

Researching livelihoods and
services affected by conflict

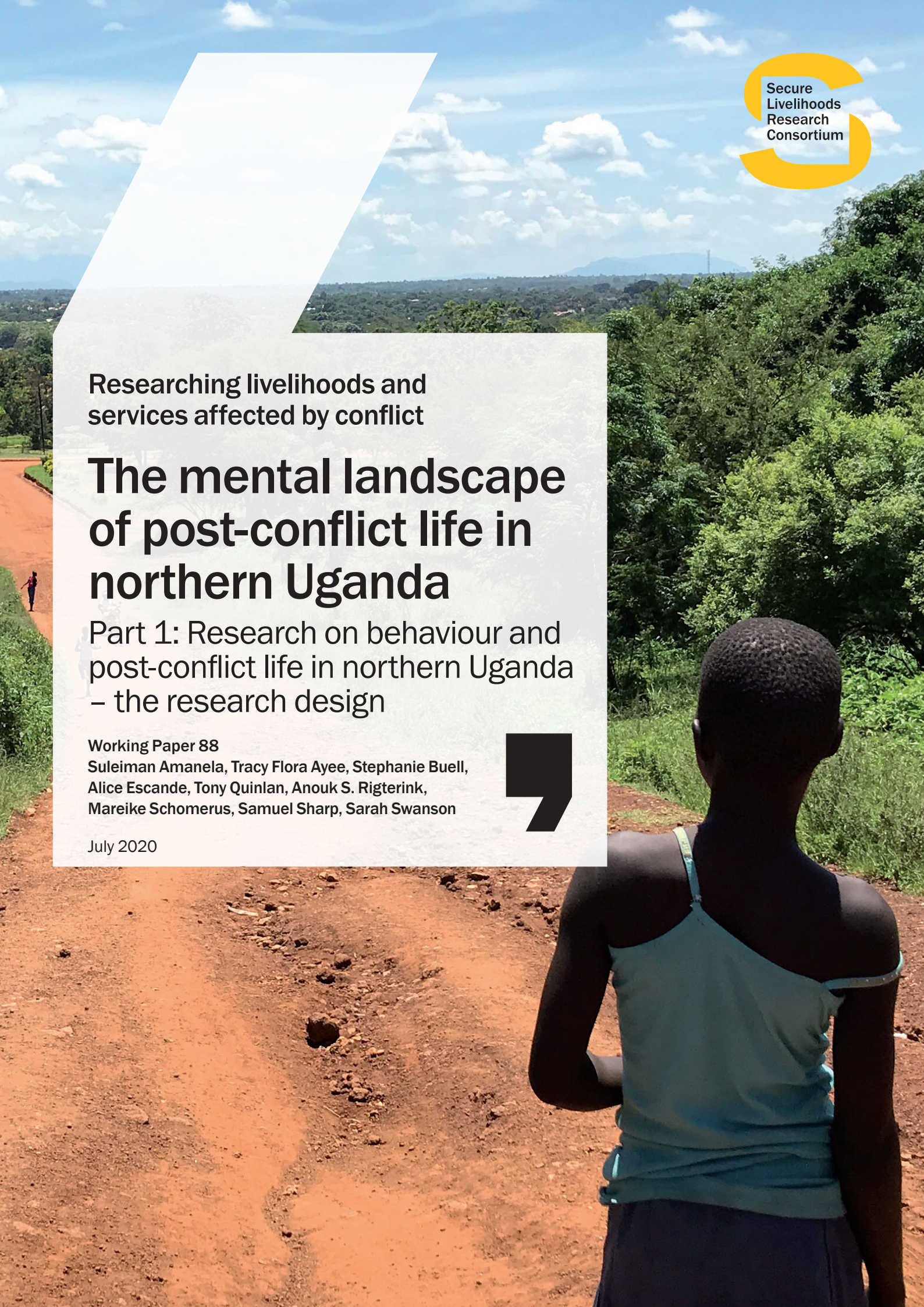
The mental landscape of post-conflict life in northern Uganda

Part 1: Research on behaviour and
post-conflict life in northern Uganda
– the research design

Working Paper 88

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SLRC publications present information, analysis and key policy recommendations on issues relating to livelihoods, basic services and social protection in conflict affected situations. This and other SLRC publications are available from www.securelivelihoods.org. Funded by UK aid from the UK Government, Irish Aid and the EC.

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About us



The **Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC)** is a global research programme exploring basic services and social protection in fragile and conflict-affected situations. Funded by UK Aid from the UK Government (DFID), with complementary funding from Irish Aid and the European Commission (EC), SLRC was established in 2011 with the aim of strengthening the evidence base and informing policy and practice around livelihoods and services in conflict.

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) is the lead organisation. SLRC partners include: Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA), Feinstein International Center (FIC, Tufts University), Focus1000, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Wageningen University (WUR), Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research (NCCR), Busara Center for Behavioral Economics, Nepal Institute for Social and Environmental Research (NISER), Narrate, Social Scientists' Association of Sri Lanka (SSA), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Women and Rural Development Network (WORUDET), Claremont Graduate University (CGU), Institute of Development Policy (IOB, University of Antwerp) and the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS, Erasmus University of Rotterdam).

