



# ELUSIVE JUSTICE

THE PLIGHT OF CHILDREN BORN OF WAR IN ADJUMANI, ARUA AND ZOMBO DISTRICTS  
WEST NILE SUB-REGION, UGANDA



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**THE PLIGHT OF CHILDREN BORN OF WAR IN ADJUMANI, ARUA  
AND ZOMBO DISTRICTS WEST NILE SUB-REGION, UGANDA**

Produced under the Promoting Sustainable Peace, Security and Justice Project in the West Nile Sub-region, with funding support from



EUROPEAN UNION

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This report was written by Joel Innocent Odokonyero, with valuable substantive inputs from Dr Chris Dolan, Dr David N. Tshimba, Devota Nuwe, Solomy Awiidi and Juliet Adoch, while Shaffic Opiny designed the report's layout.

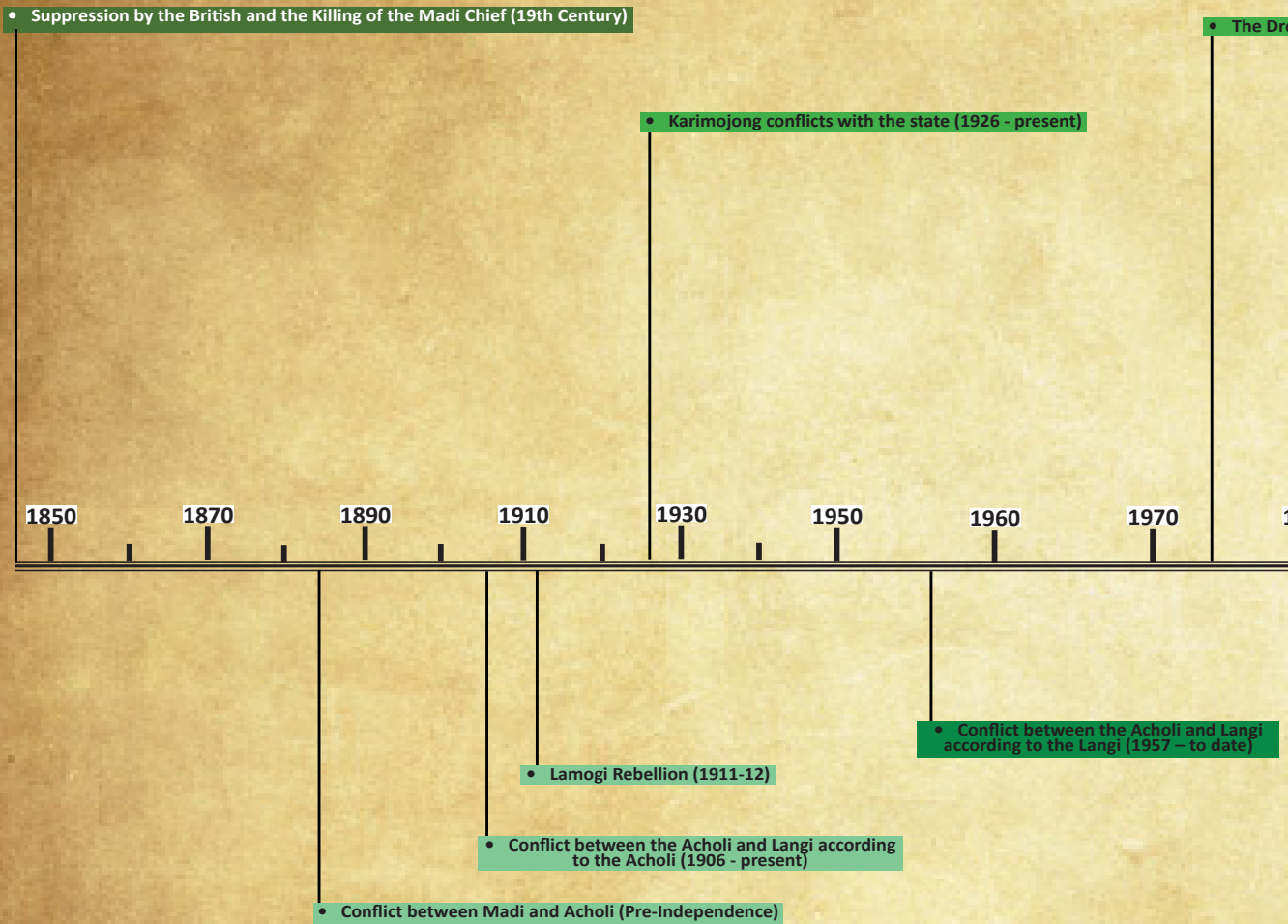
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**ACRONYMS**

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| <b>CBOW</b> | Child/ren Born of War                              |
| <b>EU</b>   | European Union                                     |
| <b>FGD</b>  | Focus Group Discussion                             |
| <b>GoU</b>  | Government of Uganda                               |
| <b>IDI</b>  | In-depth Interview                                 |
| <b>LRA</b>  | Lord's Resistance Army                             |
| <b>NIRA</b> | National Identification and Registration Authority |
| <b>NRA</b>  | National Resistance Army                           |
| <b>NRTJ</b> | National Reconciliation and Transitional Justice   |
| <b>PRDP</b> | Peace, Recovery and Development Plan               |
| <b>RLP</b>  | Refugee Law Project                                |
| <b>SGBV</b> | Sexual and Gender-Based Violence                   |
| <b>SWAY</b> | Survey of War Affected Youth                       |
| <b>TPDF</b> | Tanzanian People's Defence Forces                  |
| <b>UA</b>   | Uganda Army  |
| <b>UNLA</b> | Uganda National Liberation Army                    |
| <b>UNRF</b> | Uganda National Rescue Front                       |
| <b>UPDF</b> | Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces                     |
| <b>WCIP</b> | War and Children Identity Project                  |
| <b>WNBF</b> | West Nile Bank Front                               |



