Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium

Researching livelihoods and services affected by conflict

The mental landscape of post-conflict life in northern Uganda

Part 3: Rethinking collaboration and good behaviour

Working Paper 90

Suleiman Amanela, Tracy Flora Ayee, Stephanie Buell, Alice Escande, Tony Quinlan, Anouk S. Rigterink, Mareike Schomerus, Samuel Sharp, Sarah Swanson

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Written by
Suleiman Amanela, Tracy Flora Ayee, Stephanie Buell, Alice Escande, Tony Quinlan, Anouk S. Rigterink, Mareike Schomerus, Samuel Sharp, Sarah Swanson

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Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium
Overseas Development Institute (ODI)
203 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NJ
United Kingdom

T +44 (0)20 3817 0031
F +44 (0)20 7922 0399
E slrc@odi.org.uk
www.securelivelihoods.org
@SLRCtweet

Cover photo: Mareike Schomerus.
Kitgum, Uganda.

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

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Conception, design and planning of the research
Mareike Schomerus, Stephanie Buell, Alice Escande, Tony Quinlan, Anouk S. Rigterink, Sarah Swanson

Implementation of experiments
Suleiman Amanela, Alice Escande, Sarah Swanson

Implementation of micronarratives research
Tony Quinlan

Implementation of qualitative research
Tracy Flora Ayee, Mareike Schomerus, Samuel Sharp

Data analysis and framing of argument
Tracy Flora Ayee, Stephanie Buell, Alice Escande, Tony Quinlan, Anouk S. Rigterink, Mareike Schomerus, Samuel Sharp, Sarah Swanson

Principal writing of the manuscript
Mareike Schomerus

Contribution to manuscript
Stephanie Buell, Alice Escande, Tony Quinlan, Anouk S. Rigterink, Samuel Sharp, Sarah Swanson

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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 collaboration and good behaviour

On a quiet and hot Sunday afternoon, this is a fairly typical scene for a small town in northern Uganda: some people gather at the church; others use the day to meet as what they refer to as their 'self-help group'. This small group of people are each other's collective savings bank, putting some money into a shared pot each week. In the event of financial trouble, a member can draw on this pot. Otherwise, the group pays out each member in turn. Further down the road, music is blasting out from a food stall, where a group of young men are shooting the breeze while one of them makes 'rolex'– omelette cooked in a chapati. A bit further away from the road, another group of young men are relaxing outside their *tukuls* (round huts), smoking marijuana.

We had been conducting interviews with various people described in this scene: members of the church, the self-help group, some of the young men working and some of the young men smoking. As members of their particular groups – as we saw them that day – they offered in interviews strong judgements about their own behaviour and that of others. The self-help group expressed that they were actively helping each other to improve their lives – and said that particularly the young men smoking marijuana were selfish and doing nothing to advance their communities. The young men smoking considered their own behaviour as not doing any harm to anyone else. They rejected the idea that they were hurting the communal good.

In this small scene, and in the opinions groups expressed of each other, we encountered a number of social norms and judgements and likely reinforcements about what is considered 'right' behaviour. This is implicitly articulated as behaviour that contributes to the public good, the betterment of the community or the improvement of social relations. Crucially, right behaviour is not selfish.[1]

Since many of our interviewees said that northern Uganda was still a post-conflict, and thus recovering, society seeking out what it wanted to become, notions of what is considered good and bad behaviour loom over many aspects of post-conflict life. Debates on reconciliation and justice, reparations and infrastructure development and political voice are often implicitly about right behaviour, but the more technical framing can obscure that these debates are also about re-establishing or newly creating social norms. These norms are shaped and then solidified by a shared understanding. Such shared understanding

1 For further insights into notions of good behaviour to achieve social harmony, see: Porter (2016).

is often considered crucial for social cohesion and trust (Parsons, 2013), which in more recent debates has been linked to prevention of future violent conflict (e.g. World Bank / United Nations, 2018: 21).

1.1 The aim of this report series

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.[2] 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 Mallet, 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), and evidence on the lived experience of these contexts can help promote more effective, sustainable policy and programming strategies.

Our starting point is that the experience of lives after violence is deeply shaped by what we call the mental landscape: the combination of how people experience their lives after violence, how they perceive and make sense of their current situation, the tools they use to interpret the challenges they face, and how they connect their experiences today to legacies and memories of the war. This mental landscape shapes people's decisions, behaviour and experience of their everyday lives. Looking at how the mental landscape directly influences people's behaviour is a way to show that perceptions do indeed matter.

