

RESEARCH REPORT

SDG16+ and Transitional Justice in Uganda

A Review of the Gains and Obstacles

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About ICTJ

The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) works across society and borders to challenge the causes and address the consequences of massive human rights violations. We affirm victims' dignity, fight impunity, and promote responsive institutions in societies emerging from repressive rule or armed conflict as well as in established democracies where historical injustices or systemic abuse remain unresolved. ICTJ envisions a world where societies break the cycle of massive human rights violations and lay the foundations for peace, justice, and inclusion. For more information, visit www.ictj.org

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
AUTJP	African Union Transitional Justice Policy
CECORE	Centre for Conflict Resolution
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CRSV	Conflict-related sexual violence
CSOs	Civil society organizations
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
HURIPEC	Human Rights and Peace Centre
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICD	International Crimes Division of the High Court of Uganda
ICTJ	International Center for Transitional Justice
JLOS	Justice, Law and Order Sector
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MDAs	Ministries, departments, and agencies
MDGs	Millenium Development Goals
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NIRA	National Identification and Registration Authority
NRA	National Resistance Army
NRM	National Resistance Movement
NTJP	National Transitional Justice Policy
NUSAF	Northern Uganda Social Action Fund
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PRPD	Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan
SAGE	Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TWGs	Technical working groups
UAAU	Urban Authorities' Association of Uganda
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
ULGA	Uganda Local Government Association
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNHCR	UN Refugee Agency
UNNGOF	Uganda National NGO Forum
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Forces
VNR	Voluntary National Review Report

Executive Summary

Nearly 10 years have passed since the United Nations (UN) adopted 17 “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs) within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Among these goals, SDG16 seeks to cultivate societies characterized by peace, justice, and inclusivity, ensuring that they are devoid of fear and violence. Previous Voluntary National Review Reports on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (VNRs) indicate that Uganda’s status regarding peace, justice, and strong institutions remains a work in progress, with limited examination of SDG16, especially in relation to conflict-affected areas. Furthermore, there is a need for SDG16 to be evaluated in conjunction with the other SDGs to reflect the interconnected and holistic framework that is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. For example, only one-third of the 36 total targets that specifically assess elements of peace, inclusion, or access to justice are included under SDG16. To remedy this gap, the totality of those 36 targets are referred to as SDG16+. For this report, the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) conducted a review and assessment of the progress made thus far toward achieving SDG16+, concentrating on specific justice, peace, inclusion, and equality issues and on challenges that have impacted post-conflict situations in Uganda since its three VNRs. The paper provides a complementary analysis to that of the Uganda National NGO Forum by offering a civil society perspective on progress related to SDG16+. The integration of data from civil society reports enhances the governmental viewpoint by providing detailed insights into current gaps and challenges, along with necessary recommendations for achieving SDG16+ through a transitional justice framework.

Methodology

This report draws upon a comprehensive literature review of previous VNRs, SDG progress reports, and pertinent documents from government and UN agencies and various civil society organizations (CSOs). It also incorporates insights from several key informant interviews and a consultative roundtable with SDG16+ implementing actors in Uganda. The paper highlights key findings, progress made, existing gaps and challenges, and the role of CSOs in achieving the SDG16+ targets. Particular focus is given to six targets due to their connection to transitional justice goals. These include:

- Target 16.1 on reducing violence in all areas, particularly in the context of peace recovery, land, and reintegration challenges;

- Target 16.3 on promoting the rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice, with a particular emphasis on accountability, reparations, and justice for victims;
- Target 16.9 on ensuring universal legal identity, with a particular emphasis on the birth registration of children born as a result of conflict;
- Targets 5.1 and 5.2, which aim to end discrimination and violence against women and girls, addressing the lasting impacts of conflict-related sexual violence, access to land, and economic opportunities; and
- Target 10.3 on ensuring equal opportunities and eliminating discrimination, particularly in the context of economic recovery in conflict-affected regions.

Key Findings

The findings indicate that notable advancements have been made on several SDGs, while others exhibit decline or stagnation. There have been some notable advancements in enabling policies and laws related to targets addressing peace, access to justice, and inclusion under SDG 5 (on “gender equality”) and SDG 10 (on “reduced inequalities”). Goal 16, however, has seemingly stagnated, especially regarding targets related to access to justice for victims and accountability for past violations in post-conflict contexts. Specifically, Target 16.1, “Reduced Violence Everywhere,” and Target 16.3, “Rule of Law and Access to Justice,” are not advancing in the conflict-affected regions of northern Uganda, Rwenzori, and Karamoja.

Target 16.1 aims to reduce violence in all its forms, including violence associated with armed conflict, the silent suffering associated with domestic violence, and the pervasive threat of organized crime. Violence in various manifestations constitutes a major barrier to achieving the SDGs, as it can lead to casualties, economic losses, displacement, and ongoing insecurities and deprivations. Although Uganda is not currently engaged in an active internal war, it faces intermittent assaults by the Allied Democratic Front (ADF). These attacks contribute to conflict-related fatalities, exemplified in 2023 when over 50 students, along with tourists and their Ugandan guides, were killed in Kasese. The various conflict-affected regions face distinct drivers of the violence that are affecting peaceful coexistence and leading to homicides frequently unreported in the VNRs. The drivers include cattle rustling and resource-based conflicts in Karamoja; land disputes, tensions between refugee and host communities, natural disasters (such as floods in northern Uganda), ethnic and historical conflicts in Rwenzori; and youth disenfranchisement in eastern Uganda. These issues are affecting the implementation of the SDG16+ Agenda, particularly in conflict-affected regions recovering from war-related harms, such as northern Uganda.

Target 16.3 addresses the rule of law and access to justice for victims. Rule of law is evaluated through the adherence by state actors to legal frameworks and the effectiveness of institutions responsible for delivering justice. Key considerations include their independence, efficiency, and responsiveness to conflict-affected regions, as well as attributes such as integrity, transparency, and accountability. This report’s findings indicate variations in access to justice and the enforcement of rule of law throughout Uganda. In certain communities, disputes occur frequently and accessing justice appears to be challenging whereas in others, low bribery rates suggest a greater compliance with legal standards. The establishment of 18 new high court circuits nationwide has contributed to a decrease in case backlog. This gain is particularly significant for conflict-affected regions where land disputes arising from unresolved historical conflicts have persistently

emerged. The implementation of electronic systems, such as video conferencing facilities, has facilitated the hearing of cases without the need to transfer prisoners and detainees to court. This was demonstrated during the trial of Thomas Kwoyelo, for example. The establishment of specialized court sessions for sexual and gender-based violence cases has facilitated prompt administration of justice for victims of sexual offenses. On the other hand, the protracted trial of Kwoyelo, characterized by delays and postponements, rendered participation burdensome for victims and dissuaded others from pursuing judicial remedies. This underscores the necessity for revising accountability processes to attain comprehensive repair and reconciliation for all victims.

Target 16.6 calls for the development of effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels. The National Governance, Peace, and Security Survey found that 54% of participants were confident in public services, whereas 19% were not. Parliamentarians, who monitor the SDGs and mobilize and allocate resources, earned 47% of respondents' trust. However, the Ugandan Parliamentary Forum on SDGs is understaffed, and militarization of the development sector without parliamentary oversight threatens institutional integrity and the rule of law. Police in Uganda, who have been accused of using excessive force against their targets, are distrusted by 59% of Ugandans, according to a survey by Afrobarometer. Although courts have improved via measures such as prioritizing victim participation and public access to information (an example of this is the Gulu trial of Thomas Kwoyelo, which saw hearings, community awareness seminars, and outreach initiatives by the court and CSOs), just 47% of the National Governance, Peace, and Security survey respondents expressed their trust in them.

Target 16.9 aims to provide universal legal identity, such as birth registration, to all. Approximately 17.4 million Ugandans remain unregistered in the National Identification Register, including numerous children born as a result of war, whose entitlement to a legal identity has been compromised due to conflict. Additionally, children born in communities lacking immediate access to registrars continue to experience delays in obtaining their birth certificates. The absence of birth certificates and civil registration documents has enduring consequences, as it restricts access to health care, education, and other social benefits.

Targets 5.1 and 5.2 aim to end gender discrimination and violence. Gender-based violence survivors suffer family and community stigma and discrimination. The 2022 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey found that 23% of women and 14% of males aged 15–49 had suffered physical violence and 11% and 4%, respectively, experienced sexual violence in the year prior. Reduced funding for violence prevention organizations has led to the closing of safe shelters and reduced legal help. Women and girls who experienced conflict-related sexual violence face challenges related to identification and belonging, discrimination, and economic hardships that will affect future generations.

Target 10.1 relates to the reduction of inequalities. Unfortunately, findings indicate that they persist across income, regional, religious, disability, education, and gender dimensions, thus posing a barrier to the overall achievement of the SDGs. These disparities manifest in unequal access to fundamental necessities, including education, food, health care, housing, and energy. An African Development Bank assessment indicated that Uganda ranks third in inequality levels in East Africa, following South Sudan and Rwanda, with over 16.36 million Ugandans (of approximately 45 million) living in poverty. Civil society consultations indicate that, despite various government and non-governmental initiatives aimed at promoting economic growth, reform, and poverty alleviation, income inequality and poverty persist, particularly in conflict-affected regions.

Civil Society's Role in the Implementation of the SDG16+ Agenda

Relevant CSOs have partnered with government and other stakeholders to educate and raise awareness about SDG16+ issues in conflict-affected regions. This has influenced individual attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs regarding peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. For example, the *Tondeka Mabega* campaign has used innovative strategies to play a pivotal role in localizing the SDGs. Consequently, fostering engagement among communities is essential for the implementation and realization of the SDG16+ agenda. The suspension of more than 50 civic groups—including the prominent donor known as the Democratic Governance Facility—adversely affected war victims and survivors in conflict zones who were directly and indirectly benefiting from their interventions.

Key Challenges to SDG16+ Implementation

Among various other challenges identified throughout this paper, such as insufficient awareness of the SDGs within communities, weak institutional frameworks, corruption, funding deficiencies, and detrimental cultural practices such as female genital mutilation, five core challenges emerged:

1. Data gaps are currently hindering the accurate analysis of trends, prevalence, and dynamics, such as those related to gender-based violence and land disputes in conflict-affected areas.
2. Emerging crimes and forms of violence, especially stemming from domestic violence and organized crime, pose significant threats to Uganda's development goals and its commitment to achieving the SDG16+ Agenda.
3. Legacies of conflict-related sexual violence pertain to the enduring impacts of wartime sexual violence on women victims/survivors and their families residing in post-conflict regions, particularly in the absence of meaningful accountability, truth-seeking efforts, or state acknowledgment.
4. Exclusion and youth disenfranchisement, which particularly affect victims and unemployed youth, are hindering progress toward the SDG16+ Agenda. They increase susceptibility to exploitation and recruitment by criminal gangs for survival.
5. Legislative gaps are a continued challenge, specifically regarding existing laws that are essential for addressing violence against women, alongside the absence of a comprehensive peace policy or transitional justice law on the implementation of reparations for victims and survivors affected by war.

Conclusion

While Uganda has made some strides toward the attainment of the SDG16+ targets, progress has been slow. This is due to several barriers that have hindered advancement, leading to stagnation and a decline in certain SDG16+ targets. This report outlines the numerous challenges associated with the inability to adequately confront the legacies of conflict, which have left affected communities at a disadvantage. It ends with targeted recommendations, such as enhancing peace and conflict prevention, ensuring justice and victims' rights, and promoting responsive policy processes.

Introduction

This report examines post-conflict perspectives on the Sustainable Development Goal 16+ (SDG16+) agenda through the lens of transitional justice. Peace, justice, and strong institutions are essential for promoting political, social, and economic stability in post-conflict societies globally. SDG16 establishes a framework for the development of peaceful and inclusive societies that deliver truth, justice, and reparations to victims and survivors of war-related harms while upholding the rule of law.¹ SDG16 and the related targets from other goals that form the SDG16+ agenda aim to facilitate community healing, thus promoting social reintegration, reconciliation, and recovery. Strong, victim-centered institutions create an environment conducive to sustainable development, attracting investments and promoting economic growth and thereby encouraging victims' participation in post-conflict regions. SDG16 highlights the significance of peace, justice, and effective institutions, acknowledging that economic, political, and social progress are interrelated components crucial for providing redress to victims and fostering a more equitable and prosperous global community.

