young people, often acting in confrontation with, and targeted by, the police. The IFES report highlights youth and opposition political-party members to be at a higher risk of electoral violence in Uganda than other population categories, such as civil society activists, minorities, women, journalists and persons with disabilities. Moreover, violence against journalists in the line of duty was a characteristic feature of the 2021 general elections. According to the Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-U 2021), several journalists were attacked by security personnel, one of the attacks occurring when the main opposition presidential candidate was delivering a petition to a human rights body in Kampala.

This suggests that calls for the use of peaceful strategies, including dialogue, education, negotiation and mobilization, during the elections and the enforcement of the COVID-19 lockdown guidelines, had not been heeded by government operatives. Moreover, similar violence was also manifesting itself at the

household level in the form of domestic violence. In May 2020, an article on Television website, NTV Uganda, indicated that domestic violence was growing and spiralling out of control. A call, by a coalition of human rights organizations, for a reduction in domestic violence was echoed by political and religious leaders. For instance, the Honourable Speaker of the Ugandan Parliament urged men to treat their wives with dignity, “*Kadaga appeals to men to renew love during lockdown*”. This call was an indication of the rising level of domestic violence across the country. Without producing systematic data or evidence, human rights organizations and various media outlets (Peterman et al., 2020) reported a steady increase in violence, including domestic violence. The lockdown restrictions heightened the risk of domestic violence, including intimate-partner. A study by Gibbs et al., (2020b: 1) reveals that intimate-partner violence is driven by “poverty, patriarchal privilege, and the normative use of violence in interpersonal relationships.” Crises, such as disease outbreaks, affect women and girls differently from men and boys, and in ways that place women and girls at higher risk of gender-based violence (GBV), particularly in contexts where gender inequality is already pronounced. Because women and girls are care-givers, their vulnerabilities may also exacerbate the risk of COVID-19 infection. As COVID-19 intensified, vulnerabilities of women and girls, men and boys were projected to increase, which would further lead to higher risks of GBV.

As Peterman et al., (2020) have observed, the lockdown measures have placed victims of GBV closer to the perpetrators, and limited the victims’ ability to seek external support, as well as undermined young people’s coping mechanisms. The rise in the level of gender-based violence and other forms of violence due to COVID-19 lockdown measures has refocused attention on violence against women and girls, and young people, and exposed the ineffectiveness of GBV interventions to change attitudes and values for peace in families and communities in general. The surge in GBV is a reflection of some of the negative aspects of patriarchy. Gibbs and et al., (2020b: 2) argue that the risk factor lies in the social constructs which include male superiority and a culture of violence in conflicts and in the enforcement of hierarchy. The entire situation highlights renewed psychological problems, such as anxiety and depression, that beset the community. Moreover, for a community recovering from conflict, the pandemic and its consequences have exposed the region’s deep-seated problems. These problems range from lack of basic healthcare to inequality and the inadequacy of existing infrastructure and systems to address people’s needs and to cope with emerging challenges as well as the community tendency to use violent means to solve conflicts. It is clear, however, that most cases of GBV remain unreported or undetected due to the lack of safe, ethical and quality response services, and of stigmatization, reprisal, and lack of access to appropriate information on seeking help. At the same time, maintaining the health and wellbeing of GBV

workers, like contributing to rigorous efforts to stop the pandemic, is of critical concern, and present a challenge to traditional modes of GBV service delivery.

Reflecting on the conflict dynamics during the two decades in northern Uganda, Angom (2018:4) observes, “Men developed insecure gender identities as they found it difficult to fulfil their traditional roles as breadwinners and protectors of their families. They meted out their anger and frustration against women, sometimes in the form of beatings and rape.” For some categories of people, patriarchal gender norms aggravate the risk of exploitation and sexual violence against females. Writing about domestic and family violence, Bradley (2018) argues that there is always high and consistent violence against women and children in post-conflict societies. She adds that an end to armed conflict is not necessarily an end to violence for women, but indeed a precipitate to escalate violence (especially domestic and family violence) in the private sphere. As Bradley (2018) aptly observes, for northern Uganda, as in other regions emerging from conflict and trying to build peace, there is still a tendency for men who were once exposed to violence to continue making home a battle field and failing to adjust their behaviour to peace time. According to Bradley (2018: 125), “One study examined veterans in post-conflict Burundi, and found that 60% reported at least one incident of violence against their children, and 36% reported an incident of violence against an intimate partner.” This clearly indicates that post-conflict environments provide a conducive environment for gender-based violence, and undermine the capacity of victims to report experiences of sexual and gender-based violence. In line with this argument, Schulz (2020) found that while men and boys had survived conflict-related sexual violence, they had no opportunities or safe spaces to share their experiences.

### 3.8 Conclusion: Violence and Realizing the Culture of Peace

This chapter has reviewed literature on the experiences of violence in a post-conflict situation. I have demonstrated, using the case of northern Uganda, that, contrary to popular assumptions, violence occurs in post-conflict situations. While much of the available literature associates violence mainly with war or armed conflict, some literature associates the end of war/armed conflict with the end of violence, thus ignoring other forms of violence embedded in formal and informal structures of society. Although these other forms of violence are often normalised or unnoticed, their impact acts as a barrier to building and sustaining peace in areas emerging from conflict. Viewing violence beyond armed conflict is significant because it provides a lens through which to examine the current situation of negative peace in northern Uganda, and in particular the manner in which communities construct violence, and the narratives they apply to different forms of violence and to categories of people, especially young people, in relation to

violence. Integrating empirical data helps to shed light on the lived realities of conflict-affected communities and has implications for policy response and scholarship.

Evidence from northern Uganda shows that people are living with the legacy of war and violence, and are yet to recover from that legacy. The conflicts in northern Uganda have not only affected the community adversely, they have also challenged the ability of both formal and informal institutions of governance to rethink some of their approaches to citizens' engagement and peacebuilding. For instance, while the traditional cultural institutions were highly respected among their subjects before the conflict, their authority has been challenged during and after the conflict, and they are struggling to remain relevant to the new generation in a situation of a crisis, and to cope with the rapidly changing world of technology.

These experiences, and the discourses around them, tell us that violence may be normalised unless communities are made aware of, and are supported to address, them, recovery, healing and reconciliation may not occur, and a relapse into violence may be imminent. The COVID-19 phenomenon is a good example of a trigger to violence in a society already vulnerable to violence, and of how various forms of violence can be aggravated in a post-conflict situation. These experiences shed new light on the preparedness of the region to deal with a crisis in a constructive, peaceful and sustainable manner. On the basis of the violence and related issues emanating from the COVID-19 responses and implications, five conclusions can be drawn. First, the use of force to achieve compliance has dominated Uganda's history, and unless non-violent attitudes and values are developed, violence will remain a standard tool to address differences and the general population will act more appropriately only when force is applied. This would be contrary to a culture of peace, and it would perpetuate and normalize violence. Second, the rise in GBV incidents reveals that intolerance is heightened among families and communities faced with unprecedented situations. Third, the sudden fall into abject poverty, the health crisis, and other challenges reveal the level of vulnerability of a region emerging from conflict, and the need for peacebuilding programmes to respond to the region's challenges and needs in a more comprehensive and sustainable manner. Fourth, corruption and lack of trust in public institutions hinder Uganda's efforts to address insecurity, development challenges, and any crisis. Finally, limited involvement or lack of a participatory approach in planning and management of COVID-19 measures is a reflection of the restricted spaces for citizens' voices and lack of accountability in the use of public resources, an important aspect for youth engagement.

The analysis of the impact of COVID-19 and violent responses highlights the importance of building a resilient society, and of the need to transition from immediate rescue measures to a policy response that supports recovery and development of the region. Luedke, Lewis and Rodriguez (2017:1) recognize the need for policy responses to address, for example, conflict-related sexual exploitation beyond accountability to include “gender inequality and the political, social, and economic vulnerabilities of civilian populations” in post-conflict situations. This approach would enable interventions to respond to multiple vulnerabilities of communities in the short and long-term. In spite of all the shortcomings of the COVID-19 response, some individuals, private sector actors, international donors and government departments demonstrated a spirit of service, good will and support to humanity, in efforts to alleviate suffering during the COVID-19. These gestures demonstrate human compassion and love for others. But these were non-enforceable obligations based on compassionate actions, patience and love towards individuals and groups. As Mathikithela and Wood (2019) observe, families and homes provide the first space for children for nurturing the values of democracy, civic participation, and the culture of justice and compassion. These values are important in fostering a culture of peace and non-violence. Therefore, to learn the sense and practice of active citizenship, different spaces need to enable conversations and actions that humanise the other. However, as young people experience unprecedented levels of violence and injustice, the situation becomes ripe for those who seek to mobilise young people around grievances, ethnic identity, and similar issues (Shapiro 2010). Moreover, these values need to be internalised and translated into practical experiences of young people and an environment that does not glorify war and violence.

## CHAPTER FOUR: YOUTH PARTICIPATION: AN OVERVIEW OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

### 4.1 Introduction

Participation in general is a fundamental human right enshrined in the Ugandan Constitution and international frameworks, including the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) of 1989 which guarantees individuals and groups the right to engage in public affairs and on issues that affect them. Moreover, Article 38 of the Constitution of Uganda provides for the right to participate and influence public and government policies, and Article 41 provides for the right to access to relevant information as a precondition for participation. These provisions are further reinforced by the policy of decentralization that localizes operations to district local governments, creating opportunities for ordinary citizens to participate efficiently, effectively and transparently (ISER 2018: x).

Therefore, decentralisation provides a framework for inclusive citizen participation in local government structures, and an opportunity to enhance participation of often invisible groups, such as non-organised youth. The need to revitalise local governments, and by extension citizen participation, was envisaged in the framework of the PRDP (Republic of Uganda 2011) under the fourth objective on peacebuilding and reconciliation. The aim was to strengthen local governance and informal leadership structures, and enhance the socioeconomic reintegration of ex-combatants as a sub-category of conflict-affected youth. Government and NGO actors have invested resources in peacebuilding interventions meant to benefit youth. These include, among others, government-directed programmes for youth, as well as specific NGO programmes driven by, and focussing on, youth.

However, the impact these programmes have had on youth is not clear. Neither is it known whether or not the programmes have helped youth to define what Burgess (2005) refers to as youth's rights and obligations as subjects and citizens. And yet, such programmes should build the capacity of youth to challenge standards imposed by customary and formal governance structures, by transforming youth into agents of change for greater equity, social justice and non-violence.

### 4.2 Framework for Youth Participation in Peacebuilding

The UN Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding (UN-IANYD 2014), outlines four interrelated approaches to youth participation in the aftermath of conflicts. These four approaches (human rights-based, economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural) provide a comprehensive lense with which to view youth participation in a post-conflict setting. The inter-connected nature of the combined approaches allows for a holistic analysis of a post-conflict situation like that of northern



Uganda, thus minimizing the risks associated with a one-dimensional approach to youth participation. The four approaches also help in identifying specific areas where participation requires reinforcement.

#### 4.2.1 Human rights-based approach

The right of young people to participation is provided for in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the World Programme of Action on Youth. Participation as a right includes exercising other rights, including civil and political rights, and economic, social and cultural rights, and entails engaging youth in designing programmes and policies on issues that affect them. Such an endeavour as (Efuribe et al., 2020) argue, provides the opportunity for young people to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for them to effectively participate in development activities, within an environment that is conducive to the amplification of their voices. Villa-Torres and Svanemyr (2015) distinguish two types of indicators for assessing youth participation: process and impact indicators. While process indicators relate to the extent and meaningfulness of the involvement, impact indicators are concerned with the results of youth involvement. The rights-based approach is more concerned with the former. Consistent with this framing, the UN Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding emphasizes meeting the needs and aspirations of diverse groups of young people while recognizing their varied experiences, and ensuring that they are empowered to participate in an accountable and transparent system, without any form of discrimination, as innovators, thinkers and problem, in order for them to prevent, respond to, and transform, conflicts and violence.

Writing about Northern Ireland, Cahill-Ripley (2019: 1248) argues that if post-conflict communities are engaged with economic and social rights (ESR) in a meaningful way, then those rights can be protected and promoted and communities can use the same rights as “a tool for peacebuilding”. This argument underscores the importance of ensuring such rights are part of all the essential stages in attempts to build and sustain peace, and in alignment to the different modes of participation for effective youth engagement. As different scholars have argued, participation needs to go beyond decoration, manipulation and tokenism to ensuring a shared decision-making platform between adults and youth in development processes (Hart 1992). Moreover, participation should also entail the readiness of intervening organisations to engage youth in various openings, and ensure they take advantage of opportunities and exercise their obligations (Shier 2001). All these arguments recognise that for effective and meaningful participation of youth to happen, there needs to be a collaborative working relationship

between the youth and adults and “shared power relationships” in decision-making processes in all programme cycle management (Villa-Torres, and Svanemyr 2015: 53).

#### 4.2.2 Economic approach

The economic approach recognizes the centrality of young people in economic development, and seeks to improve access to economic opportunities that are essential for youth’s own development (UN-IANYD 2014). The National Development Plan III of Uganda (Republic of Uganda 2020) recognises the youthful population of the country as an endowment, and seeks to partner with the private sector to harness the youthful energy and to create opportunities for improved livelihoods and nation-building. In Uganda, the framework for youth’s access to economic opportunities is provided for under the National Youth Policy (Republic of Uganda 2001), and government strategic choice to work closely with the private sector to spur economic development and create jobs. The National Youth Policy established the youth livelihood fund, a mechanism for microcredit schemes, training and information services to youth entrepreneurs to start businesses and create employment for other young people. The pre-requisite for accessing the fund is the formation of a youth interest group. According to Makumbi (2018: 47), the government allocated UGX 265 billion (US\$71.42 million) for the period 2014 to 2018 to support youth-led enterprises in sectors such as “grain-milling, metal fabrication, clay products, carpentry, bakery, tailoring, soap-making, the manufacture of fuel briquettes, fishing, poultry production, arts and crafts, music and drama, and beauty.” The assumption that the chosen area of trade would appeal to the majority of young people across the country was misplaced because it ignored the role of context-specific realities, variations in individual and group interests, opportunities and constraints, and capacity to initiate and manage a business. Makumbi (2018) established that the fund failed to achieve its objectives mainly because it had not been designed in a participatory manner, and failed to incorporate context-specific realities, group dynamics and capacity for business and financial management, and the role of information and guidance on business opportunities.

However, while the findings do not include the experiences of youth in northern Uganda as Makumbi’s study was limited to Kampala and Mukono districts although the youth livelihood fund programme is implemented across the country. In northern Uganda, the initiative is further supported by the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) which outlines packages to restore peace and engender development. Through the PRDP (Republic of Uganda 2007: 97) the government sought “to coordinate all existing and planned efforts towards community reconciliation, resuscitate social capital formation

and strengthen mechanisms for political, cultural and socio-economic recovery and rehabilitation of Northern Uganda.” Specifically, it sought to:

- Increase access to information by the population on available opportunities for increasing welfare, incomes and land rights;
- Enhance the provision of psychosocial, trauma and other counselling services to the traumatized and others that need it;
- Establish support mechanisms for local intra- and inter-community conflict management, especially in areas dominated by inter-community conflict, such as Karamoja and the neighbouring districts;
- Support reintegration of ex-combatants; and
- Ensure that formal and non-formal accountability and justice mechanisms are in place” (Republic of Uganda 2007: 97).

Conflicts and development are related, and the above objectives help to understand issues that need to be addressed in order to maximise the benefits of placing communities, especially youth, at the centre of economic development. It is imperative, therefore, that youth be made aware of the available opportunities and that they be empowered to contribute actively and profitably to economic development. Similarly, without a healthy citizenry, young people will not be able to actively contribute to, and profit from, economic opportunities. Moreover, conflicts disrupt societal structures and functions and undermine the ability of communities to effectively engage in economic activities. Therefore, reintegrating ex-combatants and associates helps them to access basic services, gain community acceptance and access resources necessary for them to lead self-reliant lives and to promote peace. Finally, without a fair justice system that assures justice and accountability, communities, especially young people, fail to access justice in a fair, efficient and transparent manner, and this drives and triggers conflicts for those deprived of resources.

#### 4.2.3 Socio-political approach

The social-political approach is concerned with instituting a system “that connects young people to civil society and the political arena, and provides them with opportunities, training and support for their active engagement and participation in public life” (UN-IANYD 2014:1). It emphasizes the importance of analysis and targeting diverse groups of young people, especially those that are hard to reach and who suffer disproportionately from the effect of the conflict. The progress report on Youth, Peace and Security emphasises the important role of civil society actors in opening up avenues for excluded categories, especially young people, to participate in the different processes of preventing violence and building and sustaining peace (Simpson 2018).

At the national level, the National Youth Council is the youth engagement platform which provides the space for Ugandan youth to voice their concerns. The membership of this body is drawn from district and regional levels, with structures at district and sub-county levels to enable youth to voice their concerns and demand for accountability at the local levels. The National Youth Council is under the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) which coordinated youth programmes in order to harmonise efforts to improve youth participation and to strengthen advocacy and accountability. In addition, it seeks to improve access to information on policies which affect youth, and to share resources for improved planning and accountability in youth engagement in development. Moreover, the mechanism also recognises the need to strengthen the National Youth Council and build the capacity of youth councillors to enable them to function more effectively in the areas of good governance and advocacy (Republic of Uganda 2013).

However, for the most part, the platforms for youth to voice their concerns have not been largely functional, which has prevented young people from participating meaningfully in decision-making. Despite the existence of a multitude of formal structures, none of them is a viable platform for meaningful engagement between young people and decision-makers. For example, the National Youth Council is not working effectively due to “political party inclinations, which undermine the effective participation of youth subscribing to other political affiliations...weak leadership, underfunding” (Republic of Uganda 2013: 2). Banks and Suleiman (2012) argue that youth hold the key to Uganda’s social and economic development. Yet a study by Action Aid International Uganda (2012) indicated that young people are not aware of the existence of youth structures and those that I identified were deemed unable to promote authentic youth participation. Of those youth that participated in the study by International Youth Foundation (2011: 39), 55% stated that they did not participate in civic activities because there were ‘no opportunities’ to do so, further illustrating the shortcomings of existing youth platforms.

Despite the numerical dominance, with about 78% of the population being below 30years (UBOS 2016), and the acknowledgement by the National Development Plan (NDP) that the Ugandan population is expected to “remain youthful for the next fifteen years”, the role of youth in the national development process in Uganda is barely articulated (Republic of Uganda 2010: 43), and youth participation in governance and development processes remains low. According to Action Aid International Report (2012: 48), 77% of young people interviewed across 10 districts of Uganda did not know their role in the development of their countries. The same is said of LC leadership in which only 37% were involved in some ways, largely due to the lack of appreciation of the value of their contribution to society and

development. Moreover, the different platforms for youth engagement are not effective, partly because they are sometimes constricted and/or militarized. As a result, these platforms are not conversational spaces for open dialogue, and youth who try to exercise their right to participation are negatively regarded and often subjected to violence. As already noted, the 2021 elections were marred with violence, and young people were the main target of brutality by the government military forces. Such events discourage young people from exercising their democratic rights and fulfilling their obligations, and lead young people into either indifference or violence in the process of exercising their democratic rights.

Mugisha et al., (2016) attribute the low level of youth participation in development processes to “high levels of underemployment, which have fuelled youth poverty and subsequently entrenched clientelistic political systems.” Other literature shows that the main problems lie in lack of civic knowledge and empowerment. It is argued that the education system is inadequate to prepare young people with the essential analytical, critical-thinking and decision-making skills required to participate actively in decision-making processes. In addition, the age-hierarchical nature of Uganda society, which encourages respect for elders, is also not conducive to young people questioning or challenging the status quo. Therefore, active participation requires attitudinal change, and it should be embedded in young people’s behaviour through early education. Moreover, the limited awareness among both in and out-of-school youth of relevant government structures, processes and policies, and of how and when to engage, affect their ability to participate. As observed in the National Development Plan (2010/11–2014/15) of Uganda, the country suffers from the “low capacity of ministries, departments, agencies and local governments to generate, analyse, utilise and disseminate statistics”. For citizens, data is not relevant to their actual problems and is, therefore, rarely disseminated, discussed or able to spur social action. This has led to minimal demand for, and use of, data (Republic of Uganda 2010).

Following displacement and encampment in northern Uganda, the extent to which youth participate in socio-political life is unclear. As articulated by Oosterom (2016a), due to internal displacement, youth missed out on the opportunity to learn and practice citizenship, because local institutions could not impart knowledge and values for citizenship during the conflict. As a result, displacement and violence have not only disempowered youth, they have also disinterested them in participating actively in the structures that are available to them. The low level of youth participation and involvement in decision-making, and the corresponding need for greater youth empowerment, feature prominently in the most recent iteration of the Uganda National Youth Policy (Republic of Uganda 2011). The policy recognises that current platforms are ineffective, young voices continue to be unheard and young people are not equipped with

the necessary leadership skills and civic knowledge to demand for their rights and participation in political processes (Republic of Uganda 2013).

#### 4.2.4 Socio-cultural approach

This approach “analyses the roles of young people in existing structures and supports dialogue, including an intergenerational dialogue, about these structures” (UN-IANYD 2014: 1). The approach is based on the recognition that existing structures that view youth as a transitional period to adulthood impose limitations on the ability of young people to undertake opportunities to rebuild their communities. In the case of northern Uganda, existing structures include a patriarchal leadership system which confines power to male elders and virtually excludes women and youth from key decision-making fora within the cultural structure. The norms, rules and practices perpetuated by community-level authorities mean that young people can only exercise their rights within certain limits in both their communities and families. Strict customary norms imply that while young people or women generally may have some limited decision-making power within their own households, ownership rights remain under the authority of older men. While it has been widely observed that the conflicts and displacement disrupted cultural institutions and may have forced cultural norms to change, other changes may facilitate or further hinder access to opportunities and decisions for different groups of young people. The conflicts and displacement have had a profound effect on some families, leading to the emergence of child-headed families, young people missing out on many aspects of life, including education, and the creation of several layers of division among young people. In other cases, the conflicts and displacement have provided more opportunities for dialogue with a structure once known for its intransigence to issues that affect communities. Therefore, analyzing the operations of the structure and exploring spaces for dialogue enhances young people’s abilities to work with adults in improving decisions and actions to build and sustain peace.

#### 4.3 Practices in Youth Participation in Peacebuilding

In 2015, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2250 in order to assess the level of progress of “young people’s positive contribution to peace processes and conflict resolution, in order to recommend effective responses at local, national, regional and international levels” (para 3). Since then, remarkable normative progress has been made at the global, regional, and national levels to document the contribution of youth and further advance and operationalize the Youth, Peace and Security agenda. There is also increasing recognition that placing young people’s agency at the center of the transition from crisis to sustainable development offers enormous potential for leveraging transformative change. Ensuring youth’s

meaningful participation in peacebuilding processes is likely to lead to ownership of, and commitment to, efforts to peace.

#### 4.3.1 Youth-led peacebuilding initiatives

Interest in youth participation, the scope and efforts to transform the youth demographic into a positive development, and transition to adulthood have increased considerably. According to Suleiman et al., (2019:1), participatory action research has emerged as a promising strategy for generating “evidence to inform policies and intervention strategies to best serve youth populations.” Participatory youth-led action involves training youth to “identify, analyze, and promote actions on issues relevant to their lives” (Ibid:3). This allows youth to leverage their experience in research to take leadership in evaluating programmes and services, as well as advocate for positive changes in programmes, policies and the environment meant to benefit young people. Youth-led action (YLA) also enables youth to better understand and identify gaps in dealing with diverse groups of youth, and thus raise awareness of the existing inequity and inequality among youth in different communities.

In Uganda and elsewhere, the move to depart from a “lofty declaration of intent” (Keenan 2007: 199) to meaningful inclusion and participation of youth in efforts to address youth concerns, and programmes targeting youth, have grown considerably. According to Burgess (2005: xvii), this has attracted unprecedented scholarly interest, following the youth budge and the experiences of youth in conflicts over time. For their part, state and non-state actors have been grappling to transform the youth demographic into “active youth citizenship” (Naidoo 2001: 80).

Given that research tends to target a section of youth as participants in the study rather than the general youth community, Body and Hogg (2018:172) consider Hart’s (1992) ladder of participation as a suitable strategy for involving young people in “initiating and directing their own activities in consultation with, and supported by, adults.” The proposed study is premised on the assumption that if youth are supported to identify barriers to youth participation, their priorities and preconditions for participation, through PAR, they will be empowered and better placed to generate evidence to inform current policies and practices, voice their concerns in peace platforms, and work with adults on a contextualized peacebuilding project for the benefit of conflict-affected youth.

The study is cognisant of the benefits of early involvement of different categories of youth in research as respondents in order for them to identify the challenges in their lives and communities, and advocate for positive changes based on scientifically established evidence and priorities in the context of peacebuilding. Beyond the benefits of the study for youth as participants, the proposed study aims to

work with youth, in collaboration with key stakeholders in the youth development sector, to design, test and assess a youth-led peacebuilding project emanating from the findings relating to youth priorities and preconditions for participation in peacebuilding interventions. This strategy is aligned to the concept of participation as a right, which, as Body and Hogg (2018:172) note, fits with Hart's Ladder of Participation (1992) that envisages youth work that motivates "youth participation in ways which would involve young people initiating and directing their own activities in consultation with, and supported by, adults."

#### 4.3.2 Young people and COVID-19: an exploration of agency and hope in COVID-19 response

The COVID-19 pandemic was characterized by fear, anxiety and hopelessness. With experts predicting dire consequences for the Africa continent, communities were expecting the worst eventualities. The situation also witnessed an increase in petty crime, as well as violence and hostile attitudes towards individuals who were known, or suspected, to be infected by the virus. In some cases, the spread of harmful misinformation fuelled prejudice and violence. While key prevention messaging targeted youth as beneficiaries and consumers of key messages, the top-down public COVID-19 prevention measures excluded young people from participation in designing and implementing the prevention measures. However, young people overcame the physical barriers posed by restricted movement, offered themselves as volunteers to engage communities, and demonstrated resilience and leadership in promoting measures to reduce the spread of the virus. Moreover, they provided hope that there would be life in the post-COVID-19 future. The World Bank blogger, Obonyo (2020), noted that during crisis situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, youth represent hope, creativity and the power required to mobilise communities and support governments for individual and collective action. In the midst of these challenges, resilient young people are contributing to the response in varied and impactful ways. These qualities were confirmed by actions taken by youth in different African countries in reducing the spread of the virus and its socioeconomic implications.

Writing about the role young people played in the measures to prevent and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, Restless Development claims that young people around the world provided a nuanced response to the COVID-19 challenges and consequences in various ways. These include making and selling face masks, producing songs, videos and podcasts to create awareness about COVID-19. For instance, a team of 100 young people around the world got connected online to expose inequality in the accessibility and quality of health services, water and technology for online information and education. The same team also exposed the scourge of teenage pregnancy and abuse, stigma and other forms of



vulnerability associated with the pandemic. They also offered insights and practical solutions to the effects of the pandemic.

Young people intervened by providing accurate and unbiased reports on events in different communities, creating awareness on what was happening and on the need to pay attention to other crucial issues (such as hunger and insecurity) using different platforms, and making a clarion call for acts of solidarity, including raising funds. For instance, young people in the UK formed a group that tracked and recorded evidence of misinformation and fake news about COVID-19, with the aim of rooting out and stopping the spread and potential harm of fake news to communities. In Tanzania, a young lady, Ramlat, teamed up with a group of other young, female counterparts in her community to make cheap masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and to generate income to enable people to cope with the economic stress posed by the lockdown.

Ramlat's aspiration is beyond the COVID-19 pandemic; she sees an opportunity to assume greater leadership in addressing community challenges. "People think I am a good leader. They tell me that when they see me, they feel inspired. To me, leadership is about solving problems in my community whenever someone needs help. People now recognise me and tell me to apply for a position at (*sic*) our local government. I want to have an even bigger impact and work in Parliament one day." (quote from Ramlat, Tanzanian, on Restless Development Website).

Restless Development goes further, and says, "In a crisis, youth power responds". These claims about the effectiveness of youth engagement with the pandemic are in line with the youth participation literature, which recognises the potential of youth power to bring about positive change to shape this generation. As society rebuilds after COVID-19, communities will require rethinking and prioritizing youth as important stakeholders in the future. It is arguable that the youth used the fortuitous to demonstrate their high level of resilience, creativity, energy and leadership in times of crisis. This is an opportunity to leverage these and many other qualities to invest in youth and amplify youth voices in addressing the felt needs of their communities, especially in the restive northern Uganda.

#### 4.3.3 Evaluation of youth-led peacebuilding projects

According to Lemon and Pinet (2018), the evaluation of the impact of peacebuilding has focused on relationships in complex contexts, and for evaluation of a peacebuilding project to be successful, the evaluation team needs to work together to agree on evaluation criteria in relation to where, when and how to explore both intended and unintended impacts of the project. By employing a participatory approach to the development and implementation of a needs-based, youth-led peacebuilding, this study

involved all key stakeholders from the very beginning of the process in order to agree collectively on the criteria and terms of reference for project implementation and evaluation.

According to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2013), the theoretical framework that underpins the evaluation of peacebuilding projects is generally weak, partly because of lack of a generally agreed framework for working towards peace in a situation where programmes are implemented without a clear theory of change, and in complex and unpredictable operating environments. As such programmes are not always implemented as originally planned. In addition, politicization of the context further complicates the evaluation methodology and outcome. That is why it is necessary for evaluators to ensure a conflict-sensitive process and outcome. Therefore, while programmes should be adapted to most of the unavoidable contexts, evaluators ought to factor risks, changes, and some level of flexibility in their designs in order to capture change processes and to demonstrate the relationship between interventions and the contexts. In addition, due to the multiplicity of actors, the complexity of the issues, and the ever-changing contexts, it is difficult to attribute the outcome to a particular activity.

To overcome the above challenges, OECD (2013) proposes that evaluators ensure conflict sensitivity in the planning and evaluation of peacebuilding programmes. Therefore, every evaluation should consider what kind of information is required, and what it is going to be used for. Once a clear purpose is established, the evaluators can then go into the specifics and ensure that the information gathered meets the interests of the intended audience, and the findings are used to the benefit of the programme.

Blum (2011) observes that the evaluation of peacebuilding programmes is essential because it allows for learning in order to differentiate between what is effective and what is ineffective, and such differentiation is key to ensuring that peacebuilding organisations practise good practice and avoid bad practice. Referring to the OECD Face Sheet, Blum (2011) states that the evaluation of peacebuilding programmes is concerned with the assessment of the merit and worth of activities, which facilitates policy formulation and programme design the designing, and enhances programme performance promotes. In the action research cycle, the term reflective practice is usually used to refer to the way a particular action has worked, and the lesson learned from it. Blum (2011) concludes that while the terminologies of evaluation and reflective practice may be used differently in different contexts, they both follow a systematic process of evidence gathering, are both aimed at learning and accountability, and are both just parts of project cycle management.

It is important that the youth, supported by adults and other stakeholders, personally experience and appreciate the benefits, challenges and lessons associated with a youth-led peacebuilding project. That is why, in this study, youth led in assessing the impact of the project on their lives and that of their communities. This provided an opportunity for youth to focus on key issues, as well as the intended and unintended impact (Lemon and Pinet 2018), and to understand how to foster effective youth engagement throughout peacebuilding and other projects involving youth as the leading agents.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

The above review reveals the importance and dimensions of youth participation in peace and recovery as a vital component of post-conflict peacebuilding because youth are the torch-bearers of the future. The concept and importance of youth participation as a human right are widely recognised. However, there is no conceptual clarity on how youth is defined and how to address operational challenges to practical engagement of the different categories of youth in national policies and programmes. Youth manifests itself in a variety of ways depending on age, gender, location, social and economic status, and other dimensions that shape their personal identity (Villa-Torres and Svanemyr 2015). The literature further reveals that youth participation can only be effective if it translates into policies and programmes that are beneficial to young people in context-specific, post-conflict realities. Moreover, the literature suggests that youth-led action is an emerging strategy for working with youth to generate evidence that can translate into policies and programmes that promote practical and context-specific interventions to serve the youth, taking into account the structures and processes that moderate and transform the realities of youth into meaningful engagement and peaceful outcomes.

## CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the strategy used to obtain, process and analyse the data required to answer the largely exploratory phase of the research. The research questions related to youth perceptions of, and relation to, peacebuilding processes and outcomes in post-conflict northern Uganda. Beginning with the research paradigm, the chapter then presents the research design, followed by the study population, the sample size and sample selection, the data collection methods and instruments, data analysis methods, the study delimitations and limitations; the procedures for ensuring validity and reliability of the data-collection instruments; and ethical considerations.

### 5.2 Research Paradigm

The study adopted a participatory action research (PAR) paradigm to understand experiences, processes and outcomes of peacebuilding in ways that transform a reality identified by a diverse group of stakeholders. Using a case study approach, the study focused on the traditional district of Lira, focusing on Otuke and Erute North counties of the Lango Sub-region to understand how youth perceive, and relate to, peacebuilding processes and outcomes in northern Uganda. The study scope was narrowed to Lira District given the limited time for the study and the need for an in-depth analysis to understand the phenomenon of youth participation. A case study was considered most appropriate for this study because case studies facilitate in-depth analysis of a situation in order to represent the prevailing situation of an entity under investigation (Rule and John 2011). Moreover, a case study had the additional advantage of complementing action research because it facilitates in-depth understanding of the problem in a particular location while also promoting actions by the research participants or community on the problems they identify, thereby translating the findings to actions, and permitting reflection on the actions taken to improve or change a situation.

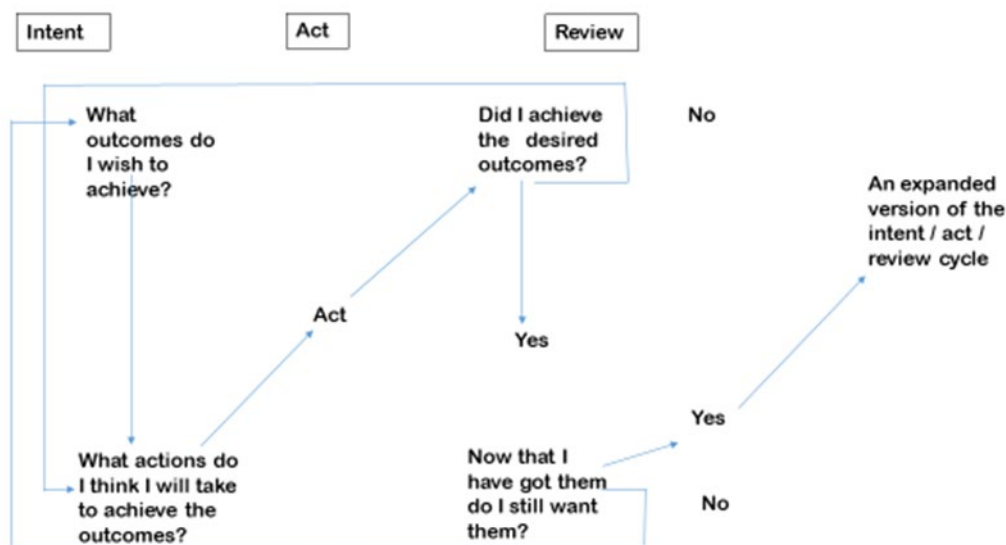
The study draws on the participatory and collaborative approach of PAR to explore the phenomenon of youth participation, with the youth as co-researchers and participants. As Kaye and Harris (2017) point out, PAR brings together theory and practice, thereby enabling researchers to explore a phenomenon and to change a situation. The same authors observe that the disconnection between theory and practice, is mainly attributed to the restrictive nature of academic research that confines the production of knowledge to students and their supervisors and examiners. As a result, stakeholders with the power to cause change are often unaware of the findings of academic research, and if they are aware, they become aware at a later stage, and are, therefore, unable to intervene in a timely manner. Action research bridges this gap

by using findings from exploratory research to inform practice, take action to improve the situation, and collaborate with a range of stakeholders to bring about and evaluate change. McIntyre (2008:1 cited in Tukundane and Zeelen 2015: 249) summarises the key tenets of PAR as:

- (a) a collective commitment to investigate an issue or problem;
- (b) a desire to engage in self- and collective reflection to gain clarity about the issue under investigation;
- (c) a joint decision to engage in individual and/or collective action that leads to a useful solution that benefits the people involved; and
- (d) the building of alliances between researchers and participants in the planning, implementation, and dissemination of the research process.

These key tenets are better captured in the form of an intent, an act and a review spiral (Dick 1993). This analysis emphasizes learning and application of learning to bring about change, and the recognition that learning from experience can only be enhanced by acting with intent, and being deliberate and intentional about the process. Figure 1 below vividly illustrates the action research process.

*Table 1: The action research process*



(Source: adopted from Dick 1993: 20).

Inspired by the action research process portrayed by Dick (1993) above, the study adopted a process that allowed me to work with research participants to identify felt needs and to implement and evaluate a peacebuilding project. In the exploratory phase, action research helped to create a participatory and conversational space for me and youth participants to clarify ideas and come to a common position on

concepts such as violence, peace, peacebuilding and participation, and on expected research outputs before full interaction in FGDs. In that way, it was possible for youth to understand the concepts, and relate to the issues, under study from their own perspectives. This, in turn, allowed the youth to explore in depth the issues in their own setting, and it created trust and linkages among actors for information-sharing and further networking for youth, peacebuilding initiatives. Using participatory action research also helped to create trust between me as the researcher and the participants, increased the capacity of participants to appreciate different forms of violence, including normalized ones, and improved knowledge-sharing and contacts with relevant stakeholders within their locations.

Similarly, Fals-Borda (cited in Tukundane and Zeelen 2015: 249) observes that action research “combines theory, action and participation to initiate and promote transformation at the grassroots level where there are unresolved social, economic or political problems”. Through action research, it is possible to develop “innovative practices in programmes for marginalised youth” to enable them to improve their situations and participate in the production and use of knowledge. Participatory action research projects aim to generate individual and collective desire and commitment to investigate, and reflect on, social problems, generate solutions to those problems, and build alliances to execute project cycles (Tukundane and Zeelen 2015: 249).

Therefore, PAR is useful in two major respects. Firstly, it is socio-politically democratising and empowering in that it allows for the participation of respondents in different processes, from data collection to developing and testing an intervention (Kaye 2017). Secondly, it is conceptually and technically educative and liberating in that it transforms respondents into participants and direct beneficiaries, actively involved in their own socio-economic transformation. This study builds on the democratic process of action research to recognise the experiences of the study community, and research “with” instead of “on” the community, and thus co-create knowledge that harmonises shared realities and actions (Friedman and Black 2016), based on youth priorities and preconditions for meaningful participation. At the point of developing the research proposal, the projects to be undertaken could not be prescribed until the findings of the exploratory study were out.

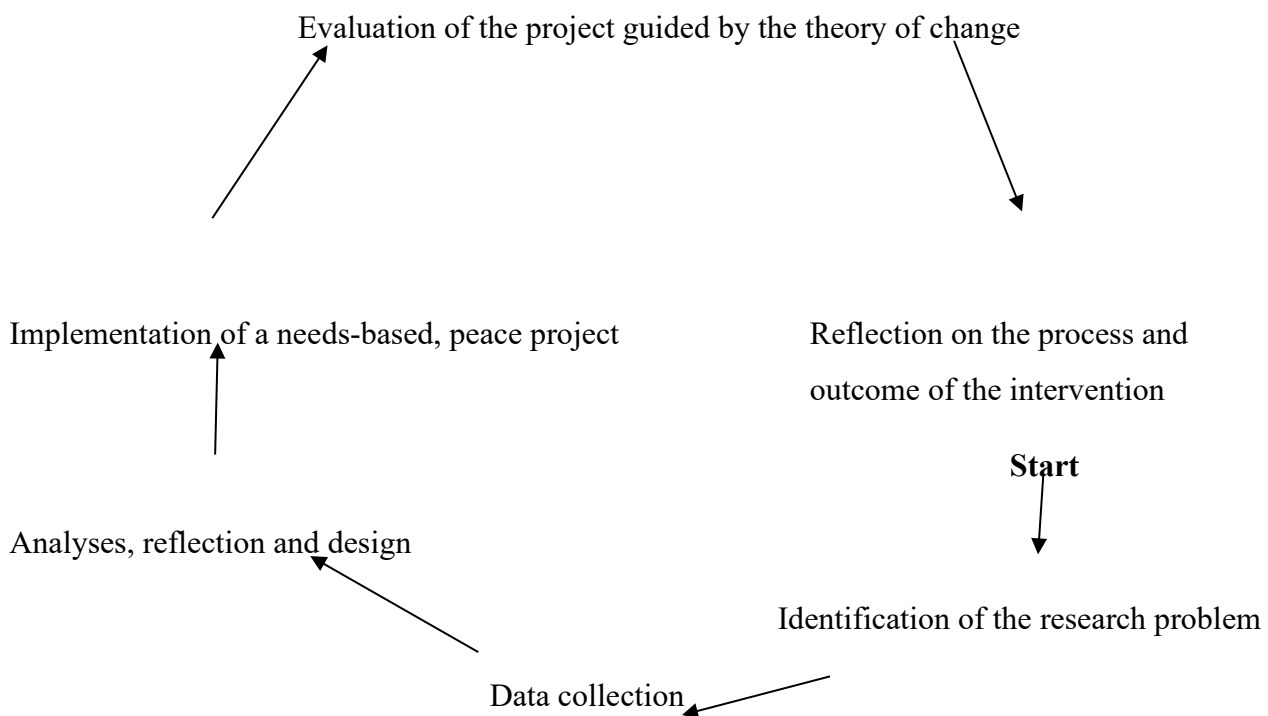
Based on the findings from the exploratory study, I worked with Ogor Seed Secondary School to revitalize their defunct Peace and Human Rights Club by identifying drivers and triggers of conflict and violence within the school community (among students, between students and teachers, and between the school and the host community). Together with teachers and students, we designed a set of activities meant to resolve and prevent conflicts, and to nurture a culture of peace and nonviolence. I chose the

school for two reasons. Firstly, I chose the school on account of the findings of the exploratory research with the school, in which key conflict drivers and triggers were identified, and because of the willingness of, and invitation by, the school managers and learners to work with me on the project. Secondly, the school offered an opportunity to reach a large number of participants, including learners, teachers, and the local community, in order to implement a project leveraging on the established framework of the Peace and Human Rights Club that had existed at the school. Although the club was nonfunctional, the school was already familiar with the concept and the potential of the project to benefit the entire school population of 418 (260 male: 158 female) as of April 2022, and the host community. In addition, with capacity-building support to reestablish the club and conduct trainings with 120 (72 male: 48 female) members of the club, the school was empowered to continue and expand the project beyond the one year of my project period.

As a result, beyond the one year of project implementation during the research period, I continued to debrief, share, learn and encourage participants to model the project to respond to their context-specific challenges and needs. PAR enabled us to work on issues that the school identified as key to them, and as such, interested them to engage with one another. This outcome is aligned with Harris (2017) who observes that PAR builds capacity and allows participants to express their views, engage with different platforms on peace, and manage their own projects, with the support and collaboration of other stakeholders.

This action plan was in line with the argument advanced by Kaye and Harris (2017: 62) that “action research is a key tool for peacebuilding because it includes the community as participants and direct beneficiaries.” This action research was intended to promote youth participation by bringing together youths and interested individuals and organizations to plan, implement, and evaluate needs-based, youth-led projects. The cyclic nature of action research enabled the project team to explore, plan, act, and evaluate the project (Kaye and Harris 2017), thereby creating the space to integrate learning so as to improve the project chances of bringing about change, better understanding of emerging issues, and further research. Figure 5 below represents the action research cycle in the context of this study.

Figure 3: The Action Cycle:



(Source: Inspired by Kaye and Harris 2017)

### 5.3 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative design, using a combination of data-collection methods: document review, interviews, focus group discussion, and observation. This design enables exploration of meanings, variations and perceptions in an integral manner (Crabtree and Miller 1999). In particular, it helped to capture respondents' experiences, knowledge and expertise to enrich the research process in relation to the changes that have taken place or have failed to take place, and the peacebuilding processes that led to such changes or lack of them in the respondents' settings. It also helped to explore the perspectives of different stakeholders on the changes, the process of change, and insights into the lives of youth, and how those lives are changing. In doing so, this method helped to generate a deeper understanding of the role of the youths in peacebuilding (Hesse-Biber 2010: 63). Moreover, the design provided an opportunity to paint a comprehensive picture of the contemporary manifestation of violence and peacebuilding initiatives in northern Uganda from a wide range of stakeholder perspectives. Therefore, qualitative data provided a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the how and why of youth participation in peacebuilding.

As Creswell (2014) observes, a qualitative design allows the researcher to experience the issue or problem under investigation at the site where respondents are based. Moreover, the use of multiple



sources of data in a qualitative design provides adequate evidence, and offers an opportunity to identify gaps in the data, and to capture meanings from the perspectives of the respondents. That is why I supplemented secondary data by interacting with respondents on site, through interviews, FGD and observation, so as to investigate youth participation in peacebuilding. The design also enables one to learn from field experience, and it allows for the flexibility to adapt tools to obtain the information needed to answer the research questions.

While gathering data, I adhered to the integrity and sensitivity required to ensure accuracy of data (Patton 1990). In the opinion of Creswell (2014), the researcher's ability to reflect on the role their personal background, culture and experiences play in the interpretation of the study goes beyond the narrative of bias and values in the study to support the researcher to shape the direction of the study, based on the experiences on the ground. Being a former NGO worker in the study area, known to most of the gatekeepers, I gained field entry easily, and secured permission to conduct the study. However, I was constantly aware of the ability of my past experiences in the study area to influence my interpretation of data; and I constantly guarded against what Creswell (2014) describes as active search for evidence to support one's position or line of argument. In addition, I used the support group, gatekeepers, and issues emerging from the field, to draw conclusions about the site and participants, and to ensure the findings objectively reflected the opinions and realities of the study population.

#### 5.4 The specific context – Lira District

The study population comprised of different categories of youth (aged 18-30) who were the primary target of the study, and ordinary members of Otuke (now Otuke District) and Erute North counties (Lira City West). The youth categories included school-going and out-of-school youth as well as youth employed by government, civil society and the private sector. The ordinary members of the community included parents, teachers, local leaders, elders, and religious and cultural leaders. In addition, a variety of other stakeholders, including government and NGO functionaries, were engaged. Preliminary literature revealed that family, school, work, religious and cultural institutions moderate youth participation in issues that affect them. Therefore, it was necessary to engage a cross-section of the youth and other population categories in order to gain a comprehensive picture of the prevailing situation of youth in the study area.

In Lira District, the study covered the counties of Otuke, a major source of displacement, and, therefore, an area of post-conflict return; Erute North, a major IDP center where many formerly displaced people have settled or been integrated; and Lira Municipality, the main urban and administrative center of the

sub-region, where most interventions originated, and including both rural and urban areas, thus capturing the rural-urban divide that characterizes the Lango sub-region. Moreover, the choice of these specific study areas was also influenced by two events.

Lira District, one of the 38 districts that constitute northern Uganda, was selected as an ideal site for a learning opportunity because it continues to struggle with the legacy of war and violence after two decades of armed conflict, while benefitting from a number of peacebuilding interventions targeting youth. It is also centrally located, and it offers a relevant, rich experience, with the potential to generate data needed to understand and to tailor peacebuilding interventions to effective youth participation. After over two decades of armed conflict, peacebuilding initiatives have been implemented in the district. In particular, the choice of the district was based on the district's experiences of one of the worst massacres during the conflict, a history of accommodating a high number of IDPs from the Lango sub-region, the highest crime rate in the country over the years, and tensions around land conflicts, cattle rustling, cross-border relations, and the increasing ethnic diversity of people settling in the region.

In Lira District, the study covered the counties of Otuke, a major source of displacement, and, therefore, an area of post-conflict return; Erute North, a major IDP center where many formerly displaced people have settled or been integrated; and Lira Municipality, the main urban and administrative center of the sub-region from where most interventions were thereby including both rural and urban areas, and thus capturing the rural-urban divide that characterizes the Lango sub-region. Moreover, the choice of these specific study areas was also influenced by two events.

First, at the conception of the research project, Lira District referred the district before the creation of Lira City. Therefore, the research plan was to cover three counties of Lira District: Erute North and Erute South counties, and Ojwina Division in Lira Municipality. The choice of these counties were thought to offer a complete picture of the issues under study because the district was playing host to many internally displaced persons from the different parts of Lango, and is characterised by rural-urban migration, giving rise to high numbers of street children, and considerable criminal activity. Secondly, while pre-testing the research tools in Erute North County (now part of Lira City West), it emerged that the study would benefit from Otuke County (currently Otuke District), which was part of the greater Lira District at the time of armed conflict, and where many of the formerly displaced people hail from. Additionally, the creation of Lira City, and relocating Lira District Headquarters from Lira Town to Ogur Sub-county meant that the study sample was better selected from the traditional Lira District. For purpose of this study, Erute North and Otuke Counties were sampled as constituencies in the Lira District.

During an FGD with youth in Erute North County, three out of the nine participants reported having been displaced from Otuke, and eventually decided to stay in Erute North County, because the conditions, including conflicts, lack of infrastructure and other opportunities in their original areas, do not support return or permanent stay. Therefore, they opted to locally integrate where they were displaced, but they occasionally visit their places of origin to secure their land and meet their loved ones. The narratives coming from the youth in Erute North County are linked to issues at the places of origin, and not only explain their continued stay in the city, but also justify some of their fear to permanently return. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to include Otuke District in the sample so that the youth experiences of peacebuilding efforts were complete because conditions in Otuke accounted for the decisions of the youth to either stay in their places of displacement in Erute North County, or return to their original homes in Otuke.

In particular, preliminary discussion with the youth revealed that any consideration of youth and the conflict in the region would be incomplete if it did not refer to Otuke which has experienced multiple displacements, and continues to grapple with land conflicts, cattle rustling and environmental stress. In other words, it was deemed necessary for the study to understand the conditions Otuke, and their implications for youth participation. Besides the LRA conflict, Otuke is also linked to prolonged clashes between neighbouring farmers and pastoralists. Given such protracted conflicts during which young people were recruited into Local Defence Units (LDUs), ethnic paramilitary entities meant to defend their territories, it was judged necessary to explore the agency of youth in peacebuilding efforts.

As a result, the choice of one urban county (Erute North) and a rural county (Otuke) was meant to provide a comprehensive picture of the situation faced by the youth in both urban and rural areas. In addition, the choice of the two locations was informed by past events: Erute North County had played host to IDPs, the majority of whom were from Otuke, and had witnessed a number of emergency and development interventions targeting youth. As such, Erute North County had a high number of former internally displaced youth who had subsequently acquired land, and become permanent residents in the county, but still with links to their original homes in Otuke County (District). Others have returned to their original homes to rebuild their lives and communities. Therefore, as a place of displacement, Erute North County had the potential to shed light on the post-conflict conditions of the host community, and their implications for the integration, and sense of citizenship, of displaced youth.

For its part, being the place of origin of formerly displaced persons, Otuke County provided an opportunity to explore the possibility of return as a sustainable post-conflict solution for formerly

displaced youth. However, as Langevang and Namatovu (2019) note, the absence of war does not necessarily translate into the prevalence of peace that communities aspire to, and many formerly displaced youth who returned to Otuke acknowledge that their return meant starting life from scratch, with land as the only material asset they own. Worse still, Otuke is becoming increasingly diverse ethnically, with non-Langi ethnic immigrants acquiring land and living there, and with Karimojong seasonally raiding for livestock. Associated with this development are people living with multiple challenges of violence that increasingly disrupt livelihoods, destroy property and lives, and violate human rights.

At a personal level, I had previously been an NGO worker in the region, had prior knowledge of, and interest in, youth, and had established a positive rapport with the main stakeholders in the area. My prior experience as an NGO worker in northern Uganda, although with little or no contact with the specific research sites, prepared me well for the study. However, I was conscious that my previous role would influence my interaction with the research participants who would assume that I was part of them, and that I had prior knowledge of the issues under investigation. Therefore, while I was aware that I was researching in a community about which I had some knowledge, I did not lose sight of my role as a researcher. I, therefore, took into consideration reflexivity which requires that the researcher should be aware of the role or influence they can have in the research (Cohen, Manion and Marrison 2007: 171).

In keeping with research norms and ethical principles, I entered the community and accessed the research participants, with the support of gatekeepers, youth co-researchers and local leaders. I also took time to explain the purpose and procedures of the study. In some cases, after stating the purpose of the research, I would ask the participants whether they had any questions before we proceeded; and most of their questions were related to what opportunities were available for them to seize, and/or how I could help them. In a remote village in Otuke County, some youth told me that I was the first person to seek their views on issues affecting them. “Why do you people not care about us?,” one of them asked. So, I often had to explain myself, and get the participants to understand that I was simply a researcher, seeking to understand some of the critical issues affecting them, and that they would benefit from the study by discussing their own challenges and opportunities to build a better future for themselves and their communities. Meanwhile, a group of employed youth teachers in Erute North County were happy to talk about their experiences, work with students through peace clubs to bring about peace, and share their experiences through the study.

### 5.5 Sample Size and Sample Selection

The study delved into the experiences of the research participants, and explored the meanings of their participation in peacebuilding, variations in their actions, and perceptions of the value, and nature of their participation in peacebuilding (Crabtree and Miller 1999). This entailed eliciting from the participants accounts of their perspectives, experiences, knowledge and expertise in relation to the changes that had taken place or failed to take place, and the peacebuilding processes that led to such changes or lack of them in the participants' settings. To gain such insights meant that as the researcher I had some idea of categories of stakeholders and individuals to be included in the study, some of whom I identified beforehand while others were identified by the gatekeepers, based on the roles they play in their different organisations. In addition, I was flexible with the number of participants so that interesting directions of the study that had not been previously envisaged, could be explored in the process of data-collection until a point of saturation was reached (Creswell 2007). A total of 40 samples were initially selected, based on Roscoe's simple rule thumb which states that, in the behavioural sciences, a sample between 30 and 500 participants can benefit from the "central limit theorem" (Roscoe 1975).

However, while I had predetermined numbers of those to be interviewed, I was eventually guided by emerging issues that I needed to follow up on until a point of saturation reached, where no new information was emerging. Consequently, **I conducted a total of 49 data-collection sessions: 10 FGDs comprising of 90 participants, seven interviews with youth employees, and 32 interviews with key informants. Therefore, I reached an overall total of 129 participants in the 49 data-collection sessions. The 129 participants reached were** made up of 90 ordinary youth, seven employed youth, and 22 key informants. The key informants were themselves sub-divided into five attained sub-categories: four NGO or civil society functionaries, one private sector operative, six government officers, 12 parents and teachers, and five religious and cultural leaders, three politicians and a journalist.

Three sampling techniques were used to select the sample: purposive, convenience and snowball sampling. Both purposive and convenience sampling techniques were applied to key stakeholders in the study. Purposive sampling was applied to participants drawn from NGOs, local government functionaries, MPs, journalists, and religious, cultural and community leaders. This is because this category of the respondent was of particular interest to the study on account of their particular experiences and roles as leaders and interveners in their communities, and their consequent ability to provide insights into the issues under investigation. Selection of community, religious and cultural leaders; local government functionaries, schoolteachers, journalists, and NGOs for key informant interviews was based

on their positions, experience, commitment to, and knowledge of, the context of youth and peacebuilding. Key target positions were directors, managers, and project staff. The parents interviewed were conveniently selected based on their availability and accessibility within the sampled locations, experiences of the conflict, and their assumed possession of relevant information. As a native speaker of Luo (language of the study site), I administered interviews with parents in Luo because either they did not speak English or they did not feel comfortable speaking English.

Convenience sampling was applied to parents, teachers, and youth on account of the fact that they were easily identifiable and accessible.

Participants were selected by means of three techniques: convenience, purposive and snowball. Convenience sampling was applied to both male and female participants with similar characteristics, and on account of the fact that they were easily identifiable and accessible. Purposive sampling was used to select youth implementing and managing civil society, private sector or government peacebuilding projects. Finally, snowballing technique was used to select participants from the categories of youth and parents with unique experiences, including ex-combatants. Some of the parents were either ex-combatants or had children who had participated in the conflict. Similarly, to identify young people with some unique experiences, it was necessary to apply an additional sampling method. The technique was used for these categories of participants because it allows for easy access to a “hidden group” (Davies and Hughes 2014: 174), that is, a set of individuals who may not be easy to identify, or who may be inclined to conceal their identity and experiences, but whose experiences are relevant to the issues under investigation. These individuals are usually known to one another and they are best identified by colleagues of the same or similar experiences. Table 3 below shows the distribution of the sample by category, data collection method and reasons for inclusion.

*Table 2: Sample distribution by category, data collection method and reasons for inclusion*

<b>Data-collection method and major participant category</b>	<b>Respondent category components and sample size</b>	<b>Dates of data collection</b>	<b>Achieved Sample</b>	<b>Reasons for inclusion</b>
9 FGD with youth with each comprising of 8-10 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Out-of-school youth in Otake and Erute North counties (5)</li> </ul>	01 August 2021 —	10 FGDs (90 participants)	Out-of-school youth suffer from, and experience, conditions different from those of in-school youth, making them either more vulnerable or creative. In-school youth may

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-school youth at Ogor Seed Secondary schools (3)</li> <li>• Employed youth teachers (2)</li> </ul> <p>10 FGDs* an average of 9 participants per group=90</p>	18 February 2022		be under parental care or guidance, enjoying systematic preparation for the future. Employed youth have experience and the opportunity to address the issues that affect them and what they aspire for.
6 Interview with employed youth with perspectives from their different employments in civil society, private sector and government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth with government (2)</li> <li>• Youth with NGO/civil society (2)</li> <li>• Youth with private sector (2)</li> <li>• Hard-to-reach youth (1)</li> </ul>	26 July 2021 — 30 June 2022	7	By virtue of their position in their respective communities, the selected categories of youth have unique experiences of the conflict, interventions and the role of youth therein. They have different perspectives from their jobs.
5 KII with NGO/civil society organisation staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restless Development Uganda (1)</li> <li>• World Vision International (1)</li> <li>• Lira NGO Forum (1)</li> <li>• World University Service of Canada (1)</li> </ul>	29 July 2021 — 25 July 2022	4	NGOs have been central to emergency and post-conflict interventions over the years, and the selected 7 implemented youth-focused programmes that might provide insights to youth participation in community life
0 KII with private sector staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Private Sector Foundation Uganda</li> </ul>	24 July 2022	1	The private sector has considerable resources and is a key player in the market system to enable young people to acquire market-oriented skills and employment.
8 KII with government officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Development Officer (1)</li> <li>• Sub-county Chiefs (1)</li> <li>• Local Council (LC 1) (2)</li> <li>• University Lecturer (2)</li> </ul>	14 August 2021 — 28 October 2021	6	The selected categories of government officials are custodians of government programmes and oversee service delivery at different levels of society

5 KII with parents and teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents (9)</li> <li>• Teachers (3)</li> </ul>	29 July 2021 — 04 August 2022	12	Parents and teachers are the pillars of community life, and are responsible for the upbringing and welfare of children, and their views on youth behaviour are important
5 KII with faith/religious and cultural leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religious leader (1)</li> <li>• Cultural leaders/elders (4)</li> </ul>	24 June 2021 — 26 June 2022	5	About 95% of Ugandans are reportedly religious, and religious leaders play a key role in people's behaviour, and they are therefore knowledgeable about key developments in the community. Elders have lived long enough, have witnessed changes over time and have memory of the conflict, and are key actors in safeguarding societal norms and practices
2 KII with politicians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Politicians (3)</li> </ul>	26 October 2021 — 26 June 2022	3	The selected categories of politicians are custodians of policies and coordinate government programmes, and oversee service delivery at different levels of society
2 KII with journalists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journalist (1)</li> </ul>	04 August 2022	1	Journalist play a central role in reporting on developments in communities over time and interact with different stakeholders, issues and contexts related to the conflict and peacebuilding interventions
Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth and thier environment</li> </ul>	01 August 2021 — 18 February 2022		Youth who participated in FGDs were the primary target for observation, which occurred in each of the settings where participants live in. Therefore, the observation sessions corresponded to that of FGD, involving the same number of participants.
<b>Total</b>			<b>49 data collection sessions (reaching 129 participants)</b>	Although not earlier thought about, the direction of the issues pointed to KII with the private sector. In addition, while two journalists were sampled, it was only possible to secure an



				appointment with one with experience reporting on issues raised by young people.
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## 5.6 Data-collection Methods and Instruments

The study adopted a variety of data-collection methods, and corresponding instruments in a methodological triangulation framework, intended to capture as much data as possible, cross-check and validate the findings of the study, and gain in-depth, cumulative insights. These methods helped to elicit data from “documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts” (Yin 2003: 83). The following sub-sections elaborate on the data-collection methods and instruments.

### 5.6.1 Data-collection methods

In view of the qualitative nature and methodological requirements of action research, I employed four data-collection methods: documentary review, interviews, FGD, and observation. The four research methods were used in a methodological triangulation framework, to cross-check and validate data.

- Documentary review of secondary sources

Documentary review of secondary sources provided secondary data obtained from relevant books, articles, local and regional government reports, published interviews, newspaper articles, and the Internet to generate evidence to answer the research questions. Relevant documents were identified with the guidance of the research questions, and relevance to the scope of the study. In addition, the key search words were used to locate relevant literature from the digital libraries, journals, and the Internet. The search tips included: “children and youth in armed conflicts”, “conflict and violence in post-conflict situations”, “youth and post-conflict situation”, “the LRA conflict in northern Uganda”, “youth in northern Uganda”, and “youth participation and peacebuilding.” All data was categorised by pertinence to the key research themes, and was used to examine youth participation and potential areas to foster youth engagement.

- Key informant interviews

The interview method was used to gain a deeper understanding of the issues, through probing questions and encouraging respondents to contextualize their responses (Khan and Canne 1983). Interview guides were used to interview specific participants who were deemed to have particular insights and experiences in various areas of interest for the study, such as community perceptions of youth and their engagement in peacebuilding interventions, narratives of violence, peacebuilding interventions, and the role of youth

participation in sustainable peacebuilding. Key informant interviews focused on policies and programmes for youth participation, and were used as a basis to compare institutional discourses around youth's needs and attitudes to such policies and programmes. The interviews, most of which were face-to-face while about five were online, zoom and team meetings, lasted from 45 to 60 minutes.

The interviews focused on the motivations for youth to participate in peacebuilding, perceptions of peacebuilding initiatives, and the perceived roles and experiences of youth in peacebuilding. Therefore, youth participants in interviews were selected on the basis of the roles they played, or the positions they occupied, in their respective organisations or groups, their experiences of, and commitment to, economic, cultural, human rights and political issues in the study area. The focus was on those youth implementing and managing relevant peacebuilding projects in northern Uganda.

- Focus group discussion

All the focus group discussions were conducted face-to-face with youth in the selected communities in the study area. FGD guides were used to conduct FGDs with different categories of youth, including in-school and out-of-school ones, to paint a comprehensive picture of the issues under study. To ensure proportionate representation of different youth categories, such as males and females, and urban and rural youth, specific gender-based FGDs were organized to allow for open discussions on pertinent issues relevant to gender-specific participant categories, which would otherwise be missed out if both sexes were lumped together. This is because, culturally, especially in rural settings, some women tend to withhold their thoughts in the presence of men, due to cultural norms according to which some issues are supposed to be exclusively in the male domain. Mixed FGDs were also conducted to triangulate data coming from separate male and female groups; and the composition of the groups was based on similarity of characteristics necessary to generate data from different youth categories. In all, 10 FGDs, including two (2) mixed groups and five (5) male and three (3) female ones, were conducted with youth participants to capture their respective experiences and perspectives. Given the limitations of movement and association imposed by the COVID-19 lockdown, it was not easy to reach the target of an equal number of gender-specific and mixed FGD groups.

Youth FGD participants were selected from among those who had either benefited or not benefited from any peacebuilding interventions, either as individuals or as groups over the years. In addition, active youth groups, engaged in peacebuilding activities, were included. Finally, some youth were included by

virtue of being in school in the selected communities in the study area. Three FGDs of gender-specific and mixed male and female participants were held with the students of mixed classes, aged 18 and above. The groups were identified with the help of a teacher who was also a Patron of a Peace and Human Rights Club of the school that had been purposively identified on account of its rural nature, and of its having been established specifically to cater for internally displaced youth. The FGDs lasted between 60 and 80 minutes.

- Observation

Observation was undertaken as part of the methodological triangulation strategy. I used an observation checklist to observe the kind of environment youth lived in, follow their conversations, note the number of participants and their behaviour (Howitt 2021) with regard to the level of engagement of the youth in different platforms, and interactions among participants in FGDs. The overall target population was youth who participated in the FGDs. Therefore, the observation sample size/sessions corresponded to that of FGD participants. Observation was conducted concurrently with FGDs while some aspects, such as the environment where participants live, were observed before, during and after the FGDs. Therefore, the number of observation sessions was equivalent to those of FGDs as every single setting was observed. Therefore, it did not require me to spend more time with the participants than he spent on FGDs and informal interactions. Observations were captured in field notes, and they supplemented information gathered through FGDs, documentary reviews and interviews. As McKeganey et al., (cited in Bloor and Wood 2006), correctly note, observation helps to tap into certain chaotic and non-rational behaviour not easily disclosed in interviews.

### 5.6.2 Data-collection instruments

Researchers, including Creswell et al., (2007) have indicated that there are many research instruments available to researchers from which they can choose to address their research objectives. Four data-collection instruments, corresponding to the four data-collection methods, were used: a document checklist, interview guides, focus group discussion guides, and observation checklist (Appendix B). The four instruments were designed to target specific categories of participants in order to promote efficiency and depth of data collection. The interview and focus group discussion guides were developed and administered in English and the native language of the participants.

- Document checklist

Through search tips guided by the topic and objectives of the study, I identified a list of relevant documents from digital libraries, journals, and the Internet. Moreover, as Gorsky and Mold (2020) observe, there is a plethora of documents at public disposal produced for different reasons, with some aimed to champion particular causes, and as Bowen (2009) notes, such can be open to potential bias and credibility challenges. Therefore, through document checklist I was able to compile, group and keep track of the most useful resources for review, analysis and referencing.

- Interview guides

I prepared an interview guide containing key questions to guide the interview process. Thereafter, the guides were reviewed by the supervisor, and tested with participants. The process of refining the guide allowed for the development of a final version that was flexible, easy to remember, and fast to administer. Interview guides were useful because they enabled me to stay within the questions, ensured consistency in the line of inquiry for different interviewees and made processing of data quite easy and systematically pursued. Two interview guides were developed, one for youth participants and the other for key informants. The interview guide was used to interview youth councilors/leaders, youth employees in relevant government departments, civil society and private sector. In addition, a separate guide was used for key informants from government, and the NGO and private sectors.

- Focus group discussion guide

The FGD guide contained topline questions on specific themes and issues for discussion with the participants. It comprised of open-ended questions intended to stimulate the discussions on specific issues under investigation. This guide kept me focused on the key themes for discussion. While I would probe further, based on the responses received, the guide always took me back on track to ensure continuity in the flow of the discussion.

- Observation checklist

I developed a list of items to observe, and it helped me to collect data in an organised manner, and to focus only on relevant issues that occurred in each of the settings, such as the nature of interactions in FGDs, and the kind of environment participants live in. The list also enabled me to take notes systematically.

To ensure that I had a good entry to the field, I worked with selected individuals who were part of my support group from each of the target communities. The individuals guided me into their respective communities. I reviewed the research tools with the support group to familiarise them with the questions and objectives of the study. This is because, besides accompanying me to the field, they supported me to either take hand-written notes or facilitate some FGDs sessions. The support team took notes in a situation where I felt that I was better placed to facilitate the discussions so as to clarify and probe some issues under investigation. Meanwhile, I took notes when a designated support person facilitated the discussion. When I took notes, I had the time to reflect on issues presented by the participants. I also took notes of issues that the facilitator needed to probe further. In both roles, I gained insights into the issues under investigation.

In all the FGDs, interviews and observations, I relied on handwritten field notes. I found hand-written notes particularly appropriate in a community where digital audio recording would make some participants uncomfortable. Moreover, I wanted to avoid anything that would impede the opportunity to interact naturally with participants. As much as possible, I captured notes verbatim to ease data analysis and to generate quotations for the report. At the end of each day or FGDs, I reviewed the notes to ensure they were clear and reflective of the issues presented during the administration of the tools.

### 5.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis involves words and image data (Creswell 2014) as well as what is observed in order to sort and interpret data. I processed and analysed the data collected in order to make sense of it (Patton 1990), using rules and processes that generate credible and reliable data. I used a combination of thematic, narrative, and theory-driven approaches to data analysis in order to address earlier criticism of qualitative methods as lacking a systematic approach (Simister, James and Lunin 2017). The combination of these three approaches helped me to develop, reflect on, and interpret, themes (Bricki and Green 2007). Thematic analysis was used to sort and analyse information in line with the objectives of the study and any emerging themes. Meanwhile, I applied narrative analysis to capture particular cases that generated relevant “quotes, anecdotes, testimonials, case studies or stories of change” to provide new insights (Simister, James, and Lunin 2017:1). Finally, I employed the theory-driven data analysis approach to test the theory of change in the intervention component of the action research, in order to ascertain whether the needs-based project had achieved its intended change (James, Napier and Simister 2017). All these approaches helped me to identify patterns, and to generate opinions and ideas relevant to the study.

The data was analysed in two stages. In the first stage, data relating to the first two research questions was analysed to understand how youth perceive, and relate to, peacebuilding interventions and outcomes. The challenges and opportunities identified informed action research in which youth planned and implemented local peacebuilding projects. The second stage involved analysis of the outcomes of youth-led peacebuilding project. Based on the outcomes, the study made recommendations to improve youth-led peacebuilding initiatives in order to strengthen existing capacity and opportunities for enhanced youth participation in peacebuilding in northern Uganda.

I transcribed the hand-written and electronic notes from interviews, FGDs, observation field notes, extracts from secondary literature, and other relevant information, including names of participants, consent for data use, and dates of data collection. The large volume of data that I collected proved challenging to analyse and to translate into significant patterns. I transcribed all the handwritten notes from FGDs, interviews, and observations into written texts in a word document. Thereafter, in accordance with the principle of confidentiality, I removed information that could expose the identity of some participants. I reviewed the data transcripts for accuracy of information, objectivity in presentation of results, and to gain full understanding of the issues under investigation. The review process was useful in gaining a better understanding of the issues, context and nuances. In addition, it helped in identifying themes and patterns, and gaining insights into youth participation in peacebuilding.

Throughout the review process, I recorded initial impressions and developed codes, and generated themes. Moreover, building on the research questions, I reflected on the responses, and made notes, coded data and created structures from which to develop, reflect on, and interpret predetermined and emerging themes. I also reviewed the themes to ensure that they were congruent to the data collected, clearly portrayed the issues involved, and had relevant examples and quotations. Finally, I used themes to present the report, based on the experiences and perspectives of the research participants, presented in a dynamic, as opposed to a static, translation, to ensure clarity and consistency in the flow of ideas.

By manually coding the data into specific themes, I was able to interpret meanings of statements, identify patterns, and isolate data that did not fit the patterns. The analysis aimed to depict some statistical information on frequently articulated points of view as well as stories and cases that could either lead to further investigation or detailed case studies (Simister, James and Lunin 2017). The interpretation involved depicting similarities and differences, themes, issues people feel strongly about, and typical or unusual responses. This process involved winnowing information and reflecting on the themes and narratives that emerged, and the lessons learnt. I also considered the implications of the

information/learning for the conclusions to be drawn from the study, and the recommendations to be made.

Data validation and verification involved data source and methodological triangulation to cross-check and verify information. The use of multiple sources of data and data-collection methods enabled me to gather information from different perspectives, and to capture the phenomena under investigation more comprehensively. As a result, I analysed data from multiple sources and cross-checked narratives based on the experiences of young people and other stakeholders with knowledge and experience relevant to youth and peacebuilding. Throughout the analysis, I compared data from different sources to develop themes and to ensure different perspectives were captured in the report.

Data from FGDs enabled me to explore group dynamics among different youth categories and to compare views from interviews, KIIs and observation. I used data from both FGDs and interviews to compare perspectives of youth categories as well as those of other stakeholders. Multiple sources of data enriched explanations of experiences of youth and their respective community perspectives, thus generating a comprehensive picture of enablers of, and barriers to, youth participation in peacebuilding. I used data from observation to compare information from FGDs, and to analyse and relate observable realities in the youth environment to the day-to-day experiences as narrated by young people. Secondary data was used to discuss and relate existing literature to my own findings, and to validate my findings. Therefore, the use of multiple sources of data, and methods of data collection, enabled me to access comprehensive and reliable information.

I used a support group comprising of three youths from the study community, two other youths, one working for a civil society organisation, and the other for government, to receive feedback on the process and preliminary findings to identify areas that required more information and analysis, cross-check for agreement or disagreement with the findings, and to draw general conclusions. The conclusions and recommendations of the study informed a needs-based, peacebuilding action that was planned and implemented with the young people in a secondary school, over a one-year period. Thereafter, the project was evaluated for its sustainable peace-building impact in northern Uganda. Analysis of the peacebuilding outcome of youth-led projects was conducted and recommendations were made to build existing capacity, and increase opportunities, for youth to build sustainable peace. Finally, the information in both paper and electronic formats was safely stored by the researcher, and will be retrieved as and when necessary, especially when further information is required for the study or writing articles,

in accordance with the principle of transparency and replicability in research. The electronic and hard-copy data will be stored for 5 years, and thereafter deleted and shredded respectively.

## 5.8 Study Delimitations and Limitations

### 5.8.1 Delimitations

Conceptually, youth-led action challenges the traditional paradigm in which youth are viewed as dependent and helpless beneficiaries other than agents of their own future. Therefore, adopting youth-led peacebuilding means shifting that narrative to viewing youth as active agents of their future (D'Amico et al., 2016). This has two implications for the study. First, it entails adequately equipping the selected youth with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively plan and implement their projects. Secondly, it involves creating a conversational space, and an enabling environment, where youth feel comfortable, accepted and valued to own and tell their stories in spaces and on platforms often dominated by adult power. This should also be an environment that enables youth to access opportunities necessary to successfully plan and implement their projects. To enhance this process, I had to identify, train, guide, and inspire youth, locate platforms/spaces, and create opportunities for youth to engage actively with issues that affect them. In particular, I liaised with school administrators, and worked with the youth, to revitalize peace and human rights clubs, and address issues identified to be key to peaceful living at school and at the community.

Spatially, the study was limited to the four sub-regions of northern Uganda: Acholi, Lango, West Nile, and Karamoja, and their associated 38 districts. However, Acholiland and Langoland were the most severely and consistently affected sub-regions during the two-decade LRA war. Therefore, either of the two sub-regions provided an opportune site for the study. However, because the Lango sub-region has been relatively under-studied in relation to youth participation in peacebuilding, the study reviewed literature on northern Uganda in general, but field data was collected from Otuke and Erute North counties of the traditional district of Lira in Lango, where the key events and activities relevant to the research took place. This site had immense potential for offering insights into the current state of youth and peacebuilding in northern Uganda. In addition, the narrow focus on Lira District was dictated by the limited financial and time resources available to the researcher, and the need to conduct an in-depth analysis of the issues under study.

Although the Ugandan youth policy officially defines a youth as a person aged 13 to 30 years (GoU. 2001), I have raised the lower limit to 18 because, legally, a person who is 18 years and above is an adult, and, therefore, legally capable of playing an active role in issues that affect his or her community. In



addition, given the traditional, patriarchal system in the study area, and the gender-differentiated roles that it assigns to people, I conducted separate FGDs for males and females to minimize the influence of patriarchy on the findings. At the same time, FGDs of both males and females were conducted to provide insights into possible changes in the traditional patriarchal system over time. While the study envisaged an equal number of males and females in the FGDs, this target was not achieved. The scare of COVID-19, and adherence to its lockdown standard operation procedures (SOPs), made it illegal for youth to gather normally, and difficult to hold meetings. At the same time, household chores made many female youths unavailable.

Although most policy makers and implementers are male by virtue of the patriarchal nature of Ugandan society, I contrived to rectify the situation by recruiting more female interviewees from the civil society and private sectors. The choice of the organizations was based on commitment to youth programmes, including civic participation, livelihoods, and Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) among others. The preference for the female interviewees does not in any way distort the constitution of the sample but rather offers an opportunity for their views to be factored in the nuances of the issues under study.

### 5.8.2 Limitations

Like any other research, this study required adequate time and finance to achieve its objectives. Moreover, the study was conducted when the world was experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, and after hotly contested national elections, marred by human rights violations, making the timing of the research inopportune. Moreover, the time and financial resources required to complete both the exploratory and action components of the study were limited. In addition, given that the action research involved facilitating youth to plan, implement and reflect on their projects and engagement over a long period of time, and in view of the limited research grant available to the researcher, the study was limited by financial constraints. I conducted the exploratory component of the research within schedule, and used the requirement of working with youth interested in bringing about positive change as an opportunity for them to build their capacity to contribute to peace in their respective communities. The youth who worked with me as research assistants sacrificed their time to do so, were also motivated to learn about research, and interested in gaining a better understanding of the role youth could play in building and sustaining peace in the region.

Additionally, the project could not address the entire range of peacebuilding issues affecting diverse categories of youth and their communities. Because the action component of the research depended on

the ability of the youth to take a lead on particular issues affecting them, with the support of the researcher, only projects that had more chances of success were selected, implemented and evaluated. Nonetheless, other promising projects received advice from the researcher, and were linked with other stakeholders, and expected to continue interacting with NGOs and duty-bearers for support. This is because the nature of PAR requires the ability of the researcher to mobilise resources, and to devote time to supporting youth to plan and implement peacebuilding projects, and to participate in relevant fora involving different stakeholders. Therefore, lack of time and financial resource made it impossible for some proposed projects to be implemented. To minimize the negative impact of this limitation, I deliberately trained youth in peacebuilding and project cycle management, and guided them in planning and focusing on activities that would benefit them at school and in the community, but that would require limited resources to accomplish.

Moreover, I interacted with duty-bearers and NGOs active in youth interventions, and discussed with them the preliminary findings of the study as it relates to the gaps and of the need for more investments in the youth sector in the study area. Significantly, while government and several organisations intervene in a wide range of issues targeting the general community, including youth, they do not have a shared commitment and understanding of the importance of, and approach to, youth engagement that is key to building trust and joint action for effective youth engagement. My intervention created space for interaction and understanding between the youth and intervening agencies.

### 5.9 Validity and Reliability

To ensure that valid and reliable data was collected, that I and other researchers could trust the findings, and that we all had the confidence to act on the implications of our findings for social policy or legislation (Merriam 2009), I formulated appropriate data collection tools which I personally pre-tested with the different categories of respondents to ensure that the questions were consistently flowing and clearly understandable by the respondents, and capable of being administered within a limited time available.

Therefore, before personally administering the tools, I ensured that respondents understood key concepts used in the study, and that the findings made sense, and represented the reality regarding the issues under investigation. The results of the pilot test showed that the FGDs and KIIs took from one to two hours, depending on the interest and level of engagement of the respondents, and that some questions were repetitive. I also needed to clarify and agree on the local-language version of some concepts, such as violence, peace and peacebuilding. Therefore, I reduced the number of questions by merging or deleting repeated questions, thereby reducing the amount of time spent with respondents to 45-80 minutes for

FGDs and KIIs. In every FGDs, we started with clarifying concepts, and this exercise was particularly useful in harmonizing the process before delving into substantive discussion.

