Oxford Research Group
Breaking the cycle of violence

About Us   Research & analysis   News & events   Blog & podcasts   Index   Search   🔍
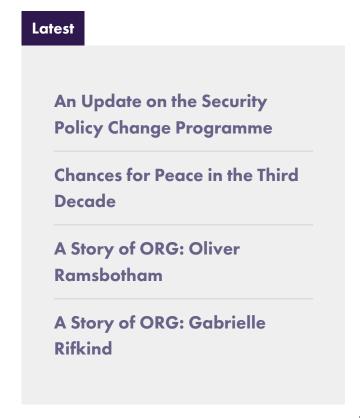
Gender Relational Peacebuilding in Uganda

Amanda J. Reinke

2 June 2016

Sustainable security and peacebuilding remain elusive in northern Uganda. But gender-relational peacebuilding offers a potential avenue to strengthen post-conflict peacebuilding efforts.

Sustainable peacebuilding in post-conflict northern Uganda is intricately interwoven into the fabric of regional security. Intrastate conflicts in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the multidirectional refugee and rebel army flows across borders contribute to destabilizing regional peacebuilding and security efforts. When taking these regional concerns and ongoing internal problems into consideration, it becomes clear that sustainable security and peacebuilding remain elusive in northern Uganda. One avenue to strengthen current post-conflict peacebuilding efforts is to appropriately gender interventions. Implementing appropriately

Latest

An Update on the Security Policy Change Programme

Chances for Peace in the Third Decade

A Story of ORG: Oliver Ramsbotham

A Story of ORG: Gabrielle Rifkind

gendered interventions will need to adequately address ongoing gendered violence that has become central to both regional and internal conflicts.

The Conflict in Uganda

During active conflict between the Government of Uganda (GoU) and Lord's Resistance Army (1987-2006), approximately 1.8 million northern Ugandans were internally displaced, many of them into poorly maintained internal displacement (IDP) camps. The conflict, displacement, and subsequent return processes have been deeply gendered. During the conflict, young girls and boys were abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA); many were forced to fight, carry LRA cargo long distances, and were subjected to sexual violence. Abductions ended in northern Uganda when the LRA was pushed out of the country, but the LRA continues to be a threat to regional security and peacebuilding. Abductions continue in the Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the LRA's regional presence is but one more complex component of ongoing conflicts in South Sudan, the CAR, and the DRC.

Beyond LRA abductions, women were often subjected to sexual violence both as abductees and while living in IDP camps. During encampment, women, treated as heads of household, were given aid to distribute among their family members; this essentially cut men out of their traditional roles as the breadwinner. The gendered allocation of resources challenged cultural norms – a phenomenon which many rural residents blame as one reason for increasing domestic violence during and after conflict. Many men and women lost access to education and economic productivity during encampment, creating employment crises post-conflict. Simultaneously, people were displaced from their land holdings, devastating their economic livelihoods; this is compounded

by the rampant killing and stealing of cattle, a source of economic and social wealth. Thus, displacement decimated men's ability to be economically productive and their sources of wealth and authority, necessary social capital for rites such as marriage, were all stripped away. Unemployment continues to be a pervasive problem as people lost access to their land and do not have the educational attainment necessary for wage employment.

Despite the far-reaching gendered dynamics of conflict and the post-conflict return process on economic production, political standing, and kin relations, peacebuilding efforts in the region concentrate on physical forms of violence, such as rape.

Research conducted in 2013 shows that many rural residents cited economic violence, such as access to land and resources, equitable employment, and social services, as a pervasive and unaddressed concern. When combined with ongoing dissatisfaction with the current government, the result is a suite of peacebuilding approaches that may fail to generate sustainable peace in northern Uganda, with wider implications for regional security.

Redefining "Gendered" Approaches to Peacebuilding

🖼 widows-program-1
Women from 'The Widows' Programme' making crafts at the Twezimbe Development Centre, Mbikko, Uganda. Photo by Lisa Byrne via Flickr.

"Gendered" peacebuilding approaches in past years became synonymous with women and conflict-related sexual violence, such as rape and defilement. Such ostensibly gender-sensitive approaches are inherently problematic; they ignore the experiences of men, the diverse experiences of women, and make women's

narratives valuable only insofar as they narrate conflict-related sexual violence. Resolutions, such as UNSCR 1820 and 1325, have made strides towards recognizing the impact of war on women; however, their operationalized emphasis on physical gendered violence continue to reflect this myopic perspective. Resolutions supporting gendered peacebuilding have historically failed to meaningfully include all genders, stereotype or homogenizethe experiences of people in conflict, and may reflect non-local cultural values and understandings.