This report assesses progress toward the SDG16+ agenda overall while also examining the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) therein and looking to transitional justice's contributions to specific SDG16+ targets. The central thesis posits that in situations characterized by significant and widespread human rights abuses, such as those that occurred in Uganda, the realization of sustainable peace and development is more likely if peace, justice, and accountability are thoroughly enforced. Transitional justice establishes a systematic approach to meet the needs of victims and aims to mitigate the "justice gap," which refers to the inadequate delivery of justice to individuals and communities lacking legal protection in exceptional situations.² This report examines Uganda's advancement in relation to SDG16+, concentrating on the particular justice and rule of law challenges present in post-conflict settings. It offers a civil society perspective on progress made toward the associated targets and indicators, emphasizing critical findings, existing gaps, and obstacles, along with suggestions for achieving the SDG16+ targets within the framework of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda).

¹ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Goal 16: Promote Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development, Provide Access to Justice for All and Build Effective, Accountable and Inclusive Institutions at all Levels," Website, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>

² Working Group on Transitional Justice and SDG16+, "On Solid Ground: Building Sustainable Peace and Development After Massive Human Rights Violations," (May 2019).

Scope of the Study

This paper explores Uganda's progress toward SDG16+, focusing on post-conflict justice, peace, inclusion, and equality issues. This includes Uganda's transitional justice efforts and their impact on SDG16+. The analysis also addresses gender equality and the overall reduction of inequalities, both of which are essential to a peaceful, just, and prosperous society.

Due to the complexity and overlap of SDG16+, the study focuses on six targets that were deemed to be most connected with transitional justice goals. Target 16.1 addresses peace recovery, land, and reintegration to reduce global conflict. Target 16.3 emphasizes accountability, reparations, and justice for victims to establish the rule of law and ensure equal justice for all. Target 16.9 emphasizes birth registration for global legal identification. Sexual and gender-based violence, land, and economic opportunity are addressed in Targets 5.1 and 5.2 to abolish discrimination against women and girls. Finally, Target 10.3 concerns reduced inequalities, especially economic recovery issues. Where relevant, the study also highlights the importance of other targets, such as 6.5 on corruption and 16.7 on participatory decision making.

The report presents civil society views about the progress toward the achievement of the goals. It highlights major findings, identifies gaps and challenges, and suggests ways to achieve these aims in post-conflict environments. Transitional justice, civil society participation, inclusivity, and restricted localization of the agenda in conflict-affected Uganda are discussed.

Methodology

The analysis followed the United Nations (UN) norms for evaluating SDG implementation, which included a review methodology, desk review and interview plans, and intensive stakeholder interaction.³ The paper is also informed by eight interviews, a consultative roundtable, and a literature review of Uganda's 2016, 2020, and 2024 Voluntary National Review Reports on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (VNRs); SDG progress reports; and relevant government, UN, and civil society papers.

The eight semi-structured key informant interviews were conducted via phone, Zoom, and in-person. The consultative roundtable included 25 key government and civil society actors. The gathering included a review of the existing literature, exchange of institutional experiences, identification of key gaps and challenges, and the development of several recommendations through organized group exercises.

After revisions, the paper's conclusions were validated via an online workshop with government agencies, CSOs, the private sector, media, community leaders, and academics. Email exchanges provided additional data for the report.

Study Limitations

The Uganda National Population and Housing Census 2024, which refreshed the national data set, was published after the evaluation. Therefore, some of the government data and statistics may be outdated. This affected comparisons of trends and dynamics, forecasts, and projections. To address this issue, the assessment used recent government, academic, NGO, and UN publica-

³ UN Economic Commission for Europe, "Measuring and Monitoring Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals," (2020).

tions, as well as strategic key informant interviews with government agencies like the National SDG Secretariat under the Office of the Prime Minister and members of various thematic working groups. This ensured that crucial data was collected and that research findings were current and preserved.

Overview of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The UN Member States endorsed the 2030 Agenda in 2015 under Uganda's presidency in the General Assembly. With 17 goals (collectively known as the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs), 169 targets, and 231 indicators, the 2030 Agenda underpins global and state development and seeks social and economic change, environmental protection, and equality.⁴ Its overall vision is of a world without poverty, inequality, injustice, or discrimination and of a sustainable planet for future generations.⁵ Agenda 2030 guides governments and partners to create peaceful, just, and inclusive communities by recognizing the interconnectedness of all its goals.

The endorsement of the comprehensive, innovative, and unified 2030 Agenda and its 17 goals marked a turning point for our global landscape.⁶ The 2015 "Leave No One Behind" promise committed countries to accelerate progress by prioritizing the most marginalized.⁷ Thus, the SDGs aim to eliminate poverty, hunger, and gender discrimination among other revolutionary goals. As the name indicates, the international community is working to achieve the SDGs by 2030.⁸

The 2030 Agenda builds on the previously adopted Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and adds peace and justice to its priorities. Success requires interwoven, interlocking, and indivisible goals and development solutions.⁹ Despite the positives, however, the SDGs have faced criticisms, including for their failure to explicitly include human rights.

The Government of Uganda has pledged to incorporate the SDGs into its development plans. It established a structure in 2016 to coordinate the 2030 Agenda under the Office of the Prime Minister.¹⁰ State and non-state actors, especially local governments, have been working together under this structure to accomplish the SDGs through a Coordination Framework. Five multi-stakeholder Technical Working Groups (TWGs) have been established to oversee implementation, each chaired by a different government institution. These five working groups are: Coordination,

4 OHCHR, "About the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development," Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Website, www.ohchr.org/en/sdgs/about-2030-agenda-sustainable-development

5 UN General Assembly, 70th Session. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, (New York: Official Record A/RES/70/1, 2015).

6 Jordan Naidoo, UNESCO, "Sustainable Development Goals: An Ambitious Vision for Education," *International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) Letter*, Vol. XXXII(1): *Financing Education 2030* (2016), 4-5.

7 UN Development Programme (UNDP), "What Does It Mean to Leave No One Behind? A Framework for Implementation."

8 Tomáš Háek et al., "Sustainable Development Goals: A Need for Relevant Indicators," *Ecological Indicators* 60 (2016).

9 Ilya Ilyin et al., "From Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals," *Globalistics and Globalization Studies: Global Transformations and Global Future* (2016): 380.

10 Uganda Office of the Prime Minister, "Coordination Framework," Website, <https://sdgs.opm.go.ug/coordination-framework/>

Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting; Planning and Mainstreaming; Resource Mobilization and Financing; Data; and Communication and Popularization.¹¹ There has also been an attempt to link the SDGs to Uganda's National Development Plans (NDPs), which are the main frameworks for national planning.¹²

The UN established the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which convenes annually, to evaluate progress toward the 2030 Agenda and receive VNRs. In 2024, Uganda was one of 44 countries to present its VNR during the 12th Session of the HLPF, after consulting stakeholders, including civil society.¹³ The 2024 report, along with Uganda's previous VNRs from 2016 and 2020, collectively demonstrate Uganda's commitment to achieving the SDGs.¹⁴ The rest of this paper will highlight past VNR recommendations and SDG16+ target issues related to post-conflict situations.

About SDG16+

SDG16 explicitly aims to create peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. Arguably, however, advances in peace, justice, and inclusion targets are intertwined with many, if not all, of the other SDGs.¹⁵ Of the 169 total SDG targets, 36 address peace, inclusiveness, and justice.¹⁶ Of these 36, only 12 (or one-third) fall under SDG16.¹⁷ Therefore, the language of SDG16+ refers to the totality of these targets.

In its "SDG16+ Civil Society Toolkit," the Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) Network notes that in addition to representing the interlinkages across SDGs, the plus (+) in SDG16+ also represents the 2030 Agenda's linkages to other major international agreements and treaties,¹⁸ particularly those on human rights and labor standards.¹⁹ Many SDG16+ targets align with or strengthen international human rights principles and duties, notably the need to provide victims of human rights violations with an appropriate remedy that fulfills their rights to truth, justice, and reparations.²⁰ Unlike the MDGs, the SDGs emphasize the need for peace and justice as foundational ingredients for sustainable development. Neglecting these features jeopardizes all other goals.

Thus, SDG16+ creates a framework for Uganda to improve and connect peace-related projects. According to the Center for Conflict Resolution (CECORE), Uganda's progress on SDG16+ depends on change makers and reformers (both government and non-governmental) recognizing and addressing critical barriers to peace, justice, and inclusion in their contexts.²¹ In Uganda, prior VNRs ignored conflict-affected regions, especially with regards to transitional justice and the SDGs. This must change if the country is to meet its obligations.

11 Ibid., "Roadmap for the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Uganda: 2020/2021–2024/2025," (August 2021).

12 Ibid., "Uganda's Progress," Website, <https://sdgs.opm.go.ug/ugandas-progress/>

13 Ibid., "Uganda's 3rd Voluntary National Review 2024," (March 2024).

14 National Development Planning Commission, "Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," (2019).

15 TAP Network and SDG16Now, "Halfway to 2030, Report on SDG16+: A Civil Society Assessment of Progress Towards Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies," (2023).

16 TAP Network, "SDG16+ Civil Society Toolkit: Introduction & Background," Website, www.sdg16toolkit.org/about/introduction-background/

17 Advocates for International Development, "SDG16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, A Legal Guide," (June 2021).

18 TAP Network, "SDG16+ Civil Society Toolkit."

19 John Romano and Claudia Villalona, TAP Network and the Global Alliance for Reporting on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, "Mainstreaming SDG16: Using the Voluntary National Review to Advance More Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies," (December 2020).

20 OHCHR, "About Transitional Justice and Human Rights," Website, www.ohchr.org/en/transitional-justice/about-transitional-justice-and-human-rights

21 CECORE, "Country Report Progress Towards Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies SDG16+ in Uganda."

Transitional Justice and the SDG16+ Agenda in Uganda

Though the 2030 Agenda does not directly address significant human rights violations, it does include goals that align with transitional justice efforts. These include establishing the rule of law, ensuring access to justice, creating inclusive institutions, preventing violence, combating corruption, enhancing gender equality, and reducing inequalities. Due to its universal nature, the 2030 Agenda provides political opportunities to assert that addressing legacies of significant human rights violations is crucial for its advancement.²²

A global Working Group on Transitional Justice and SDG16+ has been established under the Justice Action Coalition to promote transitional justice as an essential element of the 2030 Agenda, owing to the considerable advantages it offers across multiple SDG targets.²³ The Justice Action Coalition functions as a global policy platform assisting CSOs to secure support for justice initiatives aimed at individuals, especially in conflict-affected areas, with the objective of addressing the prevailing “justice gap.”²⁴ This gap refers to unaddressed justice needs, including the failure to obtain justice for common civil, administrative, or criminal matters; exclusion from available legal opportunities; and persistent and severe injustices, such as land grabbing and domestic violence.²⁵

In 2019, Uganda approved the National Transitional Justice Policy (NTJP) after a decade of development. Its objectives include attaining sustainable peace, enhancing social cohesion, and delivering justice to victims.²⁶ The NTJP defines transitional justice as a set of processes and mechanisms utilized by a society to confront the legacy of significant past abuses and human rights violations, with the objectives of ensuring accountability, delivering justice, and promoting reconciliation.²⁷ It refers to the UN Secretary General’s 2004 report on transitional justice and the African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP), which was adopted in February 2019.²⁸

Transitional justice refers to the methods and processes by which societies confront the lasting effects of major human rights violations.²⁹ It seeks to establish accountability for perpetrators of serious crimes, prevent ongoing violations, and mitigate the risk of future incidents.³⁰ This is essential for meeting specific SDG16+ targets, particularly 16.1 and 16.3, which emphasize the importance of addressing violence, maintaining the rule of law, and ensuring equitable access to justice for all individuals. Transitional justice is also essential for advancing the attainment of SDG targets 5.1 and 5.2 in Uganda. The objective of these targets is to eliminate discrimination, violence, and exploitation directed toward women and girls, while transitional justice seeks to protect witnesses and victims, eliminate barriers to justice, and provide reparations.

A participant in one of the key informant interviews remarked, “The enactment of the NTJP in 2019, the ongoing mapping of victims and survivors, and the commitment to register children born of war provide a substantial opportunity to restore the rule of law and guarantee equitable access to justice for victims in conflict-affected regions of Uganda.”³¹ This comment embodies the insights derived from civil society initiatives aimed at reconciliation, healing, and trauma rehabilitation in conflict-affected areas of Uganda.