Pre-testing the tools also enabled me to identify areas for improvement, and offered him an opportunity to increase the degree of clarity, consistency and accuracy of data. In addition, there was careful field entry, selection of participants, and actual data analysis, validation, and presentation of data, based on the minimum standards for gathering data throughout the research process. The pre-test results suggested that additional locations needed to be included in the study, and led to the inclusion of Otuke in the sample.

I used multiple data collection methods and corresponding sources to capture as much data as possible. The methods included literature review, FGD, KII, and observation, used in a methodological triangulation framework, to counter the weaknesses of each individual method, and enhance internal validity of the findings by reducing bias, and to provide a nuanced analysis of divergent views with respect to the issues under consideration. These set of actions were followed by consistent capturing, cleaning, labelling, and storage of data collected throughout the research process.

In addition to use of multiple data sources, I worked with a support team to review data and identify gaps and areas for further investigation. With the support team, consisting of an independent individual with interest in youth and peacebuilding in northern Uganda, and three youths from the study area, I reviewed field notes from different data sources, against emerging themes, to ensure consistency, and triangulation of responses from different sources in order to determine the accuracy of the information generated. In addition, I utilised a community of inquiry, an equivalent of what McTaggart (1998: 211) refers to as “critical community’ or a community of ‘critical friends’ to receive feedback on the study throughout the research process, and to ensure that the findings resonated with the study population, and objectively captured the issues in question. The community of critical friends included a local NGO worker and a government department employee, who were active in youth interventions.

#### 5.10 Ethical Considerations

Creswell and Creswell (2018) aptly observe that because research is about collecting data from people, and about people, it raises a number of ethical issues that a researcher ought to anticipate, and it calls upon researchers to actively address those issues. By anticipating and addressing those ethical concerns, the researcher seeks to ensure that research participants are protected from potential harm, and that trust is developed with them; that the integrity of research is promoted; that misconduct and impropriety are guarded against; and that the research copes with new and challenging problems.

The ethical issues this study anticipated included permission to do research, informed consent and voluntary participation, privacy and confidentiality, and adherence to the Do No Harm principle, which I addressed before and during data collection, analysis and reporting. I committed to pursue the study with integrity, and to adhere to the ethical standards of social sciences and standards/regulations set by the Ethics Committees of Durban University of Technology (DUT) and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST).

#### 5.10.1 Approval of the research proposal and permission to do research

Prior to the study, I received ethical clearance with full approval of the research proposal to proceed with data collection in accordance with the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) of DUT. Upon approval of the research proposal by the DUT Ethics Committee (Appendix C), I worked with the support of gatekeepers, and research assistants, and sought permission from a local official of the proposed field study location to access the targeted research participants. The gatekeepers, who were part of the study area, helped in the identification of respondents in the sample size drawn.

#### 5.10.2 Informed consent and voluntary participation

I sought the informed consent of all the respondents, both orally and in writing. After verbal acceptance, respondents signed a written consent form. A written consent form was used for organisations and individuals while oral consent was sought from individuals participating in FGDs, and the consent form signed by their representatives in the FGD. Therefore, directly or indirectly, all participants in the study completed the DUT consent forms (Appendix A). Securing the informed consent of involved me as the researcher explaining the purpose and nature of the study to enable participants to make informed choices either to participate or not to. In addition, participants understood that, in addition to their consent to participate, they were also at liberty to withdraw from participation at any point in the research. No participant withdrew their participation. While the tools were developed and administered in English for stakeholders fluent in English, the letter of information and consent, and the interview guide for parents were translated into, and administered in, Luo, the native language, which I have a good command of. Some parents preferred to interact in English.

To enable informed consent, all the key aspects of the research, including its purpose, nature, benefits, and findings, were explained to the research participants. In the context of COVID-19, it was also necessary to inform participants about the spread of COVID-19, and SOPs. I also explained the mitigation measures that I had taken as a researcher to conduct the study in accordance with the Ministry of Health

guidelines regarding research during COVID-19 period. The measures included putting on a facemask, keeping a social distance of two meters from one another, holding meetings on open and spacious grounds, and washing or sanitising hands. I also explained the procedure and avenues to get tested in case one had signs of, or felt it necessary to test for, COVID-19, and the attendant protective measures.

I explained that the purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of how youth of northern Uganda perceive, and relate to, peacebuilding processes and outcomes, with a particular interest to improve the understanding and experiences of youth in peacebuilding. Therefore, the youth were alerted to the fact that some of them would occasionally be consulted as part of a follow-up to enable me to clarify some issues, and to tap their views on how a project for conflict-affected youth and communities could be developed, implemented and evaluated.

I explained that participation in the study would not result directly in any support or payment for the participants, and that the participants were not expected to make any financial contribution to, or cover the cost of, the study. I also clarified that the information the participants provided would help me and the local communities to understand how youth participate in addressing issues that matter to them, and how effective youth participation might be achieved. However, in cases where a participant had to incur a cost to participate in this study, I reimbursed the participant's expenditure, based previously agreed terms. Such costs were mainly associated with a modest transport fare to an agreed meeting venue, and limited to a few meetings with participants who had to gather in a convenient, safe and spacious venue. The selection of venues was guided by closeness to participants, and spaciousness and convenience relative to social distancing. In some cases, the venue was a school compound, a seminary compound, or under a tree. In other cases, we deliberately conducted meetings in locations that were inaccessible to other people or law enforcement agencies who could interrupt the discussions, if they wanted to participate in them or to learn about them. While we had sought permission to conduct the study, including to access particular venues, engaging with other people or law enforcement officials, would interrupt the flow of the discussions.

As a token of appreciation of their valuable time and participation, I offered refreshments to FGD participants. Such refreshments were provided to participants either during or at the end of the exercise, and it was clear to them that they did not constitute a reward for participation. After offering refreshments for a while, I received requests from participants of the FGDs for cash, instead of refreshments, on account of the perceived benefits of cash to their families. Meanwhile, the students expressed a wish to

play football, and I provided two balls, one for females and the other for males. The football directly fitted into the students' plan of action for the Peace and Human Rights Club where they envisaged games and sports as one of the activities that would keep them usefully occupied instead of roaming about in trading centers during free time. As Angucia (2010) notes of her study in northern Uganda, departing from the view of the study population, that incorporates cultural and day-to-day considerations of what matters most to the study respondents, is critical to understanding an appropriate entry into the ethical issues of our time. Therefore, based on the participants' request for cash in order to buy some food or soap that they would share with their families, and thus meet a real family need, I stopped offering refreshments, and instead provided their equivalent in cash. The participants' request for cash must have been motivated by the economic hardship caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The provision of cash instead of refreshments also acted as a safeguard to the spread of COVID-19 by controlling food handling and public eating. To ensure that the token did not influence the decision of the respondents to participate in the study, I did not announce the tokens to the participants, and I distributed it to them at the end of the session.

Since the research envisaged some form of collaboration with selected youth in the design and implementation of peacebuilding projects, based on the field findings of the study, I explained that there was a possibility of some youth benefitting directly, and by extension, their respective communities benefitting indirectly, from the spinoff effect of their projects, upon successful implementation. Moreover, I also made it clear that, by discussing issues, the youths could gain a shared understanding of their situations and challenges; and I, therefore, impressed upon them the need to take proactive steps to participate actively and candidly in discussions on issues that affect them and their communities.

Finally, I explained that the results of the research were aimed at influencing specific changes in policy or practice/enforcement as part of an advocacy strategy. Therefore, the research report would be disseminated in a number of ways, including one-on-one briefs, and meetings or presentations to various stakeholder audiences. A number of respondents in one of the FGDs with employed youth expressed interest in reading the report. In another FGD with out-of-school youth, the facial expressions of the participants betrayed lack of interest in disseminating the study findings. On that account, I asked one of them why they thought it might not be a good idea to disseminate the study findings among the young people. In his view, which others supported, if the study findings are disseminated among NGOs and government agencies, these would recognise the existence of young people and their problems, and initiate programmes to solve those problems. The out-of-school and other youth who were not interested

in reading the findings preferred that the findings be shared with intervening agencies so they can act on the information to the benefit of the youth and their communities.

Given that my research included an intervention component, with a focus on support to young people to design and implement projects to build peace, I indicated to the participants that I would work closely with a group yet to be identified to support them to start or strengthen their project initiative. This would entail convening some meetings with the group to understand how their project was doing, and advise them on how to improve their project implementation by encouraging them to share with, and learn from, good practices in peacebuilding. In particular, participants in one of the FGDs requested me to support them to form groups so that they could benefit from youth livelihood funds and any other NGO projects. During the action research phase of the study, I returned to a youth group leader who had requested me to work with them as an advisor, to help them register their group, so that they could benefit from NGO and government programmes. In addition, I accepted the request of a patron of a defunct peace and human rights club of a secondary school to revitalise the club, and we implemented activities to promote conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the school and surrounding communities.

#### 5.10.3 Privacy and confidentiality

To eschew the possibility of doing harm to participants, data was anonymised and presented in such a form that it did not reveal the identity of the respondents. Finally, all the information obtained from participants was treated with utmost confidentiality. At no point did I use individual participants' names when quoting remarks, unless prior permission had been granted, and such quotations were deemed appropriate and safe. All data collected will be stored in a database for 5 years, with restricted access for only me and my supervisors. In addition, hard copies of the data will be shredded, and electronic data securely deleted.

#### 5.10.4 Do No Harm Principle and COVID-19 Pandemic

I did not anticipate any physical or emotional risk to participants in the research beyond that of everyday life, but was aware of the emotive nature of the experiences of conflicts and violence that has the potential to trigger negative memories. As such, I emphasised the voluntary nature of participation in the study and the option to discontinue participation if a participant felt uncomfortable at any point during the research. In addition, participants were provided with an emergency-support telephone number, and that

of the researcher, for support and referral, in case a need arose. In addition, data was anonymised and presented without revealing the identity of the respondents.

The study was conducted in accordance to the Ministry of Health (MOH) guidelines for the prevention and management of COVID-19. This was to ensure that the rights, welfare and safety of both the research participants and researcher were not compromised (Republic of Uganda 2020). In the course of 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out and its spread and containment measures, including stay at home, movement restrictions, social distancing, and wearing of facemasks, gave rise to a new dimension to my field research. I had, therefore, to adapt fieldwork to the new conditions in order to complete the study, without increasing the risk of contracting and spreading the virus, and thus causing harm to participants. The spread of pandemic complicated the research process, and necessitated changes in the fieldwork plan of the study.

First, the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions made it difficult, and in some cases impossible, to interact with people. Therefore, given the spatial scope of the research, covering three districts, it was not possible to travel to all the previously planned research sites as and when planned, leading to delays and sometimes postponements of activities. However, with the gradual ease of restrictions on movement, I was able to conduct fieldwork in phases in the planned locations. Secondly, I had to adjust to new approaches to fieldwork, adopting a mix of face-to-face and online interactions, and adhering to COVID-19 preventive and containment measures. I assured the gatekeepers and local authorities of my full adherence to COVID-19 protocols, and I explained the measures I took to the participants, while urging them to observe the same measures strictly.

I conducted face-to-face interactions in accordance to COVID-19 containment measures. In particular, I ensured that the target number of 8-10 participants in each FGD adhered to the COVID-19 SOPs limiting gatherings to 8-15 people, and stipulating a social distance of 2 meters between people. I also allowed only those participating in the study to access the meeting venue, and ensured that everyone wore a facemask, and sanitized their hands. Face-to-face interactions were appropriate to the rural nature of the youths whose voices the study sought to capture. Face-to-face interaction, necessitated by the participatory nature of the study, allowed me to speak directly to participants, to observe their behaviour, and to act within their settings (Creswell and Creswell 2018). In addition, because many locations in the study area had no access to Internet connectivity, and the target participants were not computer literate, online sessions were out of the question. In any case, online or remote sessions would have been culturally inappropriate for discussing important issues. Similarly, and in the interest of the principle of



privacy and confidentiality, I opted to travel and meet the participants physically, to assure them of my adherence to those basic principles, and to elicit their full participation. I also believed that physical contact would help build rapport with the participants, create a conversational space, and predispose participants to candid discussion. The choice of both options was meant to bridge whatever communication gaps may have existed, to generate as much authentic data as possible, and to enable me to meet all the different categories of my research participants.

## CHAPTER SIX: YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR PARTICIPATION IN PEACEBUILDING

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter relates to the first subsidiary question, and seeks to explain how youth perceive their participation in peacebuilding. It focuses on youth perceptions of the nature and value of participation in the four areas of human-rights based, socioeconomic, socio-political and sociocultural aspects of youth participation in peacebuilding. It presents voices of youth from northern Uganda on a range of issues that moderate action for peace in their communities. This is in keeping with the argument that for youth to take a leading role in issues that affect them, they themselves need to be part of the conversation.

To trace the peacebuilding experiences and perception of youth, we explored their conceptual understanding of violence, peace and peacebuilding that are key to their perception of their roles in peacebuilding. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section presents the youth narrative of their experiences of violence and peace in order to appreciate their perceptions of, and role in, peacebuilding. The second section considers youth's narratives of peace and peacebuilding, while the third section presents the value youth attach to their participation in peacebuilding. Finally, the fourth section discusses the nature and scope of youth participation.

### 6.2 Youth Narrative of their Experiences of Violence and their Coping Strategies

#### 6.2.1 Youth narrative of their experiences of violence

Generally, the youth understand violence in terms of their experiences and the environment they live in, the changes they have witnessed over time, and how they want to overcome some of the challenges they face, including various forms of violence that deny them a peaceful life. In all the FGDs, the youth reported having experienced or witnessed violence. The general fear of violence permeates communities in northern Uganda, and it featured in all discussions with the participants and key informants.

Asked whether young people had any worries about the future of their communities after the LRA war, most participants answered affirmatively. They indicated that since the LRA war, land disputes, alcohol and drug abuse, crime, hunger and famine had been rampant, and cases of high school students dropping out of school, youth unemployment, HIV/AIDS, illiteracy, and mental problems, often ending in suicide, were on the rise. Moreover, relationships between the military and civilians had also been confrontational as government sought to use the military to solve community problems. In addition, participants attributed the limited support for young people to idleness among young people, young people's lack of respect for elders, and elders' lack of trust in young people. The effect of the past violence, and the

current manifestation of violence in the communities, were cited as the basis for their fear. According to one young man,

We fear gunshots, we remember the traumatic past, and we worry that increasing violence, street children, and extreme inequality may lead to a relapse into war, and the violence may turn our community into a dangerous place to live in (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021).

The “dangerous place to live” referred by the young man in Erute North was actually already real, and this was confirmed by another young man in the same area, who said, “Some youth don’t fear to kill, and they threaten to kill. We are living in times of fear and violence” (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021). In the opinion of yet another young person, “Violence has been adopted as a solution to many social problems. Youth no longer participate in constructive conversations and; and they are generally hot-tempered (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

The situation is compounded by the presence of many youth suffering from trauma arising from the war. As one young person feared, “If this is not addressed, then we are going to have a mad generation” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021). Worse still, the strings that held communities together have been broken by the war, and “elders who used to offer guidance to the young generation have died, and some children don’t have people to guide them. These children will be a real problem in the future” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021). But the violence young people experience is not exclusively physical: some of it is structural. For example, a young lady in Otuke bemoaned her “Poverty and inability of [her] family to meet [their] basic needs” (FGD, female participants, Otuke, 17 February 2022).

The forms of violence reported range from harm by the LRA conflict to other forms of physical and psychological harm. These other forms of violence manifest themselves in missed opportunities to go to school, inability to meet basic needs of children, and health problems among others. Reportedly, the challenges have increasingly influenced the way youth behave, and impacted their activities in the immediate and long terms. As a result, youth have turned to crime in the form of murder, theft, domestic violence, and sexual violence, including rape and bestiality. These experiences of violence vary depending on the environment where the youth live, and the stages at which they are. The communities where the youth live are generally poor and continue to struggle with the negative consequences of the war. One of the participants referred me to a popular song ‘*wan bulu wato i can*’ (we the youth die out

of poverty) by ‘Muzee B,’ to deliver a message about the predicaments of young people, and to call on God to come to their rescue. This and similar sentiments were expressed by some of the participants.

According to one participant, “My wife fought me over my failure to meet some of our basic, domestic needs” (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021). In the words of another participant, “Last week, four men were killed by their wives for failing to provide for their families” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021). In the same vein, another participant reported, “I lost a relative to domestic violence. She was killed by stabbing” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021). As if to attest to the prevalence of the domestic violence, yet another participant reported,

In our village, a week does not pass without recording cases of domestic violence; and it is either the parents fighting or parents versus their children. It is now common for children to gang up with their mothers to fight their fathers (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Domestic violence also manifests itself in a variety of forms, including child labour, child neglect, child marriage, child trafficking, and defilement. For example, according to one participant, “Child labour, child neglect, family neglect, child sacrifice, child trafficking, child marriage, bullying at school, fighting, and defilement” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021). But, as the experience of one youth participant reveals, some forms of domestic violence are bizarre. In his own words, “Our stepmother left us to sleep in the bush for a week because she didn’t like us. Whenever we came home late or did not perform household chores to her expectation” (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021).

With regard to land-related violence, a participant said,

Land conflicts have steadily increased during the lockdown. Most people have resorted to farming now and an inch of encroachment leads to serious conflicts and violence. Competition over land has led to physical fights, deaths and witchcraft. Cultural leaders are now even more challenged because they have no capacity to address disputes. Recently, some rowdy youths killed three people during a community meeting in which an elder was trying to resolve land disputes. In yet another case, a man killed his younger brother over land, which the latter had sold, but did not share the proceeds (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

According to another participant, “In our village, an old grudge over land led to a man cutting over 1,000 eucalyptus trees belonging to a neighbour” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021). Cases of theft were also reported. For example, according to one participant, “The crime rate

has increased, and one of the ‘Pipino’ boys [youth gang] stole my piglets. He monitored my movement until I went to bed and slept off” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Similarly, sexual violence was also reported to have increased. In the words of one participant,

Sexual violence has increased, especially among teenagers who abuse drugs. Some drug addicts have run mad, while others waylay people to harm them. In our village, there is a certain swamp that a woman cannot cross without being raped. There are groups of male youth who sit by the roadside from 5pm to lift and rape women. Because of widespread rape, some men have to escort their wives to the well and gardens (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Some rape cases are as extreme as they are obnoxious. For example, one participant reported a case in which “twenty boys raped a woman until she became unconscious”, and he feared the “possibility that new cases of HIV/AIDS [would] rise” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021). Cases of bestiality are equally on the rise, and one participant reported that “some boys have sex with cows” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

In the opinion of most participants, the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in violence in households and communities, including physical and psychological fights, murder of close relatives, and child neglect at the family level. At the broader community level, participants cited gross violations of human rights by government forces, thugs, street kids, and youth gangs. According to most participants, the COVID-19 triggered simmering community issues, clearly indicating that the people had not yet recovered from the effects of the war. The rise in violence was attributed to a variety of factors. For example, according to one participant, the increasing rates of violence are attributable to “a deteriorating economic situation where men cannot afford to support their families. Men are already overwhelmed with COVID-19 challenges and are ready to fight as a response to pressure from their wives” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021). According to another participant,

Before the outbreak of COVID-19 women had some freedom to run their homes: plan and do whatever they liked. But now men are at home all the time, trying to follow up and control their women. Some women don’t want to be questioned (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

This participant’s views are supplemented by those of another participant who also identified idleness among men as a major cause of domestic violence. In this other participant’s opinion, “Men are idle and concentrating on sex. Women are tired of sexual intercourse and frequent pregnancies that have led to an

increase in the number of children, and in the burden of bringing up children” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

According to some participants, the COVID-19 lockdown gave some youth an opportunity to turn to drugs, and commit drug-induced crimes, including rape. In the words of one such participant, “Young people used the lockdown to organise themselves into gangs to take drugs, waylay people, and rape women. They have a special name, Pipino Boys” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021). Pipino is a local word for wasp, and is used in this context to describe the boys’ ability to cause harm with ease and flexibility. During the COVID-19 lockdown, violence also found expression in the form of discrimination. For example, a young man in Otuke reported, “We were discriminated against in the COVID-19 support programmes, including food distribution (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 17 February 2022).

Unfortunately, the idleness among male parents during the COVID-19 lockdown led some of them to mistreat their daughters. As one female participant reported, “Some girls have been forced to get married due to stress from home” (FGD, female participants, Otuke, 17 February 2022). According to another female participant,

Parents mistreated girls, many of who got married and others dropped out of school, and others died of stress due to abusive language from parents. Imagine what my father told me ‘you are old enough, and you need to take your big breasts to your own home [referring to getting married]. You have twisted buttocks’ he said (FGD, female participants, Otuke, 17 February 2022).

Another female participant was even more direct in her expression: “Our biggest problems are the parents. They abuse us. Some of our parents, including mothers, get drunk and abuse us. Their interest is to force girls into marriage. When they see a girl, they say this is money for drinking” (FGD, female participants, Otuke, 17 February 2022).

It was not only irresponsible parents that subjected their children to mistreatment during the lockdown: the standard operational procedures imposed by government also made life difficult for many people, including HIV/AIDS patients who needed to travel to access medication and concomitant food rations. In the words of one such victim, “permission to travel for treatment [medical attention] and other vital reasons was not always granted, the means to travel to access medication and vital food provision were not always available, and some people may have died as a result” (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021).

Even though everyone has been affected by conflicts and violence, the spread of COVID-19 further aggravated their situations, and the COVID-19 lockdown period was particularly challenging for the youth. The youth indicated that violence was directly or indirectly affecting all members of their communities. In their opinion, violence was getting normalized and glorified by some members of the community, as a means of fulfilling their many individual and group interests, including land grabbing, domination, and settling disputes. A few youth expressed support for violence because it is the only quick and affordable means for them to solve their problems, arguing that justice through statutory and customary systems was compromised and less accessible to the youth and vulnerable members of the community. For example, one FGD participant had this to say:

Our uncles were depriving our mother of our ancestral land. Because we live in town, and it is only our mother in the village, they took advantage of our weak mother and of being a woman to try and grab her land from her. We, the male children, organised ourselves from town and went to the village and applied violence to regain our land. They may use witchcraft to scare and perhaps destroy us, but they also know that we will finish [kill] them if they dare encroach on our land (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021).

A number of key informants also cited the use of violence as a common means of settling community disputes or misunderstandings. For example, a key informant argued that violence was the main resource available to people in rural communities, and young people use violence to secure their land rights, and for other survival purposes. According to the same key informant, because many youth are unemployed and landless, poverty was the main driver of all the vices and undesirable behaviour of young people today. He noted that, left with limited options, young people will exploit gaps in the community to defend their rights. In his own words, “Youth want to defend their territories, in this case, responding to territorial invasion by the Teso” (KII, youth representative to the cultural institution at clan level, Otuke, 16 August 2021).

While the issue of ‘immigrants’ from other counties of Lira District settling in Erute North was cited as an example of “outsiders” taking up available opportunities at the expense of “natives,” no evidence was presented of the issue having led to violence. However, the protection of ethnic land from other ethnic groups was reported to be escalating, and non-Langi people were accused of massively buying land in Lango, irresponsibly using water sources, cutting down trees, and using poison to eliminate members of the host communities. This accusation, be it founded or not, depicts the fears associated with increasing

immigration, characterised as an invasion, of non-Langi people into Lango. For example, participants in Otuke reported that an entire village (Goto Jwang) in Ogor Sub-County, had been occupied by people from Teso, and all their leaders were Teso. However, what some key informants call an “invasion of foreigners” needs to be interpreted in context of free transactions of land by members of the Langi community, which has seen members of other communities settle in Otuke and elsewhere. Interestingly, while people in Otuke refer to non-Langi immigrants, especially those from Teso, as foreigners taking up their land, the Langi of Lira District also accuse fellow Langi, from Otuke and neighbouring northern Lango communities, of buying up land in Lira and dominating economic activities in Lira Town.

The foregoing findings indicate that violence was affecting youth in different ways. In all the FGDs, young people affirmed that their experiences of conflict and violence were preventing them from actively participating in rebuilding their lives and those of their communities. These experiences included fear, injury, death, discomfort, unwanted pregnancy, early and forced marriage, and lack of focus on essential issues. Other experiences cited were: low self-esteem, dropping out of school, HIV/AIDS, mental illness, poor neighbourliness. In addition, participants indicated that many young people, who should be helping themselves and their families, are in prison, making it difficult for such families to fend for themselves and develop.

Another commonly cited negative consequence of conflict and violence is hatred between or among extended family members and neighbours, which leads to loss of social networks and development opportunities. For example, conflicts among extended family members may lead some members into establishing development projects away from home, and associating those projects with people other than their family members. Similarly, family members may, for similar reasons, not support family members in anyway even if they can. In extreme cases, a family member may resort to witchcraft against a family member or neighbour. Other negative consequences of violence mentioned included loss of property, as people have to sell their land and other property to meet the costs of compensation, medical treatment, and other costs related to physical violence. Generally, participants expressed the fear that violence was undermining their ability to lead their lives and do what matters to them, including, peacebuilding. As a young man in Otuke said, “I fear that I might die any time, and I fear to indulge in any controversy or protest” (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021).

Conflict and violence have also severed social ties between and among family and community members, leaving many young people socially stranded. For example, a young man in Otuke regretted, “I miss the connections and benefits of living with people who should be able to support me better (FGD, male



participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021). In addition, conflict and violence have undermined the self-esteem and respect of young people's, especially young men that have been rendered incapable of providing for their families. As a young man said, "If your wife undermines you because you have failed to provide for her, it affects your self-esteem and ability to command respect in your community, as people loose trust in you" (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021). It is not only young people's self-esteem and respect that have been damaged by conflict and violence: access to development programmes has also been hindered. When "people think that you are violent", a young man said, you are excluded from "government and NGO programmes." (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021). Moreover, when you are violent, "You fail to interact freely with other people", making difficult or impossible to join development programmes (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021).

Conflict and violence have affected even household development projects. For example, according to a young man, "We now fear to keep cattle because the Karimojong may raid them any time" (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021). The violence has not spared even ordinary, small businesses:

As a teacher or any other person, we do side businesses like running a saloon, but we cannot progress. You cannot work beyond a certain time; they break into your shops or they kill you while on a *boda boda* [on your way back home] (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

In some cases, the fear of violence, especially of robbery, has forced people to adopt bizarre sleeping arrangements:

We are sceptical about the risk of starting business because of theft. We have goats and children that spend nights in the same house, and our pigs stay in one of the rooms of our house for fear of thieves. Thieves give waragi [local gin] to goats to help transport them with ease. Even when the thieves are caught, they are often pardoned, and they steal again. Some of these thieves are street kids, and their "ambassador" (leader) says they are not bad people, but they are looking for survival (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Through the lens of the youth, it can be argued that conflicts and violence are prevalent in the study area. The findings also show that whereas there is no active armed conflict in the region, memories of past violence are fresh in the minds of young people most of whom do not wish to witness those events again. Yet, the dominant narrative shows that there is a section of the youth who are ready to adopt violence to address their challenges, and it is feared that some former LRA fighters have not reintegrated. Participants also suggested that the spread of COVID-19 triggered many other

underlying issues, and led to an increase in violence, vulnerability and exclusion among young people. Young people have adopted a number of coping strategies, including resort to alcohol and drug abuse, and the formation of gangs. Alcohol, drugs and youth gangs are discussed below because they are negative coping strategies that are likely to increase violence and vulnerability, and hinder efforts to rebuild community lives.

### 6.2.2 Alcohol and drug abuse

Alcohol and drug abuse was the most cited concern among the youth sampled. In an FGD, one of the youth who proudly spoke about his indulgence in alcohol as a hobby argued that life was so hard and depressing that one needed alcohol and drugs to forget one's worries and problems. He stated that it was not good to blame the youth without understanding why they do what they do, indicating that those who are in such a situation know how difficult it is to manage life. Meanwhile, some youth attributed the increase in drug abuse to peer influence. While those with problems justify the use of drugs to relieve their pain or frustrations, others are drawn to drugs out of curiosity, but they end up getting addicted to them.

Asked why the youth indulge in alcohol and drugs, the participants noted that life had become very hard, with no opportunities to contribute to family welfare. Some youth noted that, in such circumstances, it was better to be under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol because it took away the feeling of guilt and pain. In the words of one of the participants,

Instead of people at home [family] bothering you with their problems, alcohol and/or 'puf' [marijuana] gives you the good and peaceful company that you need to move on with life during the long hours of day and night. I think it is better than committing suicide. I cannot handle the headache from home without being charged [getting drunk] (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021).

This information was corroborated by a cultural leader representing youth at the institution, when he argued that the actions of some parents were partly responsible for the negative coping strategies adopted by young people. In his words, "We are old people, but our parents want us to feel young, and they are the ones undermining and burdening us. They must respect us if they want us to be creative and successful" (KII, youth representative to the cultural institution at clan level, Otuke, 16 August 2021).

Indeed, in some cases, the discussions seemed to portray family or community members as a burden to the youth. However, some key informants, especially parents, presented the youth as reckless, lazy and neglectful of their parents and community. However, some participants and key informants also noted

that not all young people were vulnerable, and that the pressure of responsibility was not a good enough reason to resort to alcohol and drug abuse. In their view, the main problem was indiscipline among the youth, and their failure to heed advice.

Concerns about alcohol and drug abuse were widely shared by young people in other FGDs, and key informants, across the study area. School-going youth in the study complained about what they called the disruptive behaviour of their fellow young people who engaged in alcohol and drug abuse. In particular, they cited noise during study hours, theft and conniving with wrong elements within the community to harass female colleagues. While none of the participants indicated that they were directly involved in drug abuse, the concern about the effect of alcohol and drug abuse was shared by all. In an FGD with female youth, drug and alcohol abuse strongly featured as one of the main causes of indiscipline and insecurity at school. This is because some male youth collaborate with members of the host communities who come to school late in the night to supply drugs and alcohol, and to access female students for sexual intercourse. Meanwhile, a separate discussion with the mixed group revealed that both male and female youth were to blame because they made themselves available to wrong elements in the community, and were both involved in alcohol and drug consumption. The researcher's observation also revealed that the school in question was located close to a trading centre, did not have a perimeter wall or fence, and shared the only nearby borehole with members of the host community. Therefore, it was very easy for the students to access community members, and vice versa.

However, while participants and key informants frequently cited alcohol and drugs as a major concern, many of them dismissed the explanations premised on the difficulty of life, stating that some young people use alcohol and drugs as a mere excuse to justify their laziness, indiscipline and deviation from 'socially accepted' behaviour. One of the key informants observed that although young people had access to land, some of them did not bother to do farm work, and others had left work to their wives while they concentrated on drinking alcohol and smoking dangerous substances. Actually, according to him, young people's style of life, laziness, and indulgence in heavy drinking was responsible for the hunger and famine in their communities, and their inability to meet basic needs. Generally, participants and key informants linked alcohol abuse to the negative changes in the lives of youth whose ability to inspire confidence and participate in important issues that affect them had dwindled, raising concern about the future of the region after the conflict. According to some key informants, one of the most severe impacts of alcohol and drug abuse was the erosion of the ability of youth to make sound judgements, and to be

alert to important issues. A key informant wondered, “How can young people be entrusted with serious societal responsibilities if they are never sober?” (KII, parent, Erute North, 25 February 2022).

Interestingly, a number of youth participants were concerned that some of their fellow young people had tainted the image of young people who were generally perceived negatively, and were increasingly losing the trust of older people. They observed that alcohol abuse among the youth did not bode well for the future of the area, and that unless something was done to stem the tide, the future of Lango would be in jeopardy. Expressing concern over the uncontrolled behaviour of young people, a parent remarked:

With the level of alcohol and drug abuse that young people are involved in, there is no future. We blame liquor companies for making cheap *waragi* [potent gin] to destroy the future of our youths, yet the government is doing nothing to regulate alcohol production and consumption (KII, parent, Otuke, 18 February 2022).

In line with the above observation, participants in the study cited a number of alcohol brands and drugs on the market, which, they noted, provided options for people with different purchasing power. Some of the participants in at least two FGDs with out-of-school youth, expressed a preference for cheap and ‘kill me quick’ brands, such as *Torero*, *Boda Liquor*, and *Moga Moga* [local gin]. According to these youth, these brands are affordable and effective in giving young people ‘peace of mind’. They indicated that *Moga Moga* is their home-brewed brand of choice, ever available, affordable and effective. They dismissed claims that the local brew was dangerous to their health, indicating that some very old people in the villages, who have been drinking *Moga Moga* since they were young, are still alive.

In the case of drugs, in addition to the traditionally and commonly known *jai* (marijuana), the youth cited new brands in the market, which include glue, paraffin, *paspalam* and *mo dege* (aviation kerosene). Interviews with teachers and parents revealed that the youth have also added grey hair to the list of drugs they commonly use. Grey hair is said to be a more potent, long-term intoxicant whose effect can last as long as a year from the time of intake. It was also revealed that grey hair is probably the most dangerous of the many drugs that the youth use, whose other effects are yet to be established. Generally, any mention of drugs during FGDs with youth, especially grey hair, attracted smiles and laughter; and in at least two separate FGDs, when I asked young people whether they were aware of, and/or smoked, grey hair, they laughed and smiled while looking at one another in apparent amusement. However, they did not volunteer any specific answer to my question.

According to one key informant,

Imagine university graduates who are thugs and thieves who smoke *bangi* [drugs] and stay idle for the whole day; and yet they boast of their graduate status! They take drugs and gamble the entire day and, to make up for the loss and lack of opportunity to access money, they raid people's homes, especially in the night, to steal property, using all means, including trickery, burglary, and murder. Some of them have organized themselves into gangs, called a *million cover*, and they have stages next to the home of the Chairperson of Local Council I, and close to the police post; and the police officers LC officials are aware of them. If you try to speak against them, nobody listens to you because they believe the gangs have the support of the leaders. I want to advise you to arm yourself with machetes so you can you fight back when they attack you. Otherwise, you are on your own (KII, parent, Erute North, 4 August, 2022).

Generally, alcohol and drugs featured commonly in the discussions of negative youth experiences. Both the youths and key informants agreed that alcohol and drug abuse was affecting communities in adversely. Moreover, key informants felt more strongly about the issue to which they attributed young people's criminality, poor health, and unproductivity. In an interview, a teacher narrated,

We are told that these young people go to the garbage bins to pick grey hair in order to smoke. I understand that the effect of smoke from grey hair lasts for a year, and that means the smoker is intoxicated for a whole year before the effect of the substance disappears. As teachers, we keep raising awareness among community members so that old and other people with grey hair don't shave in public places or discard their shaved hair anywhere young people can find it. We admit that smoke from grey hair has kept some young people in a state of confusion, and teachers have to be careful when dealing with students whose character seems strange, for they could be under the influence of such drugs and are potentially dangerous (KII, teacher, Otuke, 18 August 2021).

These sentiments were echoed in the words of a parent who said,

As a 67-year old, retired civil servant, I produce enough food to take me to the new season, and to see me through the entire year. But these young men, who have all the energy and time, have almost nothing to eat throughout the year; and they don't seem bothered at all about the welfare of their families. They fancy alcohol and leave gardening to their wives who, on their own, cannot produce enough food for their families. In addition, the young men sell the little food produced by the women, and spend the proceeds on alcohol. As a result, we old people have to feed, and pay school fees for, their children because we feel ashamed to see their children starve and risk ending up on the streets. I wonder whether they are aware that they are bound to die some day! (KII, parent, Erute North, 29 July 2021).

Another parent, perhaps wondering if alcohol and drugs had any role to play in the differences between the conduct of his female and male children, had this to say:

I am happy with female children [actually adults above 18 years]. Even though they are married and in their homes, they don't forget about our welfare. When I am sick, they help pay my medical bills; and I know that they would do more if they had the means. But I know they are also struggling to meet their own family needs. They also visit to check on us. Overall, I appreciate their love for us as their parents. If all children were to behave as responsibly, then life would be better. However, my male children are the biggest headache that we have. Since we returned home after the LRA conflict [displacement], one of them sold off our land in the city, without knowledge or consent, and he used all the money alone. This one [referring to a male youth who lives with him in the village] has become a witch in the family. We have paid dowry for him to get a wife but he forced her to go due to his recklessness and love for alcohol. Now he has brought another young lady, and still the burden is on me as his father to pay dowry for him. Imagine a man of his age still burdening me in spite of all that I did to bring him up to this stage. I expected that my sons would be appreciative of what we have done for them, but instead, they will send us to the grave long before our time (KII, parent, Otuke, 16 August 2021).

Overwhelmed by the depth of adversity to which drug abuse had plunged her son, a female parent indicated that she thought her son had been bewitched because unless he took drugs, he did not seem to understand anything, or to have any purpose in life. She remarked:

I think my son is bewitched because I cannot imagine a son whom I brought up so well turning into what he is today. He does not seem normal or understand anything in life until he has taken *jai* [marijuana] (KII, parent, Erute North, 29 July 2021).

Moreover, FGD participants in the same location confirmed that some young people known to them were unable to eat or speak normally unless they had taken *jai* [marijuana]. Some participants observed that their fellow youth on drugs also expected them to 'style up' by joining them in smoking *jai*. However, some of the key informants, while agreeing to the fact that youth were involved in drugs and other vices, indicated that the circumstances of the youth led them to behave the way they did. In addition, they argued that some parents and the government were to blame for leaving the youth on their own, and for the mess that the youth have found themselves in. They cited bad examples from parents who were always drunk, used abusive words, and inflicted violence on their children, and spent no productive or constructive time with their children.

Other participants also blamed negative influence and drug abuse for the failure of young people to engage constructively with the issues that affect them. In their opinion, youth who are under the influence of drugs do not care about what is going on around them, and are not taken seriously within their communities. Interviews with parents paint a gloomy picture of the behaviour exhibited by some youth who, they say, are involved in substance abuse. According to these parents, substance abuse by the youth,

especially by male youth, has led to them neglecting their physical wellbeing, abandoning their wives and children to the care of grandparents, and engaging in crime, to the detriment of their families and communities. Some key informants opined that the scarcity of opportunities available to the youth to build their capacities, and to lead self-reliant lives, should have propelled young people to take proactive steps to change their lives for the better. These key informants argue that the youth are instead involved in drug abuse, gangs, and other forms of violence, which negatively affect their lives and those of their communities. One of the key informants noted that the fact that the youth were disadvantaged did not, for example, in any way justify their engagement in destructive behaviour, including violence, environmental degradation through massive felling of trees to make charcoal, and selling off family land for their personal interests.

### 6.2.3 Youth gangs

One of the most cited issues across all locations was the emergence of youth gangs and their engagement in violence and criminal activities. Participants feared that the systematic manner in which the gangs emerged, and the resultant increase in violence across rural and urban areas, had the potential to curtail efforts for recovery and peace in post-conflict northern Uganda. While communities were familiar with street kids and the vices associated with them, the groups of street kids transformed into gangs, and new gangs emerged, leading to widespread violence and crime, especially during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Initially, communities were used to street kids, who were mainly urban-based, and often involved in minor vices. However, the LRA conflict led to the emergence of children who took to the streets to escape being abducted by the LRA. Over the years, these children especially orphaned ones and those pressed by the challenges of life, have criminal gangs that have eventually spread to rural areas.

In all the locations, the participants expressed concerns and fears over the disruptive activities of these youth gangs, including theft and robbery, rape, torture, bullying and disruption of public events, and even murder. Study findings indicate that while the gangs have evolved from different parts of Otuke District, their intentions and operations were similar. The participants admitted that they knew some of the members of the gangs, and they identified the different groups operating in their locations. The groups identified included the *Pipino Boys* (wasps), the *Pharoah Group*, and the *Abongo Balu Group*. The first two groups reportedly operate in urban and peri-urban areas while the latter operates in rural locations in Otuke. While the *Pipino* and *Pharoah* groups were said to operate secretly, the *Abongo Balu Group* in Otuke was said to operate overtly, be it during the day or at night. A key informant expressed the fear that gang activity was likely to be the next source of widespread violence in northern Uganda,

and indicated that the phenomenon was not limited to Lira District, but spread across locations in the greater northern Uganda. Elsewhere in the region, existing gangs included the *Aguu* in the neighbouring Gulu District of Acholi sub-region, the *Koku* of Kumi District in the Teso sub-region, and many others in Karamoja sub-region.

According to one key informant, the youth gangs had been evolving over the years across most districts of northern Uganda. In his opinion, the gangs seem to be in communication with one another, and trend is worrying. Therefore, what had started as street kids in Gulu Town, had evolved into an organised group, *Aguu*, which continues to change the dynamics of life in Gulu and neighbouring districts. In his view, with gangs taking shape in Karamoja, cattle rustling, other forms of crime and violence as well as gross human rights violations were expected to rise. He added that the emergence of gangs across the Karamoja sub-region, special youth gangs known for systematic raid on villages to loot food and other property, mirrors the actions of *Aguu*, who represent a new generation of young people eking a living by any means possible. Left unchecked, he argued, the gangs were likely to plunge the Acholi and Lango sub-regions into even worse turmoil than they had already experienced.

These groups reportedly represent young people who feel disadvantaged, and they collaborate with community members who support their agenda. One of these gangs, the *Pipino* was dubbed tiny as wasps, to describe its sophisticated nature and the power of its “sting”, and it was said to have the capacity to revenge against local communities by using violent and nonviolent means. *Pipino* boys are known for their brutality, raping women, beating people, and stealing from community members. While participants kept referring to *Pipino* boys, one of the key informants noted that the gang includes girls, although the leaders and most of the members are boys.

Meanwhile, the *Pharaoh* gangs are so-called to echo the ruthless acts of the biblical Pharaoh, implying they would act ruthlessly to achieve their ends. At least two participants reported having fallen victim to the gang that had been terrorizing their communities, especially during the peak of COVID-19 pandemic, waylaying people, raping women, and stealing of property, including livestock. This gang is said to have even restricted night movements and business operation hours; and its members are said to use alcohol and drugs to intoxicate themselves before executing their missions.

In Otuke District, the youth gang is called *Abongo Balu*, literally meaning “uninvited guests”, and, as the name suggests, they are known for storming and disrupting public gatherings, helping themselves on the food, dowry money (in case of a marriage), and other items. This group reportedly evolved specifically



to access resources by force. Describing their mode of operation, one of the key informants had this to say:

The *Abong Balu* could burn an entire music system, disorganize people, and disrupt an entire ceremony. If you are unlucky, they could injure or even kill you. Then there is the group called *Pipino Boys* who are equally dangerous. I remember an incident where a man bought alcohol for some *Pipino Boys*, but on his way back home, some members of the same *Pipino* group attacked him. Fortunately, he was rescued by other members of the *Pipino* group after they learnt that his life was in danger. It means you have to have some connections with *Pipino* boys to survive attack or to avoid embarrassment. Imagine one of the *Pipino* girls asked an old man to have sex with her, but because the old man could not perform to her satisfaction, she cut his back with a razor blade, left him bleeding, and later asked him to run for his life (KII, parent, Erute North, 4 August 2022).

In addition to other criminal acts, the *Abongo Balu* group is said to particularly target marriage and other social gatherings to help themselves on money, food and other items. For fear of disrupting an entire event, community members have reportedly devised means of negotiating with them to access what they want with a modicum of order. Interestingly, in some circumstances, especially in the neighbouring district of Kumi, the *Koku* (meaning red ant) are said to play a key role in ensuring the safety and security of special groups of people, including local leaders. However, they also reportedly disrupt public functions if the conditions are unfavourable or if their demands are not met. Generally, youth gangs are said to be changing the patterns of celebrations in communities. For example, a parent observed that, for the most part, the *Abongo Balu* group have made it difficult to exchange money and gifts in the traditional way during marriage ceremonies. Instead, one has to find a way of delivering the money before or after the marriage ceremony, something he noted is contrary to the spirit of such an event, which people should celebrate with freedom, honour, and dignity.

Interestingly, the characteristics and conduct of the gangs are similar across locations. They use sharp objects, like knives, machetes and similar tools, and firearms. In Karamoja, the gangs are said to be very systematic in their activities; they decide which community to visit at a given time, and do all manner of things, including stealing food, beating people, and committing other human rights violations. In Gulu District, the *Aguu* group is widely known to ‘officially’ terrorise Gulu City. In the course of my field research, I travelled to Gulu to meet a key informant from the Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies, Gulu University, with whom I interacted until about 9 pm before I could leave for my hotel room.

However, I was informed that as a visitor in that community, it was no longer safe for me to travel back to my hotel room in the city center, and that it was even more risky for me to do so on the same *boda boda* (motorbike taxi) that had taken me to meet the key informant, because in addition to having a new

motorbike, the *boda boda* rider was not known in the area. That meant that I had to use a *boda boda* rider known to the gang. In the opinion of my Gulu University key informant, the youth gangs are part of their communities, and are more likely to be lenient with some members of their communities than with ‘outsiders’ unknown to them. Indeed, the *boda boda* rider who had taken me to my rendezvous with my key informant was asked to return without me so that I could take a *boda boda* from within the area if I wanted to reach my destination safely. I had to spend the night at a nearby hotel, about one kilometre from where I had planned to stay. But I still feared for the safety of the *boda boda* rider who had taken me to the home of the key informant, and his brand new motorcycle. The next morning, I requested for an interview with a hotel attendant, a young lady aged 24, who indicated to me that the *Aguu* were not people to play around with, noting that they had unlimited ability to cause harm. According to her, the nature of her night work is risky, and she only survives because her husband is friendly with *Aguu* members in the locality. Apparently, the *Aguu* members in the area deliberately spare those they know to be potentially harmless to them, and those who ‘cooperate’ with them. But what accounts for this high level of vice with impunity?

Some key informants offered varying opinions on why vice was thriving. In the first place, they viewed youth criminality as already out-of-hand because of the widespread presence of gangs and their high level of organization: anyone who tried to counter gang activity would be putting himself and his family at great risk. Therefore, people prefer to remain indifferent to gangs. In the words of one of the parents,

I am very much afraid because, as much as you want the best for your children, it is impossible to control their actions. Imagine a situation where you bring your children up well, and they turn against you. I was nearly killed by some youth while having a drink in Ngetta because I picked up an argument with some youth while advising them on how to improve their lives. I really think they should not be targeting other people, including the elderly. How would you crack the back of an old man or follow an LC in his or her own place to reprimand him or her for trying to guide you on how you should behave? If you tell a child that what he is doing is not good, that child is likely to attack and harm you at night (KII, parent, Erute North, 4 August 2022).

Worse still, it was reported that some gangs have connections with some prominent members of the community and police officers, so that when they engage in criminal activities, they are not arrested or punished. For example, a female youth cited the *Koku* group of Kumi District as comprising of a network of about 200 youths who have a clear chain of command and links to the police and the elite for whom the gang openly boasts of providing security. In her own words,

The *Koku* group openly boast of being known by the government, and of their ability to provide security for the ‘big men and women’ in their communities. Therefore, I don’t think police can do anything against them. Actually, they are most likely collaborating with the police to commit crimes and destabilise communities. If it was not the case, why would such youths attend public functions and help organize crowds without being arrested for the crimes they are known to commit? (Interview with a female youth, Lira Municipality, 3 August 2021).

It is evident from the foregoing account that while people recognize the danger that the growing influence of youth gangs and their activities pose to communities, the fear of the consequences of taking any action against the gangs has led to inaction at the individual and community levels. Moreover, some key informants suggested that acting against the gangs could result into long-term incarceration or some other adversity, which few people are prepared for. In the opinion of a key informant,

When you report gang activities to some LCs and community members, they ignore you because they also fear being harmed by the same gangs. [He weeps and asks for forgiveness for his emotions and then continues] I have suffered a lot, and my children are starving because these young people steal everything, including chicken, cattle, and goats; and they sell it cheaply. Imagine an old person whose two bulls were stolen by some young men, also had his daughter raped; and when he intervened, he was arrested and taken to jail; and now he has to serve a jail term although he is innocent. This really annoys me (KII, parent, Erute North, 4 August 2022).

Evidently, most respondents felt insecure due to the activities of the youth gangs, and this sense of insecurity was well-founded, and echoed in the narratives of youth across communities in the study area where youth gangs had reportedly maimed and murdered people, raped women, stolen property, and disrupted public functions with impunity. While a few gang members had been subjected to mob justice or arrested and killed, neither the community nor security forces had taken any systematic action against the gangs, largely because of the fear of retaliation by the gangs, which further emboldened the gang members.

#### 6.2.4 Experience of violence and implications for peace

A good number of participants indicated that it was the responsibility of young people to change the current, undesirable situation into opportunities for peace. To this end, they suggested, young people should begin by using their experiences of armed conflict to encourage the young generation to shun war and violence, embrace dialogue, and report criminal elements to local government authorities. They also proposed that people engaged in violence should face the full wrath of the law, and that the concerns of different categories of youth should be addressed in a fair, transparent, and timely manner. Reflecting

on the current condition of relative peace, one participant observed, “We now have access to schools and farmland, and our minds are settled. We can sleep in houses without thinking of running at night or being displaced. There is some stability and peace of mind” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Some participants noted that their experiences of conflicts which had led to loss of life, and undermined the quality of life and future prospects, had helped them to understand the negative consequences of conflict, and to shun violence. In addition, a section of young people saw an opportunity to use their experiences of conflict and violence as a basis for devising strategies to break the cycle of violence, and move forward. According to one of these young people,

Some people have looked at the violent past as an opportunity to use the bad past as a basis for creating a better future. We are therefore working with different members of our communities to make decisions efficiently and collaboratively. We don’t want a repeat of the suffering that we experienced during the LRA insurgency (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

This view of past experiences of violence as a trigger for constructive behaviour was also shared by other participants. According one such participant, conflict and violence come with some opportunities that the youth need to tap into to rebuild their lives. In his own words, “We have bought land and settled in other places to minimise conflicts at [their original] home, and we have set up businesses in our current locations (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021). In the same vein another participant reported, “Some of us have realised the importance of having alternative homes in other locations for security purposes. This enables us to leave troubled areas when conflicts arise, and settle in the alternative home (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021). Yet another participant had this to say: “Some people are running away from their families and family land, and acquiring their own land far away to avoid conflicts, but also to initiate projects (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

The revelations of these three participants indicate that former IDPs or their children have integrated in their displacement locations or are at least commuting between their areas of displacement and their original homes. These revelations also imply that land is at the centre of conflict and violence, making it an important factor regulating relationships at the family and community levels.

The foregoing discussion shows that, individually, young people are using their experiences of conflict and violence either negatively or positively; and that communities are managing conflicts at different levels. This suggests that, in order to create positive long-term outcomes, managing and resolving

conflicts have to be prioritised over and above transforming conflicts. According to a key informant, the experiences of armed violence have weakened social cohesion, and caused failures in many aspects of life, for example, by limiting the use of indigenous dispute-resolution practices. He cited massacres, trauma, murder, disregard for human life, and mistrust of government as manifestations and consequences of conflicts, which have made it hard to recover and rebuild lives. He argued further that the current level of violence is a symptom of a bigger problem that requires the community to create space for young people to articulate their needs, because restricting such spaces only encourages young people to resort to violence. In his words,

I want peaceful demonstrations to show our discontent, and I hate violent demonstrations because they are horrifying. We don't want to go through similar violent experiences again. To conclude, I am an old man of 69 years, and I want peace (KII, parent, Lira Municipality, 24 February 2022).

Earlier discussions on the experiences of conflict and violence showed that, in most family and community disputes, some of the parties involved ended up resorting to violence. Indeed, participants across the different locations indicated that resort to violence was their only available means of addressing grievances and expressing discontent. It is not surprising, therefore, that most key informants expressed the fear that, by resorting to violence as a means of conflict resolution within their communities, young people were headed in the wrong direction, and paving the way for even more violence in the future. As a female participant said,

How can we be leaders when we are engaged in drugs at such an alarming rate? Moreover, these youths have no respect for anyone, including their parents, teachers and local authorities. Worse still, many young people are joining bad groups (FGD, female participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Her fear was supported by a female youth working for a government institution, who observed that the youth gangs, especially the *Pipino Boys* and the *Pharaoh* groups, had made life miserable for most people, especially for women and girls. The youths, she added, had adopted violence as a means of attaining whatever they wanted.

While the resort to violence as a means to any given end received mixed reactions from some respondents, generally, young people felt that, in the absence of space for dialogue on issues that affect them, violence enabled them to draw attention to their woes. Some youths reported that the use of violence had helped them to reclaim their property, although it had also heightened intra-familial tensions, led to physical injury and death, and sometimes worsened communal relations. As stated above, using past

experiences of violence to take positive steps to rebuild lives is an example of how previous conflicts can serve as a basis for managing current conflicts to release tension, and avoid further conflict. At the same time, for vulnerable groups, past experiences of violence seem to provide immediate solutions to, and raise awareness of, and vigilance against, the violation of human rights. However, our data shows that, in and of itself, violence has not addressed the root causes of the absence of peace that the youth and the communities are grappling with.

Therefore, it is logical to conclude that the experience of violence is a two-edged sword: while it has the potential for building peace, it can also perpetuate violence. Responses from participants show that while some sections of the youth take the experience of violence as an opportunity for them to end violence and rebuild their communities, some youths have also resorted to violence as a means to address their predicaments, especially land conflicts. The resort to violence could also partly arise from the weakness of the current justice system which appears to be incapable of resolving conflicts in an efficient, effective, fair, and transparent manner.

The use of violence and its linkage to the absence of an effective space for youth engagement also drew some mixed reactions among a section of participants. Those opposed to the use of violence highlighted the fact that despite opportunities at their disposal, young people have not taken bold steps to engage government and other stakeholders, and to hold them to account. They indicated that the resolution of issues that are important to the youth does not need any special platform: it only requires young people to mobilise themselves, use existing media, and speak out candidly without any fear. This opinion was shared by a key informant who observed that although young people are to blame for the failure to seize opportunities to help themselves and build their communities, they have numerous excuses for that failure. He argued that instead of young people taking seriously the opportunities available to them, they focus on the pursuit of immediate material benefits. Referring to his experience on how the youth respond to opportunities, he observed,

Youths have been invited to so many seminars and workshops, but they are only interested in money. When you tell them about farming, they are not interested. They want money, and they are preoccupied with football and betting. They are not patient enough to work on issues that take time (KII, Chairperson Local Council, Lira Municipality, 24 February 2022).

This statement echoes some sentiments expressed by young people themselves, who noted that some of the government programmes were bound to fail because they were geared to tree-planting which is a long-term investment that is not responsive to young people's immediate and medium-term needs and

interests. A few participants also recommended that funds for youth initiatives should be given directly to them so that they can decide how they want to use the funds. (For a complete picture of how youth perceive, and respond to, interventions targeting them, and the ability of such initiatives to address their immediate, felt needs, refer to Section 6.5.2 on structures and modes of participation in peacebuilding).

### 6.3 Youth Voices on, and the Practice of, Peace

It should already be evident that young people's experiences of violence reflect their respective, prevailing community situations. Generally, the participants equated the concept of peace to absence of barriers to peace, or to the existence of efforts to create an environment that can enable them to meet their needs, and realise their aspirations. By exploring the concept of peace, participants came to a common definition of peace, and of peace-building processes and outcomes.

Most of the youth recognised the absence of war and violence as the first stage in the pursuit of peace. They also acknowledge that war and violence disrupt individual and community socio-economic development efforts. However, they also acknowledged that peace is much more than the mere absence of war, and that it entails freedom from fear; access to opportunities; and the ability to overcome any environmental stress that interferes with their wellbeing. According to one young person, peace is the "Absence of war and violence, including the opportunity to disagree without generating fights and bloodshed" (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021). In the opinion of another young person, peace is the "Absence of fear or terror inspired by another or the environment" (FGD, female participants, Otuke, 17 February 2022).

The above quotations point to young people's aspiration to live in a society free from war, violence, terror and environmental stress. The issues raised implied that changes in the lives of people over the years have influenced the way they conceptualise peace.

A number of other participants defined peace in terms of freedom, especially freedom from insecurity and theft. This is because, as the youth narratives suggest, insecurity and theft thwart the efforts of the youth improve their lives and meet their basic needs. In some cases, both youth and key informants indicated that, due to insecurity and theft, they had to pay additional costs to do business, were unable to access their farms and harvest their crops, or lost their crops and other property. In their words, for them, peace means "Freedom from insecurity and theft (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Yet another definition of peace related to advancement in science and technology and changes in culture, which, participants indicated, had led to significant changes in the way young people appreciate and interact with different cultures and peoples. According to proponents of this concept of peace, the Internet had enabled young people to access information from any part of the world, thereby creating awareness of events around the world. Citing human rights abuses and humanitarian crises, some participants indicated that, thanks to the current state of information science and technology (ICT), it was possible for humanitarian agencies to intervene rapidly in situations across the world. Others cited the ability to use the Internet and social media to learn new things and use modern technology to improve their lives. Many respondents saw the Internet as an opportunity to connect to different issues, people and opportunities to improve wellbeing. Others saw the Internet as enabling people to claim and exercise their rights, to promote the rights of others, including young people, and to exercise freedom of expression by bypassing traditional and often rigid and oppressive structures of citizen engagement.

Therefore, some young people look at peace in terms of the availability of the different media of communication to express their views, connect to other young people and progressive networks in order to promote the rights of young people. In the opinion of some participants, peace revolves around freedom of expression, using mainly ICT of technology, learn, and bring about change. As one of the participants indicated, social media has the potential to enable young people to share information freely and to bypass the often autocratic and bureaucratic structures for participation. According to him, peace is “Freedom to express oneself freely” (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021). In the opinion of many FGD participants, especially female ones, the expression of freedom also relates to children’s rights, particularly the rights not to be abused, raped or defiled. According to one such participant, peace entails “Freedom from child abuse, rape and defilement” (FGD, female participants, Otuke, 17 February 2022).

Responses from the participants also showed that young people were keen to live in an environment that allows them to achieve what they aspire to, including the attainment of personal, inner peace, cordial interpersonal relationships, environmental sustainability, and socio-political and economic wellbeing. This aspiration was succinctly expressed by one participant when he summarised it as “living in harmony with oneself, others, and the environment” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Based on these narratives of peace, participants indicated that peacebuilding was a means to address their fears, enhance their freedoms, and promote their aspirations. Therefore, they defined peacebuilding in form of activities that promote peace, rehabilitation, counselling, reintegration and harmonious living at



the family and community levels. To some participants, peacebuilding is about creating an environment that lays the ground for the welfare of humanity, physically, psychologically and mentally. It is, therefore, logical to conclude that the respondents' dominant narrative of peacebuilding was aligned to their dominant definition of violence; and that, in search of peace, and to alleviate their suffering, the youth have used different means, including undertaking projects to raise awareness, and protests and violence against what they perceive as injustice. The young people's views of peace reflect their narratives of violence and how they seek to attain peace. In addition, the experiences show that young people aspire not only to the absence of war, but also to structural change.

#### 6.4 Youth Perceptions of their Role in Peacebuilding

Regarding the role of youth in peacebuilding, the study focused on the benefits of the involvement of youth in peacebuilding programmes, and community expectations of young people in addressing issues that affect them and their communities. The findings suggest that youth think that they should participate in peacebuilding because conflict and violence affect them directly, and they would like to be involved in peacebuilding efforts. In all the FGDs and interviews with youth, participants reported that they valued their contribution to society because they considered themselves central to the future of their communities.

Participants indicated that peace could only be built and sustained if young people could identify the issues critical to peace, and get actively involved in working on those issues while inspiring other young people to do the same, in pursuit of individual and community peace. They argued that the future of their communities depended on the youth getting constructively involved in community affairs, and training the next generation of youth to emulate their parents or the generation of youth before theirs. However, according to most of the youth, this could only happen if certain conditions were met, and these include the youth supporting their parents' generation. However, according to most of the youth, this could only happen if certain conditions were met, and these include the youth being supported by their parents' generation and other stakeholders to get meaningfully involved in community affairs.

Participants frequently cited the need for young people to develop a sense of belonging to, and ownership of, their respective communities in order for them to be able to tackle their challenges effectively. Young people who had participated in some development programmes reported having benefited from them, partly by learning to identify their challenges and opportunities in engaging effectively with issues that affect them in their respective communities. A female youth participant, who happened to be a researcher

in economic opportunities for young people in northern Uganda, had this to say about her participation in a previous youth development programme,

I got the opportunity to understand the real-life problems experienced by that young people who do not have the opportunity that I had. I was able to get first-hand information on the different ways young people were trying to make a living with the limited resources they had. In [the] Think Tank [research project], I was able to understand that young people actually need a platform to enable them to be heard because they have wonderful ideas. I had just graduated from the university, and I didn't know that I could face the problem of not being heard (Interview with female youth employed by NGO, Lira, June 20, 2022).

This young lady's experience implies that many young people, including graduates of tertiary education institutions, are inadequately informed, or ill-informed, about life's challenges and opportunities, in a situation where their best expectations are often undermined by a reality in which their participation is limited by structural impediments to their engagement. Therefore, having a chance to participate in a development programme that allows them to interact directly with issues in their communities, and to engage with other young people, helps young people to learn about the possibilities and opportunities to participate actively in community life.

Young participants who had had the opportunity to participate in matters that affect young people reported having been enabled to discover their talents, learn from others, share their challenges, and network in pursuit of their potential. This suggests that when young people get an opportunity or a platform to be heard, to discuss their challenges, to showcase their talents, and to learn, they can benefit immensely from such an opportunity. In the opinion of most participants, platforms for sharing ideas can also be therapeutic, and help beneficiaries to cope with trauma and a feeling of helplessness. Interestingly, participants revealed that the discussions we had during the study proved to be a rare opportunity to reflect on and talk about their own challenges in a constructive manner positive. In the words of one female participant,

Participating in this research, and the issues coming out of it, have provided me with mental relief, especially after realizing that when you share challenges and opportunities with others, you become stronger, partly because you realise that you are not alone in your predicament. I also feel motivated to follow in the footsteps of others who have overcome their challenges (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Also cited by the participants is the value young people attach to their participation, which helps them to understand their contexts and gain knowledge of their rights and responsibilities, to be able to take steps to improve their welfare as well as that of their communities. Participants indicated that awareness

empowered them by giving them a sense of purpose and a feeling of self-actualization. Indeed some of the participants noted that it is only when young people are aware of their roles and obligations that they can be vigilant, and act responsibly on issues that affect them. For instance, one of the participants cited interventions to protect children as crucial in creating awareness and vigilance against child abuse, and of the need for communities to ensure a child-friendly environment for healthy growth and wellbeing of children in their communities. In other words, participants recognised the role of knowledge about rights and responsibilities as crucial to internalising and committing to socio-cultural values and ethics, including dialogue, justice, equality and respect for fellow human beings. This, they argued, can have a positive impact on interpersonal relations at home, school, and in the community as a whole, and help individuals and families to identify and address conflicts collaboratively, effectively, and safely. In this regard, a female participant remarked, “A programme like child protection helps children to know their rights and responsibilities” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Another value attached to youth participating in peacebuilding that participants cited was the opportunity for self-discovery, especially of one’s talents, interests and opportunities, which was also said to be useful in building self-esteem, because when young people participate in issues that affect them, they get to understand what they can do better, and can work towards specific goals that contribute positively to society. Participants indicated that young people have a lot of potential in different areas, which they can only be actualized when those who possess it identify it, and put it to use at the earliest opportunity. In addition, participants linked self-discovery to self-esteem, stating that when young people know what they are good at, and are supported to pursue it, they gain the confidence necessary for them to attain their development goals in a society that they believe values them and their contribution.

Young people also indicated that there had been some peacebuilding programmes that addressed important issues that relate to young people. They cited interventions for the protection and promotion of human rights, economic empowerment, education and access to justice, dialogue, and environmental conservation as some of the critical themes relevant to their needs and aspirations, and that have the potential to support communities to rebuild their lives. For example, one of the participants stated that, directly or indirectly, some programmes can be useful to the general community, and added,

Such programmes are intended to benefit us and, if well-managed, they should enable us to improve our livelihoods and our future. Some of the youth trained by NGOs through some projects, have started their own projects, and are training other young people and community members. For example, even though some of us have not benefited directly from the NGOs, we benefited from cross-breeding of pigs to produce piglets that were

supplied to the direct beneficiaries, thus improving our local pig breeds (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

However, other participants argued that many peacebuilding programmes had not had any positive impact on the intended beneficiaries because they had not been participatory or inclusive. In the opinion of one participant, the war had left scars in the lives of the communities, but the programmes had failed to identify and address hidden challenges, such as trauma, psychological tensions, marginalization, and increasing poverty. Unless these challenges were addressed, they added, they will continue to hinder reintegration, healing and full recovery. In the opinion of one key informant, having served with the LRA meant that he had to endure the burden of negative, attendant consequences, translating into a multiplicity of needs that required an multifarious remedial approach. Using his experience, he drew attention to what he described as the growing tendency by different actors to target specific aspects of the needs of their intended beneficiaries while forgetting that for a programme to improve the well-being of its intended beneficiaries, it has to address the entire individual with his or her array of needs and vulnerabilities. Citing his own example to drive the point home, he revealed that even though he had been supported to graduate with a Diploma in Secretarial and Information Studies, he cannot function effectively in most aspects of life because he has other needs that have not been addressed by the diploma. In his words,

The mistake you people [perhaps referring to the government, NGOs and researchers] make is to think that you know everything about us. For instance, how do you know that I have bullets in my body if I don't tell you? There is an organization that insisted on paying my school fees while ignoring my other problems that affected my education and that could have probably killed me. I raised this with the organization that sponsored my education, but they said they would only pay for tertiary education and not health needs. Do you think I can study well when I am unhealthy? Since I thought education was that important to them, I requested them to support me to proceed to a degree programme, but the one in charge told me that my chance was over. If an organization genuinely wants to support someone to succeed, then they should be flexible enough to enable that person to succeed, otherwise whatever support they render would be incomplete and largely wasted (KII, Ex-combatant, Lira Municipality, 29 July 2021).

Participants also reported being inspired by some programmes, and wished to be part of such initiatives, arguing that young people should have opportunities to participate in issues they consider critical to their survival and the wellbeing of their communities, and through which they can make valuable contributions. Such programmes included the environmental programme for sustainability, which was reported to have been implemented at the school of one of the participants in collaboration with a German donor agency. According to the participant who had participated in the programme, it enables the young

people to interact with people within and outside of Uganda. Repeatedly, young people indicated that giving them an opportunity to understand the challenges of today helped them to learn to live responsibly at an early stage, and appreciate the implications of their actions or inaction for peace, and the role they can play in adapting and mitigating their challenges at an early stage. Participants indicated that each generation of young people learns from the generation before them, and that the opportunity to build peace in a community lies in the way young people relate to community issues. Linked to this argument was the idea that when young people work alongside inspirational individuals or leaders, they learn to do things differently, starting with positive change in attitudes, followed by emulating their role models.

Most participants agreed that there were significant benefits in involving young people in policy-making and programmes for peacebuilding. In particular, young people reported that through platforms that enable them to share ideas, they get to understand their challenges, and to identify the opportunities they have to address issues that affect them while at the same time learning from one another, and building on those lessons to improve their approaches to life. According to one youth employed as a researcher with Restless Development Uganda, while the opportunity for youth to be directly involved in research and programme design are rare, her experience enabled her to appreciate the value that young people add to the understanding of their context-specific challenges, and to provide insights into programme design and implementation. In her opinion, her research on economic opportunities for youth in northern Uganda, and her discussions decision-makers and other stakeholders were so enriching and fulfilling that she began to appreciate her role in changing the landscape for youth participation.

The young lady's opinion was validated by a Restless Development Uganda staff member who, as a key informant, averred that youth-led research had improved the way youth engage in development programmes. In his view, youth researchers were not just beneficiaries of such programmes; they were also co-designers by virtue of the role the findings of their research play in programme design. Moreover, he observed that youth-led research constitutes a central pillar in the design and implementation of his organisation's programmes, including youth engagement in agriculture, access to sexual reproductive and health services, and civic participation, which are all critical to a healthy and empowered population that can spur development. In his own words,

Young people were able to diagnose real sexual reproductive health challenges faced by their fellow youth. Youth, by virtue of their age, are future leaders, and it is important that they know the problems their communities face. Their participation in research created in-depth awareness of common challenges their peers face; and as a result, they have dealt with some of these challenges. A typical example is the youth sexual reproductive health research under *My Voice My Right*, implemented by Restless Development Uganda.

Under this project, the research, led by young people revealed some of the causes of teenage pregnancy. Young people presented evidence of this plight and, by working with gatekeepers [parents, community leaders, religious and traditional leaders] were able to reduce the prevalence of teenage pregnancies (KII, NGO Employee, Lira Municipality, 24 July 2022).

However, most of the young people were of the view that the way many programmes were conceived and implemented did not target and address the factors that hinder the participation of youth in building and sustaining peace. They noted that the issues that are critical to them are not addressed, and they repeatedly complained about not being part of the process, being unaware of such programmes, and not benefiting from the programmes. These complaints were succinctly and rhetorically captured by one participant who wondered: “How can our issues be addressed if we are not heard in the first place?” (FGD, Male participant, Otuke, 12 August 2021).

According to many young people, even in cases where intervening agencies think they are involving youth, interventions are often channelled through local authorities or youth leaders who are the ones who end up benefitting instead of the general youth population for which the programmes are meant. According to these participants, part of the problem lies in imposing programmes on youths, without seeking to know the latter’s felt needs and priorities. As one participant put it,

Even if a programme is already designed, the youth in the target communities need to give their ideas and other inputs to enable the programme to benefit the intended beneficiaries. We know what is good for us, and we should be allowed to go for what is good and beneficial to us. Even if they think they have programmes for us, the programmes should be run through us, so we can validate them (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021).

This opinion was echoed in the words of a key informant who observed that issues that affect young people needed to be viewed in relation to the experiences of violence that young people had gone through. In his opinion,

The war lasted for about two decades, and the young people of today were young and went through all the hurdles associated with the conflict: they were in IDPs camps, they missed going to school, and faced health challenges, including HIV/AIDS. We interact with them through radio and social media. However, all the programmes implemented so far have not had any positive impact on the lives of young people. There are so many youths interacting on social media on a range of issues, and their expressions reveal that they are bitter and disappointed by the prevailing political and economic situation in the country. This is because they feel that not much is being done to help them out (KII, media personality and journalist, Lira Municipality, 4 August 2022).

The same key informant further argued that to appreciate the unique challenges that bedevil young people in northern Uganda, it was important for the general public to understand the issues underlying those challenges. Citing the use of children in armed conflict, and the effect of violence on communities, he noted:

There is a need for mind-set change for everyone. For example, Ogwen [former LRA commander] is being implicated in the ICC [International Criminal Court], and yet he was abducted, and there are so many Ogwens out there. Such young people are traumatized, but there is no clear programme, targeting them (KII, media personality and journalist, Lira Municipality, 4 August 2022).

On the other hand, while the dominant youth narrative indicates that young people have a strong sense of purpose and connection to what they believe in and aspire to do for themselves and their communities, they also identified two challenges. First, some young people are not sufficiently focussed or determined to pursue important issues that matter in their lives; and second, intervening agencies have neglected the youth and used pejorative adjectives to refer to young people, further excluding and undermining them. Referring to some of the challenges the youth face, an employed youth noted,

The community knows that the majority of the youth have wrong mind-sets, and they also know that they are a few of us who are not bothered about the future. Therefore, they don't want to waste resources or time on spoiled youth (Interview with youth politician, Otuke, 24 February 2022).

The same young participant reported that young people have been neglected in most aspects of governance, noting that key activities that should benefit the youth are not included in the budgets of local governments. He also noted that the design and implementation of projects targeting the youth, such as the Youth Livelihoods Fund, are so haphazard that they do not address the prevailing conditions effectively or sustainably. In his own words,

The youth are considered as the future of every community countrywide, but I believe that the youth can do a lot more to build the future if they change their minds to think and act positively instead of resorting to negative habits and coping strategies that perpetuate negative perceptions and stereotypes of them. Moreover, the youth who want to do something positive for their communities are not supported in most aspects of life, and programmes for youth don't simply reach them (Interview with youth politician, Otuke, 24 February 2022).

These views were corroborated by key informants who observed that young people face barriers, such as being orphaned and destitute, which leads some of them into crime for survival while others have resorted to unproductive love affairs, and yet some others have committed suicide. Regardless of these barriers,

some key informants had a generally negative perception of young people. According to one such key informant,

The contribution of youth to peacebuilding is minimal. If you give them the opportunity to study, they turn to alcohol and drugs. They may be bright, but they are involved in dangerous activities. Indeed, the youth are a burden to society. I have a grandson who takes drugs and he was sent to jail. He is stubborn, drinks alcohol and takes drugs... The youth have a lot of interests, they love material possessions, but they don't want to work for them. They can kill you for material property....This is not to say that all youth are bad; there are a few good ones, but the majority are useless. There are so many graduates who are unemployed; and some of them are trying to do something little to survive, but there are those who are idle or thieves. In the past, young people above a certain age would live in their own houses, but today, they don't want to leave their parents' houses – a real burden to the parents (KII, parent, Erute North, 24 February 2022).

The above quotation paints a mixed perception of young people in light of what is expected of them in rebuilding their communities. However, other key informants indicated that the behaviour exhibited by young people today needs to be assessed more profoundly in order to understand and appreciate the structural issues responsible for their current conditions, instead of simply writing off the youth as failures. For example, one key informant was of the opinion that while youth form the majority of the Ugandan population, the level of support offered to them is not commensurate to their numbers or challenges and needs. He stated his experience as follows:

In 2020, I was ... contacted by Afrobarometer to review their data on media coverage, and we thought that it would be an opportunity [to show what is working and to expand the use of ICT for the development of young people in Uganda]. Out of about 43 million Ugandans, only about 18 million are on the Internet. About 12 per cent could be young people, but Uganda has the most expensive Internet data among all the East African Countries, and most Ugandans cannot afford it. Remember that the USAID reports of 2018 and 2019 indicated that Otuke and Albetong are the poorest districts where people die of hunger. Therefore, we could not even afford to think of buying data for our children when Uganda shifted to e-learning during the lockdown because we had to prioritise food; and the effect will be felt much later. Moreover, many villages in Lango cannot afford the high power tariffs, which means that the villagers cannot charge their phones and radios, and therefore cannot use the available media platforms (KII, media personality and journalist, Lira Municipality, 4 August 2022).

Communities have high and varied expectations of their young people. The findings indicate that as youth aspire to participate in matters that affect them, their communities also expect them to play an active role, lead by example, and be role models. According to the youth, society expects of them to have a good



record of accomplishment, to be trustworthy and self-reliant, and to learn from their parents. In this regard, one male participants had this to say:

I sat for Senior Four exams in 2019, and due to COVID-19, I cannot go back to school. I ride a *boda boda* and do farming. I do all these in conformity with the advice of my parents, and in order to show good examples to my siblings and the community (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Most young people in the study opined that they were doing their best to meet community expectations and demands. For instance, they cited their participation in community functions, such as burials and marriage ceremonies, which are considered key traditional roles for community members. Indeed, participation in such function is considered even more appreciated than monetary contributions. In the same vein, an FGD participant reported that the community expected teachers to be smart, presentable, effective, and good decision-makers. Similarly, participants noted that they were culturally expected to marry, beget children, and raise a family, expectations, they indicated, that most of them found difficult to live up to given the prevailing economic hardships. To most participants, young people's failure to live up to such unrealistic expectations renders them even more vulnerable and susceptible to resorting to negative coping strategies, and entrenches the perception of them improvident. But young people do not simply comply with community norms or fail to do so: some of them actually challenge what they consider to be retrogressive norms practices, work to improve their lives and innovate for a better life. In the case of one employed youth in the study, this involved joining politics:

I wanted to demonstrate to the rest of the youth that we could do something to help our people to change their mind-set, and act responsibly in support of our initiatives. I have demonstrated that youth can lead, and I have the support of my community to do what I wish to do for them. I have also decided to establish a nursery school in which I employ only youth to show the community that young people can also lead and act responsibly. Our main challenge lies in our limited financial capacity to run the school: we use rented structures, and we do not have any source of income, but we are interested in demonstrating that our work is valuable. We have 200 learners ..., and we want to instil in them the right values, and to invite community members and other stakeholders to support us in improving the lives of young people (Interview with youth politician, Otuke, 24 February 2022).

Interestingly, many young people in the study observed that some of the community expectations of them limit their ability to attain their aspirations because of constraints posed by traditional and community norms and practices. According to one female participant, bias against young females makes it difficult for them to access adequate resources, including land, education and decision-making platforms. This

implies that youth are expected to conform to what society expects of them, and their failure or decision to not conform is resented, and regarded as rebellious. In addition to challenges relating to socio-cultural norms and practices, generally, some progressive youths reported facing challenges from their fellow youth who feel jealous, and sabotage their work, thus making it difficult for progressive youths to succeed and have a positive impact on their communities.

With regard to what young people were doing individually to meet community expectations, and to contribute to peacebuilding interventions, the findings suggest that, for the most part, youth were more involved in personal initiatives than in those initiated by the government. Moreover, young people reported that personal initiatives supported by NGOs were more likely to succeed than those initiated by government. In addition, such personal initiatives were mainly economic, and were those that did not challenge the status quo characterized by mismanagement of resources. Yet, there were hardly any initiatives by young people geared towards mobilizing communities for social accountability and related issues.

In response to whether they were personally doing anything about the issues affecting them and their communities, most young people answered affirmatively, and provided examples of such initiatives. These included participation in promoting sanitation and hygiene, and community sensitisation, including on COVID-19 preventive and containment measures. Some reported helping at the sub-county level to distribute school learning materials during the COVID-19 pandemic, and others reported having worked as polling assistants during the previous in political elections. Yet some other youth reported being in village saving groups, farming, carpentry and *boda boda* transport business.

Significantly, it was also reported in two FGDs that some young people were opposed to crime by anybody, including fellow youth that they knew personally, and were reporting 'bad boys' (criminals) to local authorities, so that punitive action could be taken against criminals. This is significant because those who dared report gang members were ran the risk of retaliatory action from gang members who, moreover, were connected to some local authorities. During separate interviews with female youth, one of the interviewees revealed that she had a cousin brother who was a gang member. Another interviewee indicated that she was a friend to one of the female leaders of a youth gang, but noted that she traded with her with a lot care because gang members were unpredictable. Generally, the interviewees noted that crime among the youth was a major security concern in the affected communities, and that peace-loving youth were highly likely to help eradicate the crime and violence perpetuated by fellow youth in spite of the risks involved in doing so.

Indeed, many young people indicated having successfully raised community awareness of the dangers of youth gangs, promoted hygiene, and rallied community members to their causes. These young people attributed their success to leading by example, being at the frontline of their initiatives, and not normalizing the violence perpetuated by youth gangs. Some of these young people also reported having taken advantage of different programmes for recovery to bring about in their communities. One such youth said, “On the practical side, young people are now involved in every sector and based on what I usually see they are leading in the agricultural sector” (Interview with female youth working in civil society, Lira Municipality, 20 June 2022).

Another youth who had worked as a youth researcher in a programme to promote agriculture had the following to say about her role:

I learnt that youths could not access the services they needed because they did not know how to go about accessing those services, and that they needed to be sensitised accordingly. I helped the programme to identify the challenges that most out-of-school youth face, and mapped where they can access the services they need, which facilitated the implementation of the programme. I, therefore, recommend that programmes use peers with success stories to motivate other youths within the community (Interview with female youth working for an NGO, Lira Municipality, 30 June 2022).

