Introduction

From the 14th to 16th of February, the Refugee Law Project (RLP) visited Paimol Sub County in Agago district. This visit was motivated by the need to understand the complexity surrounding sexual and gender based violence situations within a post-conflict recovery context. Like any other post conflict district, Agago has its own uniqueness and challenges. The bad roads and bridges make it one of the hard-to-reach areas. Though life seems normal, verbatim with locals indicates that access to basic social services is challenging due to inaccessible roads and dysfunctional health centers, and bore holes.

Though the area is peaceful and free of insurgency, under development in the area presents a huge obstacle to effective governance. There is continued discontent from the locals over the poor levels of service delivery.

Gender violence is one of the numerous development challenges in post conflict societies and this manifests in form of rape, defilement, early marriage, wife battering, denial of rights and property grabbing among others.

This is a case documentation of Paimol Sub County. The report contextualizes the realities, causes, effects, challenges and community recommendations to ending violence in Paimol; it also acknowledges that SGBV affects household development and post conflict recovery.

Five Facts About SGBV in Paimol Sub County, Agago District

- About 2-3 cases of SGBV are handled by the police on daily basis.
- High alcohol intake is one of the factors reported to contribute to the
CONFLICT WATCH: “SGBV IN POST-CONFLICT ENVIRONMENT”

The magnitude and severity of gender violence amongst the locals.

- Collective decision making between men and women relating to family planning is limited and in some cases results in domestic violence.
- Women and children are mostly affected by this violence and it negatively impacts on child growth and development.
- Defilement cases are high in the community and are mostly handled by the LCI structure and at family levels.

Contextualising Sexual Gender Based Violence: From Theories To Realities

According to responses from the dialogue, annotations indicate that ending violence will necessitate substantive positive behaviour and perception changes at all levels of social, cultural and economic spheres of particular societies. The theory therefore is that, altering the underlying patriarchal belief systems and practices would lead to changes in social norms and behaviors and this should also take into consideration the revitalization of livelihoods of the locals.

In the case of Paimol Sub County the reality of gender based violence is worsened by misconstrued understanding of women’s rights by the community and the women themselves. The consequential deviation in the rightful thinking about gender roles, responsibilities, class, status are some of the hidden and contributory factors through which SGBV manifests in Paimol Sub County in Agago District.

Though there have been attempts to respond to these violence situations in particular against women and girls during the conflict and post conflict environments, there is still a gap associated with responses that should target male victims of sexual and gender based violence. Men in reality are left torn apart by the need to seek support and social expectations associated with the male gender. Implying that, there is a continued gap in responding to violence against men. The reason for this as stated by the in charge of police in Paimol is that a number of “men die silently and do not come out to report or do not want to identify themselves as victims”. This could as well be as a result of a general belief that women are the survivors and men the perpetrators.

The dialogue was guided by three key issues; understanding Sexual and Gender Based Violence from a conflict lens and its implication on recovery; community knowledge about gender based violence including causes and implications; and policy alternatives on how to respond to SGBV.
Existential Realities And Sexual Gender Based Violence in Paimol Sub County – Agago District

Community Knowledge about SGBV and its Causes: the interaction indicates that most of the locals do understand what constitutes violence against women, girls, men and boys. Though they are not able to provide a discrete definition of what SGBV is, they are able to identify and explain causal factors or issues that translate to violence existing within communities in Paimol. “If I beat my wife that is SGBV” laments a male participant during the dialogue. According to an elderly male and one other female participant, they both acknowledge that there have been some shifts in the causes and trends of SGBV. The manner in which SGBV manifested in the “old days” is said to be different from “these days” on grounds that; culture, attitude and exposure have tuned and shaped the behaviors and characters of the current generation negatively resulting into disrespect and conflict amongst families. In the old days, the elders advised and guided young couples; they ensured that societies were peaceful. These days this fabric has been destroyed and there is no forum where elders interact with young people on how to manage families and resolve disputes.

Contributory Factors to SGBV As Identified By The Community Of Paimol Sub County

“Men can drink and get drunk, but women should remain sober and take care of the homes” says an elderly male.

