



# Post-disarmament Peace-building Strategies in Karamoja, Uganda: Integrating Gandhian Nonviolence and Transitional Justice

Augustine Bahemuka

Laudato Youth Initiative - Kampala, Uganda

Corresponding author: [augustine.bahemuka@hekima.ac.ke](mailto:augustine.bahemuka@hekima.ac.ke)

Received: 17 Apr., 2025

Revised: 22 May, 2025

Accepted: 02 Jun., 2025

---

## ABSTRACT

This paper re-examines the peace-building interventions that were established in post-disarmament Karamoja which ushered in and sustained relative peace in the period (2010-2019). It identifies the challenges and gaps that compromised optimal results to the extent of attaining lasting peace; and further attempts to find possible points of integration of Gandhian nonviolence to address the gaps. The challenges identified include use of excessive force by security forces during disarmament that reproduced historical legacies of the human rights violation in Karamoja; shared burden of penalties given to culprits of stolen cattle, and their families and/or immediate neighbours, in the event that the culprit fails to pay back the required number of animals. Two main gaps are identified: The environmental peace-building approaches applied laid more focus on peace at the community level inadequately addressed 'inner conversion', which lies at the core of Gandhi's satyagraha to prevent all forms of violence. The paper also reveals the critical need for transitional justice in Karamoja to address the human rights violations perpetuated by security forces during disarmament, in addition to the long decades of social, economical, political and ecological injustices that the Karimojong have endured.

**Keywords:** Disarmament, Environmental peace-building, Non-violence, Transitional justice, Karamoja

---

Karamoja sub-region is a semi-arid area located in the north-eastern corner of Uganda, which for over five decades has remained a theatre of protracted conflict, violence and insecurity. The root causes are complex, multi-faceted and somewhat interlocked, including inter-communal grievances, cattle raiding, protracted economic deprivation and political marginalization (Odhiambo, 2003; Kabiito, 2021; Okoth, 2023), which are compounded by harsh climatic conditions, gradual environmental degradation, resource-based competition and proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Levels of insecurity gradually intensified through the 1990s to early 2000s, predominantly caused

by violent cattle raids within and across the Karamoja borders, perpetuated by armed youth gangs (Quam, 1997; Bevan, 2008; Saferworld, 2020) which further exacerbated historic inter-ethnic differences, culminating in fatalities and destruction of property, disruption of livelihoods, poverty and food insecurity.

The state responded with a militaristic approach to address the insecurity situation in Karamoja

**How to cite this article:** Bahemuka, A. (2025). Post-disarmament Peace-building Strategies in Karamoja, Uganda: Integrating Gandhian Nonviolence and Transitional Justice. *Int. J. Peace, Edu. Dev.*, 13(01): 31-42.

**Source of Support:** None; **Conflict of Interest:** None



by launching disarmament operations. This was followed by a decade of “relative peace” (2009-2019), largely attributed to joint efforts of the national security forces, local authorities, community-based organisations, cultural and religious elders.

However, in as much as large-scale violent conflict predominantly caused by armed cattle raids significantly de-escalated, the dynamics of the conflict landscape in Karamoja gradually shifted to low-scale household acts of violence, including gender-based violence, theft of animals and household assets; and loss of livelihoods, which set in gendered impact on young people (Stites *et al.* 2014; Saferworld, 2020). Peace-building programs that restored and sustained peace and stability in Karamoja during this period include, alternative livelihoods, disarmament, environmental peace-building, and enhancement of education services.

This list is not more than indicative; yet, there is a dearth of literature on the gaps identified in the concerted peace-building interventions in post-disarmament Karamoja. In 2020, waves of violent inter-communal skirmishes and cross-border commercialized cattle raiding resuscitated perpetuated by armed youth gangs, largely attributed to a combination of micro and macro factors. The latter include unbalanced disarmament, cross-border arms trafficking from conflict-affected areas in Ethiopia and South Sudan which re-armed civilians (Lubega, 2017), and impact of Covid-19 measures implemented to curb disease spread, particularly the lockdown and restriction of physical human mobility and boda-boda transport. The micro-level factors include redundancy of unemployed young people, poverty and failure to adapt to alternative livelihoods. The drawbacks encountered include memories of gross acts of torture; stringent penalties for cattle thieves and lack of transitional justice.

This paper is an attempt to examine peace-building interventions established in Karamoja post-disarmament during the period of relative peace (2010-2019); and is guided by three research questions. (a) What are the peace-building interventions that were established in Karamoja

post-disarmament? (b) What are the challenges and gaps identified in the peace-building efforts? (c) How do or can the principles of non-violence and transitional justice be integrated into the peace-building interventions to address the drawbacks and gaps encountered?

To discuss the questions, the paper is structured as follows. This section is followed by a historic overview of conflict in Karamoja from the colonial period to today; after which peace-building interventions are discussed in section two. The ensuing section discusses the quest for nonviolent action in Gandhian thought and how it can be contextualized in Karamoja; and then the article concludes in the last section.