The above quotation implies that young people lack basic information on programmes and services meant to improve their individual and community welfare, which may partly explain why many programmes that target young people do not reach many of them. In addition, it could mean that the interventions undertaken by development agencies are not participatory, which explains the failure of the interventions to meet the needs of the intended beneficiaries.

- Benefits of youth participation in peacebuilding

In spite of all the factors bedevilling youth participation in peacebuilding, young people reported at least three positive changes resulting from that participation. The first and most frequently cited change was increased knowledge of the role of youth in promoting traditional norms and practices. For example, participants mentioned that they reared domestic livestock as part of their contribution to their household welfare, to compensation or any other emergency or cultural rituals that may arise.

The second most commonly cited positive change was increased youth involvement in dispute-resolution at the family and community levels as negotiators, facilitators and mediators, which had reportedly fostered understanding among youth and community members.

The third positive consequence of young people's participation in sociocultural affairs was young people becoming more aware of the disciplinary platforms that exist to deal with unruly youth, and of the need to report human rights violations to the institutions. For example, some youth indicated having reported their family members to their clan authorities for failure to meet their educational needs, or for violating rights of their family members. In other cases, young people reported having taken steps to claim and exercise their rights through their cultural institutions. For example, male youth cited taking responsibility to support their female siblings to access land and other property in their fathers' homes.

However, asked about any positive changes as a result of their involvement in activities of the cultural institutions, about half of the participants responded negatively. One of the most commonly cited reasons for the negative responses was that, for a number of reasons, many young people did not respect or trust the leaders of their cultural institutions. The main reason for this lack of respect and trust was that protect and favour violators of other people's rights, especially land and other property grabbers, and those exploiting vulnerable community members.

#### 6.4 Structures and Modes of Youth Participation in Peacebuilding

Chapter Four discussed the four approaches to youth participation, namely, the human rights-based, economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural approaches. Considering youth participation from those perspectives provided an opportunity for the youth to narrate their experiences in relation to the challenges and opportunities in the four approaches to youth participation. The UN Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding (UN-IANYD 2014) indicates that participation as a right includes exercising other rights, which include civil and political rights, and economic, social and cultural rights; and once those rights are exercised meaningfully, communities can use those rights as peacebuilding tools. The rest of this section examines the structures and modes of youth participation in peacebuilding in northern Uganda.

Uganda is home to one of the world's most populous young populations, and this has significant implications for the country's socioeconomic and political development. The participation of youth in peacebuilding entails access to platforms, and considering the views of youth in the planning and implementation of peacebuilding agenda that influence the lives of the youth and their communities. In Uganda, the participation of youth in peacebuilding is not haphazard: there are structures in the governance system that allow for citizen participation, including youth participation, and young people are expected to use those structures to benefit themselves and their communities. Moreover, in the context of the post-conflict situation in northern Uganda, the youth form an important segment of the human

capital that should help to restore peace and engender development in the region. The rest of this subsection examines the structures and modes of youth participation in peacebuilding in the Lango sub-region of northern Uganda.

#### 6.4.1 Structures of youth participation in peacebuilding

The different categories of youth in the study demonstrated awareness of existing, grassroots structures through which they could address their concerns and aspirations. Collectively, the youth identified six such structures that play significant roles in the participation of youth in human rights, economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural aspects of their lives. These structures were: the Local Councils, from the village to the district levels; clan-based cultural institutions; school-based structures, including associations of Young Christian Students (YCS), Scouts and Girl Guides, and peace and human rights. The other structures named were youth councils at the district and national levels; NGO and government programmes; and informal structures, like community meetings and political rallies.

Most of the youth who were aware of existing structures thought of them as having the potential to channel the concerns of the youth to decision-makers, and to enable the youth to communicate directly with stakeholders who hold the key to the implementation of their ideas. Generally, the youth categorised the participation structures into two: community-based structures, like the LC system, and informal spaces, that are readily accessible to young people, and the youth councils which are nebulous and hardly active.

- Local Councils

Of the institutions that provide space for youth participation, the LC system emerged as the most accessed by youth in rural areas. Most youth felt that because it was part of the local government system, the LC system was recognized by the central government, and could be used to raise issues that the local and central governments could act on. This is because it operates from the village to the district levels where political and administrative leaders have a chance to factor the issues from the communities into their development plans. However, some young people noted that although youth representation on local councils, from the village to the district levels, is provided for, youth representation and participation were inadequate.

However, participants observed that although NGO and government programmes are coordinated through the LC system, almost all of the youth engagement with the system is by invitation, and not all the youth are, or may be, eligible. Moreover, participants indicated that the LC platform tends to be

dominated by a particular political party in an area, and biased in favour of that party. Some participants also indicated that, at the lower community levels, the LC leaders tend to be preoccupied with making money, especially when they resolve disputes. Given that LC leaders mainly handle disputes in which the youth are either victims or perpetrators, and for which money is required for hearing cases, impoverished youth, who are the majority, find it difficult and often impossible to engage with the system. Therefore, they argue, the system serves only the interests of people with money and influence.

- Cultural institutions

After the LC system, cultural institutions were reported to be the second most frequently used structures for youth participation. Generally, young people are expected to participate in their cultural institutions by adhering to cultural norms and practices, including those to do with marriage, burial and compensations in different forms, including when a clan member kills another from a different clan. Each clan has a youth representative at each parish, and another for each sub-county, and it is through these representatives that young people voice their concerns. In most FGDs, young people reported having met their cultural obligations by abiding to their cultural norms and practices of supporting traditional ceremonies and behaving decently.

- School-based structures

As expected, school-based structures were reported to be the most accessible to school-going youth, and the in-school youth demonstrated more awareness of school-based structures, and indicated participating more in them than in community-based structures. Among the school-based structures cited were school clubs with community outreach programmes that promote patriotism, hygiene, public health, child rights, and environmental conservation and rehabilitation in schools and communities. Others included clubs like Young Christian Society (YCS), peace and human rights clubs, and debating, dance and drama clubs. While patriotism clubs were reported to promote patriotism, peace and human rights clubs sought to promote basic human rights in communities. However, in all the FGDs, young people agreed that these school-based structures had a minimal impact on the lives of the youth and their communities, largely because of their limited technical and financial capacities, and partly because they are voluntary and politically or religiously partisan. Young people agreed that these structures help young people to implement activities specific to the challenges at school, and seek to instil knowledge, values and attitudes for responsible citizenship. While students subscribe to specific clubs of their choices, the activities or the benefits gained from each of the clubs are expected to trickle down to the entire school

community. However, in all the FGDs with learners, participants indicated that most of the issues they raised, within these structures, regarding their challenges were often not taken seriously or acted upon.

- NGO and government programmes

All the youth agreed that NGO and government programmes for service delivery were also available to them, although access to them was limited. Young people identified their participation in NGO and government programmes as having the potential to change their lives positively. Many young people noted that NGO programme interventions had a wide range of impacts, especially increased awareness of educational opportunities for youth, the dangers of violence, and of avenues through which to address violence, and improve livelihoods and in different communities. Significantly, many young people were of the view that NGO programmes were more beneficial to young people than government ones. According to participants, government programmes are largely ineffective because they are not adequately resourced or efficiently implemented, and they are prone to corruption. Additionally, participants observed that interventions at the parish and sub-county levels present an opportunity to young people at the grassroots to articulate and address local-level challenges. However, participants indicated that they found it difficult to utilize those grassroots programmes because they were often neither informed about, nor invited into, those programmes.

Generally, participants acknowledged that there were programmes meant for recovery, peace and development of northern Uganda after several decades of armed conflict. However, some of the participants noted that despite their vulnerability, the implementation these programmes was marred with corruption, manipulation, favouritism, and other bureaucratic hurdles that one needs to clear in order to benefit. As a result, they noted, most young people do not access the programmes meant for them, or do not participate as actively as they should in the programmes they access. As one young male said, “When we raise our concerns in some of the meetings or platforms, we are ignored or not heard. As a result, we don’t get what we want or deserve, and all programmes for youth continue to go to waste” (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021).

However, an elder was not convinced by the arguments proffered by young people. In his view, youth were to blame for their woes:

Youth have many opportunities, through different spaces, to lead and direct the way communities are governed. They don’t even need any of those platforms to change their lives for the better. In fact, youth are the main reason this country is being poorly governed, and why conflicts and violence are prevalent in northern Uganda. This is

because they have left the affairs of their society to be run by bad leaders. How can the youth be listened to when they are always high on alcohol and drugs, while others are idle and disorganised? (KII, Elder, Lira, 26 October 2021).

He further argued that as long as the youth don't change their attitudes and mobilise themselves to take up leadership roles in their communities, they will be further excluded from key decision-making forums, and their contribution to a peaceful and prosperous post-conflict community will remain a dream. Moreover, he noted, despite decades of investments by the government and NGOs, youth participation in community life remains minimal and ineffective.

While all the participants acknowledged that NGOs played a more significant role than that of the government in supporting youth and their communities to rebuild their lives, they observed that NGO interventions had not significantly improved youth participation in matters that affect them. As a result, most participants felt that the nature and level of their participation had largely remained the same or worsened due to their involvement in violence.

- Informal structures

Besides established structures, young people acknowledged the existence of informal platforms or structures through which they could participate in peacebuilding activities, and they cited community meetings and political rallies among these platforms. In their view, such spaces are more practical, and some participants indicated having used them to voice their concerns and implement beneficial projects. Participants cited the example of *Community Accountability Platform* through which young people monitor the implementation of government development projects within sub-counties, and hold government to account. According to the young people, these informal platforms tend to be effective if community members embrace them, but ineffective if the young people participating in them challenge the status quo of power relations. For example, when young people protest against poor service delivery or any human rights violation, government responds with military violence, or by arresting youth leaders. Interestingly, cultural leaders and elders generally were also accused of reacting similarly to youth dissent which they tend to view as unnecessary disrespect. According to many young people, by discouraging young people from voicing their concerns, or by simply muffling their voices, government functionaries and cultural leaders render informal structures less effective than they could be. As a result, some youth become indifferent, especially if they believe that taking any action might not only lead them into trouble, but also be in vain.



In the case of political rallies, the participants indicated that participation is open to the general youth population as politicians mobilise the youth to vote for them during elections, often luring them with monetary incentives. The magnitude of the incentive was reported to vary depending on one's loyalty to the party and the resources available to the party of individual candidate. Such incentives may be responsible for young people being unable to articulate their concerns, and ensure that those concerns are adopted in the manifestos of political leaders.

Moreover, according to most young people, political rallies and campaigns are often party-based rather than issue-based, and they benefit a few individuals who mobilise voters for candidates seeking political office. All the same, not belonging or subscribing to a party means that a young person has less chances of influencing issues that a party prioritizes, or sharing in material benefits.

- Youth council

None of the youth indicated having participated in the youth council, largely because it is minimally active. Actually, a study by Action Aid International Uganda (2012) indicated that young people were not aware of the existence of Youth Council structures. In some FGDs, the youth expressed dissatisfaction with the youth council for its detachment from the youth and their concerns. Secondary data revealed that despite the youth council's presence, from the village to the district and national levels, it lacks the capacity and interest to champion a participatory youth agenda, and young people hardly participate in it. Part of the challenge cited was lack of funding, and politicisation of the council that has made it partisan and annexed to the ruling NRM government. As a result, the youth council remains more in documents than on the ground.

- Concluding Remarks

The findings reveal that it is difficult, if not impossible to sustain full youth participation in all the human rights, economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural dimensions, and that, in most cases, the youth have not adequately accessed the existing participation structures to voice and address their peacebuilding concerns. It is also clear that access to participation structures diminishes from the village to the national levels, through the parish, sub-county, district and regional and levels. Moreover, popular, youth participation also diminishes similarly.

Although young people access different participation structures, the decisions taken and implemented in those structures are hardly related to the needs and aspirations of young people. That is why many youth said that they expected deliberations in the different structures and at the different levels should translate

into practical programmes that enable them to actively meet their needs and aspirations sustainably. As indicated by participants, their lack of access to decision-making spaces had exposed them to exploitation and made it possible for their authorities and representatives to ignore most of their concerns, and extort money from them. The limited representation of youth was attributed to limited technical capacity on the part of their local authorities and youth leaders, and ignorance of the programmes targeting them or their communities. Some youth noted that limited space to voice their concerns had increased the risk of leaders and other intervening agencies taking them for granted, and failing to account to them.

Therefore, participants in most of the FGDs observed that their physical presence in meetings in the different structures would not have any impact if leaders and decision-makers did not value them and their concerns. The existing structures and programmes are typically concerned with delivering government or NGO programmes. In that context, they focus on implementing plans within specific budget and time constraints, without necessarily focusing on building the capacity of youth to respond to conflicts and violence. Evidence suggests that such programmes have engaged youth more as recipients than as partners, which largely explains why the programmes do not foster youth participation for greater impact. However, some participants argued that for youth concerns and interest to be taken into account, the youth themselves need to have common understanding of what they want and demand for them through different avenues available to them.

The findings also reveal that a section of youth who are using informal and private spaces to initiate change, however, small the initiative, were creating positive impact in the attitudes of other young people and the community on the potential benefits of their actions. This space needs not be granted by anyone, and can be utilised by young people to promote actions for active and positive citizenship among other young people to build and sustain peace at local levels. However, that understanding and appreciation of the space and the potential they have for change is yet to be understood and acted upon by young people.

Inferences from the youth narratives suggest that NGO and government-led peacebuilding initiatives targeted at the youths, as well as individual youth-led initiatives are yet to build a critical mass of youths who are empowered to engage with issues and peacebuilding efforts without resort to violence, and with the resilience required for long-term peace in the region. Such efforts require collaboration/partnership between the youth, NGOs, government and their communities. While some efforts have been made by individual and youth groups, there is still much to learn about those actions and how such interventions can be leveraged for greater youth participation. Investing in the youths through economic empowerment programmes and awareness, including use of diverse channels such as dialogue, drama, debates, and

social media present an opportunity for the youths to understand and provide solutions to the main drivers and triggers of conflicts in their communities. This is in line with the recommendation of DFID (2010) where the youth need to be empowered to voice their perspectives on issues that affect the world in an environment that works with youth as target beneficiaries, partners, and leaders.

This sub-section has explored structures for youth participation in peacebuilding. These included the Local Council, the cultural institution, school-based structures, NGO and government programmes, informal structures and the Youth Council. It is evident from the findings that participants were familiar with only five structures, and had participated in them. However, while some youth expressed ignorance of some platforms for youth engagement, none of the participants in the study indicated having participated in the youth council because it is largely non-functional. Some participants attributed the non-functionality of the structures to weak or non-existent youth leadership, and lack of interest by the government and other stakeholders to build the youth sector. A section of the participants who indicated that they were unaware of structures for youth engagement highlighted the fact that the existing platforms are general and not specific to youth affairs. Generally, even those who showed awareness of the structures expressed mixed feelings about them because they (the structures) did not encourage meaningful engagement, and lacked interest in youth affairs.

The out-of-school, and often rural-based, participants were familiar with local government-based and cultural structures, particularly the LC and clans in their communities, and indicated having taken part in some activities, including meetings, dialogues and sensitization programmes, although on an ad hoc basis. However, participants indicated that their level of awareness and ability to participate in each of those structures dwindled the higher and farther up one advances from the village to the parish, the sub-county and the district levels. Moreover, interview and FGD data revealed that the more educated or employed the youth are, the more knowledgeable and nuanced their opinions were about the structures for engagement, and the challenges and opportunities therein. In addition, relatively educated and employed youth indicated having participated less in those structures, especially the clan-based ones, than their rural counterparts did. More rural-based youth were able to recognise the existence of cultural institutions and norms therein than their urban-based counterparts who, even if they understand those structures exist, indicated being less associated with the institution. While all the categories of youth expressed knowledge of cultural norms and practices, the rural-based youth felt more obliged to observe those norms and practices. It is, therefore, likely that, due to their close proximity to the traditional

leaders, and the likely influence the institution has on the rural population, rural, young people find themselves obliged to act in favour of their institutions.

Regarding the way different structures responded to youth concerns and aspirations, participants expressed fear that the structures were using youth as a pretext to attract funding for youth activities, from the government, NGOs and donors. Young people did not see the spaces and structures as positive in setting and acting on their agenda. Instead, they viewed the spaces as selective and exclusionary, often targeting young people as mere recipients of aid. To the participants, active participation in the different structures will require that young people are empowered to set their priorities, demand for full implementation of their specific agenda and continuously hold government and other stakeholders to account. In their views, the nature of youth's access to structures for participation will require moving beyond mere access to meeting rooms to setting clear agenda, implemented and evaluated for their ability to meet young people's needs, and realize their aspirations.

#### 6.4.2 Modes of youth participation in peacebuilding

##### *6.4.2.1 Youth participation in human rights protection and promotion*

Following its Resolution 35/14, in 2018, the Human Rights Council published a report on youth and human rights. The report highlights under-representation of youth in political institutions as one of the factors hindering youth from claiming and enjoying their fundamental human rights, including the right to civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights (UNHRC 2018).

This study sought to establish whether the youth were aware of their basic rights and whether, and how, they claimed and enjoyed those rights. In response, less than half of the youth showed awareness of their right to participation as a basic human right, noting that it was their right to participate freely in issues that affect them, as opposed to being decided for by their parents or other members of the community. They cited the examples of the rights to marriage, education, and access to land rights that that are often violated although they are crucial for the well-being of the youth.

Regarding knowledge of other basic rights, about half of the youth were able to cite one or more of the other rights. The eight most frequently cited other human rights, in all the FGDs, were, in descending order:

- (i) The right to access economic opportunities like employment (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021);
- (ii) The right to demand what belongs to you (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021);

- (iii) The right to health (FGD, female participants, Otuke, 17 February 2022);
- (iv) The right to eat (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021);
- (v) The right to parental care (FGD, female participants, Otuke, 17 February 2022);
- (vi) The right to shelter (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021);
- (vii) The right to freedom of worship (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021); and
- (viii) The right of association (FGD, female participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Generally, the youth in the FGDs demonstrated broad understanding of their rights in relation to the immediate challenges they face, and how they wish to overcome them. For instance, faced with any form of injustice or dispute, many youth have reportedly used violence or other unlawful means to rectify the injustice or resolve the dispute. Indeed, in almost all the FGDs, violence was cited as one of the means of resolving disputes, and/or accessing justice. Some key informants attributed the use of violence by young people to a dysfunctional system that does not guarantee the rights of young people and their families.

While young people in the study did not name their human rights as they are conventionally named in legal documents, their narratives reveal the human rights that they are not enjoying fully or at all. For example, some participants mentioned the right to eat, which equates to with the right to adequate, sufficient and healthy food, contained in Article 11 of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR). Other participants referred to the right to shelter which corresponds to the right to adequate housing, contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. However, a key informant indicated that the interpretation of the right to eat needs to be contextualised in order to take into consideration differences of character among young people. According to this particular key informant, while some young people are lazy and idle, they also want to return home and find food ready for them to eat, without having worked for it. In his view, such youth should not claim to have their right to adequate, sufficient and healthy food violated. In the same vein, the same key informant noted that young people who fail to construct huts for themselves, as tradition ordains, should not complain about their right to shelter not being respected. In his opinion, while it is important to recognise and protect the rights of young people, it is equally important to remind young people of their responsibilities.

According to most participants, although very many forms of injustice are inflicted upon young people and their families, when young people complain about these injustices, they are ignored or rejected in order to silence and control them. For example, some youth in the study reported having protested against

some community members dispossessing vulnerable individuals and households, including widows, children born out of wedlock, young people and the elderly, of their land and other property, but their protests were ignored. This indicates that at least some of the youth wish to ensure that their rights and those of their fellow community members are upheld, although they do not appear to get the support they deserve. It also indicates that while there many young people who are perpetrators of violence and conflict, there are also others who are peacebuilders.

Overall, it was evident from the discussions and interviews that in the absence of a just, fair, efficient and transparent justice system, some community members have taken the law into their hands, and used brutality and witchcraft, to address disputes. In the opinion of these community members, the customary and justice systems have failed to deliver justice, partly because they are costly, time-consuming and frustrating. This partly explains why some youth have resorted to violence or the threat of violence against those, sometimes family members or neighbours, who try to dispossess them; and they have thus succeeded in protecting their land or other property.

Asked how they were exercising their rights to improve their living conditions, and promote peace in their respective communities, young people in Erute North and Otuke offered different, but revealing answers. According to one, “Our parents are selling our family land at our expense, and I am fighting to protect our land, and to make sure that we all access and utilize it to sustain our livelihoods” (FGD, Male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021). Another young man cited an example of violation of human rights that was even more complex in that the purported violation of one right appears to be used to conceal irresponsibility on the part of the purported victim:

I resist practices that undermine our well-being. For instance, two days ago, a young person was forced into marriage as a strategy to force him out of his father’s house, and to make him responsible for his life. I would not accept anything that puts my life at risk (FGD, Male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021).

Yet another young man talked of a more proactive and constructive youth initiative: “We have exercised our right to association by forming youth groups through which we benefit from government programmes and demand for what rightfully belongs to us (FGD, Mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021). Another young man cited a rare example of a young person heeding parental advice, and delaying his marriage: “I followed my parent’s advice to delay my marriage until I would be better prepared for it (FGD, Male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021).

Generally, the FGD and interview data revealed that the youth were involved in disputes and conflicts, especially over land and property, a typical feature of community life in northern Uganda two decades after the LRA war. Young people reported that they were playing a significant role in these disputes and conflicts by working to protect the fundamental human rights of their family members. According to the youth, their work included initiating and facilitating negotiations, mediating between parties to a dispute, raising awareness, and educating their families and communities. At the opposite extreme, they also indicated using protests and brutal force as a deterrent to further abuse of rights, especially land and other property rights. Therefore, one can conclude that youth are at the centre of these conflicts, both as protagonists and facilitators of conflict resolution and transformation.

However, a key informant had a different view of the way youth exercise their right to participation in a bid to improve living conditions and promote peace in their communities. In his opinion, the youth had made it very easy for government or any other persons or intervening agencies to take them for granted because they are barely informed or inquisitive of critical issues and programmes that are meant for them. Moreover, he added, the youth had resorted to violence as a means to claim what they want, and that was leading to a rise in violence, injuries and deaths. Unless the youth pick interest and are ready to change their communities for better, he concluded, they will not enjoy their rights. In his own words,

It is the youth frustrating programmes. So, how can they claim their rights? Youth are the majority and a priority; and some of them hold university degrees, but they do not inspire confidence. They are shabby and disrespectful; so, we cannot take them seriously, however brilliant they may be (KII, Chairperson Local Council, Lira Municipality, 24 February 2022).

According to another key informant,

Children and youth must be reminded of both their rights and their obligations. They are killing their parents after taking drugs. So many youths are not getting married because of drugs and alcohol. They are more interested in cohabiting, spoiling young girls, and producing children without taking care of them (KII, parent, Erute North, 24 February 2022).

Therefore, while many young people claimed to have limited avenues to claim and exercise their right to participation, some key informants held the youth responsible for their failure to claim and exercise their right to participation. In addition, while young people pursue their lives in different ways, key informants, just like some young people, indicated that some of these ways, including the use of violence, indulgence in drugs and alcohol, and sale of customary land, are not in conformity with the law, prevailing socio-cultural norms, and community expectation of young people.

As part of their right to participation, young people in the study took part in the response to COVID-19 which affected many of them adversely. Therefore, this study explored the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people, and the role they played in the response to the pandemic.

- *Youth and the COVID-19 response in a post-war context*

The findings show that the COVID-19 pandemic affected every youth in the study area, either positively or negatively. On the positive side, a number of youths indicated having played significant roles in efforts to contain the virus, and adopted the new normal by learning new skills in securing their lives and livelihoods. On the negative side, many young people lost their livelihoods, the formal education of all the youth was disrupted, the security situation deteriorated, and was characterized by human rights abuse, and youth were largely excluded from the formal COVID-19 response.

While it is true that young people were generally excluded from the formal response to the COVID-19 pandemic, some of them were involved in efforts to contain the virus, and prevent it from spreading. In spite of the youth not having been involved in the planning and implementation of the COVID-19 response measures, spearheaded by the government, some youth reported having adopted the new normal by learning new skills, and played significant roles in efforts to contain the virus. These roles included regular hand-washing and sanitising, wearing of masks, staying at home and self-isolation in case of infection. Therefore, despite the pandemic having led to a deterioration in people's lives, some young people rose to the occasion, adjusted their lives appropriately, learned new skills, and helped contain the pandemic.

While the majority of the youth became unemployed or did not earn any income during the COVID-19 lockdown, some started farming as a new activity, and others learnt new skills that made them productive. According to one such youth in Otuke, "Corona awakened me to save money and prioritise my expenditure. I changed from being dependent, to a life of work and independence (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021). Young people in Erute North had similar experience to recount. One said, "I started helping my parents in the shop, and I focused on raising money. Now I appreciate the value of doing business (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021). The other added, "I learnt how to farm. I had never cultivated land, and it is Corona that helped me to start farming, which I now appreciate (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Interestingly, although many key informants dismissed the youth as irresponsible and improvident, and while youth were largely excluded from formal COVID-19 response planning and implementation, most



of the youth felt that they were able to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic because of the support they received from their families, religious leaders, and local authorities. In the testimony of one young male, “My family was great, and without it, I would not have been able to stabilise psychologically; and our friendship was strengthened by spending time together (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021). Another young man shared a similar experience: “Before COVID-19 we were not close as a family; but during the pandemic, we created a WhatsApp group and exchanged ideas on a daily basis. We also put together ideas and resources to support those who were unemployed (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021). For yet another young man, the lockdown provided the opportunity to acquire new skills: “My family taught me domestic work and business skills; and I learnt how to dig and help with garden work” (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Some of the help young people received came from outside the family or household. For example, according to one male youth, “I was supported by my religious and local council leaders who provided spiritual guidance, hope and encouragement” (FGD, female participants, Otuke, 17 February 2022). In a similar case, “The local leaders also helped to disseminate relevant information on COVID-19 measures, and to enforce the curfew” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021). In other cases, the local leaders helped to reduce the impact of gang activity. As one youth reported, “In my village, the Local Council members and Gombolola Internal Security Officer really helped to crack down on the bad boys. They demobilised the boys who had relocated to a strategic point from where they would attack people (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

In spite of some youth having been helped by their family members, religious leaders and local government leaders to mitigate the adverse effects of the COVID-19 lockdown, a few young people felt neglected and tormented during the same period, when they most needed family and community support. As one such young person lamented, “My family gave me more stress, and I felt like running away. There were complaints about there being too many people at home, making it impossible for the family to afford quality food (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021). Similarly, a young female in Otuke complained that she simply did not get enough the support during the pandemic, and that she risked not returning to school: “I did not get enough support. I don’t have money to go back to school when school resumes” (FGD, female participants, Otuke, 17 February 2022).

This young lady’s plight points to at least one of the financial, social and psychological consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for young people in northern Uganda. Many of those who did not get the family support they expected attributed this to the inability of their families to meet their needs, partly due to

poverty, and partly because the COVID-19 lockdown had closed their sources of income. For example, one young man said,

I was working as a casual labourer for a construction company in Kotido District, but the lockdown rendered me redundant, with no source of income. And yet, I am the sole provider for my family. Worse still, locusts and drought destroyed our crops, leaving us without food or money” (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021).

On the other hand, those that were supported during the pandemic appreciated the value of family and community solidarity in times of adversity.

Faced with such challenges, the young people in the study offered opinions on government's role in a future public-health crisis. Some felt that on account of the failure of the measures to address the negative impact of the pandemic, especially on young people, the government should ensure that measures to prevent and contain the pandemic are arrived at through an inclusive and participatory approach, based on thorough needs assessments, considerations of the implications of each potential programming approach for young people, and the feasibility of each potential programming approach. Other young people recommended that the government create an emergency fund to meet the basic needs of all people without discrimination. Moreover, they added, the delivery of services in times of crisis should prioritise health, agriculture and the environment in that order, to ensure that ordinary people are not dependent, and it should be of high quality.

Many young people expressed dissatisfaction with the government's habit of borrowing funds from outside countries and agencies, misappropriating the funds for personal benefit, and leaving the burdening of repayment to the taxpayers.

The foregoing account of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the importance of addressing the root causes of violence and marginalisation; and it points to the need for a more holistic, inclusive, and context-specific approach to supporting young people struggling to improve their lives in a region recovering from decades of armed conflict. The same account also shows that young people play a significant role in both violating and protecting human rights in their respective communities. As it has been noted, while some young people in the study area resorted to violence to resolve disputes, and violated human rights, others protected and promoted the human rights of individuals, families, and communities, as acted as peacebuilders.

#### 6.4.2.2 Youth participation in economic development

*“We are not involved in, or benefiting from, the policies and programmes that are meant to promote our well-being, make us self-reliant, and rebuild our lives and future”* (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021).

The above words, uttered by a young FGD participant, point to one of the main weaknesses of the development programmes and projects that seek to empower young people and improve their lives. When young people in the study were asked whether young people were involved in the policy formulation and implementation of their socio-economic development, most of them answered negatively. According to them, most young people are either in school or unemployed, and those who are government, civil society or private-sector employees, serve in the lower ranks, and are, therefore, not involved in policy-making. In their experience, individuals and groups are commonly consulted only during project or programme implementation, when it is too late for youth to influence development interventions, including those targeting them. In the opinion of a self-employed female youth in Lira City, “... local authorities take decisions on behalf of young people because the youth leaders are not active, and the local authorities think they know our problems, and are better placed to address them without involving us” (Interview, self-employed female youth, Lira Municipality, 2 August 2021).

However, the study established that young people had, and still have, opportunities to participate in local government budgeting processes, and some peacebuilding interventions initiated by the private sector and NGOs, and to benefit from the Youth Livelihood Fund and Operation Wealth Creation. But, most of the youth claimed to have been involved merely as recipients of these interventions, making it impossible for them to influence project design, or to ensure that projects addressed their felt needs. As a result, they argued, economic empowerment projects targeting young people did not achieve their objectives.

But some key informants held different opinions. For example, one key informant stated that the youth did not need help because they had the future in their hands, and it was up to them to define what is good for them. He added that young people were not patient enough to pursue long-term objectives; instead, they were more interested in ready cash and other hand-outs. To buttress his argument, he cited Frantz Fanon, who had said, “Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it.” In his opinion if the youth themselves did not rise up to what they aspired to, merely helping them would not benefit them. In his own words,

Getting assistance is like getting a loan from the bank: a loan is never given for start-ups; it is given to going concerns. Similarly, only young people who have undertaken a

development project, and are evidently moving towards a certain goal, should be assisted. Young people who want to first get money, and then think of what to do with the money, should be ignored. I am reminded of a group that I trained, and at the end of it all, the group members wanted me to pay them allowances (KII, Community Development Worker, 26 October 2021).

Interestingly, the above opinion was shared by a youth representative to a cultural institution, who observed that besides loans being burdensome for youth to pay, youth initiatives are further undermined by the operating environment, the youth not trusting one another, and young people preferring to spend loan money on items that are irrelevant to the purpose of the loan. He added,

Institutions that lend money to young people expect youth to refund the money with interest, but the youth don't have the capacity to do so. The other problem is that youth undermine fellow youth, and don't respect and support such initiatives. Even here at our home, there is a lot of undermining so that it is not easy for a youth to initiate a project and get the necessary support. Youth are more interested in quick money which they use for gambling and drinking. Unless they learn to take initiatives, they will go nowhere. (KII, youth representative to the cultural institution at clan level, Otuke, 16 August 2021).

In the same vein, a university lecturer observed that mind-set change should be part of any training or mentorship programme for youth, especially entrepreneurship training; and he observed that his efforts to sensitize young people about available training opportunities, and encourage them to take advantage of those opportunities had met with little success, largely because young people are more interested in tokens or hand-outs than in empowering opportunities. In his view,

We often advertise scholarship and training opportunities, and even job links, but we hardly we get any serious follow-up inquiries. The problem is not just lack of knowledge of opportunities, but also disinterest on the part of young people. We even announce free advisory services, but still get low or no response, which undermines our efforts of "Change through Sharing". We need to come up with ways to interest young people in available training and employment opportunities (KII, University Lecturer, Lira Municipality, 28 October 2021).

An interview with a youth entrepreneur revealed a slightly different dimension to problem. According to the youth entrepreneur, youth fail to progress because they take up whatever an intervening agency proposes regardless of whether they are interested in it or not. Instead, youth should be encouraged to undertake enterprises that they are genuinely interested in and prepared for. In his opinion:

It's not just the fear of people's opinions, but also the nature and type of business play a significant role in the success of a business. I strongly believe that one's interest in a business plays an important role in one's success in that business. For example, I would

not invest in a business that I don't like. So, while motivation and inspiration are important for the success of a business, interest in the business one does is equally important (Interview with employed youth entrepreneur, Lira Municipality, 5 November 2021).

In the opinion of a key informant, young people prefer white-collar jobs, which are very scarce, or jobs those that make them feel important, and despise some types of businesses which are more lucrative than many white-collar jobs. In his view,

The youth of our time, especially those of northern Uganda, despise so many businesses because of fearing people's opinions. For example, selling *chapati*, eggs, *mandazi*, and porridge are not desirable for them although people elsewhere are thriving through such small businesses. We have left such businesses to "outsiders" because our young people find those businesses demeaning. We need to change the mind-set of young people, and their attitude to certain types of work. (KII, An Entrepreneur, Lira Municipality, 5 November 2021).

A youth researcher, who had participated in research on young people's engagement in agriculture in northern Uganda, revealed that her participation in the research had contributed to her personal development, and enabled her to work with fellow youth in implementing agricultural activities in the region. According to her, although young people are active at different stages in the agricultural value chain, there are no consistent programmes to promote youth initiatives in agriculture. Speaking about the project to promote youth-led agribusiness and micro-enterprises in Uganda, she proposed that intervening agencies should focus on enterprises in which young people are interested, and support young people to make agriculture profitable and attractive. In her opinion, the current practice of rain-fed agriculture, using rudimentary methods and tools, is not sustainable, especially in the face of climate change. That is why she further proposed the propagation of climate-smart agriculture, and the adoption of modern agricultural methods and tools.

Most of the key informants, and some young people in the study also blamed laziness among the youth for the failure of northern Uganda to move out of poverty and to recover from the armed conflict. For example, a key informant observed that while youth form about 70% of the total population of Uganda of 44.2 million, they are not using their demographic strength to invest in land and other opportunities to lift the region out of poverty. In his words,

The LRA war destroyed our economic livelihoods and we were placed in concentration camps where we lost our sense of self-respect and our work ethic; and we were humiliated in abject poverty and total dependence. It became difficult to reverse the dependence mind-set, and people now believe that they have to be paid to be taught how to make a living, or to vote for a candidate. Politicians no longer need to have developmental ideas

to win elections: they only need to have deep pockets, and to empty them for the lazy lot. Most of the elders who brought us up, and only a few remain. The dotcom generation have learnt nothing, and believe in getting rich quickly without hard work. They have no values to hand down to the next generation. We need to deal with our distorted value and cultural systems in order to get the youth to re-focus on development (KII, Politician, Otuke, 26 October 2021).

The foregoing quotation highlights the need for young people to change their mind-set in order for them to become productive citizens. As observed by key informants, the dependence mind-set, and the resultant reliance on external solutions to internal problems, is compounded by ineffective leadership, and absolute poverty among other challenges. The current leadership was accused of providing hand-outs, partisan distribution of government resources, and corruption, which also undermine the ability of young people to act proactively on issues that affect them. Unfortunately, as a result, young people are viewed as rebellious, and often punished with further exclusion, or co-option for those deemed capable of upsetting the establishment. This may partly explain why some young people were reported to have resorted to religion as one of their coping strategies. According to some key informants, instead of working, many young people spent nights in churches, praying to God to grant them jobs, to enable them to go to America or Europe, and to solve their family.

In the opinion of some key informants the challenges that young people face today are related to the broader issue of governance in Uganda, with the leaders of Lango sub-region appearing to be unable to set a feasible development agenda for the region, or to rally people in favour of development. Moreover, they noted, because young people had gone through a lot of traumatic experiences, and some had lost out in most aspects of life, they should be supported to meet their basic needs and aspirations. Others noted that part of the challenge lay with families and institutions that had failed to guide their children to plan and achieve their goals. As one of the key informants noted,

We need to help our children set and realise their visions. I remember very well when I was young I used to beseech God to grant me wisdom, and to enable me not to repeat any class so that I could gain admission to Makerere University, the only university in Uganda then; and all this came to pass. So the lesson for today's youth is simple: set your vision and pursue it; but above all, put God first and listen to your parents for guidance all the time. This ego you guys have won't take you far in life....*mwole bala gwok okwoto I ka wele* [humble yourself like a dog that has farted in public] and all shall be well (KII, Elder, Lira Municipality, 26 October 2021).

Most young people indicated that they were involved in activities meant to promote socioeconomic development, especially retail business and farming. While the retail businesses the youth undertook

included operating bars, selling clothes, and *boda boda* riding, the farming activities included poultry and piggery, and growing crops such as soya, beans, and sunflower. However, the majority of the youth indicated that young people did not have the means to undertake business enterprises. Although the youth indicated that it was possible for some of them to access loans from Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), only the few daring and hardworking ones could actually get such loans.

In at least two of the FGDs, participants indicated that although not all of the youth had benefitted from government and NGO programmes, some of the benefits of the programmes had trickled down to them and their communities. For instance, the exotic breeds of pigs and goats that some of the youth received had improved pig and goat breeds in their communities; and some youths and community members had prospered, and inspired others to undertake pig farming, goat rearing and similar projects.

According to many young people in the study, although youth members of parliament and other MPs offer young people opportunities to participate in development projects, most young people do not make use of these opportunities; instead they seek assistance only when they are in trouble, especially trouble with the law. This may be largely because young people in rural areas do not have a platform through which they can easily engage their MPs or other stakeholders in positions of influence. In the opinion of young people, the situation often aggravated by leaders who rarely seek or represent the opinions of the people they represent. Actually, one NGO worker argued that it was not in the interest of most politicians to effectively engage youth on issues that affect them, and he added, “Youth programmes are underfunded. NGOs may succeed in raising awareness about youth rights, but unless government acts on youth concerns, the situation will not change” (KII, NGO employee, Lira Municipality, 29 July 2021).

The other issues had to do with the manner in which programmes are designed. According to many young people, while there are many programmes that address issues that affect them, the majority of young people who participate in these programmes do not actually benefit from them: their lives remain unchanged. They noted that part of the problem lies in the fact that the interventions are not participatory: the intended beneficiaries are not involved in problem identification and prioritisation. On this issue, one NGO worker observed,

The other problem is that workshops and trainings are not linked to the challenges of the young people that we are supporting. NGO activities are characterized by rosy project proposals and shoddy project implementation. We don't present the real picture on the ground, and we often base project plans on very small samples so as to justify our spending

and activities (Monitoring and Evaluation Consultant for NGO projects in northern Uganda, Lira Municipality, 25 July 2022).

Yet another challenge that young people face was identified as the stringency of loan conditions. According to many participants, the loan conditions, especially the requirement for collateral, are so stringent that many young people cannot meet them. In addition, participants reported that competition often puts youth out of business because they lack employable and life skills to overcome barriers in the market system. According to an NGO worker, programmes for youth are unsuccessful because of multiple structural and operational challenges in the national market system. He identified the main challenges to be lack of accreditation for informal skills to enable the youth to work in the formal sector; weak labour laws, coupled with lack of a minimum wage; and lack of a fair regulatory framework for foreign investors, allowing an influx of unskilled foreigners to take over jobs meant for local youth. All these factors, he argued, have resulted into companies contracting workers from their foreign countries of origin, and exacerbated the exploitation of the youth by both local and foreign contractors.

Overall, young people in the study proposed that for the youth to take advantage of the market system, they should be trained in business management skills, be enabled to access loan schemes and programmes, such as the Youth Livelihood Fund, and to actually benefit from programmes and projects that target them. According to a key informant, until recently, the private sector employers in Uganda ignored the youth due to the latter's lack of employable skills. In his opinion, employing Ugandan youth is not viable because it entails considerable resource expenditure to reskill them. Therefore, a number of private sector organisations are offering youth with limited or no experience an opportunity to acquire job market skills, and become employable through internship programmes. In the agriculture sector, the private sector is also empowering young people to become effective raw material producers. In northern Uganda, the Private Sector Foundation Uganda (PSFU), in partnership with Mastercard Foundation, have partnered with Mukwano Industries to create 50,000 jobs for young people in Northern Uganda. Through this partnership, which includes loan schemes, provision of improved seed varieties and extension services adapted to the knowledge and skill needs of the youth, youth are producing sesame and soya bean which they sell to Mukwano Industries.

Regarding how projects targeting young people can build capability for self-reliance and resilience, a key informant observed that any form of capacity-building for youth can only be successful if the government puts in place strong measures to address barriers to effective youth engagement in the



government and market systems. This includes ensuring youth have access to government programmes and markets without exploitation. In his words:

The PPDA could empower firms that get contracts with government to employ a certain percentage of the youth while ensuring that the employed youth meet specified qualification requirements. Unfortunately, although Ugandan youth are not sufficiently skilled for mid-level jobs, there is no affirmative action to close this gap. Neither does the youth policy address this challenge. Given that government is the largest employer, the many unemployed youth can only be saved if the youth engagement policy includes affirmative action in favour of youth in government projects (KII, NGO employee, Lira Municipality, 29 July 2021).

As the above quotation indicates, there are gaps in the government's youth policy and its implementation, resulting into the failure of youth development programmes to be inclusive, participatory, and accurately responsive to the felt needs of the youth. This situation is aggravated by limited funding, selfishness, fraud, and ineffective leadership, among other weaknesses. The fraud and ineffective leadership were exemplified by one young person in Otuke who reported, "Our leader, the Chairperson, Local Council at the village level, asked us to contribute Uganda Shillings 10,000 per person in order for us to benefit from an onion farming project, but we have not seen any project to-date (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021). Another young person, this time in Erute North, had a similar story to tell: "I was advised to contribute Uganda Shillings 15,000 so as to benefit from a project implemented by World Vision International, but we have been waiting in vain for the last two years (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021).

Many participants reported feeling left out of government and NGO programmes, which they attributed to favouritism and otherwise unfair selection criteria. Participants commonly believed that the system was corrupt, and that one had to pay some money in order to benefit from the officially free programmes provided by government and NGOs. However, one key informant, an NGO employee, noted that the youth were generally unaware of the selection criteria, and that most youth development programmes did not have enough funds to support all the vulnerable youths. In addition, he noted that the same youth were vulnerable to fraudsters who took advantage of youth vulnerability and several NGO interventions to con community members, including youth, of their money. Moreover, while some KIs reported having tried to sensitize youth about youth programmes, including the Youth Livelihood Fund, and how to benefit from them, some youth simply did not meet the requirements for participating in the programmes.

However, even some of the youth who participated in some of the youth programmes reported that they had not benefitted significantly from their participation. For example, a few participants in the Youth

Livelihood Fund, reported that the funding was not sufficient to meet their planned project needs for all the members of the group, which led some groups to simply distribute the money among themselves and dissolve the groups, contrary to the project objective and implementation modality. Commenting on this challenge, a monitoring and evaluation consultant for an NGO observed,

The administrative costs of NGOs and the government are higher than what beneficiaries could get. Most of the money in the programme budgets is allocated to cars and full-board accommodation in big hotels, and the programme managers prioritise accounting to donors over meeting the needs of the beneficiaries. For instance, why spend Uganda Shillings 2,000,000 on me to travel from Lira to Kampala in one trip when the same amount could support a young person to implement a project that helps them to move out of poverty, and to support their extended families? (Monitoring and Evaluation Consultant for NGO projects in northern Uganda, Lira Municipality, 25 July 2022).

According to another key informant, while some youth groups tried to implement the projects according to the original plans submitted and approved by the development office, a few others shared money among themselves and the majority of the groups were unable to refund the money as per the guidelines of the fund. This, he argued has not benefited the youth groups significantly, and perhaps the group approach to the intervention needs to be revisited to include support to hardworking and prosperous individuals who demonstrate commitment to the cause, and can eventually employ other youths.

Besides, the policies and laws governing youth development programmes should take into account the needs of the different categories of youth in their different economic environments. Generally, participants indicated being aware of some government programmes targeting youth, but noted that the youth had not utilized well those programmes because they had not been adequately prepared mentally to manage the amounts of money they received. As such, they were overwhelmed, and ended up misusing the money. Citing a government livelihood programme, Operation Wealth Creation, participants indicated that they were not interested in the long-term nature of the programme, noting that they were sent grafted mango seedlings which some described as not good as their native ones, and pine seedlings which take many years to mature. Participants cited lack of consultation on the nature and appropriateness of investments as one of the most frustrating aspects of government projects. In the opinion of a youth working for the district council:

Operation Wealth Creation failed because the youth were not interested in the long-term nature of the project. They want money, sitting allowance and not farming....The youth apprenticeship programme also failed because many of the beneficiaries never received inputs on time, and the guidelines [for implementing the projects] were also not responsive to the challenges. Some youths were even forced into piggy projects that they were not

competent in or comfortable with. Also, the conditions for fisheries and other projects were not supportive (Interview with youth politician, Otuke, 24 February 2022).

#### *6.4.2.3 Youth participation in socio-political matters*

Discussions of youth participation in socio-political issues revolved around the right to vote and to contest for elective positions, to participate in the management of election processes, and to hold leaders to account on critical issues, including poverty, unemployment, allocation of resources and many other issues perceived to be important. One of the most frequently cited political processes that the youth reported to participate in were national elections in which they participate mainly as voters, campaign managers, and candidates for political offices. Most of the participants indicated that young people participate as voters, largely motivated by the desire to have their preferred candidates elected to political offices. In many FGDs and interviews, young people were also reported to play the role of campaign managers for political contestants, and to participate actively in campaigns, soliciting votes for their preferred candidates. According to some key informants, while youth play a big role in elective politics, some of them have been used to cause violence during encounters among supporters of different political parties. It was widely accepted that candidates were not necessarily elected because of the content of their manifestos, but depending on their popularity among voters, owing to their charisma, ability to distribute resources during and/or after campaigns, and party or ethnic inclinations. Many young people reported that because they did not have enough resources or connections, the need for candidates to distribute resources among voters made it difficult for them to compete favourably with well-established contestants.

Perhaps this explains why, out of the many youths in the study, only one was holding a political office as a Councillor to the district council. There are several offices from Local Council One to Five, and given that the youth are the majority, it is significant that they do not occupy most of these political offices. The only youth who was a youth who was a Councillor at the district level had this to say about his experience in running for political office:

I joined politics because I saw youth abandoning politics and issues that affect them. I started as a youth leader at the sub-county level, and now I am representing the district as a Councillor to demonstrate that, as young people, we can do more (Interview with youth politician, Otuke, 24 February 2022).

This example demonstrates that the youth are relatively absent in mainstream political decision-making platforms, and the issues that affect them are either ignored or mismanaged because their voices are not heard.

Young people were also reported to play the role of presiding officers and pooling agents during elections, although not all the participants felt qualified for these roles that require minimum qualifications which many young people could not satisfy. Therefore, those who participated as presiding officers were youth who had attained a certain level of higher education. More youth in rural areas indicated participating more as polling agents for political parties than as presiding officers, most likely because the latter positions requires higher education qualifications than the former ones. According to most participants, young people serve in those capacities because they aspire to have smooth elections, earn some money, and facilitate fairness in the electoral process. However, one participant observed that some young people were used by politician to manipulate election results. Participants attributed the desire to earn money as the main reason for participating in elections, arguing that the need to survive in the midst of poverty and unemployment, had pushed the youth to go for anything that brings money to their pockets.

The youth also reported being involved in the implementation of programmes. They indicated having raised issues regarding their inability to access government and NGO programmes through their youth leaders and village local councils. Some also reported having raised the issues through radios in an attempt to be heard. According to one of the participants, “Youth use radio to raise their concerns. For example, we raised complaints and provided feedback about a project, but our efforts were in vain (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021).

In the opinion of one of the participants, because young people did not pay attention to important issues, they were not taken seriously by their communities. As such, he added, whatever issues young people raised were not taken seriously because no one took the youth seriously. A media personality and journalist agreed with the participants on young people’s concerns not being prioritized, and noted that the mainstream media did not address issues that were either important or appealing to young people. In his opinion, mainstream media do not consider, let alone prioritise, youth concerns. In his words,

Young people are not using the media, or radio specifically, to the best of their ability. I expect them to raise critical issues of corruption, poor services, and bribery in public service delivery, but young people are more interested in music (Maria Carrie) and pornography; yet many are not well-informed or willing to engage on critical issues. In addition, instead of focusing on key peacebuilding issues for young people and their communities, our media hosts so much information on uncoordinated issues. Moreover, cyber- bullying, especially of girls, is forcing parents to discourage their daughters from engaging in media platforms (KII, media personality and journalist, Lira Municipality, 4 August 2022).

Young people also reported that the existing Local Council government structures do not encourage the participation of young men and women in government programmes. They argued that the local government structures are not open to new ideas, and that LC system is based on favouritism system, and is not inclusive.

In addition, the youth reported that they had no platforms that focus on fostering democratic governance, apart from occasional moments during political campaigns and meetings with members of parliament when they could raise issues affecting them, and ask leaders about their previous campaign promises and future plans. Young people also noted that the political campaign platforms were often abused by political leaders who return to the electorate and ask the voters for an additional term in office, arguing that they need more time to fulfil their promises.

Young people also reported that they had an opportunity, through their youth leaders or youth policy makers and government representatives on youth affairs, to participate in advisory committees to inform democratic processes. However, they stated that such programmes are reserved for a few, well-connected youth, and they concluded that, as a result of limited participation in political issues, their concerns were not heard or acted upon; instead, they continued to receive empty promises from politicians, and inappropriate services from leaders. According to one young male, “Only NGO programmes are successful. Government programmes require beneficiaries to pay back some percentages to the same officers offering the service or individuals interceding for you (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021). Another young person lamented, “I have never had any opportunity to participate in any workshop or event to promote democratic governance (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

To address the issue of exclusion and to enhance youth participation in political activities, participants indicated that the youth needed to be empowered to know their rights, be consulted in all matters that affect them and their communities, and be part of decision-making. As one participant put it, “Youth need to be mobilized to know their rights and available programmes, and to be supported to participate in those programmes (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Key informant drawn from the NGO sector acknowledged that the low participation of youth in governance and other activities of their communities was attributable to limited knowledge of young people’s basic rights, and of the processes involved in claiming and exercising those rights. However, some key informants argued that the attitude of young people played a bigger role in their inability to

influence systems and governance because they had abandoned the struggle, and failed to stand up for their rights. In the words of a key informant,

Young people are the majority of the population, but they do not register in large numbers to vote. They make noise here and there, but are not bothered to change the direction of the country. They are wondering what is there for them in elections. They don't register for elections because they see politics as nothing, and as incapable of changing their lives. But young people must know that this country is theirs, and not only for old people like us. Those of us who have messed up the country cannot be the ones to change it for the better. Therefore, it is fatalistic for young people to surrender, give up, and be cynical. It is up to them to play a central role in elections if they want to improve their conditions (KII, Elder, Lira Municipality, 26 June 2022).

Therefore, despite their numerical dominance, the youth hardly feature in governance structures, and rarely have their issues considered. A youth who is a District Councillor noted that it was hard to mobilise support without money, noting that young people were mere well-wishers and did little to support fellow youth candidates. Moreover, he added, young people who wished to support political campaigns were limited financially, making it practically impossible for a young person to defeat a well-established adult in a contest for a district council seat. That is why, he concluded, his success had been a source of encouragement for many youth who had given up, and who now share with him their ideas on how young people can contribute to improving local governance.

It also emerged that some NGOs were helping to empower young people to participate in the governance of their communities. For example, key informants from two different NGOs indicated that to develop the capacity of youth to participate in governance of their society, they had initiated youth parliaments and community empowerment programmes. One of them described his NGO programme thus:

The community empowerment programmes brings together young people and other members of the community to understand their sub-county level development plans and budget, and to follow up on the delivery of services to their community members. Through this programme, we have exposed a lot of rot in the governance system, but also enabled so many other programmes to be implemented as planned. While we have challenges of corruption and poor service delivery, as a result of poor motivation and lack of equipment in different facilities in the district, we have raised awareness, and created vigilance against poor service delivery among community members (KII, NGO employee, Lira, 19 August 2021).

The other NGO functionary indicated that many more capacity-building initiatives needed to be implemented to empower youth to appreciate their role in rebuilding northern Uganda and in the day-to-day governance of their communities. He added that while the youth should be leading

conversations on how to recover and develop after several decades of war, they were, unfortunately, excluded in decision-making platforms, and required support for their voices to be heard. Describing his NGO programme, he said,

The youth parliament is a programme that was conceived in order to bring together youth to understand the governance processes at local government level and for them to participate in all the processes, providing leadership in their communities to the issues that need to be addressed in the planning and implementation of local government activities. Through this programme, we have built a critical mass of young people who understand how local governance systems function and are ready to challenge local authorities to improve service delivery (KII, NGO employee, Lira, 19 August 2021).

However, some participants observed that the failure of policies and programmes targeting youth had to do with the inability of young people to take advice, learn and concentrate on important issues. They argued that the inadequacies of young people were due to their failure to adhere to basic rules, and rally in favour of community causes, thereby undermining the good intentions and initiatives at different community levels. Young people and key informants identified conflicting interests and material greed as the main barriers to the success of community initiatives, and noted that some youth were just interested in money, and got easily swayed by politicians and other elements within the communities who are more interested in their personal interests than in the legitimate concerns of communities. Many FGDs also noted that young people were just interested in money or hand-outs, and no longer cared about holding their leaders to account on their manifestations or service delivery by local governments. A key informant provided a different insight to the issue, and noted that the spaces for engagement were not sufficiently empowering and enabling to allow young people to participate effectively, citing restriction of the freedom of speech of members of the community and institutions. In his own words,

Even away from the media, there are bazaras [community platforms] where the youth are able to interface with leaders, but it appears their freedom of speech is compromised. However, we in the media record their voices, and replay them in the mainstream media; and this has been possible through government and NGO programmes that seek to empower young people to know their rights and demand for accountability (KII, media personality and journalist, Lira Municipality, 4 August 2022).

Young people also castigated their own youth leaders, indicating most of them lacked the capacity and integrity to represent them. Some youth indicated that although they usually complained about prohibitive provisions in programmes targeting youth and their communities, their local authorities, leaders and NGOs did not address their complaints, which discouraged some youth from raising similar

issues again. Finally, they highlighted their failure to work collectively to cause intervening agencies to make decisions in favour of young people and their communities.

#### *6.4.2.4 Youth participation in sociocultural matters*

This section focuses on young people's perception of, and relation to, the norms, practices, and values upheld and promoted by their cultural institution. To understand the value the youth place on sociocultural matters, the study required them to state whether or not they liked and valued their cultural institution, to which most of them answered affirmatively. Their most frequently cited reason for liking the institution was the active and efficient way in which it addresses disputes and other community challenges as opposed to government that takes many years without producing desired results. They cited a number of family conflicts that the cultural institution had resolved amicably, and the institution's focus on instilling positive values in young people so they know, and are proud of, their roots as a people. Moreover, they argued that the retributive approach to problem-solving, through compensation rituals in cases involving death, was more efficient and effective than the imprisonment adopted by government. Young people also credited the cultural institution for the amount of care it takes to organize vital life events, including decent burial of the dead in their preferred homes. As one of the participants observed,

Even if you die abroad, the cultural institution will bring your body home...In case of death, the institution mobilizes money to meet all the costs associated with the loss. Moreover, the same institution mobilizes money for youth to marry, and blesses young people (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021).

However, all the participants reported facing challenges participating in their cultural institutional activities. They reported that although it was embarrassing for a youth to fail to fulfil his or her obligations to his or her cultural institution, many young people were unable to contribute to cultural rituals of compensation, marriage or any other tasks requiring their support. But, according to some key informants, some young people fail to fulfil such obligations because of their stupidity or stubbornness, which has often led to punitive beating and/or collecting any valuables from their homesteads, and those of their neighbours. The failure of a young person to meet his or her obligations is a source of shame for the family, which leads some parents to support the youth to meet their obligations; and female youth, whether married or divorced, who ideally should have been left out of this, are now forced to contribute to such causes on behalf of their husbands and maternal families.



Therefore, youth participation in sociocultural matters would appear to exclude decision-making, and many key informants highlighted the need to improve the upbringing of young people so that they respect their cultures and obey their elders.

- ***Modes of youth participation in sociocultural matters***

Significantly, although about a half of the youth in the study reported that they were involved in the sociocultural activities of their clan-based institutions, the other half indicated not being involved in any way at all. Moreover, the half that was involved in the sociocultural activities of their clan-based institutions indicated that they were not involved in processes that influence the exercise of sociocultural rights. This would tend to suggest that while clan-based cultural institutions are present in every community, they are not accessible to all the youth, or that some youth do not deem it beneficial to engage with them. Actually, most young people who engage with the clan-based institutions indicated that they did so more or less perfunctorily: more to fulfil their obligations to the cultural institution than to influence policy or decision-making in the institutions. Indeed, a “youth” representative to a clan-based institution whom I interviewed said he was 41 years of age, 11 years past the official Uganda youth age bracket. This suggests that, in at least some cases, youth are not legitimately represented in their respective cultural institutions, and that decisions within the institutions are made on behalf of the youth. Young people who indicated being involved in sociocultural activities described their involvement as consisting of mainly two main dimensions. The first one was participating in dispute resolution, which involves three aspects: contributing to compensation rituals, in case a clan member killed a person from another clan; and participating in disciplinary action for youth who violate some of the cultural norms, such as those who engage in witchcraft, beat their wives unreasonably, or neglect their family responsibilities; and participating in community dispute-resolution meetings. According to most young people, the traditional dispute-resolution mechanism of paying compensation for murder, was responsible for avoiding vengeance, and maintaining peace. It emerged that when community members have disputes or any other challenges, the first authority they seek support from is the cultural institution represented by an elder, a youth leader or a clan leader; and many young people indicated having consulted their cultural leaders to address disputes, rights violations or misunderstandings arising at various levels, including the family level. Generally, young people considered cultural leaders as helpful in settling conflicts and reconciling members of their families, individuals and groups.

According to many young people, cultural institutions were faster and cheaper in resolving local disputes through family heads, clan leaders and chiefs; and a number of participants reported having been

supported by the cultural institutions to reclaim their rights, especially in cases where dishonest family and community members tried to take advantage of the vulnerability of young people to deny them basic rights. The most frequently reported victims of human rights violations were widows, male children born out of wedlock, and the general youth population. Some of the youth indicated having taken steps to claim their rights, and one such young person said,

Our uncle grabbed a large piece of land belonging to our late father. He left us with a small piece of land to cultivate. He would also threaten our mother if she insisted on asking for the land. We then went to the head of our clan who settled the case to our advantage. If it were not for the intervention of the clan leader, maybe we would have lost the land or something bad would have happened (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021).

The second, and least commonly cited form of involvement in sociocultural activities was reported to be that of undergoing cleansing rituals, following the atrocities some youths committed during the war, and as part of healing and reconciliation among communities.

#### ***6.4.3 Youth and prospects for peace***

Incidents of violence involving young people were frequently cited by both young people and key informants, and some young people confessed that the use of was the only means of dispute-resolution they were aware of. It has also emerged that while the perception of youth as perpetrators of violence seemed to be dominant, it was other categories of community members who pursued their objectives by using violent youth, a situation that, according to some key informants, did not augur well for the future of the Lango sub-region. As one community leader put it,

The future of Lango will be dead tomorrow unless something is done. We are already old, and there is little we can do. How can you as a parent speak to your drunkard child? There is the option to take them to jail, but they will kill you after their jail term (KII, Chairperson Local Council, Lira, 24 February 2022).

This grim view of the future was at least partly shared by a representative to a clan-based institution who indicated that although young people would wish their cultural institutions to solve their problems, young people are sometimes not cooperative. In his view, some young people are not only violent, they do not always communicate their problems honestly or accurately, making it hard to resolve their problems. However, he added, young people have various channels through which their grievances can be handled. For example,

We encourage them [youth] to be honest about the issues and listen to both sides. We also refer them within the institution and to government, depending on the issues; and we give them options to pursue their cases, and provide them with referral letters (KII, youth representative to the cultural institution at clan level, Otuke, 16 August 2021).

Similarly negative views of the youth were expressed by key informants, generally characterising young people as disrespectful of their cultural institutions, drug abusers, lacking interest and pride in their culture, unmarried, incestuous, and not leading exemplary lives.

### 6.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has addressed the first research question: How do the youth of northern Uganda perceive the nature and value of their participation in contemporary, post-conflict peacebuilding initiatives?

Regarding the nature of their participation in post-conflict, peacebuilding initiatives, our data has shown that while about half of the youth in the study indicated that they had participated in at least one initiative, the other half reported that they had not. This implies that the research question was irrelevant to about half of the youth in the study.

The young people who reported having participated in peacebuilding initiatives identified at least eight (8) modes of participation in the four domains of participation: sociocultural, human rights, socio-political, and socioeconomic domains. In the sociocultural domain, young people reported participating in dispute resolution by contributing to compensation-for-murder rituals, and participating in disciplinary action for youth who transgressed cultural norms, and participating in community dispute-resolution meetings. The second mode of participation in the sociocultural domain was reported to be that of undergoing cleansing rituals, following the atrocities some youths committed during the war, and as part of healing and reconciliation among communities.

In the human rights domain, youth reported participating in four different ways: protecting family land and other property, sometimes using violent means; forming youth groups to access government and NGO programmes; facilitating dispute resolution; and creating awareness of human rights and obligations, especially during the response to COVID-19.

In the economic development domain, youth reported having been involved in entrepreneurial activities, especially retail and farming ones, as part of government programmes, such as the Youth Livelihoods Fund, Skilling Uganda and Operation Wealth Creation, and NGO interventions.

In the socio-political domain, where youth appear to be least represented and influential, young people indicated that they participated in local and national political elections, as voters, campaign managers, candidates, polling agents, and presiding officers. Significantly, youth participation in this domain was reported to be characterized by violence. But to what extent do young people value their participation, if at all?

It emerged that the young people who reported having participated in peacebuilding and related interventions valued their participation in those interventions, and that they did so for three main reasons. Firstly, most of them believed that they should participate in peacebuilding because they were adversely affected by conflict and disputes; and they actually wanted to participate. Secondly, many young people believed that the future of their respective communities depended on the participation of youth, who constitute the majority of the national population, in community affairs. Thirdly, most of the youth had realized that participation in community affairs facilitated their self-discovery and improved their self-esteem. However, some young people also realized that in order for them to participate constructively, they needed to develop a sense of belonging to, and ownership of, their communities; that they were not adequately informed about the challenges of, and opportunities in, life; and that many of the programmes they had participated in had been unsuccessful because they had not been participatory.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONSTRAINTS TO YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN PEACEBUILDING

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses constraints to youth participation in peacebuilding. In particular, it seeks to answer the following questions: Why is the number of youth participating in efforts to build and sustain peace in northern Uganda still limited despite years of peacebuilding interventions? What are the implications of limited youth participation for the peace, recovery and development of northern Uganda?

Our findings indicate that although peacebuilding interventions in northern Uganda have been implemented for a long time, targeting the youth as a key stakeholder in peace, recovery and development, the degree to which youth are involved in such interventions is determined to a large extent by their experiences and community perceptions of them. It is in these experiences and perceptions that the constraints to youth participation in peacebuilding are embedded. The constraints include harmful social and cultural norms, structural and capacity limitations, unresponsive programming, and limited space for interaction and action on the aspirations of youth. The constraints are drawn from the findings in Chapter Six on youth experiences and the way youth view the practices and possibilities of their contribution to peacebuilding.

### 7.2 Unfavourable Social and Emotional Youth Environment

Seven (7) issues have been identified as constituting an unfavourable social and emotional youth environment, thus acting as barriers to youth participation in peacebuilding. These include: an unfavourable home environment; uncontrolled access to social media; inequitable resource distribution; gender-based inequality; inter-generational discord; limited school-based spaces for youth voices; and inappropriately conceived and implemented government and NGO interventions.

#### 7.2.1 Unfavourable home environment

Participants cited an unfavourable social and emotional environment, characterized by harmful socio-cultural norms at home and in schools, especially in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the most commonly cited ideas and practices is an unconducive home environment, in which young people feel inadequately supported to face the challenges of life. According to some participants, their parents, especially the male ones are not exemplary: they are negligent, drunkards, abusers, and lazy. Female youth, in particular, complained of the pressure put on them by their parents to abandon education and marry; while others reported being abused and beaten by their often drunk fathers. Generally, participants reported parental neglect as responsible for their poor upbringing. In some cases, while poverty was

indicated to aggravate unsupportive parental behaviour some parents were reportedly lazy and not exemplary.

These findings were confirmed by key informants who observed that there were some parents who are negligent and indifferent to what happens to their children. As a result, their children have to fend for themselves from an early age, are left to learn from peers, and lack the emotional support they require from their parents. Therefore, without proper guidance and support, young people were reportedly engaged in destructive and unproductive activities, including drug and alcohol abuse, betting, disco dancing and watching films. As a result, such young people are exposed and rendered vulnerable to acts that distract their attention away from things that matter, thereby undermining their resilience to the challenges of life.

Moreover, with the onset of COVID-19, dynamics in family relations changed and perhaps aggravated already existing poor relations and undemocratic practices within families. In relation to whether young people felt supported by their families and local leaders to adapt to the challenges of COVID-19, some young people indicated having received limited support from their families, and felt they were not offered guidance and relevant support to cope with the challenges of the pandemic. According to one young person,

My family gave me more stress, and I felt like running away from home. There were a lot of complaints about too many people residing at home, and resources not being enough to accommodate needs, especially to buy enough quality food (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

A young lady also complained about her inadequately supportive home environment, saying,

I did not get enough support. I don't have money to go back to school. I would have been in Senior Four this year [2021]. We women don't have time and anything can interrupt us. One year is a big loss to me (FGD, female participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

In some cases, the home situation was so dire that households were on the brink of starvation:

We were starving, and no one offered us food [yet government had budgeted for food to be distributed to needy people]. Our efforts to farm were frustrated by drought. We were therefore expecting our leaders to initiate some projects for the youth, but they did not (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021).

Participants also reported that limited support, and the exercise of unquestionable authority by parents and cultural and religious leaders, were among the difficulties young people face in their attempts to

freely discuss or question certain practices and decisions affecting youth. According to them, although some of their parents' efforts to raise children are based on the parents' aspiration to mold their children into responsible citizens, some of these efforts are undermined by bad faith or negligence. While some parents may exhibit dictatorial tendencies in their parenting, others are democratic and caring. However, directly or indirectly, the outcome of the upbringing is also influenced by the experiences of young people in the broader operating environment. It could be deduced that young people will likely exercise the same spirit of dominance and dictatorship when they rise to positions of power in government and other sectors. These and other power-related characteristics could partly explain the varying degrees of youth involvement in issues that affect them.

Generally, parents reported that they were preparing their children to be responsible citizens and to nurture in them a culture of peace and nonviolence, especially after the LRA conflict. They cited providing basic needs, including education and health care; and providing guidance on how they should lead a good life, in harmony with themselves and the community. Most responses indicate that the parents are aware of the challenges their children face, and are, therefore, doing their best to support their children to overcome challenges, and become responsible citizens. For instance, one parent stated, "I have tried to bring up my son in such a way that he respects other people, and contributes to the common good" (KII, parent, Otuke, 5 August 2021). In the words of another parent,

I educated and provided medical care to my children. I have also shown them how societal and cultural norms work and told them about the challenges in life and how to manage them through hard work and prayer to God the Almighty (KII, parent, Otuke, 16 August 2021).

According to yet another parent,

On return from displacement, I have shown the children our land boundary, paid dowry for them to settle, and trained the female children to behave well. The lowest-educated child in my family completed Senior Four, and it was out of his stubbornness that he could not go further.....I returned my children from Lira to Otuke, our original home, after the war. Apart from one, all the three children were born while we were in displacement; so I brought them home so they can know their roots, and I allocated land to my sons so that they utilise it to make a living (KII, parent, Otuke, 16 August 2021).

The fourth parent blamed poor governance for the disappointing behaviour of young people. In his view,

We are aggrieved about poor governance, and we have tried not to return to armed rebellion because we are trying not to influence our children to fight and go through the suffering that we went through. We have persuaded young people to shun war because the effect is terrible” (KII, Ex-combatant, Lira Municipality, 29 July 2021).

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that parents are supporting young people to rebuild their lives and communities. Asked if they were happy with the results of their efforts in preparing their children for responsible citizenship, one of the parents answered, “My children follow my instructions, and are not involved in delinquent behaviour” (KII, parent, Erute North, 31 July 2021). Another parent had even better results to report: “The children who followed my advice are well-educated and are employed. They are helping themselves and us as well” (KII, parent, Otuke, 16 August 2021).

Although the above testimony reveals that parents’ efforts to bring up their children responsibly were yielding some fruits, the same question elicited more negative responses than the positive ones above. Many parents noted that despite the support they gave to their children, the outcome of their upbringing was not positive or desirable; and they attributed this to external factors, including the prevailing, overall environment characterized by conflict and violence. Others attributed their children’s undesirable behaviour to the peer pressure, and they all had a litany of woes to relate. According to one parent,

Young females are giving birth to ‘illegitimate’ children who are roaming the streets and terrorising communities. The street kids are behaving like rebels. Of course, we know that some of the former rebels are the ones giving birth to those kids; and it is painful that the children are behaving like rebels, and are likely to cause another rebellion in the region in the future (KII, parent, Otuke, 18 February 2021).

Another parent had a similar story to tell,

The rate at which young people are engaging in drugs, alcohol and crime is worrying, and I worry for my children because they may follow suit. Violence is so prevalent that we, parents, have little we can do to change the way young people act (KII, male parent, Otuke 2021).

Yet another parent lamented,

Although I have twice paid dowry for my son so far, he is not managing his family well. He divorced both wives and the children are suffering. While I have allocated him a piece of land, he is not using it to help himself (KII, parent, Otuke, 16 August 2021).

A former LRA rebel had an ominous message to deliver. In his view,



Young people participated involuntarily in the war, with negative consequences for them. As a former fighter, I left the LRA because there was no future in it. Brothers and sisters, especially the Acholi and Langi were pitched against each other, and the wound is still too fresh for communities to forget. There may not be actual war, but people are not happy. So, it is a matter of time before young people offer themselves to fight for a just cause, especially if the challenges they are faced with are not addressed (KII, Ex-combatant, Lira Municipality, 29 July 2021).

The quotations above indicate that the environment in which the youth live presents multiple challenges, ranging from those related to upbringing to those arising from the LRA war. These and related issues moderate conditions under which young people operate. Referring to efforts to improve the condition for young people, one of the respondents observed that the issues to be addressed are historical, and related to the impact of armed conflict. In his opinion, intervening agencies have underestimated the problem, and continue to address symptoms rather than the root causes. In his words:

Some of the problems are historical, and they have to be addressed before we can think of the youth being able to do something useful for themselves. Some of the youth are a product of the war. So, why would you think that such young people should manage life challenges like others? Unlike children who grow up with their parents, and have the parental love and guidance, the war children grew up in body but not in mind and emotions. They lack psychosocial support and the love and values that guide the way children should behave in a socially, morally and psychologically acceptable manner. The other problem arises from NGOs who give a false picture of the challenges that conflict-affected communities face. They tell donors and government that the situation is under control, and they are working towards improving the livelihoods of the people when, in reality, their contribution is negligible (Monitoring and Evaluation Consultant for NGO projects in northern Uganda, Lira Municipality, 25 July 2022).

### 7.2.2 Uncontrolled access to social media

Participants identified two other causes of the current erosion of cultural and family values: young people's uncontrolled access to social media, and parents being increasingly unable to spend time with, and inculcate cultural values in, their children. In the same vein, some key informant observed that negligence and/or the pressure of work leave many parents with limited time to spend with, and guide, their children. According to one such parent, "My inability to control, or even know, what my son watches on TV and on videos he accesses through my phone or that of his mother bothers me" (KII, parent, Otuke, 5 August 2021).

Some young people traced their problems to a family history characterized by a cycle of poverty or increasing needs, in which their parents or relatives find themselves trapped, and which they attributed to excessive socioeconomic inequality. A young man in Erute North lamented,

If I had a choice, I should not have been born into this world. Some children live in five-star hotels [houses] but here I am struggling to survive. Even if you try to do something for yourself, it is not possible to succeed; yet other tribes come here and flourish (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021).

### 7.2.3 Inequitable resource distribution

The young man's ideas above suggest that some young people attribute the growing level of poverty and inequality in their communities to inequitable resource distribution, sometimes with an ethnic dimension which has the potential to undermine social cohesion. The same ideas also reveal that young people feel marginalized and lacking the capacity to seize opportunities to improve their well-being. Faced with such a situation, there is need for young people to feel supported in order to realise their potential to rebuild their lives and to contribute positively to their communities.

### 7.2.4 Gender-based inequality

The other reason cited for the unfavourable youth environment to unequal treatment and upbringing of girls and boys. In almost all the FGDs, especially those involving girls, participants decried the prioritization of boys in access to education and other resources, especially land. A female interviewee who happened to be a bank employee also complained that girls were marginalized in access to education, which she attributed to the patriarchal nature of society, which relegates females to household chores while males are prepared for leadership roles. She argued that this had affected most of the female youth who end up with limited or no education or property. Moreover, she observed, when the female youth rise up against injustice in society, they are viewed as disrespectful and bad mannered. According to her, this partly explains why women and female youth in particular find it difficult to access family resources like land. Stating her experience, another female participant noted:

Even though I have children and I am living with my parents, I have not been allocated any part of the family land although my brothers have. On several occasions, my father sold land and shared money with my brothers while I looked on. I fear to challenge them because I will be reminded to return to my ex-husband or get married to another man (FGD, female participants, Otuke, 13 August 2021).

### 7.2.5 Inter-generational discord

Both female and male participants cited lack of voice in decision-making at the household level. They indicated that even if the issues to be decided were about them, they did not have the final say in most of the decisions. Many participants indicated that they did not mind their parents taking certain decisions for on their behalf, because they believed that their parents are experienced, knowledgeable and always act in the best interest of their children. However, few participants observed that some decisions taken by their parents were not in their (children's) best interest. For instance, according to participants, some young people were asked by their parents to abandon school and get married early, and both decisions ended up harming their future prospects.

It is clear from the field findings that there is tension between the young people and their parents over access to resources and platforms for engagement. In a number of FGDs, the youth indicated that their parents constituted one of the challenges to accessing resources and platforms to improve their lives. According to the young people, their parents use rules and dictatorship to control youth behaviour and access to resources. In the opinions of participants, young people need the space to grow and make decisions in such a manner that they are able to own the process and to learn from them. However, the parents were confident that they were appropriately bringing up and guiding their children so that they become responsible adults. Significantly, this inter-generational divide is not unique to northern Uganda: children worldwide often resent and try to resist the power their parents seek to exercise over them. Young people singled out their disagreement with their parents over the former's access to land: while the parents consider it their duty to use and preserve customary land for generations to come, the young people are reportedly selling off customary land to buy *boda boda* or other luxuries, or to move to urban areas to start a new life. According to key informants while customary land can only be sold under very specific circumstances, for example, to facilitate marriage or to meet medical expenses, young people are seek to sell customary land for their selfish interests.

### 7.2.6 Limited school-based spaces for youth voices

School-going youth cited lack of free space to engage with teachers on issues that affect them. They argued that many of their learning challenges are not addressed by their school administrators, and that issues raised by learners are often met with threats and/or punishment by school authorities. Faced with such challenges, many young people reported to have resorted to strike action in order to be heard, although such action also resulted in destruction of physical infrastructure, fines and dismissal. This experience implies that schools do not offer effective platforms for constructive dialogue between

learners and teachers. The school environment was also reported to offer mixed experiences for young people, including violent practices like bullying, beating, and sexual harassment. Young people noted that while corporal punishment is illegal in Ugandan schools, it has been replaced with violent practices of threatening learners to instil fear in them. Therefore, instead of schools being dynamic and rewarding spaces for dialogue, where young people freely participate in generating solutions to their challenges, they tend to create fear in the learners. This youth narrative of violence depicts the school as a restrictive environment where power dynamics make mutual engagement and independent thinking difficult, and where learners' attempts to question or challenge the *status quo* are viewed as rebellion that must be tamed.

#### 7.2.7 Inappropriately conceived and implemented government and NGO interventions

Yet another constraint to youth participation was reported to be government programmes targeting young people. According to many young people, government programmes targeting young people had failed because they were not meant to improve the lives of youth, but were designed and implemented as pretexts for siphoning public resources. Citing the example of programmes that implement projects targeting groups of youth, many young people noted that they did not wish to be in groups, and the government was exploiting that weakness to form ghost groups through which to siphon money meant for youth. Comparing government and NGO programmes that use groups, a participant observed,

Organizing people into groups to implement projects only works with NGOs and not government. Therefore, people need to reject these fraudulent government schemes and embrace NGO approaches and thus share lessons learnt and best practices to foster youth participation (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

All this implies that if these government programmes were designed and implemented in a participatory manner, involving the intended beneficiaries at each stage, the young people would not be raising the complaints they are airing.

Apart from non-participatory government programmes, young people identified the life-saving support that people have been receiving, from both government and NGOs, during and after the LRA war, which created a dependency mentality that persists to this day. This dependency mentality explains why young people are more interested in money or immediate gratification than in programmes, like planting fruit trees, that take a year or longer to produce benefits. It also explains why young people shun participation in long-term programmes, and remain poor. To reverse this unfortunate trend, a young person in Erute North proposed that young people should “desist from

excessive reliance on hand-outs, and use the different projects initiated by either government or NGOs to improve their lives in the long-term as opposed to running for short-term gains” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021). But the identified constraints to youth participation in peacebuilding were not limited to an unfavourable social and emotional environment: they also included conflict and violence.

### 7.3 Sociocultural Factors

Despite reports of youth participating in peacebuilding, there are barriers to their participation, and our data shows that young people, especially urban ones, do not always find clan-based institutions easily accessible or may not always appreciate the value of the institutions. The most commonly cited of these barriers was corruption, manifesting itself in bias or favouritism, and translating into administrative ineffectiveness, and among cultural leaders. Many young people reported that they felt they had little say or were not actively involved in the adjudication of justice, and that the cultural structures were ineffective, accounting for recurring disputes in communities. This perception was shared by a key informant who confirmed that the cultural institution was no longer as strong as it had been in the pre-conflict period, and that so much had changed that today’s youth no longer appreciate fully some of the traditional cultural practices, especially those they regard as outdated. The key informant also attributed the minimal interest that youth have in cultural affairs to the ineffective leadership and disreputable conduct of some cultural leaders. This opinion was shared by many young people who accused some of their cultural leaders of corruption and greed, and of betraying the young people’s devotion to their cultural institutions.

In the words of one key informant,

The majority of youth don’t respect cultural leaders. They don’t even attend meetings of the cultural institution despite the traditional requirement to do so. They think the meetings don’t help them to get married or educated, or to solve their other problems. So, why attend such meetings? (KII, cultural leader, Lira, 25 February 2022).

Actually, many young people reported that the credibility of cultural institution was questionable and could have led to further violations of people’s rights and lack of faith in the system. A representative to a cultural institution revealed that the credibility of his cultural institution was at stake due to disunity within them, and perceived bias in the conduct of their affairs, lack of confidence in their integrity, and operational ineffectiveness.