22 Working Group on Transitional Justice and SDG16+, “On Solid Ground.”

23 Working Group on Transitional Justice and SDG16+, “Toward Victim-Centered Change: Integrating Transitional Justice into Sustainable Peace and Development,” (2023).

24 Working Group on Transitional Justice and SDG16+, “On Solid Ground.”

25 World Justice Project, “Dissecting the Justice Gap in 104 Countries,” (2023).

26 Avocats Sans Frontières, “The Long Walk: Uganda Adopts a Transitional Justice Policy,” October 14, 2019.

27 Ugandan Ministry of Internal Affairs, *National Transitional Justice Policy*, (June 2019), iv.

28 Report of the UN Secretary-General, *The Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies* (New York: S/2004/616, 2004); African Union, *African Union Transitional Justice Policy*, (February 2019).

29 International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) Website, www.ictj.org/

30 Report of the UN Secretary-General, *The Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies*.

31 Interview with a CSO member on May 24, 2024.

It is worth noting that transitional justice interventions in Uganda have been primarily led by civil society for decades.³² A national symposium on transitional justice held in February 2024 in Uganda emphasized the potential for a government-led initiative to promote justice and reconciliation, both of which are critical for sustainable development.³³ Conflict-affected areas are being prioritized by the government in the execution of affirmative action development and recovery programs, such as the Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan (PRDP) and the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF). The national curriculum of schools in Uganda has incorporated peace education as a strategy to foster a culture of peace among the youth.³⁴

Concerns exist regarding the slow pace of implementation of a transitional justice process, particularly the insufficient prioritization of the immediate justice needs of victims as demonstrated by the absence of a government reparations program. Additionally, a primary objective of transitional justice is to facilitate recognition and healing for victims, while also striving to restore their rights and dignity within society.³⁵ Substantial outcomes can only be achieved through the active participation of victims. It is proposed that transitional justice is connected to the SDG16+ agenda through the implementation of a people- and victim-centered approach. Examining the advancements in transitional justice processes in Uganda is crucial for assessing their impact on the achievement of SDG16+ targets.

32 TRAC FM, Women's International Peace Centre, and ICTJ, "Transitional Justice in Northern Uganda: Citizens' Perspectives," (July 2020).

33 "Remarks at National Symposium on Uganda Transitional Justice Policy," February 20, 2024.

34 Adeyiga Abisoye, "Uganda to Include Peace Education in School Curriculum," *African Leadership Magazine*, April 30, 2022.

35 Pablo De Greiff, "Theorizing Transitional Justice," *Nomos* 51 (2012).

Uganda's Contextual Analysis: Toward Vision 2040

Ugandan citizens aspire to live and participate in activities within a peaceful, secure, and harmonious environment that is defined by stability, rule of law, and a dedication to the protection of individual rights.³⁶ The Government of Uganda articulates its ambition to attain a high-income, stable, peaceful, and prosperous national status in its Vision 2040. The stated vision is of a “transformed Ugandan society from a peasant to a modern and prosperous country within 30 years.”³⁷ The country's fourth NDP focuses on the realization of Vision 2040, functioning as both the final phase of planning to meet the 2030 Agenda and the initial framework for implementing the government's strategy to achieving tenfold growth.³⁸

The SDG Secretariat within the Office of the Prime Minister reports that the third NDP (NDP III) demonstrated a notable 95% alignment with the SDGs, as well as Vision 2040 and the National Resistance Movement (NRM) party's manifesto.³⁹ An established Certificate of Compliance requires the alignment of planning and budgeting frameworks with the objectives of Vision 2040 and the NDP, which are both linked to the SDGs. This has thus enabled the alignment of financial allocations at local and national levels with the SDGs.⁴⁰

Policies and Enabling Environment for SDG Implementation

Under the supervision of the Office of the Prime Minister, Uganda has built a strong structure to manage the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. Local governments and other stakeholders are included in this coordination framework to achieve the goals.

Through an established framework, the national SDG Secretariat coordinates and oversees Uganda's SDG coordination structures and roadmap. It also facilitates, supervises, and integrates activities. The current SDG Roadmap (2020/21–2024/25) aligns with NDP III and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2021–2025 by assessing the prior coordination structure and roadmap. The Prime Minister, UN Country Team, and other stakeholders led the roadmap's 2021 launch. The current document outlines the secretariat's strategies to improve SDG coordination and execution.

36 Government of Uganda, “Vision 2040.”

37 Ibid.

38 Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, “NDP IV National Planning Conference,” June 4, 2024.

39 Interview with SDG Secretariat, Ugandan Office of the Prime Minister, on June 6, 2024.

40 Ibid.

Uganda has both national and subnational SDG structures. The 2030 Agenda has been promoted at the local government level through collaboration and multi-stakeholder action since 2019. Advocacy efforts by the SDG Secretariat, Uganda Local Government Association (ULGA), Urban Authorities' Association of Uganda (UAAU), and Uganda National NGO Forum (UNNGOF) have successfully included all stakeholders in the local government structure. Local government SDG focal persons work with the national SDG Secretariat and the TWGs to integrate the SDG Agenda into their daily operations.

Uganda's third VNR shows its commitment to transparently disclosing its progress toward, challenges to, and potential for achieving the SDGs. Regional gatherings influence the yearly SDG conference, which involves diverse stakeholders. District leaders, particularly the Chief Administrative Officers and Local Council Chairpersons, led local efforts. Regional forums, including youth and women parliaments, promoted inclusivity and equity by involving a diverse spectrum of Ugandans.

Assessing SDG16+ Progress from a Transitional Justice Perspective

Overview of Uganda's SDG Journey

Previous VNRs have described some SDG16 targets as “stagnating,” while others remain “on track.” The vision of peaceful, just, and inclusive societies in Uganda is currently met with conflicting perspectives. The Ugandan government has prioritized peace and security for decades to secure national stability.⁴¹ The security sector thus receives the majority of the budget, demonstrating a strong commitment to peace and security. To ensure peace and security for all Ugandans, the government allotted 9.1 trillion Ugandan shillings (24.2% of the budget) for the security agencies in the fiscal year 2024/25,⁴² up from 3.8 trillion shillings in fiscal year 2023/24.⁴³ While important, peace also entails protecting against micro-level conflict-related deaths, such as those stemming from land conflicts, which are only partially documented in the VNRs. Patterns of micro-level violence must be examined for their root causes, and these elements must be addressed for enduring peace, especially in northern Ugandan communities recovering from war trauma. While many Ugandan regions are free of ongoing armed conflict, the root causes remain. Unresolved conflict legacies, marginalization, inadequate governance, impunity, and socioeconomic challenges (including youth unemployment and natural resource conflicts) persist. This kind of negative peace undermines SDG16 milestones.

Gender equality has improved, especially with affirmative action policies. Numbers of women in decision-making and management roles are rising. The International Futures tool estimated that from 2015 to 2023, the number of women in executive roles increased by 0.5% annually.⁴⁴ By comparison, the global percentage of women in leadership roles increased by about 1% annually over the past eight years.⁴⁵ Many gender-enabling policy frameworks promote, enforce, and monitor gender equality in Uganda.⁴⁶ Box 1 lists several such frameworks.

41 NRM, “NRM Is a Vanguard of Peace, Security and Stability of Uganda.”

42 Parliament of the Republic of Uganda, “Parliament Passes Shs72.136 Trillion Budget for FY 2024/2025,” May 17, 2024.

43 Andrew Bagala, “Soldiers, Police Get Huge Salary Rise in New Budget,” *Monitor*, June 14, 2024.

44 Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures and UN Women, “Forecasting Women in Leadership Positions,” (2023).

45 World Economic Forum, “Global Gender Gap Report 2023: Insight Report,” (June 2023).

46 UN Women, “Country Fact Sheet: Uganda,” Website, <https://data.unwomen.org/country/uganda>

Key Legislation Enabling Implementation of SDG5 in Uganda

- Legal and policy frameworks addressing gender-based violence in Uganda include:
 - Constitution of Uganda
 - National Women’s Council Act of 1993
 - Children Act of 1997 as amended in 2023
 - Uganda Gender Policy (Amendment) of 2007
 - Penal Code Act Chapter 120 (Punishment for Rape) enacted in 2007
 - Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act of 2009
 - Domestic Violence Act of 2010
 - Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act of 2010
 - Public Finance Management Act 2015
 - The Children Act (Amendment) of 2016
 - National Action Plan III on Women, Peace, and Security 2021 - 2025
- Key institutions, such as the Equal Opportunities Commission, and various legal instruments have been established with a mandate to eliminate discrimination against and inequality among any individual or group of persons on the ground of sex, among other bases for discrimination and imbalances.

Despite progress toward gender parity, violence and discrimination persist. Due to community violence, improvements in gender equality in conflict-affected regions has been slow and inconsistent, or has even backslid. For example, according to the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2022, 23% of women and 14% of men aged 15–49 experienced physical violence in the reporting year, while 11% and 4% (respectively) experienced sexual violence.⁴⁷ According to the same survey, 84% of women with alcoholic partners had experienced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.⁴⁸

While this paper cannot comprehensively address corruption (as included in target 16.5 on substantially reducing corruption and bribery in all forms), some statistics are worth noting since corruption threatens peace, global security, and sustainable development. Public sector corruption in Uganda consists primarily of bribery (27%), embezzlement (17%), favoritism (11%), and nepotism (10%). Over 80% of the Ugandans are inactive in the fight against corruption, with 54% feeling powerless to change and only 2% overseeing or evaluating government projects.⁴⁹ The issue of corruption in conflict-affected regions deserves special attention in the future.

Specific Progress, Challenges, and Urgent Actions on SDG16+

Goal 16 is the main standalone goal for fostering peaceful, just, inclusive, and fear-free communities. However, violence in its many forms hinders multiple SDGs by causing death, economic loss, population displacement, and daily insecurity and suffering. This interconnectedness led to

⁴⁷ Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), “Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2022,” (2022).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Government of Uganda, “Prevalence of Corruption in Uganda 2022-2023 Report: Rebuilding Ethics and Integrity,” (2023).

the conception of the SDG16+ agenda, which encompasses targets across multiple goals, rather than an exclusive focus on SDG16. As noted above, while there are 36 targets related to peace and security in total, the primary targets considered for analysis here are: Target 16.1 to end all forms of violence worldwide; Target 16.3 to promote the rule of law and equal access to justice for all; Target 16.9 to establish legal identity; Targets 5.1 and 5.2 to end violence and discrimination against women; and Target 10.3 to reduce inequalities. The targets included within the 2030 Agenda have various associated indicators against which to measure progress. Box 2 lists some of the key indicators associated with these six targets that will be examined.

Relevant SDG16+ Indicators

- 16.1.1 Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age
- 16.1.2 Conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population, by sex, age, and cause
- 16.1.3 Proportion of population subjected to (a) physical violence, (b) psychological violence and/or (c) sexual violence in the previous 12 months
- 16.1.4 Proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live after dark
- 16.3.1 Proportion of victims of (a) physical, (b) psychological and/or (c) sexual violence in the previous 12 months who reported their victimization to competent authorities or other officially recognized conflict resolution mechanisms
- 16.3.2 Unsensitized detainees as a proportion of overall prison population
- 16.6.2 Proportion of population satisfied with their last experience of public services
- 16.9.1 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority, by age
- 16.b.1 Proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law

Source: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division Website, “SDG Indicators: Metadata Repository,” (accessed February 2025), unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/

Target 16.1: Reduce Violence Everywhere

This target aims to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related mortality rates worldwide. The motivation to reduce direct violence, which includes war-related violence homicides, trafficking, extrajudicial killings, domestic abuse, exclusion, and torture,⁵⁰ arises from the recognition that these actions produce significant and lasting consequences, such as loss of life, economic harm, displacement, and ongoing insecurities and deprivations in everyday life.⁵¹ This section analyses relevant SDG indicators related to Target 16.1, especially those concerning conflict-related deaths and prevalence of all forms of violence.

⁵⁰ Council of Europe, “Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People: Peace and Violence,” (October 7, 2023).

⁵¹ World Bank Group, “Atlas of Sustainable Development Goals 2023: SDG16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions,” (2023).