# NORTHERN REGION C

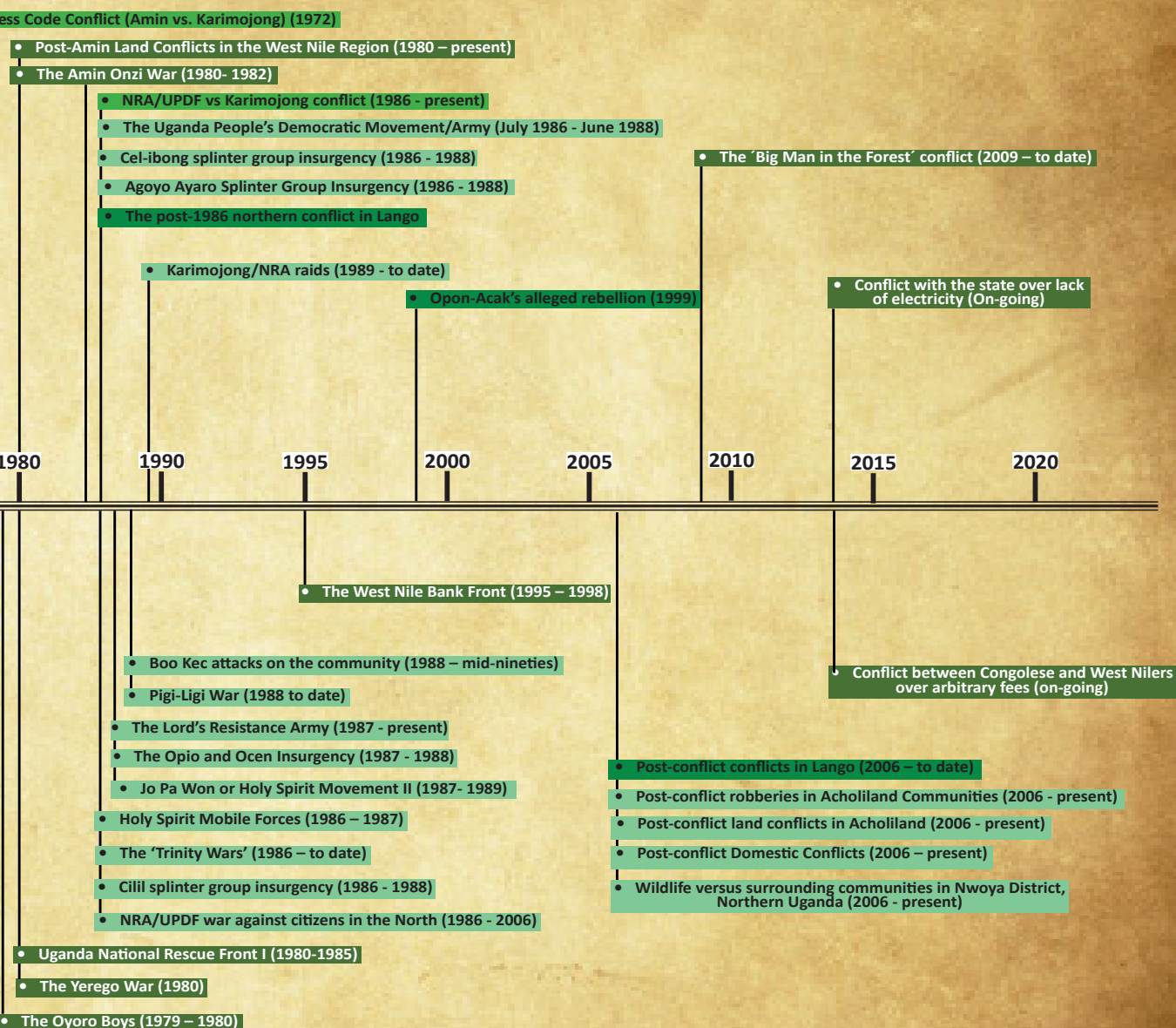


## KEY

### SUB REGIONS

- West Nile Sub-region
- Karamoja Sub-region
- Acholi Sub-region
- Lango Sub-region

# CONFLICT TIMELINE



**SOURCE:** Refugee Law Project (2014). *Compendium of Conflicts in Uganda: Findings of the National Reconciliation and Transitional Justice Audit*. Kampala: RLP Publications, School of Law at Makerere University

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A critical review of ‘recovery’ and ‘development’ in post-war northern Uganda some half-decade after the multi-million dollar implementation of the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) is timely and can contribute to maximizing the dividends of ‘peace’ in such a post-war context. It is against this backdrop that RLP undertook an exploratory study on the plight of children and women with children born of war in the selected districts of Adjumani, Arua and Zombo, with a view to informing appropriate advocacy interventions for policy and legislative reforms.

The overall objective of the study was to understand the challenges of children born of war as well as women with children born of war in West Nile, a region of Uganda ridden with armed conflict into the early 2000s. This study brings to the fore the multi-faceted challenges of post-war social reintegration faced by these West Nile youths, many of whom are now adults.

This report is based on insights from fieldwork conducted from March to July 2019 in three districts of the West Nile sub-region, namely Adjumani, Arua and Zombo-part of the larger insurgency-affected area of north and north-western Uganda since the fall of the Idi Amin regime in 1979 through the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency. The study’s temporal scope spanned twenty-seven years, from the ousting of the Idi Amin regime by Tanzanian People’s Defence Forces (TPDF)-aided Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) in 1979 to the end of the Lord’s Resistance Army insurgency within the borders of Uganda in 2006.

Additional primary data were collected from key informants based in Kampala through the first half of 2020. Qualitative data (via interviews and focus group discussions) collated for this report were subjected to a thematic analysis. The study’s sample size, eventually determined by the attainment of saturation point, encompassed 48 male and 65 female respondents selected purposively. Additionally, 29 (23 male and 6 female) key informants participated in the study and they too were selected by non-random purposive and snowball sampling techniques.

The study broadly found out that many CBOW and their care-givers had experienced significant negative psycho-social and economic effects related to the circumstances of their conception. Many have lacked access to both formal and non-formal education during their formative years, demonstrated poor physical and mental health. Worryingly, their subsequent un/under-employment poses particular political, economic and social challenges to peacebuilding in post-war West Nile sub-region of Uganda, where thousands of young people have returned from encampment, abduction and/or conscription, to a socio-economic setting that benefits only a few. The propensity to victimisation of these former children borne of war varies by gender and lived war experiences.

The male offspring of former young female abductees who turned into child mothers during rebel captivity experience victimisation both during and after armed conflicts. As male children (of oftentimes single mothers) whose paternity remains unknown, they face hardships due to systemic rejection. The structural discrimination they suffer due to unresolved identity—particularly given the stigmatization arising from a deeply conservative patriarchal society and state—runs deep not just in the physiological and psycho-social realms, but also in the political economy realm of education, employment and relations of production (especially through access to land).

The findings here reported were subjected to a validation exercise during which different categories of stakeholders consulted in the course of the study’s fieldwork had the opportunity to clarify their views, especially on some topical emerging issues. In the final analysis, it was clear that a renewed LRA-like armed insurgency in today’s northern Uganda is conceivable. The failure to effect holistic socio-economic reintegration of these former children borne of war—whether from formerly abducted or conscripted parents—not only licenses the damaging status quo of these surviving victims of armed conflict but also reduces the prospects of bringing social justice and sustainable peace.

## KEY OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

**Child/ren Born of War (CBOW):** This study takes the definition from the War and Children Identity Project (WCIP 2006), which considers CBOW as “a child that has one parent that was part of an army or peacekeeping force and the other parent a local citizen” where the weight is on the stigma these children can be subjected to due to their origins as resulting from wartime sexual violence. CBOW are here categorized into 4 types: (i) children of enemy soldiers, (ii) children of soldiers from occupying forces, (iii) children of child soldiers, and (iv) children of peacekeeping forces.

**Social reintegration:** This study paraphrases Margaret Angucia’s definition according to which social reintegration is understood as the process by which CBOW begin a new life with their families and in their community after the bitter experiences of war by creating positive economic and social relationships. The need for the (re)creation of positive relationships between the CBOW and the community arises as a result of what we call the broken citizenship status of these children due to the circumstances of their birth and the war conditions they have had to endure. CBOW are here considered reintegrated when and if they can rebuild, recreate or restore their hitherto broken citizenship (Angucia 2010).

## 1. Introduction

Uganda has witnessed numerous protracted conflicts since its independence in 1962. The National Reconciliation and Transitional Justice (NRTJ) Audit conducted by the RLP in 2014, which included two districts of the West Nile sub-region (Adjumani and Arua), recorded 125 armed conflicts that have negatively affected many Ugandan lives to date.<sup>1</sup> 11 of these recorded armed conflicts in contemporary Uganda pertained to the West Nile sub-region. The fall of the Idi Amin regime in April 1979 - precipitated by the invasion of the Tanzanian People's Defence Forces (TPDF) alongside the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA)—augured a litany of violence meted onto the people of West Nile (Amin's homeland) in revenge<sup>2</sup> for his eight-year rule. Only seven years later, following the deeply contested 1980 election and a five-year guerrilla war, Yoweri T.K. Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA) was able to capture Kampala and oust the embattled Obote II regime.<sup>3</sup> The capture of Kampala in January 1986 marked the starting point of several new armed conflicts in Uganda; in effect, the battle zone simply shifted location from central Uganda (the infamous Luweero Triangle) towards the north and the country's other peripheries.<sup>4</sup>

Of the twenty-seven rebel movements that have followed Museveni's NRA/M take-over to date, the most protracted, vicious and debilitating has been Joseph Kony's LRA rebel insurgency in the greater north (northern, north-western and north-eastern parts) of Uganda.<sup>5</sup> This relatively recent bloody conflict has been attributed to a number of factors, including the marginalisation of the north, poverty and general underdevelopment, the loss of economic opportunities and jobs by former army officers, the political repression, and a struggle for political power.<sup>6</sup> Characteristic of many civil wars in post - Cold War Africa, a great many children and youths bear the brunt of war experiences, including mass abduction and conscription into armed forces. Central to the tactics of abuse and humiliation in such non-conventional, asymmetric warfare are sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including rape, defilement, sexual slavery and sexual exploitation.<sup>7</sup>