### **Historic Overview of Conflict and Insecurity in Karamoja**

The conflict and security situation of Karamoja is closely tied to its colonial legacy (Mamdani, 1982; Kabiito, 2021). In 1894, Uganda became a British Protectorate, however, imperialist rule only reached Karamoja district four years later in 1898 as the colonialists expanded outward. The geographical, climatic and cultural landscape of Karamoja greatly challenged the colonialists. The region was vast and covered by hot and dry climate most of the year, and the households were sparsely populated; traditional structures of authority were “seniority-based” with high respect for elders; and cultural practices of nomadism and cattle rustling.

The colonial administration anticipated great difficulty in replicating their system of indirect rule in this region as they had in other regions of Uganda; and policing such a vast area with ease (OPM, 2007; Stites, 2022). Consequently, Karamoja remained isolated from the political and economical establishments initiated by the colonial administration in other regions as it was “insulated” externally as a way of containing cattle raids, pastoral movements and restricting gun trade (Mirzeler & Young, 2000, p. 412).

The Karimojong first encountered guns through ivory trade with hunters from as far as Nairobi, Zanzibar and Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia)

before the advent of colonial rule. Reports of proliferation of arms among the Karimojong forced the British administration to reverse their position, upon which they imposed direct control over the region with police patrols in 1915. By 1921, it had been declared a “closed district; which technically implied alienation of Karamoja from the rest of Uganda (Mamdani, 1982, p.68). This colonial episode would set the stage for decades of political marginalization and economical deprivation against the Karimojong by subsequent post-colonial governments.

The post-colonial history of Karamoja was marked with a chain of episodes that exacerbated the conflict and insecurity situation in the region. The 1970’s ushered in Uganda’s most brutal regime under Idi Amin Dada (1971-1979), which significantly shaped the conflict landscape in the region. In 1971, Amin erected Moroto barracks in Karamoja in bid to curb cattle raids, which had become violent, thus causing insecurity. Amin’s soldiers brutally dealt with the warriors, locally known as *karacuna* and predominantly young males, who perpetuated the cattle raids.

In many instances, the stolen animals were recovered; however, the soldiers confiscated and sold them off for their own gain (Quam, 1997, p.37). The fall of Amin’s regime in 1979 would probably become the single-largest chapter that culminated into accumulation of fire arms in Karamoja. His soldiers fled from Moroto Barracks leaving behind unspecified amount of weaponry which were left to looting by the Karimojong. Czuba (2024) estimates that over 10,000 guns and ammunition were looted from the barracks and minor armoury in Kotido. Traditional weapons used for raiding – spears, bows and arrows – were replaced with rifles, thus consequently creating a generation of young warriors who disregarded the traditional wisdom that had regulated the age-old practice of cattle raiding.

The National Resistance Movement (NRM) regime under President Yoweri K. Museveni, which ascended into power in 1986, has made significant efforts to pacify Karamoja, but most predominantly

militarily through disarmament. The greatest downside of the regime’s “intelligence-led” approach was its excessively forceful character, many a time associated with violation of . It involved use of heavy artillery, torture and physical abuse of civilians (OPM, 2007, Taylor 2022b; NTV 2024a). Nevertheless, there is collective evidence that disarmament exercises conducted in the 2000’s ushered in relative situation of peace and stability in Karamoja. This facilitated economic growth through increased trade and penetration of private enterprises and businesses in major towns and growth of local markets. Community-led peace dialogues played a critical role in restoration of peace and stability, which were jointly supported by security forces, local authorities and civil society.

### **Post-disarmament Peace-building Strategies in Karamoja**

This section attempts to elucidate the approaches of peace-building that were applied to address the violence and insecurity by different actors in bid to restore peace and stability.

The main actors include national security forces, local authorities, civil society organisations, international partners, traditional leaders and community groups. The interventions included recruitment of vigilantes and disarmament, environmental peace-building, improvement of horizontal and vertical relationships, and alternative livelihood programs. This list is not more than indicative; however, it enables the article to highlight the upsides of each initiative; and identify the challenges and gaps encountered; and how these may have contributed to relapse of peace in the region.

It is worth noting that peace processes and strategies in the region were established within the broader framework laid down by the Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Program (KIDDP) whose main objective was to draw a course of action that would guide government and all stakeholders to ensure coordinated disarmament and sustainable peace and development (OPM, 2007, p.xii). The KIDDP was established nearly parallel to another poverty eradication government-led program –

Poverty Reduction and Development Program (PRDP) – which principally aimed at lifting the post-conflict affected region of northern Uganda, including Karamoja, out of poverty. The unique feature of the PRDP was its alignment to lessons learnt from past similar interventions, which prioritized development needs over the post-conflict needs, consequently under-achieving set objectives (GoU, 2007, p.20).

