SEEKING ACCOUNTABILITY AND PREVENTING REOCURRENCE: ADDRESSING CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL SLAVERY THROUGH THE WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY AGENDA

CASE STUDY: CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL SLAVERY IN UGANDA
A publication of the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, funded by the Korean International Cooperation Agency

© 2020 Global Network of Women Peacebuilders
Printed in New York, New York, USA

Case Study Author:
Twijukireho Edwins Ahumuza

Editors:
Mallika Iyer, Jenaina Irani, and Eleonore Veillet-Chowdhury

Layout and Design
Katrina Leclerc

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. Please feel free to use and cite parts of this publication, crediting the authors and the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders.

Acknowledgments
We thank the survivors of conflict-related sexual slavery, women’s rights activists, local and national government officials, human rights lawyers, and grassroots peacebuilders in South Korea, Uganda, and Iraq whose generous participation in focus group discussions and key informant interviews made this research possible. We hope that this research will inform and strengthen the global response to conflict-related sexual slavery and survivor-centered implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda.

Special thanks goes to global policymakers who provided valuable insights to this research through key informant interviews.

We are grateful to the Korean International Cooperation Agency for their generous support, continuous partnership, and valuable inputs into the research. We express deep gratitude to Stephanie Kim, Gender Specialist, Program Strategy and Policy Planning Department, for her guidance and substantive inputs into the research.
Table of Contents

- List of Acronyms
- Executive Summary
- Research Method and Approaches
- The Drivers and Impacts of Conflict-Related Sexual Slavery in Uganda
- Access to Justice for Survivors of Sexual Slavery
- Gaps and Opportunities to Address Conflict-Related Sexual Slavery Through the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda
- Highlighting the Initiatives of Women’s Rights Organizations and Civil Society Groups in Condemning and Demanding Accountability for Conflict-Related Sexual Slavery
- Conclusion and Recommendations
- Bibliography

List of Acronyms

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO: Civil Society Organization
FGD: Focus Group Discussion
FGM: Female Genital Mutilation
GNWP: Global Network of Women Peacebuilders
IDP: Internally Displaced Person
KII: Key Informant Interview
LDU: Local Defense Units
LGBTQIA+: Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans Queer Intersex Asexual +
LRA: Lord’s Resistance Army
NAP: National Action Plan
NRA: National Resistance Army
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
PRDP: Peace Recovery and Development Plan
SGBV: Sexual and Gendered-Based Violence
UPDF: United People’s Defense Force
UHRC: Uganda Human Rights Commission
WAN: Women Advocacy Network
WPS: Women, Peace, and Security
1. Executive Summary

This case study focuses on Northern Uganda, where protracted armed conflict between the insurgent terrorist group, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), and the state lasted for over 20 years. During that time, close to 30 percent of women in the region experienced at least one form of conflict-related sexual violence, including sexual slavery.1

The major findings of this case study reveal that sexual slavery was utilized by rebels belonging to the LRA in an institutionalized manner, in order to exert control over local communities. These acts were carried out with impunity and the perpetrators have not yet been brought to justice. The case study showcases that several conflict drivers contributed to the incidence of sexual slavery. Despite the crimes meted out against them and their communities, women in the region played a big role in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and rebuilding communities. They achieved significant advocacy and policy milestones during and post-conflict.

Even though there are several international, regional and national instruments that exist to prevent and protect women from sexual violence during conflict, Uganda has not been able to successfully utilize them to hold the LRA accountable for its atrocities, for a number of reasons. Although the government has initiated post-conflict recovery processes and signed a National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, survivors of conflict-related sexual slavery have not successfully participated in or benefited from these processes. Nevertheless, full and effective implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda, with the meaningful participation and leadership of survivors at its core, is critical to prevent reoccurrence of, protect women and girls from, strengthen accountability mechanisms for, and improve relief and recovery services for conflict-related sexual slavery.

2. Research Methods and Approaches

This case study report is part of the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders’ (GNWP) research on conflict-related sexual slavery titled “Seeking Accountability and Preventing Reoccurrence: Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Slavery through the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda.” The research was carried out between July and September 2020 through Key Informant Interviews (KII), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and a national document review.

The main objective of the study is to promote synergies in the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda (WPS), international humanitarian and human rights laws, and policies to prevent and counter violent extremism to improve the prevention of, protection from, accountability mechanisms for, and relief and recovery for survivors of sexual slavery. Recommendations have been provided based on the interviews, discussions and research.

---

The research was carried out in the war-ravaged Acholi sub-region, covering the districts of Amuru, Gulu, Kitgum, Nwoya, Lira, Oyam and Omoro. These districts were specifically chosen as they were particularly impacted by the conflict. All interviews have been transcribed and data was managed by the author. Triangulation was used throughout the study to confirm data validity and consistency. The interview transcripts were analyzed through qualitative, deductive coding.

Interviews conducted with 13 key informants focused on:

- information on causes and impact of war on women and girls;
- support given to sexual slavery survivors;
- revival of socio-economic structures;
- participation of women in peace talks and peacebuilding;
- impact and participation of women in post-conflict recovery processes; and
- assistance and services provided to the most vulnerable members of the community (women, children, and disabled persons).

This information enabled the researcher to understand the gaps that still exist in service delivery, policy formulation, and implementation. It also helped to identify ongoing post-recovery processes by civil society organizations (CSOs), international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the government, and development partners.