1.2 The mental landscape and collaboration

In this report – the third in the series, ***The mental landscape of post-conflict life in northern Uganda*** – we look at how recalling violent conflict translates into collaborative behaviour. We also ask whether the impression people have of social norms and how they believe these are adhered to or violated corresponds to how people actually behave.

How social norms come about that then establish what is considered socially acceptable behaviour is the subject of much research in the social sciences.[3] Different research disciplines tackle the question of how the moral underpinnings develop that make people judge behaviour as either good or bad in different ways. Our focus here is on how things connect, so we are asking:

- How does the experience of conflict influence how people behave and what choices they make in collaborating with people?
- How do the stories and experiences that are important to people shape their choices?
- How does such behaviour then translate into what is perceived as constructive and good behaviour for post-conflict life – or why does it not?
- And is the process the same for individuals and their groups?

This report looks at the perception of collaboration and people's actual collaborative behaviour. It is a widespread belief in northern Uganda that war has made people and communities selfish and less collaborative. Perceptions are that the war has created this 'bad behaviour'. The quest for collaboration and the notion of 'good social behaviour' is deeply linked to the experience of the loss of Acholi culture, that has been part of the war and particularly during times of displacement (e.g. Rodriguez, 2004). This perception is often linked with an understanding that, as a group, the Acholi are not recovering from conflict because the war has made them behave in ways that do not benefit the community and allow recovery to happen. This impression in turn likely influences not just how people experience recovery, but also how they behave more broadly.

However, we find that the perception that war has made communities less willing to work together is not reflected in reality. This report sets out the detailed findings and implications of this discrepancy between perception and behaviour.

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

3 For a recent take on how to model social norm creation, see: Savarimuthu and Cranefield (2011).

1.3 Methods and data used for this report series

This paper is part of a series of reports using qualitative, quantitative and experimental behavioural research. This includes:

1. more than 100 open-ended interviews with authorities, citizens and NGO staff
2. systematic collecting of individual stories using the SenseMaker® tool
3. three rounds of the SLRC large-n structured survey on livelihoods, access to and experience of basic services, exposure to shocks and coping strategies and peoples' perceptions of governance, conducted in northern Uganda in the Lango and Acholi sub-regions in 2013, 2015 and 2018
4. a 'lab in the field' set up to conduct experimental behavioural games with 700 participants.

This report series looks at the link between people's experience of living post-conflict lives, their behaviour, and the possible influence the war still has on perceptions and behaviours.

A detailed description of all methods used and the research design can be found in 'Part 1: Research on behaviour and post-conflict life in northern Uganda – the research design' (Amanela *et al.,* 2020a).

Combining storytelling with experimental games allows us to contribute to the knowledge on how the experience of violent conflict shapes people's choices. We asked people about the stories and experiences that are important to them, using these stories and the experience of telling them as a prime to establish a control and treatment group for a behavioural experiment. To do this in an experimental set-up, we asked half the people to tell us a story of importance to them from the time of the conflict; the other half was asked to tell a story that had happened very recently.

Qualitative interviews with games participants and others allowed us to contextualise our experimental findings.

For this part of the study, three experimental games are relevant:

Fragile public goods game (Hoyer *et al.*, 2014).

This game tests for collaboration.

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, it is an indication of whether people are willing to cooperate (by contributing), free-ride (by neither taking nor contributing) or steal (by taking).

Vendettas and retaliation (Abbink and Herrmann, 2011).

This tests for antisocial behaviours: in particular nastiness (willingness to steal from someone's endowment) and retaliation behaviour (willingness to steal back in response to having been stolen from).

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). 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 samount.

2 How did the conflict change behaviour in Acholiland?

Respondents in Acholiland regularly talked about how the war had changed behaviour in their area, arguing that after the war 'people treat each other differently'.[4] In respondents' views, this change in behaviour can be directly attributed to the experience of war and, due to the gruelling experience of war, was a change towards negative behaviour. While it is not possible to systematically investigate this claim to be true (after all, there is no pre-war behavioural baseline and no way of knowing if behaviour change – if there is indeed one – would have happened anyway), that war brought change in behaviour is a widely shared perception among our respondents.