### *Vigilantes and disarmament*

The government dealt with the situation of volatility and insecurity in Karamoja with a rather militaristic response. The first instance involved formation and deployment of vigilantes to neutralize the *karacunas*. This was essentially a small force of local police personnel organized from armed warriors who were recruited using two basic criteria: One, possession of a gun as no arms were to be distributed to vigilante-designates; and two, manifestation of leadership skills as appraised by elders based on braveness, clarity in opinions shared in community and public admiration (Quam, 1997, pp. 38-40).

The other mechanism, which turned out equally stringent and controversial, entailed disarming herders and civilians who had acquired rifles and ammunition for self-protection. There were three main phases of disarmament in the period 2001-2008. The Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) – the national defence forces, were the main executors of the disarmament exercise, which was initially voluntary, but later on upscaled into a forceful operation, given the low success rate in terms of armed civilians who surrendered their rifles (OPM, 2007, p.51).

The UPDF applied their notorious “intelligence-led” tactic of condorn-search-disarm, whereby they security forces would condorn off kraals, villages or households (locally known as *manyatta*) based on intelligence and conduct a thorough search for any guns and ammunition. The members of the household would then be compelled to share details of any other household that possessed arms.

The acts of torture and physical abuse perpetuated by soldiers against civilians in coercion to surrender

arms and provide names of other armed people reinforced the past dark episodes of torture and social injustice experienced in Karamoja. There are reports of extrajudicial killings, maiming, destruction and torching of homesteads and granaries. Vulnerable persons such as the elderly, women and children became victims of rape, beating, forced removal of teeth and exposure of pregnant women in the scorching heat whereas others were physically abused (Mkutu, 2008; Delany, 2011).

In as much as both men and women reported acts of torture, adult men suffered disproportionately as their traditional role of protection and herding cattle made them top targets (NTV 2024a). The use of excessive force by the UPDF not only earned it accusations of gross violations of human rights (OPM, 2007; Taylor 2022b), but also public mistrust. The Karimojong, particularly *karacuna* perceived the state forces as enemies upon which they reacted with more resistance, consequently triggering more lethal force by the security agents; thus, reinforcing a spiral of violence.

Nevertheless, there was a sense of relative peace and stability in Karamoja by 2009-2010, which was largely attributed to the disarmament exercises. It is referred to as ‘relative’ because inasmuch as high intensity violence perpetuated by armed youth gangs and other criminals was silenced, low scale social skirmishes were still observed at household level (Stites, *et al.* 2015; VSF, 2020).

Religious leaders in Karamoja have cited government's neglect and failure to fulfill promises to the *karacuna* who gave up their guns as a serious threat to lasting peace in the region (NTV, 2024b). According to Rt. Rev. Dominic Eibu, Bishop of the Catholic diocese of Kotido, *karacuna* should be prioritized as beneficiaries of government empowerment programs to address the redundancy and feeling of marginalization among the reformed warriors, which has forced some to consider re-grouping into criminal gangs as a way of survival.

### *Environmental Peace building*

Communal peace dialogues between aggrieved

ethnic sides played a central role in the peace-building architecture in Karamoja in adopting shared agreements to allow natural resource sharing. For instance, relative peace and calm returned between the Jie and Matheniko ethnic sides, which silenced years of bitterness, conflict and violence between the two communities. This situation was result of a long period of inter-clan negotiations and meetings between the two sides, which climaxed into a peace summit in August 2007, with over 1,000 delegates in attendance (Bohnett, 2007).

The benefits of this approach of environmental peace-building included resource sharing and safe human movement, which eased accessibility to markets and agricultural lands, and livestock mobility. Intercommunal dialogues significantly increased contact between reconciled ethnic sides, which built more trust and confidence between them (Deschacht, 2013; VSF, 2020, p.2).

Environmental peace-building through peace resolutions as well played a critical role in restoring peace and silencing cases of cattle thefts. For instance, the Morutit and Nabilatuk resolutions which were adopted in 2013 by elders in northern and southern Karamoja, respectively greatly reduced cattle thefts in the region (Stites *et al.*, 2015, p.15). The elders and Peace Committees were the main custodians of the peace resolutions, with support from security forces and civil society.

The most dominant feature about the resolutions was tough penalties against perpetrators and potential impact on their families and larger communities to which they belonged. Perpetrators were charged to pay back twice the number of animals stolen to the owner; and additional animals paid to the elders and member of the Peace Committee (Eninu & Ebele, 2019). In case they did not have enough cattle, their family and village would be forced to assist in acquiring the expected number of animals. Penalties and compensations were enforced by elders and Peace Committees with support from security forces and civil society.