On June 9, 2024, Uganda commemorated the 35th anniversary of Heroes Day under the theme, “Hail Our Legends: A Secure Uganda is Now a Reality.”⁵² This motto highlighted the current state of relative peace in the country, based on the lack of active warfare nationwide. This anniversary celebration acknowledged Uganda’s tumultuous and conflict-ridden history since 1962.⁵³ During the conflict with the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), violent death rates in northern Uganda were observed to be three times greater than those recorded in Iraq, averaging around 146 fatalities per week.⁵⁴ The current “state of peace” and reduction of macro-violence associated with armed groups such as the LRA and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) can be attributed, in part, to interventions by the Uganda People’s Defence Forces (UPDF). Surrounded by some of the most unstable nations in the world, including South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Uganda is relatively stable, though it faces challenges from the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.⁵⁵ In a 2023 report, Oxfam indicated that “there exists a ratio of at least one firearm for every five individuals within the Jie and Dodoth pastoralist communities.”⁵⁶ This underscores the significant influence of small arms on at-risk populations in conflict-affected regions, especially in Acholi and Karamoja, despite ongoing disarmament efforts and attempts to create a comprehensive national policy on firearms, ammunition, and explosives.

Similarly, intermittent ADF attacks continue to result in fatalities linked to conflict. As of June 2023, a total of 64 individuals had died because of assaults by the ADF in the conflict-affected areas of Kasese and Kamwenge in western Uganda. This figure includes 38 students, two tourists, and their guide.⁵⁷ Intermittent assaults lead to fatalities and cause emotional and physical harm, while also hindering post-war recovery and intensifying the unresolved justice needs of those impacted by past conflicts. The increasing prevalence of micro-level violence, including police brutality, torture, gender-based violence, and organized crime, indicates that Uganda is straying from the path toward sustainable peace.

Indicator 16.1.3 pertains to the “proportion of the population experiencing (a) physical violence, (b) psychological violence and/or (c) sexual violence within the preceding 12 months,” as specified in the SDG framework. The prevalence of gender-based violence and gun-related incidents (including violent crimes, attempted suicide, suicide, and unintentional death and injury) remains a substantial obstacle to the realization of SDG16+ in Uganda. In both urban and rural settings, individuals contend with a range of criminal activities, including petty theft and robbery, as well as more serious offenses such as armed violence and organized crime.⁵⁸ In regions affected by conflict, significant crime trends frequently rise from land disputes and the high incidence of domestic violence, both of which are intensified by factors including poverty, unemployment, and urbanization. Analysis of past VNRs reveals that this indicator has not been sufficiently addressed owing to data deficiencies.

Target 16.3: Rule of Law and Equal Access to Justice for All

Target 16.3 encourages countries to promote the rule of law domestically and globally and to ensure equal access to justice. The rule of law holds that all people and institutions and entities, both public and private, are accountable, equal before the law, and independent and adhere to in-

52 “UAE Prince to Receive Highest Honour on Heroes Day,” *New Vision*, June 8, 2024.

53 John Mary Matovu and Frances Stewart, “Uganda: The Social and Economic Costs of Conflict,” in *War and Underdevelopment*, eds. Frances Stewart and Valpy Fitzgerald (Oxford: Oxford University Press eBooks, 2000), 240-288.

54 Alina Labrada et al., CARE International, “New Report: Rate of Death in Northern Uganda is Three Times Higher than Iraq,” (March 2006).

55 Victor H. Mlambo et al., “Armed Conflict and the Increasing Use of Child Soldiers in the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan: Implications for Regional Security,” *Journal of Public Affairs* 19.2 (2019), e1896.

56 Bruno Ocaya and Darlington Lorika, Oxfam, “Conflict’s Children: The Human Cost of Small Arms in Kitgum and Kotido, Uganda,” (June 2023).

57 Alex Ashaba and Jerome Kule Bitswande, “Locals Blame Security Lapses for ADF Attacks,” *Monitor*, January 2, 2024.

58 Jamila Mulindwa, “Crime Trends in Uganda: Navigating Challenges Amidst Progress,” *NilePost*, March 12, 2024.

ternational human rights norms and standards.⁵⁹ It dictates that all people, including government officials, are bound by publicly known legal norms and processes. This comprises systems that ensure legal equality, prevent abuse of power, and improve access to quality justice. Uganda is a stable democracy that is improving its administration of justice and rule of law enforcement, but three core components remain under scrutiny: (1) standardized law enforcement for all individuals and institutions, (2) respect for human rights, and (3) government transparency and accountability. Indicators relating to this target show that the rule of law in Uganda is undermined by its current systems, processes, institutions, practices, and political norms. Access to justice is hampered by corruption, arbitrary arrests, detentions without trial, and judicial independence concerns.

The UN-commissioned “Handbook on Governance Statistics” considers the rule of law to refer to “the ability of people to defend and enforce their rights and obtain just resolution of justiciable problems in compliance with human rights standards; if necessary, through impartial formal or informal institutions of justice and with appropriate legal support.”⁶⁰ Access to appropriate justice for Ugandan victims of historical atrocities remains difficult. Victims of mass atrocities, such as those that occurred during the LRA war, have received little remedy for human rights abuses, especially for conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), since victims may not disclose their experience due to shame and fear of additional victimization. Despite the establishment of a Trust Fund for Victims, the International Criminal Court’s (ICC) reparations order is limited to victims of a specific perpetrator (Dominic Ongwen), thus excluding the majority of victims of the conflict. Similarly, any reparations emanating from the case of Thomas Kwoyelo before the International Crimes Division of the High Court of Uganda (ICD) would be limited to his victims. Uganda’s NTJP requires a reparations framework for Ugandan mass atrocity victims. The government has introduced electronic justice mechanisms, such as virtual court sessions, and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) measures, to speed up case disposal, trials, and case backlogs.⁶¹ However, Thomas Kwoyelo’s extended trials underscore the difficulty the ICD, police, and prisons face in providing effective and efficient judicial services for conflict {or international} crimes, thus affecting justice for victims of serious violations. In addition, human and material resource capacity concerns create severe justice administration deficiencies. The treatment of atrocity victims, particularly children born of war who need protection or are in trouble, remains a major issue in conflict-affected regions.

SDG Indicator 16.3.1 measures the percentage of people who reported violence to authorities or dispute resolution mechanisms in the past year. The World Justice Project’s Rule of Law Index ranked Uganda 125th out of 142 countries in 2023, indicating a slight gain from previous years.⁶² Uganda Law Society’s 28th “State of Rule of Law Report” attributes this gain to a reduction in court case backlog due to the creation of 18 new High Court circuits set up to improve access to judicial services, particularly in conflict-affected regions like Kasese and Kitgum.⁶³ For land-conflicted places like northern Uganda, this gain is crucial. The Uganda Police Annual Crime Report for 2023 showed a 1.5% drop in reported offenses, from 231,653 in 2022 to 228,074.⁶⁴ Domestic violence and land-related conflicts account for most unreported incidents. Domestic violence complaints dropped from 17,698 in 2022 to 14,681 in 2023. Many reasons contribute to the reduction, and over 80% of Ugandans believe the police are “very likely” (59%) or “somewhat likely” (25%) to treat gender-based violence incidents seriously.⁶⁵

59 UN, “What Is Rule of Law,” Website, <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/what-is-the-rule-of-law>

60 Praia City Group, “Handbook on Governance Statistics,” (2015).

61 Interview with a judicial official on June 7, 2024.

62 World Justice Project, “Rule of Law Index: Uganda,” (2023).

63 Uganda Law Society, *28th State of the Rule of Law in Uganda Quarterly Report, January to March 2024*, (April 2024).

64 Uganda Police Force, “Annual Crime Report 2023,” February 23, 2024.

65 Stevenson Ssevume Male et al., “Majority of Ugandans See Domestic Violence as a Private–Not Criminal–Matter,” *Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 593* (January 23, 2023).

Still, many women, especially women human rights defenders, report struggling to access justice.⁶⁶ Corruption in the police and insufficient funding also hinder their ability to provide remedies in conflict-affected regions. According to participants in the roundtable discussions, police sometimes fail to help or process cases when people cannot afford transport and related costs.

SDG Indicator 16.3.3 is the percentage of people who have used a formal or informal dispute resolution mechanism in the last two years, classified by type. A 2024 assessment of Uganda's justice needs found that 93% of those with at least one legal issue resolved their biggest one, up from 80% four years ago.⁶⁷ The Ugandan judiciary instituted a video conferencing facility to improve court procedures in response to demands for access to justice.⁶⁸ Where available, this e-justice innovation enables case adjudication without needing to transport inmates and detainees. Additionally, audio-visual technology now allows child sexual abuse victims to testify without fear of retribution.⁶⁹ This speeds up child proceedings and lessens the risk of additional traumatization of victims and witnesses in court. It also addresses geographical impediments to trials and in-person testimony, which have previously delayed justice. The introduction of an Electronic Criminal Records Management System reduced case backlog by 17.2% and lowered judicial costs. Electronic document submission by lawyers speeds up case management. Despite this, case backlog, prolonged pre-trial detention, personnel shortages, and inadequate legal services continue to plague the court system. For instance, the World Justice Project reports that there is one lawyer per 27,258 Ugandans.⁷⁰ Women and girls face several obstacles to justice, including low awareness of their rights and legal options, high legal service prices, poverty, prejudice, and insecurity.⁷¹ Though legal aid clinics, mobile call centers, and toll-free lines have improved, many victims and rural poor, especially in conflict-affected areas, still struggle to obtain justice.

ADR mechanisms are becoming more popular for dispute settlement. Mediation, arbitration, and negotiation efforts are being used to resolve disputes outside of court.⁷² In conflict-affected Uganda, especially northern Uganda, these methods have been useful for resolving land disputes without going to court. One study on traditional justice and truth telling indicated that informal justice methods resolve 80% of Ugandans' disputes.⁷³ People choose ADR mechanisms because they resolve disputes faster and reduce the emotional impact of lengthy court hearings.⁷⁴ ADR proceedings are efficient, creative, and cost-effective, especially for legal practitioners. The Acholi people of Uganda use traditional justice mechanisms like *nyono tong gweno* (stepping on the egg), *mato oput* (drinking the bitter root), and *gomo tong* (the bending of the spears) to reconcile and heal broken relationships.⁷⁵ Traditional practices enable apologies, forgiveness, and future collaboration agreements that court proceedings may not. These techniques are crucial for post-conflict social cohesion and case backlog reduction. At the March 2024 African Chief Justice Summit, the Speaker of Parliament pledged to increase judicial funding for ADR to reduce case backlog and promote social harmony.⁷⁶

66 Defend Defenders, "'To Them, We're Not Even Human:' Marginalised Human Rights Defenders in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania," (December 2018).

67 The Hague Institute for Innovation of Law, "Justice Needs and Satisfaction in Uganda 2024," (2024).

68 Judiciary of the Republic of Uganda, "CJ Launches Video Conferencing System to Luzira Prison," (April 2019).

69 Moses Sserwanga, UNICEF, "UNICEF Boosts Uganda's Justice System to Protect Victims, Survivors and Alleged Child Offenders," May 17, 2023.

70 UNDP, "Enhancing Access to Justice for Women and Girls, Through Technology," (March 6, 2023).

71 Legal Aid Service Providers' (LASP) Network, "Access to Justice for the Women: The Affordability of Access to Justice for Women in Uganda & the Plight of LASPs and Legal Fees in Case of Having to Pay Fees After Losing a Case," (November 26, 2015).

72 Stephen B. Goldberg et al., *Dispute Resolution: Negotiation, Mediation, Arbitration, and Other Processes*. (Aspen: Aspen Publishing, 2020).

73 Uganda Law Reform Commission, "Guidelines for Use of Informal Justice Systems in Administration of Justice."

74 Susan Blake et al., *A Practical Approach to Alternative Dispute Resolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

75 Cecily Rose and Francis Ssekandi, "The Pursuit of Transitional Justice and African Traditional Values: A Clash of Civilizations – The Case of Uganda," *Revista Internacional De Direitos Humanos*, 4.7(2007).

76 "Among Pledges More Funding for Alternative Dispute Resolution," *New Vision*, March 7, 2024.

SDG Indicator 16.6.2 measures the population's satisfaction with their most recent public service experience to help develop effective, accountable, open, and accessible institutions that are trusted by the public. According to the Ugandan National Governance, Peace, and Security Survey, 54% of respondents trusted public services, whereas 19% distrusted public institutions.⁷⁷ For the purposes of examining SDG16+, the parliament, police, and judiciary are considered in this paper to be the most relevant public services.