A growing body of scholarship investigates the relationship between the experience of violence and preferences, asking whether exposure to violence changes the choices people make (Jakiela and Ozier, 2015; Voors *et al.*, 2012). An emerging consensus is that people who have been exposed to violence participate *more* in social groups and community leadership. Further, this scholarship points towards prosocial behaviour – meaning people behave in ways that are beneficial to others or a broader community (Voors *et al.*, 2012).

While this literature uses the language of 'choices' and 'preferences', what it examines is whether the experience of violence has changed behaviour as expressed through decisions people make. Whether the relationship between exposure to violent conflict and shift in preference and behaviour is causal, however, remains an open question.

In Acholiland, people strongly perceive that such a causal relationship exists, but it is assumed to be solely negative. It is a common sentiment that the war has created behaviours that did not exist before. A religious leader (reflecting also on the experience of the church in dealing with its congregation) described the phenomenon as:

> ***people do not want to share. In the long run – for lack of a better way to say it – [the war] makes people become selfish. Because they lived in a time when they lacked so much, they had to be provided for. So, when they now have something, they feel they have to protect it. People are not willing to give, and they feel that whatever little they acquired they have to jealously protect it so that it can benefit them to the most.***[5]

4 Male lab participant 7.

5 Religious leader 1.

A young traditional leader echoed that 'people nowadays treat each other differently, not seeing that this one is my relative, this one is my friend'.[6]

Often, when asked about new behaviours, fingers point towards the younger generation. This then makes it impossible to determine whether any shifts in behaviour can be attributed to the war or whether they would have happened anyway. Norms shift all the time and particularly from one generation to the next. One respondent argued, however, when asked if elders complaining about the youth was just normal intergenerational tension:

> ***To me it's more than that. The war contributed to what we see now. But with the youth I see this strain of laziness, idleness, drug abuse. They just want to live for the moment; they just want to get involved in leisure activities. The spirit of hard work is gone. Unemployment has greatly contributed to that fact, but also, they don't want to take the initiative. And that comes as the result of laziness, people do not want to willingly engage. And when you go to school, the youth… are not interested in education. They just want quick things.***[7]

Others said behaviour and norms had shifted because the war had destroyed the hardware of life that facilitated social interactions. One respondent argued that there had been:

> ***loss of social setting of the Acholi. There is nothing like the camp fire where people can learn informal education. And that one brought a lot of greediness, a lot of selfishness. And that one brought a lot of bitterness… And that is why there is slow development.***[8]

Another respondent explained how the mass displacement into camps during the war had had the greatest impact on society today. 'When people were going to the camp, everyone knows their boundaries. But when people were moving back, they forgot the boundaries.'[9] For others, the experience was different: war had hardened the social barriers, with people withdrawing: 'When someone is affected by the war, they behave like they do not have an open life.'[10]

The inability to live among the community with rules accepted by all – the notion of the 'open life' – chimes with a broader theme for Acholi society. During the war, many people spent time with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the bush; bush life came with its own behavioural norms. How to manage those having returned from the bush was and continues to be one of the great quandaries of northern Uganda's conflict.[11] It was – and to some extent remains – common advice that it is not good to associate with those who have returned from the bush.[12]

Those who have experience with the LRA in the bush regularly explain that it can be difficult to learn that what had been considered good behaviour in the bush – asserting oneself, if necessary violently – was not acceptable social behaviour back in their communities. This somewhat confusing situation of needing to regulate behaviour according to two different norms created, at times, unforeseen dilemmas. One young man who had spent time with the LRA narrated how his neighbours were 'intimidating him and his mother', seeking to provoke them because they would not fight back. Being seen to fight back was too risky, as people would point fingers at him and say that he was behaving like the LRA. He explained that, in such circumstances, he found it difficult 'to not think I will go back to the bush and come back for you people'. A friend of his had found himself in a similar dilemma. Both had found themselves in situations where they were angry about something but were unsure what kind of response would change the situation and would be socially acceptable. Those situations would be easier to deal with using the kind of behaviour that was acceptable in the LRA: 'Then I think the war was good.'[13]

6 Acholi leader 1.

7 Religious leader 1. For a rethinking on the complaint that the youth are idle, see Amanela *et al.* (2020b) and Alava (2018).