The question is whether there should be a discrete distinction of which gender should or should not drink alcohol. This raised divergent response which can be looked at within the feminine and masculine lenses. However, the common line is that culture and traditional practice was applied in responding to the impasse. Many appreciate that a dignified woman is one who does not get drunk. However, though the cultural norm is silent about the position of men, it does not encourage drunkenness. It should also be noted that gender and power relations is key in understanding alcoholism as a contributory factor to gender based violence. Not everyone who drinks is violent and not everyone sober is non-violent but the abuse of power tends to undermine gender equality and the fight to end violence in communities.

1. Alcoholism – various kinds of Alcohol are available for consumption at affordable costs in Paimol. These include beers, locally brewed warragi, and sachet warragi – commonly known as “Mu-indi” some of the known sachet waragi include; Chief, Adrikos, Beckam Gin, Coffee Spirit, Big 5, Kick, Empire, Commando, Signature to mention but a few. Both men and women are engaged in drinking alcohol. The dangers associated with alcohol and over drinking are that it results into arrogance, impatience and misunderstanding with possibility of generating conflict.

Most participants agree that alcoholism is the leading contributory factor to SGBV. “When these guys are sober you rarely hear them quarrel, not even raise a fight, but wait when they are drunk, that is when you will see total
conflict.

Alcoholism per say is a triggering factor, “some of these guys may have incompatible goals and misunderstanding, and it only gets to the surface when they are drunk and that is when they attack each other”. Some of the forms of SGBV that are directly associated to alcoholism includes; rape, defilement, and physical attacks.

However, some elders and men disagree that it is not necessarily alcoholism that results to SBGV. “If you are drunk you cannot fight, it is greed causing all these conflict between men and women”. The concept of greed in this context was used to imply a scenario where for example a wife fails to provide food/dinner for the husband upon returning from the drinking place. People also acknowledge that this act does not just happen on plain account, but it’s an expression of frustration from women for men failing to provide for their families. “These guys spend all their monies drinking and when they come back they expect to eat” said a female participant.

2. Bol Ni Cub Saving Scheme and Practices

In entirely, the practice of group saving scheme has become common amongst the communities in post conflict northern Uganda. The common one practiced by the locals mostly the women is called ‘bol ni cub’. In this method, women of a specific number agree on the amount of money that each should contribute for saving either on weekly or monthly basis. The money is then kept in small sealed containers with very small opening that neither hands nor fingers can get through. This is opened on the due date for sharing proceeds.

Participants during the dialogue session at the Sub County Court Hall.

This method of saving is not necessarily bad, what men in particular decry of is the methodology through which their wives obtain the monies for contribution towards the group saving. Men accuse women of not being transparent and accountable; exclusive and selling household assets and food items.
without their husbands’ knowledge. This is what one of the female participant had to say “As women, we need this money to take care of other businesses, the problem is that when we don’t tell our men, they tend to worry of our interest… not only that, the men have the right to worry because the woman would have become financially powerful”. Similarly, another male participant said; “The problem is that these women when they get the money they become big headed”.

Thus, the saving scheme comes with a lot of financial empowerment for women that threaten men’s position. The failure to clarify the sources of the income by women and financial secrets have been reported as some of the contributing factors towards family misunderstanding and SGBV. The psychological feeling attached to patriarchy; that men should control household resources and determine the distribution and usage is still predominantly huge in rural areas and the efforts to try to change this by women has become source of discontent.

3. Access and Control of Family Resources

“During cultivation period we are happy and always working together, once the crops are harvested the mood changes and that is when there are a lot of quarrels and divorce” said a woman representative in Paimol.

There is a clear line between how cultivation and harvest period determines relationship between rural households. Many rural women and men agree that during cultivation period (months of February to April and July to October) most families are peaceful and happy with reduced rate of SGBV. The reason advanced for this calm is that each gender will need the other to enhance and improve on productivity in the agricultural sector. The reverse is true during harvest periods and in particular from November to January.