In-depth interviews were conducted with women who had been subjected to sexual slavery, mutilation, violence, and other forms of violations, as well as with individuals who witnessed the murder of close relatives in their communities. Five in-depth interviews were held with senior staff of CSOs in Gulu district and three wives of the Senior Commanders of LRA, including the wife of LRA Commander in Chief, Joseph Kony. Two FGDs were held with former women abductees and 29 female survivors of sexual slavery. The criteria for the selection of the FGDs included women who were sexually abused, abducted, married to soldiers, mothers of children born of rape, displaced, and ex-combatants.

Finally, the researcher conducted a comprehensive national literature review. The review mainly utilized research reports looking at the impact of war, the impact of sexual slavery, reports of women’s peacebuilding initiatives, post-conflict recovery processes in Northern Uganda, and international, regional and national instruments on Women, Peace and Security.

3. The Drivers and Impacts of Conflict-Related Sexual Slavery in Uganda

This section showcases that civilian women and girls bore the brunt of the conflict-related sexual violence and sexual slavery during the armed conflict that persisted in northern Uganda. This was due to persistent economic insecurity of women in the region, which existed even before the LRA’s dominance as a result of historical regional conflicts. Rebels took advantage of the extreme poverty
that women faced during the armed conflict, particularly in and around camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Perpetrators of sexual slavery used it as a means to exert control over this population in need. They also used the cultural stigma attached to survivors to their advantage, knowing that reporting of sexual slavery would be curtailed due to fear of societal shame. Sexual enslavement was institutionalized within the LRA and seen as commonplace, as testimonies from former combatants and witnesses showcase. The ubiquitous nature of sexual violations perpetrated against women by both government-supported troops and rebel forces indicates how fertile the breeding ground was for further atrocities such as sexual enslavement, especially given that widespread impunity for these crimes existed on both sides of the conflict.

Uganda has had continued political and armed conflict for the last 50 years. Multiple governments have tried to address various conflict drivers. During the course of these conflicts, people, especially women, young girls, and some men and boys have suffered unimaginable sexual violence including gang rapes, human trafficking, sexual slavery, forced marriage, and displacement. The most notorious of these conflicts was between the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and the National Resistance Army (NRA) that resulted in the displacement over 1.7 million people, or ninety percent of northern Uganda’s population, and over 200,000 children abducted and forced to fight in the rebellion against the government.

There are numerous factors that have caused and protracted armed conflict in Uganda. Historical factors include the regional divide between the north and south as well as divisive colonial policies that have been perpetuated by post-colonial governments. Poverty, socio-economic deprivation and subsequent underdevelopment, along with the widespread use and abuse of guns, has caused insecurity, impunity of armed forces, human rights abuse, criminalization, proliferation of small arms, and weak border control. Additional factors include poor governance, competition over scarce natural resources, land disputes, and marginalization of political and regional groups.

In Northern Uganda, between 1.8 and 2 million persons have been internally displaced since 1986. It is estimated that over 200,000 children were abducted during the conflict. Children’s rights, parental support, education and health services are still threatened by insecurity. There is rampant physical and sexual exploitation of children. Food insecurity and scarcity due to limited access to land has resulted in chronic and acute malnutrition among the population. Poverty, the disruption of basic social services, and poor hygiene and sanitation are ubiquitous. As a result of weakened government institutions to enforce the rule of law, there is also armed theft as well as increased fear and heavy loss of life and property.

---

5 Ibid.
Too often, sexual violence is part of the tragic and brutal pattern of acts committed during armed conflict. Sexual violence is primarily inflicted on women and girls, but it also impacts men, boys, and LGBTQIA+ persons. In addition to the extreme physical and psychological trauma suffered by survivors and witnesses, sexual violence is used to aggravate ethnic or other divisions, perpetuate instability, and undermine peacebuilding and stabilizations efforts.

Several pre-existing conditions in the northern Uganda region put local women at a disadvantage to men. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, 98 percent of the Acholi pastoralists' cattle were stolen by raiders from neighboring tribes and other local insurgents. This paved the way for LRA attacks on the local population, showcasing how one conflict can erupt in many more or stay protracted if it is not effectively resolved through sustainable and inclusive peacebuilding. Agriculture and cattle keeping were historically the main source of income for the pastoral Acholi tribe. As a result of the cyclical resurgence of armed conflict, the once large-numbered livestock herds in the region were wiped out, thus denying the Acholi society one of its major sources of wealth and livelihood. The armed conflict impacted how the historically pastoral tribe lived, as the majority of them moved to live in camps commonly referred to as “protected villages,” and in the towns of Gulu, Pader, and Kitgum.

Poverty, poor living conditions, lack of access to food, education, and economic insecurity made women and girls extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation. The insecurity of women and girls was exacerbated by structural inequalities perpetuated by patriarchal cultural and religious norms. Traditionally, Acholi land was communally owned. However, even before the insurgencies, women's access to land was considerably limited and often pegged to their marital status. Risking loss of the right to the land that they tilled through separation or divorce, women experienced a higher risk of economic insecurity. Widows could also lose the right to use their deceased husband's land in the absence of sons. Stripped of their assets and the wealth associated with cattle, economic insecurity increased, as did local women's workloads. This meant that women and girls now had to partake in labor outside the home, which was unusual. Rising unemployment and LRA attacks on schools resulted in many girls dropping out of school and higher education. In order to “protect” young girls, families sought to marry them off early or make them concubines of government soldiers as a means of extra protection. Exchanging sex for money, food, soap or favors became “normal” and for many, a necessary tool for survival.