8 Religious leader 3.

9 Local authority 4 (male).

10 Male respondent 26.

11 For background, see: Amanela *et al.* (2020c).

12 Male lab participant 7.

13 Male lab participant 7.

3 The long-term effects of the times of violence on behaviour

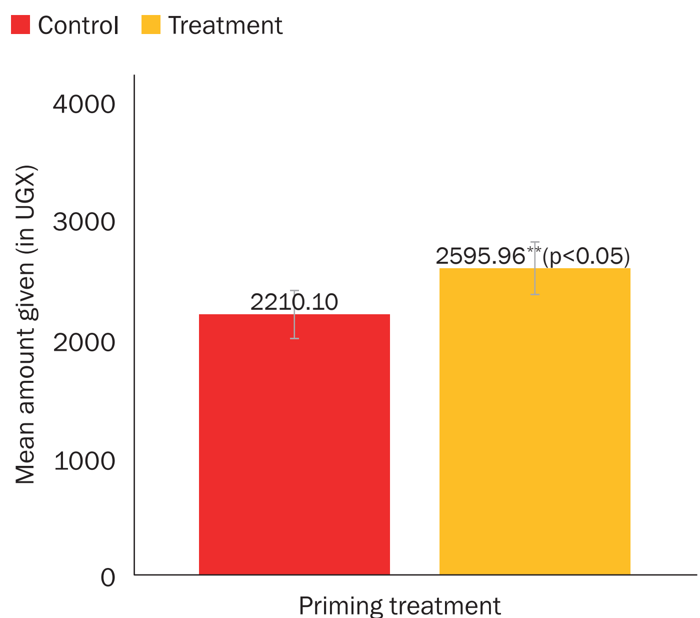
In our experimental set-up, we find a marked difference between how people perceive their social environment and how they act in it. We discover that respondents who recalled an experience they had during the time of the conflict act differently from those who root their behaviour in having recalled a more recent experience that was important to them.

We draw these findings from the behavioural games, where we observe a significant effect of recalling the conflict on the amount participants were willing to share with an anonymous partner in the dictator game. Participants who recalled the conflict (hereafter referred to as being in the 'conflict mindset') shared 17.5% more money with their partner than the people who recalled neutral stories ($p<0.05$).

> ... respondents who recalled an experience they had during the time of the conflict act differently from those who root their behaviour in having recalled a more recent experience

Figure 1 shows the difference in money shared between those who had just recalled the conflict versus those who had told a neutral story.

Figure 1: Amount given in dictator game as a function of priming



There is no specific difference of this effect for men, women or participants of different age groups. This result, more surprisingly, is independent of participants' degree of exposure to the conflict or whether they were perpetrators or victims of violence. We do not find any effect of the priming treatment on the collaboration game (fragile public goods game). Importantly, we do not find any effect of the priming on any of our antisocial measures that would tell us whether someone would steal from someone else or retaliate for being stolen from.

3.1 How do these findings need to be interpreted?

The experimental behavioural games are designed to assess the extent to which participants display prosocial behaviour. For someone playing the public goods game – with the possibility of making more money if their counterparts were equally willing to share, but without the possibility of liaising about this – this translates into the experience of collaborating with an unknown person who might not want to collaborate back.

The difference between the control and the treatment groups illustrates a number of things. First, even talking about a personal experience during the conflict – which ended more than a decade ago – still has a powerful effect on a person today. Just recalling an experience from the times of the conflict measurably influences behavioural choices. Second, we learn that recalling a conflict experience makes people behave more collaboratively – in short, they are more altruistic but it is important to note that we did not find meaningful results on our public good games, which more precisely measures collaboration. Third, the effect is only positive in the sense that people behave in ways that are more collaborative. Our experiments were designed also to tell us about antisocial behaviour, meaning whether recalling a conflict experience also nudges behaviour towards consistently less collaborative actions. The 'conflict prime' did not strengthen or weaken people's antisocial behaviour. Recalling conflict thus does not have the effect that people behave less collaboratively or with less consideration for their peers.

Do our findings mean that if people spoke more about the conflict, everyone would be more collaborative? Or, since we see that those recalling conflict act more collaboratively, are northern Ugandans experiencing their post-conflict recovery as being driven by collaborative and prosocial behaviour? Not quite. However, the findings point more towards the potential of communities to work together after violence, rather than the conclusion that talking will always create more collaboration. A common argument is that individual behaviour can differ from that of the group or culture to which the individual belongs and that conclusions about broader cultural aspects cannot be drawn from insights into how individuals behave. Yet when we see that individuals belonging to a group systematically behave in certain ways, this does point towards larger patterns within the group, even if the perception of these patterns is different.