Parliament is tasked with mobilizing and providing resources to implement the SDGs.⁷⁸ Given their general proximity to constituents, members of parliament can be said to represent the SDGs in a way, although survey data indicates that only 47% of the public trusts them.⁷⁹ Uganda's 10th Parliament passed a resolution to strengthen their responsibilities,⁸⁰ integrating SDG oversight into lawmaking and evaluating the national budget's performance against SDG targets.⁸¹ In practice, parliament faces many obstacles to passing legislation to maintain the rule of law and guarantee equitable justice, including understaffing, especially of the Ugandan Parliamentary Forum on SDGs.⁸² The militarization of the development sector without parliamentary control is another issue. A recent Human Rights and Peace Center (HURIPEC) report shows that militarization has hurt institutionalism and the rule of law, compromising progress toward SDG16+.⁸³ According to the report, the trend has rendered parliament's military oversight role ineffectual, as evidenced by its inadequate monitoring of the budget and its implementation, military actions during election, and law enforcement support deployments.⁸⁴

Police should enforce laws, prevent crime, maintain public order, and safeguard lives and property.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, Uganda's police are often criticized for brutalizing its citizens instead. Since 2008, Ugandan security agents have killed over 100 individuals and injured, harassed, and abused many others, often during protests and, in recent history, amid COVID-19 restrictions.⁸⁶ The national media in Uganda report on frequent police repression of journalists, political activists, and political opponents. Recent studies link this trend to the militarization of the police, which has led to heightened aggression and violence in the police force.⁸⁷ Naturally, police brutality and violence are increasing public distrust of law enforcement.⁸⁸ Lack of police accountability for human rights abuses contributes to this issue. Uganda lacks an impartial supervisory body to investigate and punish acts of police brutality and wrongdoing. The latest Afrobarometer survey shows that 59% of Ugandans trust the police "just a little" or "not at all."⁸⁹ This tendency has persisted for two decades.

The Ugandan judiciary is supposed to safeguard fundamental rights and freedoms, helping achieve SDG16+. The system has been actively seeking to improve to better administer justice.⁹⁰

77 UBOS, "Report of the National Governance Peace and Security Survey 2017," (2017).

78 Republic of Uganda, "Coordination Framework."

79 UBOS, "Report of the National Governance Peace and Security Survey 2017."

80 Parliament of the Republic of Uganda, "Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Sustainable Development Goals (UPFSDGs)."

81 Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Parliamentary Engagement in National Development Plans in Uganda," (September 2022).

82 Ibid.

83 HURIPEC, "Guns, Bread and Butter: Militarization of Economic Sectors and Public Institutions in Uganda: A Socio-Legal Analysis," (May 31, 2024).

84 Ibid., p. 181.

85 Uganda Police Force, "About Uganda Police," Website, <https://upf.go.ug/history-of-upf/>

86 Ronald Kakumba Makanga and Matthias Krönke, "Brutality and Corruption Undermine Trust in Uganda's Police: Can Damage be Undone?" *Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 88* (August 2023).

87 "Human Rights: Study Questions Increased Military Role in Police Work," *The Independent Uganda*, October 12, 2023.

88 See Travis Curtice, "How Repression Affects Public Perceptions of Police: Evidence from a Natural Experiment in Uganda," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65.10(2021). See also Rebecca Tapscott, "Violence, Sovereignty, and the Uganda Police Force," in *Arbitrary States: Social Control and Modern Authoritarianism in Museveni's Uganda*, ed. Rebecca Tapscott, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

89 Makanga and Krönke, "Brutality and Corruption Undermine Trust in Uganda's Police."

90 Henry Peter Adonyo, Acting Chief Registrar, Judiciary of Uganda, "Structure and Functions of the Judiciary: A Paper Presented During the Induction of New Magistrates Grade One at Ridar Hotel, Seeta, Mukono on the 24th September 2012," (2012).

In particular, the ICD increasingly recognizes the importance of public access to information, victim participation, and witness protection in criminal cases. During Thomas Kwoyelo's trial in Gulu, the court collaborated with CSOs to stream trials, hold community information sessions, and conduct outreach.

Despite functional judicial advancements, only 47% of National Governance, Peace, and Security Survey respondents expressed trust in the judiciary system.⁹¹ Uganda's Constitutional Court has found that inadequate "judicial budget" funding, frequent usurpation of its functions, and the need for courts to solicit cash threaten the judiciary's independence.⁹² The same can be said for rearrests of court-released individuals and military court custody and trials of civilians against court orders.⁹³

Corruption is a final overall issue that is weakening institutions, the rule of law, democracy, and individuals' rights, freedoms, and quality of life.⁹⁴ Corruption undermines public faith in government institutions implementing the SDG16+ Agenda.

Target 16.9: Provide Universal Legal Identity for All, Including Birth Registration

The UN Legal Identity Agenda says that everyone has the right to birth registration and legal recognition. Article 6 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights and Article 7 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child establish and affirm this right. Thus, Target 16.9 is crucial to the 2030 Agenda's inclusion goals. It understands that approximately 1.1 billion people worldwide without legal identity or birth registration are disadvantaged and relegated to the informal economy, while being denied access to health care, education, financial resources, voting rights, and freedom of movement.

SDG Indicator 16.9.1 categorizes civil authority-registered births of children under five by age. In addition to the abovementioned Article 6 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18 of the Ugandan Constitution (1995) guarantees legal identity to all people.⁹⁵ In Uganda, the National Identification Registration Authority (NIRA) is mandated to register births and deaths and to maintain the National Identification Register. The Mobile Vital Record System has helped Uganda register 32.2% of under-fives.⁹⁶ But NIRA reports that only 2% of Uganda's 1.4 million births are recorded in their first year.⁹⁷ In many Ugandan communities, social identity is valued higher than legal identification. Unlike legal identification, social identity provides a vital sense of belonging, which, according to CECORE research, communities cherish emotionally, spiritually, and socially.⁹⁸ Their report shows that many children are born at home or with traditional birth attendants who are unaware of the benefits of a birth certificate, resulting in unregistered births.

Sexual violence is another factor that has a significant impact on birth registration. Thousands of women and girls were sexually assaulted in northern Uganda during the LRA conflict. Many gave birth to children born out of forced marriage and rape. These children are often referred to as children born of war. The Justice, Law, and Order Sector (JLOS) conducted a pilot study which estimated the number of children born of war to be 6,000.⁹⁹ Birth registration is low among these children for many reasons. Those born in LRA captivity were mostly from South

91 UBOS, "Report of the National Governance Peace and Security Survey 2017."

92 Carmel Rickard, "Judicial Independence Infringed When Uganda's Chief Justice has to 'Plead' for Funds - Constitutional Court," *AfricanLII*, March 20, 2020.

93 "HURIPEC, "Guns, Bread and Butter."

94 Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2021: Events of 2020," (2021).

95 UNDP, "Having a Legal Identity is Fundamental to Human Rights," (January 2023).

96 UBOS, "Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2016," (2016).

97 "Only 2% of Births in Uganda Are Registered," *New Vision*, May 9, 2023.

98 CECORE and Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), "SDG16+ in Uganda: Progress Towards Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies," (July 2020).

99 "Gov't to Register Children Born During LRA War," *New Vision*, May 12, 2019.

Sudan or DRC and often birthed outside formal medical institutions and their home countries. In these cases, birth registration was not available. Children without living parents may not know their lineage. These children are therefore undocumented and lack civil status registration, making it harder to verify their nationality and citizenship and raising their risk of statelessness.

The lack of birth certificates and civil registration documents has long-term implications for children born of war. It affects their access to health care, education, and other social benefits. The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) has undertaken years of research and advocacy to ensure children born of war in Uganda, receive legal and civil registration.¹⁰⁰ ICTJ held a stakeholder engagement session in April 2024 with NIRA leadership, security organs, cultural and religious institutions, civil society actors, victims' groups, and representatives for children born of war. The meeting developed clear protocols for collecting and verifying child and parent identity data. Participants agreed to improve coordination between police, UPDF, local leaders, and caretakers to raise public awareness and protect children. After the session, NIRA undertook a pilot registration of 33 children born of war and other returnees, who the Government of Uganda repatriated from the Central African Republic in 2023.

Target 5.1: End Discrimination Against Women and Girls

Gender bias weakens society and devalues everyone. Denying women equal rights prevents half the population from fully participating in life. Goal 5 aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by improving their access to justice, promoting legislation and policies that protect their rights and address violence against them, building institutional and professional capacities to uphold their rights, and creating an environment that empowers them.

SDG Indicator 5.1.1 evaluates legislative systems that promote, enforce, and monitor gender equality and non-discrimination. This indicator measures the extent to which nations have legal structures to promote gender equality in four areas: comprehensive legal frameworks and public life, violence against women, employment and economic benefits, and marriage and family dynamics.

Uganda has made significant progress in protecting women's human rights and fostering gender equality through legislative frameworks, laws, and programs. The Ugandan constitution guarantees gender equality and prohibits laws, customs, or traditions that degrade women. Article 21 discusses equality and the right to be free from discrimination, whereas Article 31 addresses affirmative action for marginalized groups, which is relevant to this target. International instruments like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) help women and girls resist discrimination by advocating for their rights.

Vision 2040 also emphasizes gender equality as a key component of socioeconomic transformation and highlights gender inequalities in access to and control over productive resources like land; wage employment in non-agricultural sectors; and household, community, and national decision making.¹⁰¹ Sexual violence and exploitation, unequal family labor, and unpaid care work remain major barriers to gender parity.¹⁰² The Equal Opportunities Commission's yearly "State of Equal Opportunities" reports include gender and equity compacts among Ugandan ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs). These reports help track Uganda's progress in improving vulnerable groups' livelihoods and well-being.¹⁰³ The Ministry of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development issues the Gender and Equity Compliance Certificate for MDAs

100 Virginie Ladisch, ICTJ, "From Rejection to Redress: Overcoming Legacies of Conflict Related Sexual Violence in Northern Uganda" (October 2015).

101 Government of Uganda, "Vision 2040."

102 Forum for Women in Democracy, "Gender Review of SDG Implementation," (August 2023).

103 UNDP Uganda Country Office, "Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2025," (2022).

after review by the Equal Opportunities Commission. As required by the constitution, 2005 Parliamentary Elections Act, and 1997 Local Government Act, women have made progress in national politics. As of 2024, data shows that women hold 46% of local government roles, 33% of parliamentary seats, and 43% of cabinet positions.¹⁰⁴ Vice President Jessica Alupo is Uganda's second female vice president. Notably, she is from Katakwi in the conflict-torn Teso subregion. Overall, Uganda's Global Gender Gap Index score rose to 0.724 in 2022, up from 0.717 in 2020.¹⁰⁵ Government sectors create three- to five-year investment plans, and MDAs must create gender policies and strategies for respective sectors. These policies encourage gender mainstreaming and private sector participation in SDG implementation. Uganda's Private Sector Foundation works with the government to promote innovation and IT solutions and finance important SDG activities to achieve gender equality.¹⁰⁶

Despite this progress, the reality of gender equality in Uganda is mixed. For example, while 84% of small-scale farmers (a group that contributes considerably to overall farm labor) are women,¹⁰⁷ only 28% of them own their land.¹⁰⁸ According to the 2020 Mastercard Global Index of Women Entrepreneurs, women own over 40% of Ugandan firms.¹⁰⁹ However, limited financial resources and the exclusion of women and girls from inheritance rights keep entrepreneurial activity low in impoverished and conflict-affected areas.¹¹⁰ The Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development promotes fair, sustainable, and stable governance infrastructure to improve well-being for all, per the National Policy on Elimination of Gender-Based Violence. And yet, women and girls who have experienced CRSV face identification, belonging, discrimination, and economic challenges. The indirect repercussions of gender-based violations on children result in stigma, social exclusion, and gendered discrimination, especially for girls.¹¹¹ Even with advocacy efforts, discrimination against women and girls still hinders their empowerment.

Target 5.2: End All Violence Against and Exploitation of Women and Girls

While intimate partner violence is an issue of utmost importance, given the focus on transitional justice, this section analyses SDG Indicator 5.2.2, which measures non-intimate partner violence against women. Overlapping insights with related indicators, such as 5.3.1 (women married before 15 and 18) and 5.3.2 (female genital mutilation/cutting), are also addressed.