The development of a country or a region, more so in the aftermath of violent conflict, depends, in great part, on the stability of its communities. Not paying greater attention to the multi-layered plight of CBOWs is tantamount to an invitation to relapse into violence, most especially given the precariousness of today's West Nile—a region over which the haunting legacies of ex-WaNubi slave soldiers still hover. The issue of youth un(under)employment poses worrying political, economic and social challenges to peacebuilding in post-war northern Uganda in general, and the West Nile sub-region in particular, with a great majority (over 80%) of young people, including CBOW, reportedly “unemployed or unemployable in the formal sector due to low qualification levels.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, failure to effect holistic integration of CBOW in this region would not only be licensing the damaging *status quo* of these resilient survivors of armed violence but also eclipsing prospects to bring the normalization of violence as well as its corresponding plight to a more durable end. The chance for an effective and just reintegration of these former children many of them now in full adulthood—must be seized as their hitherto displaced citizenship calls for dignified recognition.

This study provides insights into the plight of what are termed ‘children born of war’ (CBOW), focusing on their lived experiences (into adulthood) and challenges to their social integration. Based on a field study carried in the three selected districts of West Nile, the present report attempts to

1 Refugee Law Project (2014). *Compendium of Conflicts in Uganda: Findings of the National Reconciliation and Transitional Justice Audit*. Kampala: RLP Publications, School of Law at Makerere University. Also available online at [https://www.refugeelawproject.org/files/others/Compendium\\_of\\_Conflicts\\_final.pdf](https://www.refugeelawproject.org/files/others/Compendium_of_Conflicts_final.pdf)

2 *Ibid.*, p. 120.

3 P. M. Mutibwa (1992). *Uganda since Independence: A Story of Unfulfilled Hopes*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

4 S. Finnström (2008). *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.

5 R.R. Atkinson (2009). *From Uganda to the Congo and Beyond: Pursuing the Lord's Resistance Army*. New York: IPI Publications. Also available online at [www.ipinst.org/](http://www.ipinst.org/)

6 A. Ginyera-Pinchwa (1992). *Northern Uganda in National Politics*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.

7 J. Annan, C. Blattman and R. Horton, (2006). *The State of Youth and Youth Protection in Northern Uganda: Findings from the Survey for War Affected Youth*. Kampala: UNICEF Uganda Publications. Also available online at [www.sway-uganda.org](http://www.sway-uganda.org)

8 Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity (ACCS) (2013). *Northern Uganda Conflict Analysis*. September 2013. Kampala: Refugee Law Project, Saferworld and International Alert, p.26.

take stock of the socio-economic reintegration (or lack thereof) of those born as a result of war. The report seeks to (re)insert the thorny issue of CBOW reintegration into the broader debate about recovery and development of a post-war society such as today's West Nile sub-region.

### 1.1. Background to CBOW in northern Uganda

Sexual violence arguably remains an underreported crime globally, despite being a pervasive global problem with significant consequences for the physical and psychosocial wellbeing of its victims and survivors.<sup>9</sup> Medical and psychosocial consequences of sexual violence are far-reaching and debilitating for its survivors and children borne of it (WHO, 2003).

In contexts where mass atrocities and repression have been systematic and/or widespread as was the case in Uganda's north some two decades ago, children and youth are always amongst those negatively affected by physical, psychological, social, economic, and political consequences. Because of their vulnerability they are not only caught up in violence but they also suffer a range of violations including illegal conscription, sexual violence, torture, slavery, and forced marriage. The LRA rebels, for instance, abducted hundreds of minors into their fighting ranks, which eventually alienated them from the local population.<sup>10</sup> Government forces (UPDF) also reportedly used formerly captured children for intelligence-gathering or to identify LRA positions and weapon caches.<sup>11</sup> According to the Survey of War Affected Youth (SWAY) in northern Uganda of September 2006, nearly two million were forcibly displaced and impoverished, tens of thousands of youths - the majority of whom were minors - were kidnapped into the rebel force, and untold thousands killed. Of more than one thousand households and nearly 750 male youths randomly surveyed between September 2005 and March 2006, a third of the youth reported having had a violent encounter with the LRA.<sup>12</sup> It is also reported that in the early 2000s, at the peak of the LRA insurgency in the north, the Government, recruited over 3,000 people (predominantly youngsters) into auxiliary forces (known as 'Local Defence Units') to help boost the efforts of the Ugandan army.<sup>13</sup>

The guns have largely gone silent in today's northern Uganda, but the effects of the multiple-decade-long armed conflict are colossal - including in the lives of the current generation of young people, many of whom were born in the midst of war and endured traumatising experiences at a very young age. Designing post-war reintegration interventions that can jump-start the lives of these war-affected young people, especially those born in war, and can break through cascading traumatic experiences of stigmatization, discrimination and outright rejection, to ensure a dignified citizenship in the post-war setting, has been challenging. For all survivors to surmount the overwhelming trauma borne of a series of armed conflicts that destroyed political, social, economic, human and moral capital requires carefully thought-out efforts both for those who were (oftentimes forcibly) actors in the armed conflict (ex-combatants) and for those who were simply affected by it.

In the litany of armed violence that wrecked the West Nile sub-region after the fall of the Idi Amin regime in 1979, a great many children and youths endured war crimes such as rape, torture, slavery, abduction and conscription, pillage and indiscriminate killings. Asymmetrical armed conflicts such as those which unfolded in post-1979 West Nile always have devastating consequences for children and youth, and these are compounded in instances of forceful recruitment of youngsters into armed forces.<sup>14</sup> Chris Coulter's penetrating empirical study (2009) reveals that while young male abductees often perform as fighters, porters, or are in support positions, young female abductees, too, have

9 See the much-publicised United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (adopted on 25 October 2000) and subsequent UNSC Resolutions pertaining Women, Peace and Security Framework.

10 M.Angucia (2010). *Broken Citizenship: Formerly abducted children and their social reintegration in northern Uganda*. Published PhD Thesis, University of Gronigen, The Netherlands.

11 Human Rights Watch "Uprooted and Forgotten: Impunity and Human Rights Abuses in Northern Uganda" September 2005. New York: HRW Press.

12 J. Annan, C. Blattman and R. Horton, (2006). *The State of Youth and Youth Protection in Northern Uganda: Findings from the Survey for War Affected Youth*. [A Report for UNICEF Uganda, September 2006] Available online at [www.sway-uganda.org](http://www.sway-uganda.org)

13 Human Rights Watch "Abduction of Children in Africa: Briefing to the 60<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Security Council" January 2004. New York: HRW Press.

14 M.Angucia (2010). *Op. cit.*

sometime been actively involved in fighting, alongside being used as sex slaves.<sup>15</sup>

It is against this backdrop that the RLP undertook a field study with the overarching aim of “Promoting Sustainable Peace, Security and Justice in the West Nile sub-region” to inquire into the plight of CBOW particularly in the districts of Adjumani, Arua, and Zombo. It is here hoped that taking full stock of the psychosocial, economic and socio-political challenges of those born of war will meaningfully contribute to debate about recovery and development of a post-war society such as today’s West Nile sub-region.

### 1.2. Rationale for the study

There exist a number of studies about the two-decade long armed conflict in northern Uganda as well as its post-war recovery, but few qualitative studies inquiring into gender in connection to citizenship and social justice in the context of armed violence and its aftermath. As a result there is still limited understanding of the impact of the cumulative armed conflicts, particularly for the West Nile sub-region that was under strain over a decade prior to the NRM take-over. No doubt, the experience of the litany of armed violence in West Nile is gendered. But gendered too are the after effects of such displacing violence, particularly as they relate to concerns of citizenship and social justice. Reading the multi-layered experiences of war and forced displacement through the prism of CBOW, this study sought to demonstrate the elusiveness of social justice for those who were not only born in the midst of war but also endured its devastating transgenerational effects thus far.