SLRC's research can be separated into two phases. Our first phase of research (2011–2017) was based on three research questions, developed over the course of an intensive one-year inception phase:

- State legitimacy: experiences, perceptions and expectations of the state and local governance in conflict affected situations
- State capacity: building effective states that deliver services and social protection in conflict affected situations
- Livelihood trajectories and economic activity under conflict

Guided by our original research questions on state legitimacy, state capacity and livelihoods, the second phase of SLRC research (2017–2019) delves into questions that still remain, organised into three themes of research. In addition to these themes, SLRC II also has a programme component exploring power and everyday politics in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). For more information on our work, visit: www.securelivelihoods.org/what-we-do

Acknowledgements and author contribution statement



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This type of deeply integrated multi-method research requires many people with different skills and contributions, working at different times. None of us could have done our job without the others, yet we all did slightly different things, which we list right.

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Executive summary



The violent conflict in northern Uganda between the government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) ended well over a decade ago. Life today in northern Uganda has a huge number of challenges but is without question better than when attacks were common and most of the population lived in internal displacement camps. Yet, for many, the idea of a post-conflict 'recovery' is illusory. Northern Ugandans continue to live with a sense of loss, injustice, neglect and a widespread sentiment that post-conflict life has not lived up to its promise.

These perceptions are deeply important, both intrinsically and through their potential influence on behaviour. Unfortunately, this research indicates that it is particularly challenging for individuals in post-conflict settings ever to feel and perceive improvements happening. We explain this through what we call the 'mental landscape of post-conflict recovery'. In northern Uganda, this landscape has developed from experiencing life as a series of challenges, injustices and dead-ends, combined with a communal identity marked by having been at the receiving end of a war without clear closure or resolution.

This report series explores this mental landscape: how people perceive, interpret and experience their circumstances today, and how this is shaped by legacies of the war. To do so, it uses a unique multi-method research design, combining experimental, quantitative and different types of qualitative work. Those developing programmes to aid post-conflict recovery have to grapple with this mental landscape. And this involves rethinking several concepts inherent to such programmes.

Rethinking collaboration and good behaviour

Notions of what is considered good and bad behaviour loom over many aspects of post-conflict life. It is a widespread belief in northern Uganda that the war has influenced people's behaviour, making people and communities selfish and less collaborative.

However, the collective impression that the war has created 'bad' selfish behaviour is not reflected in how

individual people actually behave. In our behavioural experiments, we found the opposite. Just recalling the conflict measurably influenced people to collaborate – those who had recalled the conflict were more altruistic with real money.

But this shift towards altruism is implicit and lacks visibility. And perhaps as a result it does not create a more positive community view of community members. This disconnect between perceived and actual behaviour points to a broader post-conflict dilemma: collective recovery might be hindered by individual perception. Changing perceptions of a group situation through supporting individual behaviour change (as many development programmes seek to do) could be an uphill struggle.

Rethinking inclusion and fairness

Inclusion and fairness are the presumed cornerstones of functioning peaceful societies. But fairness and inclusion are experienced, acted upon and understood in diverse ways by different people. A post-conflict setting can make operationalising inclusion and fairness particularly challenging.

In our behavioural experiments, people's standards of what is considered fair increase when they are reminded of the experience of violent conflict. Moreover, the experience of fairness and inclusion in northern Uganda is greatly influenced by loss and suffering, and hence expectations of reparations. When people discussed fairness, they emphasised that the outcome of an experience is what makes it fair and that a beneficial personal outcome trumps an inclusive and fair collective process. Combined with higher fairness standards, this compounds the difficulty of designing post-conflict programming that is experienced as fair and inclusive, especially when the outcome cannot always be to everyone's liking.

Furthermore, a legacy of perceived broken promises (from both government and non-government organisations (NGOs)) creates a limited window of opportunity within which these outcomes need to be delivered in order to be

experienced as fair. Respondents have a high tolerance when it comes to waiting for fair treatment. Yet, at some point, the expectation of inclusive treatment turns into a broken promise; and the experience of this as unfair and exclusive becomes the more powerful perception.

Rethinking idleness, risk-taking and agency

In northern Uganda, people often attribute a lack of improvement to idleness, particularly among the young. Our research suggests it is helpful to reinterpret this idleness, however, as not a character flaw but an expression of agency. Given the options, experiences and perceptions of people, being idle can be a sensible choice for an individual, while still posing a challenge at the level of broader recovery.

Investing in the future involves a certain degree of risk. Participants in our research expressed that Acholi people in general should take more risks to build a future. But in our experiments, appetite for risk-taking is low, and even lower when people are reminded of the conflict. Although

people might collectively agree that *someone* should take risks, they may not be the one willing or able actually to take these risks.

The experience of life in camps and the post-conflict landscape could have generated such risk aversion and patience. People have experienced that big risks do not automatically bring improvement. Waiting for action from the local authorities or NGOs is a major part of everyday life for most. And previously, in internal displacement camps, waiting was indeed the only option available. During the war, people were often able to express agency only by joining the rebels, so expecting proactive agency to drive development today is particularly controversial.