However, the stringent nature of penalties, particularly the shift of burden from individuals to immediate neighbouring households or villages,

made peace resolutions controversial and overtime, unpopular. In 2016, for instance, Morutit resolution was deemed obsolete by area politicians whereas human rights activists held it unconstitutional because of promoting “double jeopardy” given that perpetrators were subjected to penalties and imprisonment concurrently (Eninu & Ebele, 2019).

Community peace dialogues and assemblies were also instrumental in conflict resolution between belligerent sides. However, the patriarchal character of peace assemblies, summoned by elders and with predominant male participation, excluded women involvement in key decision-making processes, which drove biased positions against them; thus, reinforcing cultural marginalization of women in Karamoja. This attitude was largely premised on the presumption that “women are represented by their fathers and husbands” (Chapman & Kagaha, 2009, p.5).

The discussion above illustrates the two-fold function of environmental peace-building through community-led dialogues and resolutions in promoting positive horizontal and vertical relationships (Stites *et al.* 2015, pp. 16-18). The former refers to improved inter-communal relationships, which promoted more human contact between ethnic sides that had historically orchestrated attacks and counter-attacks against each other causing disruptions in the socio-economic life patterns.

For instance, dialogues between the Jie and Dodoth enabled sharing of grazing grounds, kraals where animals are kept and even led to intermarriages. The latter regards relations between Karamoja and the state, which further deteriorated because of forceful disarmament, thus reproducing public mistrust. However, support and collaboration between the Peace Committees and security agents, for instance through tracking stolen animals and apprehending perpetrators, slightly improved relations with the security forces (Stites, *et al.* 2015).

Yet, concerns of lack of transitional justice to recognize and acknowledge the injustices perpetuated against the Karimojong remain unaddressed. Poor documentation and low media

coverage of the stories and state-driven counter narratives have silenced the voices of the affected communities; which most likely explains why these issues have not attracted significant national interest (Nangiro, 2017, pp. 150-155). There is need for recognition of the injustices committed by security forces and distributive justice for the Karimojong to address the decades of marginalization and deprivation that they have experienced.

### ***Adaptation of alternative livelihoods***

Karamoja underwent rapid socio-economical and ecological transition triggered by a combination of interlocking multi-dimensional factors, including anti-pastoralist government policy, relative peace and security, climate change and rapid environmental degradation, population growth *inter alia*; which consequently affected the animal dependant socio-cultural and economic livelihoods of the Karimojong. Cattle are central to the survival of pastoral communities as they are a source of income, food, wealth and define their collective identity.

The cattle raids were disastrous as they left a trail of destruction of property and loss of animals in many homesteads. Disease outbreaks and inaccessibility to veterinary services for also led to mass loss of animals, which were kept together in community kraals, as a security initiative against cattle raiding and theft (Granville-Ross *et al.* 2016, p.2). The mass reduction of livestock and deteriorating climatic and environmental conditions produced a chain of effects, including loss of livelihoods, poverty and reduced crop production, which had impact on livelihoods, social safety nets and gender roles; thus, making the need for adaption inevitable for survival.

The reduction on pastoral livelihoods pushed many Karimojong into practicing agro-pastoralism; however, the region's climatic conditions, characterized by rainfall variability and long droughts greatly affected agricultural productivity. This was exacerbated by poor land management practices, such as dry season burning to create more land for habitation and agriculture, which

consequently accelerated erosion of top soils and flooding. Relative peace triggered an influx of foreign investors, who were awarded government concessions of land in the region to exploit opportunities, noticeably large-scale agricultural production and mineral exploration and mining; which consequently hiked the value of land.

This is a direct threat to traditional pastoral lifestyles whose sustainability and equilibrium is anchored upon mobility and flexibility of land use which allows for moving animals over long distances in search for water and pasture during dry seasons (VSF, 2020, p.1). Additionally, the shift to agro-pastoralism reshaped gender roles of men and women.

Traditionally, men and boys are charged with protection of the home and herding of cattle whereas women and girls take on the domestic chores, such as preparing food, fetching water and firewood. However, the shrinkage of livestock among households has rendered many men and young boys unoccupied, unemployed and poor as they their major source of income, wealth and social safety nets was eroded; consequently, increasing the workload of women. There is evidence of linkage between redundancy among men and increased alcohol consumption, which gravitated into a risk factor of gender-based violence in Karamoja (Deschacht, 2013; Stites *et al.* 2015; Brosorn *et al.* 2016).

The underlying objective of alternative livelihood programs established in Karamoja was to enhance adaptive pastoral lifestyles by empowering the affected people with skills and knowledge of other sources of livelihood, such as agriculture and small businesses in order to remain self-sustainable amidst the social stress caused by reduced possession of animals.

This episode exposed Karamoja to the market-based economy as an alternative to their traditionally pastoral-based economy. Alternative livelihood interventions were largely run by civil society and community-led groups with support from government and other partners. The livelihood programs broadly covered areas such as agriculture,

education, financial literacy and entrepreneurship, *inter alia*. Some interventions tactfully integrated aspects of peace-building in their livelihood programs, which was a more concerted approach of promoting the culture of peace and driving mindset change among beneficiaries.