Indifference to the plight of CBOW could signify endorsement for the continuation of war itself, albeit without guns. This study was undertaken with the hope to point out to all stakeholders (at local, national and international levels) all possibilities—however slim they may be—to ensure meaningful reintegration of this important segment of Uganda’s citizenry.

### 1.3. Objectives of the study

Globally, this study sought to take stock of and provide recommendations for improving the process of psycho-social and economic reintegration of CBOW in post-war settings such today’s West Nile region. Specifically, the study aimed to:

- (i) Understand the challenges (systemic and otherwise) faced by CBOW in the three selected districts of the West Nile sub-region (Adjumani, Arua and Zombo);
- (ii) Decipher the multi-faceted needs of the mothers and other care-takers of CBOW in post-war West Nile;
- (iii) Draw context-resonant recommendations for meaningful social reintegration of CBOW in post-war West Nile.

### 1.4. Scope of the study

Conceptually, the study focused on the prerequisites for psycho-social and economic reintegration of CBOW in the West Nile sub-region. Reintegration here entails the (re)creation of positive relationships between the individual former child borne of war and the larger community in the wake of what Margaret Angucia termed “the broken citizenship status”<sup>16</sup> of CBOW that results from the war conditions they were born in and have had to endure.

The temporal scope of the study was 1979 – 2006, a period in which the West Nile sub-region was riddled with a series of armed conflicts that began with the fall of the Idi Amin regime (with the UNLF incursion into the sub-region in April 1979), and only ended with the Juba peace talks between the GoU and the LRA (which ushered in the ceasefire in greater north of Uganda since June 2006).

<sup>15</sup> C. Coulter (2009). *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers: Women’s Lives through War and Peace in Sierra Leone*. New York: Cornell University Press.

<sup>16</sup> M. Angucia (2010). *Op. cit.*

Geographically, the study limited itself to three districts of the West Nile sub-region: Adjumani, Arua and Zombo. These districts were mapped out in tandem with the EU-funded project implementation that had been underway since 2016. The choice for this spatial scope was further justified by the fact that while most of Acholi and parts of Lango which consisted of the epicentre of the LRA insurgency in northern Uganda have received considerable research attention, other sub-regions of Uganda's north - and West Nile in particular - have been relatively marginalized in scholarly and policy endeavours of post-war recovery. In addition to a litany of armed conflicts impacting its own territories, the West Nile sub-region has also been affected by cross-border violence involving South Sudan and the DRC, both of which have often resulted in horrendous devastation of human life and property as well as mass forced displacements. Fieldwork in the aforementioned districts was supplemented by additional in-depth interviews that were conducted in Kampala where some key respondents were based.

### 1.5. Methodology: data sources, techniques, tools and validation

The research took *narrative analysis* as its approach. Contrary to content analysis, which allows making inferences by systematically identifying specified characteristics of the content of communication across a variety of settings, *narrative analysis* goes "deeper into the causes, explanations, and effects of the spoken word."<sup>17</sup> In a narrative analysis approach, the emphasis therefore is on what is said, as well as why, and its effect. As such, context is significant. Tellers of the narratives—the primary research subjects for this study being CBOW—were here treated as experts of their own stories. Nevertheless, emotion and non-verbal communication were also included as part of the primary data for analysis. This approach thus allowed for broader thematic understandings of the armed conflict process and its lingering effects, capturing not only what was said (or not), but also the meaning behind it. Like action research, the subjects in narrative analysis too were active participants in the process.

A multiple site case-study design (seven sub-counties/town councils of the three selected districts) was adopted for the study. This methodological choice allowed for a detailed, in-depth analysis of the study's qualitative preoccupations.<sup>18</sup> Suffice to note is the fact that much of northern Uganda (including parts of the West Nile sub-region, especially urban) has experienced a growing research fatigue, particularly when it comes to conflict-related issues and post-war recovery. The focus on the formerly forcibly displaced (internally or otherwise) as well as on formerly abducted and/or conscripted into armed forces has been far greater than that given to those specifically born of war in West Nile sub-region. A case-study research design across multiple sites (urban, semi-urban and rural) thus opened up greater possibilities for nuanced understandings of the lingering effects of armed conflict, particularly concerning the much less narrated challenges of psycho-socio-economic reintegration of CBOW now into their adulthood.

The population for this study mainly comprised of samples drawn from former internally displaced and/or abducted young female West Nilers who eventually begot offspring from conflict-related sexual violence through defilement, rape and forced marriages. Other respondents (here referred to as key informants) consisted of, mothers of CBOW, (former) caregivers of these CBOW, opinion leaders (cultural/religion/civil servants/etc.) and practitioners previously engaged on such issues pertaining to post-war recovery. The total sample size for the study amounted to 113 respondents—arrived at by the methodological principle of saturation point—62 CBOW themselves (13 male and 53 female), 18 previous and current mothers/caregivers (12 male and 6 female), 12 opinion leaders (10 male and 2 female), and 17 local government officials (13 male and 4 female) at district and sub-county levels. In-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) were two main data collection techniques used in this study. To the extent possible, however, overt observation was also deployed particularly for gathering non-verbal data during the course of fieldwork. The observation so conducted was principally participant to avoid what is referred to in social research as the 'Hawthorne effect,'<sup>19</sup> an effect by which the subjects of an experiment are changed by the

17 D. Druckman (2005). *Doing Research: Methods of Inquiry for Conflict Analysis*. London: Sage Publications, p. 277.

18 A. Bryman (2008). *Social Research Methods, 3rd ed.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

19 *Ibid.*

mere fact that they are the objects of observation and experimentation. Some of the one-on-one interviews with the study's key informants spanned over an hour, while a couple of focus-group discussions with CBOW went on for over three hours. Groups were mostly formed on the basis of descriptive characteristics of respondents (by gender, age bracket and occupation) while one-on-one interviews were accorded to specific caregivers as well as leaders or practitioners whose sphere of influence in shaping public opinion within the specific locale was significant.

Both purposive and snowball sampling techniques were utilized in the selection of respondents. In addition to the primary data collected in the course of the ethnographic fieldwork, the study also engaged critically with secondary sources of data—here analysed against the backdrop of the socio-historical context of West Nile sub-region and positionalities of authors. These secondary sources of data (most in the form of reports, working papers, journal articles or books) broadly entailed scholarly and policy written works focused on post-war reintegration challenges in northern Uganda since 2006. Qualitative methods for data analysis were employed, although this report also contains limited presentation of statistical data (mostly bio-data) about the descriptive characteristics of respondents. Qualitative data derived from the interview and FGD guides, as well as the observation checklist were here processed thematically in tandem with the study's specific objectives.

At the end of the ethnographic fieldwork, a validation workshop was held in Arua on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2019 to allow for a thorough discussion of preliminary findings. Different stakeholders (including study respondents whose voices had been captured) discussed the draft report with renewed insight and critique. Feedback from this validation workshop was captured and incorporated into the final analysis of the study report. Findings that were clarified and sharpened during this process of stakeholders' feedback consultations are here clustered under three emerging themes: (i) stigmatization and discrimination, (ii) paternity and citizenship, (iii) access to property and social justice. Ethically capturing and returning voice back to the study respondents thus mitigated most of the methodological limitations of this study.