Yet many post-conflict development programmes revolve around the need for individuals to take on monetary risk (such as accessing credit or spending time and money on a new business venture) or social risk (showing agency by going against established expectations of behaviour). A culturally and contextually appropriate attitude to risk is needed.

1 Northern Uganda's mental landscape of post-conflict life

It has been more than a decade since the end of the violent conflict in northern Uganda between the government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). So, do people feel they have moved on from the times of war and that life today is better? In other words, has northern Uganda *recovered*? The answer is not straightforward.

Some northern Ugandans feel that they are in the very early stages of recovery, if they think that their lives and communities have recovered at all. Many of our respondents highlighted that recovery was an ongoing process, talking about the 'wound that has been created during war... healing slowly'.¹ While some mentioned 'signposts of recovery around',² many did not feel a real change in the lives of communities. Some pointed towards visible improvements, but often articulated that they feel excluded from the benefits of such improvements. Others take small improvements as a sign of ongoing recovery, with people rebuilding or forging new connections and collaborations. For some, things have clearly moved on since the war: they see a new generation tackling life with courage, determination and community spirit. Those who are more sceptical argue that this new generation lacks the energy, responsibility and willingness to change things for themselves and frequently bemoan the idleness of youth. Some – very few – express fear that the war could return because remnants of the LRA are still at large. One respondent summed up the multi-layered experience of recovery succinctly: 'To a small extent there is peace. But to another extent there is no peace.'³

These perspectives of northern Ugandans show the many different opinions about how long it takes to rebuild lives and a society. They also highlight that identifying what recovery entails is not straightforward – in fact, the term 'recovery' might be misleading in a situation where returning to a presumably better pre-war state is not realistic. Of course, viewed from the outside, life has much improved in northern Uganda, with improved security being one of the most obvious signs. Yet, post-conflict societies remain, in one way or another, post-conflict for a very long time. This is because post-conflict life has a specific quality to it: the continuing memory and impact of conflict makes it difficult for many individuals to *feel* and *perceive* that their lives after conflict are improving.

¹ Acholi leader 2.


² Male respondent 11 (31 years old).

³ Male lab participant 7.

The mental landscape of post-conflict life in northern Uganda

Part 1: Research on behaviour and post-conflict life in northern Uganda – the research design

If people do not perceive improvement, one could argue that the situation has not become better, despite the long time that has passed since the war. This series of reports on the mental landscape seeks to examine this special quality of post-conflict lives and to understand how perceptions, life and behaviour in northern Uganda today continue to be shaped by the legacy of war.



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The report series uses behavioural insights to think differently about what we call the mental landscape of post-conflict life. The series seeks to fill a research and policy gap in understanding the mechanisms that connect perceptions, decisions and behaviour as they relate to situations of violent conflict.⁴ Understanding these mechanisms is an important starting point for policy discussions, which are currently focused on the need for programming that supports inclusion, community building and investment in the future (Nixon and Mallett, 2017). Yet, how to define and achieve all of these in a 'post-conflict' environment is under-researched (MacGinty and Richmond, 2016; Sow, 2015; Ejumudo, 2014; Stahn, 2012; Bos *et al.*, 1998). Evidence on the lived experience of these contexts can help to promote more effective, sustainable policy and programming strategies and to question current assumptions in standard programming in post-conflict contexts.

1.1 The aim of this report series

The mental landscape of post-conflict life in northern Uganda is a series made up of seven reports, of which this is Part 1:

Executive summary

Part 1: Research on behaviour and post-conflict life in northern Uganda – the research design

Part 2: Defining the mental landscape

Part 3: Rethinking collaboration and good behaviour

Part 4: Rethinking inclusion and fairness

Part 5: Rethinking idleness, risk-taking and agency

Annexes

1.2 This report

This report gives a brief overview of the current state of behavioural experimental research in conflict. It then describes in detail each research methodology we used and how we combined different methods. All reports in this series use findings from this multi-method research design.

⁴ This gap has been duly noted regarding behaviour in other contexts. See for example: Sniehotta *et al.* (2014).

2 Behavioural research in conflict

War and conflict tear apart people's lives and hinder development in countries and regions. It is safe to assume that war alters people's psychology and behaviour in significant and long-lasting ways (Bowles, 2008). Behavioural research asks not just if there is an effect but, further, how this effect comes about. Such research often uses experiments that help identify the pathways along which behaviour is shaped.

However, relatively little experimental behavioural research exists on how people make decisions differently, having been exposed to conflict versus living in an environment that they perceive as not influenced by violent conflict. We thus explore the mental landscape of post-conflict life by combining experimental methods with other research approaches to understand behavioural patterns and what particular quality of living a post-conflict existence might shape these patterns.

Box 1: Key concept: Risk aversion

Risk aversion is the attempt to lower uncertainty. People who are risk-averse will (to an extent) choose a certain outcome over an uncertain one, even if the latter has the potential to be more beneficial.

While there is considerable research on preferences (the systematic patterns in which groups of people make their choices), this literature focuses mainly on decisions and behaviour that have been widely studied in non-conflict zones. This includes economic or health choices, for example (such as whether to save for a pension or whether to use preventive health measures). Exceptions include work on migration decision-making and thresholds for staying versus fleeing (van der Velde and van Naerssen, 2015). Fewer studies have applied this behavioural lens to the conflict setting and integrated interdisciplinary work remains rare. Little experimental work exists on how group identities – including cultural behaviour and perceptions of risk and courage – shape behaviour in conflict situations (Suleri *et al.*, 2016).