Sexual violence is a serious concern during and after conflict, especially where it is a wartime tactic, there is little support for survivors of violence, and where local sociocultural norms and communities have broken down. However, homogenizing women as singularly vulnerable, passive, and the subject of violence obscures the diverse experiences of both women and men during and after conflict. These homogenous characterizations are paralleled by only addressing gendered violence among men as conflict is either an assault on or a reflection of masculinity. Both of these perspectives are imbued with often uncritical assumptions that fail to see genders as relational and embedded within complex social, political, and economic contexts.

Thus, scholars developed a gender-relational approach to analyzing conflict and implementing peacebuilding frameworks. Gender-relational approaches stand in contrast to prior perspectives that rely on gender binaries and homogenous categories. Instead, gender-relational scholars examine gender as an intersectional category that is intimately bound up in social, political, and economic contexts before, during, and after conflict. Utilizing a gender-relational perspective allows researchers and peacebuilders to identify the most vulnerable in society, allowing precisely-targeted interventions and more

effective implementation. Gendered peacebuilding in this way shifts the focus from women's sexuality and sexual experiences and men's masculinity, to identifying and targeting the contextually specific needs of the most vulnerable in post-conflict societies.

Appropriately Gendering Peacebuilding to Promote Sustainable Peace

Gendering peacebuilding in post-conflict northern Uganda must go beyond the censure of physical SGBV, such as rape, to take into account the complex experiences, relationships, and sociopolitical and socioeconomic needs prior to, during, and after conflict. In this local and regional context, gendering peacebuilding appropriately takes into account the various experiences of men and women as they are embedded within ancestral communities pre-conflict, during displacement and in the IDP camps, and post-conflict return process, and as they are affected by age, education, ability, and other intersectional categories.

Engaging a gender-relational framework for peacebuilding in northern Uganda can illuminate a number of discrepancies between local needs and concerns and ongoing peacebuilding efforts. While traditional political systems, which predominately support and were led by men, degraded, the loss of property and cattle – traditionally for economic productivity, social status, and marriage and kinship – have negatively impacted all genders. Although the degradation of sociopolitical systems and loss of agricultural and pastoral productivity have disempowered men, it has simultaneously empowered women. Women have broken traditional gender roles by entering public workspaces and shouldering normatively male responsibilities. However, these shifts along with pervasive poverty have also contributed to domestic violence and local pushback against the implementation of international human rights standards.

For example, although conflict-related sexual violence was, and remains, an entrenched concern in northern Uganda and the region more generally, many rural northern Ugandans are deeply concerned about economic forms of gendered violence. Both men and women cite land wrangling or grabbling – the forceful taking of land – as pervasive concerns that inhibit access to economic livelihoods, spiritual fulfillment, political authority, and kin networks. According to one resident in Nwoya District, *"before the war [SGBV] was there. During, it escalated and after has been added on because of land wrangles."* Although land is often wrangled by neighbors or even relatives, many rural residents fear land grabs from South Sudanese and other foreigners who are reportedly buying up large tracts of land for farming. Widows in particular cite the lack of support for them as they make claims with the legal, local political, or religious authorities to have their case heard and get their land back. Widowhood in rural northern Uganda is precarious – normally women rely on their husband for land ownership (not mandated by law) and when he passes away depend on the community to uphold their right to continue living and producing on the land. However, the unique challenges of the post-conflict region, including ongoing security concerns and a lack of arable land more generally, means that there is less support from elders, the legal system, and religious leaders for widows with land wrangling complaints. This example of widows demonstrates the power of gender-relational approaches to post-conflict peacebuilding.

Land wrangling disproportionately affects women, widows, and the elderly, and remains a serious security and peace concern for residents throughout the northern reaches of Uganda. These ongoing conflicts are embedded within a nation-state that has consistent human rights violations and political uncertainty, and a region that is beset by internal and regional conflicts. Utilizing such data-driven approaches, we can better develop, implement, and

target peacebuilding efforts towards those groups and the leaders that are in positions to help widows resolve such conflicts. As these conflicts are also intricately bound up in ongoing gendered divisions and reconfigurations, appropriately gendering peacebuilding has the potential to open avenues to contribute to regional conflicts and security concerns. Several organizations in the northern Uganda region have been conducting this difficult work, including the Refugee Law Project, Centre for Reparations and Rehabilitation, and the Women's Advocacy Network. Each of these organizations were generated and are propelled forward by northern Ugandans and each reflects the myriad needs facing residents in the post-conflict period, such as economic violence and insecurity, education, social inequality, and lack of social services. By addressing these points as part of a gendered peacebuilding program, practitioners can grapple with pervasive concerns, such as land conflict, that affect both women and men; thus, they may also begin to unravel some of the regional security concerns tied to inter- and intrastate conflict.

Share this page

✉   f   🐦

Contact

Unit 503
101 Clerkenwell Road London
EC1R 5BX
Charity no. 299436
Company no. 2260840

Email us

020 3559 6745

Follow us

🐦   f

Registered with
FUNDRAISING
REGULATOR

Useful links

Login
Contact us
Sitemap
Accessibility
Terms & Conditions
Privacy policy