For instance, Veterinaires Sans Frontieres' Karamoja Livestock Development Program was mainly focused on improving accessibility to natural resources such as water and pastures for animals. Community-focused peace dialogues were incorporated into the program as mechanism of helping them to adopt resource-sharing agreements; thus, addressing the problem of resource-based conflicts (Deschacht, 2013, p.21). Another youth-focused program addressed the prevalent negative perceptions of young people as agents of "intergenerational conflict" generally held among the adults.

This intervention adopted an "integrated and innovative approach" in which the youth were empowered with livelihood skills in business and finance management and concurrently equipped with knowledge about conflict resolution and prevention (Brosorn *et al.* 2016).

To sum up, this section has presented three peace-building interventions that played a central role in the restoration of peace in Karamoja, namely; disarmament and vigilantes, communal peace dialogues and adaptation to alternative livelihoods. Over and above, the interventions achieved their main objective of promoting peace and stability; however, they had some drawbacks and gaps as elucidated above.

The security forces successfully disarmed the region and silenced violent cattle raids, but at a heavy human cost given the gross violation of human rights involved and lack of transitional justice. Peace resolutions bound communities and their stringent penalties indeed served as a deterrent of cattle thefts, however, they shifted the burden of the individual perpetrators to their immediate neighbours in case the former was not able to pay back the required number of cattle. Livelihood programs equipped youth with skills for alternative means of survival, which in attempt to address

intergenerational tensions between the youth and adults, however, sustainability of such interventions posed a challenge amidst logistical limitations.

## **Integrating Gandhian Nonviolence and Transitional Justice**

This section attempts to address the challenges and gaps identified above by way of suggesting the principles of Gandhian nonviolence and transitional justice as alternative ways of addressing inter-communal conflicts and injustices committed against the Karimojong by security forces.

### *Gandhian nonviolence: Satyagraha*

The principle of nonviolence finds origin in the great mind of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who came to become popularly know as Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) – the father of the fight against British imperialism in India. Gandhi was absorbed by the procreation of violence by the 19<sup>th</sup> century Western civilization, which was anchored on systems and structures driven by competition, materialism and pursuit for power and physical pleasures; to which he made a total resolve to resist the kind of "violence-procreating civilization" (Mathai, 2012, p.78; Khimta, 2012, p.60).

Gandhi's actions are encapsulated in his doctrine of *satyagraha*, which literally means holding to the truth. This doctrine was sparked by a discriminatory law that was passed against people of Asian descent in Transvaal, South Africa by the British rule. It became his weapon of "determined, but non-violent resistance" to demand respect and basic human rights for the Indians in South Africa from the colonialists; and would later apply the same weapon to fight for India's freedom from British rule.

Gandhi, according to Devi (2012), was alive to the fact that his Indian country men and women were drowsed in superstitions, religious belief, ignorance and poverty; thus, lacked the individual and communal self-respect, courage and resolve to organize themselves against their oppressors. As a way of rallying Indians against imperialism, Gandhi dared to employ his philosophy of non-violent resistance to fight their injustices.

*Satyagraha*, in Gandhian thought, is a moral alternative to all forms of evil and violence that the oppressed can apply against their oppressors. The critical feature of this doctrine regards its rigorous introspective character: *Satyagraha* requires the oppressed to undergo a serious process of self-scrutiny to “achieve correct insight into the real nature of an evil situation by observing a nonviolence of the mind and seeking truth in a spirit of peace and love” (Encyclopaedia Britannica). Through this process of self-confrontation, the oppressed learn to find the truth in situations of injustice, which empowers them with the resolve of non-cooperation and refusal to submit to the injustices committed against them. Gandhi’s thought is premised on the conviction that the use of violence against the oppressor only breeds more violence (Devi, 2012, p.1). *Satyagraha* is inspired by an ancient Indian principle known as *ahimsa*, which he adopted, developed and contextualized to suit the modern era. *Ahimsa* literally means non-injury or non-hunting and carries the elements of love and truth; however, in Gandhian thought, the principle transcends its literal understanding of acting in non-violent ways.

Mathai (2012) quotes Gandhi: “*Ahimsa* is not merely a negative state of harmlessness, but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer.” Herein was Gandhi’s most peculiar challenge to his followers: Loving the oppressor is neither tantamount to facilitating their wrong-doing nor tolerating it by “passive acquiescence”, but rather, love for the oppressor necessitates dissociation from them, even when it may cause pain and suffering (Mathai, 2012, p.79).