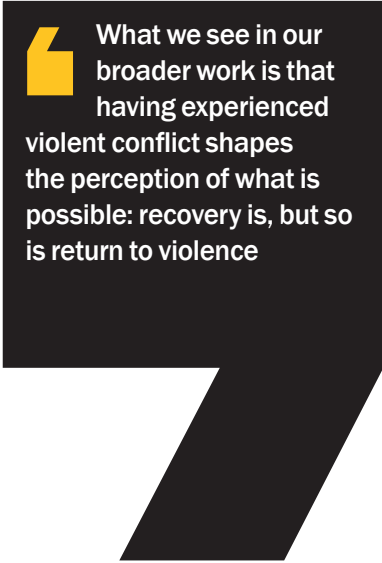
Box 2: Key concept: Prosocial behaviour

A growing body of literature is emerging that suggests that experiences of violence may foster more prosocial behaviour, meaning people behave more collaboratively towards each other.

A growing body of literature finds that experiences of violence may foster more prosocial behaviour, meaning people behave more collaboratively towards each other. A meta-analysis of 23 papers that examine the effect of violence on behaviour concludes that exposure to violence is related to an increase in social group participation, participation in community leadership, prosocial behaviour in experimental games, voting and knowledge of and interest in politics (Bauer *et al.*, 2016). In addition to prosocial behaviour, the literature offers evidence that exposure to violent conflict affects certain kinds of preferences. These include individuals' level of risk-aversion (Callen *et al.*, 2014) and how much people prioritise the present over the future (Voors *et al.*, 2012).

Whether the relationship between exposure to conflict and shift in preferences and behaviour is causal remains an open question since most of those studies correlate levels of exposure to violence with prosocial outcomes without establishing a clear causal link. Typically, the explanatory variable in these studies is self-reported exposure to past violence. The aforementioned studies may present biased results if, for example, more prosocial individuals are more exposed to violence, either because prosocial individuals are targeted by warring parties or because prosocial individuals are more likely to participate in collective action that will expose them (Bauer *et al.*, 2016). What we see in our broader work is that having experienced violent conflict shapes the perception of what is possible: recovery is, but so is return to violence.

A second open question is why there is a relationship between exposure to violent conflict and behaviour. What are the mechanisms driving this relationship? Authors argue that research so far has been better at establishing the phenomenon of improved cooperation after the experience of violence than understanding the reasons for it (*ibid.*).



What we see in our broader work is that having experienced violent conflict shapes the perception of what is possible: recovery is, but so is return to violence

There is a question of whether expectations carry constructive or destructive power in post-conflict situations, and about the role of, for example, present bias (the tendency to assign higher value to what can be gained and achieved in the present versus the future; or the foregrounding of a current situation) in people's perceptions that their situation will always get worse.

Box 3: Key concept: Present bias

Present bias refers to people's tendency to prefer pay-offs that are happening sooner, rather than later. It is when people live more in the present than plan for the future.

Conflict resolution research has also paid much attention to the importance of interactive problem solving, which requires the building of trust and attitude and behaviour change in individuals (Kelman, 2016). However, again, the exact mechanisms of how either come about are under-researched. More broadly, research in conflict settings that does not specifically look at conflict dynamics, but embeds these in much broader questions on, for example, trust, expectations, information or economic systems has created interesting recent work (such as Mallet and Pain, 2017; Rigterink and Schomerus, 2017; Suleri *et al.*, 2016; Thomas, 2015).

This report series on the mental landscape of post-conflict life contributes to this literature in three ways. First, it employs experimental methods to investigate whether the relationship between exposure to conflict and behaviour is causal. Second, it explores the mechanisms behind this relationship as they relate to the concept of collaboration, fairness and idleness. Third, it features a unique design employing a combination of research methods involving experimental, quantitative and different types of qualitative work.

3 Methods

The research design presented here forms the basis for all reports in this series.

3.1 Research questions and research design

We use an integrated research design that combines four discrete methods to examine two overarching research questions:

- 1 How does the experience of violent conflict or its aftermath link to how people perceive, define and experience trust, fairness or expectations of the future?
- 2 Through what mechanisms do these perceptions, definitions and experiences translate into behaviour?

We sought to address these questions by examining what factors shape the post-conflict experience and how social, systemic or contextual factors (Denney and Mallet, 2017) create an enabling or disabling environment for behaviours that support peaceful developments or a more positive post-conflict experience. Specific factors we looked at include:

- expectations for the communal and personal future
- exposure to violence or other types of insecurity
- length of time since such exposure
- emotions, identity and demographic factors.

We seek to understand how these factors link to behavioural outcomes, such as trust, perceptions of fairness, preferences, prosocial behaviours (such as participation, cooperation and giving), optimism / expectations for the future, as well as propensity for disruptive behaviours between groups.

