

# CONFLICT WATCH

Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity  
(ACCS)

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## “Transitional Justice for the Region or the Nation?”: Views from Civil Society Leaders at the National Validation Workshop for the National Reconciliation and Transitional Justice Audit

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### 1.0 Introduction

From July 2011 to June 2012, the Refugee Law Project (RLP), School of Law, Makerere University, undertook a countrywide study aimed to comprehensively map past and present conflicts in Uganda, along with their legacies and related transitional justice needs. In the course of this National Reconciliation and Transitional Justice (NRTJ) Audit, RLP conducted 73 focus group discussions and over 60 key informant interviews in twenty districts, involving over 1100 participants (Women, Men, Youth, Civil Society Organisations and Local Government representatives).

The purpose of the National Validation Workshop of the NRTJ Audit, held on 27th and 28th August 2012, at Colline Hotel in Mukono, was two-fold: to validate the findings of the NRTJ Audit and to discuss the capacities and roles of civil society organisations (CSOs) in supporting the development of Uganda’s transitional justice (TJ) processes and policies. The complete results of the NRTJ Audit, with updates based on feedback from the validation exercises, can be found in the forthcoming *Compendium of Conflicts*.

By casting the TJ debate as a national project, the NRTJ Audit validation workshop raises the question of how post-conflict recovery in northern Uganda might be affected by or benefit from experiences and actors in other regions. This newsletter summarizes important cross-cutting conflict and TJ issues that were identified during the validation workshop, and also



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presents the emerging call for solidarity among CSOs working on national TJ issues. The final section analyses the implications of these findings for recovery in northern Uganda.

### **2.0 Cross-cutting Conflict and Transitional Justice Issues**

- The NRTJ Audit findings distinguish between national and regional conflicts, but the validation workshop revealed that there is extensive overlap among these, including various regime changes, armed groups that were active across regional boundaries, and causal factors like tribalism and corruption.

- The validation workshop confirmed that there is overwhelming consensus among communities on TJ needs; though they may have different opinions on implementation, participants agreed on the need to advance all TJ mechanisms presented in the study, including: reconciliation, amnesty, prosecution, accountability, traditional justice, institutional and legal reform, psycho-social support, memorialization and truth telling.

- In the validation workshop, the lack of national unity was repeatedly cited as both a source of conflict and a need to be addressed in the national TJ agenda. This was evident in a discussion led by Rosalba Oywa, CSO leader from Gulu, who said “People don’t know where to turn. Are

they human beings? Many say they don’t know if they are part of Uganda.” Similarly, former civil servant David Pulkol spoke on the threat of divisionism and testified that, “The Karamojong feel that they are not Ugandan. When we are on the road from Soroti towards the east you feel as if you are in a different country. The people are Uganda’s periphery.”

*“By supporting [the Karamojong], you are supporting everyone in northern and eastern Uganda... If people say they hate Karamojong, he is saying he hates himself.”*  
*Elder from Karamoja*

### **3.0 Call for Unified Action**

- As the director of RLP, Dr Chris Dolan, made it clear that one of the purposes of the workshop was to discuss a strategy for more unified action by CSOs toward influencing the national TJ agenda. He stated that JLOS was left without a civil society counterpart when they formed a working group on TJ policy, and that despite their efforts for consultations, there is no consistent civil society voice. The workshop aimed, therefore, to find such a civil society platform to complement JLOS.

- The proposal of more input from CSOs was welcomed by Margaret Ajok of JLOS Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWK) who said, “There has been a gap between civil society and Government... The Government does not have engagement with the community such as civil society can. The Government acknowledges that we need

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support from civil society and make efforts to engage as much as possible.” She explained that currently the JLOS TJWK is restricted to government institutions, but that CSOs can participate in a body called the transitional justice plenary.

- George Mukundi, a Kenyan delegate from Freedom House, cast vision for how CSOs could evaluate their capacity for promoting transitional justice and increase their collective impact through coordinated action. Using a comparative perspective between Kenya and Uganda, he emphasised the need for a strategic, unified approach from like-minded organisations.

*“We must unite in diversity.”*  
**George Mukundi**

- To address the identified challenge of fragmentation of CSOs in their advocacy for TJ measures, RLP proposed forming a National Platform for Civil Society Actors on Transitional Justice, which gained widespread support from workshop participants. Delegates from all regions indicated their commitment to forming such a group.

### 4.0 Implications for Recovery in Northern Uganda

Based on the outcome of the National Validation Workshop for the NRTJ Audit, CSO representatives from all regions of Uganda underscored the need to adopt a national approach to advocating for TJ policies that

are broad and reflect the scope of wrongs committed. This does not to exclude the need to address conflict legacies on a local or regional level. However, it does reveal that conflict legacies are not confined to defined regions within Uganda, and therefore a comprehensive solution must include actors from across the country. Mukundi’s presentation also suggested that solidarity between CSOs on a national level would contribute to expanded influence and more sustainable and efficient advocacy.

*“We look at Uganda as one people, as a nation; Uganda with one Parliament and with one President. That is the kind of Uganda we want to see.”*  
**Ret. Bishop Ochola**

CSO representatives from northern Uganda who participated in the workshop agreed with the need for a national perspective on transitional justice. This suggests a need for cooperation not only between CSOs within the region, but more coordination with like-minded groups and communities in eastern, central and western Uganda, especially on cross-cutting issues like reparations, institutional reform, truth telling and amnesty.