Young people who indicated that they had not experienced any positive changes as a result of their participation in the cultural institutions accused cultural leaders of ignoring young people's opinions on certain issues, being biased in their management of cases or disputes involving youth, especially land-ownership disputes, and favouring their own relatives who violate other people's rights. According to one clan head,

The presence of youth in situations of disputes has complicated the management and resolution of land disputes by clan leaders. Although the youth are at the centre of land ownership and land use disputes, they do not give elders a chance to adjudicate land disputes; instead they resort to violence, and do not embrace collaborative dispute-resolution, especially if they suspect the outcome will not be in their favour. As a Rwot [clan head], I fear for my life, especially after I witnessed youth killing people at a land site where we had gone to resolve a dispute (KII, cultural leader, Lira, 25 February 2022).

The clan head's opinions and experience were collaborated by a young man who recalled that when his late father's land was at risk of being grabbed from his mother (widow) by one of his uncles, his only known means of redeeming the land was to use violence.

However, according to one cultural leader, some level of violence, including corporal punishment and the use of force, was acceptable in leadership in order to enforce norms and practices, and to bring young people to order. In his view, "They [young people] only understand when you use violence to resolve issues; and violence is also the only means by which the president [of Uganda] is managing us (KII, youth representative to the cultural institution at clan level, Otuke, 16 August 2021).

In a related argument, another key informant noted that, there were three reasons why cultural leaders were responsible for the deteriorating cultural norms and practices. First, they exercise their authority more in their personal interests than in those of the communities they are purported to lead. Second, some of them are technically incapable of managing the affairs of their subjects and the dynamics of the youth of today. Finally, the conduct of some of them was morally not commensurate with their status. In his own words,

The cultural leaders are also part of the problem. Some are stupid, while others don't value education, so we have serious challenges. They are struggling for positions, but their impact is not felt, and some of them are culturally unsuited for their positions because they are not married, or they do not have a home, and their children do not go to school. (KII, Chairperson Local Council, Lira, 24 February 2022).

The second most commonly cited barriers to youth participation in sociocultural matters was the form of punishment meted out to those found guilty of violating clan norms: beatings. As noted by a youth

representative to his cultural institution, although it is the role of the cultural institution to instil discipline in its members, the role is often played violently. For example, a key informant observed that accounts of past political differences and conflicts, often related by elders, tended to divide rather than unite communities and community members; and he cited the example of animosity between the Langi and the Acholi, and between the Langi and the Karimojong.

In his opinion, young people need to accept that while past leaders, Obote and Tito, (former presidents) had their own differences, the situation had changed, and, to rebuild our society, young people needed to move on along the path of healing, reconciliation, growth, and development.

According to many young people, corporal punishment of adults was belittling, and it undermined the self-esteem of people who were otherwise supposed to be respected. For example, a young person related an instance when a young person being punished was beaten almost to death. The practice is certainly unacceptably violent, and it discourages young people from participating in sociocultural affairs. But this was not the only cultural norm or practice that was reported to promote violence, and, therefore, to be a barrier to youth participation in sociocultural matters.

Asked if there were any other cultural norms or practices that promoted violence, the majority of each category of respondents answered affirmatively, and some even characterizing some cultural norms and practices as outright evil. In the opinion of one young male, “Cultural norms and practices that bar women and people from other clans from accessing land are outdated” (FGD, female participants, Otuke, 13 August 2021). Other such norms and practices cited included “suppressing the voices of women” (FGD, female participants, Otuke, 13 August 2021, “mistreatment of children born out of wedlock (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021), and “widows being forced to get married to a brother-in-law or to leave their matrimonial land (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

The third barrier to young people’s participation in socio-cultural matters emerged as poverty. As one key informant indicated, the cultural leaders themselves have personal challenges that affect their capacity to do their work, and therefore the ability of young people to participate in sociocultural matters. As he put it,

Personally, I have a lot of problems which have affected my ability to lead. How can I lead when I am so vulnerable? I am poor; I have no means of transport to travel to meetings, and young people do not respect me. Please help me out at a personal level (KII, youth representative to the cultural institution at clan level, Otuke, 16 August 2021).

The above quotation points to the level of vulnerability, the uncertainty that surrounds access to government programmes, and the paucity of material resources available to cultural institutions.

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that youth perceived their participation in their sociocultural affairs differently: while about half of the young people in the study thought that youth participation in sociocultural affairs had been beneficial, the other half thought that the participation had not produced any positive changes in their lives. It is also evident that youth participate in their sociocultural affairs for two main purposes, and in two main ways: dispute-resolution and cleansing. It is equally evident that youth participation in sociocultural matters had produced three main benefits: increased youth awareness of the role of youth in promoting traditional norms and practices; increased youth participation in dispute-resolution, which, in turn, improved relationships among youth and other community members; and increased youth awareness of existing platforms for dispute-resolution and/or disciplinary action. The foregoing discussion also reveals that there were two main types of barriers to youth participation in their sociocultural affairs: corrupt, technically incompetent, and morally unsuited cultural leaders; and the use of corporal punishment against those found guilty of socio-cultural offenses. What prospects, then, does the Lango sub-region have for peace?

#### 7.4 Conflict and Violence

Conflict and violence are closely related. As youth experiences of conflict and violence demonstrated, there are increasing sources of conflict in communities, arising out of the failure of community members and post-conflict interventions to resolve conflicts amicably. As a result, conflicts that would otherwise be resolved end degenerating into direct or indirect violence.

Most of the participants reported that violence was on the rise and had disrupted their lives at the family and community levels, and negatively affected their contribution to society. Disruption of the lives of young people has been one of the most severe impacts of the LRA conflict and other forms of violence reported by the young people in the study. Many participants, although children at the time of the conflict, indicated that they were victims and continue to feel the impact of the war which had ruined their lives in different ways.

All the youth in the study admitted having been affected by violence in one way or another, or having relatives that had been victims of violence. Violence was reported to be on the rise at the family and community levels over the years. According to the participants, the LRA conflict and COVID-19 increased domestic and other forms of violence. At the household level, many young people said that at



least one of their household members experienced violence. In many cases, the violence culminated into death. As one young person recounted,

Land conflicts have steadily increased during the lockdown as most of the people are farming and even an inch of encroachment on a neighbour's land has led to conflicts, competition, death, physical fights, and witchcraft. Cultural leaders are also challenged in addressing land conflicts. A man killed his younger brother because the younger brother had sold family land and denied his elder brother a share of the proceeds. In a case where clan leaders were trying to resolve a community dispute over land, some rowdy youth killed three people. In another case one person cut over 1,000 eucalyptus trees belonging to a neighbour following an old grudge over land. (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Another young person had a similar story to tell:

I lost a relative to domestic violence. He was stabbed with a knife. In our village, a week does not pass without recording domestic violence. Parental neglect is common, and in one case children joined their mothers and fought their father to death. Last week four men were killed by their wives for failing to provide for their families (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Some of the reported violence is sexual:

Sexual violence, especially by teenagers who take *mirra* [herbal intoxicant] and smoke marijuana is on the rise. Some youths are running mad while others waylay people on the road. In our village, there is a certain swamp that you cannot cross if you are female. Young men will rape you. Because of that, some men have to escort their wives to the well [to fetch water] and to the garden (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

In some cases, family members' disagreements culminate into murder:

Disagreement over resources is leading to wastage and murder. Husbands sell the little household food available to get money to buy alcohol. Last year, my brother cultivated soya beans and his wife had to escort him to the market to ensure that he did not squander the proceeds from the sale. Domestic violence may not end even with all the radio talk shows to sensitise the general public. The culprits may not even listen to the radio programmes and if they do, they do not pay attention (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

In yet another case, a man murdered his wife, and to meet the cost of compensating her family, the entire land of his extended family had to be sold. Deprivation of land, poor relations and revenge were cited as some of the effects or manifestations of conflicts and violence. Some young people cited inability to operate business, rear animals, and remain in school among other negative manifestations or

consequences of conflict and violence. For example, a teacher complained that he could not “work beyond a certain time” because thugs would “break into your shop or kill you on your way home” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Conflict and violence were reported to affect school-going, young people as well. As a young lady observed, “There are many cases of high school dropout due to violence. For development to be effective, young people need to complete education, but they drop out and live in trading centres, drinking, watching football and gambling” (FGD, female participants, Otuke, 17 February 2022).

This may partly explain why some young people proposed that the government should consider psychosocial support to young people to restore normalcy among the youth. In the words of one young lady, “There are no counsellors in government health facilities, and yet there are so many cases of mental disorder. People need psychosocial help, but the services are not available” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

To some extent, violence was also reported to occur in the form of obstacles posed by social norms and practices that prevent some youth from enjoying some of their rights. In particular, women were cited as finding it difficult to access land in their natal homes because, unlike males who are expected to inherit land and other property in their natal homes, females were expected to get married off and access land in their marital homes.

Key informants confirmed that violence was on the rise, and was often employed to address rampant conflicts in communities. According to one key informant, some youth are taking people’s lives, some are losing theirs, while others are either in prison or on the run for crimes they have committed. Another key informant observed that dealing with youth who think violence is the only means to resolve challenges has made being a parent, and life in general, challenging. Asked how the challenges of violence could be overcome at the family and community levels, a parent bemoaned his predicament:

How can I overcome challenges when everything ends up in violence [physical fight]? The traditional leaders could do more to help us discipline the youth. For now, they [traditional leaders] are tired of continuous complaints from me about my son. I wish he is sent to prison because I have tried my best, and I think prison is the place where he and other unruly youth rightly belong (KII, parent, Otuke, 16 August 2021).

Commenting on the use of violence, a key informant wondered what had gone wrong with the people. According to him, murder, through poisoning, fighting, kidnapping, often because of land disputes, had

become commonplace. He added, “It is very painful to see people being killed for stealing two kilograms of groundnuts, and women taking poison due to minor disputes they could resolve” (KII, religious leader, Lira Municipality, 24 June 2021).

It is evident from the foregoing account that young people recognize conflict and violence distort efforts to rebuild lives after the LRA conflict. While the LRA conflict ended more than a decade ago, its effects on the lives of young people are still being felt. Some of the effects are psychological while others are physical. Moreover, conflicts and violence arising out of unfair resource distribution, and competition over resources, continue to bedevil the district, and to trigger widespread violence. The negative coping strategies adopted by many young people, in the form of youth gangs, and alcohol and drug abuse, undermine the health, productivity and wellbeing of young people.

### 7.5 Climatic and Demographic Factors

We are no longer sure of the rain pattern, and are unable to predict it as we did before; and the recent invasion by locusts has added to the existing problems, destroying plants and preventing fruiting of edible fruit trees, including shea trees, our main source of income. This situation is really affecting us who rely on farming and our own efforts for everything in life (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021).

The above quotation summarises the experiences of a typical rural farmer who relies on rain-fed agriculture for survival. Many young people in the study, especially those in rural locations, reported that unpredictable weather conditions, characterized by prolonged droughts and occasional flooding, had undermined their ability to make a living through farming, as unpredictable weather conditions made farming risky and unprofitable, leading to water and food shortages. According to many young people, this situation was aggravated by Karimojong pastoralists who encroach onto Langoland in search of water and pasture for their animals.

One significant natural event that occurred in 2020 was the invasion of locusts which destroyed crops, driving people into abject poverty, partly attributable to continued use of underproductive farming tools, methods, and crop varieties. According to a key informant, unless agricultural productivity is boosted through an enterprising private sector that takes agriculture seriously, and invests in it significantly, subsistence farming will remain dominant, and rural poverty will persist. In his view, the peasant mind-set had dominated our society and this is not helping young people, many of whom seek to get money quickly, and shun agricultural work. However, he added, even hard-working farmers face the challenge of an unfair agricultural market which favours the trader at the expense of the producer, further discouraging young people from engaging in the agricultural sector. Citing an example of climate-smart

farming, the key informant stated, “Embracing and investing in modern, commercial agriculture is the solution to subsistence farming and the harsh climatic conditions. This involves use of irrigation; and the government should subsidise solar irrigation pumps to promote small-scale irrigation farming (KII, teacher, Lira Municipality, 26 June 2022).

However, some key informants observed that the government had failed to respond to the worsening climate change, noting that efforts to do so were used as a pretext for a few individuals to enrich themselves through sensitisation workshops. In the words of one key informant,

It is now six months that most parts of the country have not received stable rainfall ... and crops have all dried up. In Lango, farmers would now (end of June) be harvesting beans, maize, groundnuts, millet and other crops, but now only a few farmers are beginning to pick some maize and beans from gardens the rest are clearing the gardens to wait for second season rains to start fresh planting because the first planting all went bad... It is now clear that unstable rainfall is the order of the day; and when it rains occasionally, we get floods and hailstones which destroy crops, livestock and human life (KII, teacher, Lira Municipality, 30 June 2022).

The worsening climate change is exacerbated by population growth and deforestation. Population growth is exerting pressure on land, and communities no longer enjoy the privilege of vast grazing land that they used to have. People are utilizing and selling land, including former communal grazing, thereby curtailing movement with animals in search for pasture and water. Moreover, as the pressure on land increases in neighbouring Teso and Karamoja, people from those areas are moving into Lango, further heightening the competition over land resources, especially arable land, grazing land, and water bodies. According to a key informant,

The fact is that although our population is growing exponentially, land is not expanding. We are now more than 2 million in the Lango sub-region, and the majority of these are young people, poorly educated, without viable sources of livelihood. Moreover, the little educated do not practice family planning. So, it should not surprise anyone that there is no fallow land anymore, and land conflicts are on the increase. It is also true that a few serious farmers are struggling to adopt modern farming practices, but the uncontrolled cost of inputs, coupled with unstable markets, make it difficult for everyone, including young people, to break even (KII, teacher, Lira Municipality, 30 June 2022).

The above quotation suggests because of lack of viable alternatives, young people engage in massive deforestation to earn a living. Deforestation was accelerated by the presence of a ready market for charcoal and timber across the country. According to both participants and key informants, charcoal has become a lucrative business and has a regional market that has seen many trucks from other districts

move to especially in Otuke District to buy charcoal. However, some parents expressed fear that young people were more interested in cutting down trees than planting. Indeed, one of the parents complained about his sons cutting down fruit trees (mangoes) which he had planted as a child, describing his children's generation as mere consumers. Most of the respondents cited massive felling of trees for fuel as a concern and a fear factor about the kind of future to expect. While the narrative depicts the youth as the key actors in deforestation, a key informant observed that it is a collective responsibility of the community to protect the environment, and to provide alternatives for young people. In his own words,

We have lost a lot of trees due to charcoal production by both the youth and elders. Of course, the youth are the majority in this country. People blame the youth even when they are instructed by their parents who do not have enough energy to fell trees. Moreover, the youth also have nothing to rely on in making a living, even after graduating with degrees (Interview with youth politician, Otuke, 24 February 2022).

Additionally, a young, male politician observed that despite all the land and other resources available, their own youth were preoccupied with alcohol and drugs, and were not making good use of the resources God gave them; instead, young people want to sell off what they found. According to him, ancestral land is available to the young people who, unfortunately, prefer to stay idle or sell the land, and spend the money in town centres or buy *boda boda*.

Another young man reported that a youth in their neighbourhood was contemplating suicide because he had sold all his farmland to a rich government officer, and to some people from the neighbouring Teso ethnic group. The youth had reportedly spent all the money from the land sale on alcohol, and had no farmland left for his own survival. Such misuse of money from land sale was reported to be a common phenomenon among the youth, many of whom resorted to gambling (betting), buying *boda boda* motorcycles and 'soft life' in town centres.

Love of money and uncontrolled sale of land were said to have soured relations among community members, and land transactions were said to be characterized by corruption, manipulation and greed. Worse still some elders, who were expected to be honest and role models, were also reported to be party to fraudulent land transactions, as witnesses to land sales involving vulnerable people. In several FGDs, especially in Otuke, young people expressed the fear that the sale of land to a government officer and other individuals had paved the way for manipulation and exploitation of an entire village community who are constrained to sell land to meet their basic needs, including medical expenses, bride price, and school fees. That is why many young people expressed the fear that most of them were headed into

landlessness. The same had happened in Acholi where Acholi government officials and individuals acted as agents for people from other ethnic groups and ‘foreign’ investors.

In all the FGDs, young people were generally worried about the increasing cases of immigrants (Ugandans from neighbouring ethnic groups) that have bought land in Lango killing people by means of poisoning. Young people, especially in Otuke, claimed that the immigrants had adopted new and sophisticated methods, a combination of witchcraft and poisoning, of killing people, and catching wild game and fish, worsening relationships between the Langi and the immigrants, especially the Teso who are reportedly the leading witches. This has led to the development of the narrative of “them and us”, or othering which is likely to grow with time.

Most of the respondents expressed fear and uncertainty about the future, arising from the negative consequences of population growth, land conflicts, and climate shocks. For example, young people indicated that there was increasing tension and restlessness among the general population due to the influx of people belonging to other ethnic into Langoland, and the extensive purchase of land and settlement by these “foreigners”. As a result, the land available to many native Langi was being increasingly reduced in size, some were being forced to move onto marginal agricultural land, and others were becoming landless. Other young people observed that the influx of ‘others’ into their areas of abode had increased cases of theft, land disputes, witchcraft and domination by the “foreigners”.

Generally, all participants of FGDs were worried about their ability to rebuild their lives and lead peaceful lives, especially given the influx of individuals and groups of people whose attitudes and behaviour were promoting violence, with the potential to destroy the future. Asked what worries them about the future of their communities, one of them remarked, “I am worried about the increasing number of attacks by the Karimojong cattle raiders, massive sale of land to the Teso and rich individuals, and rampant poisoning of people and water bodies” (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021).

Other young people indicated that they were worried that the Teso would eventually take over their land. In addition, some young people expressed fear about the increasing incidence of criminal violence in their communities. Moreover, most young people indicated that many young people and their families were struggling to meet their basic needs due to lack of means, drought and at times flood that destroy their crops, as well as lack of agricultural facilities and the means to sustain their livelihoods.

The foregoing account highlights the challenges associated with displacement and return, particularly in Otuke county (now District), which borders on Karamoja, Teso and Acholi, and was hit hard by the LRA,

and where people live in constant fear of the violence perpetuated by Karimojong cattle rustlers. Actually, for a long time, part of Otuke was uninhabited due to displacement by the LRA and Karimojong, rendering the land fertile and attractive to pastoralists and cultivators from neighbouring communities. Given that natives of Otuke District are generally poor, they are forced to sell their land to meet the cost of their basic needs, and those with money, including people from neighbouring ethnic groups, are taking advantage of the situation to buy land in Otuke.

## 7.6 The COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic was yet another factor that constrained the participation of young people in peacebuilding. Most of the young people in the study indicated that they had been largely left out of COVID-19 responses. This meant that their concerns and the impact of the measures taken in response to the pandemic on their lives were not incorporated into the prevention and containment measures, and the COVID-19 recovery strategies. As a result, according to the young people, their existing vulnerabilities were exacerbated. The livelihoods, formal education, and security of young people were the most affected by the response to the pandemic.

### 7.6.1 Reduced service provision and youth participation

Young people indicated that COVID-19 led to a reduction in the provision of services to the youth. Businesses of young people collapsed, rendering youth unable to grow their businesses and improve their welfare. As food supply decreased because it was difficult to transport produce to markets, many of which were closed any way, due to social distancing, food prices soared beyond young people's means. Reduced functions and limited funding to some youth organisations led to a reduction in services unrelated to COVID-19. Due to the prioritisation of the response to COVID-19, some organisations did not receive core funding, rendering some of their staff, including young people, redundant and unable to meet their needs and those of their families.

One of the most severe impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on youths was the disruption of their livelihoods. Most of the youth who earned a living through employment reportedly became unemployed or did not earn an income from any form of work after the lockdown measures, rendering them idle, and making it difficult, and often impossible, for them to meet their basic needs. According to one young man, "The measures were insensitive to the needs of vulnerable groups, and the so-called support was selective. Indeed, many people died due to the government's inability to provide support to vulnerable communities" (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

Moreover, many of the youth indicated that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for them to recover from the setback occasioned by the pandemic. In the opinion of many young people, the government needed to address the failure to involve young people in the planning and execution of the COVID-19 response, and the situation could be remedied through a range of measures. According to one young man, the government could introduce “loan schemes and ensure that they are beneficial to the youth” (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021). Another young man proposed that the government should provide “services to all communities without discrimination” and he complained that the government was providing services selectively “to supporters of the National Resistance Movement strongholds”(FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021).

### 7.6.2 Exacerbated digital divide and formal education among youth

Participants also indicated that while some young people used social media platforms to engage virtually (online) in educational learning, the COVID-19 response, and in other issues, others, especially in rural areas, were unable to access digital platforms. This was because they did not have laptops or smart phones; neither did they have access to the Internet. In other words, some young people lacked the digital capacity and the resultant space to engage in some community activities, and their voices and creative ideas were missing in campaigns and online information-sharing.

One of the preventive measures taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic was the closure of all educational institutions, leading to the suspension, and in some cases end, of the formal education of many young people. For example, a female FGD participant expressed the fear that she would age and fail to realize her life goals.

The fear of dropping out of school preoccupied many young people in all the three FGDs with learners because the lockdown conditions had made it very difficult for their parents or benefactors to earn money to meet the cost of their education. Actually, in all the three FGDs with learners, many participants urged government and NGOs to identify and assist needy school-going youth. In the words of one participant, government and development partners should “provide scholarships to school dropouts so they can resume their education and acquire practical knowledge and skills for survival” (FGD, mixed participants, Otuke, 17 February 2022).

### 7.6.3 Idleness and associated risks

In addition, youth became idle, unable to engage with various structures or to access many services, which indirectly led to a rise in teenage pregnancy and child marriage. Breadwinners were unable to



provide basic needs, including food for their families. Confining young people to one place prevented them from participating in social networks, including games and sports, community dialogues, school-based structures, and religious activities, where they would have actively contributed ideas to the COVID-19 response and other issues. Instead, they got involved in behaviour that ruined their lives, leading to a rise in violence, which undermined their ability to contribute to peacebuilding.

Moreover, having to stay at home instead of being at school or at work mean that families had more people to feed, but less money to buy food, than they normally would. According to one young teacher,

Teachers and learners were greatly affected. As a teacher in a private school, I was no longer earning a salary. Government-school teachers were paid salaries, but not the private-school teachers. The government should have come to the aid of private-school teachers. Worse still, the young people resorted to risky behaviour: forming bad groups, drinking and engaging in other risky behaviour (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

The findings suggest that, for the most part, COVID-19 led to a deterioration in the security situation, as a result of an increase in criminal activities, including theft and rape, some of them perpetuated by youth gangs. Many young people reported feeling less safe now than they did before the pandemic, and they attributed it to the presence of youth gangs that terrorise communities. Some reported that they lived in fear of being attacked, or having their property stolen. Others feared that the presence of the military in their community would increase their risk of being attacked or having their rights violated by soldiers who enforce the curfew harshly. Conversely, some young people said that they felt safer with the military presence, arguing that the presence of soldiers would reduce their chances of being attacked by criminals.

### 7.7 Limited Capacity to Respond to Conflict, Violence and Changes

Generally, the youth reported having limited capacity to respond to conflicts, violence and changes. This limited capacity was said to manifest itself in the form of the technical capacity of the youth themselves, weaknesses in local mechanisms to enhance opportunities for youth to overcome barriers and improve peacebuilding outcomes, and gaps in institutional mechanisms and response capacity.

Field data reveals that the youth consider their technical capacities to be low due to the long-term impacts of the conflict and violence, relatively low levels of formal education among the youth, as evidenced by the profiles of the young people in the study, widespread unemployment throughout northern Uganda, poverty, and cultural degeneration. Faced with these challenges, the youth argue, their ability to influence peacebuilding processes and outcomes is limited, at both the household and community levels.

Peacebuilding programmes have the potential to strengthen the capacity of young people to reduce their vulnerability, promote nonviolent approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and be at the forefront of change. However, youth narratives show that while a minority of them work as farmers or *boda boda* riders, many, including educated ones, are unemployed and idle, and often unable to fend for themselves and their families. Given the limited livelihood opportunities, low incomes, and the high rates of poverty, few youth are able to meet their basic needs and influence decisions at different levels.

As an ongoing challenge, some of the in-school youth expressed fear of missing education due to the devastating effect of COVID-19 on the already vulnerable communities. During the peak of COVID-19 pandemic, a small proportion of the youth had no access to online learning, and their prospects of returning to school after the pandemic were slim given the devastating impact of COVID-19 on the socioeconomic and other aspects of life. Following the easing of lockdown measures and reopening of schools, school-going youth in an FGD revealed that a number of their fellow youth had not resumed their secondary school education because of lack of school fees, pregnancy, violence, madness, and a few cases of death. Some female youth reported that some of their colleagues had dropped out of school to help with domestic chores. These cases of young people dropping out of school after the COVID-19 lockdown were confirmed by parents who reported that their children had dropped out of primary and secondary school due to financial constraints and other causes, including substance abuse, indiscipline and lack of interest in education on the part of the children.

In addition to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, young people cited the failure of local authorities to address emerging challenges in their communities as a major constraint. For instance, they cited recurrent drought and the invasion by locusts as increasing their vulnerability to poverty. According to one key informant, the Government of Uganda's late and inadequate response to early warning signs was responsible for the increasing vulnerability and inability of young people and their communities to recover from shocks and drastic changes. In his own words, "By the time people die of hunger, they have sold their land, sent children to streets or married them off, making the recovery practically impossible" (KII, teacher, Lira Municipality, 26 June 2022).

Although the youth cited farming as a common activity, especially for rural youth, the findings indicate that, due to a number of reasons, including harsh weather conditions, laziness, high intake of alcohol and poor health, some youth are not productively utilizing land to improve their lives. Those engaged in agriculture attributed their failure to use their land optimally to their use of unproductive methods and

rudimentary tools, lack of farm inputs, and unpredictable weather conditions. Only a small proportion of the youth engaged in agriculture were reportedly able to meet their basic needs and progress, especially in rural areas. Generally, the respondents indicated widespread vulnerabilities in terms of livelihoods, with many households having few opportunities to earn incomes. A graduate of agriculture from Makerere University, who hails from Lira District and is currently working as an intern with an agricultural firm in Israel, had this to say about his experience in the agriculture sector:

Within the short time that I have spent in Israel, I have learnt that agriculture requires skills, passion, and technology. If one day I have to employ people, I need to make sure there is enough capacity to do the work, pay well and value human resources. People in Israel work so hard and they value agriculture so much that we the youth are enjoying what we do. They have invested in technology and beaten climatic, storage of perishable goods, and lack of market challenges that Uganda is still grappling with. I think the agricultural sector in Uganda is not taken seriously as it should be. From teaching to work and remuneration, agriculture in Uganda is not motivating, especially to young people. Teaching is focused on theory, with very little practical work. In the end, we fail to make the best use of our knowledge and time in the field. So, part of the reason why the youth are not taking advantage of agriculture to improve their lives is because they have no capacity to invest productively in agriculture, and the few active young people in agriculture get frustrated with drought, floods and lack of market for their products. (Interview with male youth employed in agriculture sector, Lira Municipality, 20 June 2022).

Some other youth cited limited access to agricultural land due to conflicts and violation of young people's right to land as one of the causes of the limited capacity. In particular, female and male youth born out of wedlock attributed their inability to inherit land to the formal absence of a father from whom to inherit land. For their part, female youth attributed their inability to inherit land from their fathers to cultural norms and practices barring females from inheriting land from their fathers.

However, some key informants said the main reasons why some youth do not have access to land is because once they are offered land for use, they want to claim total ownership of the land, sell the land and go to urban centres to ride *boda boda*, or spend the money luxuriously. The key informants highlighted the need to keep the land for future generations as crucial, noting that although customary land was the only asset left to them after the conflict, the young people wanted to sell it for selfish reasons. Some of the youth who chose not to return to their areas of origin after the LRA conflict cited land conflicts, witchcraft, and limited livelihood opportunities as the reasons for their choice. A few of the youth, especially those from Otuke, cited lack of security arising from cattle rustling and encroachment onto Langoland by the Karimojong pastoralists as the reasons for their not returning there.

It was also noted that when faced with conflicts and violence, some young people feel that violence is the only means available to them to respond to their challenges. This is partly because, in most cases, cultural and local government structures do not offer them an efficient and effective space to openly discuss and agree on the issues that arise. It was also evident from the FGDs that, as a population category, young were the most frequently involved in conflicts and violence. As one of the female participants noted, “When young people want anything, they apply violence to get it” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

In the same vein, a key informant, who happened to be a youth councillor in the district council, noted that youth continued to confirm the narrative that they are violent because they resort to violence even when they do so on behalf of their parents or other members of the community.

Another reason cited for the weak capacity of the youth was the gaps in institutional mechanisms and response capacity. Many young people indicated that although government and NGO had undertaken a range of interventions in their communities, those interventions had not reached most of the youth who deserved to be reached. While some young people attributed this to unfair, selective targeting of beneficiaries, others blamed it on the interveners’ failure to inform all deserving youth about interventions meant to benefit them, on prohibitive conditions of some interventions, and on corruption among implementers. In this regard, the words of one young person are particularly revealing:

As youths we often get stuck on the way. For example, we heard about a loan scheme called *emyooga* in which each benefitting group was entitled to about Uganda Shillings 30 million, but only a few groups received the money. The participating micro-finance institutions also made it difficult for youths by demanding a lot of interest, which discouraged many youths from participating. Why do they want profits when the youth are suffering? I know some people received abnormally high amounts while others didn’t receive anything. In addition, some leaders took the money and gave very little to the youth groups. Why do you ask a youth who does not have any money to first deposit Uganda Shillings 500,000 in order to get a million? Yet we know that sometimes you pay the money, but end up losing it (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

However, some young people blamed fellow youth who fail to embrace even projects that are obviously beneficial. Citing an example of COVID-19 vaccinations, a participant advised that young people “to be proactive in supporting government projects. For instance, many people did not embrace vaccinations for COVID-19 yet it was for their own good” (FGD, mixed participants, Erute North, 8 August 2021).

An analysis of the gaps in interventions for youth reveals that support for youth in peacebuilding should be directed to efforts to reduce conflicts and violence and to contribute to peace. Similarly, the intended outcome of such interventions should be to increase capacity of the youth to claim and exercise their right to participation as a prerequisite to other basic rights. However, after years of peacebuilding programmes, the limited capacities of young people continue to limit their ability to manage and transform conflicts and violence, and to implement effective peacebuilding strategies. As a result, many young people are unable to meet their need and contribute to peacebuilding; instead they are involved in crime.

#### 7.8 Politicisation and Manipulation of NGO and Government Interventions targeting Youth

The findings suggest that, for the most part, interventions targeting youth have been politicised and manipulated regardless of their purported objectives. Youth expressed concern over manipulation of NGO interventions by local authorities, resulting in some sections of a community being given preference over others. For example, one young man asserted,

We just hear that an NGO or government programme is being implemented in a given village, and that some people have been selected to benefit, or are already benefiting from it. We only get to know about it when the selection is over and the project is going on. In some instances, some of us who were registered to benefit from such programmes were asked to pay some money. In one instance, I paid Uganda Shillings 10,000 to be selected for income-generation activity funded by an NGO, but it is now a year, and we are still waiting. I wonder what criteria they use to select the area and the people to benefit from such programmes, and why some people are asked to pay money before benefiting from such programmes. Yet if you look at those selected, some are doing as badly as we are, although most are much better off than we are because they are more connected or come from well-to-do families (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021).

The many young people who had never benefitted from any intervention also blamed the politicisation and manipulation of interventions for their situation. Generalized displacement and the effect of the LRA war on communities could have contributed to the feeling that everyone deserves some form of support. In particular, young people felt that it was unfair that historical sites of massacres and massive abduction had not received the attention they deserve, arguing inhabitants of such places needed support to cope with the trauma and loss experienced during the war.

One of the most frequently raised concerns about government programmes was that they are biased in favour of those who subscribe to a particular political party or people who have connections with those responsible for such programmes. Young people also pointed out that, in most cases, government interventions targeted strongholds of the ruling party to reward them for their support. However, some

young people noted, in some cases, the support young people received from government was a form of bribe to entice them to support the ruling party. On that basis, they argued, a government intervention could target an opposition stronghold in the hope of winning it over to the ruling party. Whatever the case may be, politicisation and manipulation of interventions results in many deserving youth being left out of interventions, and thus denied an opportunity to be empowered to participate in peacebuilding.

The bias in government interventions targeting youth was also highlighted by key informants. According to many of them, if one is not connected to, or liked by, the one's community leaders, then it is unlikely that one or one's children will access any form of support. Sometimes, at least some respondents, thought, one was left out of an intervention simply because the decision-makers were jealous of him or her. Asked how, if at all, his children had benefited from any government or NGO interventions, an indignant key informant answered,

If you ask me such a question, I really get annoyed. I was once registered for NUSAF [a government programme for rehabilitation of northern Uganda] to access cattle. However, at the time of distribution, I was left out because I come from the far north [Otuke] and because my cousin is known to be employed by an NGO. People are jealous of me; they don't wish to see me prosper. All projects are implemented with the influence of community members and leaders (KII, parent, Erute North, 31 July 2021).

However, another key informant opined that the youth of northern Uganda needed to go beyond waiting for support and blaming the government, because unless they acted proactively, they would never benefit from government interventions which he associated with failures. In his words, "We should avoid blaming government while we are actually just idling around, waiting for government to do what we ourselves should be doing. We can choose to lament endlessly until Jesus returns" (KII, politician, Lira Municipality, 26 June 2022). The opinion of this key informant was echoed by other key informants who observed that the youth were not making good use of opportunities available to them. Citing youth livelihood funds, a key informant noted,

We are very concerned about the behaviour of youths. When we give them livelihood funds, they misuse them. Some simply share the money among themselves, contrary to the intended purpose. Yet they blame government for their failures. If youth do not change their behaviour, they are headed for failure, and not a single programme will benefit them...Of course, we know that some officers misappropriate funds meant for youth, but this should not be an excuse for youth to always blame government (KII, Chairperson Local Council, Lira Municipality, 24 February 2022).

Echoing the misappropriation of funds cited by the key informant, some young people noted that part of the problem was local authorities who do not hold local people and duty-bearers to account for their actions. Actually, some young people accused local leaders of conniving with criminals, which partly explains why corruption and other crimes were committed with impunity. In the words of one young man,

Leaders should stop glorifying thieves. Local Council leaders who know who the corrupt people are fear to confront or report them to relevant authorities. They not only fear, but they are also relatives to some of those corrupt people, and above all, they benefit from the corruption (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 17 February 2022).

Therefore, the discussion on economic participation by young people reveals mixed results, with some young people complaining of being excluded from key processes while others bemoan their limited capacity, or inability, to participate. Similarly, key informants highlighted young people's preferences for quickly earned money as opposed to long-term interventions that require patience. All the same, there is no gainsaying the fact that interventions targeting youth are reportedly politicised and manipulated to the disadvantage of young people thus undermining their participation in peacebuilding.

#### 7.9 Lack of Durable Solutions for Formerly Displaced Persons

Yet another impediment to youth participation in peacebuilding is the lack of durable solutions for formerly displaced persons, including young people. Displacement, experienced directly or indirectly by young people, has been a life-changing phenomenon for the youth of northern Uganda. Young people's narratives suggest that until now, some sections of the formerly displaced population have not attained durable solutions, implying that they still have "specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement..." and they can exercise their rights without any discrimination (Beyani, Baal, and Caterina 2016: Para.3). Some youth, although children at the time of displacement, continue to experience post-displacement challenges, including failure to reintegrate sustainably in their places of origin because of disputes and conflicts over land and property, witchcraft, and fear of revenge for their role in the LRA conflict. Some were born out of wedlock and cannot inherit land from their maternal homes, while others are unmarried women or divorcees who were expected to be married and access land in their marital homes. All this makes reintegration and participation in peacebuilding very difficult if not impossible.

The other reason cited by young people for failure to find durable solutions for formerly displaced persons was inter-ethnic conflicts over land and other resources. The border district of Otuke remains fragile, with the potential to deteriorate into violent conflicts following an increase in land conflicts, especially those pitting cultivators against pastoralists, and crime. When Karimojong cattle-rustlers invade Otuke District, and encroach on the district in search of water and pasture for their animals during the dry season, this often triggers conflict between the two groups, often ending up in the destruction of crops by animals, and violation of human rights, leading to tension between the Karimojong and the Langi. The tension, in turn, erodes the sense of good neighbourliness. More crucially, cattle-rustling, and competition over pasture and water sources often trigger violence, discourage investment, and undermine peacebuilding efforts and self-resilience.

It also emerged that there was no enabling environment for meaningful reintegration in areas of origin (return), areas of displacement, and in areas where former IDPs relocated. According to the respondents, this is because of Housing, Land and Property (HLP) disputes, lack of housing and other basic services in many return locations, especially remote areas, climate change, and limited opportunities. As a result, young people are unable to reintegrate fully or to contribute to long-term peace, and many of them continue commuting between areas of origin and areas of integration and relocation.

Yet another reason for some formerly displaced persons failing to return to their former homes is stigma, especially that endured by former LRA combatants. For example, a key informant, who had spent most of his youth as an LRA combatant, blamed his inability to return to his place of origin on stigma and limited support from government and NGOs to enable him resume a normal life. Speaking partly rhetorically, he said,

How do they expect us to marry and bring up normal children when we are traumatized, without any employable skills, money or other resources? I personally cannot even stay in the village because of what people think and say about me. After returning from the bush [war], I enrolled in a secondary school, but learners, teachers and the entire community called me a rebel, *kadogo* [child soldier], so I decided to relocate to Lira Town where I was not known by many people. I tried to rear cattle in my home village but my cousins use them to their own benefits, so why should I keep investing in what I know is of no value to me? My condition is not unique to me: there are many people out there who are worse than me. I am about 50 years, and I am not yet married because I cannot take care of children and a wife without money. I don't want my children to end up on the streets. Those street children you see moving around are a product of frustrated youthful parents. Indeed, they represent our problems and the failure to raise them. But they are



our representatives, call them rebels if you want. It is a matter of time, and they will begin to haunt the community (KII, Ex-combatant, Lira Municipality, 29 July 2021).

The time the former rebel was talking about was already in the present. Many of the young people in the study complained about the emergence of youth gangs, often said to be made up of street children in major towns of northern Uganda, raising concerns over the upbringing of this new generation and the future of the region. Youth continue to suffer severely from vulnerability, abject poverty, and the ever looming violence. Actually, one young person attributed his current predicaments to his parents having been displaced and raised in a poverty-stricken family. He also cited his having served the government as part of the Amuka (a local militia group from the Lango sub-region that were recruited to fight the LRA during the peak of the conflict) for which he has never been paid. He blamed the government and his late father for his woes:

I was used by the government to risk my life fighting the LRA, but until now, I have not been paid for my service. May be my life would have been different if they [government] had paid me or if my father had bequeathed some property to me to start life with. I blame my problems on the government and my father who died leaving me destitute. For that reason, I will never participate in any government programme (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021).

Evidently, at least one young man has failed to reintegrate fully, and he has vowed never to participate in any government intervention on account of his earlier disappointment with a government intervention, and there may be many more like him. While the study did not delve into the effect of the LRA war on the youth, the nature and level of youth participation in peacebuilding suggests that there is need for a comprehensive strategy to address the effect of war and violence in the post-war period.

For the most part, land issues were mentioned across all the FGDs as affecting the productivity of the youth. The female youth, especially rural ones, reported unique challenges related to their gender and marital status, which, according to them, limit their ability to access land and use it to meet their basic needs. They cited being single, divorced, a widow, and having male children born out of wedlock as some of the additional reasons for failing to access and use land. For their part, male youth cited mainly conflicts over land, having been born out of wedlock, having committed, or being suspected to have committed, atrocities during the LRA war, corruption, bias in allocating and settling land conflicts, and conflicting opinions on land use, such as whether to sell customary land or not, as the main factors limiting their access to land. While some youth believe they should sell off some of their customary land

and use the money for other purposes, the elders argue that customary land is not for sale except for justifiable reasons. These then are the main reasons formerly displaced young people advanced for their failure to access land and reintegrate.

Young people and key informants agreed that the situation is aggravated by the absence of effective and accessible mechanisms to address HLP issues, such as boundary and inheritance disputes, landlessness, children born in captivity, and compensation for lost, damaged or destroyed property, and to ensure that conflict-affected families and individuals have a place to live, and can farm, earn an income, and access food.

The study also established that some people, especially from Otuke District, who were displaced into Lira and other districts, as a result of the LRA conflict and Karimojong cattle-rustling, have settled in their displacement areas. However, they commute between their places of displacement and Otuke District. In at least two FGDs, young people complained about being discriminated against or called names for being 'okide' (people from the northern side of Lango), a derogatory term used to refer to foreigners and relatively primitive people). Asked how such name-calling was affecting them, they indicated that the term was intended to portray them as different and not deserving of all the services in their areas of settlement/displacement. Asked in what ways they were being discriminated against, the youth cited lack of involvement in government and NGO programmes which, they said, targeted native residents, which they blamed on a their local leaders who favoured their relatives and friends at their expense. However, evidence from different FGDs pointed to general exclusion of the youth, with some areas receiving more support than others. Some young people indicated that because of what they had gone through, they had learnt to work hard to earn a living, which, unfortunately, had elicited jealousy from their less successful fellow youth, leading to tension among community members.

The above developments were confirmed by a key informant who claimed that, in the past, it had been government policy to impoverish some sections of the Ugandan community, and the people of Otuke were victims of the policy, although some of them had overcome the deliberate impoverishment, and prospered. In his words,

As we have seen in practical examples in the lives of our own people who have been targeted for impoverishment, we can overcome the government's malicious agenda, and prosper. When government pursued a deliberate programme of cattle-rustling to impoverish us, a number of our enterprising brothers from the 'Okide' [East] came to Lira Town, and, taking advantage of business opportunities, mostly involving those that the

locals despised, prospered in spite of the adversities that the government had subjected them [to]. (KII, politician, Lira Municipality, 26 June 2022).

In the opinion of these formerly displaced, and now settled people, some members of the host community see them as more progressive, depriving natives of opportunities, and buying land from the natives. Given that, in rural and peri-urban areas, land plays an important role in socioeconomic and political life, and provides the basis for permanent settlement and access to livelihoods, when formerly displaced people buy land from natives, the natives feel threatened.

Interestingly, young people in the study noted that while they would wish to return to their areas of origin, they fear for the lives because witchcraft and land disputes, and they prefer to remain settled in their former areas of displacement. Particularly in Otuke District, where there is massive sale of land to rich individuals and their neighbours, the Teso ethnic group, on a willing seller and buyer basis, the youth accuse the neighbouring Teso community of manipulation and use of witchcraft to kill people and livestock, poison water bodies, encroachment onto Otukeland, and deforestation. According to the youth, these factors make it difficult for them to return to, or prosper in, their homeland.

In addition, public services and opportunities are in short supply in most of northern Uganda, further victimising the youth of the region, who are already vulnerable and have missed out in most aspects of life. Therefore, empowering young people to be self-reliant would enable them to rebuild their lives and to contribute more actively to the wellbeing of their communities.

## 7.10 Restricted Space for, and the Role of ICT in, Youth Participation in Peacebuilding Structures and Programmes

Participants indicated that while it appears, or may actually be, that there are structures and programmes for youth participation in peacebuilding, the manner in which such initiatives are implemented restricts youth participation. In this sub-section, we discuss how young people are excluded from structures and programmes, and the role of ICT in youth participation.

### 7.10.1 Exclusion from relevant structures and programmes

The findings on the structures, programmes and decision-making for youth participation in peacebuilding indicate that, generally, the youth can barely access key decision-making structures on important issues that affect them, and feel alienated from programmes meant to address their problems.

Young people in the study argued that while the youth would like to have their concerns addressed through policies, structures and programmes, they feel excluded from those structures and programmes.

Those who had participated in some structures said, that this was because, even when they attend meetings, their issues are not addressed. Those who had not participated in any of those structures were indifferent, and blamed their leaders for not voicing their concerns, and indicated that while they have not played any role in those structures, they did not see any need to do so. Generally, most of the youth who have participated in some structures or programmes reported that they were not fully accepted or heard in on those platforms. Other young people cited lack of information, poor communication, lack of incentives, and lack of interest on the part of young people as being responsible for young people's limited participation in peacebuilding activities. In an interview with a female youth working for a civil society organization, it was revealed that although the youth were taking steps to address issues that affect them on various platforms, the challenges they faced made it nearly impossible for them to have any meaningful impact. In her words,

Young people are now very proactive in trying to find solutions to their problems. However, they have limited space to do that. For example, Uganda has more than 300 members of parliament, but the youth representatives are less than 10, and the final decisions are not made by the young people. I still feel we are overshadowed in decision-making (Interview with female youth working in civil society, Lira Municipality, 20 June 2022).

According to many young people, either by default or because they are regarded as 'outcasts', some of them hardly access structures or platforms for engagement. In most FGDs, alcoholism and physical disability among young people were somehow attributed to the victims' not being heard. As one young male noted, "If you are always drunk and you think as a drunkard, then you cannot make a useful contribution to issues that affect society, and we have no choice but to decide for you." (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021). In the same vein, another young male observed,

Unless the issues specifically concern persons with disability, it would be difficult to involve them. Persons with disability may have a voice, but their voice does not count. Otherwise, someone must be there to speak for you directly if you are to succeed (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021).

Young people identified sex, location, and health, employment or education status as the factors influencing or determining their exclusion from participation in peacebuilding. For instance, according to one of the participants, disabled people were at times excluded because they could not move to the site or location of participation, or access the place where services were delivered. Moreover, physically disabled youth were often despised and discriminated against. However, according to one participant,

persons with disability were probably better heard than the general youth population because they have special representation and support of activists and NGOs.

Generally, young people recognized the importance of leading an exemplary life in order to be part of the discussions on issues that concern society. For instance, a young person referred to bad behaviour [what is considered an ‘unacceptable’ conduct by respective communities] as a reason for the culprit to be shunned by community members. Alcoholism and drug addiction among young people were reported to be among the ‘bad behaviours’ that had led to a rise in youth gangs and their violence, and to the inability of young people to participate in peacebuilding.

These young people’s opinions were shared by some key informants. In the opinion of some parents, if alcoholism was not addressed, there would be no future for northern Uganda, and the region would suffer more than it did during the LRA war.

However, some key informants blamed communities for having focussed excessively on the negative side of young people, without appreciating the challenges they face, or tapping into the potential of young people. Responding to the tendency to blame the youth for their low participation in issues that affect them and their communities, a key informant observed that unless communities changed their attitudes to young people, they would continue to miss opportunity to learn from them. In his opinion:

People view young people negatively because they never interact with them or their leaders. Elderly people do not see things the way youth see them. If you want to get data on youth, and you go to elders, then you are unlikely to get correct data. I know that there are a number of youth who are lost, but it is incorrect to portray all the youth in the same way (KII, politician, Otuke, 26 October 2021).

Regarding criteria for inclusion and exclusion in programmes, young people indicated that not all of them benefited from programmes meant for them. According to one young man in Otuke, “Some leaders discriminate some people undertaking personal development projects, like building construction, or people perceived to be well off by village standards” (FGD, male participants, Otuke, 12 August 2021). The story of a young man in Erute North was even more revealing,

I was asked to participate in a training programme in sewing, but I wanted either to ride *boda boda* or to learn construction. I was later offered a bursary by the Area Member of Parliament to learn construction, but the intermediary used the money to pay fees for his children. I am now a full-blown *waragi* [local gin] drinker and inseparable from alcohol just like a cat’s love for milk (FGD, male participants, Erute North, 1 August 2021).

Perceptions or experiences of exclusion by the youth are not limited to government and NGO programmes. In a separate FGD with female youth, the most cited examples of exclusion related to resource allocation. According to them, because of changes over time, not all the females get married, and, in cases of divorce or death of a husband, their families are hesitant to allocate divorcees or widows land, or protect their land rights, simply because they are female.

### 7.10.2 The role of ICT in youth participation

Speaking about the role of information and communication technology (ICT), the teachers in the study acknowledged that ICT provided an opportunity for young people to access new ideas and to research independently. According to them, independent research was useful in sharpening the minds of young people to think more proactively about solutions to their challenges instead of relying on book knowledge and memorising notes given to them by teachers. However, one of the teachers expressed concern over the use of mobile phones, indicating young people were using phones to engage in illicit and destructive activities. In spite of this concern, some other key informants were opposed to the restriction of the use of ICT as it would undermining the potential of young people to learn from their challenges and failures and to ultimately champion important causes for a peaceful living. According to one teacher in Otuke,

Whether we want or not, we have to come to terms with the reality that these students are fast learners and thinkers, and as the world advances, the learners are moving with change and advancement in technology such that the teachers need to be prepared and equipped to cope with those changes. Blaming youth is not the way to go; instead, we should embrace change instead of coercing young people to follow outdated ideas which we use as a basis to judge young people today. We must realise that things have changed and that the world is moving forward (FGD, mixed participants, Otuke, 18 February 2022).

In the same vein, another teacher in Otuke said,

The teachers also need to come to terms with the fact that their students know certain things that they do not know, and have to try to catch up with their students by working with them instead of imagining that they will use the power of their positions and sticks to coerce students to believe in them (FGD, mixed participants, Otuke, 18 February 2022).

In spite of these differences of opinion, most of the young people and key informants affirmed the importance of ICT in learning and human interaction. For example, some key informants observed that students with smart phones had been able to study online and interact with friends and relatives during the COVID-19 lockdown while those without smart phones and network connectivity lagged behind. This finding reveals the digital divide among young people, and the fact that digitization will further

marginalize rural, and generally poor, youth who cannot afford smart phones and the cost of data, or who have no network connectivity. It also implies that programmes that target the use of ICT need to consider young people who, for a variety of reasons, are unable to use ICT. Overall, the foregoing narratives demonstrate that, as the spaces for youth engagement grow, so does the challenge of ensuring that the different spaces available to different categories of young people are contextualized and enhanced for better outcomes.

### 7.11 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has addressed the research question: how do constructions and experiences of post-conflict violence constrain participation of youth in peacebuilding in northern Uganda? The findings have revealed that the youth are grappling with sometimes restrictive social and cultural norms, conflicts and structural violence, and limited capacity to respond to conflict, violence and changes in their various contexts. In addition, programmes and structures that have the potential to foster effective youth participation in peacebuilding are restrictive and, therefore, not responsive to the needs and aspirations of youth for peaceful living.

Some youth were found to commute between their place of displacement and their original homes, which suggests lack of durable solutions for such youth, as their definitive return to their original homes would be risky. Therefore, the importance of supporting the targeted youth to achieve durable solutions and reduce their risk of further displacement and violence is key.

It was also noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated the vulnerability of many young people, and the inequalities among them, and driven some of them into extreme poverty, and was likely to affect their participation in socioeconomic and political life in the coming years. This suggests the need for an inclusive and collaborative approach to ensure investments into the participation of young people are targeted, strategic and effective.

It was observed that interventions intended to foster youth participation and to mitigate the negative impacts of violence, the COVID-19 pandemic, and climate change, among other factors that undermine young people's ability to effectively participate in matters that affect them were being implemented in the different districts of the Lango sub-region. These include NGO support to human rights and peace clubs in different schools, and NGO programmes promoting participation in social accountability, and livelihood opportunities, and fostering the economic empowerment of youth.

This chapter has also highlighted the experiences of youth, including constraints to young people's participation in peacebuilding, which informed the researcher's action to implement a peace club in a school, to address some of the challenges to the promotion of youth participation in building and sustaining peace, and take advantage of some of the lessons learnt. The exploratory component of the research has revealed that despite several peacebuilding interventions targeting youth in northern Uganda, young people remain largely excluded, sceptical and inadequately empowered to contribute effectively to peacebuilding efforts. The youth perception of their role in, and constraints to, peacebuilding reveals that to foster youth participation in peacebuilding, it is necessary to create an environment based on informed empathy and a spirit of solidarity. The empowerment initiatives ought to focus on building local capacities to address conflicts in a non-violent and sustained manner by incorporating attitudes, values, knowledge and skills for a peaceful living. The assumption is that, if young people are empowered use the attitudes, values, knowledge and skills that they have gained, they will be able to think, act and react in a non-violent and collaborative manner, and therefore be torchbearers to the future of their communities.

Values, such as equality, diversity, empathy, non-violence and social responsibility are key to the understanding that for peace to be built and sustained, we ought to desire it and uphold peace-related norms and practices. Similarly, one needs to develop a set of skills, including effective communication, stress management, cultural and conflict sensitivity, gender awareness, self-care, and reflection in order to analyse, prevent, mitigate and transform conflicts in different contextual settings. Finally, knowledge helps in creating awareness and understanding of the role theories, strategies and local contexts play in peacebuilding efforts at different levels. According to Krathwohl (2002), a complete theoretical lens through which to view knowledge is a combination of the different factual, conceptual, procedural, strategic and self-knowledge elements, and those that locally-driven.

Based on the findings of the study, and given that attitudes, knowledge and skills are key ingredients to an empowered local capacity to respond to conflict, violence and changes, this study opted to work within the framework of a peace club, and to design and implement a peace education curriculum for school-going youth in a local school, constructed to promote learning as part of the rehabilitation efforts targeting a previously displaced community. Peace education provides a comprehensive framework to understand the culture of war and violence, and to promote a culture of peace. Therefore, the training is the first step to equip students with the attitudes, values, knowledge and skills to resolve conflicts in a collaborative manner, beginning with their school settings and the local community. The action research was



implemented and evaluated over a period of one year, and the next chapter describes the peace club project.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: YOUTH EXPERIENCES OF IMPLEMENTING A YOUTH-LED PEACEBUILDING PROJECT IN NORTHERN UGANDA

### 8.1 Introduction

As explained in the methodology section, this study involved two phases: one exploratory, and the other an intervention. This chapter documents young people's experiences of implementing a peacebuilding project led by students who are members of the Peace and Human Rights Club of Ogor Seed Secondary School in Otuke, northern Uganda. Drawing from literature and fieldwork with participants at the study site, I chose to work with students from Ogor Seed Secondary School to identify and implement a needs-based peacebuilding project. Therefore, the chapter is an account of young people's efforts to contribute to peace by implementing activities relevant to conflicts and violence as experienced in their school and community. While some of the manifestations of conflict and violence relate to the broader issues for the legacy of violence in northern Uganda, young people chose to initiate activities that would improve their daily experiences at the school and within the community. Moreover, the immediate challenges are linked to the underlying issues, and they help to draw attention to the bigger challenges, and to the need to act responsibly in rebuilding northern Uganda.

The chapter presents a brief discussion on alternative ways of doing education and training with reference to peace education and peace club, background to, and justification of, the Peace and Human Rights Club, followed by an introduction to the action research participants and approaches that they proposed and implemented to build peace at school and in the local community. Finally, it presents concluding remarks.

### 8.2 Peace Education

We employed peace education as a strategy to instil attitudes, values, knowledge and skills to enable students and their teachers to resolve conflicts amicably. Scholars and practitioners recognise peace education as a special form of training that is required to nurture a culture of peace. According to UNESCO (n.d para 1), "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed." The UNESCO preamble affirms that a certain set of attitudes, knowledge and skills are necessary to build defences for peace in the minds of the human person. Such defences should be based on a resolve to dismantle the culture of war and violence, and to promote peace, nonviolence and solidarity, among human beings. Young people have the energy and capability to adopt attitudes and values for peace, and to play an active role in building a peaceful society.

Plagued with over two decades of violence, northern Uganda has a current generation of young people who have witnessed and/or been socialised into violence. That is why I opted for training in peace education, using the already existing peace club at the school. Peace education was deemed particularly appropriate for the learners in a formal setting because it fits into their extra-curricular activities and setting that expose them to worldviews and ways of life. In addition, peace education was deemed appropriate in a setting where young people are about to attain the age of 18 years, have attained that age or surpassed it. These age categories are important because they constitute the periods when young people are transformed into active and productive citizens and equipped with the values, attitudes, knowledge and skills they need to be agents for peace and positive change in their communities.

Having reviewed peace education modules of peace clubs, especially those developed by the Mennonite Central Committee and implemented in schools in Nigeria, and based on the exploratory findings, I decided to adopt and adapt the peace education framework by Floresca-Cawagas and Toh (1999) because it offers a holistic framework for peace, and provides the flexibility for adaptation to different contextual realities in response to violence in all its forms. As the nature of conflict and violence in northern Uganda is quite complex and embedded in community structures, the six tenets of peace education advanced by Floresca-Cawagas and Toh (1999) offer a framework that encompasses, and responds to, conflict and violence at the school and community levels while pursuing the broader vision of dismantling the culture of war and violence, and eliminating social injustice to attain the peace, recovery and development of northern Uganda and beyond. Therefore, I deemed it expedient to adopt the peace club model to design and implement a peacebuilding project which enabled young people to translate the knowledge and skills acquired during the training into the commitment required to respond to conflict and violence at the school and community levels.

### 8.3 Peace Club: An overview of theory and practice

A peace club is regarded as an avenue to build and sustain peace, and a strategy to implement peace education. The concept of peace clubs gained prominence following World War II when the world recognized the importance of training for peace. For instance, in the United States, more than 40 colleges and universities formed peace clubs to advance international peace (Juma 2019). After the Cold War, especially in the 1980s, Africa became the world's battle ground for active and violent internal and regional conflicts, and peace clubs gained momentum as a strategy to instil values, knowledge and skills to address conflicts in a collaborative manner. For example, according to Juma (2019), peace clubs were established in Zambian schools in 2006 as a means to educate for peace, and to promote non-violent

approaches to disputes in schools and communities. In northern Uganda, following the two decades of armed conflict, and the cessation of hostilities in 2007, the search for peace included the establishment of peace clubs in schools as a form of youth-focused curricula to respond to the challenges of youth participation in peaceful and sustainable community development.

Experiences from Africa reveal that peace clubs are effective, affordable, and a model of hope for peaceful living (Juma 2019). However, while there are hundreds of peace clubs in operation in various African countries, there has been very little academic writing about them. Irene (2015), Juma (2019) and Moyo (2022) refer to peace clubs as an effective model for engaging young people in building peaceable schools and communities. Juma (2019) observes that peace clubs are a resource and a practical approach to educating for peace because they help participants to attain knowledge and skills, and to interrogate and address conflicts in schools and communities. In particular, peace clubs raise awareness that enables participants to be self-aware, to understand unequal relationships and injustices, and to work towards equality and equity in society. According to Juma (2019), peace club training and other activities cover personal transformation, prevention, management, resolution and transformation, using participatory learning approaches that allow for interaction, ownership, nurturing role models, and sustainability of change. This is because the model creates a conducive environment for learning, develops future leaders, and enables acquisition of competencies that are useful for addressing conflicts in collaborative and non-violent ways.

For her part, Irene (2015) cites violence as a worrisome phenomenon that impacts negatively on young people's mental, psychological and physical well-being, and the learning processes in school. According to her, addressing the legacy violence requires a deliberate effort: one that addresses violence from its roots, and nurtures a culture of peace. That is why she examines the role of peace clubs as an infrastructure for peace in Nigerian schools. Elsewhere, Moyo (2022) evaluated the performance of peace clubs that used different peace curricula in various schools in South Africa. She departs from the point that schools had become a violent environment in which learners resorted to violence to resolve conflicts; and she evaluated the outcome of peace club interventions in 15 South African schools to establish whether the interventions had transformed learners and teachers into peace agents and role models in their schools and communities. Moyo (2022) found that, thanks to the peace club interventions, learners had started to resolve conflicts in non-violent ways, and to act as mediators in conflicts at school and sometimes at home. This result was attributed mainly to the content of peace education curricula which focused on attitudes and values for peace, the experiential learning approach, and the peace clubs'

transformation of young people into agents of change for peace. Moyo (2022) reports further that the teachers indicated that, as mentors, their commitment to the club yielded fruits, exemplified by reduction of conflicts and violence at school. As a result, her study recommends civil society organisations to use peace clubs as avenues to promote peace in schools and related contexts; and I embraced the recommendation.

#### 8.4 Peace and Human Rights Club

The exploratory results showed that conflict and violence permeate communities and the school environment. Moreover, it has already been established that education and training have the potential to respond to conflict and violence, especially when they target age groups with some level of education, and the capacity to comprehend and relate to their worldviews and perspectives for peace. Therefore, a school was deemed an ideal place to implement peace education training. I found Ogor Seeds Secondary School an ideal choice for the training for two reasons: first, as a community-led initiative, founded in 2003, the school sought to improve access education and learning as a tool for peacebuilding. In addition, the community conceived the school with the hope that it would incorporate vocational skills training to enable the majority of young people who had dropped out of mainstream formal education to acquire vocational skills for formal or self-employment. Moreover, given the community's past history of violence and displacement, the community wanted to use education as a tool for peacebuilding and development, and to encourage more children to go to school.

Situated in a remote location that was hit hard by the LRA and Karimojong cattle rustlers, and with the majority of learners coming from conflict-affected communities, the school offered a formal space to engage with students and teachers and the local community on conflict and violence in a systematic and sustained manner. Secondly, during the exploratory study I had developed a rapport with the students and teachers that made our collaboration easy and time-saving. More interesting was the fact that the findings of the exploratory study pointed to drivers and triggers of conflict and violence, and offered me a nuanced understanding of the issues at the school. I, therefore, used that understanding and rapport to conceive the peacebuilding project, and build on the vision and existing infrastructure (including a patron) of the defunct peace and human rights club to work with the school.

A secondary school in Uganda has a systematic learning curriculum that is meant to prepare people to play an important role in national development. Thus, working with a school promotes a shared vision for peace and development, and facilitates the incorporation of a peace education intervention into the school's routine activities. The students would not only learn different subjects taught in their standard

school curriculum, they would also strengthen their capacity to build peace at local and national levels. The age group of a typical Ugandan secondary school ranges from 12-25 years. The age range provides an opportunity to tap into different age sub-groups, and to prepare a category of young people with the energy, capability and ability to adapt to new developments at an early stage in their formation. Moreover, this age category allows those involved to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes for peace at an early stage in their life, so they can develop respect and tolerance for other family and community members, lead by example, inspire other young people, and act as ambassadors for peace in their families and communities.

While having to work with young people would have required me to look for, and negotiate with, a school this potential hurdle was obviated when Ogor Secondary School requested me to work with them to revive their Peace and Human Rights Club. This enabled me to work with an organised group in which peace-education training would find space in extra-curricular activities to address conflict and violence identified in the exploratory research at the school and community levels. In addition, I did not have to start from scratch: I inherited a defunct club whose members were eager to revive, and to which they had already committed some resources, including time. Therefore, I got the commitment and support from students and teachers that made it possible to implement the project within the limited project timeframe.

Following two decades of armed conflict in northern Uganda, several interventions were proposed and implemented to restore peace and engender development. Peace clubs, in particular, were established to promote attitudes, values and practices that would foster justice, equality, peace and human rights. In Otuke Seed Secondary, the club established was named Peace and Human Rights Club to emphasise the connections between human rights and peace in order to nurture a young generation to champion peace and uphold human rights at various levels of the community. The Club was established in 2017 to: sensitize the community on human rights; settle disputes among students; maintain sanitation of the school and health centre; encourage physical and mental health of the youth by participating in games like football, volleyball and farming; and conduct interclass debating competitions among students.

Following field research in which some youth were targeted, the school requested me to activate the club by providing training and any other support to members of the club. Unfortunately, at the time of its establishment, the club had neither the capacity nor a well-defined plan to run activities and achieve its objectives. The club lacked the technical and material capacity to train club members and teachers in peace education, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. In addition, the club required a neutral person to mentor members and mediate among them to ensure its effectiveness. Moreover, given that both learners

and teachers were perpetrators and victims of conflict and violence at the school level, the club did not believe that teachers alone were appropriately placed to moderate discussions and mediate between parties to a conflict. As a result, the club operated without training, mentorship and guidance on how to implement activities. Due to lack of capacity to effectively operate the club, and the eventual onset of COVID-19, the club collapsed and all its activities came to an end in 2019. As a result, it was necessary to bring an expert from outside the school who would be independent and impartial in the affairs of the club. It was, therefore, not surprising when the learners and the school administration requested me to lead the process of reactivating the club. Following the activation of the club, an additional activity of club members making exposure visits to nearby schools was introduced. Exposure visits were intended for students to observe and learn from the experiences of other communities with similar experiences of violence, and others without such experiences, but were implementing co-existence and development projects to the benefit of their schools and communities. The exposure visits were deemed capable of enabling students to interact directly with people within and outside of their settings, who had the experience and opportunity to enhance peacebuilding practices in the students' local settings.

The exploratory fieldwork and follow-up discussions with learners and teachers revealed that the LRA conflict had led to a cycle of violence, manifested in loss of lives and property, gender-based violence, hatred, weakening of family and other relationship ties, and limited social, economic and political opportunities. In addition, the spread of COVID-19 led to an upsurge in gender-based violence, and an increase in school-related risks, such as sexual violence and harassment, high teenage pregnancies, sexual exploitation and abuse, and insecurity as a result of youth gangs, alcohol and substance abuse and food and income insecurity. Participants, especially female ones, cited having increasingly experienced violence at home and school, and in the community. This situation was exacerbated by the spread of COVID-19 and associated lockdown measures. The different forms of violence were attributed to inability of households to fend for their families, drunkenness and drug abuse by youth, criminality, and neglect by parents. Other forms of violence arose from psychological problems and forced marriages.

It was evident from the voices of young people, the teachers, parents and the general community members that violence has permeated community structures, from the family to schools and the general community. While students engaged in bullying, especially against junior or new students, teachers dominated the use of corporal punishment as an illegal form of disciplinary action in response to student misconduct. Generalized use of force by caning, or suspending students in response to indiscipline, dissenting views or protests, was cited as a source of conflict, violence and restlessness among learners

in the school. The use of force or heavy punishment was justified by some teachers and students on account of the fact that some learners were perpetually unruly, and would not heed advice from fellow students or teachers.

However, such actions had hindered the initiation and sustenance of dialogue. One of the students noted that students feared to interface freely with teachers because the latter were insensitive to students' concerns. As such, a toxic environment was both the cause and manifestation of conflict and violence in the school. It was also noted that school strikes resulted from the failure by the school administration to have a sober conversation with learners, or to meet their most basic needs at school. Moreover, it was noted that some students had no anger-management skills, and resorted to violence, or translated their anger into destructive activities. In addition, bullying by fellow learners, use of corporal punishment by teachers and students, sexual harassment, theft, physical fights, and substance abuse continued unabated in schools, largely because of lack of candid communication between teachers and learners. As a result, vital information was concealed, and school authorities could identify the 'culprits' and to hold them to account. As such, complacency flourished, but to the detriment of the entire school learning environment. This is partly because reporting misconduct was counter-productive to learners.

For details on the prevailing situation, I recorded students' and teachers' perceptions of the operating environment in relation to conflict and violence on the one hand, and peace on the other hand, as part of the baseline and end-line information. The baseline and end-line information provided the basis for the Peace and Human Rights Club to evaluate the effectiveness of its intervention in peacebuilding. The baseline and endline information is presented in Table 6.

Based on the exploratory study and follow-up conversations with learners, teachers and the community, it was noted that the situation was getting worse and that an initiative that would engage young people on critical issues affecting them, and in which they played an active role was necessary. It was also observed that such an intervention was equally necessary to raise awareness among community members so that they became aware of, and vigilant against, vices affecting young people. Ultimately, it was concluded that in order for the Club to benefit the students, teachers, and community, it was necessary to engage with the host community, community leaders and government departments. Therefore, the intervention sought to involve all the stakeholders in the activities of the students, thereby expanding the content and spatial scopes of the Club activities beyond the school.



Therefore, to ensure that young people were able to respond to and mitigate violence and its multiplier effects, we proposed to increase knowledge and implement activities around five thematic areas of peace education: dismantling the culture of war and violence; educating for human rights and responsibilities; living in harmony with the earth; educating for multicultural solidarity; and inner peace.

The Peace and Human Rights Club is managed as an extra-curriculum programme, with elected leaders among the students, and a patron to coordinate Club activities, including meetings, drama, debates, poem recitals, peace songs, cultural dances, quiz competitions, studying the peace club manuals, and maintaining hygiene and sanitation of the school. These clubs also provide young people with an opportunity to learn how to resolve conflicts, address cases of bullying and corporal punishment, and exchange experiences with one another as well as develop respect for other people irrespective of gender, age, religion or ethnic affiliation. So far, the peace club members have played a vital role in raising awareness of the challenges they face and of the need to generate solutions to them, with the ultimate aim of promoting peaceful co-existence among themselves and in the communities. However, participants indicated that despite their awareness of the challenges they face, there is limited space for their concerns to be heard and addressed by the school administration and the community members. Similarly, teachers and parents complained of student indiscipline which they blamed for poor academic performance among students, and insecurity in the area.

Therefore, when the Deputy Head teacher of the selected school requested me to revive the club, I obliged because the request was in line with my agenda to implement a youth-led peacebuilding project. A discussion with the team comprising of youth participants and teachers in the study concluded that the project would be beneficial to the target group if it equipped young people with the right attitudes, values and skills, and necessary to create durable peace at the school and the host community. Eventually, the Deputy Head teacher became the Patron of the Club.

The Peace and Human Rights Club commenced a peacebuilding project in 2021, following an interaction with the school participants during field research, and a request by the school administration to revive the Club. It was realized that in addition to the legacy of violence in the community, risks related to COVID-19 posed additional challenges, and led some young people to adopt negative coping strategies. Some of the most frequently cited such risks included resort to alcohol and substance abuse, emergence of youth gangs and criminality, early and forced marriages, indiscipline among learners, corporal punishment by teachers, and learners dropping out of school.

The motivation for the club to intervene was premised on two grounds. First, it had become apparent that the students were undergoing some difficult and traumatic experiences, following the onset of COVID-19 and its multiplier effects. As a result, there was an increase in indiscipline and criminality among learners, and a corresponding increase in corporal punishment as a response by teachers. Moreover, police and parental interventions had met with little success as young people continued to indulge in alcohol and substance abuse. Second, the exploratory study revealed that community members expressed fears and worries about the future owing to the increasing vulnerability of their communities to conflict and violence, and desired a programme that would reduce the negative impact of conflict and violence.

The Peace and Human Rights Club was considered to be an important intervention in the ongoing and future challenges, and young people were regarded as key agents to focus on. Therefore, the Club was revitalized as an extra-curriculum programme to equip young people with the attitudes, values and skills necessary to build peace in the school community. Therefore, modules were developed to respond to the different form of violence identified through the exploratory study and during the inception of the peacebuilding project. It was deemed necessary to explore people's understanding of violence so as to raise awareness of violence and foster understanding of what are often normalised forms of violence to alert learners. It was hoped and expected that this would make people, especially the youth, more vigilant and responsive to all forms of violence. It was found necessary to develop a training manual to systematically document practical examples of bullying in schools, corporal punishment, early and forced marriages, and sexual harassment, as the starting point to a better understanding of violence and measures to curb it.

### 8.5 Action research participants and approaches

This section discusses the composition of the Peace and Human Rights Club, the development of the training module on Peace Education, actual delivery of the training, and activities implemented by young people in actualising their commitment, followed by concluding remarks.

#### 8.5.1 Composition of members of the Peace and Human Rights Club

In a school of 418 (260 male: 158 female) students, 120 (72 male: 48 female) voluntarily joined the Peace and Human Rights Club, and committed to serve the club according to its principles and values. This figure represents 28.7% of the school population. In addition, two teachers, a male and a female, offered to be patrons of the Club, to mentor and guide the club members.

Members of the club selected a leadership team to coordinate the activities with the guidance of their teachers (patrons). The leadership team was so composed that it was representative of the membership by gender, class, and religious denomination so as to promote diversity, inclusiveness and cross-pollination of experiences and ideas. The club members also agreed to an annual term of office for the leadership team to ensure both stability and necessary change.

#### 8.4.2 Development of training manual on peace education

This manual was adapted for the Peace and Human Rights Club from the work of Langole and Awici (2011) that was used to train secondary school teachers in northern Uganda (Appendix E). The original work was inspired by Toh and Floresca-Cawagas' (1999) *Peace education: A Framework for the Philippines*. We adopted the six tenets of peace education because they provide a framework for understanding violence, and approaches to nonviolence. It is, therefore, appropriate for equipping young people with the attitudes, values and skills necessary to create durable peace in their respective communities. Meanwhile, I adapted the manual to the context by including relevant examples and case studies relevant to young people in northern Uganda. The content recognises the value of sharing experiences and generating alternatives to violence from the perspectives of those affected by violence. It departs from the viewpoint that conflict is part of life, and it emphasises the need to transform destructive conflicts into constructive relations.

Based on the exploratory findings and further discussions with members of the Peace and Human Rights Club, I found it appropriate to approach the training from the broader perspective of peace education. This is because, as a philosophy, and a process, peace education involves a range of attitudes, knowledge and skills, that are integral to understanding the causes of, and alternative to, violence, for a safe, non-violent world, and to internalising the values of love, inner peace, compassion, respect for rights, justice, inter-cultural solidarity, reconciliation, non-violence, reverence for all life, and a sustainable environment.

The manual incorporates a participatory mode of delivery, and encourages discussions in small groups to allow for sharing of experiences. The training is intended to provide participants with the tools and understanding to engage with conflicts constructively. The sessions incorporate case studies, role play, and discussions, and they are intended to be fun, and to allow participants to innovatively tackle or communicate issues and their experiences. For example, as an introduction to a session, participants use

a dramatic “welcome circle.” In turn, each participant goes into the middle of the circle and demonstrates what he/she likes doing, and then jumps out of the circle to allow the next participant to jump into the circle.

The manual is divided into eight modules planned to be covered in 5 days, as shown in Table 4 below.

*Figure 4: Training modules and schedule by day*

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Module</b>	<b>Day</b>
1	Peace Education in Theory and Practice	1 & 2
2	Dismantling the Culture of War and Violence	3
3	Living with Justice and Compassion	3
4	Human Rights and Responsibilities	4
5	Intercultural Solidarity and Reconciliation	4
6	Living in Harmony with the Earth	5
7	Inculcation of Inner Peace	5
8	Culture and Learning	5

Source: Field data

Relevant examples and manifestations of conflict and violence, including gender-based violence, were incorporated in activities that cut across all the themes to enable participants to reflect on their different experiences, and explore possibilities of practical work across the themes.

#### Module 1: Peace Education Theory and Practice

This module focuses on the concept of peace education, and it covers the basics of teaching and living a peaceful life with oneself, in the classroom, at the school and with communities.

#### Module 2: Dismantling the Culture of War and Violence

The second module provides a framework for identifying indicators of the culture of war and violence among learners, and in their homes and communities, on the basis of which they propose and are exposed to other ways to moderate that culture. Gender-based violence is incorporated as a key sub-theme in the module, to help participants appreciate manifestations of structural violence in norms and practices.

#### Module 3: Living with Justice and Compassion

This module seeks to instil the spirit of justice and compassion in the school community, and it focusses on the conceptualisation of justice and compassion, and how these are experienced in day-to-day lives.

#### Module 4: Promotion of Human Rights and Responsibilities

The module is intended to encourage participants to dialogue on what can be done to protect the rights that are being violated, and on the responsibilities of different stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents and community members. The module covers basic rights and responsibilities, focussing on “Rights of Children and youth”, “Rights of Women”, “Rights of the Disabled”, and “Rights of Teachers.” The other themes covered include “Responsibilities of Women,” “Responsibilities of Children and youth”, “Responsibilities of the Disabled”, and “Responsibilities of Teachers”.

#### Module 5: Intercultural Solidarity and Reconciliation

The module is concerned with the ways in which communities perceive themselves and others, and the ways through which they practice their values vis-à-vis other communities or cultures. It is meant to enable participants examine critically their norms and practices in order to identify how those norms and practices promote or hinder solidarity among groups, to reflect on how they can live in solidarity with others, and to consider the role their norms and practices play in the journey to reconciliation. The module also emphasises the importance of being proud of, and upholding, one’s cultural identity while at the same time being alert to the need to work together in harmony as members of the world community who all have interest in peace and development, despite our cultural differences.

#### Module 6: Living in Harmony with the Earth

The modules enable participants to appreciate their environment by focusing on the kind of home and its surrounding that they would like to live in. The sessions, intended to depict environmental protection, conservation, and rehabilitation, challenge participants to think of the kind of world they would like to leave for their children and the future generations. Ultimately, participants are expected to grasp the principles of sustainable living, and to generate practical ideas to promote environmental protection and sustainable living.

#### Module 7: Inculcation of Inner Peace

The module allows participants to reflect on and share their experiences of how to live in peace with oneself. In addition, it helps participants to reflect on bad practices, including any self-inflicted practices that counter or jeopardize inner or personal peace.

#### Module 8: Cultures and Learning

This module is premised on the assumption that culture is dynamic and useful in learning and acquiring behaviour. It recognises that human behaviour is transmitted from one generation to another through culture in a process of socialisation. To categorise and label identity is usually a powerful way to justify violence and cooperative behaviour. This module aims to develop an understanding of how culture promotes learning and a peaceful environment. It explores concepts and frameworks, linkages of different forms of violence to culture and learning, and avenues to promote values and practices of peace in society, using concrete examples and case studies. The key guiding questions are: what are some of the practical ways to address and handle expressions of cultural violence in our communities? What are some of the creative ways through which cultures have regulated violence and established order?

A sample agenda for the five-day training is provided in Table 6 below.

*Figure 5: A sample agenda for peace education training*

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Peace Education Theory and Practice	Peace Education Theory and Practice	Dismantling the Culture of War and Violence	Promotion of Human Rights and Responsibilities	Living in Harmony with the Earth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Peace education, values for a peaceable school/community</li> <li>— Negotiation and Mediation skills</li> <li>— Conflict analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Pedagogy and values</li> <li>— Developing moral sensitivity</li> <li>— Styles of learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Indicators of violence among students and how to deal with them</li> <li>— Other tips for promoting the culture of peace and non-violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Human rights and responsibilities</li> <li>— Promotion of human rights and responsibilities in school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Miscellaneous statistics about the environment</li> <li>— Environmentally destructive human activities</li> <li>— What schools could do to conserve the environment</li> </ul>
		Living With Justice and Compassion	Intercultural Solidarity and Reconciliation	Inculcation of Inner Peace
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Understanding justice and compassion</li> <li>— Some tips on living with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Culture, respect and solidarity</li> <li>— Building cultural respect,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— “How do we get inner peace?”</li> <li>— How does northern Uganda fare in inner peace?</li> </ul>

		justice and compassion	reconciliation and solidarity in school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Search for alternatives</li> <li>— Cultivating inner peace in school</li> </ul>
				Cultures and Learning
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Culture: dynamics and features</li> <li>— Identification of the problem and resolution</li> <li>— Case study</li> </ul>
Evaluation and reflection	Evaluation and reflection	Evaluation and reflection	Evaluation and reflection	Closure: an “Appreciation Circle” where participants come together in a circle to evaluate the training, express appreciation, and comment on areas for improvement in the future

### 8.5.3 Training on peace education

Based on the demand of the Peace and Human Rights Club to train all its members, I organised a five-day workshop based on the modules developed. The training aimed to develop the capacity of young people, to enable them to actualise their potential as agents of social change, to be aware of their environment, and to engage with issues in order to claim and exercise their rights for peaceful living. To enable young people to gain the knowledge and skills they need to lead processes leading to conscious identification of, and response to, conflict and violence in their school and communities, we embarked on training, with specific reference to what the change process entails, and how to make change happen. In particular, the training on peace education provided young people with an opportunity to learn how to handle conflict constructively, exchange experiences with one another, and develop respect for other people, irrespective of their gender, age, religion, ethnicity or political party affiliation.