For Khimta (2020), nonviolence presupposes conscious suffering on the part of the oppressed; however, is far from mere submission to the will of the oppressor: “It means pitting of one’s whole soul against the will of the tyrant” (p. 60). In other words, to return violence against the oppressor means submitting to their will and acting like them. The off-shoots of *Satyagraha* in the Indian context were mainly civil disobedience and non-cooperation; however, Gandhi was convinced of the universality

of the doctrine, as evinced by Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela, *inter alia*.

### ***Satyagraha and conflict resolution in Karamoja’s context***

It is absorbing to note how Gandhi’s ideas on *satyagraha* relate to other concepts in the realm of conflict resolution, such as dialogue and conflict transformation. Gandhi offers a broader vision of peace that transcends the mere absence of war and violence, but rather encompasses a “dynamic, positive vision of peace” incorporating all forms of cultural and structural forms of violence, including human rights violations, gender and equality, social discrimination, ecological and environmental destruction (Meraj, 2019).

Gandhi was a strong advocate for nonviolent alternatives in conflict resolution because he was convinced that non-violence prevents the either side of the conflict from reacting in “mindless reflex action” and is most likely than not to breed the urge for revenge, bitterness and resentment (Devi, 2012, p.11). He was convinced that human nature is essentially good and non-violent, inasmuch as the potency for both good and evil subsists. *Ahimsa* in Gandhian thought is the soul force, which is the power for non-violence in human nature, and “is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man” (Mathai, 2012, p.80).

Therefore, every human being is capable of nonviolence. Devi (2012) offers three different ways of achieving non-violent action: accommodation, nonviolent coercion and conversion. Accommodation entails giving in to all or some of the demands of the oppressor for the sake of creating peace, even when the oppressed is not convinced that it is correct whereas the oppressed may opt for coercion in situations where their sources of power and control are depleted or extinguished, thus, forcing them to give in despite their willingness to continue the struggle.

In contrast to the other two, conversion entails the strong commitment by either side to resolve the conflict without reiterating violence, which is

born out of the inner transformative process of self-scrutiny. *Satyagraha* advocates for conversion in conflict resolution as it creates room for dialogue between the belligerent sides: An opportunity for both sides to recognise their human potency for non-violence and discuss openly about their differences. Arun Gandhi (2017) discusses the five pillars of non-violence communication, which are instrumental in achieving constructive dialogue: respect, understanding, acceptance, appreciation and compassion (pp. 207-230).

Integrating *satyagraha* to Karamoja's peace-building interventions, this article focuses on the environmental peace-building efforts to improve horizontal relationships, i.e., intra and inter-communal conflicts. Through community-led peace dialogues and resolutions, horizontal relationships improved as peoples from previously belligerent sides could cross one another's tribal borders in search for pastures and water, and in other instances, intermarriages reported.

The successful state-led disarmament silenced the guns and armed conflicts, hence ushering in relative peace and stability; which enabled free movement of people to the markets and agricultural lands to cultivate. However, the excessive force used by security forces in dealing with the *karacuna* involved gross human rights violation whereas the community-led dialogues seem to have mainly focused at resolving inter-ethnic conflicts, but ignored inner peace and harmony of individuals.

*Satyagraha* advocates for the use of nonviolent means to avert violence. Little wonder that upon expiry of less than three months expiry period of voluntary disarmament, excessive force used by security forces only spiralled more violence. Gandhi disagreed with the use of guns in conflict resolution, but rather focus on the root causes of conflict and find amicable solutions using non-violent mechanisms. *Ahimsa*, which is the radical force of non-violence inherent human nature, repudiates all forms of violence – structural and cultural, including thefts, physical abuse, women exclusion, domestic violence, alcohol abuse, most of which sprouted in communities, albeit at lower scale levels.

From the Gandhian perspective, focus on neutralizing the evils and wrong doings perpetuated at community level was not adequate enough to spark inner conversion required to ensure lasting peace at individual level within households. This probably explains, atleast to the extent of Gandhian thought, the shift from large-scale insecurity caused by armed cattle raids to low-level social conflicts in Karamoja that manifested at household level (Stites *et al.* 2015). *Satyagraha*, in contrast, is hinged on the inner transformation of oppressed individuals through self-suffering in order to empower them not to submit to the 'natural' urge of reiteration, bitterness and perpetuation of violence in all its off-shoots.

*Satyagraha*, just like any other discipline, has some limiting factors. For instance, the doctrine requires high level of training and mobilisation of the masses in order to grasp its principles, given their introspective and metaphysical nature. One predominant feature of Karamoja upon which non-violence action would hinge is its deeply cultural character and high regard for the traditional structures of authority. Elders wield high respect in the community, their decisions are binding and play an instrumental role in conflict resolution; thus, they become good targets for training and mobilising nonviolent action.

Gandhi's optimism for the possibility of applying nonviolent action by all segments of society, including the poor, illiterate, excluded and marginalized is premised on the fact that non-violence is soul force and as all humans are gifted with a soul; thus, possess the capability of using nonviolence (Mathai, 2012, p.83).