As the war proceeded in the early 2000s, the primary rationale for rebels to abduct women for the purpose of sexual slavery seems to have been the need to swell the rebel's ranks. Enslaved women experienced the burden of working as soldiers in the day and as “wives” in the night. Those who managed to escape or were rescued from enslavement testified to the rampant sexual violence inflicted upon enslaved women and girls. Apart from being subjected to constant sexual violence, the enslaved girls and women carried out similar work as the abducted

---


7 Ibid.

boys and men. This included looting food, carrying heavy loads, building huts, fetching water and washing clothes. Women performed the dual duty of being soldiers and wives, all while being treated as prisoners. During a key informant interview, a former wife of the LRA Commander, Joseph Kony, and survivor of sexual slavery shared:

We were the engine of the rebellion. We cooked, washed clothes, provided sex to boost morale, and organized the camp. As girls were killed, committed suicide, or were captured by government forces, the LRA had to replace them with additional victims. There was a unit in the LRA that was solely dedicated to the abduction of women and girls from schools and IDP camps.

Hence, it is clear that the LRA used sexual slavery to intimidate, harass, and coerce all local women, and not just for sexual gratification. The victims saw rape used as a form of torture more than for the sexual satisfaction of men. This is because it affected all women, including very young girls and the very old women. In many cases, rape was committed in front of other people including family members. The former “wife” of the LRA Commander, Joseph Kony, and survivor of sexual slavery further explained:

sex was a form of punishment, recreation, and sometimes sacred ritual. None of the women or girls who were enslaved had control over their bodies. We were distributed to commanders the way you distribute goats, cows, or bulls. Girls were raped at such a young age. You’d see the kuruts (newly captured girls) struggling to walk. They were so young…before they even had their first period.

Notably, women and girls were forcibly married to individual rebels, to whom they were required to be faithful, with violations punishable by death. If the “husband” died either at the war front or through sickness, the “wife” would be put aside, then subjected to a humiliating ritual cleansing exercise, and finally married off to another rebel after some months. Before settling down into rebel camps, all women were reportedly routinely raped by multiple numbers of rebels and any reluctance or attempt to resist usually meant execution. Sometimes severe punishment was meted out to the victim until she gave in.

One respondent’s statement reveals the top-down, institutionalized nature of these violations and how the LRA’s command structure promoted these atrocities. She explained, “All the girls that were abducted and defiled or raped were married off to rebel leaders or used for general sexual service to rebels..Some commanders were reported to have four to five wives, while Joseph Kony himself had over 27 wives at any one time.”

Unlike earlier northern resistance movements, the LRA quickly lost popular support among the local population, primarily due to the terror it inflicted against civilians. The Ugandan national army, renamed the United People’s Defense Force (UPDF) began to forcibly move civilians into IDP camps and “protected villages,” allegedly to cut the rebels’ food supply. Corralling the population was also intended to reduce the incidence of abduction and forced recruitment of children and youth into the LRA. However, the extent to which the government of Uganda (GoU) was able to

---

9 Key informant interview conducted by Twijukreho Edwins in Gulu District on August 22nd, 2020.
10 Ibid.
offer protection to civilians in the displacement camps has been inconsistent. Many of the most serious massacres and waves of abduction occurred after people were forced into the “protected villages,” which were, in reality, camps for IDPs. In 2003, the government encouraged the creation of local defense units (LDUs) to provide protection to the population. In addition to the creation of these units, the government supported vigilante groups, such as Arrows Boys in the Teso sub-region, the Arrows in Acholi of 1990s, and the Amuka of Lango sub-region. Although these militias were under the control of the UPDF, they were often poorly trained, and lacked regular salaries. According to a founding member of a local civil society organization, Peoples Voices for Peace, these groups were poorly regulated and were considered mercenaries. These troops were also purportedly guilty of committing conflict-related sexual violence. An interviewee stated that “there was a very thin [line between] them and Kony’s rebels. They abducted and raped women at will in the regions they operated.” This showcases the dire situation civilians faced on all fronts through the conflict, and the impunity for such crimes across the board.

Conflict-related sexual slavery was widespread during the conflict between the government of Uganda and the LRA in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Both government forces and the LRA sexually abused women and girls extensively; however, it was the LRA that utilized sexual slavery to subjugate the local population. The women who were sexually abused by UPDF said the rape by government forces was reportedly “more tolerable” than the brutality meted-out by rebels to their rape victims. Conversely, the women who served in the rebel ranks claimed that rape committed by government forces was vicious and barbaric. These atrocities were rampant in and around the IDP camps, yet generally under-reported due to the lack of access to police and medical services as well as cultural stigma and complicated legal procedures in place. In general, a victim-blaming attitude prevailed in most local communities, where the women or girls were blamed for their violations. According to staff at Refugee Law Project, Gulu Station, up to 75 percent of demobilized women and adolescent girls had one or more sexually transmitted diseases. Women also mentioned during the FGDs that they had multiple sexual relationships, at times, bearing children by different rebel men who subsequently neglected them, thereby adding to their burden and vulnerability.

To this day, survivors of sexual slavery suffer from tremendous physical and psychological trauma. Physical ailments from the war include backaches from carrying children, heavy loads of loot, and tins full of bullets weighing 25 to 35 kilograms over long distances, exposure to bomb fragments, frogging, and other injuries sustained while in LRA captivity. Survivors of sexual slavery also suffered from many sexually transmitted diseases and infections. Their physical conditions were worsened by the lack of immediate, reliable medical treatment; long-term injuries consequently impacted their livelihood prospects. Participants in the FGDs revealed that survivors were often rejected and treated poorly by their own family members. Some parents rejected their daughters upon their return from captivity outright. One female survivor from the Omoro district stated during an August 2020 FGD: “My parents never welcomed, never wanted to see me, and when I go to them they would say, ‘Do we have anything of yours so we give it back to you?’”