All the 120 members of the club and the two patron teachers were trained on peace education. In all, the training took five days during which the students and teachers participated actively. The training sessions and facilitation techniques, including role plays, group work, experience-sharing, presentation, and use of energizers, enabled the participants to easily comprehend and to open up to sharing their experiences, and to learn from one another. During the training, participants narrated their stories of being subjected to, and participating in, different forms of violence. On the other hand, they saw the positive side of their roles and their ability to transform conflicts into constructive relationships if equipped with knowledge and resources.

Based on their needs and aspirations, I provided mentorship and logistical support to members of the Peace and Human Rights Club to plan and implement their planned activities at school and in the community. Thereafter, the trained members, together with club leaders implemented activities, and conducted weekly meetings to monitor their progress, and to evaluate the impact of their activities. The set of activities designed and implemented by the Club included: debates, games and sports; environmental conservation through tree-planting; peer-to-peer learning; raising awareness; and guidance and counselling. All these are discussed under the different Club initiatives.

#### 8.6 From Commitment to Practice: Peace and Human Rights Club Initiatives

After the training, members of the club committed to a number of actions, developed a work plan, and assembled the resources needed to implement their project ideas. These ideas included, among others, the use of debating clubs to discuss topical issues/challenges affecting them at school and in the community. They also scheduled games and sports to interact among themselves, manage stress, and avoid redundancy during free time. Inspired by the module on living in harmony with Mother Earth, participants agreed to plant trees in their school compound as the starting point to the conservation of the environment. Moreover, the awareness session was extended to non-club members, through the peer-to-peer model, and to the community in order to educate the entire student community and the host community so they are vigilant and supportive of the Club initiatives. On their part, the teachers committed to support students through guidance and counselling, and to call upon students to open up to them for support as and when necessary. The details of the commitments are discussed below.



### 8.6.1 Debates

During the training, participants highlighted context-specific challenges that students face at school and in homes and community in general. Participants observed that it was necessary to create space to share their stories, experiences, and understanding, and to invite fellow students and the school community to address various issues affecting them. Participants noted that some students were silently suffering with what they were experiencing, and that there was a need to establish a platform for them to come out with the beliefs and stereotypes they hold, urging that, by sharing, they were likely to change their perspectives, and to enhance understanding.

Participants initiated debates on thematic issues relevant to conflict, violence, conflict-resolution, and peacebuilding. The debates helped participants to articulate some issues that they would ordinarily not broach in ordinary conversations. The different perspectives provided an opportunity to understand what the students believed in, felt, and experienced. In addition, it simplified debriefing as selected Club members later summarised the highlights of a debate, and delivered some key messages for peace on specific discussion topics, and on how to work through conflicts amicably together.

### 8.6.2 Games and sports

Sports (football) was also used by Club members to keep fit and manage stress. At the request of Club members, I bought two footballs, one for females and the other for males, and the participants made time to play, especially during their free time. Learners had indicated that in the absence of games and sports or any other activities to occupy them, some of their colleagues would walk to the trading centres where they would find themselves taking alcohol, and girls would be lured into sexual affairs with some male members of the community.

### 8.6.3 Tree-planting for environmental sustainability

In addition to overgrazing, overfishing, over-cultivation and irresponsible bush burning, participants identified deforestation for charcoal production as a major threat to the environment in northern Uganda. Participants also noted that instead of protecting indigenous and lucrative fruit trees, community members were cutting them down to make charcoal. As part of the module on living in harmony with the earth, members of the club mobilized students to plant pine, teak and fruit trees, including avocado, mangoes, jack fruit in their school compound, and begun to sensitize and mobilize community members to abandon making charcoal, actively conserve and propagate the Shea tree, plant other tree species, and

utilise the value of Shea and other trees for building peace. Students planted 170 seedlings and promised to plant more trees during each rain season in the coming years.

#### 8.6.4 Peer-to-peer learning

Members of the club organised weekly discussions with the student body to convey key messages regarding how to respond to, manage, and mitigate conflicts and violence. They also discussed topical issues, including issues affecting students, and the actions they had taken with the teachers to address them. All these activities were conducted to provide space for students and teachers to dialogue on issues relevant to their situations. These activities aimed to remove barriers to a conducive learning environment, and to address early signs of discontent among learners. This platform allowed non-Club member students to gain a better understanding of the operations of the club, their role in the general challenges that students face, and of the need to collectively find solutions to their challenges. This platform allowed non-members of the Club, who would otherwise have been unable to take part, to participate in at least some Club activities, for the benefit of all.

#### 8.6.5 Awareness sessions with the local community

The members of the club decided that it was necessary to conduct awareness-creation sessions in communities, through particular actions. For instance, during weekends, members of the club participated in promoting community sanitation and hygiene, by cleaning strategic areas, collecting refuse, and disseminating key messages. Awareness was considered important in promoting knowledge-sharing and learning among students, teachers and the community. Moreover, young people also used the opportunity to educate community members on young people's role as agents of change and transformation.

#### 8.6.6 Guidance and counselling

Most of the learners had ties with teachers. In particular, female students had a link to female teachers, especially the Senior Women Teachers who are charged with providing guidance and counselling to students regarding the latter's personal and other challenges. However, female students did not get the support they sometimes desperately needed, basically because the relationships between them and their female teachers were not sufficiently close for that purpose. Female teachers felt that while it was their responsibility to provide support to their students, it was the responsibility of the students to seek that support, and to look out for one another. The discussion with teachers indicated a renewed resolve to be closer to female students, especially adolescent ones, so they are supported to overcome some of their personal challenges and those that arise out of interaction with other students. Female learners reported facing some difficulties at home, especially from parents and relatives who are not adequately supportive

of their education, and whose actions drive them into early marriage or dropping out of school. In Chapter Six, it was noted that mental health challenges among young people constitute a serious barrier to a productive youth citizenship. Key informants pointed out that the behaviour of some young people was quite unusual and required special care to ensure that any remedial actions were sensitive to their mental conditions. While health challenges did not emerge as a theme in this study, teachers advised that it was necessary to consider the negative experiences of learners, and to be close to the learners. Therefore, the teachers resolved to get closer to learners, to provide guidance continuously, and not to wait for learners to ask for help. Additionally, they took more time to build relationships with the students to enable them to share their feelings and experiences, and to enable students to self-identify for counselling support.

### 8.7 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has explored reviving Peace and Human Rights Club as an avenue to mobilise young people, build their capacity to implement different initiatives relevant to their daily experiences of violence at school, and in their homes and community. Through the Club, young people were trained on peace education in order to promote attitudes, values and practices that would be beneficial to them in the search for peace at school and their homes and respective communities. The training content was based on an analysis of triggers and drivers of conflicts and violence at the school and in the community, and adapted to the needs of the learners through a participatory training methodology.

As a result of the training, young people implemented several initiatives to build peace. Their proposed set of activities sought to respond to barriers to effective youth participation in peacebuilding in the short, medium and long term. Through training of, and material support to, the Peace and Human Rights Club, young people were equipped with knowledge and skills to initiate and implement activities that were responsive to their local needs. However, for these initiatives to address violence and its manifestations effectively and sustainably, young need encouragement, mentorship, and material and moral support.

## CHAPTER NINE: OUTCOMES OF THE YOUTH PEACEBUILDING EXPERIENCES

### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the evaluation of the peacebuilding project implemented by young people in collaboration with other stakeholders, based on the theory of change. The evaluation sought to identify what works and what does not work in implementing a youth-led, needs-based peacebuilding project in an effort to build and sustain peace. Moreover, the chapter also documents the implications of young people's experiences regarding the effectiveness of youth engagement. The chapter focuses on the linkages between activities and intended and unintended outcomes of the project. It also analyses the challenges and opportunities of effective youth engagement. The presentation begins with an overview of the evaluation, followed by the purpose, objectives, evaluation questions, methodology and limitations of the evaluation. Thereafter, it presents the main findings in the form of achievements, strengths and shortcomings, and recommendations. Finally, it makes concluding remarks about the youth-led peacebuilding project and what needs to be done to improve future engagement with youth through the Peace and Human Rights Club.

### 9.2 Peace and Human Rights Club Initiatives: An Evaluation Overview

The evaluation of the performance of the Peace and Human Rights Club was two-pronged. First, it considered changes in relevant knowledge, which were measured at the end of each day of training, through the process of evaluation and reflections on the topic or issues of the day. During this exercise, participants also generated practical and implementable ideas on the issues they felt passionate about, and to which they were keen to contribute. Second, I assessed the performance of the Club based on Club members' **perceptions and on my own observation of the situations before and after the intervention**. The evaluation considered the ability of the training to improve young people's understanding of conflict and alternatives to non-violence. As such, the two key questions sought to: assess the extent to which young people's commitments during the training had been translated into practical activities to respond to, prevent, and transform conflicts; identify what worked well, and what did not work well, on the basis of which the study draws some lessons learnt with regard to how to work with youth in Ogor Seed Secondary School, and the possibility of replicating the project to other locations in northern Uganda. The evaluation of the performance of Club used two methods of data-collection: FGDs with students (both members and non-members of the club); and interviews with teachers, members of the community and local authorities.

### 9.3 Purpose of the Evaluation

The evaluation component of the intervention sought to assess the performance of a needs-based, youth-led peacebuilding project to improve the capacity of young people to respond to, mitigate, and prevent destructive conflicts. The evaluation considered the short-term and medium-term outcomes of youth involvement in peacebuilding in relation to the theory of change. It sought to answer two specific questions: What works and what does not work in implementing a youth-led, needs-based peacebuilding project to build and sustain peace? And what implications does this experience have for effective youth engagement? Based on the lessons learnt, the report presents what worked and what did not work before making some recommendations for further work with the youth.

### 9.4 Objectives of the Evaluation

The objectives of the evaluation are crafted around achievements, strengths and shortcomings, and recommendations. Specifically, the evaluation sought to:

1. Determine the level of achievement of the peacebuilding project;
2. Describe the linkages of the goal, objectives, activities, and resources of the project in the short term, midterm, and long term;
3. Identify and explain what worked and what did not work in the peacebuilding project; and
4. Recommend strategies for future work with young people.

### 9.5 Evaluation Questions

The evaluation was guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent has the project contributed to the capacity of young people to build and sustain peace at the school and community level?
2. What linkages, if any, exist among the project goal, objectives, activities, and resources in the short term, midterm, and long term;
3. What worked and/or did not work well and why?
4. What should be done differently?

### 9.6 Evaluation Methodology

#### 9.6.1 Evaluation methods and process

We conducted five (5) FGDs, two with members of the Peace and Human Rights Club, two with non-members of the club, and one with a mixture of Club and non-Club members. In addition, I conducted

eight (8) interviews, involving the club patrons (one female and one male), a female teacher and a male teacher, and four members of the local community, comprising of 2 parents and 2 local government officers. This information is summarised in Table 6 below.

*Figure 6: Evaluation methods by corresponding participant category*

S/N	Method	Participant category	Number
1	FGD	Peace and Human Rights Club members	2
		Peace and Human Rights Club non-members	2
		Peace and Human Rights Club members & non-members	1
<b>Sub-total</b>			<b>5</b>
2	Interviews	Female and male Peace and Human Rights Club patrons	2
		Female and male teachers	2
		Parents	2
		Local government officers	2
<b>Sub-total</b>			<b>8</b>

Source: Field data

The evaluation was conducted between September and December 2022. We documented the performance of the project with reference to project achievements/successes, failures, and areas for improvement.

### 9.6.2 Limitations

The evaluation was constrained by three limitations, all of them extrinsic to the research design, or related to research environment. Firstly, the research project required more time than was available to the researcher. Consequently, I could not afford to delve deep into evaluating the theory of change which belongs to the long-term impact of the project. Despite that limitation, the evaluation results point to some progress towards the envisaged goal in line with the theory of change.

Secondly, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was impossible to revitalise the Peace and Human Rights Club, provide capacity support, and commence the Club's activities at the same time. Therefore, the Club's activities only commenced in the third quarter of 2022 when the pandemic had been contained, making it possible to train a large number of participants. Therefore, the evaluation commenced before the medium and long-term impacts of the project could be fully realised. Nonetheless, the evaluation outcomes indicate that the short-term benefits of the project were achieved and proxy indicators showed that the project was on track to attaining the medium and long-term impacts.

Finally, the Club and I did not have enough financial resources to implement all the planned and necessary Club activities, particularly those that required collaboration with other stakeholders, including exposure visits and debating competitions. Therefore, I had to fund some of the activities with a limited budget, and hopes that the school will mobilise resources to implement, expand and sustain the planned Club activities. I have proposed means of sustaining Club activities for the long-term benefit of young people and their communities.

## 9.7 Findings

This section presents the findings according to the objectives of the evaluation, beginning with the achievements of the youth-led peacebuilding project, followed by the strengths and weaknesses of the project, and recommendations on how to work with youth in the future.

### 9.7.1 Achievements of the youth-led peacebuilding project

- ***Baseline and end-line data***

Due to the limitation of time, the study used data available with the school administration and employed proxy indicators to generate baseline and end-line data. Some of the baseline information was obtained during the exploratory research, and the rest was gathered during the Club's training sessions. For instance, information on the environment was generated during a session on living in harmony with Mother Earth while in-depth information on relations between male and female students, between students and teachers, and between the school and community members, emerged more prominently during the sessions on dismantling the culture of war and violence. The data, although mainly qualitative in nature, served as baseline data to facilitate the evaluation of the initiative, by comparing it with end-line data.

The baseline survey data was based on the perception of the forms and manifestation of conflict and violence, and was used to compare the perception of the same after the intervention by the Peace and Human Rights Club. In cases where baseline values were accessible, I applied them. Therefore, the evaluation report is mainly based on perception of the reality as it was before and after the intervention.

The table below presents baseline and endline information on the basis of which the findings of the study is based.

*Table 3: Baseline target and end-line data on youth-led peacebuilding project*

<b>Baseline Issues and indicators</b>	<b>Baseline targets (2021)</b>	<b>End-line targets (2022)</b>
# of incidents of conflicts and violence reported at school during 2021	85	34
# of cases of alcohol and drug abuse	7	3
# of cases of violence against female students	2	0
# of cases recorded by school administration	94	37
	<b>Baseline reality</b>	<b>End-line reality</b>
Positive expressions that characterise the nature of relationships at the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adherence to school rules and regulations</li> <li>- Respect for fellow students and teachers</li> <li>- Roles and responsibilities of students</li> <li>- Abstinence from drugs and alcohol abuse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peer-to-peer discussions through the Peace and Human Rights Club</li> <li>- Human rights and responsibilities</li> <li>- Conflict and conflict resolution</li> <li>- Nonviolence</li> <li>- Guidance and counselling</li> <li>- Punishment administered to regular offenders of school rules and regulations</li> </ul>
Negative expressions that characterise the nature of relationships at the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strikes and destruction of school and personal property</li> <li>- Sexual harassment</li> <li>- Big breasts</li> <li>- Twisted buttocks</li> <li>- Fear and shame</li> <li>- Early and forced marriage</li> <li>- Truancy</li> <li>- Drunkenness</li> <li>- Complacency, in which students fail to report wrong acts to school administration</li> <li>- Theft, involving school and personal property</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peer-to-peer discussions through the Peace and Human Rights Club</li> <li>- Awareness</li> <li>- Adherence to school rules and regulation,</li> <li>- Friendly classrooms and compound</li> <li>- Consultations,</li> <li>- Support from teachers,</li> <li>- Cooperation,</li> <li>- Dialogues and conversations</li> <li>- Open debates</li> <li>- Improved gender relations</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Disobedience</li> <li>- Indiscipline</li> <li>- Physical fights involving between students, and between student and teachers,</li> <li>- Mistrust between students and teachers</li> <li>- Trauma</li> <li>- COVID-19 mothers</li> <li>- Corporal punishment</li> <li>- Bullying</li> <li>- Crime</li> <li>- Gangs</li> </ul>	
What you like or dislike about your school environment	<p>Likes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Natural and good tree shades;</li> <li>- Huge piece of land with natural trees; and</li> <li>- Enough compound to play</li> </ul> <p>Dislikes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dusty and windy during dry season;</li> <li>- Few good trees for shade due to deforestation for classroom; construction and charcoal making</li> <li>- Indiscriminate felling down of trees, including sheer trees;</li> <li>- Bushy; and</li> <li>- Presence of snakes around the school compound</li> </ul>	<p>Likes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New trees were planted in the school compound as a demonstration;</li> <li>- Compound designed to allow for tree corridors;</li> <li>- Clean compound to play;</li> <li>- Consciousness about environmental protection, conservation and rehabilitation.</li> </ul> <p>Dislikes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dusty and windy;</li> <li>- Dry;</li> <li>- Hot; and</li> <li>- Open access to the school compound</li> </ul>
Space for participation and conflict resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Directives from the school</li> <li>- School assembly</li> <li>- Student leaders present their challenges as a demand to school administration</li> <li>- Strike preferred as viable option; and action student strikes could easily turn tragic, leading to destruction of school and personal property</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dialogues/meetings</li> <li>- Peer-to-peer meetings</li> <li>- Parents being part of important school days to interact and advise students</li> <li>- Guidance and counselling</li> <li>- Involvement of police in criminal matter</li> <li>- Meetings between student leaders and teachers</li> </ul>

# of trees planted by the students/school	- 00	- 170 seedlings
Ways in which conflicts are resolved in school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Many of us prefer strikes, a few cowards want dialogue” (Student).</li> <li>- “Sometimes we have to fight to get over our differences” (Student).</li> <li>- “A student fought with the watchman” (Teacher).</li> <li>- “I don’t really think those teachers will ever listen to us unless we strike” (Student).</li> <li>- “When found in a wrong, teachers cane before listening to your side of the story” (Student).</li> <li>- “Some students don’t know what they want, they don’t listen, and it is our role as teachers to guide them” (Teacher).</li> <li>- “Teachers prefer to threaten us than to address our problems” (Student).</li> <li>- “The only way some learners listen is by being caned or otherwise punished” (Teacher).</li> <li>- “Because some teachers are unnecessarily strict and don’t give us permission to go out, the only way is to escape” (Student).</li> <li>- “If you elect me as your head prefect, I will ensure that all teachers contribute</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Convening of weekly club meetings</li> <li>- Student leaders updating students and teacher on duty on key agreements and actions ahead</li> <li>- Debates on topical issues</li> <li>- Guidance and counselling by teachers</li> <li>- More involvement and interest of parents in learners’ performance</li> <li>- Child-friendly punishments, such as fetching water</li> <li>- Encouraging the victim to influence other students to do good (agent of change)</li> <li>- Enforcing school rules and regulations by raising awareness</li> <li>- Students and teachers observing key features of, and respect for, school protocols</li> <li>- Members of the school administration and teachers communicate candidly messages on the challenges and actions taken over time</li> </ul>

	<p>towards expenses for food; otherwise they will not be allowed to eat school food” (A teacher quoting a student).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Arbitration (Teacher)</li> <li>- Use of reward and sanctions (Teacher)</li> </ul>	
# of dialogue meetings between teachers and students	15	70
# of cases resolved through referral to police	02	01
# of cases resolved with support of parents	54	70

Between September and December 2022, we evaluated the performance of the Peace and Human Rights Club, and the results show that different initiatives were successfully implemented. The success of the initiatives demonstrated that the youth-led initiative empowered young people to resolve conflicts and reduce violence at their school and in the local community. As a result, the project contributed to improved social cohesion, and a commitment to peace and stability among young people. It also provided some lessons. For example, the youth-led initiative illustrates that building social cohesion through the Club can effectively mobilise young people, and generate commitment to a common cause, thus strengthening peacebuilding efforts.

As per the project theory of change, through creating awareness and capacity-building support to participants of the peacebuilding project, the expected increased knowledge should lead to appropriate application of the knowledge, and improvements in practices at the school and in the community. The study has revealed that, as a result of the training, young people were able to use the knowledge they acquired to initiate different activities, create spaces for conversation for students and teachers, conduct awareness-creation sessions with the entire student community and the local community, and initiate

environmental conservation activities by piloting tree-planting at the school. The results are discussed under three themes: capacity; engagement with stakeholders; and youth-led initiatives.

- Increased capacity of young people to respond to, mitigate and prevent conflicts and violence

It was assumed that the project would lead to increased awareness and knowledge of conflict, its triggers and drivers, and how to respond to, mitigate and prevent them among the participating students. As a result of increased awareness, there was a move towards transformation as students engaged in various activities that helped members of the school community to appreciate their potential contribution reflection and became into peace advocates. During the exploratory research with learners and teachers, it was revealed that learners and teachers were involved in conflicts, and that learners were more inclined to use violence and destructive means, including strikes, destruction of school and personal property, disruption of studies and indulgence in alcohol and drugs. On their part, teachers were said to have used punitive measures, including caning, suspension and/or dismissal from school, and referral to the police. Moreover, both the learners and teachers agreed that the school environment was toxic and did not offer the space for constructive engagement. As a result, resort to violence was the norm.

However, the training programme focused on awareness of conflict and violence, and resolving them using nonviolent means. Proxy indicators from the end-line survey reveal that the school actively engaged in regular meetings, debates and dialogues that were key to reducing the frequency of confrontation between students and teachers, and, therefore, strikes. Moreover, learners expressed awareness of peaceful options for resolving conflicts, and of the negative impact strikes have had in their lives by way of destroying school and personal property, dismissal from school, having to pay fines and poor performance. Therefore, awareness led to more order during school assembly and club meeting days, thus improving the learning environment and academic performance, and leading to a reduction in the incidence of violence, which is partly due to the increased understanding of the conflict issues by the students. It also implies that students and teachers were more likely to engage in dialogue than to resort to violence or punitive actions as had been the case before as mentioned during the baseline.

The project also led to practical action to conserve the environment through tree-planting. It emerged that the students had internalized the content of the modules on living with the environment and dismantling the culture of war and violence, and decided to practice what they had learned. The students themselves cited their tree-planting activities as an example of the impact of the training they had received on living in harmony with the environment. While only 120 (72 male: 48 female) Club members

attended the training, all the 418 (260 male: 158 female) students of the school committed to planting trees in the school compound. Actually, every student in the school agreed to plant and take care of at least one seedling of a tree species while each of the 170 Club members planted and took care of at least one seedling of a tree species. In total, 170 seedlings were planted, and each Club member promised to plant an additional tree seedling the following year. Teak and neem were the most commonly identified tree species for planting by the learners. Given the dry season at the time, most of the students opted for neem because it was naturally available and drought resistant; while a few planted teak that they considered more resistant to hard weather conditions. Pine, teak and fruit tree seedlings (including mangoes, oranges, lemons and cashew nuts) were supplied by the Government and available at the sub-county, free of charge. While pine and fruit trees were readily available, under the initiative of Operation Wealth Creation, most of the students opted for other tree species arguing that it was hard to maintain pine and fruit trees. Fruit trees in particular were rejected because, according to the students, they require spraying and constant watering, thus reducing their chances of survival, and increasing the risks of project failure.

As the behaviour of the students suggests, the youth-led intervention has led to improved attitudes to women. While the exploratory study revealed that female learners faced some difficulties, including being bullied and sexually harassed, being teased by male students during their menstrual periods, and about changes in their body morphology, these difficulties were significantly reduced by the youth-led intervention. For example, some female learners expressed having overcome their own fears and shame over such experiences which, they had learned, were normal. Indeed, one of the female teachers noted that her working closely with female learners had improved their awareness of bodily changes and self-esteem. She attributed her newly acquired courage to speak openly to female learners to the impact of the Club. According to her, as a result of regular meetings with, and ongoing support to, students, and guidance on self-care, especially targeting female students, there was considerable improvement in relationships among and between students and teachers. In her own words,

Becky (not real name) always looked out of place, and was always afraid and shy in class. I was able to win her trust in me, and to enable her to share her feelings with me. After some weeks, Becky told me that it was her first time to share her anxieties with someone, and that she now feels very comfortable and happy that there is someone who is there to listen to her” (Interview with female teacher, Otuke, 27 September 2022).

Improved gender relations emerged as an area of benefit to the school and community. Awareness sessions, organised by the Club, resulted in improved male attitudes towards females, thus contributing to a reduction in bullying and harassment in schools. This explains why Module 2, on dismantling the

culture of war and violence, with a focus on gender-based violence, was popular. The awareness created, and the resultant actions, provided an opportunity for young people to transfer the knowledge and practices to their respective communities. Similarly, participants cited the module on dismantling the culture of war and violence, and specifically the aspect of gender-based conflict, as useful in promoting interaction between male and female students, and enabling students and teachers to work together in handling conflicts that arose in relation to differences between male and female students. Since the project has changed some male students' perception of their female counterparts, it is an opportunity to initiate programmes to improve the empowerment of female students.

Besides awareness, the programme created vigilance against violence and indiscipline at the school. In one of the FGDs with female students, it emerged that a group of male students, who used to escape from school and indulge in alcohol and drugs, became responsible and observed the school rules and regulations as other students were alert to such behaviour and would report them to the school administration. Moreover, the students realised that they could not continue stealing, bullying and disrupting studies, which inconvenienced everyone at school. This indicates that, to some extent, some students had not been reporting undisciplined fellow students. It also emerged that cases of theft had reduced following the training. An interview with the Deputy Head teacher revealed that the students were keen to report indiscipline among fellow students. Citing one of the cases of perennial phone theft but where the culprit was either unknown or concealed, the Head teacher indicated that the learners exposed the culprit, and handed him over to the police. It was also revealed that the same student was conniving with members of the local community to steal, and sexually lure female learners. In conclusion, the Head teacher noted that while the students had previously tended to protect criminal elements among themselves, by concealing their identity, they were now more inclined to report them to school or local government authorities. It was revealing to note that the students themselves wanted the behaviour of their fellow students to change for the better, partly because they believed that indiscipline by fellow learners was portraying the entire student body negatively to the local community.

Similarly, cases of bullying and corporal punishment were found to have dropped, and teachers to have become more receptive to students' concerns and complaints than before. Records from the Deputy Head teacher's office revealed that while, on average, there had previously been four cases of bullying reported per week among students, as a result of the Club intervention, some weeks had passed by without a case of bullying having been reported to the school administration. However, while he did not explicitly say that corporal punishment was taking place in the school, he said some students did not listen until there

were caned. Moreover, some of the students described the level of bullying and corporal punishment as being on the decline. The students had the opportunity to learn and use the knowledge to resolve conflicts, address cases of bullying, corporal punishment and exchange experiences with one another. Respect for one another irrespective of gender, age, religion or political affiliation emerged as one of the outcomes of the Club activities. Both the students and the teachers participated actively, and were willing to learn during the training sessions, which also motivated the facilitators.

- Improved engagement among students, teachers and the local community

As part of the Club's initiative, members of the Club conducted weekly meetings to discuss challenges and opportunities for learning and student welfare at the school. The meetings provided a platform for students and teachers to discuss solutions to challenges and emerging issues at the school. At the school level, learners spoke openly about their challenges and provided options for redress, and the knowledge gained by students from the training programme made the Club members confident enough to introduce awareness-creation sessions during the school general assembly. These sessions were meant to sensitize other students on sexual and gender-based issues, and appropriate behaviour. Fortunately, the school administration supported this initiative which provided an opportunity for the Senior Woman Teacher and other female teachers to advise both male and female students deliver to seek advice when confronted with issues that affect them. As a result of all this, the level of engagement among students and teachers and their community increased.

During the training, both students and teachers raised critical issues affecting them, and brainstormed on solutions. They agreed to adopt nonviolent approaches to address conflicts between and among students and teachers. The free interaction between students and teachers, demonstrated during training sessions, continued in and outside the classrooms. Both students and teachers agreed that they needed the space outside normal teaching hours to interact and to work better together. Participants commended the school administration for strongly supporting, and cooperating with, students following the training.

A conversational environment has been created. The students revealed that the space created by the Club allowed them to discuss with their teachers issues affecting them, without fearing their teachers regarding them as disobedient. In the opinion of a female student, the Club and the training it provided were a blessing because they provided an opportunity for students and teachers to speak about issues they would ordinarily not speak about. Moreover, it was noted that the presence of an external facilitator was beneficial as he presented the training and issues from a neutral point of view, and allowed participants to speak their minds, generate solutions and act on some of the issues. Among the students, the

programme made it possible to engage on some of the vices committed at school and in the community. One of the commonly cited vices was harassment of female students by male ones. A female student indicated that it was nearly impossible to pass by a group of male students without being whistled at or ridiculed for how big or small one's breasts and/or buttocks were; and yet it was difficult to report or speak about these issues. This is clear evidence of a form of harassment female students have been living with, that the learning space created by the Club has exposed, and that is now being addressed, with the help of the entire school.

The Peace and Human Rights Club has also helped to strengthen school and community cohesion, and relations among and between students and teachers, leading to an improved social atmosphere at the school. While common grievances around student behaviour and the interference of community members in learning at school remain, the Club's awareness-creation campaigns and hygiene and sanitation work in the community, have improved relations, and reduced tensions, between the students and the community. As one of the Club members said,

I am happy that the way men used to whistle at us has reduced, and that other people in the community are now approaching us with some level of respect. Imagine how they used to call us names, and loudly described how we looked and walked. That made our lives difficult. Some of our male fellow students who were acting as pimps for community members have now reformed (FGD with Female Students, Peace and Human Rights Club, 27 September 2022).

It is not only relations among students, teachers and the community that have been improved by the project: relations between students and the local police have also benefited. Police officers have become particularly popular with the students after they pledged to support students in trouble. During the training sessions, police officers were given a slot to speak about their role in maintaining law and order, and about options for the student community to seek redress when they got in trouble with members of the community, or if they felt that the school administration was not acting on their concerns, rather than resorting to strikes. Police officers also added that because theft was criminal, any students who stole any property needed to be reported to the school administration who would in turn report them to the police. On the other hand, the established relationship between community members and students means that, when community members find a student abusing alcohol or drugs, they look after him, and advise him instead of reporting him to the police. Similarly, the collaboration between the Club members and local authorities was reported to have led to reduced incidents of violent confrontation between the police and



students. Perhaps an unintended consequence of the Club's initiative was the idea of inviting parents to participate in some school activities. On one occasion where parents were invited to interact with their children and teachers, a lively discussion ensued in relation to the behaviour of some learners at the school. In one particular case, a parent was surprised to know that while he had been giving his son school fees for three consecutive years, the son had not fully paid school fees. This case of fee defaulting and other cases involving learners enabled parents to share ideas of better approaches to handle their children. In an interview with one of the parents regarding how the Club's initiative was helping them and their children, one of the parents stated,

The school invited us to take part in a school session to speak to our children about parental support, and to use positive parenting strategies as opposed to violence. I learnt from teachers and other parents, I now appreciate my daughter's challenges better, and I am better placed to support her to pursue her dreams (Interview with female parent, Otuke, 27 September 2022).

- Better appreciation of youth-led initiatives

Students, teachers and the local community appreciated initiatives by young people to improve their well-being and that of their communities. Awareness-creation sessions and hygiene and promotion days in communities raised awareness of community members on proper hygiene and sanitation practices. Similarly, the actions of Club members to raise awareness among learners, teachers and the community attracted interest in activities of young people at the school and within the local community. As a result, teachers and community members now have high expectations of the students as providers of solutions to local problems. Students also noted that while some students had been committing crimes, and abusing alcohol and drugs before the project, thereby staining the image of the school, the incidence of such antisocial activities had dropped. For example, a female member of the Club said, "At least members of the community now have respect for us. Before, every time we went to the trading centre, they only thought of us as people looking for money, alcohol and men, or lacking what to do" (FGD with Female Students, Peace and Human Rights Club, 27 September 2022).

The young people's initiatives were lauded by community members because, contrary to what they were used to, a new breed of young people had evolved to contribute to the solution of common community problems. This development presents an opportunity for a renewed commitment to change the negative perception and stereotypes against youth. The school also has the opportunity to scale up and sustain the young people's project to improve community engagement and the impact of this youth-led initiatives.

## 9.7.2 Revisiting the Theory of Change: Linkages among the Goal, Objectives, Activities, and Resources in the Peacebuilding Project

### 9.7.2.1 Introduction: relevance of the youth-led initiative to conflict and violence

Young people in the post-LRA conflict-affected communities struggle to claim and exercise their right to participation in pursuit of peace in their respective communities. They are often left out of key structures and decisions for peacebuilding interventions due to deeply-rooted barriers in the social and structural settings of their communities. In addition, policies and peacebuilding interventions have not empowered youth to appreciate the value of participation as a right, and to embrace nonviolence in conflict-resolution and peacebuilding. Therefore, conflict and structural violence act as key barriers to youth making decisions and plans to rebuild their lives. Without playing a key role in the recovery, reconstruction and development of their communities, they cannot attain sustainable peace.

The intervention component of the study sought to work with students and teachers to understand the triggers and drivers of conflict, and to design and implement a project to empower youth to use nonviolent approaches to resolve conflicts and address violence in their school and local community. We used the experience and expertise of young people to conceive and design activities that were responsive to the local peacebuilding needs and challenges. The theory of change was used to guide the planning process in pursuit of the goal and objectives of the project. All the activities were planned to complement one another, and to contribute to the objectives and overall goal of the peacebuilding project, within the limited resources available.

The conception and implementation of the project was based on the assumption that if young people were supported to lead the process of identifying and addressing the triggers and drivers of conflict and violence, through training, awareness-creation, community engagement, and advocacy, then they would be empowered to lead peacebuilding processes and outcomes at their school and in the local community. The activities and resources were planned and implemented in such a way that they would contribute to the goal, objectives of the project. The activities are presented in the form of capacity- building, youth engagement, community engagement and advocacy, to show how the activities relate to the goal and objectives of the project.

### 9.7.2.2 Goal, objectives, activities, and resources versus short, medium, and long-term outcomes

- a) Capacity-building contributed to increased knowledge of conflict resolution, and commitment to peacebuilding activities at the school and community levels.

In the short-term, increased understanding of conflict and violence, and of options to resolve disputes, were achieved as a result of the training in peace education. Evidence from the training workshop suggests that participants were able to define conflict and violence and list their forms. Their initial descriptions of the how they perceived conflict and violence were use as the baseline for the changes that occurred after the project implementation. The exercise in which they orally described the situation as they saw it then enabled participants to develop a list of actions to address conflicts and violence in their school and local community. For example, the session on living in harmony with the environment resulted into participants listing what they liked and did not like about their environments, and what they promised to do in the immediate and long terms to change the environment into what they desired. Their commitments included planting new tree species, and raising awareness about the importance of environmental protection, conservation and rehabilitation. They also committed and delivered on creating awareness about sanitation and hygiene, and ridding of the environment of litter and polythene bags and other wastes.

Meanwhile, I provided the youth with logistical support in the form of footballs, which enabled them to spend some of their free time playing and interacting with one another. As it was discussed in the findings section of the report, learners found that games and sports offered additional space for them to release their energy and remain fit.

- b) Creation of platforms for constructive engagement contributes to collective action and ownership of peacebuilding initiatives

- [Spaces for youth engagement](#)

Members of the Peace and Human Rights Club initiated weekly meetings during which solutions to key challenges and issues relevant to students are discussed and agreed on. Moreover, key messages and updates incorporated into the teachers' the daily assembly communique, debates conducted on topical issues of peace, and football games, served as constructive spaces for engagement/interaction among young people and with their teachers. As a result, individual and collective commitment was realised in the short and medium terms.

- Individual and collective learner and teacher commitment to the Club's objectives.

While it was expected that teachers would create a conducive learning environment, which would lead to positive learner-teacher relationships, this was not always the case. A renewed commitment to a positive working relationship between teachers and learners was essential for identification of individual challenges, and actions that were beneficial to learners. Although it was not possible for the evaluation to conduct an in-depth assessment of the extent to which learner-teacher relationships had improved, the project succeeded in creating the space for a better working relationship between students and teachers.

- Potential for a broad range of individual and community benefits

At the individual level, some participants indicated that the participatory nature of the Club's activities had helped them to appreciate their right to participate in issues that affect them and their communities. Regarding conflicts, positive changes included young people citing the importance of amicable resolution of conflicts (instead of resorting to violence), refraining from bullying, and cooperating with the school administration to make learner-teacher relationships more beneficial to them.

At the community level the changes are potentially more far-reaching. There is likely more appreciation of the contribution of young people to community affairs now than before. If sustained, this shift has the potential to change the negative community perception and stereotypes of youth, resulting into better appreciation and involvement of young people in peacebuilding decisions and structures.

- c) Community engagement led to perceptions of impact primarily linked to youth taking positive steps in community affairs

The immediate outcome of the training was knowledge that enabled youth to take positive steps to find solutions to local challenges that confront their communities. For example, young people engaged the local community through raising awareness on environmental sustainability, hygiene, and sanitation. When asked what difference the participation of young people in community engagement had made in their communities, some parents cited the improvement in environmental sanitation, and their increased awareness of, and vigilance against, indiscriminate felling of trees for charcoal making. Other parents and teachers cited their improved perception of, and attitude to, young people as additional fruits of young people's participation in peacebuilding. According to some participants, the students' initiative had demonstrated that having a school nearby the community was good because it motivates parents to pay fees, and it inspires young people to join, and remain in, school.

#### d) Advocacy limited by broader government and NGO operating contexts

The project had set a long-term goal of making changes to policies to improve the operating environment for youth participation. While the long-term objective is yet to be achieved, in the short-term, young people managed to create an environment of cooperation and solidarity, where they worked with fellow young people, school administrators and the local community to respond to environmental, hygiene, and sanitation challenges in their communities. However, the extent to which young people can take a leading role in community affairs is limited by knowledge, material capacity and community support to youth-led initiatives for peace. In addition, the school environment does not provide enough space for dialogue on issues that students consider important to their overall well-being. The youth-led approach gave young people the opportunity to mobilise themselves, and to prove that, when provided with space, they can engage productively to build a peaceful community at the local level. The evidence from the Club showed that space created by young people to engage with fellow youth, teachers and the local community raised the profile of the Club, and provided an opportunity for the school to tap into youth power to cause positive change. It also provided an opportunity to influence follow-up actions with the youth themselves, government, and NGOs to invest in the Clubs as one of the many avenues to promote participation as a right for young people. The challenge lay in lack of a common appreciation of using the different spaces available in communities, including schools, to influence governments and NGOs to speak about the importance of using such a platform, and to prioritise youth as peacebuilders in their own settings.

#### 9.7.2.3 Unintended consequences of youth-led peacebuilding interventions

##### a) Deeper gender issues and challenges were not addressed

The module on the culture of war and violence played an important role in shaping the discussion on gender relations, especially in creating the space to discuss subtle issues often omitted when reflecting on violence. Engagement with such often less discussed gender challenges in relation to violence provided field-evidence and an opportunity for the school and the community to consider networking with organisations and individuals to improve young people's learning and home environments.

Some female participants in FGDs reported that when the Club conducted training, some deeper gender concerns, including harassment, psychosocial and mental issues, school dropout rates of females, early and forced marriage, and self-care challenges were not fully addressed. Therefore, the training should have provided more specialised and targeted support for these issues. The participants observed that given the nature of their different challenges, the activities implemented by the Club did not fully address

those and related concerns, and did not, therefore, translate into increased access to services or strengthened rights. The deeper gender challenges were raised with the female patrons and the school administration for follow-up support.

To a large extent, the project did not have a plan to respond to the social and cultural constructions that hinder males and females from actively participating in peacebuilding structures and decisions. Furthermore, the project requires more time to gradually raise awareness, identify gaps and added value, and empower communities to articulate priorities and collaborate with other actors on safe spaces for young people, especially female learners.

#### **b) Dependence on the researcher for training and basic logistical support to run and sustain the Club's initiatives**

It was evident from the beginning that the Club could not be revitalised without training and some logistical support from the researcher. While training and logistical support were important for the revival of the Club, the support itself could not sustain Club activities to achieve the Club's long-term goal. Incremental implementation and broadening of activities, the ability to address emerging needs and concerns, and refresher training on technical aspects of peace education will require some human and financial resources to meet the targets. However, the Club's dependence on me for training and logistical support was bound to have unintended, negative consequences for the Club's future programming.

Participants acknowledged technical and material capacities as crucial to the running and sustaining of the Club, and regretted that the Club lacked both. They accordingly suggested that it would be necessary for them to mobilise resources, network and coordinate with individual, government, and NGO stakeholders to enable the Club to operate effectively and sustainably. Many of the participants believed that the Club was so important because without peace, the conflict-affected communities were vulnerable to the devastating effect of the legacy of conflict and violence. Fortunately, young people know that while conflict and violence have to be ended, their financial and technical capacities to end conflict and violence are inadequate. Therefore, while the Club can achieve its short-term, expected outcomes, it is doubtful that it can achieve the long-term outcomes without external support. That is why, the participants saw in the Club an opportunity and a challenge to work with the school administration, the Ministry of Education at the district and national levels, and NGOs to seek for funding and to galvanise community support for the Club.

#### 9.7.2.4 Achievement of Peace and Human Rights Club objectives

The goal of this action research was to enhance the participation of youth in peacebuilding within the theoretical framework of the theory of change. The research sought to achieve its objective by empowering young people to identify and respond to conflict and violence, through an implementable project. In addition, it recognised the importance of sensitising the youth and their respective communities to create favourable attitudes to support young people's participation. Finally, it acknowledged that youth-led initiatives would benefit from an analysis of context-specific challenges and current initiatives for peacebuilding in northern Uganda. Therefore, as part of the project, exploratory research was done with the youth as participants, and an intervention was conceived, designed and implemented with the youth. Youth were therefore trained, sensitised and provided with some logistical support to implement their planned initiatives.

The project's short- and medium-term outcomes of increased knowledge, skills, and power to respond to conflicts and violence were being achieved through awareness-raising, meetings, and dialogue among other activities as captured through FGDs, interviews and school records. The project's objective of ensuring that young people had the space to actively participate in resolving conflicts and violence, especially through nonviolent means, point to the ability of youth to contribute to peace, and by extension, to claim and exercise their right to participation. There is no doubt that the knowledge gained by young people on peace education, and the commitment they have made through the Club's activities, will increase their ability to contribute to building peace in their school and community. By engaging with the local community, young people have also proved that they care about the negative effects of conflict and violence, and would like to be part of the efforts to end them. The young people's commitment to nonviolence and peacebuilding is likely to change the pre-existing negative perception and stereotypes of youth, and hopefully lead to a situation where, eventually, policy responses promote young people as the drivers of change in peace, security, and development in northern Uganda.

#### 9.7.3 Strengths and shortcomings of the project

- **Strengths: what worked and why?**

A number of areas of project strength can be identified, the first one being the participatory approach adopted in project identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The participatory approach ensured that, at all the stages of the project, young people took leadership, with the support of their teachers and the researcher. This served not only to identify the felt needs of the young people, but also

to exploit their knowledge, and experience in identifying and prioritising possible solutions, and to engender a sense of ownership of the project among the young people. This may also explain the young people exhibited a high degree of commitment to, and enthusiasm about, the project.

The second strength of the project, most probably arising from the first one, was the high degree of commitment to, and enthusiasm about, the project exhibited by the students in the Club. The commitment and enthusiasm enabled participants to work proactively, collectively and enthusiastically to resolve conflicts, care for the environment, and raise awareness about basic rights and responsibilities, such as promoting hygiene and sanitation, ending gender-based violence, and creating conversational space to improve the overall learning environment.

Thirdly, the project is aligned to the efforts to realise peace, recovery and development in northern Uganda, and is, therefore, understood by, and familiar to, the local communities, the local government, and development actors. Therefore, as young people extended their outreach to the local community, they were easily understood and supported by members of the community. The youth-led initiative, seeking the participation of young people in community affairs, enabled youth to analyse, design and implement a project that responded to their context-specific challenges, and by extension, to those of the local community. Young people were able to discuss their common challenges and know what was expected of them in rebuilding their communities. More importantly, the youth-led initiative was an avenue for young people to learn to tolerate, accommodate and work with one another. In particular, it helped young people to appreciate the values of tolerance, accommodation and collaborative working, and in doing so, the project garnered the support of the school administration and the community, and has the potential to benefit from PRDP funding and to scale up its intervention to out-of-school youth and the neighbouring communities.

The project was conceived and promoted as a culturally and contextually aware or sensitive project. As a result, young people implemented the project in a cooperative and amicable manner while engaging with their challenges at the school and in the community. The Peace and Human Rights Club provides a scalable model for understanding and resolving conflicts and violence at the school level.

Another strength of the project was engaging the students to learn to live in peace with one another through the Club. This helped learners to practice what they learnt in their schools and the community where the school is located. This meant that the students were able to practice what they learnt with their families and communities, and were, therefore, more likely to improve the attitudes of their parents and



the community to young people. As a result, the parents and the community as a whole were able to provide the support required for their children to engage more productively on issues that affect them.

Moreover, because students who are members of the Club are constitutionally life members, they are encouraged to remain connected to the Club and its activities even after they leave the school, thereby engendering the sustainability of the project and its impact.

Yet another strength of the project was the establishment of partnerships. On different occasions, local authorities, including community leaders and the police, were invited to speak to the students on particular issues of interest to the project. The issues included security, co-existence with members of the community, drugs and alcohol, and how and where to seek support. These partnerships not only extended appreciation of the project beyond the school, they also increased the number of participants to include key actors in the management of young people's problems, such as parents, community leaders, and the local police force. This certainly contributed to the success of the project, and increased the chances of it being sustainable.

In addition, comprehensive stakeholder involvement was a key strength of the project. The project ensured that all key stakeholders in young people's participation in peacebuilding, including primary and secondary stakeholders, were actively involved. The primary stakeholders, those who benefit directly from, or are adversely affected by an activity, included students, their teachers and school administrators, parents, and the community as a whole. Among the secondary stakeholders, those who have an interest in an activity, were the police officers and the local government authorities. By involving all these categories of people, the project ensured that all those who were supposed to be affected by the impact of the project, and all those who were likely to influence the impact of the project, were part of the project. As a result, support for the project was maximized, and opposition to the project was obviated, thus increasing the chances of project success.

Finally, the practical training sessions were also a major project strength because they allowed young people to relate the training content or subject matter to their real-life situations, share their experiences and generate options to manage their different circumstances. The various issues raised during the training allowed students to dialogue among themselves and with their teachers, thereby engendering a better understanding of the issues, and appreciation of the different experiences recounted and views

expressed. Members of the club conveyed key messages of peace in their debates, drama and songs; and as young people told their stories, healing and recovery ensued. However, the project was not without shortcomings.

- **Shortcomings: what did not work well and why?**

Perhaps the main shortcoming of the project was that it was not adapted to respond to new needs in a changing context. For example, mental health problems and child abuse were commonly cited as real challenges requiring specialised services and support. In addition, some learners who were on the verge of dropping out of school due to inability to pay school fees, and others who had menstrual and hygiene-related challenges, requested for support which the project could not provide. Given the varying expectations and aspirations of young people, and day-to-day challenges related to health, material and leadership challenges, the project will need to consider fundraising for a follow-up project that supports members of the club to translate knowledge into practical activities in their communities.

Given the limitations of time, money, and technical knowledge of the project, it was not possible to attend to emerging issues, especially those of gender, because they represent barriers that require special interventions to overcome them, and foster effective youth participation. In particular, the project could have invested in efforts to attain better understanding of barriers specific to female youth participation, and avenues to enhance knowledge of, and improve attitudes to, the role of females in peacebuilding at the grassroots. However, this is an aspect that requires the design and implementation of a follow-up programme after the study.

The project failed to secure the envisaged NGO and government support, in order to expand and sustain the activities of the Peace and Human Rights Club. I had so little time available to me that I could not lobby NGOs and government for support to the Club. However, as the project is intended to be pursued as advocacy work jointly done by the school and prospective collaborators, it will still be possible for the school to achieve this objective.

The number of students in the Club was excessively high and the limited time available could not allow for more training sessions than those already planned. As the only facilitator, I could not facilitate different sessions at the same time, or extend the already planned training schedules. A total of 122 participants were trained for ten days. The training was divided into two sessions with each session consisting of 61 participants for five days. Given that an ideal training session seeks to accommodate a small group of participants of between 20 and 25 in order to encourage maximum participation, it is

possible that the sessions did not allow for an exhaustive account of participants' experiences. It is necessary that a refresher training be conducted to respond to any emerging or new training challenges and to inspire club members to innovate around new challenges.

The project relied on quantitative data recorded by the school administration to understand the magnitude of conflicts and violence, and the conflict-resolution approaches adopted in the school. In order to triangulate such data, I asked participants to describe the nature of their relationships with fellow learners, teachers and the community, and the ways in which they resolve conflicts and violence when they arise. The study was limited in extent to which it measured quantitative aspects of the changes. This is because data was not easily available and the only quantitative data was from the school administration which could have emphasised conflicts and violence by students and focused less on the role of teachers and support staff in the conflicts and violence. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to set up a system to generate a comprehensive quantitative baseline and to ensure quality in periodic monitoring of progress that would systematically and objectively track changes in numbers, and intangible results. Nonetheless, it was possible to measure the impact of the project from the limited quantitative data and qualitative data that allowed participants to express their views based on their perceptions of the reality before and after the project implementation.

The Club did not properly document its activities, making it impossible to refer to any records other than those of the school or narratives from students and teachers. To ensure proper tracking of progress or incidents of violence, the club will need to train its members in record-keeping. The challenge of record keeping was partly due to the gap in project planning in which I omitted training the Club members to categorise and record cases in a systematic manner, on a daily basis.

#### 9.7.4 Recommendations for a youth-led peacebuilding initiative

The recommendations presented here are derived from the suggestions and recommendations of the 122 participants (comprising of Club members and the two patron teachers) as interpreted by the researcher. The recommendations are presented in three parts, with respect to: the youth-led approach to peacebuilding; engagement with the local community and government stakeholders; and the peace and Human Rights Club.

##### ***a) Research on youth participation in peacebuilding***

In view of the strengths and shortcomings of the project outlined above, it is recommended that:

- (i) Young people should be supported to design projects/programmes, in collaboration with other stakeholders, including teachers, parents, local authorities, NGOs and government, in which young people have the capacity to participate in all phases of the project cycle as beneficiaries, partners and leaders;
- (ii) Youth should be supported to design and lead research that enhances young people's knowledge of, and attitudes to, their role in peacebuilding;
- (iii) Young people should be supported to undertake a mapping of local youth-led peacebuilding interventions that have been successful and use them as evidence base to push for change at the local level. Regular exchange of information and learning with schools that have implemented Peace Clubs across northern Uganda and other parts of Africa would be helpful to young people as they advocate for themselves in this regard;

***b) Engagement with the local community and government stakeholders***

This study recommends further that:

- (i) Schools, the Ministry of Education and Sports, and NGOs should establish Peace and Human Rights Clubs in all government-supported schools, and incorporate into them benchmarks, database, monitoring, evaluation, and accountability systems to track progress and inform decisions on youth participation in peacebuilding at various levels;
- (ii) The Government should support schools to collaborate with youth-led and youth-focused organisations, networks and groups, to enable youth to play a role in peacebuilding; and
- (iii) Government and NGO interventions should target youth groups and individuals who should be supported to start, expand and sustain innovative and scalable initiatives for peace at the local level.

***c) A youth-led peacebuilding project: The Peace and Human Rights Club***

With respect to the Peace and Human Rights Club and its activities, it is recommended that:

- (i) The Club should always use the participatory approach to ensure that its training and other activities are relevant to the challenges of young people, and based on needs and a proper contextual analysis of the youth demographic differences, structures of participation, and practices of the community;
- (ii) The Club should integrate its activities into the broader peacebuilding agenda of northern Uganda, and link them up with relevant Government programmes, such as the Youth Livelihoods Fund and Operation Wealth Creation, to enable Club members to access funding and material inputs for their projects;

- (iii) The project should encourage the school to support the Club by including Club activities in the school time-table and budget. Similarly, the project should encourage parents to support the Club by contributing some money towards activities, providing positive advice to learners, and supporting their children to translate into practice what they learn from the club and the school;
- (iv) The project should encourage agencies currently supporting orphans and vulnerable learners with sanitary pads and scholastic materials to invest in the Peace and Human Rights Club in order to boost its activities and impact;
- (v) When working on responses to, and mitigation and prevention of, conflict and violence, interveners should involve parents, local authorities and other stakeholders as part of regular engagement with communities to get buy in and support for longer-term and sustained collaboration. For instance, the parents would need to allocate land to young people to plant trees, and local authorities and relevant departments will need to link school activities to their budgets and peacebuilding programmes;
- (vi) Write stories about the challenges and support required from the Ministry of Education and Sports and other intervening agencies in order to support the running of the Peace and Human Rights Club;
- (vii) The project should disseminate widely the purpose and outcomes of the peacebuilding activities of the Peace and Human Rights Club, and ensure that external stakeholders support the efforts of the school at community levels;
- (viii) The youth, teachers and members of the local communities should identify the successes and weaknesses in youth-led peacebuilding initiatives and mobilise adequate resources and relevant support from relevant government and NGO bodies.
- (ix) The Club should ensure continuous training of its members and teachers as a means of building their capacity to respond to conflicts, violence and changes, and to promote continuity by having a pool among members of the teaching staff who understand and support the club;
- (x) Explore the use of a peer-to-peer model by Club members to target other young people with key messages on peace and on the importance of an active youth population in continuing, expanding and sustaining positive change in their communities;
- (xi) Alumni of the Peace and Human Rights Club should be encouraged to start activities in their communities, and mentor and inspire others to effect positive change in their communities;

- (xii) Alumni of the Peace and Human Rights Club should form a network and use media platforms to connect on issues important to them, occasionally convene physical meetings, and conduct exchange visits to take stock of their activities, share and learn from one another;
- (xiii) The project should encourage all teachers to take interest in, and support, the Peace and Human Rights Club as part of a bigger school agenda to promote effective learning, discipline and co-existence; and
- (xiv) The school should introduce an annual debating competition, with awards for the best debaters in different categories; and the debates should focus on topical issues for the year, agreed upon by the students and teachers.

### 9.8 Concluding Remarks

The chapter on the evaluation of the youth-led peacebuilding project employed focus group discussions with members and non-members of the Peace and Human Rights Club to assess the performance of initiatives implemented by young people in collaboration with teachers and members of the local community. First, the training was evaluated for its immediate results in increasing knowledge and empowering young people to take initiatives to build peace in their school and the local community. Second, the different initiatives implemented by young people were assessed for their impact in the lives of the entire student and local communities. The findings demonstrated that through training and material support to the Peace and Human Rights Club, young people were equipped with knowledge and skills to innovate, and that they implemented activities that showed some progress towards more collaborative and efficient living and working in the school environment, involving students, teachers, and the community. Moreover, the actions taken by members of the Peace and Human Rights Club demonstrated that the capacity of young people to respond to, and mitigate and prevent, lower-level conflicts and violence at the school level increased. Similarly, the level of engagement between young people, teachers and the local community improved; and young people and local communities had a better appreciation of initiatives by club members to bring about positive change.

The above findings highlight two key factors in youth participation in peacebuilding. First, there is need for structured or intentional space for young people to claim and exercise their rights; and the outcome of the youth-led initiative demonstrated that young people are willing and able to act on issues that they consider important to them, but need the space and support to make it happen. Second, young people lack the material capacity and support required to put their ideas into practice. It is evident from the findings that without some form of external support, young people would find it difficult to start and

sustain a vibrant youth-led initiative in a situation where financial resources play a role in enabling certain processes to happen.

The strength of the Peace and Human Rights Club lay in its ability to mobilise young people and the community around a common cause, demonstrating that young people have a sense of commitment to, and passion for, addressing issues that affect them. Therefore, to ensure that young people own and sustain their activities, they need to be supported to innovate and lead processes that are beneficial and effective in empowering them and building a critical mass committed to rebuilding their communities. In particular, the peace club can be strengthened through linking the different initiatives to the broader peacebuilding agenda of northern Uganda. Meanwhile, the Peace and Human Rights Club needs to collaborate with other stakeholders where youth play roles in three capacities, as beneficiaries, as partners, and as leaders, in order to lead and sustain change processes.

## CHAPTER TEN: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

### 10.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the research objectives and the theoretical foundations of the study. The relevant theories are discussed to help understand peacebuilding interventions and how the findings from northern Uganda contribute to the theoretical perspectives on the role of youth in peacebuilding. This chapter is a synthesis of the findings from Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine, based on youth experiences of conflict, violence, and peacebuilding, in order to help appreciate the young people's perceptions of the peacebuilding process and outcomes, and the role of conflict and violence in the exclusion of young people from peacebuilding. Finally, I discuss youth participation in northern Uganda in relation to conflict transformation and the theory of change. Discussing the experiences of youth helps to clarify a situation of multifaceted conflict, and to appreciate the realities the youth find themselves in, and which influences their efforts to build and sustain peace.

### 10.2 Young People's Perception of the Value of their Participation in Peacebuilding

Young people's opinions imply that the value of their participation in peacebuilding in northern Uganda, and in Lira District in particular, is entrenched in a complex set of experiences and factors at home, in the community, and at school and work. The findings show that, generally, young people perceive conflict and violence as affecting them negatively, and they believe that they have the right to speak for themselves through relevant structures. Young people also observed that communities recognize their potential to contribute to society, and expect them to positively influence peacebuilding outcomes. This endorses the UNSCR 2250 appeal to countries to document and learn from the contribution of youth in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. It further reaffirms the aspirations of young people and their communities to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of armed conflict and violence. The analysis of the experiences of youth demonstrates that the participation of young people is vital for peacebuilding. Young people's positive perception of their roles in peacebuilding was linked to their realisation that their participation in peacebuilding was beneficial to them and their communities. In particular, the fact that the youth themselves identified with the challenges and common priorities, and aspired to work together, own the peacebuilding process, and bring about peace, was the driving force behind their call to share in decision-making. This finding is in line with the argument by Spalding et al., (2021) that inclusion of youth in peacebuilding is key to shaping young people's understanding of what the future holds for them, and to encouraging effective participation for the sustainability of peacebuilding interventions.



However, the study demonstrates that the desire for active youth participation in life is not always consistent and supported in practice, and the negative community perceptions and stereotypes of youth, coupled with the barriers that young people face, hinder the realisation of the aspirations of young people, and of durable peace. I observed that the recognition of the importance of the role of youth in peacebuilding has not been translated into practical policies and programmes that are beneficial to the youth at the grassroots. Moreover, empirical data from this study indicates that lack of a participatory and inclusive peacebuilding process, and representation of youth as lazy and idle perpetrators of violence in northern Uganda, further complicate the challenges of youth participation. The youth expressed limited knowledge of policies and programmes relevant to them, and lack of support for their participation. In addition, resort to violence and negative coping strategies featured prominently in discussions with the youth and key informants. Therefore, as observed by Spalding et al., (2021), the exclusion of young people from key processes, prevents young people from building their capacities and learning, and turns them into mere onlookers to important decisions and actions in their lives and that of their communities. It was also evident from the FGDs that the youth hardly trusted the peacebuilding process, which underscores the value of trust in galvanising support for peace and holding actors to account. As Shapiro (2010) observes, when young people feel unfairly treated and, in this case, are not meaningfully involved, they are rendered vulnerable to groups that seek to exploit the opportunity to cause violence. Therefore, it is not surprising that youth gangs are now a common phenomenon across districts of northern Uganda.

Equally important is the negative community perception and stereotypes of young people, which appears to influence the way youth respond to issues that affect them. Young people are commonly perceived as lazy, unable to make sound judgements, to claim and exercise their basic rights, or to fulfil their obligations to their communities. As a result, their role in peacebuilding, recovery and community development has been questioned or dismissed. This was well exemplified by Malak, a former US Ambassador to Uganda, who observed that northern Uganda had all the ingredients for economic development, including land and reliable rainfall for farming, but was unable to develop because its young people had failed to take up available opportunities to lift the region out of poverty (Daily Monitor 25 October 2019). This and similar sentiments were expressed by key informants in northern Uganda who argued that young people had failed to prioritise important issues, including agriculture for the development of the region.

It can be argued that the recognition of the role of youth in peacebuilding can be meaningful only when the issues affecting youth and their participation are well-understood, documented and acted upon,

informed by the experiences and lessons learned over time. As the finding suggests, it may be argued that it is the responsibility of intervening agencies to ensure that programmes targeting young people are responsive and accessible to young people in their respective communities. This is because, without well-defined timelines, a comprehensive implementation plan and an inclusive and participatory approach, it is difficult for young people to meaningfully contribute to peacebuilding. Moreover, I argue that the stereotyping and exclusion of young people from decision-making processes and development programmes, and the manipulative approaches to youth issues, have prevented young people from participating meaningfully in peacebuilding. Therefore, for positive change to occur, young people need to use the window of opportunity in peacebuilding programming, by taking proactive steps to demand for better services, to hold leaders and communities to account, and to change the narratives and tell their own stories in their own ways. However, the findings suggest that young people have accepted some of the barriers to their participation, especially the negative community perceptions and the stereotypes of them. As a result, they reinforce the same anti-youth constructions and narratives, and to do little to make constructive decisions and speaking for themselves. In fact, this acceptance of negative energy has been manifested in youth adopting negative coping strategies, and doing little to change the negative narrative, or to contribute to community causes.

That is why some participants and key informants were right when they proposed that, given the limited spaces available for youth participation, the youth themselves should take bold and positive steps to utilise available and nonconventional spaces to mobilise, build their capacity, and network across the region to raise awareness, and to claim and exercise their right to participation in building and sustaining peace in northern Uganda.

The findings from a case in Lira District demonstrate that the recognition of the role of youth in peacebuilding did not translate into a significant step towards enabling youth to participate in peacebuilding processes in northern Uganda. While the UNSCR 2250 is an important and timely intervention, it is undertaken by government and civil society, with limited or ineffective youth participation. Indeed, because of the increasing sources of violence in northern Uganda, intervening agencies should have leveraged on the UNSCR 2250 to develop plans with well-defined timelines and comprehensive implementation plans to address structurally embedded barriers to youth participation in peacebuilding.

The findings of this study resonate with the observation by the Golden Institute (n.d) that the Juba peace process was ill-conceived, and failed to gain a sufficient understanding and appreciation of the post-

return challenges and opportunities to enable the full reintegration of young people. Moreover, as the Lira case study demonstrates, voices of young people continue to be constricted and the spaces for engagement in themselves do encourage meaningful participation. Persons associated with the LRA face additional challenges of reintegration, linked to their combat and other roles. Referring to a unique category in the LRA conflict, Sandhar (n.d) quotes the experiences of a former child soldier regarding community perceptions of, and response to, former child soldiers:

“For decades, the voices of former child soldiers have not [been] included in outputs. The perceptions about former ex-combatants are often untrue, that they are a hopeless and vulnerable group who cannot achieve anything positive. They are dehumanised. Girls are also not included in conversations about child soldiers. So, getting these voices heard through this comic will help with the deconstruction of existing negative stereotypes about former ex-combatants” (para.5).

Therefore, investments in fostering youth participation in peacebuilding are yet to yield their expected returns. As pointed out by the Golden Institute (n.d), interventions by government and NGOs have been largely standardised, and have failed to appreciate the varying challenges of the conflict-affected communities. Moreover, the focus on supporting youth, without empowering them with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to play an active role in processes and outcomes of interventions might have left them with little ability to transition into productive citizens. Unfortunately, young people used the failure of these approaches as an excuse for them to remain passive recipients of interventions, and thus missed an opportunity to influence the design and implementation of interventions as partners and leaders.

Given the context in which the LRA conflict occurred, and in which the capacities of the youth and their communities were reduced, one of the most feasible pathways to the expected peacebuilding outcomes, would be to strengthen social accountability. This could be achieved by amplifying youth voices through advocacy and raising awareness, community engagement, a detailed implementation plan, complete with timelines, for a transition from humanitarian to development interventions, strengthening networks and partnership, and overcoming barriers to market systems for economic development. It was also established that communities expected young people to liberate their communities and country at large from rampant corruption and bad governance by actively holding their leaders to account so that the leaders fulfil their promises and manifestos, prioritise key youth issues in budgeting, and provide leadership for future direction.

However, the study also found that the challenges of life lead young people to be bribed during elections, and to refrain from taking holding cultural, political, and administrative leaders to account. However, the

commercialization of politics, the politicization and manipulation of assistance, and the exclusion and marginalization of young people are not exclusive to northern Uganda: they are experienced across the entire country and elsewhere in Africa.

Some scholars have argued that capacity-building takes time, and has to be progressively monitored and supported to build a critical mass of youth who can act and speak for themselves on issues affecting them. A report by Spalding et al., (2021) reveals that, in most cases, young people are not heard and have no option but to mobilise themselves in order to get things done. The failure to involve youth in most aspects of the peacebuilding process and outcome is partly associated with the notion that young people, as the leaders of tomorrow, should receive instructions from elders, and wait for their turn to lead. Yet, by merely taking orders, without critically engaging with issues, the youth fail to learn at the critical young stages of their lives, and end up unable to overcome the challenges of life in their communities. As the report by Spalding et al., (2021) notes, young people are referred to as leaders of tomorrow when it comes to peace processes and critical decisions to rebuilding society, which places them on the waiting list, and denies them an opportunity to be involved at an early stage, and to acquire practical leadership knowledge and skills.

While the youth are expected to participate in building and sustaining peace, the challenges they face aggravate their vulnerability, and reduce their ability to cause positive change. For example, violence makes it difficult for the youth to produce socially desired outcomes despite interventions by government and NGOs. Moreover, government policies and interventions are hardly responsive to the vulnerabilities of young people. Therefore, while the youth are expected to contribute to peacebuilding in their communities, they have limited support and resources, and widespread conflicts and structural violence limit their ability to contribute to peacebuilding.

It was also found that the violent conflict that lasted over two decades in northern Uganda was replaced by other forms of violence, including land conflicts, GBV, electoral and service delivery-related violence, and that young people found themselves on the side of both perpetrators and victims of violence. However, violence is increasingly normalised and blamed on the youth. Therefore, in the absence of space to voice their concerns, the youth continue to be presented as the main perpetrators of violence; and yet structural violence continues to undermine their ability to build peace. In addition, young people do not get to tell their own stories or to participate in important decision-making; their stories are told by older members of the community who also make all the important decisions. This situation leaves the youth vulnerable to decisions that are irrelevant to their challenges and aspirations.

The findings on the present peacebuilding context indicate that youth participation varied considerably across locations, and depending on sex, employment, and education status, and reported perceptions of their experiences as well as in the pattern of conflict and violence. The narrative by the youth indicated that there is a range of policies and programmes targeting the challenges of young people, including poverty, limited livelihoods, and constrained education opportunities, but which the youth are not aware of, or whose design and implementation the youth cannot influence. These include the youth policy, the Youth Livelihood Fund, and NGO interventions at the community level.

Therefore, there is a need to ensure that young people participate actively and effectively in relevant policy formulation and programme design and implementation, and that young people are not considered as a single homogeneous entity, with identical challenges and interests. The current practice of trying to involve youth through youth and local leaders, without a clear follow-up and accountability mechanism, is unlikely solve the problems of the different categories of young people. According to most young people, the benefits of involving youth will only be realised when the youth participate in the planning and implementation of interventions meant for them, and when young people have a chance to hold different stakeholders to account. Moreover, the design and implementation of peacebuilding interventions needs to focus on and beyond the immediate and visible challenges of the youth, to include structural violence which is often invisible and embedded in norms and practices that are used to legitimise or normalise violence. A report by Spalding et al., (2021) reveals that the youth are not invited or heard where key decisions that affect them are made and acted upon. Therefore, as the report aptly argues, youth voices need to be amplified, and this calls for youth to participate in all stages of peacebuilding interventions, from conception to evaluation, through design and implementation.

It can be deduced from the findings that post-conflict peacebuilding efforts did not enable young people to make decisions or participate in structures to the extent necessary for young people to transition to positive youth citizenship. It is difficult to know whether the support was directed at enabling youth to be effective agents of post-conflict. This is because there was limited focus on youth as a category and the implementation of programmes lacked a comprehensive approach to building an active youth citizenship, which views youth as agents of social change capable of exercising rights and responsibilities. Due to the long-term impacts of the LRA conflict and displacement, the capacities of young people are too limited to enable youth to participate in ensuring social accountability in service delivery and peacebuilding programmes.

Moreover, given the high level of investment in the recovery, peace and development of northern Uganda, and the persistence of high level of youth vulnerability, one wonders why the high investments have not yielded the expected results. One could argue that the past experiences of violence and the current challenges should form the basis for young people to take more proactive steps to remedy the situation, and rebuild their lives. It could be argued that while the challenges militate against the youth, they also provide an opportunity for young people to exert themselves, be disciplined, take interest in community activities, and use their numerical power to speak up, hold leaders to account, and take a leading role in the running of community affair. Yet the findings suggest that young people have resorted to some negative coping strategies, for which they have been alienated, increasing their desperation and risks. Resort to negative coping strategies, and doing little to demand for accountability and to engage in peaceful livelihood activities means that young people have generally failed to respond constructively to their challenges. In some instances, it was evident that drug and alcohol abuse, as well as gang activities have been employed as means to deal with the challenges of life and to demonstrate to communities their dissatisfaction with the status quo. Similarly, remaining indifferent to serious matters, such as engaging leaders to set a befitting development agenda, and holding them to account on their manifestos, have led to a situation where young people have alienated themselves and left important issues in their society in the hands of those who have created and maintained the current reality that is unfavorable to the development of young people. As already noted, young people are perceived as craving for immediate material gains, which renders them susceptible to being bribed to engage in violent vices on behalf of political leaders bent on achieving their objectives by any means. Young people have also been accused of playing a leading role in violence related to land disputes in Lira District. Yet while some community members prefer to use young people in violence, they forget them in peacebuilding and decision-making processes, and continue to propagate the perception of young people as violent, lazy, improvident and incapable of leading.

### 10.3 Structures and scope of youth participation in peacebuilding

The spaces for, and scope of, youth engagement featured as an important aspect for the youth in peacebuilding. Generally, spaces that the youth can use to engage with different issues that affect them exist, and they include governmental, cultural, political, and programmatic platforms, the latter being availed by individuals, government, the private sector, and civil society. While some of the spaces, including youth representation in local government councils, are provided for by the law, others are informal, but recognise young people as a key category of citizens. However, the findings suggest that youth engagement in these platforms is ineffective because the platforms limit the physical presence of

youth, and fail to take into account youth voices. In this sub-section, we discuss the Youth Council and the local council systems, the political campaigns, cultural institutional structures, and the youth and religion.

#### 10.3.1 The youth council and the local council system

The youth council, a formal governmental platform, dedicated to youth and development, is arguably weak and/or non-functional as far as youth matters are concerned.

Participants indicated that the Youth Council and the LC system have limited influence on the participation of young people, and are, therefore, unable to shape important decisions relating to the affairs of young people. Whilst the local councils, from level one to level five, are ubiquitous, from villages to sub-counties and districts, the effectiveness of their operations is determined by the kind of leaders that populate their structures, and the level of faith young people have in the ability of local councils to address youth concerns efficiently and effectively. While the LC system was established to engage with ordinary citizens and bring services closer to the grassroots, the participants' experiences show that young people do not regard the system as inclusive and effective. For example, while the budgeting process which, ideally, should start from the parish level, through to the sub-county and district levels, offers a chance for the youth to influence decisions at the lower levels, the views and priorities of young people are not sought. As a result, the voices and concerns of youth are missing in the outcome of the budget process because youth representation in the LC system does not speak for the majority of young people's concerns, and there is no political will to prioritise issues that youth may consider important. According to the participants, priorities are factored into the budget at the sub-county level, but the final budget figure and priorities are set by the district, which, in most cases, does not prioritise young people's issues. Therefore, as matters move upwards, from the village to the district, the priorities identified at the lower levels are dropped.

At the implementation stage, the youth have another chance to ensure that the priorities that are passed are implemented, and that there is proper accountability regarding the expected benefits for local communities. However, the findings suggest that the youth not only lack adequate information on the priorities and budget for their locations, they are also not well-informed and empowered to raise their voices, and hold leaders to account. It was evident from the FGDs that the youth are unable to clearly differentiate special programmes for recovery and peace from any other regular government and NGO programmes implemented in their areas.

### 10.3.2 Political campaigns

A small number of young people indicated that while structured spaces for engagement exist, there is a plethora of opportunities to engage in a non-structured way, arguing that the key moment is when politicians travel down to the communities to solicit for votes. At the time of vote hunting, politicians tend to be humble, and they reach out to most communities, creating an opportunity to discuss community priorities, and to monitor the extent to which politicians fulfil their manifestos. Similarly, young people have a chance to disregard politicians who do not fulfil their agenda, and to remind politicians of the importance local communities attach to the promises that politicians make. Similarly, the youth have a chance to engage with politicians and participate in political elections as candidates, voters or in any facilitating role. The findings reveal that while young people attend political rallies, they do not raise issues that should feature in the manifestos of politicians. However, many young people do not attend political rallies for political reasons: for many of them, campaign periods are occasions to interface with politicians, and access some cash and other hand-outs because, once elected, the politicians disappear, and do not reappear until five years later, during another election cycle. In addition, young people argued that because politicians do not deliver on their promises, the campaign period offers young people an opportunity to get some tokens from them.

However, it was also revealed that the youth are often divided along political-party lines, and sometimes resort to violence at political rallies in support of their candidates. There is also a feeling among young people that a candidate without money can hardly win an election. This is because being elected to political offices requires money that many young people do not have. In addition, young people increasingly regard political elections not as a moment to focus on important issues and priorities, or to hold politicians to account for past promises, but as an opportunity to access money from candidates for political positions. Given the apathy among the youth, it has become increasingly difficult for politicians and members of the community to take young people seriously regarding whether they actually have any serious concerns.

The findings further reveal that young people have largely failed to win political offices. Among the 97 young people in the study, only one had successfully won a political office, partly confirming the view that elections in Uganda are highly commercialised, making it impossible for most young people to run a credible campaign, without money or support from rich individuals or political parties. Given that money is the central focus for voters and politicians during political campaigns, it becomes difficult to focus on more important community issues and priorities. It is even more challenging to hold politicians



to account for any promises that they might have made. It was established that, because of their inability to meet the costs associated with political campaigns, very few young people had run for political office, and even fewer had won an election. That is why the majority of young people think that they hardly stand a chance to win a political election.

### 10.3.3 Cultural institutional structures

The findings indicate further that conflicts and changes over time have exposed the cultural institution to risks and disintegration. While the old generation believes in maintaining the status quo, the generation of young people today thinks that some practices do not meet the needs and aspirations of today's youths. The issues of contention include norms and practices governing resources, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. At the cultural, institutional level, youth have leaders at the village, parish, and sub-county, the highest level of representation, and it is assumed that the structure is well-placed to gather and represent the views of young people from the grassroots. As an institution dedicated to preserving and promoting cultural heritage, values, norms and practices of a particular, group of people, the cultural institution involves youth in issues relevant to the objectives of the institution. While culture is vital to a community, and should, therefore, be protected and promoted, a generational divide has emerged regarding then the appropriateness of certain cultural norms and practices. For instance, while the old generation is hesitant to sell customary land, the young generation believes they can use the proceeds from the sale of customary land to engage in business and other productive ventures. Similarly, norms and practices that prevent girls and women from accessing land and other property are bones of contention between progressive youth and conservative elders. Moreover, as conflict led to the weakening of cultural institutions, the young generation have little faith in the ability of their cultural institutions to cope with change and meet their needs.

Conflicts and tensions within the cultural institutions have brought into question the relevance of the institutions in today's governance of community affairs. While, traditionally, cultural institutions played a major role in resolving disputes, including land ones, today the institutions appear to be helpless in the face of widespread land-based conflicts. As a result, some young people are exploiting the lacuna by resorting to violence to resolve disputes, which portrays them negatively, and undermines their ability to participate in peacebuilding. This is what Osiemo et al., (2021) had in mind when they observed that youth exploit the limitations in access to justice and dispute resolution mechanisms to engage in various forms violence; and warring parties take the opportunity to recruit young people into significant conflict roles in Africa. This has promoted the exclusion and marginalization of young people in peacebuilding

efforts, and created a need to construct a positive role for youth as peace builders and agents of change during and after conflict.

The findings from Lira District demonstrate that the youth can only voice their concerns on issues of cultural governance through their youth representatives. Interestingly, those who represent youth in those institutions are not necessarily or technically young people; neither are they always youthful in the way they relate to issues affecting young people. While not being a youth by definition may not be a major concern, especially if the youth themselves have limited ability to articulate their issues, and inspire confidence, it appears that the representatives do not, in the first place, share in the experiences of youth; neither do they always have the interests of the youth at heart. Indeed, the so-called youth leader in the study was above forty years old. Young people are expected to be agents of social change, to exercise their rights and assume responsibilities by adhering to cultural norms and practices that include marrying, participating in marriage and burial activities, and contributing to the costs of compensation in different forms, including when a clan member kills a person from a different clan. While cultural institutions expect the youth to play their role, they do not expect the youth to challenge institutional practices that the youth may consider retrogressive. In addition, cultural institutions do not provide sufficient resources or support to enable young people to implement programmes that bring together young people to interact and dialogue on key issues relevant to their institution and communities. A youth representative to a cultural institution at a village level complained that his cultural institution did not give him enough material and moral support to enable him perform his duties, rendering his position unattractive.

Faced with such challenges, it might be difficult for a youth representative to mobilise young people and to implement programmes that contribute to the objective of the institution. For example, while the cultural institution is keen to promote indigenous peacebuilding approaches, it will find it challenging to instil and sustain traditional peacebuilding values and practices without the active participation of young people. This finding is in line with the views of Osiemo et al., (2021) according to whom youth are not sufficiently involved in indigenous peacebuilding approaches to enable conflict-affected communities to benefit from the multipronged peacebuilding approach necessary for recovery, healing and reconciliation. Limited participation of young people means that those affected by violence are likely to receive limited psychosocial support and healing. It also means that opportunities to foster understanding may be missed, the capacity of the youth to promote indigenous policies and agenda may be reduced, and, by extension, a chance by young people to lead, champion and sustain traditional conflict-resolution and peacebuilding efforts in their communities may be lost.

#### 10.3.4 Youth and the right to participation

The peacebuilding strategy for recovery, peace and development of northern Uganda does recognise the importance of youth participation in projects, as beneficiaries, collaborators and partners. The findings suggest that different programmes have applied the strategy differently, depending on their objectives. Some programmes were focused on economic empowerment while a few others dealt with voice and accountability. However, economic empowerment programmes were largely focused on economic empowerment, without incorporating participation as a right, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and collaborative dispute-resolution that are essential to the empowerment of young people to deliver the peacebuilding agenda. At the school level, there exist clubs for the engagement of young people, with a focus on school-level challenges, rules and regulations, and current society-wide challenges in northern Uganda and elsewhere. For instance, there are clubs dedicated to environmental protection, human rights and peace, patriotism, and dance and drama, just as there are scouts and girl guides clubs and Christian societies. These clubs and societies promote values for active and positive citizenships. However, membership to these clubs is voluntary, implying that not all the learners are members although some of their activities benefit or are supposed to benefit an entire school and neighbouring communities. Moreover, the benefits may not be enjoyed by all students, especially those who do not subscribe to some clubs; and not all clubs are involved in activities that prepare the hearts and minds of individuals through attitude and behaviour change. The clubs can do more to foster youth engagement by focusing on skills, values, attitudes and principles of social justice, fairness, equity and inclusiveness to provide a coherent approach to participation that helps young people to appreciate the kind of resources required to transition from a situation requiring humanitarian intervention to peace and development.