It is reported that the rate of SGBV increases in the harvest period where families, and in particular men, deny their spouses access to the proceeds from agricultural produce. “During rainy seasons we are together digging and clearing fields and there are no SGBV, during dry season is when the problem starts because of disagreement over sales of products” laments a female adult. Most men want to control sales and benefits at the expense of women. In circumstances where women disagree they are chased and told to return to their paternal homes and only to be allowed to return during the cultivation season. In the course of the process, others are abused, tortured, beaten and neglected.

Some other general contributory factors of SGBV includes; having sexual intercourse outside marriage, failure of men to meet their marital and family obligation such as failing to pay school fees, staying away from home for long hours, especially at night, which is a common practice by men as they watch football matches, and women as they watch video shows. HIV/ AIDS and consequent efforts like rejection and beatings amongst spouses, and early marriages.

Challenges in Responding and Managing SGBV issues in Paimol Sub County

- Poor detention facilities for keeping SGBV
perpetrators such as defilers and those who would have committed rape, assault and torture of criminal nature. The facilities available are old and weak, with limited space and poor sanitation.

The Sub County Court Hall where the dialogue on SGBV was held

- Interference with justice and poor reporting of SGBV cases. In situations where families of affected victim negotiate for a resolution of SGBV cases such as rape, early marriages and defilement it becomes difficult to respond and manage consequential effects and damages. Some families are accused of engaging LCs in managing and handling rape cases and only get to report later to the police when a settlement is not agreed.
- Fear of intimidation, stigmatization and rejection – this affects all gender, a number of men who are victims of SGBV fear to report cases on grounds of stigmatization and so are women who also fear being rejected by their spouses.

Suggested Recommendations to Respond to SGBV

- There is need to revitalise the traditional practice of ‘Wang Oo’ (family sitting) where elders are provided the forum to mentor and resolve family related misunderstandings and disputes. This accordingly acts as a forum where issues are identified and prevented.
- The community proposed that there is need to regulate the sale and intake of alcoholism for all gender by instituting a by-law against alcoholism. Though the community recognizes that this could come with a lot of resistance, they do not rule out the possibility of it working and the long term benefits.
- There is need to productively engage the youth through recreational based activities (games and sports) to keep them busy other than engaging and spending most of their incomes, energy and talents in drinking. Others proposed that provision of trainings and creation of environment that allows the youth to engage in income generating activities would help reduce the level and rate of SGBV.
- There is need to increase on the awareness of the dangers of SGBV and the importance of family planning.
CONFLICT WATCH: “SGBV IN POST-CONFLICT ENVIRONMENT”

About Refugee Law Project (RLP)
The Refugee Law Project (RLP) seeks to ensure fundamental human rights for all, including asylum seekers, refugees, and internally displaced persons within Uganda. RLP envisions a country that treats all people within its borders with the same standards of respect and social justice.

About Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity (ACCS)
The Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity (ACCS) is a three member consortium that brings together; Refugee Law Project, International Alert and Saferworld. The overall aim of ACCS is assisting DFID and partners in strengthening the potential of the PCDP and recovery process to address the causes of conflict and contribute to sustainable peace and stability. Under ACCS, RLP is leading on contextual analysis of the overall recovery process (focusing on conflict indicators, issues and dynamics), and early warning as and when necessary.

Acknowledgement:
This Briefing Note is authored for advocacy and early warning purposes. This Issue was written by Denis Barnabas Otim –Project Officer, with valuable input from Jackson Odong –Research and Advocacy Officer, Nangiro Patricia–Program Team Leader, Kotido Office, Stephen Oola – Program Manager, Conflict, Transitional Justice & Governance and Dr. Chris Dolan –Director. The conflict analysis and early warning was made possible by UK–DFID financial support.

For comments contact:research@refugeelawproject.org

RENEE LAW PROJECT
“A Centre for Justice and Forced Migrants”
School of Law, Makerere University
Plot 5 & 9 Perryman Gardens,
Old kampala,
(opp. Old Kampala Primary School)
P.o.Box 33903
+256 414 343 556
info@refugeelawproject.org
www.refugeelawproject.org
www.accsuganda.org

Designed by Opiny Shaffic with valuable input from Otim Denis Barnabas, Dr. Chris Dolan.