---

Although the conflict is considered to have ended the late 2000s, following unsuccessful peace talks held in Juba between the LRA and the Ugandan government, rebel leader, Kony, refused to sign a peace agreement. Therefore, the likelihood of hostilities erupting again is always present. The impact of large scale internal displacement of communities, environmental degradation in settlement areas, general lawlessness, and widespread conflict-related sexual violence in the region has left scars, which are largely ineffectively addressed by the post conflict resolution process. Ongoing insecurity in Uganda, and in the Great Lakes region more broadly, continues to be characterized by gross human rights violations, including human trafficking, torture, abduction, and systematic sexual violence, including sexual slavery. Women and children are disproportionately affected, and also represent the vast majority of internally displaced persons and refugees.

4. Access to Justice for Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Slavery

Uganda has strong national laws and policies to address conflict-related sexual slavery. The government has committed to the implementation of international instruments such as UNSCR 1325, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Goma Declaration (2008) and developed multiple iterations of the Peace Recovery and Development Plan to promote gender equality and sustainable peace. Uganda’s 2008 National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325, 1820, and the Goma Declaration is an important policy achievement, as it addresses the incidence of conflict-related sexual slavery committed by the LRA. Through these frameworks, Uganda recognizes that sexual slavery is a domestic war crime and has a duty to enforce and prosecute perpetrators.

However, access to justice continues to be an uphill battle for survivors of sexual slavery in Uganda. Bringing an end to the armed conflict in Uganda is considered to be a landmark achievement in the country’s history—and yet major steps still have to be made towards bringing perpetrators of sexual slavery and other gross human rights violations to justice. Allowing such crimes to go unpunished is a failure of the administration and international community.

With its universally acclaimed National Constitution of 1995, Uganda has been recognized for its policies that promote the protection of human rights and women’s rights. The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995) establishes the broad legal framework for the respect of human rights, equality between men and women, and affirmative action to address structural inequalities, and articulates specific rights of women including outlawing customs, traditions, and practices that undermine the welfare, dignity, and interests of women.

The government of Uganda has committed to implement several critical international legal instruments that condemn conflict-related sexual violence and prosecute and punish perpetrators.

---


The Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) is mandated to monitor the government’s compliance with international treaties and conventions on human rights and provide recommendations to improve national efforts in this regard to Parliament. Importantly, the UHRC is required to protect the rights of historically marginalized groups, raise public awareness about human rights, and receive and forward cases of sexual and gender-based violence to other jurisdictions for appropriate redress.

The Ugandan Government attempted to address the impacts of armed conflict, including sexual violence and violations of women’s rights, through the Peace Recovery and Development Plan. First launched in 2007 by the government of Uganda through the office of the Prime Minister, the Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) is a comprehensive development framework with an overall goal of stabilization in order to build sustainable peace and lay the foundation for recovery and development of Northern Uganda. The newest iteration, PRDP III for the period 2015 to 2021, has seven over-arching principles that cut across all sectors of development. These are: outcome focus; additionality; multi-sector and multi-stakeholder partnerships; transparency and accountability; functionality and value for money; gender equity and inclusion; as well as public awareness and sensitization. However, despite the implementation of the PRDP, the disparity between people under the poverty line in northern and southern parts of Uganda continues to increase. The actual number of people living in poverty in the northern region has increased from around 2.4 million in 1992 to 3.6 million in 2013. During the same period, people living below the poverty line in all of Uganda has fallen significantly from around 9.7 million to 6.7 million.

Although the PRDP had the potential to adequately address the disproportionate impacts of conflict on women and girls, there were multiple issues with the formation and implementation of the plan that hampered its effectiveness. A lack of consultations and an inclusive drafting process was a major shortcoming of the first and second iterations of the Peace and Recovery Development Plan (PRDP I & II), which ultimately failed to meet the unique, urgent, and intersecting needs of women and survivors of sexual slavery particularly in northern Uganda. Through an interview, a coordinator of the Women Advocacy Network noted:

The PRDP was and is just a political image building tool. It concentrated on increasing police officers in Acholi, building health facilities and school. But most of the built facilities were/are inadequately equipped with the necessary staff, drugs, medicine and equipment. For instance, most survivors of sexual slavery, had physical and internal injuries. How do you diagnose my back and head pain if the hospital has no x-ray or scans? Most of us, we have issues with wild dreams and fears. How do you expect to afford a psychiatrist? The PRDP should have consulted us, to capture our unique needs. Those officials in charge of the PRDP drafting and implementation from Kampala just come to northern Uganda to inform us about PRDP not to consult. Otherwise, Women Taskforce for a Gender Responsive of PRDP input since 2011 would have been captured and PRDP re-adjusted.

The PRDP failed to provide accessible or adequate psychosocial support, even though it is mentioned as an urgent need by women survivors of sexual slavery and violence. A religious leader for northern Uganda stated:

PRDP is like a four-legged chair that has gotten three legs….it has concentrated on infrastructure like building more health facilities, buying cars, constructing roads, recruiting more police officers and construction of power transmission line. They forgot we are an immediate post-conflict area, that they need a lot of soft infrastructure like more equipped health facilities to handle post-conflict physical and psycho trauma and counselling, we need more schools with adequate teachers and chair, we need more assistance for women to access land, truth story telling for closure rather than tarmacked roads.

Despite massive expenditure on development programs through all three iterations of PRDP, civil society and survivors of sexual slavery report that there have been very few changes in the lives of women living there. They state this is because gender was poorly mainstreamed in the plan. Peacebuilding programs were managed through top-down processes, which did not meaningfully include the perspectives of grassroots peacebuilders, nor seek ownership from community members. Ineffective rehabilitation, reintegration, and demobilization programs contributed to increases in levels of domestic violence and self-harm amongst former combatants and survivors of sexual slavery.