An overarching framework for youth participation in peacebuilding (UN-IANYD 2014) outlines four interrelated approaches to youth participation in the aftermath of conflicts. It recognises that a human rights-based approach to participation is essential to attaining other basic rights related to economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural rights. Therefore, participation as a right of young people reinforces other approaches to youth participation in peacebuilding. The findings suggested that the youth were not equally engaged with all the four interconnected approaches to participation.

The findings also revealed that existing peacebuilding initiatives by the youth are limited in scope, often focusing on only some aspects of the four interconnected parts of the rights-based, economic, sociopolitical, and sociocultural areas of participation that are critical to peacebuilding. Few youth indicated they had benefited from, or were empowered by, programmes intended to promote awareness

of their basic right to participation. Moreover, they felt neither embedded in decision-making structures nor empowered to voice their concerns or demand for accountability.

Interestingly, when the young people in the study were asked what could be done differently to promote their right to participation, their answers focused more on access to economic benefits than on their right to participation in the socio-cultural and sociopolitical aspects of life. This could have arisen out of the economic hardship the region was experiencing, and it underscores the importance of economic empowerment to address the broader challenges of marginalisation and vulnerability young people in northern Uganda are facing. However, it was clear from recommendations by the youth that in order for them to have equitable and full access to peacebuilding interventions, other actors, including community members, NGOs and donors, need to ensure that the planning and implementation of interventions are participatory, and transparent, especially in the allocation and use of financial resources. This is an interesting recommendation on the part of the youth because it implies that, currently, young people are unable to voice their concerns or to hold the implementers of interventions to account.

Young people also highlighted the fact that economic empowerment is critical to other aspects of participation, for it is only when one has the economic power that one can overcome other challenges, which raises the question of whether or not rights-based participation proceeds economic participation. While the right to participation may act as a prerequisite to attaining other rights, especially in situations where the youth are marginalized and excluded from decision-making, the findings suggest that without material capacity, it is challenging for young people to meet their needs, and to devote time and other resources to the pursuit of community-wide objectives. In all the FGDs and interviews, most young people and key informants prioritized economic empowerment over other forms of empowerment in efforts to power youth to improve their lot and that of their communities. However, some key informants disagreed to this, and instead highlighted the need to begin by ensuring that young people became responsible citizens if they were to succeed in rebuilding their communities. According to these key informants, only responsible young people could overcome major challenges engaged in productive activities.

Indeed, few of the participants indicated being involved in some economic initiatives, such as piggery, saloon operation, and *boda boda* transportation to improve their lives. Most young people who were involved in such economic activities attributed their success to their personal initiatives and drive rather than to reliance on external support. In other words, young people who were successful to some extent thought that it was necessary for the youth to drive their own ideas than to rely on government or NGO

programmes. In their opinion, unless young people are prepared to engage in personal initiatives, and to sacrifice for what they believe in, even support from government and NGOs will contribute little to their success. Moreover, some participants indicated that it was more realistic to build on personal initiatives and use external support to boost personal efforts than to rely mainly on external support. Significantly, very few young people prioritized participation as a basic right, enjoyment of which opens the way to other rights. This may, perhaps explain why interventions targeting youth have had limited emphasis on youth capabilities and personal agency to claim and exercise their right to participation as a prerequisite to accessing other basic rights. Therefore, despite the government and NGOs investing substantially in young people, many young people fail to demand and claim the space for programmes that would empower them to contribute to practical solutions to the challenges their communities face. This finding is in line with the observation by Olajide, Adaja, and Ojoogun (2020) that young people in Nigeria and elsewhere are reduced to onlookers because they have accepted the argument that the issues of governance are a preserve of expert adults, and that the youth lack the qualities to productively engage with such strategic issues.

As discussed under the social and emotional environment of the youth, restricting youth to certain issues and spaces reduces exposure, and denies them the kind of experience they need to contribute effectively to their respective communities. That is why, the same authors observe, policies and programmes can only be relevant to the youth if they are context-specific and informed by the realities and aspirations of young people. Therefore, unless a deliberate effort is made to support youth participation, youth agency will be undermined, and young people will be even more marginalised.

Writing about efforts to foster youth participation in civic spaces, the Global Forum for Development (GLOFORD), a local NGO based in Lango, noted that the spaces for effective youth participation in key decisions are generally limited, thus creating a gap between youth and their leaders, and lack of prioritization of youth issues in budgeting and other planning processes. Through its youth parliament arrangement, GLOFORD seeks to empower youth to engage with the structures and processes of local governments in order to enhance social accountability in service delivery (Ssejjoba 2022). However, the scope of their interventions is limited to specific locations, and organised youth groups in Lira District. This and similar interventions, aimed at empowering youth, take time, and require building a critical mass of people who can engage actively and network with a range of actors to create positive and sustained change.

Intermittent and limited coverage of youth interventions has been cited as one of the factors preventing young people from taking advantage of peacebuilding interventions to rebuild their communities. A case in point was the use of digital knowledge spaces to access knowledge, conduct campaigns, access decision-makers, and connect with other young people. While it appeared normal for some young people not to use the media, based on the perception that it was a privilege, the outbreak of COVID-19 exposed further the digital divide, and aggravated its exclusion and marginalization effect. Most of the in-school young people in the study spoke about the disruption of their education during COVID-19, and about their inability to access the digital platform of learning, which left them lagging behind other learners. The lack of access to the Internet and smart mobile phones for learning and other purposes was generally experienced in the study area. Unfortunately, there is no institutional mechanism to promote young people's access to information and communication technology, which may partly be due to the high taxes and other restrictions, including banning Facebook, the government imposes on social media.

This finding is corroborated by Mao (2020) when referencing the Brookings Institution report that 90 per cent of children in developed countries have access to remote learning, compared to less than 25 per cent of children in African countries. It is, therefore, not surprising that the young people in the study area, in addition to the already restricted offline spaces, are unable to access and use online spaces to participate in peacebuilding. In October 2022, Uganda passed a Computer Misuse Law to govern the use of social media. The law has received mixed reactions, with some people arguing that it provides the opportunity to restrain individuals who disrespect others, while others see it as restricting further the freedom of expression, and enabling government officers and other individuals to act with impunity.

Generally, young people appear to be more involved in pursuing short-term economic benefits than in governance processes for sustainable peace and development. As a result, they are more focused on results than on processes which, in northern Uganda, should address unfair distribution of resources, corruption, youth exclusion and marginalisation, conflicts and violence, and limited capacities of youth and institutions to address challenges. Processes are as important as outcomes in peacebuilding, and young people need to be educated to appreciate that reality. Villa-Torres and Svanemyr (2015), in distinguishing between process and impact indicators, emphasise the process, which is consistent with the framing of the UN Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding. According to the Guiding Principle, the process should emphasize meeting the needs and aspirations of diverse groups of young people, and recognize their varied experiences. Meanwhile, the outcome should focus on empowered youths, capable of participating in an accountable and transparent system, without any

form of discrimination, as innovators, thinkers and problem solvers, in order for them to prevent, respond to, and transform, conflicts and violence.

The ability of young people to use their right to participation will likely enable them to activate other rights, including economic and social rights (ESR). This would work in situations where young people exercised their right to participation would help young people to determine how resources are allocated, implemented and accounted for. This is because, as Cahill-Ripley (2019: 1248) argues, if post-conflict communities are engaged with ESR in a meaningful way, then those rights can be protected and promoted, and communities can use the same rights as “a tool for peacebuilding”. The experiences of the youth in the study area are contrary to this expectation. Intervening agencies hardly involved youth in the intervention processes, and hardly emphasised the right to participation in programmes for youth participation. As a result, young people did not exercise their economic and social rights.

However, generally, young people indicated that there were limited spaces to engage with such issues, share experiences, and connect with others. In terms of programming, the general impression that youth are not involved stems from the approach that consists in simply consulting a few youths or members of the community, and taking views of the few as representative of the entire youth category. Unfortunately, as Hart (1992) notes, such consultation does not constitute meaningful youth engagement, and is ornamental, manipulative, and tokenistic. What is missing that Hart and Villa-Torres, and Svanemyr (2015: 53) advocate for is a collaborative working relationship between the youth and adults and “shared power relationships” in decision-making processes in all programme cycle management.

The importance of meaningful participation is also emphasised by Altiok and Grizelj (2019: 29) when they state that “while the inclusion of young people as signatories inside the negotiation room is key, their presence alone does not always guarantee that youth specific needs will be addressed.” This implies that active participation is much more than mere involvement of youth in programmes: it involves ensuring that there is collaboration and shared decision rights in key processes that affect young people.

Overall, the findings reveal that young people have found it difficult to meaningfully influence issues that affect them. Therefore, the failure of policies, structures, and programmes to address the challenges of young people denies youth an opportunity to learn, and build their capacity, and encourages them to adopt negative coping strategies, such as alcohol and drug abuse. It also encourages young people to resort to violence, partly through gangs, to solve their problems. Lack of effective involvement also leads young people to lose confidence in governance processes.

In a post-conflict situation, like that of northern Uganda, working with youth to identify early-warning signs is crucial to conflict prevention, resolution and transformation. This is because formal and informal structures and programmes moderate relationships and spaces for violence and peace, and are the basis for inclusion or exclusion of youth from playing an active role in building and sustaining peace. The experiences of young respondents reveal that many young people find themselves complying with cultural norms and practices even when those norms and practices are in conflict with their vision for peaceful living. Those who go against those norms and practices are often considered disrespectful and unworthy of involvement in community governance. A study by Spalding et al., (2021) reveals that the youth are not invited and heard at tables where key decisions that affect them are made and acted upon. Therefore, as the report confirms, youth voices need to be amplified and this calls for a more inclusive approach to their participation in all stages of peacebuilding interventions.

Young people's perceptions of the value of their participation in peacebuilding, and community expectations of them, varied sharply. While young people felt that prevailing social attitudes and norms undermined their worth and potential, key informants claimed that young people had deviated from socially acceptable norms and practices, and were not doing enough to improve their situation and rebuild their society. This suggests the existence of a generational divide in the ways the two groups view issues, and envisage the future. For example, the evolution of a pluralistic society means that many young people are shunning remote village life, with limited opportunities, and settling in town centres in different regions of Uganda. Similarly, while the older generation argues that customary land should not be sold except in very special circumstances, young people prefer to sell customary land, and use the money generated to meet their needs, start a business, or buy land elsewhere. Faced with such challenges, and in the absence of proper space for dialogue and agreement, young people have increasingly opted for violence or other means to achieve their targets, an option that the older generation has viewed as ungodly, and short-sighted. Generally, while there was total agreement among key informants that young people were headed in the wrong direction, the majority of the same key informants also agreed that parents, institutions of learning and the general community had failed to support youth to grow holistically, and were mainly to blame for the failing state of affairs.

#### 10.3.5 Young people and religion

In line with the above observation, the Minister of Education and Sports, also the First Lady of Uganda, argues that today's generation of young people do not know God, and are mainly interested in money, regardless of how they acquire it. According to her, in the past, parents had the time to bring up their



children into God-fearing and responsible citizens, and so did institutions of learning that taught about God and spirituality. However, the Minister observes, today's parents do not have time for their children, and schools have no system to guide learners on Godliness. Moreover, she fears that digitising education will expose young people to all kinds of information that will further alienate them from God (Delilah 2022).

Some members of the older generation believe that when young people are grounded in religion, they will be able to lead their lives in accordance with socially acceptable values. However, some members of the older generation and participants themselves view high attendance of churches and mosques by young people as a sign of frustration, and a search for hope in life. It was observed that, in the process of going to church, some young people end up believing that God would provide whatever they ask for, regardless of whether they worked for what they sought. The churches and mosques have not been helpful to young either. Indeed, some people have accused mushrooming churches of encouraging young people to waste time praying and waiting for God to solve their problems, instead of working hard to earn a living.

#### 10.4 Conflict, Structural Violence and Youth Exclusion in Peacebuilding

The narratives of youth experiences of the nature and value of participation are, to a large extent, informed by the barriers young people face in influencing community affairs. Therefore, any efforts to address youth exclusion in peacebuilding needs to consider conflicts and structural violence. Young people in the study indicated that the youth, like other population categories, are negatively affected by conflicts and violence, but in their case, the opportunity to be part of the structures and decision for peacebuilding is limited and sometimes non-existent. Because structural issues are hidden, they are not always visible to everyone. That is why members of the community pay little attention to any little good performed by young people although focusing on the little contribution of young people could enhance that contribution, and boost young people's transition into productive youth citizenship, and build peace. For example, the negative community perception of the youth as perpetrators of violence, and the challenges they face in overcoming barriers to their active and positive participation in community life, could be partly attributed to their indulgence in alcohol and drug abuse and gang activities, which undermine their ability to participate in conflict- resolution and peacebuilding.

Similarly, because young people hardly participate in family, cultural, and local council activities, they have not gained the experience they need to lead and influence governance systems and processes to their

advantage. For instance, being denied access to land makes it hard for the youth to produce food to meet their basic needs, or to earn the income they need to keep their children in school. The vulnerability of young people is exacerbated by their limited ability to cope with the effects of COVID-19, which is itself aggravated by the limited support government offers to communities to enable them to withstand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and other emergencies, and to mitigate the effect of climate change. Similarly, when young people are denied access to education, or when they drop out of school, they are rendered incapable of acquiring the knowledge, skills and the confidence they need to be employed and to participate in governance processes.

#### 10.4.1 Land, conflict, violence and the narrative of the ‘othering’

Many FGD participants and interviewees reported having experienced, or knowing people who had experienced, conflict over land. These findings are consistent with police reports according to which Lira District has consistently had the highest incidence of violence in the country. Our data indicates further that, according to the key informants, youth are both the leading perpetrators and victims of the violence which is also a threat to community cohesion. However, a youth who is a member of his district local council noted that the youth who use violence to settle disputes or solve problems simply act as agents of their parents. This exemplifies the role of adults, and even entire adult-led communities, in the violence perpetrated by young people. Overall, many respondents accused young people of being the main perpetrators of violence, mainly for political and economic reasons.

Most people in northern Uganda live in rural areas, and land is their premier resource and source of livelihood. Therefore, it is not surprising that land has become a source of tension in post-conflict northern Uganda. Faced with limited sources of income, people in northern Uganda are selling their land to those who can afford to buy it, including powerful individuals in and outside of government, and members of neighbouring ethnic communities, especially the Teso and Karimojong. This has stoked fears among the Langi that “foreigners” are bent on taking over their land, and depriving them of their main source of livelihood. The opinion of the rural Langi community is echoed by Whyte, Gausset and Henriques (2013), when they argue that land moderates relationships among families and neighbours, and, therefore, conflict is expressed through claim to land, and is a legacy of the war and encampment. The relationship gets further complicated for categories of people who feel denied access to land. For example, orphans, widows and other vulnerable groups find it difficult to win cases involving competing claims for land, territorial claims in response to the settlement of members of other ethnic groups, and

wealthy or politically powerful individuals and investors, using their power to buy and grab land. As a result, already vulnerable individuals and groups of people are rendered even more vulnerable.

Inter-ethnic discord, involving especially the Langi, the Acholi and the Karimojong, has been cited in the narratives on resource utilisation in the border areas of Lira. These narratives have the potential to influence the way young people perceive, and relate to, their neighbours, and they have implications for peace and stability in the region. In the event that a land matter or dispute is between a Langi and non-Langi, past events and differences are used to explain why Langoland has to be protected by all means possible. This is because, most Langi believe that the intrusion of foreigners into Langoland is partly responsible for the growing poverty, inequality and insecurity that the sub-region experiences. For instance, old people always remind young people that the Karimojong depleted cattle in Lango through rustling. In the case of the Teso ethnic group, youth are reminded of increasing death by poisoning, depletion of natural resources, and massive acquisition of land, all attributed to the Teso.

It is interesting that while some of the accounts are fresh in the minds of the local community, the young generation is reminded and enticed to believe that non-Langi neighbours are not welcome to Langoland. The young generation has intermarried with different ethnic groups, enjoyed relative peace and co-existence with other groups, and would perhaps like to promote social cohesion. When young people are excluded from decisions over such important issue of co-existence and how they would like to move to a peaceful the future, they will find it hard to actively counter negative perceptions of, and response to, ethnic diversity within their communities.

#### 10.4.2 Violence in societal norms and the service sector

Generally, violence in its different manifestations limits young people's ability to use, question, and shape the law and repressive cultural norms and practices, and to exercise their sociocultural, civil and political rights. This study reveals different layers of violence at the family, community, and service sector levels. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of young people reported having received little or no support from their families. Instead, they reported having been abused by their immediate family members, which led to negative consequences, such as some of them dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy, early marriage, injury and death. Several reports, including one by Angom (2018) and Schulz (2020), indicated that victims of conflict-related, sexual violence were unable to access justice. Moreover, although many of them were subjected to shame, dehumanization, stigmatization, and fear, the law could not help them, and the public service departments were unprepared to offer them the specialised services they needed, leading to their failure to reintegrate. This finding confirms Schulz's

(2018) observation that the little policy attention paid to male victims of sexual violence was responsible for the failure of the victims to speak up, and seek the support they might require in order to recover.

Therefore, young people are victims of the circumstances of a restrictive environment where there is limited access to the support needed to express themselves, claim and exercise rights, and access justice, protection, and referral services. Schulz (2020) found that male victims of rape and other SGBV suffer from stigma and other issues that undermine their self-esteem and ability to reintegrate. In addition, Schulz highlights gaps in the law and law enforcement in relation to the difficulty in advancing legal arguments in support victims, especially affected by armed conflicts. Unfortunately, the relevant legal, policy, implementation, and regulatory frameworks are too weak, and public awareness, technical assistance, and advocacy are too inadequate, to protect, and support the recovery of survivors of violence and others at risk. This promotes complacency, and prolongs the cycle of violence.

In addition, violent demonstrations, arrests and detention, loss of life and property have occurred during or after disputed elections, poor service delivery and cases of exploitation by some members of the community. Protests against bad practices, policies and contrary opinions have met with little success because the government responds violently to dissenting views. It has even been suggested the Public Order Management Law, passed ostensibly to regulate public gathering, was actually meant to prevent people from gathering and protesting against the government. The law requires any gathering of at least three people to have been authorised by relevant government functionaries, which, according to the Law, should be the Inspector General of Police or any other authorised officer responsible for conduct of public meetings. However, according to some presidential candidates and commentators, the Law was applied selectively to favour the incumbent president while restricting the space for the opposition candidates.

Electoral violence is, perhaps, one of the most spatially generalised challenges in Uganda, and study data shows that the youth are aware of the consequences of violence and protests, especially against government authorities. An article, titled “*NUP: Museveni's bullets killed appetite for protest*” (Observer, 17 November 2021), appears to characterize the way Uganda’s security forces perceive and respond to protests and dissenting views. The Ugandan space for dialogue among, and conciliation of, interest groups has, over time, been constricted, and protests over service delivery and human rights violations do not have space in most parts of the country. In an interview with David Lewis Rubongoya, the Secretary General of National Unity Platform, Uganda’s leading opposition party, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the November 18-19, 2020 killings of protesters during the presidential and

parliamentary elections of 2020, he said that the space for people to express their views and grievances, and to genuinely discuss issues that affect them, was restricted. He added that expression of dissent was met with illegal arrests and abductions, bullets, and wanton killing of opposition supporters. This, he concluded, had killed people's appetite for protest. According to him, there was a time when about 3,000 people were arrested or kidnapped. To-date, there are so many people who were picked up by the state and kept in unknown locations. Indeed, "over 150 people [are still in prison and] there are others whose whereabouts are unknown", he added. (Kakembo, November 17, 2021, para. 16). A newspaper article summarized the effect of expressing dissenting views:

Bullied by the events of November 2020, in which regime operatives opened fire and killed people in broad daylight, people were scared to come out and protest. Remember, after those events, General Museveni said that was just a rehearsal. It became clear to the people that we are not dealing with a civil person at all (Kakembo November 17, 2021, para. 16).

When a young person in the study suggested that youth could use protests to improve their participation, the other young people simply laughed, citing fear of confronting the military. This is because whenever communities expressed dissenting views, even through peaceful protests or demonstration, they would be confronted by the military. Moreover, the more young people witness, and suffer from, violence, the more they fear the consequences of protesting to demand for better services or treatment. In addition, the closing of informal spaces for political and civic activism, breeds fear, facilitates the violation of human rights, and reduces opportunities active citizenship among young people and the public.

Similarly, our data indicates that violence, crime and human rights violations were recurring features, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which, for some youth in northern Uganda, may have rekindled memories of LRA war experiences. This finding is consistent with a 2020 police report that, although violations of human rights had increased that year, Uganda had registered a "... 8.9 % decrease in the volume of crimes reported to Police from 215,224 cases reported in 2019 to 195,931 cases..." (Uganda Police Annual Crime Report 2020: XV). The violations that rose in number included domestic violence, from 13,693 in 2019 to 17,664 in 2020 (a 29% increase); murder by shooting, from 181 cases in 2019 to 249 in 2020 (a 37.5% increase); and murder as a result of domestic violence, from 360 cases in 2019 to 418 cases in 2020 (a 16.1% increase). The Uganda Police Annual Crime Report (2020) attributes increased domestic violence to the COVID-19 lockdown that kept people close to their families. According to the same report, kidnaps rose from 159 cases in 2019 to 207 cases in 2020, and

political/electoral and media offences rose from 169 cases in 2019 to 1,033 cases in 2020. The report attributed the rise to the general elections and campaigns for 2020/2021.

Therefore, violence was generally prevalent at all levels of the communities, and, in northern Uganda, the youth were the key actors either as community members or as government soldiers. While our data indicates that young people were the key perpetrators of violence, family and community members were also perpetuating violence against different youth categories, such as females, youth born out of wedlock, former child soldiers, persons with disability, and those regarded to be drunkards and anti-social. Young people cited violence at the family, local government, and cultural levels where some youth are subjected to harassment, discrimination, gender-based violence, social and economic exclusion and verbal and physical abuse. This indicates that violence within the community affected the quality of life and the ability of youth to meet their needs, realise aspirations, and effectively participate in socioeconomic and political life.

These types of conflict and violence have implications for the options available to the youth to participate in peacebuilding. While state and community initiatives are necessary to counter the involvement of young people in violence, and to empower youth to cause positive change, peacebuilding interventions need to focus on the community-level sources of conflicts and violence involving youth, as an important ingredient of a post-conflict recovery and reconstruction.

Instead, there is a tendency to blame and/or punish youth for participating in violence, without a thorough analysis of the root causes of their engagement in violence, or any efforts to address violence from its roots. This has led to the community perceiving young people as perpetrators of violence, ignoring the peacebuilding potential of the same young people. The negative narrative about youth could also be used as a strategy to maintain the status quo by denying youth the opportunity to participate in key decision-making. That is why it is important to devise means of reducing opportunities for violence and vulnerabilities, and of enhancing peacebuilding outcomes, informed by an analysis of these challenges.

Young people had mixed feelings about the importance of their participation in community matters, with some opining that their participation could produce positive results while others thought that they were helpless. It was noted that while individual youths were making positive contributions, they were few, and, as a generation, the youth were headed the wrong direction. Perhaps what makes the mixed reactions interesting is the fact that some young people see the challenges as an opportunity to work harder in an attempt to overcome barriers, and lead better lives. On the other hand, although many youths find themselves caught up in the hardships of life because they have limited or no viable options, community

members think that such youths are not doing enough to change their lives for better. Therefore, part of the problem lies in the inability of adult members of the community to put themselves in the position of the affected young people in order to perceive the role of structural violence, especially in the day-to-day norms and practices, and in institutional processes.

#### 10.4.3 Youth gangs and the future northern Uganda

The discussions on youth gangs were mixed, with some young people suggesting that they are pushed into gangs by their vulnerable situations rather than by choice. In other words, they implied that they resorted to gangs and violence because they had no other means of access to resources and public spaces for their voices to be heard. On the contrary, most key informants characterized youth gangs as made up of bad, lazy and idle youths who have no respect for life or the well-being of their communities. Notably, most key informants stressed the dangers young people pose to society and predicted a bleak future for northern Uganda. According to some key informants, the current youth generation do not have regard for values that keep society in harmony, and their engagement in perilous activities hinders the recovery, peace and development of northern Uganda. Undoubtedly, the issue of youth gangs needs to be addressed because unless their root causes are addressed comprehensively, the gangs may turn into an even bigger problem for the community. This finding is in line with a study by Divon and Owor (2021) in which it is reported that youth in northern Uganda had resorted to systematic crime and violence to secure a living. While referring to the 2014 Human Rights Watch Report, titled ‘Where do you want us to go?’, Divon and Owor (2021) observe that street children, particularly in Gulu Town of northern Uganda, face multiple forms of violence and discrimination from their communities, including violence perpetrated by their peers, the police, and government officials. Increasingly, the level of crime and violence had become a concern for the community who expressed fear that young people, who should be spearheading the recovery of northern Uganda from decades of armed conflict, had turned into a problem. While speaking during a funeral, the then Deputy Speaker of Uganda’s Parliament, Honourable Jacob Oulanyah (RIP), said,

What are we doing in our households and communities to ensure that we raise children who respect lives? It saddens me that young people are the ones killing today. The murder of Christine Anyeko was carried out by ‘street goons’, or, as they are dubbed in the local youth language in Gulu: the *Aguu* (Divon and Owor 2021: 82).

The late Speaker’s words draw attention to the general fear that youth gangs are making life unbearable, and the future uncertain. As Divon and Owor (2021) observe, the evolution of the street kids in major towns of northern Uganda is traced back to displacement during the LRA conflict, in which many

children and youth sought refuge in the streets of major towns in northern Uganda. Today, there are many of reasons why street kids exist: orphanhood, poverty, and rural-urban migration, and, to survive, street kids engage in criminal activities. More recently, especially since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, a new set of youth gangs has emerged across different locations, more organized and systematic in their operations.

Media reports attribute the increasing gang activities to the rise in the cost of living, especially in urban centers. In addition to using firearms, the gangs in rural areas are reportedly also armed with pangas, spears, knives and sticks to pursue their objectives. Faced with such a challenge, one wonders why community members and law enforcement bodies are doing nothing despite the actual and potential dangers that the gangs pose to the communities. One also wonders whose interests the gangs are serving apart from their own. These concerns are echoed in the words of Taylor and Vecchio (2014) who, when writing about the development of youth gangs, ask, “But how did we get here? What does the “gang problem” actually encompass?” In the context of northern Uganda, further research is required to interrogate the implications of the youth gangs for peace, recovery and development in northern Uganda.

#### 10.4.4 Alcohol and drug abuse, and youth citizenship

In focus group discussions with the youth, they emphasised the threats alcohol and drug abuse pose to the community, especially threats relating to their health and role as leaders in private and public life. In all locations, respondents acknowledged alcohol and drug abuse as a serious matter adversely affecting the youth. Significantly, most respondents also agreed while the challenge is widely known, it is difficult address because alcohol and drugs are widely available, affordable, and allegedly used by politicians to nurture a weak generation incapable of challenging them and holding them to account.

Moreover, alcohol and drug abuse among young people is also linked to violence, insecurity, and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Recently, the Daily Nation newspaper of 26 June 2022 and 04 February 2021 reported the alarming rate at which school children are abusing alcohol and drugs. All the reports highlight the abuse of alcohol and drugs, and list marijuana, cocaine, shisha, heroin, *mairungi*, cigarettes, grey hair as the commonest types of drugs used by young people. The reports estimate 60% and 14% of Ugandan and refugee youths respectively to be abusing drugs. Leading to mental disorders among refugees in northern Uganda (Abet 2021; Taibot 2022; and Kafeero 2022). These reports highlight the fear among the youth themselves, their parents, and leaders that the problem is increasing in magnitude, and is likely to hinder youth from participating effectively in socio-political and economic life. In the West Nile region of greater northern Uganda, that hosts refugees from Congo and South Sudan, the



number of drug addicts is increasing, and some of them reportedly smoke snake skins. According to Hudu Hussein, the then Resident District Commissioner of Yumbe District, the increase in teenage pregnancies in the region could be attributed to drug abuse, emanating from neighbouring countries. In his words, “The district has a lot of drug addicts, people are smoking grey hair. I have received cases of people smoking snake skins. This is too much. I think these vices are being imported from South Sudan and Congo” (New Vision, 22 June 2022).

According to young people and key informants in the study, youths get involved in alcohol and drug abuse for different reasons, including especially doing so as a coping strategy, which indicates that the youths are struggling with their lives. While only a section of young people may be abusing alcohol and drugs, the community perceives the entire youth population as addicted to alcohol and drugs. However, to address the problem comprehensively and effectively, it is necessary to view it from the perspective of the young people themselves. Evidence suggests that although alcohol and drug abuse has immense potential for disrupting the lives and productivity of youth, it is also avoidable (Lubman et al., 2020). Writing about the effect of drug abuse on female youth in the conflict-ridden northeastern Nigeria, Adegoke (2021) states that female youth indulging in drug abuse were acting in defiance of good norms of their communities, and were facing mental, academic, relationship, and social difficulties which have made them a menace to themselves and their communities. Moreover, the future can only be bright when the majority of the youth population are sober, healthy and productive socioeconomically and politically. Therefore, further research is necessary to establish the effect of alcohol and drug abuse on youth citizenship in northern Uganda.

#### 10.4.5 COVID-19, climate shocks, and lack of durable solutions

It was also established that the experiences of conflict-affected communities suggest that the displacement-related challenges still exist and continue to haunt young people. These challenges manifest themselves in land disputes and the resultant violence and having two homes, one in the former place of displacement, and the other in the original home, and lack of livelihood opportunities. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown conditions aggravated the already fragile situation of young people, and exposed the unpreparedness of the population and existing systems for such shocks or challenges. These observations are consistent with related findings from elsewhere. For example, Daily Monitor (08 September 2022), highlighted key findings in a recent UN report, noting that COVID-19 has set back human development by five years, and caused desperation, frustration and worries about the future among the general population. In India, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic

disproportionately affected young people's lives, disrupting their health, education and economy. A report by Restless Development India (2020) highlighted mental health, lack of jobs and alternative livelihood opportunities as key issues for governments and development partners to focus on, to ensure recovery, and to avert the long-term impact of the pandemic. Similar findings were recorded in FGDs in Lira District where the pandemic exposed the weaknesses within the current peacebuilding frameworks, and for which a comprehensive strategy is required in order to foster youth participation, and bring about peace. Although research shows that poverty is a generalized problem for young people across Uganda, the situation in northern Uganda is worse. According to UBOS (2021), in the Lango sub-region, poverty rose from 16% to 23% in 2021, and the sub-region accounts for 5.4% of national poverty.

Field data reveals that climate shocks constitute an additional trigger of hunger, famine and the cycle of poverty in the region, mainly because they disrupt agriculture, the main source of livelihood. Therefore, as the respondents indicated, rain and dry seasons no longer occur when or as expected, and this inconsistency creates uncertainty, disrupts farming plans, and leads to drastically reduced production, poverty, hunger, sometimes famine, and always stress for all those who depend on rain-fed agriculture. One respondent blamed the meteorological department for further complicating the situation by broadcasting unreliable or inaccurate information. Another faulted the government for not providing proper guidance and support in times of climatic crisis. According to the World Meteorological Organization (2021), 2020 was the third warmest year ever recorded in Africa, and East Africa was hit hard. In the same report, experts predicted that the temperature would rise by 2.5 degrees Celsius by 2050, raising the spectre of extreme rainfall, but also increased evaporation, and intense drought, with all their attendant disasters, in the years to come. Therefore, climate change is likely to have even worse in the lives of young people now and in the years to come.

Faced with such challenges, and in the absence of sufficient return packages that empower communities to be self-reliant and resilient, former internally displaced persons struggle to meet their basic needs, reintegrate in their places of origin or settle elsewhere. Therefore, lack of durable solutions means continued marginalization of the youth, which, in turn, hinders recovery, peace and development in northern Uganda. The growing phenomenon of youth gangs, alcohol and drug abuse, and criminality may be negative coping strategies, and symptoms of failed reintegration. In addition, the community's perception of young people as idle, lazy and destructive could be a true reflection of the broader challenge of youth despondence in the face of the challenges they face. Principles 28-30 of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (OCHA 1998) recognise durable solutions as a right, and call upon

governments, humanitarian and development actors to support affected populations in their efforts to overcome the challenges they face, and to contribute to long-term peace and reconstruction of war-torn societies. This recommendation is relevant to northern Uganda where the youth need to be empowered to access livelihood and employment opportunities, where mechanisms for access to justice are ineffective and inaccessible to the youth, and where there are no effective strategies to overcome barriers to young people's efforts to build and sustain peace.

The youth experiences of conflict and violence are interwoven, and they directly affect their actions in most aspects of life, including their right to participate in the four elements required for them to build and sustain peace. For instance, land conflicts are responsible for violence and denial of access to land-based development, and they lead to some people viewing others as enemies. Similarly, gaps in service delivery deny young people the opportunity to meet their basic needs and improve their lives. In addition, young people's attempts to voice their concerns are often met with indifference, and their protests against poor service delivery are met with brutal force. In apparent response, the youth have increasingly formed gangs, and indulged in alcohol and drug abuse as a coping mechanism, but also to draw attention to their plight. However, these approaches to meeting their basic needs and to voicing their concerns have had far-reaching consequences for peace and security in the restive northern Uganda. Moreover, young people's vulnerability conspired with the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated containment measures, climate shocks, and lack of durable solutions to further exacerbate young people's vulnerability and exclusion. Therefore, given that peacebuilding interventions are more effective when they exploit young people's capability and agency to realize and sustain peacebuilding outcomes, it is not surprising that the young people of northern Uganda participate minimally in post-conflict peacebuilding.

Part of the challenge young people face today stems from their being a conflict cohort. The current young generation were born during or after the LRA conflict that led to spontaneous displacement of the Langi into IDP camps since 1986 when the LRA war began. Therefore, the current generation of young people were either raised in IDP camps or they witnessed the devastating effect of the LRA conflict. Historically, people who were born in 1986 and during the conflict were 36 years old, or younger, in 2022. Therefore, while some among them were slightly beyond the 35-year, official youth age limit, most of them were still officially youth. Moreover, some of them have children of their own, and they constitute a historical cohort of young adults who have experienced the conflict directly or who have to bring up their children amidst experiences of violence. This is in line with Oosterom's (2016a) observation that the current cohort of young people did not have an opportunity to learn the sense and practice of active citizenship

for two reasons. First, at the time of the conflict, interaction between government and ordinary citizens was marred by a military presence, mistrust and a feeling of revenge, such that key community concerns were not genuinely or adequately articulated or addressed. Second, the traditional cultural system, whose authority had been respected for ages, was weakened by the war during which traditional leaders and elders had to depend on hand-outs, to suffer the humiliation of lining up with children and women to get their food rations, and to be reduced to idlers.

The above challenges meant that young people were not brought up to appreciate the importance of having rights and obligations, of positively challenging the status quo, and of respecting societal norms and practices. Moreover, the Golden Institute (n.d) reveals that most (58.9%) of the children who were abducted by the LRA were aged 15 and below, implying that they lost out on many aspects, including childhood, education, the sense and practice of active and positive citizenship, in addition to undergoing traumatic experiences of war, diseases, and being child parents. The Golden Institute (n.d.) also reveals that slightly over half of former LRA child soldiers indicated having lost either one or both of their parents, and, therefore, had to face life as orphans some of whom had to take care of their siblings or their own children.

Generally, because of the experiences they have had to undergo, young people in northern Uganda are poor, and cannot afford many of the basic needs of life. Poverty and violence are pervasive in the region, and limited access to land limits the ability of most young people to meet their basic needs and to have a sense of belonging to a community they once called, or should call, home. Worse still, climate shocks, population pressure, and conflicts further aggravate the conditions of young people, and reduce their ability to effectively utilise land resources to improve their lives.

### 10.5 Youth Initiatives for Peace in Lira District

The action research enabled young people to mobilise themselves and effect change in their communities. In particular, the youth-driven approach to peacebuilding represents an alternative paradigm, and provides space for young people to lead processes that affect them, and to learn from those experiences. Following several discussions on conflict and violence, the students realized that they had a significant role to play in transforming destructive conflicts in their schools and communities. Moreover, the students interacting among themselves, and the bottom-up approach in which the student drew on their own experiences, allowed them to respond to conflicts relevant to them through the Peace and Human Rights Club.

Through the club, young people were able to innovate and undertake practical activities that enabled them to understand conflicts and violence, and to use alternatives to violence to live harmoniously at the school and in the community. The Peace and Human Rights Club also demonstrated that when provided with the right space and support, young people can mobilise themselves and their respective communities around a common cause, thus positively impacting individuals, schools, and communities levels. Analysis of the initiatives at each of the three levels, demonstrated that young people and the school community gained a better understanding of the causes of violence, and of the value of alternatives to violence.

These results confirm existing research showing that participatory action research is a promising strategy for engaging youth to generate evidence to serve the youth population (Suleiman et al., 2019). Therefore, when young people were engaged in participatory action research, they were able to draw on their experiences, and to respond to different issues relevant to them. The participatory approach showed that young people can be active agents for peace despite the negative perception and stereotypes of them in general, and structural violence, that often limit their autonomy and ability to act. The participatory action research has also demonstrated that, given a chance, young people can mobilise themselves, and change the negative perceptions of them.

Moreover, the participatory action research has confirmed Hart's (1992) observation that the strategy for youth to conceive and direct their activities is effective if conducted in consultation with, and supported by, adults. In addition, the participatory action research has demonstrated that it is crucial that youth-led interventions are implemented as part of a formal peacebuilding strategy that seeks to overcome barriers to young people's participation, and to exploit the potential of youth power to cause positive change and promote peaceful living.

The implementation of the Peace and Human Rights Club also illustrated the importance of youth-led initiatives in mobilising communities, and the benefits of a participatory and inclusive approach. However, it also demonstrated that, in practice, when young people undertake any development initiative, community members doubt the viability of the initiative until it begins to flourish. In the particular case of the Club, young people had to demonstrate commitment to act on their plan of action before the rest of the students and members of the community believed in their initiative, and joined them. Perhaps, this tendency to leave it to young people to first demonstrate their commitment partly explains why government stakeholders are reluctant to prioritise youth in some processes, including formal peace processes. Yet, the result show that, in order to maintain, expand, and sustain such youth-led

interventions, there is need for funding and linkages of the initiatives to the broader peacebuilding agenda and government initiatives for peace, recovery and development. Prioritising funding and support for youth-led initiatives reinforces young people's commitment to lead change, and to address structural violence. Moreover, the implementation of the Peace and Human Rights Club project suggests the need to work with young people throughout the project cycle in so that, as beneficiaries, they can contribute to, and benefit from, programmes meant for them; as partners this allows them to take part in critical decisions; and, as leaders, they can innovate and lead positive change in their respective communities.

Evaluating a peacebuilding project is not simple, and Lemon and Pinet (2018), highlight its complexity when they note that, to be successful, a project should consider working with a diversity of stakeholders in a participatory approach. The evaluation of activities of the Peace and Human Rights Club involved young people, their teachers, and their local community to ensure conflict-sensitive planning and implementation of a peacebuilding project in order to improve the outcome. The process that involved young people and their teachers working with the local community led to the generation of ideas that proved useful in promoting positive attitudes to young people among community members. As OECD (2013) observes, when evaluators ensure conflict sensitivity in the planning and evaluation of peacebuilding programmes, they help to garner the support required to understand the situation, mitigate risks, and maximize the impact of the programme. The evaluation of the Peace and Human Rights Club also confirmed Blum's (2011) observation that, for any peacebuilding evaluation to be effective, it has to ensure a process of evidence gathering, learning and accountability.

#### 10.6 Action Research as a Tool for Peacebuilding

This study adopted PAR as a tool to understand youth perspectives on conflict and violence, and their role in bringing about peace in the restive Lira District of Northern Uganda. While the exploratory component of the study helped to understand how young people perceived and related to peacebuilding processes and outcomes, the action research component enabled me and youth participants in the study to actively respond to the problem by planning and implementing a project to obviate, or at least reduce, the barriers to young people's ability to actively participate in peacebuilding by addressing the drivers and triggers of conflicts and violence in their communities. This set of actions was based on Lewin's (1946) argument that, for change to happen, a researcher needs to identify a research problem, recommend solutions to the problem, and work with the research community to plan and implement a project to address identified felt needs, and to bring about positive change. Moreover, Kaye and Harris (2018), through their research work with students of peacebuilding programme, have, over the years,

demonstrated that, as a tool for peacebuilding, action research has enabled individual and collective desire and commitment to generate solutions to the challenges of conflict and violence in communities.

The Lira case study demonstrated that when young people are provided with the space to individually and collectively investigate and find solutions to challenges of violence in their communities, they are more likely to appreciate their role in bringing about positive change. For example, through a participatory approach to the exploratory research questions, youth participants clarified their ideas of the different forms of violence in their communities and what they could do individually and collectively to address them. Moreover, in one FGD, some participants appreciated being part of the research, and having the opportunity to share their experiences. Indeed, some of them were motivated to consider undertaking similar studies to enhance their ability to contribute to peacebuilding. In the immediate term, the interaction motivated some participants to pledge to support one another, and this included teachers indicating a willingness to do more to promote peer-to-peer learning and support for youth-led interventions to build peace in their communities through the peace club. In other FGDs, participants shared their experiences of current peacebuilding interventions and what should be done differently to enhance youth participation in peacebuilding processes and outcomes.

The experiences of the study demonstrated that creating conversational space for dialogue generates the trust and confidence required for research participants to share, learn, and build the capacity and network necessary to bring about positive change in the lives of individuals and communities. Through that space, participants identified issues, and appreciated norms and practices, which promote and often normalise violence in their schools and communities. In doing so, youth participants reflected on issues in their own setting, shared relevant information, and implemented a project to build peace in their school and local community, and all this was achieved thanks to PAR. As Kaye (2017) observes, the value of action research lies in democratising and empowering participants to investigate, plan, implement and test an intervention. This view is echoed in Friedman and Black's (2016) observation of the domino effect of PAR, which helps to capture experiences of the research participants that are relevant to their lived realities and actions for peace.

The exploratory stage of the study considered different categories of youth in the study locations, and deliberately enabled as many youth categories as possible to interact on issues, and to generate peacebuilding strategies or proposals. **I worked in a context where cultural norms dictate that money be spent on mobilising research participants, which resulted in my having to spend much more money and time than I had anticipated.** The research context also included people's beliefs, norms, and practices

relating to violence and peace that the research needed to explore in order to help participants to appreciate the challenges they face, and address the root causes of those challenges. Therefore, the study was challenging in that I had to address both the research problem and the real-life problem on which the research problem was based. In a standard research, researchers address only the research problem, leaving the real-life problem to government or civil society actors. Nevertheless, young people participated as much in the exploratory research as they did in the Peace and Human Rights Club.

I opted to work with students in their project to build peace in their school and local community because it was convenient given that I was more likely to achieve my objectives, and realize my expected outcomes, if I worked with students than if I worked with out-of-school young people. In particular, students were easier to mobilise because they were already organised, mobilised and relatively enlightened. While they may not be representative of the entire youth population, they are a significant section of that population, and the section that we look to for positive change. The out-of-school category would have been more difficult and costly to mobilise, partly because they are scattered and largely unruly. Moreover, I feared that many of them would drop out of the research prematurely, and prevent me from accomplishing my task within the limited time I had. In addition, I interacted with street-based youth in Lira City, through participant observation, to understand their operations, and explore possibilities of working with them to build peace. However, it proved difficult to access them, and I had to meet them at night in a central location where they indulge in alcohol and other substances. While my interaction with them was exciting, it was highly risky, as they could easily misunderstand me, and hurt me: even the local police fear them.

Whereas I would have loved to do more than I did, it proved impractical given the nature of doctoral research, and financial and temporal limitations. While I did not involve out-of-school youth in any practical peacebuilding project, my interaction with them allowed us to speak about issues that concern them, the possibility of future work with them and of linkages to government and NGO programmes. For reasons that I have already stated above, future research should target out-of-school youth. Based on the exploratory research and intervention component, this study made some recommendations that NGOs active in the field of peacebuilding will hopefully find useful when implementing future projects with the youth in northern Uganda. Moreover, it is anticipated that NGOs will give time and resources to support learners, out-of-school youth, and their communities.

This study also demonstrated that young people live in a world of enormous contradiction and great possibilities. On the one hand, although young people believe that they are affected by violence, and



should play an active role in addressing it, most of them believe that they lack the space and support to harness their potential to build and sustain peace. As a result, some youth have resigned themselves to the negative community perceptions and stereotypes of youth, and to other barriers, and have done little to demand and claim the space to positively change their lives. Instead of building on the little progress they have made, and the lessons they have learnt over the decades, current peacebuilding efforts have largely disregarded previous contributions of youth to peace. Regarding youth as a problem has increasingly become acceptable, if not fashionable; and young people are not supported to actualise their potential to lead change in their communities. Yet communities expect that the same youth should cause positive change. Therefore, young people live in a paradoxical world: while the community expects young people to do more for their communities, the same community has a negative perception of young people, and does not support them to participate in peacebuilding.

On the other hand, through the needs-based, youth-led peacebuilding project, young people have demonstrated that they have great potential for mobilising fellow young people and communities to build sustainable peace. The action research project with the school demonstrated that, when provided with the technical and material capacity to deliver their programmes, young people can lead change in their communities. In particular, the space created by the Club enabled young people to interact with their teachers and their communities, and to create conditions for mutual learning and cooperation. This was a departure from most of the progressive peacebuilding programmes, which often focus on the older generation at the expense of intergenerational dialogue that ought to promote youth as future leaders. As the world aims to transform the youth bulge into future opportunities, and, more importantly, in a context where world challenges multiply and intensify, youth leadership is required more than ever before. As the UNSCR 2250 articulates, the current efforts for nonviolence should document knowledge systems, ideologies and practices in order to realise the real power of youth in peacebuilding. Action research helped us to move beyond the simplistic narrative and stereotypes of youth to reflect critically and constructively on actions for peaceful living, and generate solutions in the school and the local community. Through action research, we asked questions, reflected on actions, and ensured learning, and sharing aimed at informing practice. The study's contribution was to enable young people to actively participate beyond tokenistic participation, and to collectively interrogate new challenges emerging from peacebuilding efforts.

Given that the action research undertaken with school-going youth was limited by time and other resources, the study does not in any way claim to have fully understood or addressed the challenges and contradictions in peacebuilding discourses on youth participation in peacebuilding in northern Uganda. All the same, the study tried to explore ways to make bold contributions to youth engagement in peacebuilding. The study not only helped to generate empirically grounded evidence, it also enabled young people to identify, define or describe, and understand their problems, and think of new ways for youth to participate in peacebuilding in the restive northern Uganda, and Lira District in particular. This finding is aligned to the argument in a post-synodal apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis 'Christus Vivit' (Christ is alive) that recognises the multifaceted nature of challenges that young people face, and encourages us to work with young people in order to empower them to nurture vicarious imaginations: to imagine themselves to be in positions of others, to understand the capacity and dreams of other people, and to place the interest of other people in their dreams, so that they continue to act with the same imagination when they eventually become adults. Working with youth, and being in their position, helps us to appreciate their challenges and to focus on informed empathy and a sense of humility, and to create an environment of reciprocal learning, an atmosphere of hope instead of despair, and an environment based on the principle of collaboration and solidarity in order to inspire practical actions for peace.

## 10.7 Theoretical Inferences

Conflict management, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation are among the terms peacebuilding scholars use. Understanding these terms helps us to appreciate the linkages among them, and the application of each of them, with reference to conflicts, gaps in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

### 10.7.1 Conflict management

Conflict management entails efforts to contain and end conflicts, but it does not address the root causes of conflict and violence. Therefore, while conflict management may provide quick solutions to conflicts, it does not lead to sustainable peace. In this study, it was evident that the youth and their respective communities were keen to manage conflicts in a number of ways. For example, young people indicated that their experiences of their violent past provided them with a rationale and an opportunity to work for a better future, if only to avoid what they went through in the past. Relating to their different experiences of conflict and violence, some youth indicated that they had learned to transform violence into opportunities to manage conflicts and build peace. Asked how violence or conflicts are helping youth to improve their well-being and that of their communities, respondents noted that conflicts and violence

come with some opportunities that young people population need to tap into. Conflicts and violence are being addressed at different levels. In some cases, they are just being avoided or managed. For instance, some young people indicated that, to avoid conflicts with relatives and neighbours, they had purchased land, and settled, away from their original homes. These revelations point to the fact that at least some youth are aware of the negative consequences of conflicts and violence, have the capacity to avoid or manage some conflicts, and aspire to a peaceful life. However, their initiatives do not address the root causes of conflict and violence. By simply avoiding or just managing conflicts, they miss the opportunity to transform the situation into a peaceful one. That is why Cramer (2006) argues that because conflicts and violence occur for some reasons, they should never be ignored, and efforts should be made to address their root causes.

### 10.7.2 Conflict resolution

For its part, conflict resolution departs from the premise that measures to address conflicts entail developing the skills to dialogue, promote understanding and settle misunderstandings constructively. As Botes (2003) observes, the focus of conflict resolution is to change the characteristics of a conflict. The Lira case confirms that the nature and manifestation of conflicts and violence largely determines the manner in which they are resolved. Across the study sites, it was evident that experiences of conflicts and violence, and community narratives and discourses about them, influenced youth's responses to them. For instance, some young people reported that they adhered to community norms and practices, such as promoting dialogue, leading by example, and engaging in productive economic activities, in order to live peacefully with members of their families and communities, and support the well-being of their families.

Young people also reported having experienced conflict and violence. Specifically, some of the discussions focused on youth experiences of social and economic exclusion, discrimination, sexual and gender-based violence, verbal and physical abuse, and crime. In fact, conflicts, violence and power dynamics have contributed to the marginalization and exclusion of youth in decision-making processes relating to peace. Although young people were concerned, and feared, that conflicts and violence would jeopardize their future, they acknowledge being caught between violence and peace on account of some of them being perpetrators of violence while others were promoters of peace. Youth found themselves caught between challenging their own traditional and modern governance systems that are responsible for perpetuating violence and marginalising young people on one hand, and remaining silent and, therefore, appearing to endorse the systems, or resorting to negative coping strategies, on the other. When

young people do nothing to cause positive change, and yet resort to negative coping strategies, the impression is created that conflicts have been resolved, which simply normalises violence which current and future generations of young people may have to endure. The inability to analyse and address what is often seen as normal in society is a barrier to conflict resolution, and leads to some forms of violence being left unaddressed. That is perhaps why England (2012) is right when he argues that certain forms of violence can sometimes be normalised and justified, and unless we rise up to challenge policies, norms and practices that are used to promote violence, the dominant discourse will continue to be used to the detriment of the marginalised, including young people.

The tendency of regarding some forms of violence as normal manifested itself prominently during COVID-19 pandemic, and to the detriment of community members. As a result, many cases of violence were recorded at different levels of the community, but individuals, and sometimes the government, often regarded them as normal practice, meant to maintain order in the family and community. This normalisation and justification of violence persisted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic that triggered an increase in domestic and other forms of violence while at the same time exposing weaknesses in the efforts to cope with stress of any kind, in a relatively poor, conflict-ridden region. This was made possible by the limited space for dialogue and peaceful conciliation of group interests at the family, cultural, religious and government levels. According to Kasozi (1994), military response to dissenting views has increasingly been normalized, and is a reflection of a deliberate attempt to block legitimate concerns for social justice and conflict resolution in Uganda as a whole. Therefore, structural violence continues to engulf the region due to the failure of institutions and programmes to effectively engage youth in issues that affect them.

Critiques of conflict resolution focus on the fact that the affected communities may see the approach as a convenient way to contain and end conflicts by opting for quick fixes. This suggests that conflict resolution may be acceptable simply because it addresses the immediate concerns of creating space for dialogue and agreement on some contentious issues while hoping that the root causes of the conflict can be gradually addressed. This approach recognises conflict as part of human life, and the importance of continuously engaging to respond to emerging challenges. However, as Bradley (2018) observes, while conflict resolution often prioritises issues relevant to containing and ending conflicts at the negotiating table, it risks ignoring relationships, and change process and outcomes that are critical to tackling structural issues at the grassroots. This is in line with Bradley's (2018) argument that, in a bid to resolve conflicts, institutional and legal frameworks have been ineffective unless they are well-equipped,

effective in prioritising and addressing violence, inclusive of women and youth, and can deal with the consequences of addressing violence, such as stigmatisation. This argument is also consistent with conflict transformation and action research approaches, in which the affected communities should be central to our analysis and interventions, enabling them to make sense of their situations and the degree to which their understanding of their context-specific challenges may promote or inhibit different forms of violence, and to exercise their rights and fulfil their obligations through existing structures. Collective experiences have seemingly influenced the ways in which young people see their roles and relate to their contexts.

Ultimately, conflicts and structural violence limit and misrepresent the role of young people in building and sustaining peace in their communities. The barriers to youth participation in community matters make it appear as if the youth had completely failed in their quest for a peaceful living. However, the barriers limit the youth's choices of transformative action. Therefore, acknowledging the extent to which the barriers affect the youth's ability is useful in understanding and appreciating the suffering of young people due to their inaction or wrong responses to challenges. That is why the conflict transformation theory is crucial in understanding why young people make the choices they make, and the circumstances that inform those choices.

### 10.7.3 Conflict transformation

The conflict transformation theory helps us to understand that conflict and violence are embedded in structures that are difficult to change; but it also encourages us to consider how structures are constructed, and how norms and practices evolve over time. In addition, the theory helps us to consider avenues to address conflicts through understanding and building relationships that view conflicts as a part of everyday life that needs to be transformed into a better situation. The experiences of Lira District demonstrate that without appreciating the challenges of the youth, and their socioeconomic, political, and cultural contexts, society will not be prepared to accept and accommodate them; instead society will continue to promote negative narratives about, and stereotypes of, young people. Therefore, conflict transformation helps us to identify and understand the deeply entrenched barriers, within social, economic, and political structures, that lead to certain behaviour, and which need to be obviated. For example, while some community members have managed to rebuild their lives and sustain a degree of material wellbeing, the obstacles to peace remain largely unaddressed. These obstacles, which include violence, weak justice systems, climate shocks, and lack of capital, require structural and institutional interventions to promote peace and development.

In general, youth participation in peacebuilding is best understood through an analysis of context-specific youth experiences. The youth have gone through painful experiences, which continue to frame their narratives and lives. Therefore, one of the ways to promote youth participation in peacebuilding is to create space for their voices to be heard. The experience of a peacebuilding initiative, the Peace and Human Rights Club, shows that the youth were aware of the drivers and triggers of conflicts and violence in their communities, and once conversational space was created for them to voice their concerns, they demonstrated interest and courage to work on the challenges and transform their environment into a peaceable community. It was also evident from the project that youth would be effective in promoting peace if members of their communities, including parents, teachers, NGOs and government authorities, worked in partnership with them to support their transition into active citizenship. Therefore, young people should be engaged in deciding what they need and aspire to, and in designing projects or programmes to meet their needs and realize their aspirations, with the support of their communities.

Relationships are the driving force for conflict transformation, and experiences from the study reveal that the nature of the relationship between the youth and the community, in policy and programme formulation and implementation, is transactional, hierarchical and ineffective. As a result, power relations and the struggle for equal rights continue to moderate the way youth relate to their issues and contexts. As Hart (1992) observes, the participation of young people in issues that affect them entails overcoming barriers, such as discrimination and repression, and it necessitates young people working in solidarity with adults. That is why DFID (2010) applies the three-lens approach to youth participation in development to illustrate the efficacy of working with youth as beneficiaries, partners and leaders, arguing that this approach requires more time, resources and capacity-building in the short term, but comes with greater overall benefits and impact, in the long term.

Conflict transformation embodies broader concerns, including methods for change in relationships, systematic change and peacebuilding, and specific approaches to practice and training (Botes 2003). The conflict transformation theory is essential to a comprehensive understanding of conflicts and violence, and to the effectiveness of policies and programmes meant to build peace. The implementation of the Peace and Human Rights Club is an example of potential of youth participation to cause conflict transformation. It demonstrates the key ingredients of understanding conflict as a normal part of life, and the relationship involved in creating pathways to address conflicts, and to continuously work to improve interpersonal relationships. More interestingly is the momentum of youth engagement and leadership leads to the creation of the space necessary to mobilise human and other resources, and voice and address

issues that affect young people and their communities. If the relationship between young people and adults is to lead to long-term benefits for the school community, there has to be a common understanding of the threats that young people and their communities face, and of the collective responsibility to obviate those threats. To this end, teachers, members of the community and their leaders play an active role in supporting youth initiatives to create the space needed to openly discuss issues that matter.

#### 10.7.4 Theory of change

The theory of change draws our attention to the ways in which activities and their outcomes can be traced, helping us to understand the connection between what we planned and what we achieved. The theory of change acts as a guide to our intentions and their outcome. In our study, it guided us to focus on the objective of empowering young people, through exploratory research, training and material support, to enable them, to identify, and respond to, conflict and violence in their school and local community. Through the Peace and Human Rights Club, young people conceived, designed and implemented initiatives that were useful for engagement with fellow students, teachers and the local community, and for targeted actions to solve specific forms of conflict and violence.

The theory of change also demonstrated that there was a connection between the training and the increase in knowledge among young people; and the results of increased knowledge were evident in the actionable initiatives generated by the young people. These included engagement at the school and community levels. At the school level, debates, weekly meetings, games and sports, guidance and counselling, tree planting, and dialogues helped to rally young people around a common cause. Moreover, community engagement helped the general public to appreciate the contribution of young people, thereby creating a favourable attitude and environment for effective youth participation in community affairs. While some of the project's short- and medium-term outcomes, especially those relating to increase in knowledge, skills, and the ability to identify and respond to conflict and violence, were within the means of young people to implement, others were not.

Therefore, where and when there were limitations, the project did not succeed in implementing activities smoothly. For example, while it was envisaged that changes in policies and practice were necessary to improve the broader operating environment for youth participation, the resources, including time, did not allow that aspect of the project to progress as planned. Although the long-term objective is yet to be achieved, the theory of change helped to show that the set of activities undertaken contributed to the short-term objectives, and to highlight what remains to be achieved. In addition, reference to the theory

of change also showed that a longer-time engagement and commitment of resources to rectify bridge knowledge gaps, limited material capacity, and negative community perceptions and stereotypes of young people were required for the ultimate project goal to be achieved.

The study has demonstrated that, for the barriers to youth participation to be addressed, conflicts and structural violence have to be understood and factored in interventions to foster youth participation, from the conflict transformation lens. Moreover, the Lira case showed that the expected outcome of a project can only be achieved if the project activities are adapted to the project context, and implemented as part of the broader peacebuilding agenda, backed by adequate resources. Well-planned activities and shared goals create possibilities for action, and encourage a network of actors to intervene. The example of the Lira case study is an invitation to reconsider initiatives for the long-term benefits of conflict-affected communities, prioritising youth as agents of change, and focusing on their transition to active citizenship.

The Lira case showed further that, as theorised by Lederach (1995), peacebuilding interventions have multiple layers of structures and stakeholders to work with in order to transform conflicts. In particular, the Lira case helps us to appreciate the importance of analysis of conflicts and actors, and of the value of building a network of relationships that help to collaboratively change destructive conflicts into constructive relationships. The case helps us to understand that barriers to effective youth participation have increasingly marginalised and excluded the youth from playing key roles in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding. Therefore, this study showed that unless we appreciate the underlying challenges of, and structures for, youth engagement, initiatives to foster youth participation are likely to fail. That is why, the three concepts, conflict management, resolution and transformation, are important because they relate to the different levels of analysis through which the theory of change can be used to build its activities in order to progressively show the linkages among the three concepts, and how a set of activities and objectives can be sequenced to address the structural issues that moderate youth participation in socioeconomic and political life.

### 10.8 Concluding Remarks

Discussions on youth participation in peacebuilding established that, generally, the youth appreciate the impact of conflict and violence on their lives, and the importance of the role they can play to transform northern Uganda into a peaceful and prosperous society. They realize that they have an important role to play in the sustenance and expansion of peacebuilding efforts in the region. The discussions also revealed



that the aspirations of young people can be achieved through peacebuilding partnerships of youth and adults, in which young people are regarded as beneficiaries, partners and leaders.

However, while the youth think that they can contribute positively to peacebuilding, conflicts and violence in their communities undermine their peacebuilding ability. Worse still, many young people have themselves accepted the community's negative perception and stereotypes of them, become despondent, and resorted to negative coping strategies. Moreover, the institutions that should provide space for youth to engage with issues affecting them are difficult to access, and they discourage youth from voicing their concerns. Therefore, unless there is space for engagement, and that space is open to ideas, and can act on them, the youth will remain apathetic to policies, structures, and programmes, including those that target them specifically.

The Lira case study demonstrates that the UNSCR 2250 call on nations to document contributions on youth in peace and security provides an opportunity for evidence from the grassroots to inform the way young people should influence peacebuilding processes and outcomes. The Lira case study shows that government, private sector and NGO investments in peacebuilding have not fostered effective youth participation in peacebuilding. Moreover, young people's initiatives for peace have not resulted into a mobilised, empowered and critical mass of young people, prepared to lead change in their respective communities.

On the contrary, evidence suggests that some of the positive contributions by young people are often overshadowed by the negative perceptions and stereotypes of them promoted by their communities, and that young people themselves aggravate the situation by accepting those perceptions and stereotypes, resigning themselves to the situation, adopting negative coping strategies, and doing nothing positive to improve their lot. Similarly, changes over time have led to a shift in attitudes, values and operations, especially among young people, that have led to a generational divide between young people and the older generation, which is a source of perceived and actual conflicts between young people and the older generation. Moreover, the decades of armed conflict led to the evolution of a conflict youth cohort whose experiences are marred by multiple vulnerabilities, violence and a warped sense of citizenship.

Despite all the peacebuilding investments, the findings suggest that programmes have not been able to overcome the existing challenges to youth participation, or to foster youth participation. Most of the efforts to address conflicts and violence are centred on conflict management and resolution, with no concrete plans and actions to transform conflicts by addressing the root causes of the conflicts and the challenges to youth participation. Neither are there any concrete plans or actions to build relationships

and networks to cause positive change. Adopting the conflict transformation approach is key to understanding conflicts, and galvanising support for recovery, peace and development in northern Uganda.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 11.1 Conclusions

#### 11.1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the findings, the study's contribution to knowledge, the implications of the findings for policy and practice, and suggestions for future research.

Relevant literature reveals that earlier research and peacebuilding interventions have focused on young people from the perspective of participants in, and witnesses and victims of, armed conflicts. However, there is still very little information on the role of young people in building more peaceful, democratic and inclusive societies, especially in northern Uganda. Seeking to bridge this knowledge gap, this study sought to establish the ways in which: youth perceive, and relate to, peacebuilding processes and outcomes, and to establish whether a needs-based, youth-led peacebuilding project could contribute to sustainable peace in northern Uganda. To achieve these overarching aims, the study pursued four specific research objectives, that is, to:

1. Explore youth perceptions of the nature and value of their participation in peacebuilding initiatives;
2. Identify the constraints on youth participation in peacebuilding in northern Uganda;
3. Develop and implement a needs-based, youth-led peacebuilding project through participatory action research; and
4. Evaluate the needs-based, youth-led peacebuilding project.

Two theories: conflict transformation; and the theory of change were used to reflect on the role of youth in peacebuilding. While the conflict transformation theory was used to understand how structures and processes moderate youth engagement and youth narratives of peace, the theory of change helped to predict change, based on a set of activities and anticipated outcomes of a peacebuilding project.

The methodology used was essentially qualitative, and it consisted of interviews, focus group discussions, and observation, to facilitate an in-depth analysis of youth participation in post-conflict peacebuilding in northern Uganda. A range of secondary literature was reviewed in relation to the study objectives. The findings are presented based on the four research objectives of the study. The first and second objectives are exploratory, and consider youth perceptions of, and constraints on, their participation in peacebuilding while the third and fourth objectives relate to the action component of the research. The exploratory research aimed to explore voices of young people in relation to their perception

of their role in peacebuilding, and the constraints thereon. That was in keeping with the argument that for youth to play a leading role in issues that affect them, the youth themselves need to be part of the process. Therefore, the two exploratory questions generated data in order to inform and justify a context-specific peacebuilding action, planned and implemented with the youth. The aim of the action research was to support the development of a peacebuilding project, initiated and implemented with the youth, in order to identify lessons learnt and areas for improvement, for effective youth engagement in peacebuilding. The planning and implementation is covered under the third objective, while evaluation of the peacebuilding project is covered by the fourth objective.

#### 11.1.2 Summary of the findings

Overall, it was established that the importance of the role that young people can play in peacebuilding is yet to be fully understood and appreciated, and, as a result, young people are yet to be adequately supported to build peace, and there is a paucity of actively participatory programmes promoting youth in peacebuilding in northern Uganda. It was further established that there are policy and practice gaps which hinder successful implementation of peacebuilding projects, learning and sharing, for the benefit of youth at the grassroots. In addition, it was established that the experiences of youth in peacebuilding are minimally understood, and the right to participation in building and sustaining peace is hardly considered, let alone prioritised, in peacebuilding interventions. In addition, it was established that young people lack the capacity they need to develop the sense and practice of active citizenship. When the youth exercise their right to participation, the choices they make, and the outcomes of their choices, do not translate into positive change for peaceful living, and barely do the choices young people make represent the youth category as a whole. The findings according to the specific objectives of the study are summarized below.

##### *11.1.2.1 Youth perceptions of the nature and value of their participation in peacebuilding initiatives*

The findings highlighted the circumstances under which the youth perceive the nature and value of their participation. Young people perceive their contribution to peacebuilding in a positive sense, and the findings reveal that half of the young people in the study had participated in peacebuilding interventions through dispute-resolution, undergoing cleansing rituals, protecting family land and other property, forming youth groups to access government programmes, creating awareness of human rights, and by participating in local and national political elections. Moreover, the half who participated in peacebuilding interventions provided three reasons for the value they attach to their participation: First, their being victims of conflicts and violence; second, their conviction that a peaceful future of their

communities depended on their participation; and finally, their belief that participation was essential to their self-discovery and improved self-esteem.

#### *11.1.2.2 Constraints on youth participation in peacebuilding*

Despite young people's positive perception of their role in peacebuilding, the majority of the youth believe that they lack the space and support to harness their potential to build and sustain peace. As a result, their involvement is too limited to create a critical mass of empowered youth who are ready to claim their right to participation as a prerequisite to other rights. Conflict and violence, and the community's negative perception and stereotypes of the youth adversely impact young people's own perception of their roles in peacebuilding, leading many of them to resign themselves to the status quo, and to resort to negative coping strategies. Programmes, such as the Youth Livelihood Fund, though intended to empower young people, are implemented in such a way that they further marginalize some categories of young people. The formation of youth gangs, and alcohol and drug abuse, as coping strategies to meet the basic needs and respond to marginalization respectively, are arguably the result of non-responsive programmes for youth in peacebuilding.

Young people perceive conflicts and structural violence as the main constraints on their participation in peacebuilding, accounting for their inability to effectively contribute to peace in their respective communities. While conflicts and violence exist in the form of social and cultural norms that limit the potential of young people to participate in peacebuilding, structural violence occurs in the form of inadequate policy platforms and programmes for youth to voice their concerns and aspirations. Moreover, young people have limited capacity to overcome barriers to their participation in peacebuilding, the space for them to voice their concerns is limited, community members have negative perceptions and stereotypes of them, and they have limited capacity to respond to conflicts and violence. Taken together, these barriers help to explain the low youth participation in peacebuilding. Therefore, despite significant investment by government and NGOs, many young people fail to translate programmes and policies into the long-term benefits for themselves and their communities.

#### *12.1.1.3 A needs-based, youth-led peacebuilding project through participatory action research*

The third objective involved implementation of activities by members of the Peace and Human Rights Club to respond to, prevent, and transform, conflicts. The planned actions were in response to forms of conflict among students, between students and teachers, and between students and the local community. For example, while students engaged in bullying, sexual harassment, theft, physical fights, substance abuse, and strikes, teachers dominated the use of corporal punishment as an illegal form of disciplinary

action in response to real or perceived student misconduct. Moreover, generalized use of force by caning, or suspending students in response to indiscipline, dissenting views or protests, was cited as a source of conflict, violence and restlessness among learners in the school. It was also noted that some students had no anger-management skills, and resorted to violence, or translated their anger into destructive activities.

At the community level, it was noted that students freely indulge in alcohol and drugs, engaged in sexual relationships with community members, and in other inappropriate acts, which generated animosity, lack of respect for, and negative community perceptions of, young people. Therefore, complacency flourished, and relations between the school, and the rest of the community degenerated, both to the detriment of the entire learning environment. Generally, participants noted that violence had permeated community structures, from the family to schools and the general community, creating a toxic environment that had hindered efforts to initiate and sustain dialogue between students and teachers, and between the school and the local community. Members of the Peace and Human Rights Club felt that the issues cited above were crucial to their well-being and that any efforts to address those concerns would entail capacity building, including training, and creation of platforms for engagement at the school and community levels.

In doing so, the project provided training to the members of the club who later translated the knowledge and skills acquired into specific activities in response to the conflicts and violence experienced at the school and community levels. For instance, the programme enhanced space for engagement, raised awareness and vigilance against destructive conflicts, and implemented activities, including tree planting, hygiene and sanitation campaigns. The activities were tailored to conflictual issues among students, between students and teachers, and between students and the local community. Essentially, the intervention sought to promote understanding, peaceful resolution of conflicts and coexistence.

#### *12.1.1.4 Evaluation of the needs-based, youth-led peacebuilding project*

Finally, regarding the fourth objective of the study (evaluation of the peacebuilding project), the project succeeded in attaining its overall objective of enhancing the capacity of young people to respond to, prevent, and transform conflicts. Young people translated into actions the knowledge and skills gained from the training on peace education, including awareness raising (through debates, poems, meetings), dialogue with teachers, community engagement on environmental conservation, hygiene and sanitation among other activities. The actions led to improved interactions among students, with their teachers and with the local community. In particular, improved relations between male and female students, and

between students and members of teaching staff on one hand, and the community on the other, were recorded as some of the benefits of initiating a platform for engagement. In addition, the initiative culminated into environmental conservation activities in which students planted trees, and worked with community members to raise awareness about environmental sustainability. The school also indicated having registered some improvement in academic performance as well as reduced incidents of destructive conflicts and violence at the school. Moreover, implementation of the project led to better appreciation of youth-led initiatives in mobilizing young people and communities to pursue noble causes. However, the evaluation concluded that youth-led initiatives would be more effective if young people were supported to innovate or initiate, lead project processes, and sustain project outcomes.

### 11.1.3 Contribution to knowledge

It is hoped and expected that this study will contribute to peacebuilding scholarship in two ways. First, the study explores the potential, and demonstrates the practice, of translating the global recognition of the contribution of youth to peacebuilding into practical and context-specific peacebuilding interventions. Our findings suggest that the dominant peace narrative is promoted by established elites, and is not representative of the reality of young people at the grassroots. Despite all the projects and programmes for recovery, peace and development, implemented since the end of the LRA war in 2007 over 15 years ago, the youth of northern Uganda are not yet key actors in decisions, structures, and programmes for rebuilding their communities. While the PRDP envisages programmes to foster active youth participation, the peace process and subsequent agreement were confined to those who were still actively involved in the conflict, and ignored underlying drivers and triggers of the conflict, the legacy of conflict and violence, and the involvement of young people, with its attendant continual engagement, accountability, and ownership.

As such, the study shows that the end of armed conflict is often followed by other forms of violence that can be manipulated to normalise and sustain violence in post-conflict settings. While formal peace processes play a significant role in understanding the broader challenges and opportunities for peace, and the role of youth in peacebuilding, formal structures limit the critical participation of young people in peacebuilding, especially at the local level. The PRDP was developed as a framework for the peace, recovery and development of northern Uganda, and recognises the significance of youth participation in peacebuilding, and the existence of barriers that need to be overcome for youth to participate actively. However, the initiative in the PRDP framework was not formulated in an inclusive way to allow for youth participation. Worse still, as new and localised challenges continue to emerge, young people

are excluded from policy discussions, lack agency, and are unable to engage effectively with transitional opportunities for recovery, peace and development. The barriers to youth participation in peacebuilding in northern Uganda demonstrate that while it is important to involve youth in peace negotiations, peacebuilding processes need to recognize and take into account the stratified nature of informal peace processes at the cultural, religious, social, household, and workplace levels. If any of these strata is ignored in the peacebuilding process, long-term prospects for peace are likely to be grim.

In addition, the involvement of youth in peace negotiations focuses on armed conflicts, and assumes that the key terms of the agreement will address context-specific challenges of youth at the grassroots. The formal peace processes focus on warring parties at the negotiation table while ignoring structural issues, and the interests of aggrieved parties at the local level where mobilisation for violence usually takes place. As a result, the agreements arrived at in the formal peace agreements often overlook the challenges and opportunities for peacebuilding at the local level. Moreover, formal peace negotiations tend to involve youth representatives who are often elitist, and whose experiences, views, and aspirations are not truly representative of those of ordinary youth, who are often poor, marginalized, and in many ways vulnerable. Therefore, even when youth may appear to be represented at peace negotiations, the vast majority of them, those that actually matter, are actually not represented. This poses two questions: how is the contribution of young people to peacebuilding processes envisaged, and how is it supposed to lead to action at the grassroots? How might lessons from the different parts of the world inform UNSCR 2250 on youth, security and development?

Finally, by using action research to draw upon direct voices of youth in exploring their perspectives of violence to generate evidence to inform policy and action, to build peace for young people and their communities, the study contributes to methodological knowledge. In particular, a youth-focused approach to peacebuilding represents an alternative paradigm, and provides space for youth to lead processes that affect them, and to learn from those practices. This finding points to the need to build youth capability and agency in order to amplify and sustain the impact of youth-led peacebuilding.

#### 11.1.4 Implications for practice and policy

In keeping with the participatory nature of UNSCR 2250, this study reflected on the implications for practice and policy. These implications relate to issues to do with individuals, groups, and communities, conceived as part of the broader social, economic, and political structures that moderate youth actions. While the practical implications relate to constraints on the implementation of policies and programmes



meant to foster youth participation, the policy implications relate to the different policy provisions that guide actions for young people at different levels.

#### *11.1.4.1 Implications for practice*

Many youth are unable to access a range of peacebuilding interventions because of unfair and restrictive procedures, and the politicisation of government and NGO programmes. As a result, some deserving youth and communities are unable to access government and NGO programmes, and do not participate in processes that are necessary to awaken them to the realities of their challenges, and the solutions to those challenges. This situation is further complicated by the inability of the youth and communities to meet the conditions set for accessing development funds. Most of these conditions require that an applicant is a member of a formally registered group, with a bank account, a requirement many young people, especially rural ones, do not meet. Faced with such challenges, the youth fail to access development funds. That is why sensitization, group formation and relevant training should be among the first activities of intervening agencies, to empower young people to access funds for their projects.

Unfortunately, fairly often, when young people form groups for the sole purpose of accessing funds, such groups are dissolved as soon as the funds are accessed and shared out among the members. Therefore, intervening agencies need to view groups not simply as channels of development funds, but as tools of development, that should be used to mobilize and equip young people with the attitudes, knowledge, and skills they need to conceive and implement development ideas, and to demand for better services from their leaders, while sustaining their groups and their activities beyond any given external intervention. In addition, while some youth groups may be category-specific, such as those for the physically challenged, generally young people's development groups should be viewed as an opportunity for inclusion of different categories of youth.

However, group-based interventions should not be the only means for youth to access funds; rather, there should be other approaches that consider individual vulnerabilities, and opportunities to reduce the level of vulnerability, and to build existing individual, youth capacity. Such approaches should aim at building and sustaining a critical mass of youth involved in some form of effort to improve their lives and those of their communities. Currently, most interventions target vulnerable youth categories, and overlook a youth programme belonging to an individual that are causing positive change and that need support to do more.

#### *11.1.4.2 Implications for policy*

There are two issues: financial management of youth livelihood funds, and youth diversity, that have possible policy implications.

The study has shown that lack of capital, a deteriorating physical environment, and an unfavourable market system are major hindrances to youth entrepreneurship and general development for peaceful living. For instance, lack of capital makes it difficult or impossible for young people to access modern agricultural tools, high-quality seeds, and other inputs, and to afford appropriate post-harvest handling facilities. Similarly, rainfall variability and unpredictability, due to climate change, makes farming, the main economic activity, economically hazardous, often unprofitable, and unattractive. Worse still, the COVID-19 pandemic made life even more difficult for young people, on account of its associated lockdown conditions. Therefore, despite investments in young people, through the Youth Livelihood Fund and other humanitarian and development funds, youth engagement in profitable ventures remains low. Actually many young people are too preoccupied with physical survival to even think about citizen engagement or entrepreneurship. Youth who are supposed to benefit from such programmes often do not, mainly because they do not qualify or they are not connected to the right people.

The study also established that for young people who manage to overcome the barriers to participation, there is reportedly limited follow-up, supervision and mentorship by intervening agencies. Moreover, many interventions are marred by corruption in the form of implementers requiring bribes from potential and actual beneficiaries in exchange for participation or for receiving project funds, and diversion of funds by project implementers.

Equally worrisome is the fact that the Youth Livelihood Fund encourages young people to form groups in order to access funds or support, which, somehow, leads young people to focus on the money, and ignore its purpose, and to regard the fund as a government imposition. And yet, group formation has the potential to mobilise youth to conceive productive ventures, access credit, save money, and earn significant incomes. However, youth groups may not be able to achieve these objectives unless interventions in their favour include ongoing training and mentorship, cash transfers, and better linkage to market systems. Therefore, youth need to first be sensitized and trained so that they can voluntarily or anticipatorily identify the development activity they wish to undertake. This process also needs to consider boosting or expanding existing initiatives of progressive youth to enable them to employ other young people. Therefore, the policy that favours group formation should be interpreted in the context of the challenges that young people face, and, therefore, address barriers to sustainable group formation,

while recognising that some individuals can work outside of a group more proactively to initiate, innovate and implement projects that can potentially benefit more young people and members of their respective communities.

Yet another barrier to youth participation is the requirement by banks or agents that young people who wish to benefit from a given youth fund, administered through a bank, provide a particular amount of money funds in order to access the fund, which translates into a disincentive to many youth. To ensure that youth funds are accessible, and put to their intended use, direct cash transfers should be channelled to successful youth groups and individuals, and the transfers should be followed up to ascertain that they have been received by the right groups or individuals.

Another policy implication relates to youth diversity. Young people are not a homogenous entity, and each youth category needs to be recognized, and approached in a category-specific way. Unfortunately, though, the youth in the street, and those regarded as antisocial, are often omitted from youth programmes because they are seen as rejects and, therefore, incapable of utilising the funds beneficially. Therefore, such categories of youth need to be supported and empowered to form groups, and access, and benefit from, youth development programmes.

In addition, there is a category of youth, especially in rural areas, who are incapable of forming groups because they lack the capacity to form and operate a modern type of group that is reliant on a written constitution, a bank account and often bureaucratic and corrupted administrative procedures, and yet the sole motivation for group formation is to access government funds. Such groups should be formed on the basis of the traditional and natural setting of the community, building on their practices to enhance their capacity to innovate and scale up workable initiatives for peace and development. Then there are youth with disability, and female youths who are challenged by norms and practices that make it difficult for them to access prerequisite resources, including land, in order to engage in profitable ventures. Therefore, policy makers should consider working with both existing youth groups and individuals who have demonstrated ability to manage and sustain an initiative. Such individuals can inspire other young people and stimulate social cohesion. Similarly, policy makers need to consider scaling up the spatial overage of groups, funding, and group activities, to foster young people's participation in societal affairs.