One of Uganda's most pervasive, enduring, and damaging human rights issues is violence against women and girls, which, according to UN Women, can have fatal physical, sexual, and psychological effects.¹¹² The first standalone National Survey on Violence against Women and Girls in Uganda found that 95% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence.¹¹³

CRSV was widespread during the two-decade war with the LRA. The LRA, the National Resistance Army (NRA), and UPDF consistently targeted women, girls, men, and boys. CRSV

104 World Bank Group, "Gender Data Portal: Uganda," Website, <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/uganda>

105 Ibid.

106 Uganda Office of the Prime Minister, "Private Sector," Website, <https://sdgs.opm.go.ug/private-sector/>

107 Andrew Adem et al., "Women's Land Rights as a Pathway to Food Security in Uganda," *African Journal of Land Policy and Geospatial Sciences* 5.1 (2022).

108 GIZ and Uganda Investment Authority, "Gender Transformative Land Acquisition: A Guide for Communities and Investors," (February 2023).

109 Mastercard, "The Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs: How Targeted Support for Women-Led Business Can Unlock Sustainable Economic Growth," (March 2022).

110 Prudence Kemigisha, "Strengthening Women's Potentials and Capabilities: A Perceived Strategy to Narrow the Gender-Gap in Land Rights in South-Western Uganda," *Advances in Social Sciences and Management* 1.8 (2023).

111 Pupul Lama, "Gender in Conflict and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: An Ethnographic Study of Northern Uganda," *Refugee Research Online*, July 13, 2021.

112 UN Women, "What We Do: Ending Violence Against Women," Website, www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women.

113 Caroline Nakayiza, "Gender-Based Violence Ranks as Top Women's-Rights Issue that Ugandans Want Government and Society to Address," *Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 72* (April 4, 2024).

committed by the LRA often involved the kidnapping of women and girls, mostly aged 10–18, followed by forced marriage, rape, and forced pregnancy and childbirth. Sexual mutilation, genital torture, male castration, forced masturbation, and other terrible sexual abuses were committed against men and boys. LRA commanders forced abducted men and boys to sexually assault female prisoners. More than 13 years after the violations, survivors of CRSV in Uganda continue to live with the effects of these violations. In addition to physical and psychological trauma, survivors face lost livelihoods, societal rejection, stigmatization, broken family ties, and insufficient recognition of their experiences.¹¹⁴

Over two-thirds of women interviewed for a new study on the long-term impacts of CRSV still struggle with untreated sexually transmitted infections, anxiety, and despair.¹¹⁵ In 2022, the ICC convicted former LRA commander Dominic Ongwen for 19 counts of sexual and gender-based crimes in armed conflict, making a dent in impunity for conflict-related sexual abuse. LRA warlord Thomas Kwoyelo was also convicted on 10 sexual abuse counts by the ICD in 2024.

Domestic violence was ranked third in the Ugandan police's Annual Crime Report of 2023, after theft and assault. Domestic violence was recorded 14,681 times, mostly due to property disputes, failure to provide, drug and alcohol abuse, and infidelity.¹¹⁶ Conflict-affected regions had the highest numbers, such as North Kyoga with 1,538 cases and Rwenzori West with 1,101.¹¹⁷ Police have indicated plans "to investigate North Kyoga's increased crime rate."¹¹⁸ However, research shows that alcohol misuse, economic loss, and unaddressed trauma from war-related violence are major contributors to criminality in conflict-affected regions.¹¹⁹ This causes double victimization and re-traumatization, as one in three northern Ugandan women have undergone CRSV.

By 2023, just 10% (1,520) of domestic violence cases had been tried. Of these, 423 resulted in convictions, 25 in acquittals, 183 were dismissed, and 889 are pending. This data shows the overall lack of accountability for this crime, especially considering the 15,184 domestic violence victims recorded. The group includes 3,243 male adults, 10,792 female adults, 505 male juveniles, and 644 female juveniles.¹²⁰ Lack of accountability contributes to overall impunity.

Government and non-state actors are working to improve access to justice and prevention of violence, as well as to increase budgets and data collection, management, and dissemination on the issue. Yet still, nearly half of women have some issue in their own family.¹²¹ Abduction stigma affects children born in captivity and makes health care difficult to get and afford.¹²² The government operates 14 women's protection centers or shelters nationwide to provide victim rehabilitation and legal aid.¹²³ However, fear of disclosure and difficulty finding providers remain hurdles to getting help.

Abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and other forms of violence against women and girls continue, with over 1 million Ugandan women experiencing sexual violence annually.¹²⁴ The Ugandan

114 Mahlet A. Woldetsadik et al., "The Enduring Consequences of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: A Qualitative Study of Women Survivors in Northern Uganda," *Conflict and Health* 16.1 (April 11, 2022).

115 Mariane Akumu et al., ICTJ, WAN, and Global Survivors' Fund, "We Cannot Survive on Hope and Promises Alone: Uganda Study on Opportunities for Reparations for Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence," (2022).

116 Uganda Police Force, "Annual Crime Report 2023," (2023).

117 Ibid.

118 Birungi Kezia, "Police to Probe Increased Crime Rate in North Kyoga Region," *Nexus Media*, February 23, 2024.

119 Padmini Iyer and Elizabeth Stites, "Trauma, Loss and Other Psychosocial Drivers of Excessive Alcohol Consumption in Karamoja, Uganda," *Pastoralism* 11.1 (November 24, 2021).

120 Uganda Police Force, "Annual Crime Report 2023."

121 Jen Ross, "Uganda's Violence Against Women Survey Heralds Legislative and Policy Changes," *UN Women*, November 22, 2022.

122 Woldetsadik et al., "The Enduring Consequences of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence."

123 UNDP, "Amudat GBV Shelter Protecting Women and Girls," (August 28, 2023).

124 Rutgers International, "Uganda Takes Step Towards Tackling Gender-Based Violence with Nationwide Support Centers," (November 20, 2023).

legal aid organization CEHURD attributes the country's high gender-based violence rate to "myths, behaviors, and norms." These conditions contribute to severe gender-based violence, including female genital mutilation.¹²⁵ As social media and smartphone usage rises, more women are also reporting cyber-bullying and abuse, and some observers worry that violence against women is becoming more sophisticated.¹²⁶ Domestic violence and its effects cost the nation 1.8 billion shillings in health care, according to the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development.¹²⁷ Police and local authorities spend 19.5 billion and 12.7 billion shillings (respectively) on the same issue.

Target 10.1: Reduced Inequalities

SDG 10 aims to reduce inequality within and among countries. The UN defined 10 targets and 14 indicators for this goal. Targets 10.1.1 (income growth inequalities), 10.3.1 (eliminating discriminatory practices), and 10.7.4 (refugee population) are relevant for this discussion given their interconnectedness to SDG16 and the underlying potential for improving peace in conflict-affected areas.

Uganda's desire to eradicate inequality by ensuring that all regions benefit from national economic growth is espoused in its Vision 2040. During its second VNR reporting, the government committed to invest in regional development to accelerate equitable regional economic growth and development, as well as support social protection.¹²⁸ Box 3 outlines some of these commitments.

Key Government Initiatives on Inclusive Development and Reduced Inequalities

- The Parish Development Model is a key government initiative to uplift the incomes of subsistence households, which account for about 39% of the population.
- Social protection programmes, such as the Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE), target elderly persons.
- The Youth Livelihood Programme and Uganda Women Entrepreneur Programme target youth and women, respectively, to boost their economic activities.
- There is the Special Grant for Persons with Disabilities to boost incomes and social support for persons with disabilities.
- The Government of Uganda, through the Uganda Development Bank, is providing low interest loans to small and medium enterprises to enhance their productivity and increase their incomes.
- Several policies and pieces of legislations have been developed to reduce inequalities, such as the Youth Policy, Gender Policy, labor laws, and others.
- Affirmative initiatives like the Development Initiative for Northern Uganda, the Peace Recovery and Development Plan 3 for Northern Uganda, and the third Karamoja Integrated Development Plan help reduce regional inequalities.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Interview with a civil society practitioner on June 13, 2024.

¹²⁷ "Domestic Violence Cases Increased Slightly in 2022—Report," *New Vision*, February 25, 2023.

¹²⁸ National Development Planning Commission, "Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

Uganda's economic growth has accelerated slightly despite external shocks. According to the World Bank, the "Ugandan economy grew at 4.6% during FY22, faster than had been anticipated due to an uptick in activity after the economy reopened in January 2022."¹²⁹

Despite this impressive growth rate, a lack of inclusive economic policies and opportunities contributes to income inequality in Uganda.¹³⁰ Even though the economy is projected to grow beyond 5% due to developments in the oil sector, rising disparities in income and wealth persist.¹³¹ An African Development Bank assessment pointed out that "Uganda has the third highest level of inequality in East Africa," with "over 16.36 million out of about 45 million Ugandans being impoverished."¹³² These disparities are manifest in unequal access to basic needs such as education, food, health care, housing, and energy. According to a 2022 Ugandan Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) report, poverty is most prevalent in the northern and eastern regions. The proportion of people who are chronically poor is 15.1% in the northern region and 7.1% in the eastern region. Meanwhile, in the central and western regions, 94.5 and 77.7%, respectively, have never been poor.¹³³ Civil society consultations reveal that despite numerous government and non-governmental efforts to promote economic growth, reform, and poverty alleviation, income inequality and poverty remain prevalent. This is especially true in conflict-affected areas of Uganda where the majority of marginalized and disadvantaged population groups live.¹³⁴ In addition, the areas most severely affected by conflict in north and northeastern Uganda have the highest monetary (58%) and multidimensional (71%) child poverty rates, while the areas that were largely unaffected by conflict have the lowest child poverty rates.¹³⁵ This trend of persistent poverty has continued, with recent statistics noting that only 5% of Uganda's working population contributes to at least one pension scheme, and only 4.5% of the population has access to some form of social protection.¹³⁶ Research has shown that misuse of public resources, elite control of economic opportunities, and horizontal inequalities in a country's economic base can all fuel grievances and even cause violent conflict to break out.¹³⁷ Uganda's conflict-affected areas are thus at risk of a relapse, thereby slowing peace recovery and even triggering internal displacement and migration in search of better economic opportunities.

Concerning forced migration, specifically the refugee population, Uganda hosts nearly 1.7 million refugees and asylum-seekers, with about 54% coming from neighboring South Sudan (Figure 1).¹³⁸ DRC is the second most common origin country, with approximately 544,889 Congolese citizens living in Uganda at the end of 2024, according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). This makes Uganda the largest host of refugees in Africa, with most of these forcibly displaced individuals having settled in conflict-affected areas of northern Uganda.¹³⁹ Roundtable discussions touched on some of the implications of this to peace, justice, and inclusion in the country, including the proliferation of small arms and a risk of disease out-

129 World Bank Group, "Where We Work: Uganda," Website, www.worldbank.org/en/country/uganda/overview

130 Nangayi Guyson, "Why Has Poverty and Income Inequality in Uganda Remained So High?" *Development Aid*, October 11, 2023.

131 African Development Bank Group, "African Economic Outlook 2023: Mobilizing Private Sector Financing for Climate and Green Growth in Africa," (2023).

132 Guyson, "Why Has Poverty and Income Inequality in Uganda Remained So High?"

133 UBOS, "2022 Statistical Abstract," (2022), 57.

134 Roundtable discussion on SDG16+ held in Kampala on June 5, 2024.

135 UBOS, "Multidimensional Child Poverty in Uganda - 2024: Volume I Key Summary Report," (2024).

136 Freddie Ssengooba, Suzanne N. Kiwanuka, Elizeus Rutebemberwa, and Elizabeth Ekirapa-Kiracho (eds.), *Universal Health Coverage in Uganda: Looking Back and Forward to Speed Up the Progress* (Kampala: Makerere University, 2018).