Corruption and the lack of political will for effective implementation of the PRDP at the national level are also perceived as impediments to justice, accountability, and adequate redress for survivors of sexual slavery in northern Uganda. The founding member of People’s Voice for Peace elaborated on a massive corruption scandal within the office of the Prime Minister:

The situation put the entire PRDP in jeopardy and many citizens of northern Uganda took this as further evidence of political marginalization, lack of political will to bring northern Uganda up to the development levels of the rest of the county. There is also [a] lack of political will to help women and women survivors of sexual violence. For instance, the budget for peacebuilding and reconciliation was 2.7 percent (USD 18.5 million) of the total budget for PRDP I, while 23.8 percent (USD 162.4 million) was allocated for the consolidation of state authority. As a result, little attention was paid to addressing the drivers of conflict and violent extremism in northern Uganda.

It is important to emphasize that shortcomings in adequate relief and recovery services for survivors and gender-responsive peacebuilding in northern Uganda are not due to the lack of ability or capacity of local women’s groups, as will be elaborated in the next section. Acting Executive Director of the Centre for Women in Governance (CEWIGO) explained that local expertise in gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting to support capacity building exist and was offered; however, it was sidelined. The Executive Director felt that women’s issues are promoted by national actors, initiatives, and policies. However, when it comes to implementation and operationalization, everything remains promised but incomplete:

They create an impression that we are participants of each government program, but what is on the ground, it is like we are simply giving legitimacy to their workings. But you know how government in Africa works, women and women’s issues are known, we are even called
to the planning table, but when it comes to implementation, of course that is the role of the government and the government works thinking of its survival. Women’s issues are captured to please us and they never put them into action. We develop recommendations, monitoring reports, programs, and project mid-term reviews and share them with Prime minister’s office and they promise they are going to address them but….we are still waiting. Ultimately, ineffective post-conflict resolution processes which failed to meet the needs of survivors and weak accountability mechanisms for perpetrators contribute to increased impunity for and reoccurrence of crimes of conflict related sexual slavery.

5. Gaps and Opportunities to Address Conflict-Related Sexual Slavery Through the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda

Uganda’s 2008 National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325, 1820, and the Goma Declaration is crucial national policy that specifically addresses the incidence of conflict-related sexual slavery committed by the LRA. Unlike the NAPs of many other countries in which conflict-related sexual slavery occurs, Uganda’s NAP recognizes sexual slavery as a specific crime and includes provisions to address its impact. Therefore, full and effective implementation of the NAP would strengthen national response to conflict-related sexual slavery.

The NAP outlines five priority areas and a number of indicators to track implementation: legal and policy frameworks; improved access to health services, medical treatment, and psychosocial services for victims of gender based violence; women in leadership and decision-making; prevention of gender based violence in society; and budgetary allocations for implementation. Importantly, the NAP underscores that formerly enslaved women and girls continue to suffer from the devastating consequences of sexual slavery and that many of them have given birth to children in captivity. In addition to provisions on relief and recovery, improving access to justice, and women’s participation in post-conflict resolution processes, the Uganda NAP has several specific measures for survivors of sexual slavery. For instance, it commits to “facilitat[ing] the release, rehabilitation, and reunion of girls and women abducted and kept as wives and sex slaves.” Furthermore, the NAP prioritizes actions to ensure women’s participation in the prevention and resolution of conflict, the maintenance of peace and security, and post-conflict peacebuilding; and to improve linkages and long-term engagement between local authorities and central government agencies, along with regional coordination and cooperation between governments and international donors to prevent sexual violence.

---


16 Ibid
Since the adoption of the NAP on UNSCR 1325, women’s participation in political decision-making at the national level has steadily increased from 24 percent in 2001\(^{17}\) to 33.5 percent in 2016.\(^{18}\) The number of women in local councils has also increased, although women are yet to be appointed to high-level decision-making positions.

In addition, important legal frameworks were passed by the parliament, including the Domestic Violence Act, the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Act, and the Prohibition of Trafficking in Human Persons Act. Uganda’s Gender Policy (2007) and National Plan of Action on Women (2007) is also being revised. As outlined above, gender was also mainstreamed in the National Peace Recovery and Development Plan for northern Uganda. A number of security sector officials have received training on prevention and response to gender-based and sexual violence. Finally, shelters for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence were established in Gulu, Mbarara, Masaka and Moroto, Nebbi, Lira, and Kween Districts. In particular, the shelters in Gulu and Lira provided support to survivors of conflict-related sexual slavery.

Since limited awareness and ownership of the NAP on UNSCR 1325 and other gender and development national policies in local communities is seen as a primary challenge to effective implementation of the WPS Agenda in Uganda, many civil society organizations lead Localization efforts. Pioneered by the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), Localization of UNSCR 1325 guarantees leadership, ownership, and participation of local communities in full and effective implementation, leading to context-specific, concrete actions that address the devastating impacts of violence conflicts and meet the needs of those most affected. Without effective and supportive local governance, achievements made at the national level in policymaking towards preventing and protecting women and girls from conflict-related sexual slavery may be overturned.

As a result of Localization efforts led by civil society organizations such as the Coalition on UNSCR 1325 (CoAct) and Centre for Women in Governance (CEWIGO) in Uganda, many conflict-affected communities have adopted District Action Plans corresponding to the NAP on UNSCR 1325, including Bushenyi, Kitgum, Kasese, Dokolo, and Gulu. Districts such as Yumbe, Luwero, and Amuria are currently developing District Action Plans with the assistance of CoAct. The District Action Plan for Bushenyi District allocates a specific budget for programs related to gender-based violence. In the Bushenyi District, Localization also cultivated greater support for women politicians who ran for office and were elected to serve in the local government. In Dokolo, a toll-free hotline was established by the local police following a Localization workshop. This encouraged a greater number of victims of gender-based violence to report incidents. The District Action Plan for Dokolo also includes provisions to improve access of survivors to medical services and treatments for post-exposure prophylaxis and fistula.