By limiting the scope of trade and the nature of engagement to group formation, school-going youth who belong to groups numerically dominated by out-of-school youths find it difficult to contribute effectively, manage, and concentrate on, business while they are in school. Indeed, some of the youth group members who benefited from the livelihood programme already cited noted that it was convenient to share the

money among themselves because most members had their own individual fears, interests, priorities, and management styles.

#### 11.1.5 Suggestions for future research

The findings of this study reveal the nature and value of youth participation, and the constraints on youth participation in peacebuilding at the grassroots in Lira District of the Lango sub-region, and point to important areas for further research with the youth.

First, studying youth participation in peacebuilding in other contexts and locations in northern Uganda and beyond would help to ascertain the external validity of the findings based on the Lira District case study. In addition, a special focus on a different category of youth, such as youth leaders (youth in leadership), would provide insights into the intersections and complementarities of the contribution of different categories of youth to peacebuilding.

Second, it would be enlightening to draw on experiences from similar contexts to explore the role of regional leadership in fostering youth participation in peacebuilding. The case of Lira District suggests that grassroots youths hardly access or translate peacebuilding programmes and policies into long-term benefits for their communities despite significant investment by government and NGOs in northern Uganda. Could local leadership play a role in advocacy and responsive policies and programmes for youth participation? Could regional leadership have a special role to play in the way interventions are prioritised, channelled and implemented with youth in the districts of northern Uganda?

Third, it would be academically interesting to build on the findings of this study to further interrogate drivers and triggers of conflict in the Lango sub-region, especially in border districts, and their implications for active youth citizenship and intra- and cross-border peacebuilding in Uganda.

Fourthly, further research should be conducted to establish the effect of alcohol and drug abuse on youth citizenship in northern Uganda.

Fifth, future research could build on the finding of this study to examine the spontaneous evolution of youth gangs in the different districts of northern Uganda. This seemingly systematically organised gang phenomenon needs to be studied to identify and explain its implications for peace, security, and positive youth citizenship in the region.

Sixth, further researcher could examine the impact, both positive and negative, of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives and activities of young people, focusing on their participation in peacebuilding. More data is required to better understand adaptation to new ways of working, changing needs and aspirations, and the levels of investment required to boost youth capacity for recovery and reconstruction of northern Uganda and elsewhere.

Seventh, future research could map and analyse different youth-led initiatives for peacebuilding in relation to conflict transformation and other theories in order to provide insights into the effectiveness of youth-led initiatives, and conditions for positive peacebuilding outcomes.

Eighth, further research could build on the findings on peace clubs in schools and out-of-school to establish their effectiveness as vehicles of youth action to promote human integrity, social justice and democracy at the school and community levels.

Ninth, further research should focus on lessons learnt about the Youth Livelihood Fund and its mode of implementation to empower youth groups in Uganda, and compare the findings with studies from the rest of Africa to provide robust evidence on youth group formation and the impact of youth groups on peacebuilding.

Finally, further research could analyse the use of social media and mobile technology advances in overcoming barriers to young people's participation in peacebuilding. Social media (both on and offline) provides a platform for young people to exchange information, raise awareness on rights and obligations, and promote incentives for peace. Conversely, youth engagement, through social media and mobile technology, without addressing barriers to equitable access to digital technology, risks excluding the most marginalised youth in northern Uganda and elsewhere. Therefore, this calls for further analysis to understand and address the digital divide for engagement of young people as a right to participation.

### 11.2 Recommendations for Future Work with Youth

Young people's right to participation is a basic human right and a prerequisite to the realisation and enjoyment of other rights, including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The UNSCR 2250 recognises the importance of fostering youth participation in peacebuilding in the search for peace

and security. However, fifteen years from the end of active armed conflict between the Government of and the LRA, northern Uganda continues to grapple with overlapping challenges, including conflict and violence, discrimination, unemployment, and limited access to economic opportunities for youth. Despite efforts by the Government, humanitarian and development actors, most youths have not accessed transitional opportunities, and most of them (youth) are excluded from post-conflict, peacebuilding decisions and structures.

Our findings also reveal that some measures have been taken by the government, NGOs and communities to address the constraints to effective youth participation in northern Uganda. While the peacebuilding framework for northern Uganda acknowledges young people as central players in the peacebuilding, recovery and development of northern Uganda, it has no guidelines on youth engagement in peacebuilding. Moreover, the majority of youth-focused programmes are open to the entire country, and those that are focused on northern Uganda are neither implemented in consideration of context-specific challenges of conflict-affected youth nor empowering young people to lead peacebuilding processes and outcomes. The findings suggest, however, that a more comprehensive and inclusive approach is required. Greater attention should be paid to the nature and level of youth engagement, structural violence, and violence against the youth and their communities. Unless those constraints are addressed, the youth's ability to meet their basic needs, absorb shocks, and claim and enjoy socioeconomic and cultural rights will be compromised. To ensure that young people meet their basic needs, and claim and enjoy their socioeconomic and cultural rights, and participate actively in peacebuilding, the respondents proposed that key actors, including the government, civil society organizations, and financial institutions and other intervening agencies should:

- a) Ensure that any policy and programmes for youth engagement in peacebuilding is based on rigorous research and consultation with youth, and on a complete understanding of young people's perspectives of problems in context-specific settings;
- b) Invest in the UNSCR 2250 as a priority to ensure that youths play an active role in the promotion of peace and security in northern Uganda and elsewhere;
- c) Invest in peacebuilding programmes that include working with other ethnic groups in the neighbouring districts of non-Lango Sub-region with focus on human rights, and peace education to promote social inclusion and cohesion, and avoid inter-group discord by providing a conversational space for different communities to dialogue on issues that affect them, instead of resorting to othering and violence as a means to settle their differences;

- d) Ensure that investments in peacebuilding programmes are implemented in partnership with academia in order to encourage interaction between research and practice in the field. Such interactions can generate findings that can inform interventions, including raising awareness and advocacy. In doing so, research should be tailored to support a community of practice through meetings to facilitate exchange of best practices and development of context-specific guidelines to foster youth participation;
- e) Invest in livelihood opportunities and training programmes for young people, and link those opportunities and programmes to the market systems;
- f) Reduce or remove the financial barriers to healthcare and education, and make infrastructure and services fully accessible and inclusive so that marginalised youth and their communities are not left behind;
- g) Provide young people with adequate information on initiatives undertaken by other youth to inspire confidence and learn from them. Therefore, intervening agencies need to ensure conversations around projects for youth are prioritised and adequately funded to achieve peacebuilding objectives. This also entails training and provision of skills to youth innovators; and
- h) Raise awareness of the importance of mainstreaming youth issues with: (i) the youth and development practitioners, to share best practices and lessons learned; (ii) local authorities, to encourage integration of youth issues in national development and peacebuilding prioritisation processes and coordination with government institutions and NGO agencies responsible for the youth; and (iii) Donors, to advocate for funding decisions to consider projects which mainstream youth, promote social accountability in funding for the youth development, and to promote longer-term funding cycles which enable better measurement of the impact of the contribution of young people to peace.

### 11.3 Concluding Remarks

This study on youth participation in peacebuilding explored the translation of the recent recognition of the role of youth in peacebuilding into policy and practice at the grassroots. The experience from the Lira case study demonstrates that more work is required to link efforts to foster youth participation to the context-specific challenges that the youth experience on a day-to-day basis. The experiences of youth, from the perspective of conflict and structural violence, demonstrate that the factors affecting young people's participation in peacebuilding are multifaceted and deeply rooted in the ambient socioeconomic

and political structures. On the basis of the challenges faced by young people and peacebuilding efforts, Lira District is perilously poised between war and peace. Peace because of the numerical dominance and potential of young people in the region; and war on account of the gravity of the issues involved in post-conflict peacebuilding. Why, one might ask.

If peacebuilding succeeds, peace and development may be realized, but if it fails, there may be a relapse into armed conflict. The study revealed that about 15 years after the end of active armed conflict in northern Uganda, there is still need for humanitarian interventions to offset the effects of the war. Therefore, communities are not only preoccupied with violence, they are also unable to transition to peace and development. It was apparent to the author that peacebuilding interventions were focused on humanitarian needs, and ignoring the drivers of violent conflict as well as community and institutional capacities for sustainable peace and development. The youth who are, and should be, the movers and shakers of the future are neither empowered nor driving the transition to peaceful living. The majority of youth continue to be excluded from structures and decision-making processes for peacebuilding; and many others have been compelled to resort to negative coping strategies, including violence to resolve conflicts. Faced with such challenges, and in the absence of inclusive policies and programmes that can ensure efficiency and effectiveness in peacebuilding interventions, the quest for sustainable peace will be in jeopardy. At the same time, if peacebuilding interventions are focused on the capacity to prevent, respond to, and mitigate conflicts, and address youth's exclusion, vulnerability, inequality and risks, then peace is possible.

The findings also point to possible future research directions or themes that could elucidate further events and structural factors hindering the transition of young people to productive citizenship. Finally, in keeping with the UNSCR 2250 recommendation to promote lessons and good practices in youth involvement in peace and security, the study has made some practical and policy recommendations to inform practice at the grassroots.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Letter of Information

#### Appendix A 1: Letter of information (English version)



### LETTER OF INFORMATION

**Title of the Research Study:** Youth participation in peacebuilding in post-conflict Northern Uganda

**Principal Investigator/s/researcher:** Charles Churchill Awici, MA

**Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s:** Professor Geoffrey Thomas Harris, PhD; and Dr. Sylvia Blanche Kaye, PhD

#### **Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:**

Hello. My name is Charles Awici, a PhD student at Durban University of Technology, South Africa. Through participatory action research (PAR), I am collecting data from key stakeholders in reconstruction and peacebuilding in Lira District, on “youth participation in peacebuilding in post-conflict Northern Uganda.” The purpose of the study is to establish the ways in which youth perceive and relate to peacebuilding processes and outcomes, and in which a needs-based, youth-led peacebuilding project can contribute to sustainable peace in northern Uganda. The information obtained will be used to understand how youth relate to peacebuilding processes and outcomes and to inform policies and programmes meant to promote youth participation. You have been identified as one of the people with the knowledge and experience necessary to provide some of the information I am seeking. I would, therefore, appreciate your participation in this study.

You are free to ask questions and to seek clarifications if any issue is unclear. In addition, you are entitled to discuss the study with your family and friends and you are under no obligation to commit at this stage. A copy of the Letter of Information document will be made available to you for more information. Your participation in the research is voluntary, and you will not receive any remuneration for participating. The information you provide will be treated with utmost confidentiality, it will not be shared with anyone

other than my research team, and it will be used exclusively for research purposes. In addition, your participation in this study is voluntary, and you will be free to withdraw from the study at any time. Moreover, your identity will remain strictly anonymous. I, therefore, request you to feel free to participate in this study by answering candidly the questions that I will put to you. Your participation is also subject to a better understanding of the terms and conditions associated with participating in the study as follows:

#### **Outline of the Procedures:**

The study seeks to understand how youth of northern Uganda perceive and relate to peacebuilding processes and outcome. You will take part in either the interviews or FGDs and you will occasionally be consulted as part of a follow up to issues that the researcher needs to seek clarity on, also to tap your views on how a project for conflict-affected youth and communities could be developed, implemented and evaluated. The study targets approximately 112 participants and you will be expected to commit about 45-80 minutes of your time to the study.

#### **Risks or Discomforts to the Participant:**

The nature of the inquiry does not involve any physical or emotional risk to you and no discomfort is expected. But should you feel uncomfortable, you may discontinue your participation or revise the terms of your participation at any time.

#### **Explain to the participant the reasons he/she may be withdraw from the Study:**

As a participant, you may be withdrawn or opt out of the study at any point in time in case you do not comply with the ethical standards associated with your participation or if you feel uncomfortable to continue with the study. Note that it is your right as a participant to voluntarily take part in the study and any decision to discontinue the study is entirely personal and will not lead to any adverse consequences on your part as participants.

#### **Benefits:**

Your participation in this study will not result directly in any support. However, the information you provide will help the researcher and the local communities to understand how youth participate in addressing issues that matter to them and how effective youth participation might be achieved.

#### **Remuneration:**

You will not be paid for participating in this study. In case costs are involved for you to participate in this study, the researcher will reimburse your expenditure upon prior agreed terms. Refreshments will be provided to some participants during the administration of the research instruments.

**Costs of the Study:**

As a participant, you are not expected to make any financial contribution or cover the cost of this study.

**Confidentiality:**

Data collected will be anonymised and presented in such a form that it will not reveal your identity as a participant. The data collected will only be accessible to the research team. In addition, all the information obtained from you as participants shall be treated with utmost confidentiality.

**Results:**

This study is intended to gain a better understanding of the realities and experiences of youth in relation to peacebuilding. The results of this research are aimed at influencing a specific change in policy or practice/enforcement as part of an advocacy strategy. Therefore, the research report will be disseminated in a number of ways, including one-on-one briefs, meetings or presentations to various stakeholder audiences. In some cases, the researcher will also disseminate the findings to the respondents as part of the project intervention to improve understanding of youth realities in peacebuilding.

**Research-related Injury:**

Should there be any research-related injury or adverse reaction, the researcher will refer you to a psychologist to assist with the problems or reactions. However, the researcher will not be in position to compensate the you in any way.

**Storage of all electronic and hard copies including tape recordings**

All data collected will be stored in a database for 5 years with restricted access for only the PhD researcher and his supervisors. Hard copies will be shredded and electronic data will be securely deleted.

**Persons to contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:**(Supervisor and details) Please contact the researcher Charles Churchill Awici on phone at +256-782931504, my supervisor Professor Geoffrey Thomas Harris on phone at 031 373 5609 or the Institutional Research Ethics Administrator on 031 373

2375. Complaints can be reported to the Director: Research and Postgraduate Support Dr L Langaniso on 031 373 2577 or [researchdirector@dut.ac.za](mailto:researchdirector@dut.ac.za).

## CONSENT

**Full Title of the Study:** Youth participation in peacebuilding in post-conflict Northern Uganda

**Names of Researcher/s:** Charles Churchill Awici, MA

**Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:**

- ☐ I, hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, Charles Churchill Awici, about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study – Research Ethics Clearance Number: \_\_\_\_\_.
- ☐ I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- ☐ I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- ☐ In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- ☐ I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- ☐ I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- ☐ I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

I, Charles Churchill Awici, herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Full Name of Researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Full Name of Witness (If applicable)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

## Appendix A 2: Letter of information (Luo version)



### LETTER OF INFORMATION

#### WARAGA ME NGEC

**Ngo me akweda:** Tic abulu me roco kede dwogo kuc itung malo me Uganda inge lweny alibo

**Atin kwan:** Charles Churchill Awici, MA

**Opwonye atin kwan:** Professor Geoffrey Thomas Harris, PhD; and Dr. Sylvia Blanche Kaye, PhD

#### **Kop anok adok ikom gin akwana:**

Apwoyo. Ageno ni itye aber. Nyinga Charles Awici, an abedo atin kwan ilevel me PhD i cukul ame olwongi Durban University of Technology, a me tye i South Africa. Kwan ni tye me penyo tam ibot wu iyore ang'o a me oromo wunu yubu kede kit ame bulu tio kede me roco tungmalo me Uganda inge lweny alibo a Joseph Kony. Dong kwani tye me niango kitango ame bulo neno kede yele adul apapat me rocho dul me tung malo me Uganda, polere i district me Lira. Atye amito ngeo dang yore ang'o ame gin bulu romo telo project apatpat me kelo kuc aperakino. Acecekere gin atye akwedo koro ne alwongo ni "Tic abulu me roco tung malo me Uganda inge lweny alibo."

Ngec a me akato ikweda ni bino bedo me niang iyore ang'o ame bulu neno kede kit yele apatpat me dwogo kuc itung malo me Uganda. Kodi ngeci bino konyo me yubu kit ang'o a me otela myero yub kede programmes me mio bulu tute atek me konyo pacu. Dong yin ibedo dano ace a me tye kede ngec a me romo knonyo igweda ni. Yia bido bedo yom ka ibedo jalo kare ni me nyako tam kede i lok man.

Bed agonyka ka itye kede apeny. Iromo dang nywako tami kede jo aturi kede owore ni. Waraga me ngwec dang tye piri ka imito. Leyo tami tye imiri ni. Pe tye culoro keken iye. Tam ame oleo bin dong ikin wan kedi, ape abino nyamo kede jo okene. Tam en bino bedo me coyo report ikit ang'o ame bulu room medo



tic aber me roco paco gi. Reporti pe bino nyutu nyi onyo mio ngatoro ngeyo ni yin aye ikobo ni aman. Konya dong wek igam apeny iyia agonya. Nywako tami dang tye kede kop okene a myero inge:

**Kita nyako tam awot kede:**

Nywako tam bino bedo interview ni, ento abino dwogo bori kede atye kede apeny okene. Jo aromo mia acel aparō aryo bino nywako tam ikom lok man. Ageno ni nywako tam man bino tero dakika aromo pyeragwen wia abic ituno kede pyera'boro.

**Peko onyo aromakom boti yin anywak tam:**

Tam awan onywako ni peromo kelo peko moro ikomi or miyi winyo alit. Ke inwongo nit ye tamoro ame kela ayela ikomi, iromo weko nywako tam ica moro keken.

**Ginaromo miyi weko nywako tam:**

Ke inwongo ni nywako tami tye a miyi peko moro, beda agonya me weko leyo tam. Obedo twero ni nywako tami onyo pe me nywako.

**Ber anywako tam:**

Pe tye konyoro ame inwongo alubere kede nywako tam. Ento ngec me yin ibino miyo bino konyo me niango yore aber ame bulu kede paci gi myero tim me roco paco.

**Bakacec/ngo inwongo ikom nywako tam:**

Culoro pe iyin inywako tami. Ka mite ni myero ityi kede cene me miyi kare me nywako tam ni, atin kwan bino leyo tam kedi wek dwogo cene a me itiyo kede. Ento mono mito kom nyiang iye con ame pwod pe ocako lok man. Gin amata moro calo soda onyo pii twero nwongere ikare me leyo tam ento pe obedo cul.

**Wel me nywako tam:**

Pe myero icul cente moro keken me konyo nyamo tami.

**Gwoko imung:**

Ngec me anwongo iboti bino bedo ka me report. Nyingi onyo ginoro keken ame nyutu nga ayin ibedo pe bino kato oko. Tam awano nywako bino bedo ka me kwani, dang atin kwan kede opwonye mere keken aye bino kwano.

**Adwogi me ngec:**

Kit ame kwani obedo me ngeo kit ango ame bulu myero tii kede me roco kede dongo tung malo me Uganda, reporti bino bedo me konyo yubo ngo ame ikom program, yubu kita ame jami timere kede. Mano bino konyo dul apapat me yubu ngo ame gin otimo. Obino miyu wu ngec ame adonyo ireport iyore apapat cake rwate acel acel, gure adit, gure atitino, kede waraga.

**Ngo atwero kelo wane in nywako tam:**

Ka ibino nwongo lit kom onyo awano alubere kede penyoro, abino kubi kede dakatal ame twero miyi kony. Ento pe ibino nwongo culo keken.

**Kano onyo gwoko tam ame tye ipapara kede iwiyo:**

Tam ducu ame tye ipapara onyo iwiyo obino keto idatabase pi mwaki abic. Atin kwan kede opwonye mere keken abino ngiyo tam man. Tam ame tye ipapara obino yeche kede e name tye iwiyo dang obino rucho oko.

**Kwene amyero apeny onyo peko myero cwal report iye:**

Cwal tami bot atin kwan Charles Churchill Awici icim namba +256-782931504, bot apwony Professor Geoffrey Thomas Harris icim namba +27(0)31 373 5609 onyo bot ngat ame loo kop me timo research (the Institutional Research Ethics Administrator) icim namba +27(0)31 373 2375. Peko myero wot inamba a Director: Research and Postgraduate Support Dr L Liganiso icim namba +27(0)31 373 2577 onyo: [researchdirector@dut.ac.za](mailto:researchdirector@dut.ac.za).

**CONSENT**  
**KWAYO TAM**

**Ngo me akweda:** Tic abulu me roco kede dwogo kuc itung malo me Uganda inge lweny alibo

**Atin kwan:** Charles Churchill Awici, MA

**Lok anyuto yee na me nywako tama ikwani:**

- ☐ Amito moko ni atin kwan anyie, Charles Churchill Awici, okobo kop du ame dok  
ikom kit kwani man, kit ame awot kede, bakacuc kede peko ame lubere kede kwani–  
Research Ethics Clearance Number: \_\_\_\_\_,
- ☐ Dadok anwongo, akwano, kede aniang ngo atye iwaraga me ngec (Participant Letter of  
Information) a me lubere kede kwan man.
- ☐ Atye kede ngec ni adwogi me leyo tam man gudo kope me bedo dako onyo ocoo, mwaka, nino  
me nywal, kede ginoro okede ame dok ikop okene ikoma pe obino yaro ame nyuto ni an eno.
- ☐ Alubo jami amite me kwani, aye ni tam ame aya ikwani obino keto icomputer atin kwan.
- ☐ Aromo, icamoro keken weko mede kede nywako tama alubere kede kwan man.
- ☐ Abedo kede kare oromo me penyo apeny, do aye ni aromo nywako tama alubere kede kwan  
man.
- ☐ Anyiang ni, abino nwongo report ame lubere kede adwogi apiretek me kwani.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Nying anwyak tam**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Nino dwe**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Cawa**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

/

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Right**

**Thumbprint (dul cing)**

An, Charles Churchill Awici, amoko ni anywako tam kede anywak tam  
jami ducu apirtek ame myero en nge amelubere kede kwani.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Full Name of Researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**(Nying atin kwan)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date (Nino dwe)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature (Cing)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Full Name of Witness (If applicable)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signatur**

## Appendix B: Research Tools

### Appendix B 1: Focus group discussion guide for youth

<b>SECTION A: BIO-DATA</b>		
<b>Name (Optional)</b>		
<b>Village</b>		
<b>Parish</b>		
<b>Sub-County</b>		
<b>District</b>		
<b>Organization</b>		
<b>Occupation</b>		
<b>Gender</b>		
<b>Age</b>		
<b>Highest Level of formal education</b>		
<b>Mobile tel. no.</b>		
<b>E-Mail address</b>		
<b>SECTION B: YOUTH EXPERIENCES OF PEACEBUILDING PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES</b>		
<i>1.1 Young people's conceptualization of peace, peacebuilding and violence</i>		
<b>S/N</b>	<b>QUESTION</b>	<b>Follow-up questions</b>
1	What do peace and peacebuilding mean to you?	
2	What does violence mean to you?	
3	Young people's experiences of violence and conflict: Have you or any of your relatives been a victim of conflict and/or violence (including land conflicts, conflict with neighbours, conflict-	If yes, what kind of conflicts or violence have you or any of your relative experienced?

	related sexual violence, domestic violence, crimes etc)?	
4	<p>Is the experience of violence or conflicts:</p> <p>a) preventing you from actively participating in rebuilding your lives and community?</p> <p>b) helping you to improve your well-being and that of your community?</p>	<p>If yes, how?</p> <p>If so, how?</p>
5	<p>In your opinion, what do the following need to do in order to assuage your experiences of violence and to enable you to play a more active role in rebuilding your lives and that of your community?</p> <p>a) Government of Uganda</p> <p>b) NGOs</p> <p>c) Donors</p> <p>d) The community where you live</p>	
6	<p>The human-rights implications of the COVID-19 measures:</p> <p>Has the implementation of COVID-19 pandemic measures affected you or</p>	<p>If yes, how?</p> <p>b) If no, why not?</p>

	members of your community in any way?	
7	The role of youth in COVID-19 response: Have you taken any measures to protect yourself and members of your communities from the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic?	If yes, what measures?  b) If no, why not?
8	Did the priorities in your role as a young person change as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak?	If yes, how? E.g. Was the priority shifting to a COVID-19 response or continuing to play your day-to-day role to make a living in the face of COVID-19 restrictions? How did you understand what the priorities were and make decisions?
9	Did you feel supported by your family and local leaders to adapt to the challenges of COVID-19?	If yes, how? E.g. Were you given guidance and relevant support to carry on with your day-to-day activities or adapt your activities? Did you feel confident to do the work that was needed?
10	What do you think government's role should be in a future public health crisis in your community?	E.g. Do you think government should repeat the way it responded to COVID-19? What changes do you think could be made?
<b><i>1.2 Knowledge of context, structure of participation, policies and programmes for northern Uganda</i></b>		
11	Do you know the existing structures for youth to participate in issues that affect them and their communities?	( ) If so, what are they and what issues are discussed in those platforms? (probe Local and National Youth Councils; Clubs and Associations e.g. Sports, Peace Clubs, YCS, UNSA; Public and Private Sector Initiatives; and others).  (i) Have you participated in any of these structures?

		(ii) If yes, which structures have you participated in? (iii) What is your opinion about the usefulness of that/those structures?
12	Do you know any government or NGOs programmes concerned with efforts to restore peace and promote development in your location/areas?	(i) If yes, name the programmes. (ii) How did you get to know the programmes? (iii) Are you involved in any of these programmes? (iv) If yes, in what capacity? (v) Has your participation in any of these programmes benefited you in any way? (vi) If yes, how?
13	Are you as youth aware of any community organisations that address community concerns/issues?	( ) If yes, which organisations and what concerns do they address? (i) Are you involved in any of these organizations? (ii) If yes, in what capacity?
14	Do you think it is important for you as a youth to be aware of:	( ) The issues affecting them? Why? (i) The structures of participation? Why? (ii) The policies on youth participation? Why? (iii) The programs for youth participation? Why?
15	Why might some youth not be participating in structures and programmes meant to promote youth participation?	
16	What needs to be done (and by who) to:	( ) Ensure that the youth are aware of the challenges they face? (i) Ensure that the youth are aware of the existence of structures and programmes meant to serve them? (ii) Ensure that the youth are aware of the usefulness of those structures and programmes?

17	Are there cases of violence in your community?	(i) If yes, what form does the violence take? (ii) What are the causes of this violence? (iii) Does this violence affect your ability to improve your life and that of your community? (iv) If yes, how?
18	Do you as youth like and value your cultural and religious institutions? (Begin with cultural)	( ) If yes, why? (i) If no, why not?
19	Are there any cultural norms or practices that promote violence in your community?	( ) If yes, describe them. (i) What could be done to eliminate the cultural norms and practices that promote violence?
20	Do you have any worries about the future of your community after the LRA war?	(i) If yes, what are your worries?
<b>1.3 Perception of the value of participation</b>		
21	What, in your opinion, are the benefits of involving youth in programmes that address issues in their communities?	
22	Do you consider the issues that these programmes address important to you?	(i) If yes, how have you benefited from these programmes
23	What does your community expect you as youth to do about issues	



	that affect you and your community?	
24	Are you personally doing anything about the issues affecting you and your community?	<p>( ) If yes, what exactly are you doing?</p> <p>(i) How successful have you been so far in what you are doing?</p> <p>(ii) What explains your success or failure</p>
<b>1.4 Nature and level of youth participation</b>		
25	Are there any structures/platforms through which youth participate in issues that affect them?	<p>( ) If yes, which are these structures?</p> <p>(i) What issues are addressed in each of these structures/platforms?</p> <p>(ii) What role(s) do youth play in these structures/platforms, if any?</p> <p>(iii) Do you face any challenges in accessing these structures/platforms?</p> <p>(iv) Are there specific groups of people who cannot access such platforms?</p> <p>(v) If yes, why?</p> <p>(vii) How are different categories of youth addressing those challenges?</p>
26	<b>Basic human rights:</b> As a youth, what are your rights?	<p>(i) How are you exercising them to improve living conditions and promote peace in your community?</p>
27	<b>Economic-based participation:</b> As a youth, are you involved in decisions to implement different economic initiatives (local government budgeting process, youth livelihood fund, operation wealth creation, private sector,	<p>( ) If you are, how are you involved?</p> <p>(i) Has your participation improved your livelihood and that of your community?</p> <p>(ii) If yes, give me examples of the improvement.</p> <p>(iii) How else would you wish to be involved in decisions regarding how resources are planned for and programmes are implemented for youth in your community?</p>

	and NGO-led interventions) in your community?	
28	<b>Socio-political based participation:</b> As a youth, are you involved with different issues that affect you (at village, parish, sub-county, regional and national levels)?	( ) If you are, how are you involved? (i) Has your involvement produced any positive changes in your life? (ii) If yes, describe the positive changes. (iii) If no, why not?
29	<b>Socio-cultural based participation:</b> As a youth, are you involved in the issues that affect you (at family, clan, faith (church/mosques)?	( ) If you are, how are you involved? (i) Have you experienced any positive changes as a result of your participation? (ii) If yes, describe the positive changes. (iii) If no, why not?
30	What needs to be done for you as young people to help improve your lives and those of your communities?	
<b>2.0 Barriers to youth participation</b>		
31	In your opinion, what hinders youth from participating in peacebuilding initiatives/programmes?	(Pose follow-up questions: cultural barriers, attitudes, limited knowledge, incapacity, structural/administrative constraints etc.).
32	Have any of you been involved in starting a youth initiative?	( ) If yes, what kind of initiative? (Initiator, sponsor/donor?) (i) Is the initiative still active? (ii) If no, why not?

33	If you have been involved in a youth initiative that has succeeded or failed, what have you learned from that experience?	
34	In your opinion, can a needs-based, youth-led project, developed and implemented by youth, build sustainable peace?	
35	Do you as youth in your community attempt to claim and demand for better services from the state and any other key actors?	<p>( ) If yes, describe those attempts.</p> <p>(i) Have those attempts produced the desired results?</p> <p>(ii) If no, why not?</p>
36	If you have any questions or would like additional information, please let me know.	

Appendix B 2: Interview guide for government functionaries

<b>SECTION A: BIO-DATA</b>		
<b>Name (Optional)</b>		
<b>Village</b>		
<b>Parish</b>		
<b>Sub-County</b>		
<b>District</b>		
<b>Organization</b>		
<b>Position in organization</b>		
<b>Nature of organization's work</b>		
<b>Gender</b>		
<b>Age</b>		
<b>Highest Level of formal education</b>		
<b>Mobile tel. no.</b>		
<b>E-Mail address</b>		
<b>SECTION B: YOUTH EXPERIENCES OF PEACEBUILDING PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES</b>		
<b>S/N</b>	<b>QUESTION</b>	<b>ANSWER</b>
1 (a)	In your opinion, should young people aged 18-30 participate in addressing issues that affect them and their communities?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, why should they participate?	
(c)	And how should they participate?	

(d)	If no, why not?	
2 (a)	Are youth capable of contributing to improving their future and that of their communities?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, how?	
(c)	If no, why not?	
(d)	What needs to change for youth to play an active role in improving their future and that of their communities	
3 (a)	What, in your opinion, are the major motives for youth taking part in issues that affect them and their communities?	
(b)	Are youth in your community participating	(i) Yes (ii) No

	in addressing issues that affect them and their communities?	(iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, how are they participating?	
(c)	If no, why not?	
4 (a)	Are there any structures in your community, that youth can use to voice their concerns and promote their interests?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, how best can the structures be used to voice youth concerns and promote youth interests?	
5(a)	Is youth participation in addressing issues that affect them and their communities promoting peace in your community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, how?	

(c)	If no, why not?	
6(a)	Do you face any challenges in engaging youth in addressing issues that affect them and their communities?	
(b)	If yes, name and explain the challenges.	
7 (a)	Do youth in your community encounter any barriers in their attempts to address issues that affect them and their community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	Which specific issues should youth in your community address in order to build peace in the community?	
(c)	At what level(s) (family, parish, sub-county,	

	district) in the community do youth need to focus their efforts and why)?	
8(a)	Are you aware of any youth programme or campaign (music, dance, drama, sensitization and other projects) to build a better future and to promote peace in your community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
9 (a)	If yes, name and describe the programme(s) or campaign(s).	
(b)	Have the programme(s) or campaign(s) achieved their objectives?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(c)	If yes, how?	
(d)	If no, why not?	



10 (a)	Are you aware of any policy or programme aimed at supporting young people to exercise their rights?	(i) Yes (ii) No
(b)	If yes, name and describe the policy(ies) and/or programme(s).	
(c)	Are any youth in your community benefitting from such policies and/or programmes?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(d)	If yes, how?	
(e)	If no, why not?	
11(a)	What should be done to involve youth more	

	effectively in addressing issues that affect them and their communities?	
<b>SECTION C: COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES AND DISCOURSES OF VIOLENCE</b>		
12(a)	What challenges have young people (18-30 years) in your community faced since the LRA war ended?	
(b)	What are the causes of those challenges?	
(c)	Have youth and/or their communities taken any action to address those challenges?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(d)	If yes, have any of those actions achieved their objectives?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(e)	If yes, describe the achievements of the actions.	

13(a)	Are there any cases of violence in your community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, what are the major forms of violence in the community?	
(c)	What are the major causes of violence in the community?	
(d)	How does the violence affect youth in your community?	
14(a)	Are there any cases of insecurity in your community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, what are the major causes of insecurity in the community?	

(c)	How does the insecurity affect youth in your community? (Check for manifestations of violence in the different structures as applicable: family, community, cultural institution, local government, NGO)	
15(a)	Have any interventions been undertaken against violence and insecurity in your community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, please name and describe the interventions.	
(c)	Have the interventions reduced violence and insecurity in the community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
16(a)	Are there any cases of violence against young people in your community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know

(b)	If yes, which categories of the population perpetuate violence against the youth in your community; and why?	
(c)	Which categories of youth are targeted in the violence, and why?	
(d)	Which forms of violence do the young people face in your community?	
(e)	What makes young people in your community vulnerable to violence?	
(f)	What can be done to reduce or end the violence against young people in your community?	

17(a)	Has the community put in place any measures to protect young people from violence?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, describe the measures.	
(c)	Have the measures succeeded in curbing violence against youth in your community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(d)	If yes, to what extent?	
(e)	If no, why not?	
18(a)	Do any categories of youth in your community commit acts of violence against other community members?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, which categories of youth do this?	
(c)	Against which other categories of community	

	members do youth commit violence?	
(d)	And which forms of violence do young people perpetuate against their victims	
19(a)	Are there any cultural norms or practices that affect youth's perception and practice of their citizenship?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, name and describe the norms and/or practices.	
(c)	How do these norms and/or practices affect the way youth perceive and practice their citizenship?	
20(a)	Are youth doing anything to stop violence in your community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, what are they doing?	

(c)	And to what extent have they succeeded in reducing or ending violence in the community?	
21(a)	Are there any cultural norms or practices that promote violence (or cause harm to youth) in your community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, which norms and/or practices are these?	
(c)	And how do they affect different categories of people: women/girls; youth; and adults?	
(d)	What can be done to eradicate the norms and practices that promote violence in your community?	



22(a)	Are there any cultural norms or practices that promote peace and non-violence in your community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, name and describe the norms.	
(c)	What, in your opinion, should be done to promote the norms and practices that promote peace and non-violence in your community?	
23	How can youth promote non-violence and peaceful norms and practices in your community?	
24	What does the community need to know about the role of youth in building sustainable peace in their respective communities?	

<b>SECTION D: YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN PEACEBUILDING</b>		
25 (a)	Are there any structures in your community (family, cultural, religious and government) through which youth participate in addressing issues that affect them?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, name and describe those structures.	
(c)	Which specific roles do youth play in these structures?	
26 (a)	Have young people played any role in post-war peacebuilding in your community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, which role(s) have they played? (Probe for youth participation in peace processes, awareness campaign, reintegration)	

27(a)	Do you face any challenges in engaging youth on issues that affect them and their communities?	(i) Yes (ii) No
(b)	If yes, name and explain the challenges.	
28	What, in your opinion, should the discussions and interventions on issues that affect youth focus on?	
29(a)	Are existing community structures (family, cultural, religious and government) reconstructing the social fabric in your community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, how are they doing so?	
(c)	Do youth engage with those community structures?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know

(d)	If yes, does youth engagement with those structures promote youth participation?	
30(a)	Are existing community structures (family, cultural, religious and government) addressing the causes and effects of violence in your community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, how?	
31(a)	Does your office inform, consult or in any way involve youth in processes meant to improve their livelihoods in your community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, how?	

32(a)	Should youth in your community be encouraged to engage more effectively in issues that affect youth?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, why?	
(c)	And how should they do so?	
33	Which channels do you consider the most appropriate for spreading information about programmes for youth in your community?	
<b>SECTION E: PRIORITIES AND PRE-CONDITIONS FOR ACTIVE YOUTH PARTICIPATION</b>		
34(a)	Does your office implement any policies or programmes to support youth in your community to realize their rights?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, has your implementation of these policies and/or	

	programmes benefited the youth in any way?	
(c)	If yes, how?	
(d)	If no, why not?	
35(a)	Are there any socio-political, economic or cultural opportunities for youth in your community to improve their current conditions?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, are the youth seizing those opportunities to improve their current conditions?	
(c)	If yes, cite examples of such cases.	

36	What needs to be done to enable youth in your community to participate effectively in addressing issues that affect them and their community?	
<b>SECTION F: MOTIVATION FOR YOUTH-LED PEACE-BUILDING</b> <i>Main Question: What needs to be done to enable youth to play a leading role in the development and implementation of a peacebuilding initiative?</i>		
37(a)	Are there any platforms through which young people in your community can exercise their right to participation?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, name and describe the platforms.	
(c)	According to you, which of these platforms do the	

	youth in your community use the most?	
(d)	What, in your opinion, are young people's motivations for engaging in these platforms?	
(e)	What are the key issues discussed in these platforms?	
(f)	Have these platforms encouraged youth to discuss and address the challenges of their generation?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(g)	If yes, how?	
(h)	Can a platform led by youth, with the support of	(i) Yes (ii) No



	adults, enable youth to play a leading role in addressing issues that affect them?	(iii) I do not know
(i)	If yes, how?	
38(a)	Could a youth-led process in promoting youth participation in socio-cultural, political and economic life have any shortcomings?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, state any such possible shortcomings.	
(c)	What could be done to overcome such shortcomings?	

39	What do the different stakeholders need to know about their respective roles in enabling youth to play a leading role in the design and implementation of a peacebuilding initiative?	
<b>SECTION G: EVALUATION IN PEACEBUILDING</b> <i>Main Question: Can a needs-based project developed and implemented through youth-led peacebuilding initiative, build sustainable peace?</i>		
40	What have been the entry points for your department to promote youth participation in peacebuilding?	
41(a)	What challenges have you faced in collaborating with youth in the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of projects?	
(b)	How can those challenges be overcome?	

42	How have efforts to improve the conditions of youth been adapted to the different circumstances of youth and their experiences and settings?	
43(a)	Are there any NGO programmes building the capacities of state and non-state actors to effectively engage youth in your community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, please name the programmes.	
44(a)	Do these capacity-building programmes create spaces for mutual learning and accountability?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, how?	

45(a)	Do these capacity-building programmes allow for youth to participate in all the programme processes and outcomes?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, how?	
(c)	If no, why not?	
46	What might be the weaknesses/challenges of a youth-led evaluation?	
47	What support mechanisms/mentoring	

	services, if any, does your office have for youth-led programmes?	
48	What support mechanisms/mentoring services would your office wish to have for youth-led programmes?	

Appendix B 3: Interview guide for cultural and religious leaders

<b>SECTION A: BIO-DATA</b>		
<b>Name (Optional)</b>		
<b>Village</b>		
<b>Parish</b>		
<b>Sub-County</b>		
<b>District</b>		
<b>Organization</b>		
<b>Category of respondent</b>		
<b>Gender</b>		
<b>Age</b>		
<b>Highest Level of formal education</b>		
<b>Mobile tel. no.</b>		
<b>E-Mail address</b>		
<b>SECTION B:</b>		
<b>S/N</b>	<b>QUESTION</b>	<b>ANSWER</b>
1	Kindly describe the governance structure of your cultural/religious institution	
2(a)	Is the current governance structure of your cultural/religious institution different from what it was before the LRA war?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know

(b)	If yes, what has changed?	
(c)	And why?	
(d)	What impact have the changes had?	
(b)	If yes, how?	

(c)	If no, why not?	
(d)	What needs to change for youth to play an active role in improving their future and that of their communities?	
3 (a)	Does the governance structure of your cultural/religious institution allow for youth to participate in addressing issues that affect them?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, how do youth participate in addressing issues that affect them?	
(c)	And which issues are youth most actively involved in?	



(d)	If no, why not?	
4 (a)	Does your cultural/religious institution actively listen and respond to the concerns of youth?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, cite some examples of such responses.	
(c)	If no, why not?	
5(a)	Does your cultural/religious institution have the capacity to promote youth participation and inclusiveness in	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know

	addressing issues that affect them?	
(b)	If yes, please describe the human and material resources that your institution has for that purpose.	
(c)	If no, which human and/or material resources is your institution lacking?	
6(a)	Are there any cultural norms or practices that affect youth's perception and practice of their citizenship?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, name and describe the norms and/or practices.	
(c)	How do these norms and/or practices affect the way youth perceive and practice their citizenship?	

7(a)	How do you define violence?	
(b)	Has violence in any way affected the way youth perceive and practice their citizenship?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(c)	If yes, explain how this has happened	
8(a)	Has insecurity in any way affected the way youth perceive and practice their citizenship?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, explain how this has happened.	

9 (a)	Do youth in your cultural/religious institution like and value the institution?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, why? (Probe for differences of attitude among youth)	
(c)	If no, why not?	
10 (a)	Is your cultural/religious institution doing anything to reconstruct the social fabric of communities at the local level?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, describe what the institution is doing.	
(c)	If no, why not?	

11(a)	Does your cultural/religious institution inform, consult or in any way involve youth in peacebuilding processes and outcomes?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, how does the institution inform, consult or otherwise involve youth?	
(c)	If no, why not?	
12(a)	Which channels do you consider the most appropriate for spreading information about programmes for youth?	

(b)	Why, in your opinion, are these channels the most appropriate?	
13	What issues do youth in your institution prioritise?	
14(a)	Do youth in your cultural/religious institution participate actively in affairs of the institution?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(c)	If yes, why?	

(d)	If no, why not?	
15(a)	Can a platform led by youth, with the support of adults, enable youth to play a leading role in addressing issues that affect them?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, why?	
(c)	If no, why not?	

16(a)	Could a youth-led process in promoting youth participation in socio-cultural, political and economic life have any shortcomings?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(c)	If yes, state any such possible shortcomings.	
(d)	What could be done to overcome such shortcomings?	
17	What, in your opinion, motivates youth to take part in issues that affect them and their communities?	



18	What do the different stakeholders need to know about their respective roles in enabling youth to play a leading role in the design and implementation of a peacebuilding initiative?	

Appendix B 4: Interview guide for NGO staff

<b>SECTION A: BIO-DATA</b>		
<b>Name (Optional)</b>		
<b>Village</b>		
<b>Parish</b>		
<b>Sub-County</b>		
<b>District</b>		
<b>Organization</b>		
<b>Position in organization</b>		
<b>Nature of organization's work</b>		
<b>Gender</b>		
<b>Age</b>		
<b>Highest Level of formal education</b>		
<b>Mobile tel. no.</b>		
<b>E-Mail address</b>		
<b>SECTION B: YOUTH EXPERIENCES OF PEACEBUILDING PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES</b>		
<b>S/N</b>	<b>QUESTION</b>	<b>ANSWER</b>
1 (a)	Does your organization implement programmes that target young people aged 18-30 years?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, what do the programmes focus on?	
2 (a)	What specific issues that affect youth do your programmes address?	
(b)	Why do you focus on such issues?	

3 (a)	Which is your geographical area of coverage by parish, sub-county and district?	
(b)	Why do you target youth in those areas?	
4 (a)	What categories of the youth benefit from the projects/programmes?	
(b)	Why do you target those categories of youth?	
(c)	Are there particular categories of youth that are hard to reach?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(d)	If yes, what are you doing to improve their	

	participation in your programme?	
5	What steps do you follow when designing programmes targeting youth?	
6	How do you publicize your programme to the target categories of youth?	
7 (a)	Are there any structures in the community that you use to reach out to youth?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, please name these structures.	
8	Which channels do you consider the most appropriate for spreading information about programmes for youth?	

9 (a)	Is there violence in your area of operation?	
(b)	If yes, how does it manifest itself?	
(c)	And how does it affect youth in the area?	
(d)	What, in your opinion, is /are the cause(s) of violence in your area of operation?	
10 (a)	i) Does your NGO address violence?	(i) Yes (ii) No
(b)	If yes, how?	

(c)	If no, why not?	
11(a)	Are there any aspects of the socio-cultural, economic, legal and political environment in which you are operating that enhance your NGO's ability to improve the future of young people and that of their communities?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, which are these aspects?	
12 (a)	Are there any aspects in the socio-cultural, economic, legal and political environment in which you are operating that hinder your NGO's ability to improve the future of young people and that of their communities?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know

(b)	If yes, which are these aspects?	
13(a)	Are there any cultural norms or practices that promote violence in your area of operation?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, please name and explain the norms and/or practices.	
(c)	How is this violence affecting your youth beneficiaries' ability to improve their lives and those of their communities?	
14	What should be done to eliminate socio-cultural norms or practices that promote violence?	
<b>SECTION C: PERCEPTION OF THE VALUE OF PARTICIPATION</b>		
15 (a)	Do young people aged 18-30 years consider the issues that your project addresses important?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know

(b)	If yes, how do you know?	
c)	If no, why not	
16 (a)	Does involvement of the target youth in issues that affect them translate into them taking action to change their situations and of their communities?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, please cite examples of this.	
(c)	If no, why not?	
17	How do you expect young people aged 18-30 years to participate in post-conflict peacebuilding in their communities?	



**SECTION D: NATURE AND LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION**

18	What are the criteria for youth participating in your programmes/projects?	
19(a)	In what ways are youth involved in your programmes/projects?	
(b)	Why do you involve the youth the way you do? (probe for participation in project cycle management: planning and design; implementation; monitoring and evaluation; and closure/exit)	
20(a)	Do youth participants make a valuable contribution to the programmes in which they participate?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know

(b)	If yes, give examples of this.	
(c)	If no, why not?	
21	How do you involve young people aged 18-30 years in addressing issues that affect their families and community?	
22(a)	What structures exist for youth involvement in addressing issues that affect them and their communities?	
(b)	How best can those structures be used to promote youth involvement in addressing issues that affect them and their communities?	
(23(a)	Do you face any challenges in engaging	(i) Yes (ii) No

	youth in addressing issues that affect them and their communities?	(iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, please describe these challenges.	
<b>SECTION E: BARRIERS TO YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN PEACE-BUILDING</b>		
24(a)	Is your organization involved in a peacebuilding project?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, please name and describe the project.	
25(a)	Is your organization involved in a post-conflict peacebuilding project focusing on youth?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, please describe the project.	
26(a)	Are there any issues pertinent to youth participation that your	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know

	project should address but does not?	
(b)	If yes, please name the issues.	
(c)	Why is your organization not addressing these issues?	
27(a)	Does your organization involve youth actively in efforts to build peace in their communities?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, why and how (planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation & sharing benefits)?	
28	How does your organization get	

	information about youth concerns?	
29(a)	What is your organisational mission for youth in your area of operation?	
(b)	What informed this mission?	
(c)	Are you accomplishing this mission?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(d)	If yes, how?	
(e)	If no, why not?	
30(a)	Is your organisational intervention for youth influenced by the context of your area of operation?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, how?	

31(a)	Is your organisational intervention for youth influenced by the diversity of youth?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, how?	
32(a)	Is your organisational intervention for youth influenced by youth policy?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, how?	
33(a)	Is your organisational intervention for youth influenced by PRDP for northern Uganda?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, how?	

34 (a)	Does your organization involve youth in developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating any policies and/or peacebuilding programmes?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, how?	
(c)	If no, why not?	
35(a)	Is your organization preparing youth to lead in peacebuilding initiatives?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, how?	
(c)	And what results/outcomes do you expect from youth leading peacebuilding initiatives?	

36(a)	Are any categories of youth in your area of operation taking any action to improve their communities as a result of your work?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, which categories of youth are doing so?	
(c)	And which actions are they taking?	
37(a)	Do any of your programmes seek to restore peace and promote development in your areas of operation?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, name the programmes.	
(c)	What is your role in the programme(s)?	



(d)	Has/Have this/these programme(s) benefited youth in any way?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(e)	If yes, how?	
(f)	If no, why not?	
38(a)	Which categories of youth are the most active in your programmes?	
(b)	Why, in your opinion, are these categories of youth the most active?	
39(a)	Which categories of youth are the most passive in your programmes?	

(b)	Why, in your opinion, are these categories of youth the most passive in your programmes?	
40(a)	Do you do anything to ensure that different categories of youth benefit from your programmes/services?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, what do you do?	
41(a)	Which categories of youth are benefiting more than others from your programmes?	
(b)	Why are these categories benefiting more than others?	
42(a)	Which categories of youth are benefiting less than others from your programmes?	

(b)	Why are these categories benefiting less than others?	
43(a)	Do the relationships among citizens, traditional leaders and local government institutions affect programme implementation?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, how?	
44(a)	Do youth in your area of operation attempt to claim and demand for better services from the state and any other key actors?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, please describe those attempts.	

(c)	Which other key actors (apart from government) do the youth engage with?	
(d)	To what extent have these attempts by youth produced the desired results?	
45(a)	Do you have any particular programmes intended to build the capacity of government, traditional, faith-based or NGO actors to better engage youth in their structures and programmes?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, describe those programmes.	
(c)	And name any benefits realised from the programmes.	
46(a)	What aspects/strategies of your organisation's work with youth have worked well so far?	

(b)	Why have they worked?	
47	What challenges does your organization encounter in its work with youth?	
48(a)	Does your organization encounter any challenges in engaging youth in your projects?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, what are these challenges?	
(c)	And how can they be overcome?	
<b>SECTION F: YOUTH-LED PEACEBUILDING EXPERIENCES</b>		
49(a)	Can a needs-based project, developed and implemented through a youth-led peacebuilding	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know



		(iv) Project exit/sustainability:
(g)	Which of the projects/programmes were unsuccessful?	
(h)	Why in your opinion, were they unsuccessful?	
50	What lessons did you learn from that/those failure(s)?	
51	What have been the entry points for your NGO to promote youth participation in peace-building?	
52(a)	What challenges have you faced in collaborating with youth in the design, implementation and	

	monitoring and evaluation of projects?	
(b)	How can those challenges be overcome?	



Appendix B 5: Interview guide for parents and teachers (English and Luo Versions)

<b>SECTION A: BIO-DATA/<u>Kop ikom dano</u></b>		
<b>Name (Optional)/Nyii</b>		
<b>Village/School/Calo</b>		
<b>Parish/parsi</b>		
<b>Sub-County/</b>		
<b>District/District</b>		
<b>Gender/ ico aya dako</b>		
<b>Age/mwaka</b>		
<b>Highest Level of formal education/level me kwan</b>		
<b>Mobile tel. no./namba cim</b>		
<b>E-Mail address/email</b>		
<b>SECTION B: PARENTS (HOME ENVIRONMENT)/KABEDO ONYWAL</b>		
<b>S/N</b>	<b>QUESTION/APENY</b>	<b>ANSWER/AGAM</b>
1 (a)	<p>Have you as a parent done anything to prepare your children for responsible citizenship after the LRA war?</p> <p><u>Calo anywal, itimo ginoro me yubo otinoni me bedo jo ame paro pi rocho kede dongo lango inge lweny alibo a Joseph Kony?</u></p>	<p>(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know</p> <p><u>(i) Atimo</u> <u>(ii) Pe atimo</u> <u>(iii) Pe angeo</u></p>
(b)	<p>If yes, what exactly have you done?</p> <p><u>Ke itimo, ngo no?</u></p>	

(c)	<p>Are you happy with the results of your efforts?</p> <p><u>Yi yom keded adwogi ango ame itimo?</u></p>	<p>(i) Yes</p> <p>(ii) No</p> <p>(iii) I do not know</p> <p>(i) <u>Yia yom</u></p> <p>(ii) <u>Yia pe yom</u></p> <p>(iii) <u>Pe angeo</u></p>
(d)	<p>If yes, why?</p> <p>Pingo yi yom?</p>	
(e)	<p>If no, why not?</p> <p>Pingo yi pe yom?</p>	
2	<p>What else would you do, if you had the means, to secure a better future for your children?</p> <p><u>Ngo okene ame iromo timo ke inwongo kare kede kero ame romo konyo otinoni gero anyim me kony?</u></p>	
3(a)	<p>Do you get along well with your male and female children?</p>	<p>(i) Yes</p> <p>(ii) No</p> <p>(iii) I do not know</p>

	<u>Bedo ni kede otinoni acoo</u> <u>kede amon tye aber?</u>	(i) Tye aber (ii) Tye arac <b>(iii)</b> Pe angeo
(b)	If yes, please give me examples of that. <u>Ka tye aber, mia apor</u>	
(c)	If no, why not? <u>Ka tye arac, pingo?</u>	
4(a)	Do you face any challenges in controlling/influencing your male and female children? <u>Inwongo ayela me miyo</u> <u>otinoni acoo kede</u> <u>amonere me timo gin</u> <u>imito ni gi otim?</u>	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii)I do not know  (i) <u>Pe anwongo ayela</u> (ii) <u>Anwongo ayela</u> (iii) <u>Pe angeo</u>
b	If yes, what kind of challenges?  <u>ke inwongo ayela, koda</u> <u>ayela angoni?</u>	
(c)	And how can these challenges be overcome?	

	<u>Kodi ayela nu romo gik/tum ningo?</u>	
5(a)	<p>Are you happy with the contribution of your male and female children to the welfare of your family?</p> <p><u>Yie yom kede adwogi me tic otinoni acoo kede mon igin apatpat ame gini otimo me yubu kwo me paco?</u></p>	<p>(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know</p> <p>(i) Yia yom (ii) Yia pe yom (iii)Pe angeo</p>
(b)	<p>If yes, why?</p> <p>Ka yie yom, pingo?</p>	
(c)	<p>If no, why not?</p> <p>Ka yie pe yom, pe yom pingo?</p>	
6(a)	<p>Are your children benefitting from any government or civil society programme or project?</p> <p><u>Otinoni tye anwongo konyoro a me ya ibot</u></p>	<p>(i) <u>Tye gini</u> (ii) <u>Pe tye gini</u> (iii) <u>Pe angeo</u></p> <p>(i) <u>Tye anwongo</u> (ii) <u>Pe tye anwongo</u> (iii) <u>Pe angeo</u></p>

	<u>abumente or irionget ame</u> <u>jenge ikom abumente?</u>	
(b)	If yes, which programmes/projects? <u>Ke tye anwongo kony,</u> <u>kodi kony ang?</u>	
(c)	And how have the children benefitted? <u>Konyo tye akonyo</u> <u>otinoni iyore ang?</u>	
(d)	If no, why not? Pe tye anwongo, pingo?	
7(a)	What else could government or civil society do to prepare your children for a better future? <u>Ngo'kene amyero</u> <u>abumente or nyo dulame</u> <u>pe jenge ikom abumente</u> <u>myero tim me yubo</u> <u>anyim otinoni?</u>	
<b>SECTION C: TEACHERS</b>		
1 (a)	Does your school have any programme or project to prepare your learners to be responsible citizens? (clubs, societies, associations, etc.)	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know

(b)	If yes, describe the programme/project?	
(c)	If no, why not?	
2(a)	What else would your school do, if it had the means, to secure a better future for your learners?	
3(a)	Are you happy with the conduct of your male and female learners? (Probe for gender differences)	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, why? (Probe for gender differences)	

(c)	If no, why not? (Probe for gender differences)	
4(a)	Do you face any challenges in controlling/influencing your male and female learners?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, what kind of challenges? (internal, external etc.)	
(c)	How are these challenges impacting your role as a teacher?	
(d)	And how can these challenges be overcome?	
5(a)	Are you happy with the contribution your male and female learners are making to the welfare of their community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, why?	

	(Probe for gender differences)	
(c)	If no, why not? (Probe for gender differences)	
6(a)	Are your learners benefitting from any government or civil society programme/project?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, which programmes/projects?	
(c)	And how have the learners benefitted?	



(d)	If they are not benefitting, why not?	
7	What else could government or civil society do to prepare your learners for a better future?	

Appendix B 6: Interview guide for youth working in civil society, government, and private sector

SECTION A: BIO-DATA/ <u>Kop ikom dano</u>		
Name (Optional)/Nyii		
Village/School/Calo		
Parish/parsi		
Sub-County/		
District/District		
Gender/ ico aya dako		
Age/mwaka		
Highest Level of formal education/level me kwan		
Mobile tel. no./namba cim		
E-Mail address/email		
SECTION B: PARENTS (HOME ENVIRONMENT)/KABEDO ONYWAL		
S/N	QUESTION/APENY	ANSWER/AGAM
1 (a)	Have you as a parent done anything to prepare your children for responsible citizenship after the LRA war? <u>Calo anywal, itimo ginoro me yubo otinoni me bedo jo ame paro pi rocho kede dongo lango inge lweny alibo a Joseph Kony?</u>	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know  (i) Atimo (ii) Pe atimo (iii) Pe angeo
(b)	If yes, what exactly have you done? <u>Ke itimo, ngo no?</u>	

(c)	<p>Are you happy with the results of your efforts?</p> <p><u>Yi yom keded adwogi ango ame itimo?</u></p>	<p>(i) Yes</p> <p>(ii) No</p> <p>(iii) I do not know</p> <p>(iv) <u>Yia yom</u></p> <p>(v) <u>Yia pe yom</u></p> <p>(vi) <u>Pe angeo</u></p>
(d)	<p>If yes, why?</p> <p>Pingo yi yom?</p>	
(e)	<p>If no, why not?</p> <p>Pingo yi pe yom?</p>	
2	<p>What else would you do, if you had the means, to secure a better future for your children?</p> <p><u>Ngo okene ame iromo timo ke inwongo kare kede kero ame romo konyo otinoni gero anyim me kony?</u></p>	
3(a)	<p>Do you get along well with your male and female children?</p>	<p>(i) Yes</p> <p>(ii) No</p> <p>(iii) I do not know</p>

	<u>Bedo ni kede otinoni acoo</u> <u>kede amon tye aber?</u>	(iv)Tye aber (v) Tye arac <b>(vi)</b> Pe angeo
(b)	If yes, please give me examples of that. <u>Ka tye aber, mia apor</u>	
(c)	I f no, why not? <u>Ka tye arac, pingo?</u>	
4(a)	Do you face any challenges in controlling/influencing your male and female children? <u>Inwongo ayela me miyo otinoni acoo kede amonere me timo gin imito ni gi otim?</u>	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii)I do not know  (iv) <u>Pe anwongo ayela</u> (v) <u>Anwongo ayela</u> (vi) <u>Pe angeo</u>
b	If yes, what kind of challenges?  <u>ke inwongo ayela, koda ayela ango ni?</u>	
(c)	And how can these challenges be overcome?	

	<u>Kodi ayela nu romo gik/tum ningo?</u>	
5(a)	<p>Are you happy with the contribution of your male and female children to the welfare of your family?</p> <p><u>Yie yom kede adwogi me tic otinoni acoo kede mon igin apatpat ame gini otimo me yubu kwo me paco?</u></p>	<p>(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know</p> <p>(iv) Yia yom (v) Yia pe yom (vi) Pe angeo</p>
(b)	<p>If yes, why?</p> <p>Ka yie yom, pingo?</p>	
(c)	<p>If no, why not?</p> <p>Ka yie pe yom, pe yom pingo?</p>	
6(a)	<p>Are your children benefitting from any government or civil society programme or project?</p> <p><u>Otinoni tye anwongo konyoro a me ya ibot</u></p>	<p>(i) <u>Tye gini</u> (ii) <u>Pe tye gini</u> (iii) <u>Pe angeo</u></p> <p>(i) <u>Tye anwongo</u> (ii) <u>Pe tye anwongo</u> (iii) <u>Pe angeo</u></p>

	<u>abumente or irionget ame</u> <u>jenge ikom abumente?</u>	
(b)	If yes, which programmes/projects? <u>Ke tye anwongo kony,</u> <u>kodi kony anga?</u>	
(c)	And how have the children benefitted? <u>Konyo tye akonyo</u> <u>otinoni iyore anga?</u>	
(d)	If no, why not? Pe tye anwongo, pingo?	
7(a)	What else could government or civil society do to prepare your children for a better future? <u>Ngo'kene amyero</u> <u>abumente or nyo dulame</u> <u>pe jenge ikom abumente</u> <u>myero tim me yubo</u> <u>anyim otinoni?</u>	
<b>SECTION C: TEACHERS</b>		
1 (a)	Does your school have any programme or project to prepare your learners to be responsible citizens? (clubs, societies, associations, etc.)	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know

(b)	If yes, describe the programme/project?	
(c)	If no, why not?	
2(a)	What else would your school do, if it had the means, to secure a better future for your learners?	
3(a)	Are you happy with the conduct of your male and female learners? (Probe for gender differences)	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, why? (Probe for gender differences)	

(c)	If no, why not? (Probe for gender differences)	
4(a)	Do you face any challenges in controlling/influencing your male and female learners?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, what kind of challenges? (internal, external etc.)	
(c)	How are these challenges impacting your role as a teacher?	
(d)	And how can these challenges be overcome?	
5(a)	Are you happy with the contribution your male and female learners are making to the welfare of their community?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, why?	



	(Probe for gender differences)	
(c)	If no, why not? (Probe for gender differences)	
6(a)	Are your learners benefitting from any government or civil society programme/project?	(i) Yes (ii) No (iii) I do not know
(b)	If yes, which programmes/projects?	
(c)	And how have the learners benefitted?	

(d)	If they are not benefitting, why not?	
7	What else could government or civil society do to prepare your learners for a better future?	

## Appendix B 7: Observation checklist

<b>SECTION A: BIO-DATA</b>		
<b>Researcher</b>		
<b>Date</b>		
<b>Village/School</b>		
<b>Parish</b>		
<b>Sub-County</b>		
<b>District</b>		
<b>SECTION B: CHECKLIST</b>		
<b>S/N</b>	<b>QUESTION</b>	<b>ANSWER</b>
1	<b>Residential environment of youth</b>	i) Approximate size of homestead (acres) ii) Nature of housing (permanent, semi-permanent, temporary) iii) Water source (tap, shallow well, deep well, river, spring) iv) Power source (UMEME, Solar, Wood fuel, charcoal) v) Distance from nearest health centre (distance & level of nearest HC) vi) Distance from nearest primary school, secondary school
2	<b>General demeanour of youth</b>	i) Confident ii) Diffident iii) Lively iv) Lethargic v) Etc.
3	<b>Mode of dress and appearance</b>	i) prim, ii) Decent iii) Slovenly iv) Etc.

4	<b>Number of participants in a particular discussion/conversation forum</b>	
5	<b>Level of interest in FGD topics</b>	i) Very high ii) High iii) Medium iv) Low v) Very low
6	<b>Level of participation in FGD</b>	i) Very high ii) High iii) Medium iv) Low v) Very low
7	<b>Body language messages</b>	i) Agreement ii) Disagreement iii) Indifference iv) Emotive
8	<b>Degree of familiarity with discussion topics</b>	i) Very high ii) High iii) Medium iv) Low v) Very low
9	<b>Level of responsiveness to the issues being discussed</b>	i) Very high ii) High iii) Medium iv) Low v) Very low
10	<b>Comportment during FGD</b>	i) Diplomatic ii) Gentle iii) Composed iv) Agitated,

		v) Antagonistic vi) Quite vii) Belligerent viii) Combative
11	<b>Any other issues important to the study?</b>	

## Appendix C: Ethical Clearance



**Institutional Research Ethics Committee** Research and Postgraduate Support Directorate 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Berwyn Court  
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6 December 2021

Mr C C Awici  
Faculty of Management  
Department of Public Management and Economics  
Durban University of Technology

Dear Mr Awici

### **Youth participation in peacebuilding in post-conflict Northern Uganda**

**Ethical Clearance number IREC 117/21**

The Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your gatekeeper permission letter.

Please note that FULL APPROVAL is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the IREC according to the IREC Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's).

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the IREC as outlined in the IREC SOP's.

Yours Sincerely

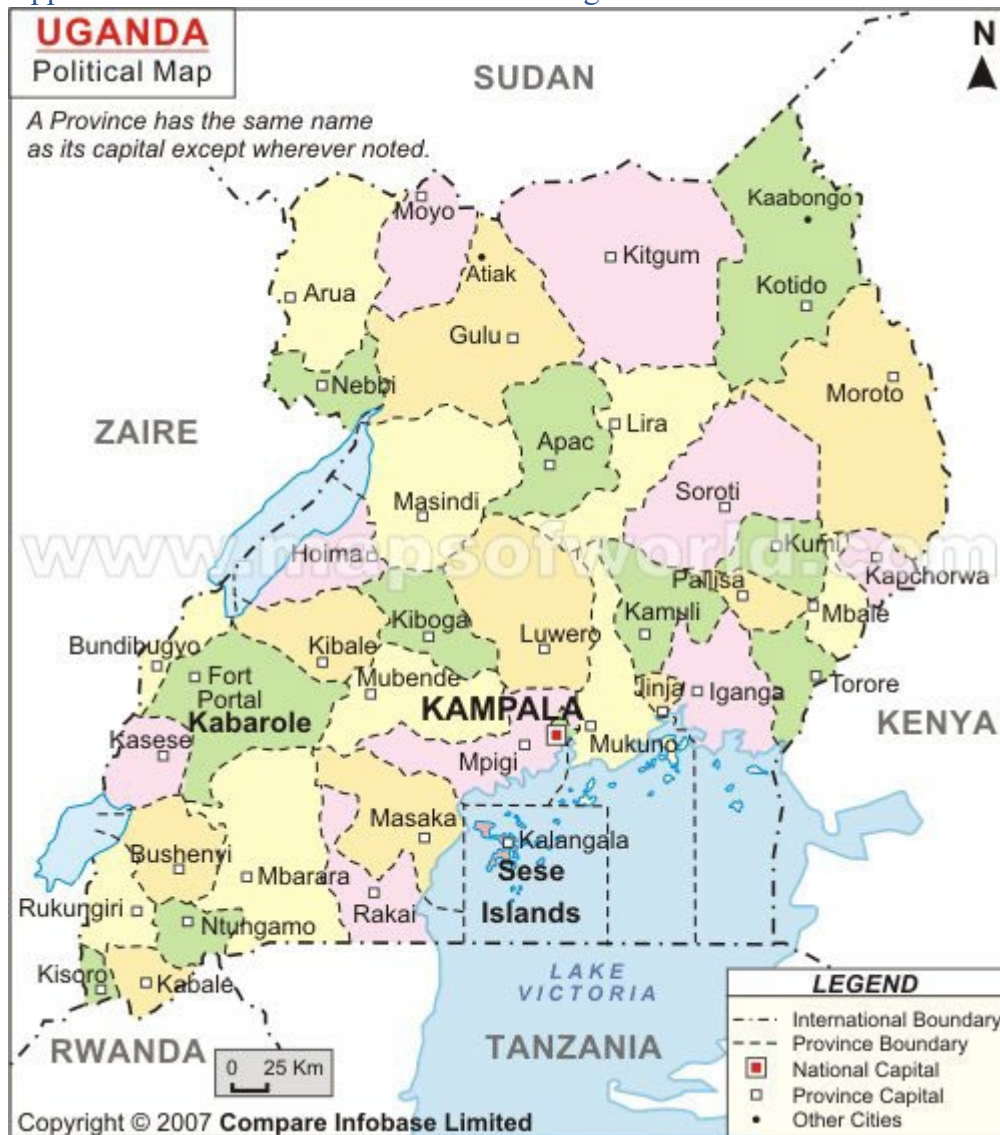
Prof J K Adam  
Chairperson: IREC

**ENVISION2030**

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# Appendix D 1: Location of Lira District in Uganda



(Source: Available: <https://www.worldmap1.com/map/uganda/lira/Lira%20map.jpg>.  
(Accessed 20 March 2023).

## Appendix D 2: Location of northern region in Uganda



(Source: Available: <https://www.worldmap1.com/map/uganda/lira/Lira%20map.jpg>.  
(Accessed 20 March 2023).



## Appendix E: Peace Education Training Manual

## **Peace Education Training Manual for Students and Teachers<sup>2</sup>**

**Adapted for Peace and Human Rights Club, Ogor Seed Secondary School,  
Otuke, Uganda**

**2022**

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<sup>2</sup> The original peace education manual was developed by Stephen Langole and Charles Churchill Awici (2011) for training primary and nursery school teachers in selected schools in Acholiland, northern Uganda.

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## INTRODUCTION

The manual is divided into eight modules planned to be covered in 5 days, as shown in Table 1 below.

*Table 1: Training modules and schedule by day*

S/N	Module	Day
1	Peace Education in Theory and Practice	1 & 2
2	Dismantling the Culture of War and Violence	3
3	Living with Justice and Compassion	3
4	Human Rights and Responsibilities	4
5	Intercultural Solidarity and Reconciliation	4
6	Living in Harmony with the Earth	5
7	Inculcation of Inner Peace	5
8	Culture and Learning	5

Source: Field data

The methodology is meant to be participatory and to enable participants share experience. It is hoped that, with careful use of this manual, participants will gain ample knowledge and skills of peace education that they can mainstream into their classrooms, day-to-day interaction, and lives.

The objectives of each session are summarized in Table 2 below.

*Table 2: Training modules, learning objectives and methodology*

S/N	Module	Learning objectives	Methodology
1	Peace Education in Theory and Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☐ To comment on learning skills and peace education pedagogy</li><li>☐ To define and explain the different concepts related to peace and conflict</li><li>☐ To demonstrate conflict resolution skills through role play</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☐ Lecture</li><li>☐ Role play</li><li>☐ Group work</li><li>☐ Case study of success story</li></ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ To list and comment on some of the tools used in conflict analysis</li> </ul>	
2	Dismantling the Culture of War and Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ To explain the concepts <i>culture of war and violence</i>.</li> <li>☐ Identify indicators of culture of war and violence</li> <li>☐ Explain what they can do to moderate the culture of war and violence in community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Lecture.</li> <li>☐ Brainstorming.</li> <li>☐ Question and answer sessions</li> <li>☐ Role play</li> </ul>
3	Living with Justice and Compassion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ To explain the meaning of <i>living with justice and compassion</i></li> <li>☐ Identify indicators of <i>living with justice and compassion</i> in the family, at school, in the community and in the country.</li> <li>☐ Explain what they can contribute to <i>living with justice and compassion</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Teaming up</li> <li>☐ Role play</li> <li>☐ Discussion</li> <li>☐ Lecture</li> </ul>
4	Human Rights and Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Comment on human rights protection and violations at different levels</li> <li>☐ Comment on the need to balance human rights with responsibilities</li> <li>☐ Suggest measures to protect human rights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Brainstorming</li> <li>☐ Lecture</li> <li>☐ Group discussion</li> </ul>
5	Intercultural Solidarity and Reconciliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Explain how culture and cultural diversity can be a resource for peace</li> <li>☐ Explain how culture and cultural diversity can be a source of conflict</li> <li>☐ Appreciate cultural diversity as a resource for peace in the school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Brainstorming</li> <li>☐ Lecture</li> <li>☐ Group discussion</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Explain the concepts “inter-cultural solidarity and reconciliation”</li> </ul>	
6	Living in Harmony with the Earth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Identify the challenges facing our environment</li> <li>☐ Identify ways by which we can live in harmony with the environment</li> <li>☐ Comment on the principles of sustainable living</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Brainstorming</li> <li>☐ Group discussion</li> <li>☐ Lecture</li> </ul>
7	Inculcation of Inner Peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Outline practices that help in cultivating inner peace</li> <li>☐ Comment on the connection between inner peace and the trauma that obtains in northern Uganda</li> <li>☐ Identify obstacles to inner peace</li> <li>☐ Suggest ways in which the obstacles to inner peace can be overcome</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Brainstorming</li> <li>☐ Lecture</li> <li>☐ Group discussion</li> </ul>
8	Culture and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ To understand the value of appreciating and including culture in learning</li> <li>☐ To explain how cultural and social values, norms and structures contribute to violence and peace</li> <li>☐ Show awareness of the value of cultural diversity in building peace</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Lecture</li> <li>☐ Group work</li> </ul>

## Module 1: Peace Education Theory and Practice

This module focuses on the concept of peace education, and it covers the basics of teaching and living a peaceful life with oneself, in the classroom, at the school and within communities.

### Objectives

1. To explain peace education learning skills and pedagogy
2. To define and explain the different concepts related to peace and conflict
3. To demonstrate conflict resolution skills through role play
4. List and comment on some of the tools used in conflict analysis

### Materials and Equipment Needed

- ☐ Projector (optional)
- ☐ Generator (optional)
- ☐ Laptop
- ☐ Flip chart
- ☐ Flip chart stand
- ☐ Markers
- ☐ Masking tapes
- ☐ Manual
- ☐ Handouts
- ☐ Notebooks
- ☐ Pens
- ☐ Reading texts

## What is peace education?

☐ It is a philosophy (thought system) and process involving skills such as:

- ☐ Listening
- ☐ Reflection
- ☐ Problem solving
- ☐ Cooperation
- ☐ Conflict resolution

It aims at creating a non-violent, safe world, characterized by love, inner peace, compassion, respect for rights, justice, inter-cultural solidarity, reconciliation, non-violence, reverence for all life and a sustainable environment. Peace education aims at equipping learners with skills, attitudes and knowledge targeting all the above ideals.

Peace education is concerned with addressing the causes of violence and seeking alternatives to violence. It aims at teaching and nurturing skills to manage conflicts non-violently and to choose peace when faced with conflict or violence.

## What is peace?

- ☐ Peace may be defined as the absence of war or open conflict.
- ☐ In 1960, Johan Galtung thought this definition of peace was narrow, and he broadened it to include situations where there is justice, economic security, social security, involvement in political affairs and decision making.
- ☐ Social security includes such attributes as good health, good housing, good education, access to safe water, etc.
- ☐ Economic security includes adequate income that is well distributed, leading to ability to afford basic needs.
- ☐ Galtung described the absence of these attributes that **may not** lead to tranquillity or peace of mind as **structural violence**. So, poverty constitutes structural violence.



- ❑ Galtung also realized that the problem of poverty may be due to people not upholding the values of justice and compassion. For example, there may be plenty of food in some parts of the world or some parts of a country while people are starving in other parts. If the food were to be given out to those who need it, then they would not starve. So, some people may be peaceless because we have not learnt how to share as fellow humans, or because some people are greedy and selfish.
- ❑ According to Galtung, when peace prevails together with the factors of peacelessness, such as poverty, it is **negative peace**.
- ❑ According to Galtung, **positive peace** is when there is no war, and people are able to get most of what they need, and live in harmony.
- ❑ We need to ask ourselves: is it possible to achieve positive peace?

## Conflict

- ❑ Conflicts occur when interests and goals are incompatible.
- ❑ When people struggle for power or over resources, and when they disagree about certain ideas and practices, that is conflict.
- ❑ Conflict is not necessarily open. It may begin in the minds of individuals, and later come onto the surface or in the open.
- ❑ Conflict can translate into violence if not managed, resolved and/or transformed.

## Violence

- ❑ Violence may be physical or psychological.
- ❑ It may be viewed as an act meant to produce physical harm to another, e.g., boxing, kicking, pinching, and killing somebody with a gun or any other means.
- ❑ Actions by the LRA in the past, like cutting people's lips, ears, and limbs (maiming), are acts of physical violence.

- ❑ Psychological violence includes such acts as a man refusing to talk to his wife, a father always threatening to beat up his children, a teacher ignoring his students, and students refusing to respond to a teacher's questions.
- ❑ Violence may also be sexual, for example, rape and defilement.
- ❑ Violence may, therefore, lead to physical, psychological (mental) or even social damage to a person.
- ❑ Therefore, violence may be used to kill, injure, or coerce (threaten) somebody to do something he/she may not have done willingly.

### **What is conflict resolution?**

- ❑ Conflict resolution occurs when individuals or groups whose goals or interests are not compatible, or who are in conflict, agree to end the conflict.
- ❑ In efforts to resolve conflict, we try to identify the sources or causes of the conflict. Once the sources or causes of the conflict are identified, there can then be negotiation or proposals, with possible options of what can be done to resolve the conflict.
- ❑ Conflict resolution is an attempt to build a new and lasting relationship between conflicting parties.
- ❑ Conflict is normally said to have been resolved when the conflicting parties cease treating each other violently.

### **What is conflict transformation?**

- ❑ Conflict transformation is the process and outcome of a long-lasting solution to a conflict.
- ❑ Conflict transformation involves considering very broadly the root causes or sources of a conflict, the wider political, social, cultural and economic factors that influence the conflict, and how these can be transformed or changed into something that can bring long-lasting peace.

- ❑ Unlike conflict resolution, conflict transformation is not just about reaching an agreement between conflicting parties. It goes beyond that, and tries to look broadly to plug all loopholes that may re-ignite conflict.
- ❑ However, many scholars use the words conflict resolution and conflict transformation interchangeably. Unlike conflict resolution that focuses on agreeing to end a conflict, conflict transformation focuses on deep transformation in the institutions, attitudes or viewpoints that can reproduce violence.
- ❑ Conflict transformation efforts may begin when a conflict is still latent (in the minds). It seeks to build relationships with the parties in conflict, with the hope of building forgiveness and reconciliation.

### **Negotiation and Mediation Skills**

- ❑ Negotiation may be defined as a dialogue between conflicting parties about issues on which their opinions differ.
- ❑ It is a bargaining relationship between parties whose interests are actually incompatible or simply perceived to be incompatible.
- ❑ In negotiation, the conflicting parties voluntarily educate each other about their needs and interests; and they may be willing to exchange specific resources, and may agree on how they should relate in future.
- ❑ They may also agree on how future problems should be solved.
- ❑ Negotiation may be without the involvement of a third party, but in some cases, a mediator may be necessary to facilitate the negotiation.

### **Tips on Negotiation**

1. Share different viewpoints/ideas about the conflict, which means openness
2. Agree on the problems or issues involved.
3. Focus more on the problem; not the people. Blaming the other party may lead him/her to become defensive and resist co-operation.
4. The questions raised should target concerns, fears, needs and interests.
5. Explore alternatives for addressing the problem.

6. Accept to forgo some of your needs and interests where necessary.
7. Evaluate the costs and benefits of alternatives to address the problem and prioritize them.
8. Formalise agreement.
9. Plan for a review of the agreement (Adapted from Fisher et al, 2000).

### **Some Factors that Influence/Undermine Negotiation**

- ☐ Multiple issues to be sorted.
- ☐ Time constraints.
- ☐ Deep-rooted distrust, dishonesty, unwillingness to share information, and poor listening.
- ☐ Disputants may not be committed to an agreement; they may only be manipulative.
- ☐ Extreme demands.
- ☐ **Bad faith negotiating:** For example, a party may enter negotiations with the intention of getting information that it uses to its advantage.
- ☐ **Lack of authority:** The person with whom you enter into negotiation may lack the power to make decisions.
- ☐ Inaccurate information/data may also undermine negotiation.
- ☐ Insisting on one's own interests and being unwilling to accept the other party's interests.