## 2.0 Contextual background

### 2.1. Historical antecedents

The roots of colonial and post-independence violence in today's West Nile region can be traced to mutations in the economic and political order that engulfed much of the Upper Nile basin in the wake of the nineteenth-century ivory caravan trade. This trade was shaped by longstanding patterns of military slavery across much of precolonial Horn of Africa and beyond. Slave soldiers were employed by successive Egyptian dynasties such as the Fatimids, the Ayyubids, and the Mamluks.<sup>20</sup> The Turco-Egyptian conquest of the kingdom of Sinnar (precolonial Sudan) in 1820/1 triggered epochal mutations of economic, social and political dynamics in lands further south to the Nile headwaters. The new regime in Egypt under the leadership of *Khedive* Muhammad (Mehmet) Ali sent slave-raiding expeditions to the Nuba Mountains in Kordofan, the Upper Blue Nile near the Sudan-Ethiopia border, and the Upper White Nile in southern Sudan.<sup>21</sup> An Egyptian military post was established at Gondokoro—the most southerly point of the then Sudan (today's South Sudan) at the present border with Uganda by 1839,<sup>22</sup> and from here more slave and ivory-raiding expeditions into the White Nile basin (West Nile) ensued.

Nubian slave soldiers had first been present in the Egyptian army way before Ali's conquest of the Sudan.<sup>23</sup> These (ex-)Nubian slave soldiers and their descendants—colloquially known as *WaNubi*—were enrolled into the nascent colonial army of the Uganda British Protectorate by Captain Frederick Lugard, beginning in the last decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> The *WaNubi* legionnaires were not a monolithic group. Comrades-in-arms as they came to boost the regiments of British colonial army, the *WaNubi* were diverse both in their origins as in their previous occupational profiles. Conscripted into this new force of the expanding colonial state, however, soon bestowed upon them an historically shaped agency that would animate their political subjectivities in the newly forged colonial Uganda. The footprint of these freshly recruited *WaNubi* ex-slave soldiers marked the Upper Nile region as a whole. Their offspring too, being a core constituency of British Uganda's colonial army, inscribed themselves into the history of colonial violence in the project of Uganda's nation-state building through independence.

### 2.2. Post-independence political violence in the West Nile

Following the toppling of the Idi Amin regime in 1979,<sup>25</sup> war broke out between the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA), made up predominantly of Acholi and Langi soldiers and aided by the Tanzanian People's Defence Forces (TPDF), and West Nile-based remnants of the former Uganda Army (UA). The latter, many of whom were descendents of *WaNubi* slave soldiers, eventually splintered into two separate insurgent groups, namely the Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF) and the West Nile Bank Front (WNBFB). Given the ethnic composition of the UNLA, people in West Nile perceived any ill-treatment suffered at their hands as a form of revenge for the overthrow of President Milton Obote in 1971 by Idi Amin - and for the injustices meted out against the Acholi and Langi peoples under Idi Amin.<sup>26</sup>

The second armed insurgency (UNRF2), during which many youngsters (male and female) were abducted/conscripted into rebel forces, sprung up in the early 1990s. This new wave of violence plunged the already fragile sub-region into massive internal as well as crossborder forced

20 Sikainga, A.A. "Comrades in Arms or Captives in Bondage: Sudanese Slaves in the Turco-Egyptian Army, 1821-1865." In M. Toru and J.E. Philips (eds.) 2000. *Slave Elites in the Middle East and Africa: A Comparative Study*. London: Kegan Paul International, pp. 197-214.

21 *Ibid*

22 Bashizi, C. "La région interlacustre et commerce swahili au XIXe siècle" *Likundoli*, Série C 1, No. 2, 1976, pp. 80-97.

23 Sikainga (2000) *Op. cit.*

24 Leopold, M.A. 2005. *Inside West Nile: Violence, History & Representation on an African Frontier*. London: James Currey.

25 President Idi Amin hailed from Koboko, one of the West Nile's districts and, as such, it was widely believed that his regime bestowed a great deal of favours upon West Nilers (natives of the West Nile sub-region) and most especially those from his Kakwa ethnic kinship (natives of West Nile's Koboko).

26 Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) "It Was Only the Gun Speaking, With a Pool of Blood Flowing: The Ombaci Massacre, June 24, 1991" JRP Field Note 20, June 2014.



displacement. A negotiated peace deal - known as the Bidibidi peace accords - was reached between the Uganda government under President Museveni and UNRF2 delegates in 2002.

The silencing of the guns across the sub-region did not last long, however, as Joseph Kony's Lords Resistance Army (LRA) soon made in-roads into the West Nile districts of Adjumani and Moyo as well as Pakwach Town. The LRA intensified its attacks on communities in those West Nile locales between 2003 and 2005, causing further devastation of property and forced displacement.

The experience of insurgencies in West Nile was heterogenous.<sup>27</sup> The proximity of some parts of Yumbe and Arua districts to South Sudan and the DRC, respectively - two countries where armed conflict had been almost endemic - both augmented the fragility and availed some opportunity for cross-border escape for communities from the two districts during the two UNRF war episodes. The fact that Nebbi and Adjumani districts border Acholiland, on the other hand, increased the fragility of communities in those two districts, without much opportunity for cross-border escape during the LRA insurgency. While massive juvenile conscription into rebel forces during UNRF2 insurgency mainly targeted male children and youths in Yumbe District, abductions into the LRA rank-and-file affected both female and male children and youths in Adjumani District. The long period of armed conflicts in this sub-region, during which many young females were particularly targeted, has had devastating repercussions on both their psyche and socio-economic status. What is more, their offspring borne out of wartime sexual violence not only have narratives of war appended to their identities as birthmarks, but they have also been left with a much less dignified citizenship in the aftermath of war. Failure on the part of the state (both at central and local levels) as well as the post-war society to formulate and implement a comprehensive response to the particular plight of CBOW, thus prolongs the sequels of wartime sexual violence, leaving social and gender justice elusive all the way into their adulthood.

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27 International Alert and Invisible Children "Still Stranded! The Socio-Economic Reintegration of Youth in Post-War Northern Uganda" A Field Study Report, December 2014.

### 3.0. Emerging Issues from the Field

As post-independence armed insurgencies in West Nile unfolded, lawlessness and breakdown in provision of essential goods and services reached abysmal levels. With the second insurgency of the Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF2) in particular, a great deal of the remainder of West Nile's material resources and human capital was savagely shattered in addition to the devastation of social structures of accountability. The lives of young people (adolescents and younger adults) were particularly traumatised by the new wave of armed conflict starting in the second half of the 1990s through mid-2000s. Thousands saw their villages torched to ashes; their parents and relatives executed or dying of disease due to unsanitary conditions; many were forced to spend much of their childhood and adolescence in squalid Internally Displaced Persons' camps, while others crossed national borders to seek refuge in then northeastern Zaire (Democratic Republic of the Congo) or then southern Sudan (Republic of South Sudan). Studies of war-torn northern Uganda (across Lango, Acholi and West Nile sub-regions) have amply documented horrendous lived experiences of many such youngsters who forcibly participated in armed violence by rebel abduction and conscription, or served as porters, cooks and sex slaves – resulting in many girls and young women becoming mothers.<sup>28</sup>

It is particularly to the children born of such wartime sexual violence—from UNRF to LRA insurgencies—that this study dedicated most of its attention. Indeed, little to no research or policy investment has been extended to these CBOW in post-war West Nile region to come to grips with their ontological predicaments, let alone contribute meaningfully to their post-war social (re)integration.