Our different research methods and philosophies require that we break down our research questions into method-specific approaches. Experimental behavioural research tests hypotheses, whereas qualitative and observational research starts with an open perspective. In designing the various research strands, we sought to stay true to disciplinary requirements for data collection and analysis. However, in developing a joint analysis, the different data can either support or challenge the findings from another dataset, allowing us to arrive at a more rounded and multifaceted picture of the behavioural phenomena we are observing.⁵

⁵ For insights on the process of developing our analysis, see: Sharp (2018).

Box 4: Key concept: Behavioural outcome

When a behavioural experiment seeks to manipulate behaviour, the measurable behaviours that occur in direct interaction (such as through cooperation) or that are displayed by an individual only (such as trust or preferences) are referred to as behavioural outcomes. While ‘trust’ might not immediately seem a behaviour as such, a behavioural perspective examines whether it is a quality that can be manipulated or changed in the short term.

3.2 Experimental behavioural research

This section outlines our research questions and detailed research design for the experimental behavioural research. Our key research question for the experimental behavioural research was:

How does recalling an experience of violent conflict affect preferences as well as prosocial and antisocial behaviours?

Experimental behavioural research requires the administration of a treatment to a group of people, with a control group receiving no such treatment. The experiment’s purpose is to pinpoint whether the treatment has a measurable effect. The scope of the question such research asks is defined and quite narrow. To investigate the causal relations between exposure to conflict and behaviour, we decided to use a priming experiment. This needed to be carefully chosen to allow us to ethically examine how the experience of recalling the time of the violent conflict influences people’s behaviour.

We decided that the best way to do this was to not ask people closed-ended questions about their experience of violent conflict, but to ask them open-endedly to tell us about an experience that they had during the conflict. In the language of behavioural experiments, this means that to prime people, we asked them to recall an experience during the conflict (for the treatment) versus a recent experience (for the control group). Experiences are simply told as stories. In this experimental set-up, we are not examining the effect of exposure to war on the behaviour of people, since exposure to war is evenly spread across both the treatment and control groups. All our respondents had some experience of the violent conflict. Instead, what the priming seeks to establish is whether recalling an experience from conflict times influences people’s behaviour.

We break down our overall question as follows:

- 1** Does recalling an experience of violent conflict affect preferences (time preferences and risk aversion)?
- 2** Does recalling an experience of violent conflict affect prosocial behaviour (altruism, fairness and contribution to public goods)?
- 3** Does recalling an experience of violent conflict affect antisocial behaviour (willingness to destroy another’s endowment, retaliation, stealing from public goods)?
- 4** Are the relationships outlined in points 1–3 mediated by actual exposure to violence?
- 5** Are the relationships outlined in points 1–3 mediated by gender?
- 6** What are the mechanisms behind the three relationships outlined in points 1–3?
- 7** How do the mechanisms continue to shape everyday experiences in a post-conflict setting?

Box 5: Key concept: Preferences

In behavioural research, ‘preferences’ refers to the choices people make. These can be abstract choices. Risk-averse people, for example, have a preference for a certain outcome over a more uncertain one.

Our hypotheses (H) are as follows:

- H1: Recalling an experience of violence increases an individuals’ preferences (meaning the choices they make are influenced by the recalling of an experience, following Voors *et al.* (2012)).
- H2: Recalling an experience of violence affects an individual’s level of risk-aversion, (two-sided, following Voors *et al.* (2012)).
- H3: Recalling an experience of violence increases prosocial behaviour (following Bauer *et al.* (2016)).
- H4: Recalling an experience of violence affects antisocial behaviour (two-sided).
- H5: The relationships outlined in H1–H4 are stronger for those who have been exposed to actual violence.
- H6: The relationships outlined in H1–H4 are mediated by gender (two-sided).

We do not formulate hypotheses regarding the mechanisms behind the relationships outlined in H1–H4. Investigation into research questions 6 and 7 will follow an exploratory rather than hypothesis-testing format.

Steps in the experimental behavioural research

Participant selection and recruitment survey

To answer our research questions, we recruited and invited 700 participants to a Busara Center mobile lab in Kitgum, northern Uganda, to attend a session of about 2–3 hours.

Participants were recruited by an enumerator team during a visit to seven villages around Kitgum town. Enumerators administered a recruitment survey to available and consenting adults in the village.⁶

To help us find people who had experienced the time of the conflict (to varying degrees) and could participate in our study without adverse effects on them, individuals were eligible to participate in the study if they:

- were between 23 and 65 years old
- lived in the Acholi area during the war
- do not have a mental disorder⁷
- are fluent in Acholi.

The recruitment survey included additional questions on demographics and asset ownership, which act as control variables. We also asked participants about having been exposed to violence to be able to test for heterogeneous effects. This allows us to understand whether any relationship between recalling an experience that a person had during conflict and behaviour is stronger for people who were exposed to violence during the conflict.

Eligible individuals were told that they may receive an invitation by phone to participate in a study in Kitgum town. Once invited, prospective participants learned that they would receive UGX (Ugandan Shillings) 7000 to cover their travel and other expenses, UGX 7000 for participation in the study, and that they would also receive an additional amount, depending on the result of the exercises they were about to go through.