Critically, Localization also built solidarity for the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence and the achievement of gender equality amongst male gender equality allies, as evidenced by the men

---


who supported the development of the District Action Plan for Dokolo. Similarly, in Kasese, cultural leaders in Kasese who participated in Localization workshops committed to advocate for the prevention of teenage pregnancy and forced marriage. They established an office of women and gender to raise funds and coordinate the implementation of projects and advocacy campaigns on these issues. In parallel, the local government of Kasese integrated provisions on early forced, and child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and gender-based violence into the district development plans and allocated dedicated funds to address these issues.

However, it should be noted that implementation of Uganda’s NAP on UNSCR 1325 lacks reliable domestic sources for funding. Similarly, civil society organizations carrying out essential peacebuilding work do not have the funding to scale up their programs. Provisions and programs for survivors of conflict-related sexual slavery remain far and few—and often short-term. An in-country Civil Society Monitoring Report on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 noted that:

In terms of prevention and protection of women against sexual and gender based violence, a lot still remains to be done. The police department, particularly the Child and Family Protection Unit, is trying 134 In-Country Civil Society Monitoring Reports to do a good and difficult job with meager resources. The number of High Court Judges is small, making prosecution of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) cases take a long time and leading to witnesses losing interest in the case. At the same time, the law enforcement officers including the police and the local councils are not familiar with the provisions of UNSCR 1325 and 1820, and the Uganda NAP is not yet popularized. Knowledge and internalization of laws and policies and as well as international instruments that protect women against SGBV would go a long way to enhance prevention and protection.20

Despite the numerous achievements of the Ugandan government in the adoption of the NAP and other progressive, gender-responsive legislation, and institutions to protect and prevent sexual violence against women, there is still a significant gap between policy and practice. Women and men are not treated equally in the national judicial system. In addition, women still struggle to access justice. Survivors of conflict-related sexual slavery suffer increased marginalization and discrimination due to stigma and limited awareness of their legal rights.

Case study participants outlined several factors for the limited accountability for crimes of sexual slavery including: a lack of systematized consultations with survivors; ineffective implementation of local and national policies on women’s rights that are already in place; a lack of political will; as well as limited capacity needed to handle cases of sexual slavery that happened decades ago. Additionally, discriminatory statutory, customary, and religious laws remain in force. Finally, the social rejection of survivors by family and community members as a whole is prevalent, and the physical and mental trauma of survivors remains unaddressed. The stigma and shame associated with sexual violence and enslavement resulted in survivors refusing to tell their partners or families what happened to them. This, combined with the social rejection of known survivors, denied them

the very support structures they needed, making them further economically and socially vulnerable.

Through consultations and research, this case study has identified ways in which Uganda can more effectively utilize the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda and the corresponding NAP to strengthen their response to conflict-related sexual slavery. Along with prioritizing full and effective implementation of its previously stated commitments, the government should widely apply WPS norms across various institutions and interventions to reduce violence, including in contexts not officially “at war.” The historical insecurity in northern Uganda preceded LRA atrocities; by recognizing that continuums of violence can be a consequence of war, WPS norms should be applied in a wide range of security situations. Through the NAP and other relevant policy frameworks, the government can address the full spectrum of security threats and their respective gender dimensions by responding to the diverse contexts in which armed violence occurs.

Additionally, the Ugandan NAP on UNSCR 1325 can provide a better understanding of how conflict-related sexual slavery connects to the context of social, cultural, political, and economic gender inequalities in which it occurs. There is a need to analyze how social identifiers increase or create risks of sexual violence, to inform prevention and protection efforts. This will lead to the development of programs to tackle cultural or customary practices in which women and girls are victimized or excluded from peacebuilding processes.

The women, peace and security (WPS) agenda is a critical tool to tackle the drivers of conflict-related sexual slavery as noted in sections above, such as pre-existing gender relations, socio-cultural norms which condone violence, and norms which have been learned or reinforced through high exposure to violent conflict or insecurity. However, beyond simply understanding the context and background of which sexual slavery occurs, the government of Uganda must ensure that its NAP is able to utilize these findings and use them to push for justice. Addressing the drivers of conflict-related sexual slavery through peacebuilding efforts is essential to prevent reoccurrence of the crime.

6. Highlighting the Initiatives of Women’s Rights Organizations and Civil Society Groups in Condemning and Demanding Accountability for Conflict-Related Sexual Slavery

"The women survivors, all they wanted was to come out of the bush alive, the rest. They pretended that nothing ever happened. They forgot their trauma and concentrated on living for today. But

---

they had been through the worst, they have suffered the worst and majority were rejected by their families and communities. We failed them and they no longer trust us (leaders), they are looking after themselves now,” shared a Probation Officer in Gulu during a focus group discussion.

For survivors of sexual slavery during the conflict between the LRA and the government in northern Uganda, organizing themselves and looking after one another was often their only way to find support and begin to heal. The strong women’s civil society groups in Uganda demonstrate that women are more than capable of organizing, consulting with local stakeholders, and implementing key peacebuilding initiatives themselves. Members of civil society organizations include women who have survived horrific crimes such as conflict-related sexual slavery; but also, and importantly, those women who were members of Lord’s Resistance Army and perpetrated or participated in armed conflict. Through the years, women’s rights advocates have led efforts to prevent reoccurrence of conflict and sexual slavery, resolve conflict, provide relief and recovery services for survivors, demand accountability and justice for crimes of sexual slavery, and improve the prosperity of communities and the financial independence of women.