### *Cries for Transitional Justice (TJ) in Karamoja*

Transitional justice (TJ) can be defined as the quest for justice in post-conflict societies, with the ultimate objective to ensure justice for the victims of violence. As noted by Opongo (2016), TJ can be a complex process that presupposes a delicate equilibrium between actions and perspectives, including justice for victims, political stability, end to impunity and the resolve to make institutional reforms such that

violations do not recur (p. 1). The instruments of TJ that are commonly applied include special courts, truth commissions, local courts and traditional mechanisms of justice. Whereas TJ is premised on the understanding that lasting peace does not subsist without justice, this aspect remains vividly omitted from the discourse and interventions of peace-building in Karamoja's context.

The quest for justice in Karamoja is driven by a number of overlapping historical episodes and factors, from its exploitative colonial legacy, which was reproduced by subsequent post-colonial governments, to decades of political and economic marginalization, to environmental and land injustices caused by state-led land management systems. The gross atrocities perpetuated in Karamoja by state security agents during disarmament only exacerbated the situation.

Nangiro (2017) indicates that the quest for justice for victims is clouded and blurred by state-run narratives, such as the presumption that guns were the single-biggest threat against peace and security in Karamoja (p.152). The problem with this narrative lies in its disregard for justice for the victims of military aggression, since the guns were withdrawn and relative peace achieved. This feeds into the generally held position among government and scholars that there is no transition in Uganda; thus, challenge the need for transitional justice in Uganda (Munene, 2016, p.27).

How about the fate of the affected communities and households that lost family and kin creating widows and orphans; livestock, assets, and vulnerabilities created as a result, including the maimed, psychologically traumatized and physically abused *inter alia*? Whereas there were legal trials implicating civilians against the state in Karamoja charged with resistance and possession of rifles and ammunition, the same was not done to incriminate individual security agents, some of who have since died, for the injustices committed against civilians (Nangiro, 2017, p.153).

If the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that propagated in hundreds is anything to go by, with some having budgets estimated at USD 3 million,

then it is evident that development was prioritized over justice in the post-disarmament period (*Ibid.*, 2017, p.152). What would justice suited for Karamoja look like? Kabiito (2021) suggests justice should presuppose "deliberate and systematic compensatory" interventions to address Karamoja's socio-economic and ecological exploitation with keen attention to ensure recognition of victims; equitable distribution of environmental risks; and impartial political inclusion of Karamoja in socio-political decisions and processes. On her part, Nangiro (2017) alludes that justice should extend to the public square in terms of dispelling and deconstructing the negative stereotypes held about the Karimojong implicating them as backward and primitive.

## CONCLUSION

This paper set out to re-examine the peace-building approaches applied in post-disarmament Karamoja that ushered in and attempted to sustain the period of relative peace in the region from 2010-2019. The paper was guided by three objectives to reach this end: Identify the approaches applied for peace-building in post-disarmament Karamoja; highlight the gaps and drawbacks, and attempt to integrate the principles of Gandhian nonviolence in view of addressing the gaps.

The drawbacks and gaps identified include: use of excessive force during disarmament, which bred into a legacy of gross human rights violation in the region; and the shared burden of paying back stolen cattle in cases where the culprit is unable to pay back the required number of animals. From a Gandhian perspective, the true meaning of nonviolence transcends the mere absence of violence, but rather contends all forms of violence holistically in deed, thoughts, communication, *et cetera* that injure or affect other people negatively.

Premised upon this perspective, the paper critiques the forceful nature of disarmament, which only bred more forms of violence in terms of resistance from the Karimojong warriors and creating public mistrust. The approaches of environmental peace-building, particularly peace dialogues

and resolutions reduced social tensions among warring communities and enabled resource-sharing; however, they were less-focused on the inner transformation of individuals, which lies at the core of *satyagraha*. Could this partly account for the low-scale household forms of violence that erupted after the armed conflict de-escalated?

The universality of *satyagraha* in driving non-violent action in different contexts of conflict, exploitation and marginalization should spark optimism in followers and proponents of Gandhism in the application of *satyagraha* in Karamoja as a way of attaining lasting peace. The paper concludes with a strong case for transitional justice for the people of Karamoja who have braved over fifty decades of reinforced injustices – socially, economically, ecologically and even worse, been victims of disparaging stereotypes in the public square.