#### 3.1. Stigmatisation and Discrimination

It has not been uncommon for these formerly abducted children (both female and male) to be stigmatised and to be verbally and physically abused by their families, relations and communities upon their return from rebel captivity.<sup>29</sup> Many of them in the case of post-war northern Uganda in general and West Nile sub-region in particular report that due to their war experiences, particularly conscription into rebel forces, they remain excluded from participating fully in the life of their respective families and communities. Some, for instance, have found it very difficult to marry. If narratives of stigmatisation and social discrimination against the formerly abducted and/or conscripted push the prospects of their reintegration beyond the realm of possibility, this also significantly impacts on the prospects for social integration of their offspring born of war, as suggested in a focus group discussion with former female LRA abductees who had given birth in rebel captivity:

***When we came back [from abduction into rebel insurgency] the community never welcomed and accepted easily. They used to call us 'wives of Kony'. Some community members, especially parents, told their female children who were not abducted not to associate with us; even the males feared them. We eventually dropped out of the school. Even while playing with other children in the neighbourhood, my child is often called out names such as 'Kony child' or 'LRA child'. Grown-ups too keep referring to him as 'cold hearted', 'cruel', 'harsh', 'troublesome' or simply 'wild'.<sup>30</sup>***

As with Coulter's female respondents in post-war Sierra Leone, these formerly abducted/forcibly displaced and sexually violated girls and women are, upon return from rebel captivity or forced encampment, often regarded by their families and communities as having engaged in socially deviant behaviour. Such "deviation" by these female youngsters from the culturally expected norms and practices due to their war experiences inevitably led to social disapproval, which was manifested social exclusion, stigma, and shame.<sup>31</sup> What is even more frustrating is that the notion of shame, which characteristically defines the relational world of these former female abductees, underpins the normalisation of violence, both direct and systemic. Some respondents related how,

28 For an extended literature review of this subject, see Atim, T. "Looking beyond Conflict: The Long-Term Impact of Suffering War Crimes on Recovery in Post-Conflict Northern Uganda" Published PhD Thesis, Wageningen University, December 2018.

29 M. Angucia (2010), *Op. cit.*; T. Atim (2018), *Op. cit.*

30 FGD with seven formerly abducted young mothers in Kiri village, Arinyapii Sub-county, Adjumani District (03 May 2019).

31 C. Coulter (2009). *Op. cit.*

in the aftermath of life in rebel captivity, they would conceive of the person who marries them as someone who has done them a favour – and how as a result they cannot afford to complain about any subsequent marital abuse.

Likewise, children born of wartime sexual violence, and especially rebel captivity, are here seen as disruptions to social harmony and thus systematically discriminated against within the family and wider community to which their deeply stigmatized mothers belong. While these formerly abducted female youths are easily blamed and scapegoated for all sorts of ills that befell their families and communities at large, their offspring born during rebel captivity are also abused (physically, materially and emotionally) at the hands of their supposed care-givers. Indeed, the war experiences of these female youths seem to have disrupted community-wide bonds in post-war West Nile. Those who did not experience rebel abduction and/or conscription, despite experiencing their own trauma in squalid IDP camps or in refuge across the border, seemed ill-prepared to accommodate sympathetically the psycho-social shocks of those who had been previously abducted and/or conscripted and so enable their social reintegration into civilian life. Mothers of CBOW reported in various focus group discussions in the three selected districts that being children borne out of wartime sexual violence (some in rebel captivity and others during encampment or upon return) these CBOW have experienced a great deal of trauma from their conception through their nursing to their adolescence and adulthood—ostracisation, physical, emotional and mental abuse from their families and communities. As they grow into adolescence and adulthood, CBOW, as with their mothers, thus find themselves becoming estranged from their very familial and social backgrounds.

Name-calling of CBOW in all three districts in which fieldwork was carried stood out as the most lucid feature of their stigmatization and eventual discrimination. Those not born of war have often bestowed upon CBOW derogatory and emotionally traumatizing names that expose them to a relapse of emotional violence: For being born to irregular armed men whose whereabouts remain unknown, some CBOW in Adjumani are constantly referred to as ‘Acholigo’ or ‘Olumolum’ [in reference to the LRA insurgency]; in Arua as ‘Juruwa’ and ‘Adiya’ [in reference to the WNB/UNRF insurgents]; and in Zombo as ‘Nyakabila’, ‘Nyalum’ and ‘Nyaloka’ [in reference to the TPDF-aided UNLFA invasion as well as subsequent insurgencies] to mention but a few. These names portray CBOW—many of them well into adulthood—as close associates of former fighting forces and as perpetual outsiders in West Nile communities. Such name-calling re-traumatizes and perpetuates stigmatization of those born of wartime sexual violence a generation or so ago. In one in-depth interview with a CBOW in Muvuli Village, Zombo District, this dynamic was bleakly described:

***We are always being called ‘Tanzanian children’. I have been told by some people in this community that I should go back to my home – Tanzania. Even my mother does not know the whereabouts of my father. For not knowing my own biological father, I was nicknamed ‘Kabila’.***<sup>32</sup>

An elderly opinion leader in Paidha Town Council, Zombo District, outlined some of the multiple complex scenarios under which children were conceived, but how they all suffered the fate of having names slapped on them as permanent markers of their origins:

***The Tanzanian soldiers assisting the UNLFA in West Nile also left so many children after the 1979 liberation war. They used both force and diplomacy during that time. Some would convince the women here and ended up having children with them, while others would simply use force, ending up raping women and girls. Children born out of such unclear and sometimes violent relationships proliferated. Society eventually gave them names such as Faida, Nyaloka, Nyalum, Olum, Kabibi, Nyakabila among others, all of which have meanings related to armed conflicts previously experienced here [West Nile sub-region].***<sup>33</sup>

32 IDI with a CBOW held in Muvuli Village, Zombo District (06 April 2019). Kabila is the name of the former President of DRC who seized power from long-standing dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko, in May 1997, and was frequently portrayed by his detractors as a Tanzanian

33 KII with a 69-year old opinion leader in Paidha Town Council, Zombo District (06 April 2019).

This kind of name system has negatively impacted/affected CBOW, in some cases leading to suicidal ideation and violent thoughts. CBOW and their mothers and/or caretakers generally express frustration with the way the community calls or labels them and the fact that such labeling goes without reprimand. As one young man expressed it: *“These kinds of names and insults affected me to the level that I feel like taking my life away whenever someone calls me that and I feel like fighting with that person”<sup>34</sup>*

The whole socialization process of CBOW is described as having been punctuated by instances of subtle as well as overt discrimination. First off, CBOW have endured negative attitudes and stereotypes for every sort of misery that may befall their maternal family and the larger community in which they grow—be it a family’s economic downturn, a family member’s demotion or loss of employment (elective or otherwise), or sanitary challenges. More often than not, when a felony or even a simple misdemeanor is committed in a community, fingers are pointed to CBOW therein. For, conditions surrounding their birth makes them particularly vulnerable to and easy target for discriminatory judgements and acts at community level.

Secondly, whether at home or in community during moments of argument, CBOW’s viewpoints are easily dismissed by comments and phrases such as ‘Now you want to bring out your bush mentality?!’ or ‘Where is your father?’<sup>35</sup> Such statements alone go a long way in negatively affecting the socialization and self-esteem of CBOW. Some maternal relatives of CBOW even manifest discrimination against the latter by the way in which they distribute family material resources and opportunities; only one frugal meal a day, healthcare neglect or denial of access to formal education opportunities are among issues that many CBOW in West Nile are confronted with, for they are almost always reminded that “they don’t belong where they are!”<sup>36</sup>. It is thus no exaggeration to ponder that whereas economic reintegration of CBOW in today’s West Nile sub-region remains crucial for positive peace, the social dimensions of this reintegration process ought not be minimized, for the former depends on the latter if the dividends of peace are to be maximised and sustained.

### 3.2. Paternity and broken citizenship

CBOW who do not know their fathers, lack the patrilineal identity that is so critical for social belonging and by extension full citizenship in the Ugandan socio-political and cultural context (as per Schedule 3 of the 1995 Constitution). Troubling questions such as “I just want to know who and where my father is” are repeatedly asked to mothers and/or caretakers (most of them single mothers) of CBOW. At stake here is the citizenship of CBOW to the extent that patrilineal descent remains an important consideration for Ugandan citizenship. Registration for birth certificates and national identification documents rank high on the priority list of adult CBOW. In numerous individual in-depth interviews as well as focus group discussions with CBOW, the latter lucidly explained how their social protection and prospects for leading economically dignifying lives were pegged to them being recognized as full citizens of the Ugandan state - and the centrality of proper documentation in acquiring such recognition. In the context of contemporary Uganda, social protection is undergirded by the National Social Protection Policy<sup>37</sup> (2015), which attempts to guarantee that government and its partners address risks and vulnerabilities that expose individuals to income insecurity and social deprivation. In its situation analysis, however, this National Social Protection Policy is utterly silent when it comes to CBOW. Yet, the Constitution particularly enjoins the State to take affirmative action in favour of such marginalized/vulnerable groups.