Women Advocacy Network, War Child Victims Networking, Rwot Lakisa, Can Rwedepi, Rubanga Matwer and Awach Tailoring Group are examples of civil society organizations that have mobilized to demand accountability for sexual and gender-based violence in Uganda. Their activities include: conducting capacity building workshops for war-affected women on mediations, conflict resolution and advocacy skills; engaging with stakeholders and other victim’s groups on women justice needs, including attending women celebrations; and organizing roundtable meetings with district and national level policymakers and other victim’s groups in greater northern Uganda.

An in-depth interview with a founding member of Peoples Voices for Peace revealed that these women’s groups have been instrumental in raising awareness on conflict-related sexual violence and in addressing the stigma that many survivors face. For instance, in 2014, these civil society groups petitioned the parliament of Uganda for adequate redress for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in northern Uganda. These organizations also carry out community outreach and radio talk shows on the experiences and impact of sexual conflict on women and their children, which have resulted in greater acceptance of formerly-abducted women and their children. In addition, these groups facilitate child-tracing and family mediation.

Women civil society groups also play a key role in empowering survivors, who often face physical health, mental health, and economic hardships Civil society groups offer economic empowerment for survivors, through the formation of women savings and loans groups. They also equip survivors with tailoring, group farming and marketing skills. These initiatives have alleviated economic hardship experienced by countless survivors and lifted some out of extreme poverty. As a result of these women-led activities, survivors in northern Uganda can now play a key role in the production and maintenance of their families and communities’ social capital through material and social exchanges, day-to-day cooperation, and informal social networks. As per the executive director of Women Advocacy Network (WAN):
I am equipping women with enterprise skills like how to sew clothes, bags and earn a living instead of depending on men. When they have an income, they are well fed, they send their children to school, they can afford to rent instead of sleeping on streets or abandoned buildings. The main purpose of the WAN is to work with former abductees, to re-unite families, especially uniting the children with their paternal clans. And to give refuge to those women and children that have rejected by their own families. We are currently over 1,200 women members under Women Advocacy Network (WAN).

Despite the post-conflict challenges confronting these women and their children, some of the women exhibit remarkable strength. Most survivors interviewed as part of this research were engaged in a range of livelihood activities within the informal sector. Since most live as single mothers, their livelihood activities have enabled them to meet their households’ daily needs, to make choices and go in new directions in their lives. For married women, their livelihood activities have allowed them to have their own income, and not rely exclusively on their husbands. Women underscored that, as a result of their earnings, they had more ability to make family-related choices and decisions. The women reported that their work gave them pride and satisfaction, providing them with motivation and a purpose in life. Many mentioned that because of their work, they are always busy, which they felt helped them to make good choices about how to spend their money and time. Importantly, their work enabled them to maintain a positive image of themselves despite the negative behavior of some of their family members and people in the community. Thus, economic empowerment, championed by women's civil society organizations, is a critical strategy to transform structural gender inequalities and address the impacts of conflict-related sexual slavery in Uganda.

Many women in northern Uganda have joined efforts to build sustainable peace and prevent reoccurrence of armed conflict and sexual slavery, including women who have been armed combatants or “wives” of LRA officers. Rosalba Oywa, a pioneer of community-based conflict resolution in the Acholi region of northern Uganda and a founding member of People’s Voice for Peace, explains that Acholi women had been armed combatants in the conflict since its beginning—the most notable being Alice Auma "Lakwena," who led the armed group that preceded the LRA. Although most women and girls in the ranks of the LRA were forcibly abducted and enslaved as "wives," some women combatants shared during the focus group discussion that they joined out of a need to save themselves or their families.

The armed conflict and resulting displacement undermined many traditional means of social support. Women's groups are working to revive cultural institutions and prepare their communities for reconciliation and reintegration. Working through local cultural institutions with activities such as prayer meetings, peace education, as well as through songs, proverbs, poetry, and storytelling, women’s groups have helped to build community support and respect. Generally, women peacebuilders have recognized the need to address all the consequences of the conflict to develop a truly sustainable peace and continue to work towards that end. In 1989, the Gulu District Women’s Development Committee mobilized other women in a peaceful demonstration at a time when no other groups dared to speak out about the war. Wearing rags and singing funeral songs, the women marched through Gulu demanding an immediate end to the violence. At the same time, many from the LRA gave up fighting and returned
home. Although there are no available statistics to substantiate the outcome of the demonstration, a period of relative calm followed, which provided an opportunity for various agencies to resettle displaced populations in Gulu.

Many Acholi women shared their experiences in conflict resolution, which profoundly challenged their traditional social roles. Many women’s civil society groups appealed to the fighting forces to use peaceful means to resolve their differences and encouraged the rebels to return home. Other women persuaded or prevented their husbands, sons and other male relatives from actively engaging in the war. In essence, they tried to persuade individual fighters to drop their arms and return to their communities, while encouraging the government to change its policy to promote peace.

Women have been active in forming or joining community-based organizations and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) intended to address the consequences of the war by promoting reconciliation, reintegration and regeneration. For example, women worked with elders and traditional leaders to establish a reception center for ex-combatants between 1989 to 1990. Women have also been active in the provision of psychosocial programs, particularly those focusing on the rehabilitation of former combatants and survivors of sexual slavery. In addition to peacebuilding at the community level, Acholi women have played a direct role in efforts to find a negotiated settlement to the armed conflict. Women representatives were among those involved in the 1994 delegation, led by the government’s Minister for the North, Betty Bigombe, herself an Acholi woman, to negotiate with the LRA. This initiative fostered a cessation of violence for almost six months before it collapsed.