## REFERENCES

- Bevan, J. 2008. *Crisis in Karamoja: Armed violence and the failure of disarmament in Uganda's most deprived region*. Occasional Paper, 21. Geneva: Small Arms Survey.
- Bohnett, T. 2007. *Uganda: Peace comes one step at a time in Karamoja*. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/uganda-peace-comes-one-step-time-karamoja>
- Britannica Encyclopaedia. (...). *Satyagraha*. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/satyagraha-philosophy>
- Brorson, L.S. and Strapola-Mala, J. 2016. *Skills for Peace Strengthening peace-building competencies among youth and adolescents in Karamoja*. Kampala: UNICEF.
- Chapman, C. and Kagaha, A. 2009. *Resolving conflicts using traditional mechanisms in the Karamoja and Teso regions of Uganda*. Retrieved from <https://minorityrights.org/app/uploads/2024/01/download-674-download-full-briefing.pdf>
- Delany, M. 2011. Tales of Torture from Karamoja: "I thought 'Let them just kill me'" Retrieved from <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/tales-torture-karamoja-i-thought-let-them-just-kill-me>
- Deschacht, T. 2013. The impact of VSF-Belgium's interventions on conflict in Karamoja: Research on conflict and peace. Retrieved from <https://www.celep.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/2013-VSF-B-conflict-in-Karamoja.pdf>
- Devi, N. 2012. Gandhian technique of conflict resolution: Satyagraha. *Bhartiyam International Journal of Education & Research*, 1(11): 1-30.
- Eninu, E. and Ebele, S. 2019. Kotido Leaders Denounce Morutit Resolution. Retrieved from <https://ugandaradionetwork.net/story/kotido-leaders-denounce-morutit-resolution-#>
- Gandhi, A. 2017. *The gift of anger and other gifts from my grandfather*. New Delhi: Gallery Books.
- Government of Uganda (GoU). 2007. Peace, recovery and development plan for northern Uganda. Retrieved from [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Uganda\\_PRDP-2007.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Uganda_PRDP-2007.pdf)
- Granville-Ross, S., Mitchell, T. and Yirga, M. 2016. Building an empowered Karamoja: STRESS summary and capacities. Portland: Mercy Corps.
- Kabiito, B. 2021. Environmental economies, survival ecologies, and economic interests in pastoral Uganda: The justice question in the socio-environmental governance of pastoral resources of Karamoja. *Journal of Science & Sustainable Development*, 8: 1-17.
- Khimta, A.C. 2020. Mahatma Gandhi and Satyagraha: A way of conflict resolution. *Dogo Rangsang Research Journal*, 10(8): 58-63.
- Lubega, H. 2017. Tracing history of guns in Karamoja sub-region. Daily Monitor. Retrieved from <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/tracing-history-of-guns-in-karamoja-sub-region-1716166>
- Mathai, P.M. 2012. The defining features of Gandhian nonviolence. *Educational Innovation*, 12(60): 77-85.
- Meraj, A. 2019. The Gandhian principles for non-violence and peace. *The Daily Outlook Afghanistan*. Retrieved from [http://outlookafghanistan.net/topics.php?post\\_id=24680](http://outlookafghanistan.net/topics.php?post_id=24680)
- Mkutu, K. 2008. Disarmament in Karamoja, Northern Uganda: Is This a Solution for Localised Violent Inter- and Intra-Communal Conflict? *Round Table: The Common Wealth Journal of International Affairs*, 97(134): 99-120.
- Munene, A. 2016. "Transitional justice processes and national reconciliation in Uganda: Lessons and challenges." In (eds.) Stormes, J., Opongo, O.E., Knox, P., & Kifle, W. *Transitional justice in post-conflict societies in Africa*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.
- Nangiro, P. 2017. "Ripeness for Transitional Justice in Karamoja: A Case for Transitional Justice in Karamoja." In T. Karbo (ed.). *Peace-building in the margins*. Geneva: University of Peace.
- NTV Uganda. 2024b. Religious leaders call for Karamoja Karacunas to be prioritised. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVLP0VrJRcA>
- Okoth, O.H. 2023. "How are the Karamojong politically marginalised?" *Nomadic Peoples*, 27: 48-72.
- Opongo, O.E. 2016. "Foreword". In (eds.) Stormes, J., Opongo, O.E., Knox, P., & Kifle, W. *Transitional justice in post-conflict societies in Africa*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.

- Quam, D.M. 1997. Creating Peace in an Armed Society: Karamoja, Uganda 1996. *African Studies Quarterly*, **1**(1): 33-46. Retrieved from <https://asq.africa.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/168/Volume-1-Issue-1.pdf>
- Saferworld. 2020. Peace, security and justice in Karamoja: Amplifying the voices of women and girls. Retrieved from <https://www.saferworld-global.org/downloads/peace-security-and-justice-in-karamoja.pdf>
- Stites, E., Marshak, A., Nohner, E., Richards, S. and Akabwai, D. 2014. Engaging Male Youth in Karamoja, Uganda. Washington: World Bank.
- Veterinaires Sans Frontieres. (VSF). 2020. Mitigating conflict in Karamoja through community structures. [https://vsf-belgium.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020\\_FactSheet\\_Uganda\\_NaturalResources.pdf](https://vsf-belgium.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020_FactSheet_Uganda_NaturalResources.pdf)