### **What makes a competent negotiator?**

A competent negotiator should:

- ☐ Listen attentively;
- ☐ Be patient;
- ☐ Be fair, firm, friendly;

- ☐ Be open minded;
- ☐ Be a good communicator;
- ☐ Have excellent skills in paraphrasing or summarizing the other party's stories/point of view;
- ☐ Possess good interviewing techniques, especially in asking clear questions;
- ☐ Be willing to give and take; and
- ☐ Be as objective as possible about which options are fair or reasonable, and generate many options for resolving the issues (Adapted from UNICEF, 1997, p. 162) in Turay (2003).

***Ice breaker: Any traditional peace song in the local language and interpretation (5 minutes).***

## **Mediation**

- ☐ Mediation is an attempt by a third party to assist parties in conflict to reach an agreement.
- ☐ Mediation usually takes place when the parties in conflict have failed to negotiate on their own and require the intervention of an **impartial** third party.
- ☐ Mediation can be learnt from real-life experiences or through formal training in mediation skills.
- ☐ Mediation is not always voluntarily taken up. The parties to a conflict may approach a mediator or mediators to assist them settle their disputes. In some circumstances, mediators may be imposed by law (arbitration).

**Recap of Day 1 and brief about the day's session then teaming up.**

## **Mediation Principles**

There are some general principles that guide mediation. These include:

- ☐ Mediator(s) need to be acceptable to all parties;
- ☐ Mediator(s) should be impartial and willing to work with both or all sides;
- ☐ Objective truth may be necessary, but an agreed solution is most important; and
- ☐ The mediator should be willing to guide and control. This means freedom should be given to the parties to propose topics for discussion and options for resolving the conflict.

### **Qualities of a Competent Mediator**

According to Turay (2002), a competent mediator should be:

- ☐ Patient;
- ☐ A good listener;
- ☐ Fair, firm, friendly and consistent;
- ☐ Non-judgmental;
- ☐ Sincere and honest;
- ☐ Able to summarise the parties' stories;
- ☐ Able to inspire trust among parties;
- ☐ Able to encourage parties to be frank and open;
- ☐ Knowledgeable;
- ☐ Trust-worthy/credible;
- ☐ Able to maintain confidentiality;
- ☐ Flexible;
- ☐ Observant and attentive;
- ☐ Knowledgeable and experienced in interviewing techniques (e.g. probing);
- ☐ Sensitive to parties' cultural differences;

- ☐ Capable for taking responsibility for the mediation process;
- ☐ Capable of ensuring that parties take control of the content and outcome of the mediation; and
- ☐ Wise (i.e., having requisite knowledge, experience and good judgment).

### **Possible Mediation Steps**

Fisher et al. (2003) suggests the following possible mediation process/procedure:

1. **Preparation by mediator(s):** this involves consensus-building meetings with conflicting parties, first separately for introductory purposes, and to explain the possible process and roles.
2. **Opening statement by mediator(s):** this should include welcoming introductions and words of encouragement, inquiry about expectations and possible time frame.
3. **Encouraging parties to commit to the rules that may be established and to the time frames.**
4. **Freedom of parties to tell their stories:** each party should be allowed to tell their stories and their understanding of the conflict while the mediator guides and controls the process, repeats and/or summarizes the main points, seeks clarification from speakers, and ensures that all stakeholders have heard from a speaker.
5. **Identification of issues and agenda setting:** this involves clarifying issues of disagreement and conflict as derived from the statements and stories, and agreeing on the agenda.
6. **Direct exchange and generating options:** this involves encouraging direct exchange between the parties about their needs and fears on each issue; and asking them to suggest options for addressing or resolving their differences. The mediator's role is to list all options suggested without judgment.
7. **Building acceptable alternatives:** this involves evaluating alternatives in relation to the needs and interests of both or all sides, and encouraging creativity in combining options and seeking common ground.

8. **Finalising an agreement:** this involves testing and clarifying points of possible agreement. It also involves guiding the parties to decide on the form of agreement (written or verbal), and setting a time frame for monitoring the implementation of the agreement.
9. **Closing statement by mediator:** this involves reviewing what the parties have accomplished and agreed upon, congratulating them, and clarifying the need for follow-up or a future review meeting.

## **Peacebuilding**

- ☐ These are several kinds of interventions to bring about peace. They are programmes designed to address the causes of conflict and to find long-term solutions.
- ☐ Peacebuilding may include humanitarian assistance or emergency assistance, conflict-transformation initiatives, and developmental activities to lift people from poverty and other sources of peacelessness.
- ☐ It may be through formal, informal and/or non-formal education, creatively conducted through critical pedagogies that can enable transformation of consciousness and world views towards a culture of peace and non-violence.
- ☐ Peace education rests on developing a critical understanding of the root causes of conflicts and violence and strategies for action to dismantle them. It aims at building a peaceful self and world.

## **Activities**

- ☐ *Divide the group into 2.*
- ☐ *Instruct each group to make a role play depicting cross-border conflict with the following elements:*
  - How the conflict began;
  - *How the conflict escalated; and*
  - *How the conflict deescalated through mediation and negotiation and how it was finally resolved.*
  - *Invite comments critiques.*



## **Conflict Analysis**

### **What is conflict analysis?**

Conflict analysis is simply a practical process of examining and understanding the realities of a conflict from a variety of perspectives. This understanding forms a basis for developing strategies and planning actions.

For a big conflict, such as the war in Northern Uganda, we can use a number of tools. These include Context, Relationship, Source, Issues, Parties, Attitudes, Behaviour, Interventions and Outcome (C.R. SIPABIO) developed by Dr. Amr Abdalla together with his students from George Mason University.

- ❑ Context means the economic, political, social and environmental situations that surround the conflict.
- ❑ Relationship pertains to how the parties to the conflict relate: who is supporting whom (alliance), and who is against whom (conflicting parties).
- ❑ Source means that which brings about the conflict.
- ❑ Issues pertain to what is at stake (bones of contention) from the beginning and during the conflict.
- ❑ Parties may be primary, secondary or tertiary. Primary parties are those directly in confrontation; secondary parties are the immediate people concerned with the conflict while tertiary parties are those remotely related to the conflict. For example, in a family conflict, a husband may be conflicting with the wife (primary parties) drawing in the children, maybe to support either side (secondary parties) and the Local Councilor (tertiary party) comes to settle the conflict.
- ❑ Intervention pertains to the measures and mechanisms that have been applied to avert the conflict.
- ❑ Outcome means what has become of the conflict. Has a resolution been reached? Is there still violence? Has peace agreement been made? To what extent has the conflict been resolved or transformed? What are the current events?

So, conflict is analysed to understand the background and history of the conflict as well as current events, to identify groups involved and their perspectives so that peacebuilding interventions can be based on sound knowledge and appreciation of the nature of a conflict.

### **Timeline Analysis**

This is a summary of key events. One can make parties to a conflict draw their own timeline of the conflict, depicting the key events that occurred in the course of the conflict, maybe in days, weeks, months, or years. This brings out the perspective of each party to constitute a very good basis of analysis. For example, if the students on the one hand and the teachers on the other were to draw their respective timelines of a particular conflict (for example strike that occurred in the school) it is likely that they would raise different issues and key events. This would be good information for the analyst because it would portray what each side feels strongly about. Explanations by each side would lead to more in-depth information. Such information could then form the basis for intervention.

### **Activities**

- ☐ *Divide participants into two groups.*
- ☐ *Let them draw their separate timelines of a conflict of their choice, involving students and teachers.*
- ☐ *Use the timelines to compare and contrast issues.*
- ☐ *Generate discussion on possible interventions.*

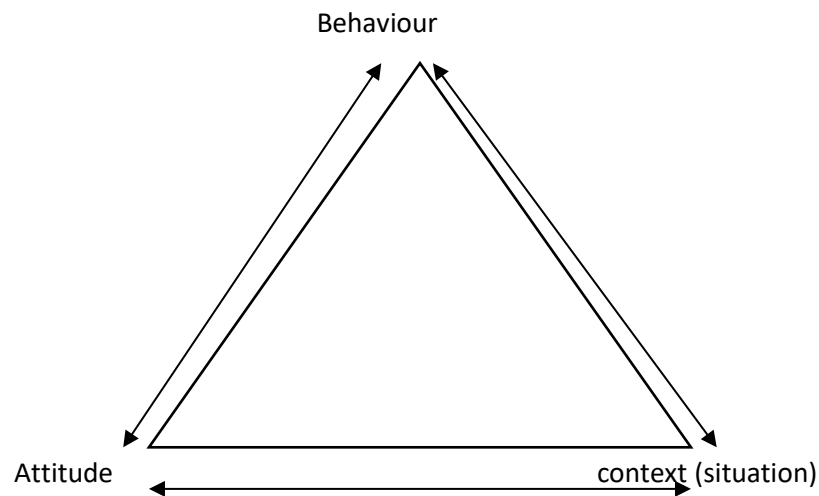
### **The ABC Triangle**

The ABC triangle was developed by Johan Galtung. ABC stands for attitude, behavior, and context respectively. Attitude comprises the feelings or views/opinions concerning a conflict. Behaviour pertains to how people react, their body language, the use of violence, or whether they, are fighting, using weapons etc. Context pertains to the economic, political and social conditions surrounding the conflict, that may be remotely associated with the conflict or even the source of the conflict.

When analyzing conflict, we need to understand the attitude, the behavior, and the context. We should also be concerned about how the conflict has progressed or the stage of the conflict:

Has confrontation started? Has it reached crisis level? What are the responses/interventions to the conflict?

### The ABC Triangle



### Identification of Sources of Conflict, Using the Snowball Fight

The snowball fight is a modification of ideas from Steven Hawkins and Thomas Mark Turay. It is a useful tool for identifying types of conflict at different levels, and for sparking up discussions on why certain types of conflicts are more prevalent than others.

#### Activities:

- ❑ *Cut and distribute three small pieces of paper to each participant.*
- ❑ *Instruct them to write three sources of cross-border conflict that are most crucial to them; one on each paper.*
- ❑ *Instruct the participants to fold the pieces of paper separately.*
- ❑ *Invite the participants into a circle and instruct them to throw their pieces of paper (snowballs) at one another, while avoiding the eye, and keep picking and tossing them until all the pieces are mixed (this often generates a lot of excitement, and is a form of ice-breaker as well).*

- ☐ *Stop the exercise after a while and ask volunteers to collect the papers, and bring them for tallying in a dummy such as below:*

Sources of conflict	Tally	Frequency

- ☐ *Ask volunteers to make the entries*
- ☐ *Discuss the findings, with brainstorming on why some items scored more than others.*

### **The But-Why Method**

This method is also a modification of Thomas Mark Turay. It helps participants to dig deeper into the sources of conflict and see the inter-connections between them.

### **Activities**

- ☐ *Pick the source of conflict that scored highest, and begin asking a series of but-why-the-source-of-conflict-exists questions.*
- ☐ *Circle this and connect it to the reasons given.*

- ☐ *Repeat the but-why questions several times, and you will end up with an interesting web.*
- ☐ *Explain that this demonstrates the inter-connections among the different sources of conflict.*

## **Pedagogy and Values that Need to be Upheld in School**

*\* This section is mainly adapted from Ian M. Harris and Mary Lee Morrison's (2003) Peace Education: Second Edition, McFarland & Co., North Carolina, London.*

### **1. Democratization of the Classroom**

Learning should promote student participation. How do we do that?

- ☐ Let learners know one another at the beginning, through a variety of introductory exercises;
- ☐ Build programmes based on learners' interests and experiences;
- ☐ Create an atmosphere for mutual respect and sharing;
- ☐ Work with the learners to set the ground rules/standards of behaviour acceptable in the classroom;
- ☐ Let the learners share their experiences of violence so that they get to know that other people, too, have undergone similar experiences; and
- ☐ Make sure everyone's view is listened to (looking at different perspectives should be a positive learning experience).
- ☐ All would feel comfortable when their contributions are heard and appreciated;
- ☐ Discourage dominance by too much speaking by particular people, but do this in a nice way; emphasize respect, trust and the worth of others' contributions;
- ☐ Share own experiences of conflict/violence to feed into the process;
- ☐ Study the body language to gauge who is ready to speak since it would be unpeaceful to ask those who are not ready to speak;

- ☐ Minimise contending to assert who is right;
- ☐ Let them learn from one another how they can cope with fears and anxieties associated with a violent world;
- ☐ Ask leading questions;
- ☐ Summarise emerging issues, and evoke reflections and discussions;
- ☐ Peace education should inculcate in learners the joy of caring for self, others and the world;
- ☐ Put in your intellect, emotions and spirit; smile to learners;
- ☐ Be a role model for peaceful behaviour; and
- ☐ At the end of each class, teachers and learners should spend about ten minutes discussing what went on in class, and suggesting how peace could have been radiated in the class. Guiding questions could include: How can we do it better? What worked? How can it be improved next time?

## **2. Teaching Cooperation**

- ☐ The facilitator should encourage learners/participants to work in small groups to help them acquire teamwork skills.
- ☐ Skills essential for cooperative learning include forming, functioning, formulating and fermenting.
- ☐ Forming skills are those skills which ensure that group members are present and working with one another. After administering group work, the facilitator should move round, checking on group cohesion and individual-member participation, and impressing upon individuals who may appear indifferent the importance of group work.
- ☐ Functioning skills involve managing group effort to complete tasks and maintain effective working relationships among members. Elements of these include: getting the group started; choosing the chairperson and rapporteur(s), presenters etc., stating

the agenda for a particular session in such a way that all participants understand what is expected, agreeing on a set of operating procedures.

- ❑ Formulation skills are those necessary to build a deeper understanding of the material being studied. They consist in summarizing what has been discussed, checking other people's contributions for accuracy, and seeking elaboration from others.
- ❑ Fermenting skills are at a higher level of analysis of what the group has accomplished. They include the ability to criticize ideas and not people; to integrate a variety of views into a single position; to expand upon other findings by group members; to probe for deeper understanding; and to generate further answers to difficult questions. This sometimes demands a lot of intellectual debate.
- ❑ Learning collaborative skills like this is a lifelong task.

### **3. Developing Moral Sensitivity**

Developing feelings of responsibility for others in learning can become a basis for moral thinking. The basis of morality and sensitivity is care for other human beings. Carol Gilligan (1987) identifies three stages of moral development.

- ❑ The first is oriented towards individual survival. At this stage, morality is seen in terms of self-centered responses to sanctions or social controls imposed by society. People grow out of this stage as they move towards responsibility with an increased attachment to others.
- ❑ The second stage involves increased social participation of an individual towards a morality based more on shared norms and expectations, manifested as increased capacity for caring.
- ❑ The third stage of Gilligan's schema is a morality of nonviolence where care becomes a universal obligation. This involves an injunction against hurting others, governing all moral judgment and actions.
- ❑ Peace educators can promote nonviolent behaviour by setting up classrooms that are respectful of all members.

- ☐ They can use effective group techniques that allow learners to practice nonviolence behavior. *How can we do this?*

#### **4. Promoting Critical Thinking**

Critical thinking is sometimes referred to as reflective thinking, divergent thinking, reasoning, inferential skills or analytical thinking. Critical thinking should be encouraged in class, and this involves:

- ☐ Encouraging learners to listen to other people's ideas, and to think back and forth between different points of view before formulating their own views.
- ☐ Learners should be encouraged to evaluate rules and regulations that affect them, their own curriculum and the techniques of learning. They should be encouraged to factor in their own belief systems, and their actions in relation to these issues.
- ☐ The skills for doing this can be taught through social inquiry. Social inquiry involves presentation and clarification for puzzling situations; gathering facts and evidence to support hypotheses and devise solutions. This model helps students to move from stage to stage by sharpening discussion on students' questions and interests,

#### **5. Promoting Self-esteem**

- ☐ Our own experiences at different levels, in the family, among our peers, and in the wider community, determine the way we perceive ourselves, and the impact on our mental health, our leadership ability and our interpersonal skills.
- ☐ The experiences that help people to realize their own power to create change are successful past experiences, characterized by problem-solving ability to cope with stress, feeling of optimism, self-confidence, feeling of responsibility for the wellbeing of others, experience of emotional warmth and reward for helping behaviour.
- ☐ The classroom should aim to stamp out feelings of fear, and feelings of powerlessness.
- ☐ One way of doing this is to share these feelings in class. This enables individual realize that they are not the only ones who have experienced those feelings.



- ☐ Self-esteem is derived from a sense of achievement. Therefore, the class should as well be made to feel a class of achievers.
- ☐ Affirmation is essential in nurturing self-esteem; so, “put-down” cultures should be minimized, sarcasm, sexist remarks, and downgrading and negative stereotyping should be discouraged.
- ☐ The other things that teachers/facilitators can do to encourage self-esteem in class include: peer tutoring, advising and counselling.
- ☐ When learners help one another to learn, their own knowledge of subject matter increases.
- ☐ One of the things that can be done is to also keep classes small to encourage participation by all learners. Sometimes, schools with a large number of learners may find it challenging to keep to a small number of learners per class or stream, and, as a result, relationships among learners may tend to be impersonal and the environment can be alienating.

## Module 2: Dismantling the Culture of War and Violence

This module provides a framework for identifying indicators of the culture of war and violence among learners, and in their homes and communities, on the basis of which they propose, and are exposed to, other ways to moderate that culture. Gender-based violence is incorporated as a key sub-theme in the module to help participants appreciate manifestations of structural violence in norms and practices.

### Introduction: Description of session

- ☐ The session will begin with the facilitator leading the participants through the learning objectives and the guiding principles for the session, and teaming up by asking participants to voluntarily contribute and share peace proverbs and symbols that are used in their cultural contexts.
- ☐ It will then proceed to the conceptualization of “dismantling the culture of war and violence” through a mix of a brief lecture, brainstorming and question and answer sessions.
- ☐ The participants will then be given a framework that can help them to identify indicators of the culture of war and violence among the learners, and ways to moderate that culture.
- ☐ They will then be divided into two groups to identify the indicators of the culture of war and violence, and the mitigating factors of that culture among the learners in their school.
- ☐ The two groups will then report their findings that will be combined into a single report following discussion of the two reports.
- ☐ This will be followed by an evaluation of, and reflections about, the session.

### Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the participants should be able to:

- a) Define and explain *culture of war and violence*;
- b) Identify indicators of a culture of war and violence; and
- c) Explain what they can do to moderate a culture of war and violence in school.

## **Guiding Inquiries**

The following are the guiding inquiries for this session:

1. What is the participants' understanding of the concept of "culture of war and violence"?
2. How can the participants identify the indicators of the culture of war and violence amongst the pupils?
3. Why is it important to understand the concept of "culture of war and violence"?
4. What strategies can the participants use to moderate the culture of war and violence in their school?

## **Materials and Equipment Needed**

- ☐ Projector
- ☐ Generator
- ☐ Laptop
- ☐ Flip chart
- ☐ Flip chart stand
- ☐ Markers
- ☐ Masking tapes
- ☐ Manual
- ☐ Handouts
- ☐ Notebooks
- ☐ Pens
- ☐ Pencils
- ☐ Colour pencils
- ☐ Drawing paper

- ☐ Learners' drawings
- ☐ Readings
- ☐ Peace proverbs
- ☐ Peace symbols

### **Pre-session Activities**

- ☐ Well before the session, ask learners to draw their favourite pictures to be used as part of the materials.
- ☐ The facilitator asks participants to voluntarily contribute peace-related proverbs as a means of preparing them for the conceptualization of the culture of war and violence and for teaming up.
- ☐ The facilitator also selects some peace proverbs or symbols to share with participants.

### **Conceptualization of Terms**

- ☐ Participants are expected to have read the handouts detailing the concept the “culture of war and violence.” However, a brief lecture and brainstorming sessions will still be conducted.
- ☐ Dismantling the culture of war and violence is one of the themes of peace education developed by Toh Swee Hin, and it is about changing values, attitudes and beliefs against war and violence.
- ☐ Features of efforts to dismantle the culture of war and violence include non-violent resolution of armed conflicts and disputes. This can be through peaceful negotiation and mediation, and not through military solutions as was previously the case in Uganda.
- ☐ Examples of efforts to dismantle the culture of war and violence include the series of peace talks culminating into the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Sudan Government and the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS), the series of

peace talks between the Uganda Government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and the cross-border peace dialogues between the Karimojong and the Langi.

- ☐ Efforts to do away with militarism, for example, banning the manufacture of nuclear weapons, and discouraging militarism, are part of the efforts to dismantle the culture of war and violence.
- ☐ Militarism can in fact be eliminated with no negative effects, and there are countries without a national army (e.g., Costa Rica, Grenada, Vatican City, Samoa, Tuvalu & Haiti).
- ☐ Costa Rica, with no army, has citizens rated among the happiest in the world.
- ☐ Militarism includes teaching people how to use the gun, such as during political education (*mchaka mchaka*) in Uganda.
- ☐ At the micro level in homes, schools and in the communities, there are practices that tend to promote the culture of war and violence (e.g., gifting children with toy guns, gunships, helicopters, and military tanks).
- ☐ On reflection, we realize that much as such toys may be popular with children, they tend to promote the culture of war and violence.
- ☐ The same problem extends to movies that are full of violence. They are popular with children who may be misled into thinking that violence is normal.
- ☐ Many of us must have learnt about examples of school violence perpetrated by disgruntled students turning guns on fellow students and teachers. One of these was the Virginia Tech massacre of 32 people by a student in 2007 in the USA.
- ☐ Possession of private guns and trading in guns are some of the drivers of the culture of war and violence; and that may be why the government is trying to disarm the Karimojong.
- ☐ However, disarmament should be done using a non-violent approach. Otherwise, disarmament by force has, over the years, met with violent resistance, and caused other forms of violence.
- ☐ Media can also be used to promote the culture of war and violence (e.g., in Rwanda *Radio Mille Collines* was used to promote genocide).

- ☐ However, the media can also be used to promote the culture of peace and non-violence.
  
- ☐ Another driver of the culture of war and violence is the recruitment or conscription of children into the armed forces. The children grow up socialized that violence is the right thing.

**Activities:**

- ☐ *Brainstorm: How do we identify a potentially violent pupil/student?*
- ☐ *How do we deal with such a pupil/student?*
- ☐ *Display and dialogue over the learners' drawings done during the pre-session: are there signs of violence reflected in them.*
- ☐ *Dialogue over the learners' drawings that reflect peace.*
- ☐ *Introduce the following framework to ultimately generate a discussion on indicators of violence among learners.*

**Indicators of Violence among Students and how to Deal with Them**

Indicators of violence among students	Possible reasons for the violence	How to deal with violent situations


- ☐ *Divide the participants into two discussion groups.*
- ☐ *Discuss the reports.*
- ☐ *Harmonise the reports*

### **Other Tips for Promoting the Culture of Peace and Nonviolence**

- ☐ Government can come up with policies against the culture of war and violence, and specific policies against recruitment or conscription of child soldiers.
- ☐ It is also argued that when you want peace, begin with the children. Children and Youth Peace organizations and initiatives should be encouraged.
- ☐ Strengthen the role of women in building and maintaining peace. Encourage the formation and strengthening of women's peace organizations as one of the approaches to promote the culture of peace and non-violence.
- ☐ Involve both religious and traditional leaders in promoting the culture of peace and non-violence.
- ☐ In our circumstance in Northern Uganda, rehabilitation of traumatized children and youth can greatly contribute to the creation of the culture of peace.
- ☐ Civil society organizations should play their role in campaigning against the culture of war and violence.
- ☐ To address family violence, appropriate laws that can curb domestic/family violence should be enacted.
- ☐ Traditional approaches that can promote peace and reconciliation should also be promoted.

## **Evaluation and Reflection**

- ☐ Ask participants to comment on the relevance of the topic to their work as learners and teachers.
- ☐ Ask participants to identify what appealed to them, or stood out for them, in the session, and what did not and why.
- ☐ Ask the participants to identify areas for improvement if any.
- ☐ Close the session with thanks for the participants' contributions and cooperation.



### Module 3: Living with Justice and Compassion

This module seeks to instil the spirit of justice and compassion in the school community, and it focusses on the conceptualisation of justice and compassion, and how these are experienced in day-to-day lives.

#### **Introduction: Description of Session**

- ☐ The session will begin with the facilitator leading the participants through the learning objectives and the guiding principles for the session.
- ☐ The facilitator then creates teams by asking three participants to pick a piece of paper on which the name of an animal has been written.
- ☐ The facilitator then asks the rest of the participants to pick theirs, then blindfold themselves by closing their eyes.
- ☐ The facilitator then asks the first three participants to pick their lots to begin making the sound of the animals they chose and move round the room while the rest of the participants grope their way to the sound of the animal they chose until they team up.
- ☐ The facilitator then stops the exercise and asks the participants what they felt about the exercise.
- ☐ The facilitator then explains that this would be their group in the forthcoming exercises.
- ☐ This exercise is adapted from Alternative to Violence Project (AVP) training and meant to be funny and energizing.
- ☐ The facilitator explains that since learning is supposed to be fun, such exercises are important to break boredom in their classes.
- ☐ The session will then proceed to a brief lecture on conceptualization of the theme “Living with Justice and Compassion” as one of the tenets of peace education of Toh Swee Hin.
- ☐ The groups will then be assigned to in turn to do role plays relevant to living with justice and compassion, followed by critiques that can facilitate better understanding of the theme.

- ☐ This will again be followed by dialoguing on how we can instil the spirit of justice and compassion in the school, followed by reflections and the session evaluation.

## **Learning Objectives**

**By the end of the session, the participants should be able to:**

- a) Explain the meaning of living with justice and compassion;
- b) Identify indicators of living with justice and compassion in the family, in school, in the community and in the country; and
- c) Explain how and what they can contribute to living with justice and compassion.

## **Guiding Inquiries**

The following are the guiding inquiries for this session:

1. What is the participants' understanding of the meaning of living with justice and compassion?
2. Why is it important to live with justice and compassion?
3. How can the participants identify the indicators (good practices) of living with justice and compassion in the family, in school, in the community and in the country?
4. What good practices can the participants adopt to enhance living with justice and compassion in different settings and situations?

## **Materials and Equipment Needed**

- ☐ Projector
- ☐ Generator
- ☐ Lap top
- ☐ Flip chart
- ☐ Flip chart stand
- ☐ Markers

- ☐ Masking tapes
- ☐ Manual
- ☐ Handouts/Readings
- ☐ Notebooks
- ☐ Pens
- ☐ Chalk board
- ☐ Chalk

### **Pre-session Activities**

Participants will be expected to reflect on the practical applications of the concept of justice and compassion in their day-to-day lives in advance.

### **Conceptualization of Terms**

- ☐ By the end of this session, we expect participants to have understood the value of living with justice and compassion.
- ☐ In simple terms, justice implies fairness or fair dealing, reasonableness or righteousness.
- ☐ It implies redress for those who have been wronged, and may imply appropriate (not excessive) punishment for those who have wronged others.
- ☐ Compassion implies sympathy, empathy, concern, kindness, consideration and care.
- ☐ The opposite of compassion is coldness.
- ☐ Accordingly, to have compassion for others is to care about the needs of others, to be kind towards them, and probably share with them what we may have.
- ☐ Living with justice and compassion implies that justice and compassion are sources of peace. When we live with justice and compassion at the family, society, national, regional, and global levels, then we are likely to have some peace.

- ☐ At the school level, it is important to recognize that we are differently endowed, both as teachers and learners; and that there is need to extend a helping hand to those who do not have physically, psychologically, materially, and avoid glaring inequalities.
- ☐ The prolonged war in Northern Uganda led to poverty, disability and deprivation and disparities; and we should always seek to redress these scenarios by living with justice and a compassion.
- ☐ For example, some children may not be able to afford fees in time. Their sponsors need to be reminded in an emphatic way.
- ☐ Similarly, some learners may not be able to perform well in class because of the psychosocial problems they may be having as a consequence of the prolonged war and/or personal circumstance in the environment.
- ☐ These should be handled patiently, sometimes through the engagement of a specialist in guidance and counselling.
- ☐ Some learners take time to learn; others learn fast; yet others are abnormally slow or fast.
- ☐ Personal attention should be given to individual learners to gauge where they belong so that an appropriate approach should be adopted in handling them, but not through prejudicing, stereotyping, singling them out or coercing them to do what we want.
- ☐ At the same time, there is no need to pamper, cajole or favour individual learners perceived to be better than others. Such actions may breed jealousy among their colleagues, some of whom may even feel unwanted. Such actions may also negatively enhance the pride of the pampered or favoured learners.
- ☐ As teachers, we need to encourage both weak and strong learners to do better in a very skilful way that makes both of them feel wanted and loved.
- ☐ The justice and compassion spirit should permeate the entire school system, taking care of the plight of learners and staff, with staff and learners sharing community responsibilities, such as attendance of, and contributions to, funerals of relatives of staff and learners.

- ☐ The justice and compassion spirit should also drive staff and learners to share resources and workload, to be gender responsive by avoiding sexual harassment at the workplace, for example.
- ☐ When learners interact among themselves, they should avoid all forms of violence, including bullying, sexual harassment.

Beyond the school, in our community, in our family, at workplaces, at the national level, we may have different attributes, different luck and access to resources. We may be afflicted by different kinds of disability or different kinds of diseases. The questions are: How do we make sure that we share what we have with others? How do we ensure that we live in harmony with the disabled and those who may be lacking in different areas? The following questions may also be useful:

- ☐ Do we have a helping heart, and do we share with others?
- ☐ How do we care for the disabled, the elderly, the sick or other disadvantaged? Do we empathize with them?
- ☐ Do we stigmatize those who may be infected with HIV/AIDS, or do we give them the support they deserve?
- ☐ Do we support HIV/AIDS orphans and other orphans?

If we do these, then we are upholding some values of living with justice and compassion. Other questions that we need to ask are:

- ☐ Do we have time for our children, and do we give them enough parental love and care? What about disadvantaged children who may be on the street? What care do we and our institutions extend to them?
- ☐ Do activities of the NGOs and the civil society benefit the poorest of the poor, or instead, do they benefit the workers more than the poorest who are purportedly targeted in the first place?
- ☐ Do NGO interventions empower beneficiaries to be self-reliant?
- ☐ Are the NGO interventions sustainable?

- ❑ Are the government's policies pro-poor?

The answers to these questions are that:

- ❑ Parents should have time for their children and extend to them the love and care they deserve;
- ❑ NGO activities should benefit the poorest of the poor, and empower them to be self-reliant;
- ❑ NGO activities should devise strategies to ensure that their activities are sustainable; and
- ❑ The government should have policies that are pro-poor rather than serving the interest of the rich people.

### **Some Tips on Living with Justice and Compassion**

To live with justice and compassion also requires some of the following:

- ❑ Our education system should help us to develop a spirit of living with justice and compassion, and also address issues that lead to inequality in society, such as poverty.
- ❑ We normally hear about the world increasingly becoming one village, with improved communication, transportation and transfer of capital or investment to where it is profitable. This process is called globalization. However, mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that globalization is fair, inclusive and democratic. It should provide tangible opportunities and benefits for all countries and peoples.
- ❑ We always hear of opening up to foreign investors, but the investors should have the spirit of justice and compassion. Globalization should not be driven exclusively by the spirit of profit, greed and consumerism. How are we preparing our young people to embrace this challenge? How are young people contributing to, and coping with, the changing world?
- ❑ There are countries that are potentially rich, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, but warlords and other foreign interests do not allow them to develop because of greed. This negates the spirit of living with justice and compassion.

- ☐ Many developing countries live under the burden of debt. In the spirit of justice and compassion, these debts should be forgiven.
- ☐ Lastly, mechanisms need to be put in place to fight against corruption. Corruption negates the principle of living with justice and compassion.
- ☐ There is need to strengthen the Inspectorate of Government (IGG), Auditor General's Office, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), and the anti-corruption civil society.
- ☐ Our parliamentarians should also be empowered to fight corruption from top to bottom.
- ☐ Most importantly, our young people need to know what is happening around them, and to drive processes that are beneficial to their communities. ***How do we do this?***

### ***Activities:***

- ☐ *The three “animal” groups now choose any good name for their group, and respectively present role plays depicting living with justice and compassion in school, in the family and in the community.*
- ☐ *A discussion and critique will follow in the hope that lessons will be learnt in each presentation.*
- ☐ *Questions derived from the guiding inquiries should be used to enhance the discussions and critiques of the role plays.*

### **Evaluation and Reflection**

- ☐ Ask participants to comment on the relevance of the topic to their work as teachers, and to their role as learners.
- ☐ Ask participants to identify what appealed to them or stood out for them in the session, and what did not and why.
- ☐ Ask the participants to identify areas for improvement, if any.
- ☐ Close the session by thanking the participants for their contributions and cooperation during the sessions.

## Module 4: Promotion of Human Rights and Responsibilities

This module is intended to encourage participants to dialogue on what can be done to protect the rights that are being violated, and on the responsibilities of different stakeholders, including teachers, learners, parents and community members. The module covers basic rights and responsibilities, focussing on “Rights of Children and Youth”, “Rights of Women”, “Rights of the Disabled”, and “Rights of Teachers.” The other themes covered include “Responsibilities of Women,” “Responsibilities of Children and Youth”, “Responsibilities of the Disabled”, and “Responsibilities of Teachers”.

### **Introduction: Description of Session**

The session will begin with the facilitator leading the participants through the learning objectives and the guiding principles for the session. The facilitator then gives the participants stickers, and because most of them are assumed to have some broad ideas about human rights and responsibilities, a prepared sheet divided into 4 sections is displayed. The sections are labeled “Rights of Children and Youth”, “Rights of Women”, “Rights of the Disabled”, “Rights of Teachers.” For contrast, another sheet is displayed labeled “Responsibilities of Children and Youth”, “Responsibilities of Women,” “Responsibilities of the Disabled” and “Responsibilities of Teachers.”

The facilitator then asks each participant to independently make two entries for each of the categories, then stick them where they belong. The facilitator then goes through the list to identify differences and similarities. This should spark off brief discussions.

The session will then proceed to a brief lecture on the conceptualization of the theme “Human Rights and Responsibilities”, briefly outlining key elements of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Participants will then be divided into two to present role plays on “Rights that are Protected in the School” and another on “Rights that are Violated in the School”. It should be made clear from the beginning that this is for learning purposes, and not meant to belittle or victimize anybody. This should then be followed by a dialogue on what can be done to protect the rights that are being violated and another dialogue on the responsibilities of teachers and learners. The session will then be concluded with a Reflection and Evaluation session.

### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of the session, the participants should be able to:



- a) Comment on human rights protection and violations at different levels;
- b) Comment on the need to balance human rights with responsibilities; and
- c) Suggest measures to protect human rights.

## **Guiding Inquiries**

The following are the guiding inquiries for this session:

- 1. What are the participants' perceptions of human rights and responsibilities at different levels, including in school?
- 2. Can the participants identify the rights of different categories of people, such as of children and youth, women, the disabled, the elderly and their own rights?
- 3. What are the participants' perceptions of what can be done to protect human rights?

## **Materials and Equipment Needed**

- ☐ Projector
- ☐ Generator
- ☐ Laptop
- ☐ Flip chart
- ☐ Flip chart stand
- ☐ Markers
- ☐ Masking tapes
- ☐ Manual
- ☐ Handouts/Readings (UDHR and CRC excerpts)
- ☐ Notebooks
- ☐ Pens

☐ Chalk board

☐ Chalk

☐ Stickers

### **Pre-session Activities**

- ☐ The participants are expected to have read the handouts in advance.
- ☐ Distribute stickers to participants.
- ☐ Display a sheet of paper divided into 4 labeled “Rights of Children and Youth”, “Rights of Women”, “Rights of the Disabled”, “Rights of Teachers” respectively.
- ☐ Ask participants to independently make two entries for each of the categories, and stick them where they belong.
- ☐ Go through the entries to identify differences and similarities.
- ☐ Discuss the entries, and ask participants whether there are limits to those rights.
- ☐ Display another sheet of paper labeled, “Responsibilities of Children and Youth”, “Responsibilities of Women,” “Responsibilities of the Disabled” and “Responsibilities of Teachers” respectively.
- ☐ Ask participants to independently make two entries for each of the categories, and stick them where they belong.
- ☐ Go through the entries to identify differences and similarities.
- ☐ Discuss the entries emphasizing the need to balance rights and responsibilities.

This should pave the way for a brief lecture on the conceptualization of human rights and responsibilities and going through provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Rights of children to education, and at educational institutions, should be emphasized.

### **Conceptualization of Terms**

- ☐ **“Human rights”** simply means freedom to life and from harm, freedom to move, to express oneself, **to be involved in decision making on issues that affect one.**

- ☐ It means freedom in all political, social and economic realms, and the right to a sound environment. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 captures all these aspects of rights that each individual is expected to have regardless of race, ethnic group, religion, disability, sex etc. *(Briefly scan through the different aspects of rights in the UDHR. Ask participants what strikes them most in the UDHR).*

**Responsibilities**, in our context, means behaviors or actions within the confines of our own rights in all dimensions while also being conscious of the rights of others, and respecting and protecting those rights. For example, a child's rights to education on the one hand and the rights to play on the other hand should be balanced. A child who plays past mid-night and wakes up sleepy and unable to go to school in time, and falls asleep while in class, would be violating his/her right to education. Our freedom of worship should not mean we should be at liberty to disturb the peace of others by being so loud that we prevent others, who may not subscribe to the worship, from sleeping. Hence rights should always be balanced with responsibilities.

If our country is to be rated highly in the observance of human rights, we should think of both incorporating most provisions of the UDHR into our laws and enforcing those laws to uphold the rights of individuals and communities. It is important to observe the rights of the vulnerable, like the disabled, women, children etc. A popular saying is that disability is not inability. The so-called disabled have considerable potential which should be tapped. Even people who are born as 'invalids' should be taken as God's gifts, and they deserve care, love and compassion as their right. Women should be looked at as equal partners to men in social, economic, political and cultural matters. Children and orphans have their rights to care, protection and several other rights that must be observed. They must not be subjected to labour that is not befitting their age.

The law should be applied to ensure that our soldiers or security operatives do not violate human rights; and in case they do so, they should be punished appropriately. Civil society or NGOs should be encouraged to freely advocate for human rights, and they should reach people at the grassroots.

Lastly, violators of human rights deserve to be punished after a fair trial. In our traditional system of reconciliation, there could also be an element of compensation of the person wronged, which in a way is punishment. Another question that we may pose is: is it alright to

have reconciliation without punishment? Are repentance and forgiveness after gross violation of human rights enough?

It is important to pose some of these questions concerning human rights, basing on your personal experience of living in your villages and in Uganda:

- ☐ Do our local communities respect the rights of different categories of people?
- ☐ Does Uganda uphold the rights enumerated in the UDHR?
- ☐ Does observance of human rights rank high in your community and northern Uganda?
- ☐ Which security organization record the highest number of human rights violations, and why?
- ☐ How effective are the human rights-oriented organizations in the promotion of human rights in northern Uganda?
- ☐ Have we integrated human rights education in our schools?
- ☐ Are most people aware of their responsibilities to promote human rights?
- ☐ Do we respect the rights of the vulnerable, like women, children, orphans, the disabled and the elderly?
- ☐ Do we take care of the disabled?
- ☐ Do we take care of the elderly?
- ☐ Traditionally, our extended family systems took care of orphans; is this still the case?
- ☐ Are girls in northern Uganda assisted to have equal access to education and other opportunities with boys?
- ☐ Do we use child labour?
- ☐ Are there cases of sexual exploitation of children?
- ☐ Do we have arranged, early and forced marriages?
- ☐ Do we have cases of marital rape?

- ❑ Do we have cases of wife beating or husband beating?
- ❑ Do we give equal opportunities for young people and women to own property, including land?
- ❑ Do we give young people and women equal opportunities to participate in decision making on issues that affect them?
- ❑ Do we give young people and women equal opportunities to participate in business?
- ❑ Do we allow young people and women to freely access health facilities or should men always be the ones to grant women permission to access healthcare facilities?
- ❑ Do we allow women to vote freely without the influence of men?
- ❑ Should former child soldiers be subjected to trial for alleged violation of human rights or should they be forgiven?

Answers to many of the above questions will tell us whether or not we are respecting or upholding human rights. For instance, we would realize that we still have few human rights-oriented organizations, and that they are overwhelmed. We also know that human rights education is not adequately integrated into our curricula. Sexual and gender-based violence is still a big problem. Education still favours boys more than girls. When it comes to elections, many men still want to influence the way their women vote. Child labour exists. Many women are not free to own property of their own. Young people and women still do not have equal opportunities with men to participate in business and in decision making on issues that affect them. Some disabled and elderly people still do not get the care and attention they deserve. All these are issues of human rights violations and peacelessness that need to be addressed.

Human rights education should be incorporated into our curricula and practiced at the local level and by teachers and learners in their schools and communities. Non-formal or informal human rights education should as well be encouraged. Non-formal education is the kind of education we get through workshops or sensitization seminars while informal education may be through stories, parables etc. told in such places as home settings.

### **Promotion of Human Rights and Responsibilities in School**

In the school environment, both learners and their teachers should know about their rights, and establish mechanisms to uphold them. At the same time, it is important that the learners and teachers observe their responsibilities.

Provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Child provide good guidelines for observing the rights of children/pupils. These include:

1. **Survival rights:** these are the rights of a child to life and basic needs. Right from birth, a child is expected to enjoy the basic right to health and nutrition.
2. **Development rights:** these are the rights of a child to reach his/her full potential through freedom in thought, conscience and religion. Other requirements under development rights are that the child accesses appropriate information and enjoys the right to education, leisure, recreation and cultural activities.
3. **Protection rights:** these are rights that pertain to the need to preserve the child's identity and nationality, and safeguarding the child against abuse, neglect, child labour, drug abuse, sexual exploitation, sale and trafficking, torture and deprivation of liberty etc.
4. **Participation rights:** these are rights that pertain to giving children an opportunity to participate actively in the affairs of their communities and nations. Hence children's voices need to be sought, especially on issues that directly affect them.

Schools should ensure that they observe the rights of their learners in all the above aspects while at the same time emphasizing the responsibilities that go with those rights. Other categories of rights that need to be observed for both learners and other stakeholders in the school are: social, economic and political rights.

- ☐ **Social rights** may be rights to social services, like healthcare, a good education environment, the right to play, and the right to nutritious food. It is not enough to say we are giving our children or learners rights to food when they are not able to get a balanced diet. You should think about other alternatives to porridge that is provided to your learners. For example, you could consider giving your learners some mangoes during the mango season.
- ☐ **Economic rights** include rights to gainful employment and a good income. There should always be mechanisms to financially support learners who find it difficult to

meet their basic scholastic materials. Similarly, teachers who are financially needy, and some of whose needs (e.g., burial expenses) require immediate attention, should be supported. Maybe a school can initiate a modest saving scheme where monthly contributions target such emergencies.

- ❑ **Political rights** include the rights to form associations, to vote and be voted for, and to participate in decision making. Dictatorship is often the enemy of political rights. People should be free to associate and express themselves. Meetings need to be inclusive. Structures need to be established to support this. **Are learners' voices heard? How are they involved in making decision that affect them? To what extent is their leadership structure allowed to operate to its full potential? In a mixed school, is gender mainstreamed? In other words, how are the women/girls involved in the political affairs in the school?** These are some of the pertinent questions that, if positively acted upon, can contribute to creating a culture of peace in school.

Other important questions are:

- ❑ Do we have mechanisms to check corruption and other malpractices in school?
- ❑ Do we uphold the dignity and freedoms of others?
- ❑ Do we respect the rights of marginalized groups, orphans, the disabled, formerly abducted children, child mothers etc., or do we stigmatize them and call them names?
- ❑ Do we have any female-friendly facilities in the school?
- ❑ Do we give learners freedom to form clubs and associations that promote peace? If answers to these questions are affirmative ("yes"), then indeed we have some respect for human rights.

However, rights should go alongside responsibilities. Within rights, there must be limitations. For example, in respecting the rights of children to play, they must know that there should be time for other activities. They should know that freedom of movement should not mean breaking the school regulations and going out any time one wishes. Therefore, school rules and regulations need to be in place, and there should be mechanisms to enforce them.

The other international convention that learners and teachers should be aware of and uphold is the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Gender needs to be mainstreamed in the school, and that means the involvement and inclusion of both male and female members, and taking into consideration their concerns in all policy, planning, and programme formulation and implementation. Regardless of their sex, all the learners have a right to a supportive learning environment, and the same applies to teachers with respect to a fair wage and good working conditions. Both sexes need equal freedom of expression and freedom from discrimination and harassment. At the same time, both sexes are tasked with the responsibility of respecting other people's views and ways of life that may be different from theirs.

### **Tips on Teaching with a Rights-Based Approach**

Teaching should uphold standards of human dignity and decency (Flowers, 1998). Flowers rightly recommends the following:

- a) Focus on human-rights concerns, and should provide opportunities for learners to express themselves and to hold views that may be different from those of the facilitator or teacher.
- b) Be responsive to diversity in terms of racial, gender, religious, cultural, physical ability and age differences. For example, some formerly abducted children may be older than their colleagues in class, but they should be accommodated without any discrimination.
- c) The learning environment, such as the classroom climate, should demonstrate respect for human dignity and fairness.
- d) Participatory learning methods, such as role play, discussion, games and simulation, are more democratic and inclusive than non-participatory ones, and should be encouraged.
- e) Emphasize human rights as a positive value, and minimize or eliminate human rights abuses.
- f) Provide examples of individuals who have made a difference.

### ***Activities***



- ☐ *Divide the participants into two groups: one to present a role play on “Rights that are Protected in the School” and another on “Rights that are Violated in the School”. (10 minutes preparation and 5 minutes each for presentation).*
- ☐ *Explain that this may be sensitive to some individuals in the school, but it should be treated as intended for learning purposes.*
- ☐ *Let them freeze at intervals whenever there are lessons to be drawn from a particular episode of the play and open up a discussion.*
- ☐ *Open up a dialogue on what can be done to protect the rights that are violated and another dialogue on the responsibilities of teachers and learners.*

### **Evaluation and Reflection**

- ☐ Ask participants to comment on the relevance of the topic to their role as learners, and to their work as teachers.
- ☐ Ask participants to identify what appealed to them or stood out for them in the session, and what did not and why.
- ☐ Ask the participants to identify areas for improvement, if any.
- ☐ Close the session with thanks for the participants’ contributions and cooperation.

## Module 5: Intercultural Solidarity and Reconciliation

This module is concerned with the ways in which communities perceive themselves and others, and the ways through which they practice their values vis-à-vis other communities or cultures. It is meant to enable participants to:

- a) examine critically their norms and practices in order to identify how those norms and practices promote or hinder solidarity among groups;
- b) reflect on how they can live in solidarity with others; and
- c) consider the role their norms and practices play in the journey to reconciliation.

The module also emphasises the importance of being proud of, and upholding, one's cultural identity while at the same time being alert to the need to work together in harmony as members of the world community who all have interest in peace and development, despite our cultural differences.

### **Introduction: Description of Session**

The session begins with the facilitator leading the participants through the learning objectives and the guiding principles for the session, followed by a brainstorming session on what strikes participants as strange in different cultures. This is followed by asking a volunteer to read a Yoruba folk tale "The Creation of Confusion". This should enable participants to realize how one norm, practice or event can be perceived differently by different people belonging to different cultures. A brief lecture on the conceptualization of inter-cultural solidarity and reconciliation will then follow. The participants will then be divided into two groups to discuss and present on "Good Local Cultural Norms and Practices that Should Be Upheld" by one group and the other one on "Bad Local Cultural Norms and Practices that Should Be Discouraged". A discussion will follow, giving way to a Reflection and Evaluation session.

### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of the session, the participants should be able to:

- d) Explain how culture and cultural diversity can be a resource for peace;

- e) Explain how culture and cultural diversity can be a source of conflict;
- f) Appreciate cultural diversity as a resource for peace in the school; and
- g) Explain the concepts “inter-cultural solidarity” and “reconciliation.”

### **Guiding Inquiries**

The following are the guiding inquiries for this session:

- ❑ What do we mean by inter-cultural solidarity and reconciliation?
- ❑ How can culture and cultural diversity be a resource for peace in different settings?
- ❑ How can culture and cultural diversity be a source of conflict?
- ❑ How can we exploit cultural diversity as a resource for peace in school?

### **Materials and Equipment Needed**

- ❑ Projector
- ❑ Generator
- ❑ Lap top
- ❑ Flip chart
- ❑ Flip chart stand
- ❑ Markers
- ❑ Masking tapes
- ❑ Manual
- ❑ Handouts/Readings (Yoruba folk tale etc.)
- ❑ Notebooks
- ❑ Pens
- ❑ Chalk board

- ☐ Chalk

### **Pre-session Activities**

- ☐ Facilitator leads participants in a brainstorming session on what strikes them as strange from the different cultures they have encountered.
- ☐ A volunteer would then be asked to read the Yoruba folk tale, “The Creation of Confusion”
- ☐ An comparison will then be made between the baseless confusion that arises in the folktale and the negative ways in which people interpret aspects of other people’s cultures.

### **Conceptualisation of Terms**

Culture has been variously defined. It has been defined simply as “the total way of life of a particular people.” That means culture concerns the kind of food a particular people eat, how they prepare it, the way they dress, sing, dance, perform certain rituals and worship, etc. The concept of inter-cultural solidarity therefore implies the harmonious inter-face of the different lifestyles shaped by our different cultures. It is also important to note that culture is not static; rather it is dynamic to the extent that most of what we think is our culture may be a hybridization of different cultures. This, therefore, means we should be adaptable in the event of cultural interface. However, this does not mean we should lose good aspects of our cultures and adopt what may not be appropriate in our circumstances.

Reconciliation, in this context, means we should be ready to reconcile the different cultures, especially in this era of globalization where transport and communication advancements allow people of different cultural backgrounds to interface. It also implies that in case of any past inter-cultural conflicts, people should dialogue and chart out a more harmonious co-existence.

It is important to note that people come from different cultural backgrounds. When people from these different cultural backgrounds meet, there is bound to be a clash in the way they do things, the way they perceive things, their attitudes to certain issues, and their behaviours which may not be the same. Each of them may be proud of their respective identities and cultures, and even imagine that their culture is superior to others. Even here in northern Uganda, we have stereotyped our neighbours. In Lango, we have heard people referring to the Karimojong as “okwo dok” (cattle thieves), while the Karimojong refer to the Langi as “lango” (an enemy).

BUT are all Karimojong cattle rustlers, or are all Langi enemies of Karimojong? The answer is of course “no”, and such stereotypes may arise from cultural differences and/or experiences.

In this session, we want to impress it upon participants that it is good to recognize that since we come from different cultural backgrounds, it is important to understand how the different cultures have shaped the way other people do their things, how their cultures have shaped their outlook or their attitudes and behaviour. Once we recognize those differences, then we would realize the need to be accommodative despite the differences. Sometimes, we realize that what we perceive as bad through our own cultural lenses may in fact be good. For example, the Acholi despise the Lugbara for mixing their beef stew with *otigo* (okra) vegetables, but in reality, that helps the Lugbara community in balancing their diet.

Despite our cultural differences, we need to work together in harmony as members of the world community, who all have interest in peace and development. We need not emphasize our differences; rather we should strive for solidarity. In other words, we need to work towards reconciling our differences. The same applies to religious differences. Almost all religions preach the same message: love one another, share, oneness as children of God etc. Therefore, there should be solidarity among the different religions. There should be inter-faith dialogue, multi-faith projects etc., given the common cause of the different religions. For example, Orthodox, Muslims, Catholics and Protestants, under the umbrella of Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), started working together towards negotiating with the LRA and other leaders, and implementing other initiatives for peace in northern Uganda.

It is also important to recognize that what upholds our identity is our culture, and that it is important to be proud of our culture and to promote it. However, there are some aspects of culture which may not be good. What are some examples of these? In this era of HIV/AIDS, for instance, it would be unrealistic to uphold the cultural practice of wife inheritance. It would also be unrealistic to marry off girls below 18 years much as our culture is not specific about the age at which girls should marry. The world has also come up to strongly oppose practices such as female genital mutilation, practiced by some ethnic groups. It is important to note, however that since these are cultural issues, if we are to condemn them, we need to be quite peaceful in our approach. It is good, for instance, to help the people who practice female genital mutilation to understand and appreciate its disadvantages, and to explore alternatives to the practice. If the practice is meant to initiate females into womanhood, there could be alternatives

to the mutilation, itself; and it is necessary to peacefully convince the people about the viability of such alternatives.

Some of the questions we may need to ask ourselves are:

- ❑ Are people proud of their identity as Langi, for instance?
- ❑ Is there harmony between the different ethnic groups in Uganda, for example, between the Langi and Teso, between Langi and Acholi, between Langi/Acholi and the Karimojong etc.?
- ❑ Is there harmony among the different religious groups in Uganda?
- ❑ Is multi-cultural or inter-cultural education integrated into our curricula or practiced in our schools?
- ❑ Is our politics free of ethnic sentiments?
- ❑ Is our politics free of religious sentiments?
- ❑ Are we allowed to promote our identity: e.g. are the different ethnic groups in the school free to showcase their culture?
- ❑ Do we have inter-clan conflicts?
- ❑ Do we feel free to interact with people from other communities? Does our education system prepare us for that kind of interaction?
- ❑ Do we appreciate the idea of multi-racial and multi-ethnic marriages?
- ❑ Do we feel free to study in a multi-cultural setting?
- ❑ Can we easily accept different lifestyles so long as they do not grossly violate our own rights?
- ❑ In case of inter-cultural conflict, are we ready to sit down and reconcile our differences amicably?

If the answers to most of those questions are affirmative, then we are on the right track. We should be proud of our own culture and identity as a people, but we should also be ready to appreciate other people's cultures, however strange they may appear to us. We should give

other people the freedom and space to practice their culture. To better understand our differences, we should encourage inter-cultural exchange and dialogue.

Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) has also demonstrated that different religious groups can work together. Such initiatives need to be encouraged. In the absence of a specific multi-cultural education curriculum, we should also think of how to incorporate multiculturalism into teaching and learning.

Politics should as well be free from ethnic and religious sentiments. People should treasure the academic and professional qualifications of people no matter what ethnic, religious or cultural background they come from. When electing our political leaders, we should treasure their qualifications regardless of their religion.

Schools should be praised for allowing people from the different regions of Uganda to showcase their culture. However, this should not be limited to culture; it should extend to politics when electing learners' representatives: the voters should focus on the candidates' qualities, regardless of their ethnic, religious or cultural backgrounds.

If we are to have peace, we should also focus on mechanisms to resolve inter-ethnic and inter-clan conflicts. Traditional leaders could be very useful here. There are some traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution that should not be ignored because they have the potential to promote reconciliation.

Lastly, the world is increasingly becoming one in this era of globalization, with improved means of communication and transportation. People should be free to interact with others from different cultural backgrounds, and to inter-marry. The Universal Declaration for Human Rights of 1948 supports inter-cultural and inter-racial marriages. We should be free to interact and share viewpoints no matter what colour we are.

### **Building Cultural Respect, Reconciliation and Solidarity in School**

When different cultures, races, ethnic groups or even clans meet, some kind of disharmony or peacelessness sometimes erupts. This may be because of the following:

- ❑ Disrespecting other people's cultures, and regarding them as inferior or strange.
- ❑ Discriminating against those belonging to a different race, culture, ethnic or religious group by denying them access to certain services or opportunities.

We therefore need to promote values and attitudes that enforce non-discrimination, non-racism, mutual respect and understanding across cultures in our schools, locally, nationally and internationally. The same principle applies to the different faiths, many of which are still emerging. Cultural and religious differences/issues are common sources of conflict, but values need to be developed that can enable people to live harmoniously together in diversity, with mutual respect and in dignity while preserving their culture.

### ***Activities***

- ☐ *Divide the participants into two groups.*
- ☐ *Tell each group to choose a chairperson and a secretary.*
- ☐ *One group should be told to make a presentation on “Good Local Aspects of Culture that Should Be Upheld” while the other should present on “Bad Local Aspects of Culture that Should Be Discouraged”*
- ☐ *Invite critiques of the presentations, followed by discussions.*

### **Evaluation and Reflection**

- ☐ Ask participants to comment on the relevance of the topic to their role as learners, and to their work as teachers.
- ☐ Ask participants to identify what appealed to them or stood out for them in the session, and what did not and why.
- ☐ Ask the participants to identify areas for improvement, if any.
- ☐ Close the session with a word of thank you to the participants for their contributions and cooperation.



## Module 6: Living in Harmony with the Earth

This module enables participants to appreciate their environment by focusing on the kind of home and its surrounding that they would like to live in. The sessions, intended to depict environmental protection, conservation, and rehabilitation, challenge participants to think of the kind of world they would like to leave for their children and the future generations. Ultimately, participants are expected to grasp the principles of sustainable living, and to generate practical ideas to promote environmental protection and sustainable living.

### **Introduction: Description of Session**

The session will begin with the facilitator leading the participants through the learning objectives and the guiding principles for the session, followed by dividing the participants into two groups, and asking them to draw a picture of the kind of school and home they would like to live in, and its surroundings. There will be environmental issues depicted in the drawing that should spark off a discussion on environment protection issues. This will be followed by a brief lecture on the terms and concepts associated with living in harmony with the earth. To gauge whether the participants have grasped the concepts, they will finally be divided into two groups to make presentations on the kind of world they would like to leave for their children and future generations. This will again be followed by a brief lecture on the principles of sustainable living, giving way to group work on what we can do at school to promote the spirit of environmental protection and sustainable living. Finally, a Reflection and Evaluation session will follow.

### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of the session, the participants should be able to:

- ☐ Identify the challenges facing our environment;
- ☐ Identify ways by which we can live in harmony with the environment; and
- ☐ Comment on the principles of sustainable living.

### **Guiding Inquiries**

The following are the guiding inquiries for this session:

- ❑ What are the challenges facing our environment?
- ❑ What can we do to protect our environment?
- ❑ What is the significance of sustainable living?
- ❑ How can we promote environmental awareness and instil the spirit of environmental protection onto our learners?

### **Materials and Equipment Needed**

- ❑ Projector
- ❑ Generator
- ❑ Laptop
- ❑ Flip chart
- ❑ Flip chart stand
- ❑ Markers
- ❑ Masking tapes
- ❑ Manual
- ❑ Handouts/Readings (Patricia Mische and others)
- ❑ Notebooks
- ❑ Pens
- ❑ Chalk board
- ❑ Chalk

### **Pre-session Activities**

- ❑ Divide participants into two groups, taking care of gender balancing.
- ❑ Ask each group to draw a picture of “the school or home we would like to live in and its surroundings.”

- ☐ Let each group make a presentation in turn, followed by comments by participants and the facilitator who should ensure that environmental issues emerge.

## **Terms and Concepts**

The concept of living in harmony with the earth concerns taking care of mother earth and not destroying it through our activities. There are currently a lot of concerns about the destructive way in which we relate to mother earth. We hear of things like global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, rising sea levels, hurricanes, tornadoes etc., that are associated with our unsustainable use or misuse of the earth's resources.

Some statistics and facts as enumerated by Patricia Mische in 2005 may open our eyes to the potential problem we face as a result of environmental degradation and destruction:

- ☐ In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, humans inflicted more damage on the environment than in all previous history.
- ☐ The human population multiplied almost four times, from 1.6bn in 1900 to 6bn in 1999, and it is expected to reach 10bn by the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- ☐ It is estimated that the Earth community cannot support more than 2.5bn at the economic level now enjoyed by the 24 most developed countries; yet most people aspire to this standard of living.
- ☐ There was tremendous growth in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but its benefits were not evenly distributed; most benefits went to one-fifth of the world's population while another one-fifth struggles to survive with no or little access to safe water, adequate nutrition, shelter, education and employment.
- ☐ In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the world lost close to 50% of its original forest area.
- ☐ The loss of forest cover increased flooding, soil erosion and depletion of aquifers, and diminished capacity to absorb carbon emissions that cause global warming.
- ☐ A five-fold increase in fossil fuel use since the 1980s has contributed to atmospheric concentrations of CO<sup>2</sup> beyond the capacity of nature to absorb it. As a result, world temperatures are rising.

- ☐ Whereas soil formation exceeded soil erosion throughout most of the Earth's history, in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a combination of overplowing, over grazing, and deforestation reversed the relationship.
- ☐ The 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw more pollutants and toxic chemicals dumped into air, soil and water than in all previous centuries. Radioactive emissions from nuclear-weapons production, testing and stockpiling entered the air, soil and water, and ultimately the DNA and human gene pool, threatening the viability of future generations. The chemicals have also been blamed for the spread of cancer.
- ☐ The 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw the greatest human-caused extinctions. Scientists estimate that the normal rate of extinctions should be 1-10 extinctions per year, but the 20<sup>th</sup> Century loss is estimated at 1,000-27,000 a year, all this related to human activities.

Patricia Mische's (2005) statistics and facts are important they:

- ☐ Reawaken us to the need to protect, conserve and preserve the environment;
- ☐ Reawaken us to the need to control populations;
- ☐ Reawaken us to the issue of world inequality, and to the need to redress the issues for the good of all humanity;
- ☐ Reawaken us to the fact that the looming ecological crises are mainly human induced and a clarion call to change for the better; and
- ☐ Articulate the various environmental issues and their linkages to the need for wise resource use, and their implications for peace and security.

Some of the other destructive human activities include the following:

- ☐ Over-fishing, leading to depletion of some fish species;
- ☐ Not respecting other community of life, or doing enough to save some animal and plant species;
- ☐ Failure to reduce, recycle, reuse and renew resources; and
- ☐ Engaging in economic wars, and supporting resource-induced wars.

What **then should** be done to save the situation?

- ☐ Where there are alternatives, we should avoid the use of toxic chemicals as much as possible.
- ☐ Organic farming could be more environmentally friendly than farming with a lot of inputs of toxic fertilizers and other chemicals used to control pests and diseases.

At the household level, there are some good practices we can adopt:

- ☐ We should cook just enough food, and avoid wastage through dumping what we do not need.
- ☐ We should avoid wasting water and energy.
- ☐ We should make sure that water taps and lights are turned off when we do not need water and light.
- ☐ It is not realistic to have a fleet of polluting vehicles when we could do with one or two vehicles.
- ☐ We should also learn to reuse, renew, recycle and reduce whenever necessary. By doing that we would be avoiding wastage.

The world is heading for doom if good practices are not adopted to tackle the above problems. In schools, colleges and universities, there is urgent need to promote environmental education and sustainable development education. The linkages between these to world peace and security should be made clear for all.

- ☐ Has Ogor Seeds Secondary School integrated environmental issues into teaching and learning?
- ☐ Is taking simple measures, like having separate dumping bins for plastic, paper, and bottles for researching on simple recycling technology a good example of what we could do?
- ☐ Do our schools teach children to plant trees and to avoid littering their environment?

Teachers should take the lead in non-formal education of the community, and even be models with practical activities, like tree planting and being responsive to environmental issues even in their own homes. As models, schools could do the following:

- ☐ Plan their compounds, preserve and conserve vegetation;
- ☐ Set up a waste management system, including dust bins or waste disposal pits for biodegradable items, and good latrines. Many schools are not peaceful because they lack latrines;
- ☐ Care about the carrying capacity of the school. If the school has 500 learners against two stances of latrines, for instance, that is a disaster and a source of peacelessness;
- ☐ Have a system of recycling, reusing and replenishing to reduce or avoid waste;
- ☐ Cook just enough food for the students and teachers to avoid waste; and
- ☐ Let the learners realize the waste that result from practices, like leaving a water tap open when we do not need the water, or turning power on when we could do without it.

### **Activities**

- ☐ *The facilitator gives a brief lecture on the principles of sustainable living.*
- ☐ *Divide the participants into two groups.*
- ☐ *Instruct them to discuss and then present on “what we can do at school to promote the spirit of environmental protection and sustainable living.”*
- ☐ *The facilitator guides the critique session.*

### **Evaluation and Reflection**

- ☐ Ask participants to comment on the relevance of the topic to their roles as learners, and to their work as teachers.
- ☐ Ask participants to identify what appealed to them or stood out for them in the session, and what did not and why.

- ☐ Ask the participants to identify areas for improvement, if any.
- ☐ Close the session with a vote of thanks to the participants for their contributions to, and cooperation in, the sessions.

## **Module 7: Inculcation of Inner Peace**

This module allows participants to reflect on, and share, their experiences of living in peace with oneself. In addition, it helps participants to reflect on bad practices, including any self-inflicted practices that counter or jeopardize inner or personal peace.

### **Introduction: Description of Session**

The session will begin with the facilitator leading the participants through the learning objectives and the guiding principles for the session, followed by a brainstorming session on “how do we get our inner peace?” This will be followed by a brief lecture on the terms and concepts. Volunteers will then be invited to role play or simulate any self-inflicted practices that counter the achievement of inner peace. Discussions should follow this session, and more examples of our own practices that jeopardize personal peace should be given. Finally, a Reflection and Evaluation session will follow.

### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of the session, the participants should be able to:

- ☐ Outline practices that help in cultivating inner peace;
- ☐ Comment on the connection between inner peace and the trauma that obtains in northern Uganda;
- ☐ Identify obstacles to inner peace; and
- ☐ Suggest ways in which the obstacles to inner peace can be overcome.

### **Guiding Inquiries**

The following are the guiding inquiries for this session:

- ☐ What are the practices that help in cultivating inner peace?
- ☐ What is the connection between inner peace and the trauma that obtains in northern Uganda?
- ☐ What are the obstacles to inner peace?
- ☐ How can we overcome the obstacles to inner peace?

### **Materials and Equipment Needed**



- ☐ Projector
- ☐ Generator
- ☐ Laptop
- ☐ Flip chart
- ☐ Flip chart stand
- ☐ Markers
- ☐ Masking tapes
- ☐ Manual
- ☐ Handouts/Readings (Patricia Mische and others)
- ☐ Notebooks
- ☐ Pens
- ☐ Chalk board
- ☐ Chalk

### **Pre-session Activities**

- ☐ The facilitator leads a brainstorming session on “how do we get inner peace?”

### **Terms and Concepts (Brief Lecture)**

Just as conflicts begin in the minds of individuals, peace values too spring from the minds of individuals. When we are at peace with ourselves, we are likely to be at peace with others. Our own peaceful minds can ably radiate peace to others. It is, therefore, important to cultivate inner peace.

### **How can we cultivate inner peace?**

There are practices that can help us to cultivate inner peace.

- ☐ **Meditation:** Through meditation, which involves deep thought or reflections, we can take stock of the goodness that abounds in us and rejuvenate inner peace.

- ❑ **Contemplation:** Contemplation involves not just reflection about the past, but also weighing up issues concerning the future, and planning for it. Good contemplation can also be a source of inner peace.
- ❑ **Spirituality:** Different faiths or religions preach similar virtues: love, sharing, justice, compassion, faith, kindness, generosity etc. Most of them are against materialism, greed and avarice. Our faiths or spirituality, be they modern or traditional, help us to cultivate inner peace.

### ***How Does Northern Uganda Fare in Inner Peace?***

We have had over 20 years of war, and there is a lot of trauma. In the process, the traditional worship system, including the shrines (*abila*), have been abandoned, burnt or even forgotten. These used to be a source of inner peace for many people because they were means through which they purified their spiritual beings and gained psycho-social support. We need to carry out research on these issues, but we would like to hypothesise that these are some of the factors that have led to numerous mental breakdowns in this region and the numerous people in need of psychosocial support. Today, some elders associate some mental health problems with the abominable act of burning down *abila*. Unfortunately, there are very few medical workers specialized in mental health issues, and there are very few NGOs involved in psychosocial support or rehabilitation.

### ***Search for Alternatives***

Northern Uganda, just like the rest of Uganda, embraced different religions as a source of inner peace. It is consequently possible that in the search for inner peace, our churches or mosques are currently fuller. There are, however, also several mushrooming Pentecostal and Baptist churches as well as those with a blend of traditional and modern religions. In the Catholic Church, we have the Charismatic Renewal movement whose ways of worship are in many ways similar to those of the Pentecostals. We also have some cults whose strange ways of worshipping attract people. All these are becoming more popular to sections of the population in search for inner peace than ever before.

However, it is unfortunate that leaders of some of these churches, especially the mushrooming ones, are driven by other motives, such as greed or profit out of the assistance that they may get, and this leads to some of their followers being frustrated. Moreover, the practices of some of the church leaders are questionable and contrary to what they preach, bringing some of their institutions into disrepute. In addition, while young people go to places of worship when they choose to, they should do so while working hard to change their lives for the better. Prayer is not a replacement to work. Consequently, the very institutions that are expected to help us cultivate inner peace have left many frustrated and even mentally broken. Nevertheless, religion still remains a source of inner peace for many people.

### **Alcohol and Drug Abuse**

It is also believed that there is an increase in drug abuse, including smoking marijuana, chewing *mairungi* (khat) etc. The former is outlawed, but people still take the risk. Alcoholism is also believed to have escalated, especially with the cheap and popular ‘buveera’ (plastic sachets) packaging. Drinking hours are hardly restricted and many brands of cheap local gin (*waragi*) are on the market; some as cheap as only 1,000 Uganda Shillings per sachet. To some people, resort to alcohol and drugs may be a search for inner peace, but it can result in very dangerous habits, including crime, and other social and psychosocial problems.

### ***Discos***

Some people seek solace in discos or night dance places some of which operate daily. Some people adore these places as sources of inner peace, but this is another potentially dangerous alternative.

### **Cultivating Inner Peace in School**

It is always argued that peace begins in the minds of individuals. There is a basic assumption that core values and root principles of diverse cultures and/or faiths provide guidance and inspiration for developing a culture of inner peace.

It is also argued that the human being has three parts: the body, the soul, and the mind. It is soul searching that helps individuals to counsel themselves and derive some inner equilibrium and peace. If we allow ourselves to be controlled by the mind alone, without guidance from our spirituality, we may not have a balanced life, and we have witnessed cases of people committing suicide due to their failure to manage the challenges of life.

Some practices, like meditation and contemplation, help to connect people to their spirituality, and to develop inner equilibrium and tranquility.

It is through a constant cultivation and renewal of such roots of inner peace that individuals can grow spiritually. Since peace begins in the minds of individuals, it is the radiation of our inner peace to the larger society that helps to build relationships and structures based on principles of nonviolence, justice, human rights, cultural respect and solidarity, and environmental care. Hence all the themes or tenets are interconnected. Religious values, be they Islamic, Christian or Bhudist, all uphold the concept of inner peace, and help individuals in that regard. Therefore, freedom of worship should be upheld in schools; and counselling services should exist to help individuals who may be having problems with themselves.

### **Activities**

- ☐ *Facilitator invites volunteers to role play or simulate any self-inflicted practices that counter the achievement of inner peace.*
- ☐ *Facilitator leads a discussion on the presentations (this should as well serve as an ice breaker).*

### **Recommendations**

- ☐ Practices, such as meditation and contemplation, that lead to inculcation of inner peace should be promoted. These can be at the personal level and through religious institutions, schools and colleges. People should, however, be made to know that as individuals, they are responsible for promoting their inner peace.
- ☐ God has provided you with a mind to weigh the good things that you can get for your personal peace through the different religions, faiths or spiritual institutions. You should have the mind to reflect on what is good for you since not everything that comes from those institutions is good.
- ☐ Avoid or reduce drugs or alcohol consumption if you are a victim of drug or alcohol abuse. Seek counselling and guidance from your peers, teachers and professional counsellors. You may need them.

- ☐ The authorities could think of enforcing some by-laws restricting drinking time. It happens in some countries, and it can happen in Uganda.
- ☐ Institutions concerned should ensure that the law takes its course in controlling *marijuana* smoking, and these institutions need community support.
- ☐ Some by-laws also need to be enacted and enforced to control the disco craze, and those by-laws should target not just the youth and children, but adults too.

### **Evaluation and Reflection**

- ☐ Ask participants to comment on the relevance of the topic to their role as students, and to their work as teachers.
- ☐ Ask participants to identify what appealed to them or what stood out for them in the session, and what did not and why.
- ☐ Ask the participants to identify areas for improvement, if any.
- ☐ Close the session by thanking the participants for their contributions and cooperation.

## **Module 8: Cultures and Learning**

This module is premised on the assumption that culture is dynamic and useful in learning and acquiring behaviour. It explores concepts and frameworks, linkages of different forms of violence to culture and learning, and avenues for promoting values and practices of peace in society, using concrete examples and case studies. The key guiding questions are: What are some of the practical ways to address and handle expressions of cultural violence in our communities? What are some of the creative ways through which cultures have regulated violence and established order?

### **Description of module**

This module on Cultures and Learning is based on the assumption that "Humans can learn and change their acquired behaviours". It also recognises that human behaviour is transmitted from one generation to another through culture in a process of socialisation. To categorise and label identity is usually a powerful way to justify violence and cooperative behaviour. This module is therefore presented with the aim to develop an understanding of how culture promotes learning and peaceful environment. The participants will therefore go through concepts and frameworks to link the different forms of violence to culture and learning. They will also explore avenues to promote values and practices of peace in their societies, using concrete examples and case studies. The key guiding questions are: What are some of the practical ways to address and handle expressions of cultural violence in our communities? What are some of the creative ways through which cultures have regulated violence and established order?

### **Learning Objectives**

- ☐ To explain the value of including and appreciating the importance of culture in learning.
- ☐ To explain how cultural and social values, norms and structures contribute to violence and peace.
- ☐ Show awareness of the value of multi-cultures in building peace.

### **Session 1:**

#### **Culture: Dynamics and features**

#### **Presentation**

The session is about what culture is, its dynamics and future. It also seeks to link conflict and culture. It explores cultural forms of conflict resolution. Finally, it explores the existence of violent and peaceful cultures.

Human society is undergoing conflict and peace transitions. The assumption is that humans can learn and change their acquired behaviours and beliefs. This implies that the role of culture, ethnic, religious, gender, linguistic and other forms of identity in creating a peaceful environment is important.

As observed by many writers, there are almost as many definitions of culture and there are cultures in this universe. It is for that reason that Boaz's observation that every culture is unique and varies from people to people, or from society to society, comes into this argument (Kevin, 1998). Going by this premise, no culture should be a measure of other cultures; and value judgment of some cultures as savage and civilized would be unfair to a people. For example, Arnold's concept that restricts culture to "special intellectual or artistic endeavors or products" is decidedly inadequate and exclusionary. This, as noted by some scholars, would imply that only a few groups of people have "culture" (Kevin, 1998:6).

Therefore, although scholars have not come out with any specific definition of culture, they do agree on crosscutting themes that we can use to define culture. These include behaviour, attitudes, artifacts, communication, dressing, and food among others (Hall, 2004:82).

Culture is not merely the study of a human society in a few days; it is much more than what we see in everyday living. Indeed, it is everything of a human being in the corporeal world. That is why some earlier anthropologists were mistaken when they spent a few days with some societies in Africa, and assumed they had mastered their culture.

In attempting to explain culture as both universal and particular, Black and Avruch (1989) identify culture as both generic and local, which should be taken seriously in any analysis. While generic culture directs our attention to universal attributes of human behaviour, local cultures are systems of meanings created, shared, and transmitted by individuals in a particular social group. Local culture directs our attention to diversity, difference, and particularism, which is very enriching in understanding conflict, and peace strategies and interventions.

However, the universality of culture should not be taken as a measure in all situations. Conflicts arise in situations, manifest and change dynamics in time; and so, it would be incorrect to

import an intervention and apply it directly to different places at a given time. On the other hand, the uniqueness in cultures should not be used as an excuse and for conflicting.

In peacebuilding, it is necessary to see the interconnectedness between generic and local cultures to be able to inform a due course of action. Culture hides much more than it reveals, even from its very own practitioners. To move from the self to others, we cannot ignore the value and contribution of local cultures. Indeed, if we have to contribute to, and cultivate, a culture of peace with ourselves and with others, we should recognize diversity and be willing to put aside our prejudices and stereotypes. In other words, we should put on the shoes of others. But all this requires sacrifice and openness to one another in a conducive atmosphere. This is the driving force for multicultural relations and openness in society.

To understand our own culture and that of others helps us to avoid conflicts that could otherwise arise in society. We can learn our own selves by taking seriously the culture of others; indeed, we find our beings and identity in others (Hall, 2000). This line of argument is in tandem with the principle of African Bantu philosophy: “I am because we are”. It recognizes the web of being that exists in the universe. This implies that culture cannot be hidden to ourselves, but rather extended to the greater community. But the pursuit of this interaction or socialization requires proper awareness as we communicate to others.

As Bjorkquist (1997) observed, aggression is not an inborn force that drives humans mechanically in line with other drivers. Whereas conflict is an inevitable part of the social life, the way we behave in conflict situations is simply learned, and is to a great extent dependent on culture. Therefore, because culture is the sum total of ritualized norms that govern and regulate daily living, it is important in dealing with conflicts. Culture should therefore be tuned into certain patterns that encourage and nurture all generations into a culture of peace.

Once we recognize conflict as inevitable, and as an issue to be dealt with in seeking to live with multiple realities, and negotiate a common good, we need to derive a single shared story, with defined roles for each of the individuals involved (Augsberger, 1992)

Finally, culture facilitates human well-being on one hand, and limits it on the other. It all depends on how we handle it. If properly handled, culture can improve relations, but if manipulated for one's personal benefit, then it can be very destructive. But above all, because culture is a mode of socialization, it should play a great role in the culture of peace. Efforts should be made by all cultures to be self-critical in promoting values towards a culture of peace.



## **Group Work**

### **Step 1: Identification and resolution of the problem**

The participants will be divided into two groups, and each group will identify a problem or conflict related to culture and learning in their school environments. Each group will write and present a short report on the problem, its proposed resolution, and the experience of working in such an environment.

### **Step 2: Group report and discussion**

- ☐ Ask each group to present their reports.
- ☐ Discuss the reports and give each group feedback.
- ☐ Summarize the main points discussed.

### **Step 3: Evaluation and Reflection**

- ☐ Ask the participants to comment on their experience of the session.
- ☐ Ask them to identify what they liked or disliked about the session.
- ☐ Close the session.

## **Session 2: Case Study**

### **Group Assignment**

Step 1: The facilitator opens the session by asking the participants to share peace proverbs in their communities.

Step 2: Divide the participants into two groups, and ask them to perform the following tasks:

#### **Group 1:**

- ☐ Identify a story in their cultural setting which relates to peace
- ☐ Discuss the role of stories in the promotion of peace and conflict resolution.
- ☐ Discuss the challenges facing story telling today, and what can be done to promote it.

#### **Group 2:**

Your village is occupied by members of different ethnic groups some of whom recently bought land in your communities. The immigrant ethnic groups make good use of natural resources, including trees, waterbodies and land to generate income and meet their needs. Meanwhile, the natives, who have been in the community longer, complain about the immigrant ethnic groups taking over their land by buying huge chunks of it, depleting natural resources, and bewitching the natives. For their part, the immigrant ethnic groups accuse the host community of being lazy, drunkards and with no sense of direction, a claim that the natives deny. Taking into consideration the interests of the host community and those of the immigrant ethnic groups, how would you address this challenge, while remaining culturally appropriate to both parties?

### **Step 3: Group Report and Discussion**

- ☐ Ask each group to report to the entire group.
- ☐ Discuss the report and summarize the main points, emphasizing the challenges of living in a multicultural environment.

### **Step 4: Evaluation**

- ☐ Ask what the participants to identify what they liked or disliked about the session.

### ***CONSIDERING ALL SESSIONS:***

- ☐ *Bring the entire group together.*
- ☐ *Divide them into 5 small groups.*
- ☐ *Instruct them to list the main action points considering all the sessions.*
- ☐ *Open up discussion and harmonise the list.*
- ☐ *This is the final exercise that will be capped with an “Appreciation Circle” where participants come together in a circle to make an overall evaluation, express appreciation, and comment on areas for improvement in future.*

### ***CLOSURE***

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