Women in Uganda have also been leaders in efforts to draw international attention to conflict-related gender based and sexual violence for decades. When the LRA abducted girls from St. Mary’s School in Aboke in October 1996, the Concerned Parents Association was formed to campaign for their release. Local NGOs such as People’s Voice for Peace have used participatory research to document the girls’ experiences. This process has helped to empower the participants with a deeper understanding of the nature, pattern and dynamics of the armed conflict—knowledge that the women’s peace movement has used to strengthen its capacity. Documentation projects have also generated information for advocacy.

Critically, women’s civil society groups mobilized to address gaps in PRDP to better address the gendered impacts of conflict, including the needs of survivors of sexual slavery. Following advocacy campaigns which called for improvements in the PRDP led by civil society, a Women’s Task Force for a Gender-Responsive Peace Recovery and Development Plan was established. Coordinated by Women’s International Peace Center, the Task Force carried out a needs assessment of women in north and northeastern Uganda, developed operational guidelines for gender responsive PRDP implementation, created a monitoring and evaluation plan, and formed a communications strategy.

Over the last two years the women’s task force members have established district-level task forces to build a larger constituency of women advocating for their needs in the PRDP. Women's meaningful participation and leadership in the task force has significantly improved the scope of
implementation of the PRDP to better respond to the needs of the community, particularly of survivors of sexual slavery. The PRDP now includes provision on conflict-related sexual violence, land-related conflicts, training for security and justice sector officials on sexual and gender based violence, and the provision of psychosocial counseling for former combatants and survivors of sexual slavery. As highlighted by a civil society monitoring report on the implementation of UNSCR 1325:

The women of Uganda have played a commendable role in conflict transformation. They have come together in associations, coalitions, networks and task forces to get their voices heard through various initiatives and fora. This they have done despite the poverty, the trauma, and the meager resources at their disposal.\textsuperscript{21}

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

It is clear that survivors of conflict-related sexual slavery in Uganda face multiple obstacles until today. They bear physical and emotional scars dating back to the atrocities that have been committed against them. They face governing bodies that have not shown great interest in incorporating their perspectives, and they have no precedent for justice or accountability for those who committed crimes against humanity against them and their communities.

However, it is also clear that these survivors are resilient; the achievements of women’s rights organizations highlighted in this research study are significant, inspirational, and showcase the power of grassroots activism and resolve. Given that the country has a robust legal framework and international commitments, it is the implementation of these commitments that should be prioritized in order for survivors to access justice and accountability. The lack of implementation of Uganda’s commitments on human rights under international law has fostered impunity for far too long. In this context, the full and effective implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda is essential to strengthen the prevention of, protection of women and girls from, accountability for perpetrators of, relief and recovery services for survivors of conflict-related sexual slavery.

Recommendations

To the Ugandan Government:

- Recognize conflict-related sexual slavery as a widespread, systematic, institutionalized, and deliberate human rights abuse and wartime strategy or weapon of warfare used by militaries under government supervision, state-sponsored militia groups, non-state armed groups, violent extremist groups, and criminal networks alike.
- Include issues related to sexual violence in conflict in all decision-making on peace and security, including ceasefire talks, peace negotiations, peace agreement implementation,
post conflict resolution processes, transitional justice mechanisms, and preventing violent extremism and countering terrorism, in order to prevent the reoccurrence of such crimes and further outbreaks of violence.

- Localize the NAP in northern Uganda in partnership with women’s civil society organizations and survivors of conflict-related sexual slavery to create a survivor-centered approach for protection and prevention of violence.
- Promote women’s meaningful political, social, and economic participation in decision-making at all levels on conflict prevention, ceasefire negotiations, peace processes, peace agreement implementation, conflict resolution, transitional justice mechanisms, preventing violent extremism and countering terrorism, and security sector reform.
- Consult with, and include survivors of sexual slavery in the design and implementation of post-conflict resolution processes, particularly related to relief and recovery services and transitional justice mechanisms.
- Provide comprehensive redress, rehabilitation, and reintegration programs for all survivors of conflict-related sexual slavery, including former combatants, such as: housing for survivors and their families; age-appropriate, gender-sensitive education; employment opportunities and economic empowerment programs; sexual health and reproductive services; medical care (for sexual transmitted diseases and/or HIV/AIDS); land ownership, and psychosocial counselling in remote and conflict-affected communities and refugee camps.

To domestic cultural and religious institutions:

- Transform and address harmful gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity through awareness raising programs in partnership with traditional and religious leaders to counter the exploitation of these norms by extremist groups
- Raise awareness of the need to prevent sexual violence in conflict in order to reduce the marginalization and stigmatization survivors experience, as well as to facilitate their reintegration (and that of their children).
- Combat patriarchal social norms and structural gender inequalities such as unequal land rights.

To the United Nations and INGOs:

- Recognize and invest in the efforts of women’s civil society to strengthen accountability mechanisms and improve relief and recovery services for survivors of conflict-related sexual slavery.
- Provide reliable, sustainable, timely, long-term, and flexible funding to women’s civil society groups and survivor networks responding to the drivers and impacts of conflict-related sexual slavery.
- Support the localization of UNSCR 1325 and Uganda’s NAP on UNSCR 1325 in northern Uganda in partnership with local women’s civil society groups.
• Provide capacity-building training to regional organizations and civil society on Women, Peace, and Security to strengthen their efforts and advocacy for justice, accountability, reparations, and rehabilitation for survivors of conflict-related sexual slavery.
Bibliography


Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: The office of Special Envoy on WPS of the Chairperson of the Africa Union Commission