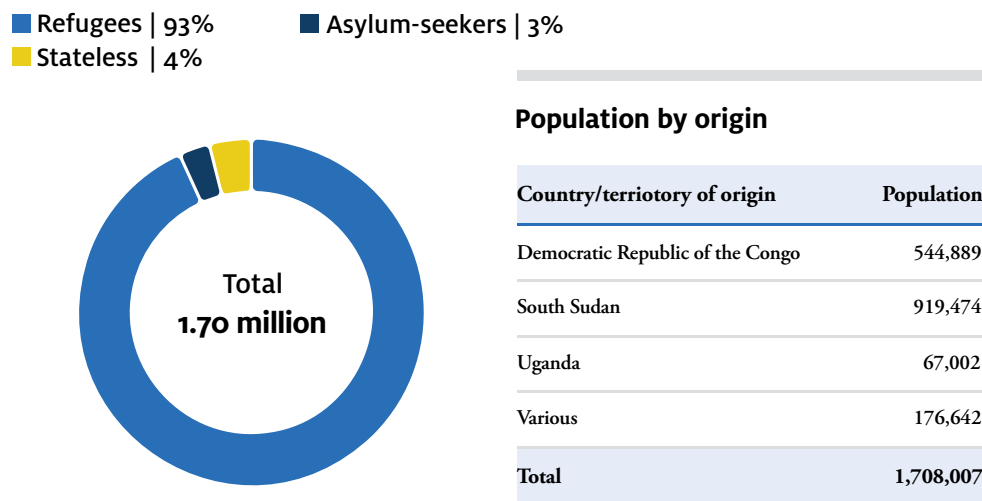
137 Jessica Banfield, International Alert, "Building a Peace Economy in Northern Uganda-Conflict-sensitive Approaches to Recovery and Growth," *Investing in Peace* 1 (September 2008).

138 UNHCR, "Where We Work: Uganda," Website, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/operations/uganda>.

139 Boniface Ogola, "Security Implications of Hosting Refugees: A Case of Uganda," PhD dissertation, Makerere University, 2022.

breaks and epidemics which hinder movement and access to services.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, the host communities in which these refugees are settled continue to live with untreated war-related harms. The impact of the lack of a comprehensive transitional justice process on prospects of reconciliation between communities in the north and their ability to cope with the influx of refugees requires further exploration if they are to meaningfully participate in the implementation of the SDGs.

Figure 1: Proportion of the Refugee Population by Country of Origin



Source: UNHCR Uganda Country Page (accessed February 2025), www.unhcr.org/where-we-work/countries/uganda

While UNHCR has ended its assistance to nearly 2 million internally displaced people in Uganda because the vast majority have returned home, internal displacement continues partly due to climate change.¹⁴¹ According to local authorities, more than 100 households were internally displaced in the Pader district due to a landslide on August 17, 2024.¹⁴² The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre reveals that there have been 656,000 internal displacements in 210 disaster events reported in Uganda from 2008 to 2023.¹⁴³ This number does not include a series of displacements arising from numerous land disputes, such as that of Apaa in the Amuru district. Therefore, the impact of internal displacement on the realization of SDG16+ cannot be underestimated.

Civil Society and SDG16+ Implementation

CSOs have played a critical role in the implementation of the SDG16+ Agenda in Uganda. This engagement has taken many forms, from examining the country's current level of commitment and performance to directly facilitating SDG16+ implementation and fostering accountability. UNNGOF hosts the 2030 Agenda Reference Group, which has over 650 members and

¹⁴⁰ Roundtable discussion on SDG16+ held in Kampala on June 5, 2024.

¹⁴¹ William Spindler, UNHCR, "UNHCR Closes Chapter on Uganda's Internally Displaced People," (January 6, 2012).

¹⁴² Tobbias Jolly Owiny, "Pader Mudslide Displaces Scores of Residents," *Monitor*, August 18, 2024.

¹⁴³ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, "Uganda," Website, www.internal-displacement.org/countries/uganda/

brings together women, youth, persons with disabilities, faith-based organizations, and cultural organizations committed to advancing CSO engagement on the SDGs.¹⁴⁴ In addition, CSOs have collaborated with the media to educate and promote awareness of SDG16+ issues among the public in Uganda. Organizations such as CECORE have produced spotlight reports on SDG16+ implementation, while organizations like ICTJ, Avocats Sans Frontières, and Refugee Law Project (among others) have been involved in the implementation of SDG16+ in Uganda.¹⁴⁵ For example, several organizations continue to build awareness of the SDG16+ Agenda—and the rest of the SDGs—and, as such, have been able to influence people’s attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs toward peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. Awareness is being created through campaigns, dialogues, and social media engagement.¹⁴⁶ CSOs were the first stakeholders to work on a localization process for SDGs in Uganda by initiating a local “leave no one behind” campaign dubbed *Tondeka Mabega*.¹⁴⁷ This campaign built momentum for all citizens across Uganda to participate in the implementation and achievement of the SDG16+ Agenda, even in conflict-affected areas.

UNNGOF is the primary organization linking civil society with the government-led SDG national taskforce, helping to bridge the coordination gap.¹⁴⁸ Consequently, civil society participation in the mainstreaming of SDG16+ into national and sub-national development plans has been evident. Some CSOs have established partnerships with government agencies and actively engaged in legal reforms, thus creating an enabling environment that supports the attainment of various SDG16+ targets. For instance, Chapter Four Uganda partnered with a member of parliament to highlight concerns over the controversial anti-homosexuality bill and simultaneously work with various actors to repeal the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act, the 2013 Public Order Management Act, and the NGO Act.¹⁴⁹ According to participants of the roundtable meeting, these discriminatory laws curtail civil liberties and undermine the gains already made toward the SDG16+ Agenda.¹⁵⁰ Restrictive legislation, such as the NGO Act (2016), stifles civil society operations and their contributions to the SDG16+ Agenda. For instance, authorities in Uganda suspended more than 50 civic groups, including the leading donor Democratic Governance Facility, for allegedly not complying with regulations.¹⁵¹ This dealt a blow to hundreds of thousands of people, including many war-affected victim beneficiaries in conflict-affected areas like the northern, Karamoja, and Rwenzori regions.

Despite these challenges, the combined efforts of civil society actors have resulted in the domestication of regional and international treaties and protocols that mandate the eradication of violence against women and girls, among other topics. Also, the enactment of laws and policies against gender-based violence, for example the Domestic Violence Act and the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence Policy for Uganda, and the establishment of the Child and Family Protection Unit in the Uganda Police, have very much been a result of CSO advocacy and engagement.

144 UNNGOF, “About UNNGOF,” Website, <https://ngoforum.or.ug/who-we-are/about-unngof/>

145 CECORE and GPPAC, “SDG16+ in Uganda.”

146 UNNGOF, “Civil Society Act toward Effective Implementation of SDGs in Uganda,” (May 3, 2017).

147 Interview with an official from Uganda National NGO Forum on May 24, 2024.

148 CECORE and GPPAC, “SDG16+ in Uganda.”

149 Deo Walusimbi, Unwanted Witness, “Chapter Four Partner with an MP to Highlight Illegality of the Controversial Uganda’s Anti-Homosexuality Bill,” (June 26, 2019).

150 Roundtable discussion on SDG16+ held in Kampala on June 5, 2024.

151 “Uganda Suspends More Than 50 Rights Groups, Citing Non-Compliance,” *Al Jazeera*, August 20, 2021.

Key Challenges in SDG16+ Implementation

Despite progress made on various SDG16+ targets, a series of challenges persist. The following are some of the outstanding obstacles impacting the SDG16+ Agenda:

Data gaps: Data and statistics required to adequately measure progress on SDG16+ indicators remain limited. The UN has highlighted the need for Uganda to “address key issues of disaggregation, proxies and non-availability of data for the SDG indicators.”¹⁵² These inadequacies inhibit proper analysis of trends, prevalence, and dynamics, for example of gender-based violence and land conflicts in conflict-affected areas. The main source of data is UBOS, yet it continues to suffer from inadequate funding, which is needed to generate timely, authentic, and accessible data.¹⁵³ Even still, such data would not necessarily adequately capture challenges that impact the data gap, such as, for instance, the low level of reporting of gender-based violence due to issues like cultural practices or challenges in accessing police stations. Although Uganda adopted the Citizen-Generated Data toolkit to aid its reporting on gender data and efficiency, its slow implementation remains a significant challenge impacting Uganda’s ability to inform evidence-based policy and gender programming.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, there has not been any deliberate effort to establish data that reflects the impact of conflict on achieving SDG16+ targets. For example, when assessing access to justice, there is no mention of the significant justice challenges faced by victims of war.

Emerging crimes and violence: Patterns of cyclical violence arising from domestic violence and organized crime threaten Uganda’s development aspirations and its commitment to achieving the SDG16+ Agenda. Besides being situated within a fragile, conflict-prone region, Uganda continues to grapple with cycles of serious, multiple, and complex conflicts. These situations arise from negative past experiences, such as ethnic tensions, and emerging issues, like land conflicts, and are often accompanied by gross human rights violations (as seen in Apaa in northern Uganda).¹⁵⁵

Legacies of CRSV: While ongoing and past serious human rights violations present immense obstacles to the advancement of the 2030 Agenda at the individual, societal, and institutional levels, the long-term effects of wartime sexual violence on survivors and their families living in post-conflict areas remains a critical challenge.¹⁵⁶ In addition, lack of significant measures of accountability, truth seeking, or acknowledgment by the state have occasioned transgenerational trauma, thus complicating recovery.

Disenfranchisement and exclusion of youth: While youth have had some involvement in the execution of the SDG16+ Agenda, it has been limited. High youth unemployment and growing wealth disparities all contribute to a tense environment that makes progress toward SDG16+ challenging. According to a key informant interviewee: “It is very unsafe for one to be rich in Uganda. Because the poor don’t sleep because they are hungry while the rich do not sleep because the poor are awake.”¹⁵⁷ He mentioned that unemployment is just one of many variables that lead to violent conflicts. Other factors include social exclusion, political intolerance, cattle rustling, and disenfranchisement in war-affected districts in the north and Karamoja.

¹⁵² UBOS, Government of Uganda, and UN Uganda, “Addressing Gaps in Sustainable Development Goals Data and Statistics in Uganda.”

¹⁵³ Interview with SDG Secretariate, Office of the Prime Minister on June 6, 2024.

¹⁵⁴ UBOS, “Citizen Generated Data Toolkit,” (2020).

¹⁵⁵ Matthew I. Mitchell, “Indigenous Land Rights and Contentious Politics in Africa: The Case of Uganda.” *Ethnopolitics* 22.3 (2022).

¹⁵⁶ Marianne Akumu, ICTJ, “Breaking the Cycle of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Uganda,” (July 5, 2023).

¹⁵⁷ Interview with a CSO member on May 24, 2024.

Low awareness: Regrettably, the level of awareness of the SDGs—and SDG16 in particular—remains low, especially at grassroots and community levels.¹⁵⁸ Communities still do not understand the SDGs and how they relate to their everyday lives. This affects citizens’ participation and ownership of the SDG16+ Agenda.¹⁵⁹ One interviewee said, “Some people perceive SDGs as a project coming from the government, UN, and other donors which has not yet reached them. They are not aware that they contribute to SDG16 even when they are doing peace-building work.”¹⁶⁰

Regarding localization and popularization of the SDGs, Uganda designated October as SDG Awareness Month in an effort to increase people’s knowledge and understanding of the 17 SDGs.¹⁶¹ During the SDG16+ consultative meeting organized by ICTJ, one of the participants noted, “When SDGs were adopted in 2015, few people knew about them, but at least many now know about SDGs midway through its implementation. This has inspired consciousness of individual actions, and many behavioral changes are taking place.”¹⁶²

Besides deepening localization, popularization initiatives foster stronger partnerships, coordination, and collaboration, all of which are needed to achieve the SDG16+ Agenda.

Legislative gaps: There are still gaps in existing laws—such as the Domestic Violence Act of 2010, the Penal Code (Amendment) Act of 2007, the Sexual Offences Bill, and the Marriage Bill—that are crucial for dealing with aspects of violence against women. For instance, these laws do not criminalize acts of marital rape,¹⁶³ though the Domestic Violence Act does consider cohabiting partners in its scope.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, the 2004 amendment to the Land Act of 1998 does not consider the co-ownership of land between spouses or even address the inheritance rights of widows to their husband’s land.¹⁶⁵ The absence of a substantive transitional justice law impacts the realization of reparations for war-affected victims, as well as management of victim expectations. Additionally, the delay in processing of other relevant bills, such as the Peace Policy, Witness Protection Bill, Sexual Offences Bill, and the Legal Aid Bill, all create a gap in the full realization of peace, justice, and inclusion. Regarding why many of these bills have lagged for a long time, one interviewee said, “Any bill, legislation, or court case that; (1) is not in the interest of the state, (2) is seeking to balance power or take some control away from the ruling party, or (3) seeks to improve accountability, is often not prioritized.”¹⁶⁶

As an example, the draft peace policy has yet to be passed into law since 2005 when it was first introduced. This has affected the implementation of peacebuilding mechanisms. In addition, the transitional justice policy that was passed in 2019 is yet to be effectively implemented, pending the enactment of the transitional justice law. This confirms that political support of a bill sometimes determines how long it will take before as-sent, which in turn suggests that some pieces of SDG16+-relevant legislation lack political support.¹⁶⁷

158 GIZ and TAP Network, “SDG16 in VNRs and Spotlight Reports: Reporting on Progress, Reflecting on Inclusive Accountability Measures and Recommendations for Going Ahead,” (2020), 33.