The participants are not representative of the broader population of northern Uganda, due to the location of the experiment in the urban Kitgum area. We compared the means between our experimental sample and the survey conducted in three rounds by the SLRC between 2013 and 2018, which in 2013 was representative of the population in the surveyed region of Acholi and

Langi (Marshak *et al.*, 2017). The comparison shows that our experimental sample differs considerably from the Ugandan population in 2013. The participants in the experiment:

- are younger
- include more women than would be representative
- are, overall, less likely to have experienced violence during the conflict
- are better educated
- are more likely to be Acholi rather than Langi
- have better social networks, as measured by their ability to borrow money from within their networks.

The differences between our sample and the general Ugandan population are likely to be a result of our efforts to recruit individuals able to participate in the experiment. This means they might be younger and better educated; because they are younger, they are less likely to have experienced violence. Also, we conducted the experiment in a slightly more urban environment in Kitgum, which has a predominantly Acholi population, with greater networks allowing them to borrow money, and more women put themselves forward as participants.

After receiving a briefing and giving informed consent, participants went through the following four steps:

Step 1: Priming treatment through collection of stories

Step 2: Self-signification of stories

Step 3: Behavioural games

Step 4: Closed-ended survey questions

Step 1: Priming treatment through collection of stories

This step involves priming people, by setting up different conditions for the treatment and control groups to see if the treatment changes people's behaviour. Participants were randomly allocated to either the treatment or control group. The treatment and control groups were of equal size. Participants randomised into the treatment group were asked to move into one room and participants randomised into the control group into another. The individuals in the two groups were asked a slightly different question to see if recalling the times of the conflict changed how people behaved.

Conflict cannot be experimentally administered – even if it was possible to do that, it would be unethical.

⁶ This recruitment survey, including consent statement, is included in the Annexes of this report series..

⁷ Meaning they were fit to participate in the recruitment survey and did not self-certify as having a mental disability.

Yet, the experience of violent conflict can be experimentally recalled. To see if this has an effect, individuals in the two groups were set the following tasks.

- **Treatment group:** The participant recounts a narrative of something significant that happened to them or someone they know during the time of the conflict in northern Uganda (government/LRA conflict), having been asked the question: 'Think of an example of something significant that happened to you or someone you know during the conflict. Please describe what happened.'
- **Control group:** The participant recounts a significant event that happened to them (or someone they know) recently, having been asked the question: 'Think of an example of something significant that happened to you or someone you know recently. Please describe what happened.'

In setting up a prime it is important to have as clear a distinction as possible between treatment and control group, seeking to exclude other influencing factors. Our interest was to find out whether recalling an experience from the time of the conflict influences behaviour. However, since we had asked in the recruitment survey if people had experienced violence, we let at least one week elapse between the recruitment survey and participation in the remainder of the study, to avoid what is called 'contaminating the prime'.

Step 2: Self-signification of stories

All participants self-signified the narratives elicited by the priming question using the SenseMaker® tool. SenseMaker® is a large-n research method (meaning it uses a large sample of people to allow findings to be quantifiable, rather than a small number of respondents) that uses personal stories to help understand different perspectives on a specific issue or question and to uncover what matters to whom. Each storyteller, or respondent, shares a story about a particular issue of interest and then interprets and analyses their own story through a series of predetermined follow-up questions. SenseMaker® evolved largely for diagnostic and strategic planning purposes but is increasingly being used for monitoring and evaluation (Deprez *et al.*, 2016).

As a method in its own right, this step in our research allows analysis of the micronarratives that people use to make sense of lives. Narratives collected using

SenseMaker® are short. They describe a specific experience prompted by a carefully chosen and bounded question. The short 'stories' shared by respondents form the basis for further probing using specific questions. SenseMaker® applications lend themselves best to efforts for which several hundred short stories (at a minimum) can be collected. Collecting stories from large numbers of people reflects the recognition that any situation consists of many diverse and dynamic interactions and influences, and researchers need to hear enough of these experiences to be able to generalise and to recognise outliers.

SenseMaker® asks respondents to give meaning to their own stories. This self-signification process generates additional data – and is often more important than the story itself as it points towards what people *do* with their narratives. People are asked to self-signify on a set of multi-dimensional scales designed by the researchers. These are:

- a triangle, where respondents can indicate the 'mix' of three elements that may or may not feature in their narrative
- a stone, with which respondents classify their narratives along two perpendicular axes
- an 11-point scale
- select-multiple responses.

Step 3: Behavioural games

All participants then played the following behavioural games with real money to create real incentives. This means that participants are allocated a starting sum over which they can decide. How much money they are able to take home after the experiment depends on both their own decisions and those of their co-players.

Dictator game

This game measures whether people will act in their own interest or that of others, thus highlighting their social preferences, altruism or aversion to inequality (Forsythe *et al.*, 1994).

- In the dictator game, all participants anonymously decide to allocate a fixed endowment between themselves and another participant. The first player (the 'dictator') decides how much of their money they will give to another player (whose identity they do not know); the recipient has no say in whether or not what has been allocated is a fair amount.

Ultimatum game

This game is used to test for fairness preferences and fairness standards (Güth et al., 1982).

- The ‘proposer’ is given a fixed amount of money to divide with another player (‘the responder’). If the responder accepts the offered share, both receive the money. If the responder rejects the share, neither player receives anything. Therefore, the responder’s choice to reject low offers is an indication of that player’s willingness to sacrifice earnings in order to punish unfair behaviour.