What is more, the the Birth and Death Registration Act (Cap 309) provides for registration of births and deaths for purposes of enabling government to accomplish effective planning and programming. While birth registration is certainly the very first step to recognition and protection, the majority of children born of wartime sexual violence (whether in rebel captivity or simply in forced displacement settings) are not registered at birth. Distressingly, many CBOW lack formal documentation relating to their bio-data particulars since birth. Some who are fortunate to have been born after their mothers’

34 IDI with 19-year-old male from Ogolo North village, Liri Parish, Arinyapii Sub county, Adjumani district.

35 Excerpts from a FGD with CBOW held in Ogolo Village, Adjumani District ( 10 May 2019).

36 *Ibid.*

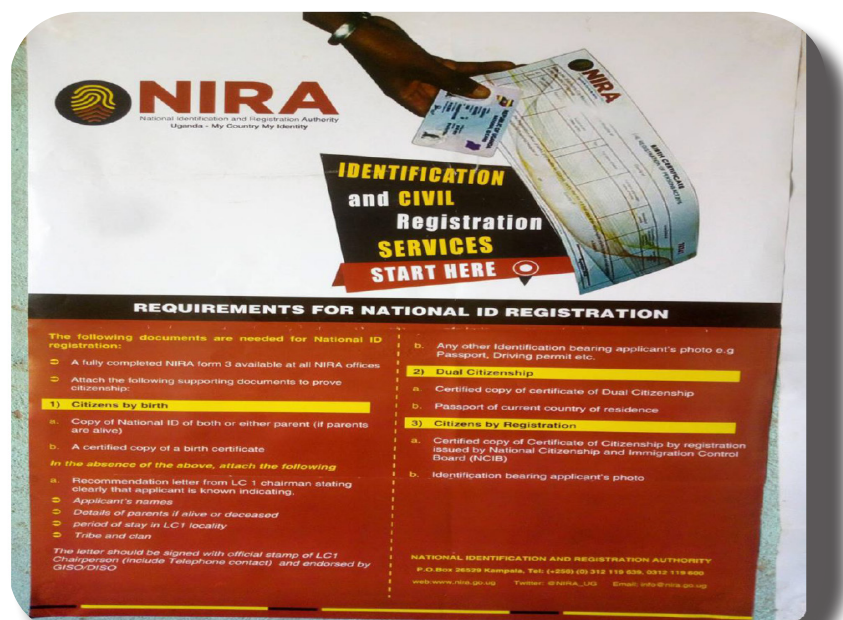
37 <http://socialprotection.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/National-Social-Protection-Policy-uganda.pdf> [Accessed on June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019]

return (either from rebel captivity or forced encampment) to their respective communities benefitted from some form of documentation such as Church baptism cards or hospital immunization cards. But even then, paternity for these documented CBOW still remains a matter of great conjecture. In an FGD with male CBOW held in Arua, one respondent revealed the following:

***Prior to the death of my mother, I was already baptized and I knew my day, month and year of birth. This helped me during the ID registration process. But the problem came when I was supposed to present details of my father, which I do not know. I thus ended up using the details of my maternal uncle for my father. It was by grace of having such a supportive uncle that I managed to secure my national ID.***<sup>38</sup>

The stringent, context-blind requirements of the NIRA application form for national ID make for potential re-traumatisation of CBOW, and contribute to their exclusion from citizenship. CBOW applications for national ID frequently run into obstacles when a recommendation letter from the office of the chairperson for the village or ward local council (LC I) is required from applicants whose maternal relatives are unable or unwilling to cooperate in covering up the paternal identity of the applicant. While the officially stated requirement from NIRA in this respect is a copy of identity document of one of the applicant's parents (not both), NIRA officials posted in field offices more often than not require names of both father and mother to finalise the registration process for a national ID, a requirement many CBOW are unable to meet.

Article 66 of the Registration of Persons Act<sup>39</sup> (2015) underscores the mandatory use of national identification cards by citizens of age seeking a public service from a government ministry, department, agency or any other government-mandated institution. For the avoidance of doubt, any such institution can require a person seeking such public service or public good to produce a national identification card or an alien's identification card. Being in possession of such citizenship-ascertaining documentation is key to partaking of all rights bestowed upon citizens. Conversely, being unable to possess it as a result of queries related to one's paternity, reduces one's citizenship to a state of permanent precarity.



**Photo 1: NIRA registration poster placed on one walls of the Council Hall of Zeu Sub-county, Zombo District. Photo credit: Refugee Law Project**

<sup>38</sup> Excerpt from a FGD with male CBOW held in Kijoro Kubo Village, Arua District (20 June 2019).

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.nira.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/Publish/Registration%20of%20Person%20Act%202015.pdf> [Accessed on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019]

### 3.3 Access to property (land) and social justice

Deprivation of access to fixed property, particularly land, remains one of the most disadvantageous experiences of CBOW in today's West Nile sub-region. Access to communal land is inextricably linked to one's sociological identity. CBOW simply fall outside the realm of consideration. Simply being called 'Oyoro' (as is the case for many children born following LRA raids in Adjumani District) is delegitimizing enough for any possible claims on customary land in the district. For *Oyoro* here refers to one being an offspring of an 'Acholi rebel' [in reference to the LRA insurgency, which originally sprung from Acholiland] and, hence, excluded from all Ma'di communally held fixed assets. Those fortunate enough to have access to communal land thanks to the generosity of their maternal uncles only benefit from such prerogative of mercy for as long as such caretakers live; once deceased or even incapacitated by illness or old age, access to family/communal land by CBOW is challenged by their unsympathetic maternal relatives.

The compounded inability of CBOW and their mothers/caretakers to access, let alone own, land for both housing and subsistence cultivation gravely undermines their survival in the post-war agriculture-based economy. Without farmland and deprived of any specialized skills to enter into capitalist labour markets, CBOW are left with slimmer possibilities of alternative sources of livelihood. It is worse still for female CBOW, who under patriarchal social norms and sanctions are cast into subordination to a male-figure, alive or dead.<sup>40</sup> Little wonder that many CBOW interviewed reported living under constant threat of eviction, whether from their current places of abode or from land they were farming:

***When my maternal uncle died, he left everything in the names of his own children and now his children have started disowning me, threatening to chase me away from their land. When you are chased [away], you end up looking for somebody to settle with and you end up settling with someone, not of your choice and who cannot really help you. We are [thus] living here with a constant feeling of being like disgracefully divorced—divorced from your own family and divorced from your would-be husband even before getting duly married to him.<sup>41</sup>***

The issue of inheritance of land property within a patrilineal order further compounds the vulnerabilities of CBOW irrespective of their gender identity. Customarily - across the West Nile sub-region, Alur, Lugbara, and Ma'di communities – there is agreement that inheritance rights are derived from one's paternal lineage. CBOW, whose paternal lineage is exogenous, are consequently viewed as unfit for accessing available communal land through inheritance. Land value appreciation in the wake of growing capitalist interest in large-scale commercial farming and massive infrastructural developments across post-war northern Uganda has further stirred up an already volatile context to the disadvantage of socially vulnerable CBOW. The increase in land wrangles, particularly following resettlement from IDP camps more than a decade ago, has further increased the economic vulnerability of CBOW and their immediate care-givers. Insecure land tenure is especially salient for unmarried female members of the community, and aggravates an already bad situation. Most of the land in the greater north of Uganda is customarily owned and customary practices of passing on land through the male line persist. This is despite the 1998 Land Act (and its subsequent amendments) which provide for women's inheritance rights. In short, mothers of CBOW and CBOW themselves (deprived of recognizable paternity claims) remain economically marginalised.