159 Roundtable discussion on SDG16+ held in Kampala on June 5, 2024.

160 Interview with a CSO member on May 24, 2024.

161 Robert Lwasa, Office of the Prime Minister of Uganda, “October, SDGs Awareness Month,” October 6, 2021.

162 Roundtable discussion on SDG16+ held in Kampala on June 5, 2024.

163 Cornell University Legal Information Institute, “Uganda,” Website, www.law.cornell.edu/gender-justice/location/uganda

164 Atuki Turner, “Not Recognising Cohabitation Discriminates Against Women Facing GBV,” *New Vision*, February 15, 2022.

165 Deogratias Acidri, “Women’s Rights to Land Ownership in Uganda: Policy and Practice,” *Critical Social Thinking* 6 (2014).

166 Interview with an official from UNNGOF on May 24, 2024.

167 Winnie Watera, Parliament Watch, “Ever, Won-der Why Bills Take Long Be-fore As-sent? Here Is Why.”

Weak institutions and corruption: Certain institutions, notably parliament and the judiciary, continue to exhibit weakness and corruption, obstructing the attainment of SDG16+ in conflict-affected areas. Most neo-patrimonial systems thrive on corruption. A prominent journalist once observed that corruption is the glue that holds the government together and that without it, it would crumble.¹⁶⁸ According to one respondent for this study, “Corruption is even legislated and bills are passed with corruption.”¹⁶⁹ He added that the “cost of a pen in the Ministry of Gender can be valued at 500 shillings, yet the same pen in parliament is valued at 1,000 shillings, and at State House, 5,000 shillings. Thus, that is a clear example of budgeted corruption.” Meanwhile, citizens, particularly in conflict-affected areas, are detached from issues of corruption. One interviewee touched on this: “When one is not doing well economically, physically, and psychologically, they cannot engage in the fight against corruption. Because, between looking for food and demanding accountability, which one do you go with?”¹⁷⁰

Funding gap: Even though the security sector in Uganda receives the lion’s share of the national budget, this does not translate into spending for peace infrastructure. For example, while there is a Conflict Early Warning and Early Response mechanism in place, it continues to receive inadequate funding and is unable to perform its intended function.¹⁷¹ Meanwhile, gender-explicit allocations continue to be restricted, despite the fact that both the NDP III and the Public Finance Management Act 2015 include provisions for gender-based budgeting across the various programs.¹⁷² Notwithstanding the increased demand for gender-responsive programming and accountability for CRSV in areas that are affected by conflict, allocations to gender continue to constitute a negligible portion of the national budget.

Negative cultural practices: As a predominantly patriarchal country, deep-rooted cultural and social norms result in persistent bias against women and girls. Harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation, early marriages of girls below the age of 18, and exclusion of women from inheritance, are even worse in conflict-affected areas like Karamoja where access to justice remains a challenge.¹⁷³ These harmful practices undermine the realization of SDG16+, particularly the SDG 5 targets.

Political representation: Despite affirmative action measures, women still face underrepresentation in politics, especially at the local government level. According to an Economic Policy Research Centre report, women constitute only about 46% of total elected representatives in local governments.¹⁷⁴ This contributes to the gender disparity in political representation, which is also exacerbated by high levels of illiteracy in conflict-affected areas, where many missed out on education opportunities due to conflict.

168 Andrew M. Mwenda, “The Political Value of Corruption,” *The Independent Uganda*, January 6, 2012.

169 Interview with an official from UNNGOF on May 24, 2024.

170 Interview with a CSO member on May 24, 2024.

171 Uganda Ministry of Internal Affairs, “National Focal Point,” Website, <https://mia.go.ug/departments/national-focal-point>

172 Budget Monitoring and Accountability Unit, Government of Uganda, “Gender and Equity Planning and Budgeting in Uganda: Education Sub-Programme Training Guide,” (April 2022).

173 OHCHR, “Fact Sheet No. 23, Harmful Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children.”

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Conclusions and Recommendations

An analysis of the six SDG16+ targets related to transitional justice goals like peace, justice, and rule of law show the agenda's impact thus far in conflict-affected areas in Uganda. Relevant factors include peace recovery, land and reintegration issues, accountability, reparations, and justice for victims (including birth registration for children born of war), as well as enduring legacies of sexual and gender-based violence. The analysis revealed that levels of achievement of SDG16+ targets vary. While there has been some progress in certain areas, a series of obstacles accounts for decline and stagnation in others. For instance, conflict-affected areas continue to grapple with a complex tapestry of crime trends and violent conflicts, which pose significant challenges to healing and reintegration, and consequently, the SDG16+ Agenda. The fear and insecurity caused by criminal gangs continue to limit people from enjoying the prevailing relative peace. Furthermore, the militarization of the police is negatively affecting peace, human rights, rule of law, and the realization of SDG16+ in Uganda. Though Uganda boasts of good laws and policies, they are still not sufficient to make meaningful inroads from a legal and policy perspective. For instance, compensation for war-affected victims and management of victim expectations have not been realized, partly due to the lack of a substantive transitional justice law. As the findings in this paper have revealed, victims remain largely excluded from the implementation of the SDG16+ Agenda. On the other hand, the use of ADR mechanisms in Uganda has boosted access to justice and has proved useful to bring justice closer to people in conflict-affected areas.

In conclusion, while some institutions, such as parliament and the judiciary, appear strong, the majority remain weak and suffer from political interference. These structures of policymaking and implementation are further weakened by corruption. This continues to undermine public confidence, leading to loss of public trust and the deterioration of access to justice and the rule of law. As assessed through a transitional justice lens, the SDG16+ Agenda should be given greater priority and more attention in the coming years to avoid stagnation, since it is a key enabler of and pre-requisite for the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The following are the thematic recommendations resulting from this paper:

Addressing Violence, Preventing Conflicts, and Sustaining Peace

Strengthen peace and conflict prevention: In collaboration with CSOs, the government should strengthen infrastructures for peace, enhance conflict early warning systems, and promote ADR mechanisms, especially at the community level through entities like the Local Council Courts. This can be done through capacity-building training programs.

Conflict-sensitive and community policing: Ugandan police should scale up its community policing program with a Do No Harm principle in mind, especially in conflict-affected areas. This would go a long way in preventing violent acts and enhancing public confidence in reporting sensitive cases, such as instances of CRSV.

Controlling arms flow: The government should strengthen the implementation of existing laws regulating arms flow, with particular attention to the prevention of possible rearmament of communities in the Karamoja region. This should include disarmament campaigns to transform the attitudes of local communities toward guns, control of the proliferation of arms through porous borders, and advocacy for a harmonized regional disarmament approach with Intergovernmental Authority on Development countries (especially Kenya and South Sudan).

Improving data collection: The government should embrace citizen-generated data as a credible source of determining the progress and barriers to attaining SDG targets. This is in addition to ensuring that there are data sets and indicators that measure the progress of SDGs in conflict-affected areas, considering the unique justice challenges they face. For instance, there is a need for better CRSV data and gender monitoring indicators for assessing progress with gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting in conflict-affected areas. There should be coordination between the government and CSOs to ensure that data collected is available to all the relevant MDAs to fast track the implementation of SDG16+.

Victim participation in SDG implementation: The government and CSOs should ensure that victims and survivors in conflict-affected areas are part of the design and implementation of SDG interventions and are not excluded because of top-down approaches that inhibit their meaningful participation.

Enhancing SDG localization: Localization presents a significant opportunity to invest in local organizations and communities, fostering robust institutions that can uphold justice for all and maintain the rule of law. This approach emphasizes the importance of victims' rights, the necessity of compensation, and the need for accountability. CSOs should enhance SDG localization by completing the localization guide that is currently being drafted by CECORE and the Office of the Prime Minister. In addition, efforts should be made to popularize the use of SDG localization guidelines at the grassroots level and within local government structures once developed.

Closing the Justice Gap

Enhancing access to justice: For victims of atrocities and human rights violations perpetrated during armed conflict, access to justice includes processes that deliver reparations, provide acknowledgment, and prevent future violations. This includes increasing agency, empowerment, social trust, and inclusion and addressing and transforming the structural causes or drivers of serious violations. For example, collaborations between CSOs and the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs could promote access to justice by enhancing the capacities of both formal and informal redress mechanisms in ADR approaches to handling conflict. Actors targeted should include the police, magistrate courts, local councils, and traditional leaders.

Promoting accountability for war crimes: The ICD should be empowered and adequately resourced to facilitate speedy trials in relation to past human rights violations. Moreover, the ICD should also be availed with an enabling legal and institutional framework for the effective investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of international crimes. This includes frameworks

for effective victim participation, witness protection, outreach, and effective investigations. This should be coupled with adequate and effective training of judicial officials.

Civil registration of victims and survivors: Ensuring the rights of victims requires a strategic approach. The government, via the NIRA, ought to adopt victim- and trauma-informed methods for civil registration in post-conflict regions that have a significant population of children born of war. This will help mitigate stigma and prevent re-traumatization. Enhancing birth registration activities can help mitigate some of the challenges faced by these children due to the absence of official documentation, particularly in accessing essential services such as health care and education.

Addressing the policy gap: The government should strengthen the implementation of existing legal frameworks on peacebuilding and access to justice. For example, the NTJP, which was passed in 2019, has seen only limited implementation. Parliament should also finalize the National Peace Policy and fast track the passing of other relevant SDG16+ laws and policies. These include the National Legal Aid Bill, Witness Protection Bill, Transitional Justice Bill, National Peace Policy, and Sexual Offences Bill, among others.

Toward Gender Equality

Documentation and empowerment of victims/survivors: Government should collaborate with CSOs to ensure that experiences of sexual and gender-based violence, including CRSV, are documented and perpetrators are held accountable. In addition, creating safe spaces and peer-support networks for survivors can help them to cope, motivate disclosure, and encourage survivor-led activism, which can lead to the transformation of harmful cultural practices.

Address harmful socio-cultural norms and stereotypes: Government should collaborate with CSOs and cultural and religious institutions to address harmful socio-cultural norms and practices that perpetuate discrimination and violence against women and girls and infringe on their human rights.

Build local capacities: CSOs and donors should engage with and develop the capacities of local government officers on gender mainstreaming in SDG implementation. Community Development Officers and local council officials, who are key players in the implementation of SDG16+ in communities, currently lack knowledge and skills on how to implement the targets.

Harness digitization for inclusion: The government and CSOs should harness the digital solutions emerging in this fourth industrial revolution era, given that digitization provides opportunities for women and girls to thrive. There is a need to bridge the gender digital divide through skill-building, data, and access to equipment to enable women to harness technology to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

Gender-responsive data ecosystems: The government should collaborate with CSOs to build and sustain a strong data ecosystem of connected data sources, applications, and tools that can enable responsible organizations to collect, analyze, and share reliable and disaggregated data in a timely manner. This could, for example, help to assess the intersectionality of gender with poverty and access to justice. Expanding the breadth and frequency of data collection by utilizing existing tools, frameworks, and methods is crucial for research and effective programming since data helps actors identify and work against factors of exclusion.

Reducing Inequalities

To strengthen economic prospects for victims, the government must increase recovery initiatives like the PRDP that target conflict-affected regions. It is critical to customize development programs like the Parish Development Model to the individual requirements of victims and survivors, thereby increasing their household incomes. Similarly, social protection initiatives like SAGE should prioritize victims and survivors in conflict-affected regions. The Youth Livelihood Programme, the Uganda Women Entrepreneur Programme, and the affirmative action program for persons with disabilities should all promote similar ideas.

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