Fragile public goods game

This game tests for collaboration (Hoyer et al., 2014).

- Multiple players individually decide (without knowing the choices of others) to contribute to or to take from a common pool. The amount left in the pool after each player has either contributed or taken is then divided between all players. The aggregate welfare is increased through contribution to the pot, yet individual welfare is maximised through stealing. Therefore, the game indicates whether people are willing to cooperate (by contributing), free-ride (by neither taking nor contributing) or steal (by taking).

Vendettas and retaliation

- This tests for antisocial behaviours, particularly nastiness (willingness to steal from someone’s endowment) and retaliation behaviours (willingness to steal back in response to having been stolen from) (Abbink and Herrmann, 2011).

Risk preferences: using choice over lotteries with equal probability.

- This tests for risk appetite (risk-seeking versus risk-aversion) (Eckel and Grossman, 2008).

Time preferences: a choice over temporal budgets design.

- Used to test for time discounting: the ‘convex time budgets’ task measures delay discounting (Andreoni et al., 2015), which is the tendency to discount value in the future (e.g., a lower subjective value of money at a later date relative to an earlier date). This tendency is often reflected by a preference for small rewards received sooner over larger rewards received later.

All games were preceded by a practice round and a question to test participants’ comprehension of the game.

Step 4: Closed-ended survey questions

After completing the games, participants were asked to answer closed-ended survey questions. These assess the efficacy of the prime and responses on additional variables of interest (such as perception of safety).

After the closed-ended survey, to check that the prime worked as intended, we included two questions about the content of the story the participant had told at the start of the session (to see whether people specifically told a story about the conflict or not) and the time at which their story took place (from 20 years ago until now).

Analysis of experimental behavioural games and micronarratives

Our main analysis for this part of the research consists of comparing behaviour as measured by the games between the treatment and control groups. To investigate the mechanisms behind any impact of recalling the time of the conflict, we investigate patterns in the participants’ self-signification of their qualitative narratives and analyse qualitative interviews.

3.3 Qualitative interviews

We conducted two sets of qualitative interviews, with:

- 1 participants of the lab study, within a few days after their participation in the games
- 2 citizens, authorities and NGO staff in northern Uganda.

In interviews with lab participants, a team of three qualitative researchers asked participants of the lab study about their experience of participating in the study. The semi-structured interviews covered such points as whether participants found it uncomfortable to play against someone else, whether they felt treated fairly and how they made the decisions in the game.

We also asked them about their experience in the sense-making exercise. These questions allow us to understand not just how participants experience this mixed-method research, but also indicate the underlying reasoning of participants’ decisions.

We further asked lab participants a number of semi-structured questions that relate to identity (including the identity of being post-conflict), experiences of inclusion or exclusion, their own definitions and descriptions of fairness, their experiences of speaking about the war and

recalling war experiences and the extent to which they think the war experience still shapes their everyday lives today.

These questions were designed to allow us to understand – in combination with our other data – how respondents classify their own intersectionality. We wanted to explore which part of their identity makes respondents feel most vulnerable, including asking whether social identity as ‘post-conflict’ acts as a cognitive tax in peacebuilding – meaning whether people’s ability to recover after a conflict is hindered by an emphasis on having an identity linked to the conflict. We further examined the extent to which experience of violence links to feelings of inclusion, exclusion and fairness (and how those feeling are defined). This relates to the question about how much feeling excluded presents a challenge to continued recovery and whether people talk about fairness in the same way as they act on their own understanding of fairness. We also wanted to collect narrative accounts of whether or not talking about the conflict is experienced as empowering or disempowering.

We further asked the same questions of ordinary citizens who were not participants in the lab study, and of representatives of authorities and NGOs (minus inquiring about the lab experience), using a snowballing or, where appropriate, purposive sampling strategy. We further inquired with NGOs and authorities about the cognitive