Adopting such a national perspective could lead to the following possible action steps:

- Exploring how proposed TJ mechanisms would affect or benefit communities both inside and outside the northern region.
- Communication with CSOs advocating for

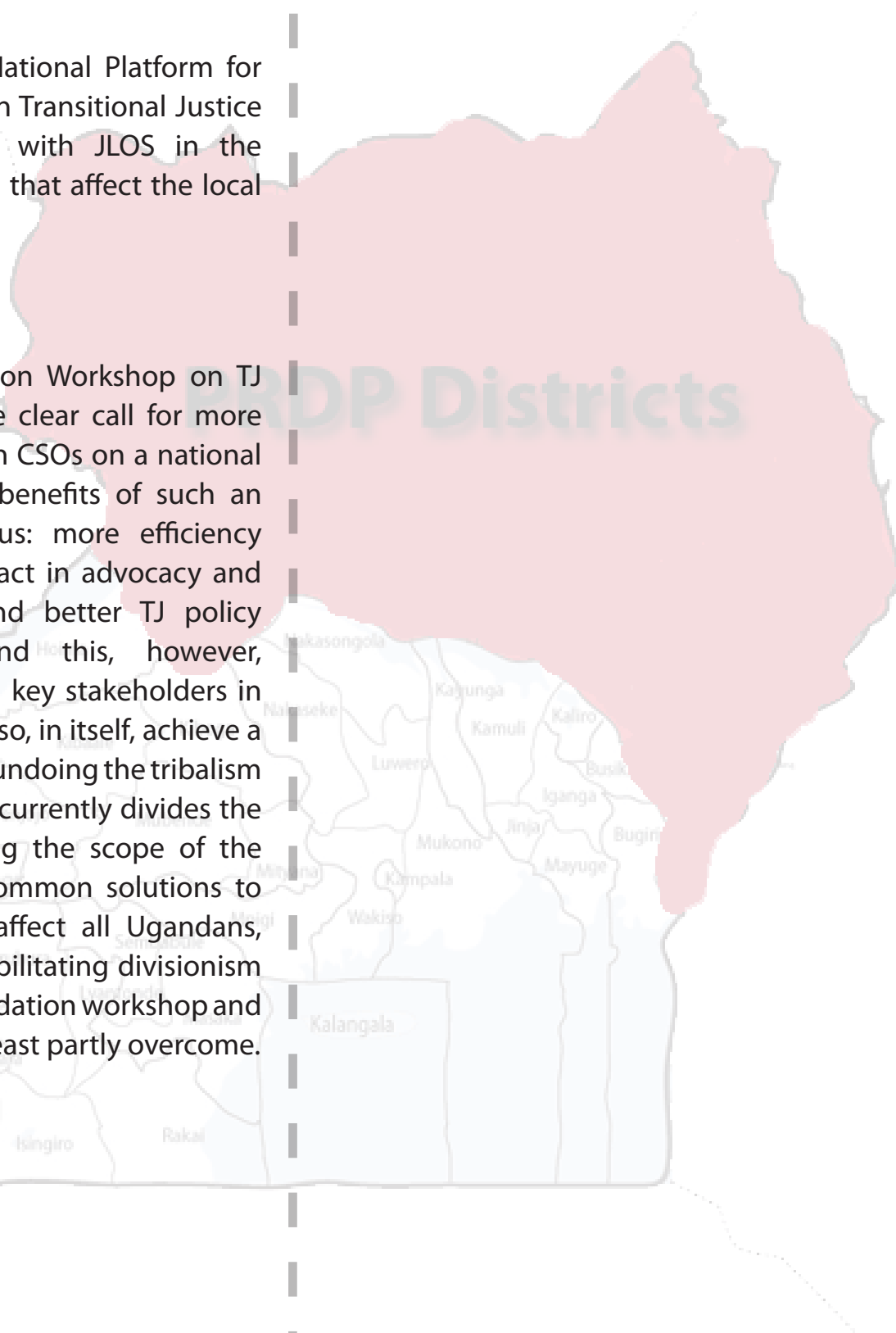
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TJ policies to find areas of common interest.

- Division of labour between such like-minded groups to increase efficiency and impact.
- Participation in a National Platform for Civil Society Actors on Transitional Justice to better cooperate with JLOS in the creation of TJ policies that affect the local and national levels.

### **5.0 Conclusion**

The National Validation Workshop on TJ issues resulted in the clear call for more coordination between CSOs on a national scale. The potential benefits of such an approach are obvious: more efficiency of CSOs, greater impact in advocacy and service provision, and better TJ policy development. Beyond this, however, cooperation between key stakeholders in various regions will also, in itself, achieve a measure of justice by undoing the tribalism and regionalism that currently divides the country. In expanding the scope of the discussion to seek common solutions to past injustices that affect all Ugandans, the pervasive and debilitating divisionism denounced at the validation workshop and elsewhere will be at least partly overcome.





### **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.

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This Briefing Note is authored for early warning purposes. The report was written by Jessica Shewan, ACCS intern, with valuable input from Dr. Chris Dolan –Director, Stephen Oola –ACCS Coordinator, Jackson Odong –Research and Advocacy Officer, Denis Barnabas Otim –Project Officer. The conflict analysis and early warning was made possible by UK–DFID financial support.

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