The land question for CBOW seems to be further compounded by gender identity. In the case of female CBOW, the issue of land is sometimes attenuated by the expectation that she will be married off and that therefore there will be no pressure on clan/family land. For male CBOW, the land question remains salient as it is always expected that a male child, once of age, will be allocated a portion of land to kick-start his own family trajectory. As narrated by one mother of a male CBOW during a focus group discussion:

40 IDI with a female CBOW held in Bedkuwedu Village, Zombo District (03 April 2019).

41 Excerpt from a FGD with female CBOW held in Paidha Town Council, Zombo District (06 April 2019).

*My male child has had a difficult time accessing property, and more so land, in our home area. Given that the family has had many male children, many of whom do not even get a fair share of the ancestral land, mine who is culturally considered foreigner in her mother's family is just excluded altogether. However, girl children have had no big problems because they [the family elders] think they will be married off.<sup>42</sup>*

As the land questions make clear, the social integration of CBOW cannot take place as a process devoid of an economic dimension. In fact, the economic integration of this particular category of war-affected persons is essential to their overall integration. For, without a sustained source for (even basic) livelihood, it is utopian to imagine their sound social reintegration. Social reintegration process of CBOW thus calls for consequential economic considerations.<sup>43</sup>



*Photo 2: In-depth interview with a mother of a CBOW in Lendu Parish, Zeu Sub County, Zombo District. Photo credit: Refugee Law Project*

<sup>42</sup> Excerpt from a FGD with mothers of CBOW held in Adjumani District (04 May 2019).

<sup>43</sup> Previous studies conducted in and about post-war northern Uganda has underscored this point: See for instance Allen Kiconco's *Understanding Former 'Girl Soldiers': Central themes in the lives of formerly abducted girls in post-conflict northern Uganda* (2015) as well as Michelle Savard's *The Reintegration of Young Mothers in Northern Uganda: Considering post-war spaces for change* (2019).

## 4.0 Conclusions and recommendations

Much remains to be told about the plight of CBOW in today's West Nile. Three broad thematic issues, however, sum up the conceptual preoccupations of this study. The geographic scope covered by this study too clearly depicts that communities from all the selected districts were variously affected by the series of armed conflicts which devastated different parts of the region in different timeframes. The variedness in being affected by armed conflict has been manifested along two variables; namely, war experiences and the gender of the war-affected.

More than two decades of a global policy focus on the concerns of children and youths affected by or associated with armed conflicts as witnessed in the Cape Town Principles of 1997 (and later in the Paris Principles of 2007), many scholars and practitioners of post-war reintegration can still agree with the words of Michael Wessells that the area of reintegration of girls and women previously affected by or associated with armed forces "is still in its infancy."<sup>44</sup> Long spells of life in ill-cared for IDP camps or in rebel captivity no doubt had tremendously negative psycho-social, economic and sociopolitical effects on the human development processes of particularly war-affected youths (male and female). Many girls and women, however, disproportionately endured wartime sexual violence, the outcome of which resulted in CBOW in addition to their already unhealthy physical and mental states as well as lost opportunity for both formal and non-formal education during their formative years. Remarkably, hundreds, if not thousands of these young women in West Nile, returned from forced encampment, abduction or conscription to a shattered socio-economic and political setting. Their CBOW had been faced with a set of interlacing challenges: no warm-welcoming family to grow and flourish in coupled with hardly any social network or livelihood to rely on.

Having explored the varied psychosocial, economic and sociopolitical bottlenecks of former CBOW in the selected districts of West Nile, this study reiterates the overwhelming evidence — albeit microcosmic as in the case of the limited sample — suggesting an urgent response commensurate to the dire situation in which this special group of war-affected persons are living. Given that positive peace (which is more than the silencing of guns, clothes on one's body and food in one's stomach) remains a highly desirable commodity in post-war West Nile communities in general and for CBOW in particular, this study makes the following recommendations:

### ***To the central Government of Uganda:***

A programme for youth empowerment nationwide, and particularly for context-specific reintegration of CBOW in post-war West Nile is required. Such programme should first and foremost necessitate a change in attitude and approach by those in charge of governance and service delivery, which is not to think for and act on behalf of survivors of violence, but rather to think with and work together with them. CBOW should not be conceived of as mere passive recipients in the country's socio-economic trajectory. In this regard, the granting of start-up capital for this category of war-affected persons would only follow a thorough economic needs assessment for skills mapped against the needs of economically dynamic sectors. In the same vein, the government's line ministries and agencies in charge of the country's education, economic and social developments should work in consortium with key non-governmental stakeholders to have a skills-driven vocational programme mainstreamed into formal curricula throughout the entire educational ladder.

### ***To the cultural and religious leadership in West Nile:***

Cognisant of issues of exclusion/disaffranchisement suffered by CBOW and their immediate caregivers, cultural and religious leaders in this sub-region are particularly called to forefront and articulate an expansive definition of family and cultural citizenship beyond the narrowly biologizing tenets of maternity and parternity in distribution of and access to resources - material/physical and psychosocial. Given that armed conflict and especially widespread instances of conflict-related sexual violence disrupted the coherence and embeddedness of the community as described in West

44 Tonheim, M. "Where Are the Research Gaps? Reviewing Literature on Former Girl Soldiers' Reintegration in the African Context" In B. Mæland (ed.) 2010. *Culture, Religion, and the Reintegration of Female Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, p. 18.



Nile and so inaugurated the breaking of citizenship of CBOW, the need for an expansive and all-inclusive formulation of family to be spelt out by cultural and religious leaders (more so on issues of social belonging and access of customary land) would go a long way in repairing the various ways in which CBOW and their caregivers were wounded and continue to experience guilt, trauma, distrust and hopelessness; brief, what Dolan (2009) referred to as debilitation. The Alur, Ma'di and Lugbara Kari cultural institutions, among others, should pass socially sanctioned gender-transformative resolutions especially regarding land rights, inheritance and access, as well as inclusive social belonging even in instances of unclear/unknown paternity.

***To the local governments of post-war West Nile:***

A deliberate programme for CBOW mind-set preparation should be consistently pursued by the local government leadership in the respective districts of West Nile to unwind the receipt-mode of thinking and acting borne of more than two-decades' experience of war. In this regard, the local government leadership should combat further *projectisation* of post-war West Nile and instead lobby for more direct investments (domestic and foreign) capable of enhancing economic development in the region, where dividends could align the region with the rest of the country in terms of national development. Correspondingly, local governments' annual planning committees for severely war-affected families should endeavour to draw substantially youth-focused budgets capable of catering for specific CBOW concerns across the spectrum of variously war-affected persons in the region.

***To the Ugandan civil society:***

A cohesive agenda for holistic, intersectional gender justice advocacy targeting post-war West Nile should be spearheaded in a bid to improve the lives of war affected persons, including CBOW. This is important in its own right and also to minimise the potential for a return to youth-driven turmoil in the region. Civil society actors — local, regional, national, international, secular and faith-based — including the media and the academia should establish and coordinate an all-inclusive 'youth situation room' where bubbling social tensions involving various war-affected young people can be de-escalated by non-violent means. Ugandan civil society, in its largest sense, should also document and support the implementation of good practices for post-war integration of youths previously affected by armed conflict leveraged from other contexts on the continent and elsewhere.

***To the private sector:***

Uganda's private sector should make a deliberate commitment through their coordinating agencies such as the Uganda National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Uganda Investment Authority and all existing business fora, to allocate a portion of their corporate social responsibility obligations for post-war business mentorship for CBOW and other war-affected young persons in West Nile. In this regard, the private sector by way of an apprenticeship scheme would offer a gap-filler between formal education and experience for the majority of post-war West Nile youths in search for hands-on skills for (self-) employability.

***To the donor community:***

The donor community should guarantee support — both in terms of funding and applicable knowledge transfer — to the Ugandan civil society for the performance of its mandate in regard to the unfinished business of gender-just reintegration process of war-affected youth in today's West Nile.

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