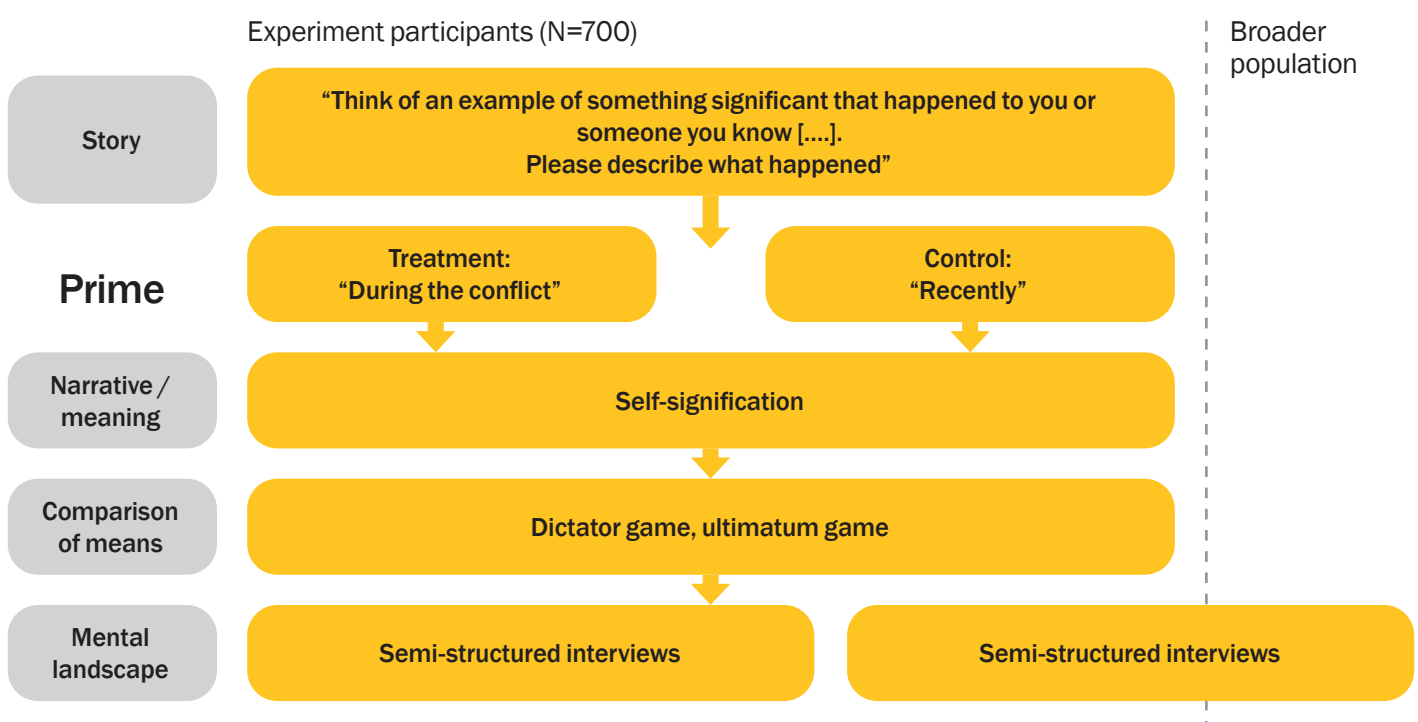
framing of their programmes as ‘post-conflict’ with a view to understanding the possible constructive or destructive impact of a ‘recovery’ frame on the everyday experience of recovery or the potential for continued tensions. These interviews examine the extent to which NGO programming continues to employ a post-conflict lens that uses conflict recall and whether those elements that were largely considered part of the conflict dynamics at the time – such as neglect, exclusion and underdevelopment – still feature in people’s daily experience.

In total, we coded and analysed 108 interview transcripts. Figure 1 shows the sequencing of methods in the research design.

3.4 Three waves of a structured survey

A crucial part of the work of the SLRC has been a structured individual panel survey with several waves conducted in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Uganda. This survey generated cross-country data on livelihoods, access to and experience of basic services, exposure to shocks and coping strategies and people’s perceptions of governance. In Uganda, we conducted the first round of the survey in January–February 2013 in the Lango and Acholi sub-regions. In 2015, we re-interviewed 1545 of the original 1857 respondents in the Ugandan sample.

Figure 1: Research design and sequencing of methods



A third and final round of the survey was conducted in 2018, in which 1513 of the original 1857 respondents were re-interviewed, providing three waves of data for longitudinal analysis (Lacroix and Hagen-Zanker, 2019; Marshak *et al.*, 2017).

In each sub-region, 45 sub-counties were selected using 'probability proportional to size' sampling and one village was randomly selected in each sub-county.

The survey was conducted in eight districts in Lango (Dokolo, Lira, Alebtong, Amolatar, Otuke, Apac, Oyam and Kole) and seven districts in Acholi (Gulu, Amuru, Nwoya, Kitgum, Lamwo, Pader and Agago). The strategy was to interview the same respondents in 2015 who were interviewed in 2013; even if they had moved. In 2018, the same methodology was used with slight changes in the questionnaire. We interviewed the same people to measure changes over time across the waves.

4 Ethical considerations

Asking participants to recall experiences during conflict can potentially cause participants distress. Field officers conducting the study were trained to detect participants who may feel distressed and to intervene. This could mean ending participation in the study. Two field officers have a background in counselling and could debrief any participants who experienced distress and make an informed decision about whether individuals can continue their participation. We had one situation where an interviewer decided to cut short an interview because the respondent seemed distressed and was giving incoherent answers. Several respondents in interviews mentioned that it was difficult for them to talk about some of these things, but only one respondent cut short an interview.

We obtained ethics approval in Uganda from all relevant authorities (MAKSS REC, Makerere University) before starting this research.

4.1 Shortcomings and challenges

The set-up for the behavioural games used the recalling of the experience of conflict as a prime. While this proved to be a powerful influence on how people acted in the subsequent games, it does not allow us to conclude that the behaviour we saw is an effect of having experienced violence. Many, if not most, of the participants will have been affected by the conflict in some way; however, only the treatment group was asked to recall an experience from their lives that is deeply connected to the times of the conflict. The effect we see is thus not the effect of the experience of violence, but the effect of recalling the times of living during conflict times. These considerations also highlight ethical questions concerning research and other interventions in post-conflict areas more generally.

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