The crucial insight here is that, while people are altruistic (and even more so when they have just spoken about the time of conflict), people perceive their social environment as fragmented and uncollaborative. In interviews, people talk about their social post-conflict environment as challenging and marked by what they describe or allude to as bad behaviour. Numerous respondents described people as having become more selfish since and because of the war. Since our experiment shows that people do not behave in more selfish ways if they are reminded of the conflict – quite the contrary – and yet the broader perception is that the conflict has made people more selfish, this points us towards how challenging it is for people to see and experience positive changes in their environment. If a person's mind perceives their social environment as being marked by selfish behaviour and full of people who are not willing to help each other, it follows that a person will find it much harder to experience their environment as positive despite the fact that it is in fact collaborative.

3.2 Why are people more altruistic in the 'conflict mindset'?

Our findings corroborate those in the literature and the evidence from a growing body of research that people exposed to war violence tend to behave more cooperatively after the war has ended (even years after the conflict). In less than a decade, 23 observational studies from Sierra Leone, Uganda, Burundi, Nepal and many other countries support this finding (Bauer *et al.*, 2016). These studies consistently provide evidence of greater altruistic giving and cooperative behaviour in people who were exposed to war violence. Similar to our results, the literature shows that the result holds for men, women, victims and perpetrators alike.

How do we explain this behaviour? Different theories have been put forth in the literature.

It might seem fairly obvious that wars and conflicts or – more broadly – traumatic shocks, even when not experienced first hand, are associated with significant shifts in psychological states (Weinstein, 1989). Negative emotional and psychological states – with symptoms of depression, distress, trauma, negative feelings about oneself or others, and hopelessness about the future – can manifest after a violent conflict (Galovski and Lyons, 2004; Ehlers and Clark, 2000). In some cases, the experience of conflict can also create a positive shift, such as people re-evaluating their lives, relationships and principles. This is referred to as 'post-traumatic growth' (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004). A changed psychological state, whether positive or negative, can also shift social preferences, meaning how people behave towards others. Preferences and lived behaviour can create new social norms. These new norms can be widely recognised and accepted as explicit new social norms and are then easily recognisable. They can also be implicit, meaning they are not clearly articulated as recognised or accepted new social norms, but are nonetheless present.

In this study, we encounter a shift of preferences in the behaviour of the participants who had recalled the conflict towards more altruistic behaviour. However, this shift was not widely picked up as being the new social norm and creating what is considered 'good behaviour' – or rather people who lamented about a more selfish community considered altruism a good social norm; they just did not think that there was much altruism in their communities. Interviewees instead regularly suggested that the war had made people less community-oriented, more selfish, and less willing to contribute to the public good. This is an assessment from respondents about the impact of a recent experience of violence – although there has barely been a peaceful time in Acholi history, even long before the war, going back all the way to the slave trade.[14] Yet the recent war serves as a reference point for many people when evaluating Acholi lives in violent conflict and after.

The unseen shift of preferences towards altruism is implicit – but its lack of visibility means that it has not created a more positive broader understanding of how individuals within a community view and experience one another. One way of explaining this discrepancy between the perception and reality is that the actual norm of behaviour has changed (people *are* more altruistic) but the 'norm perception' has not. Norm perceptions – what people believe other people think and do – are very powerful in determining behaviour (Evans, 2017).

Recalling conflict – or even the experience of conflict – thus seems to make individuals behave more altruistically; however, people do not perceive this change in behaviour: They do not perceive increased altruism as a stronger post-conflict norm. While more altruism is good for social collaboration and cohesion, the potential benefits of this increased altruism are thus limited by these perceptions. If people perceived increased collaboration as normal, presumably there could be a positive multiplying effect of this increased collaboration. This might improve the everyday experience of life in northern Uganda.

The point here is not to say that increased collaboration will solve all problems people experience: poverty, inequality, disillusion with the government and the increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots are all real. But human behaviour is not simply shaped by anyone's influence: The concepts of 'bounded' and 'multiple' rationality remind us that behaviour stems from decisions not based on full information, but drawing on complex sets of norms and values (Sen, 1990). Behavioural economists aim to identify the heuristics and biases people use to utilise the limited information they have (Kahneman and Tversky, 1974). The point is that many things influence choices and behaviours, but the perception of selfishness and lack of improvement contribute to people not experiencing those things that are improving.

Another potential explanation for the mechanism that makes people behave more collaboratively comes from evolutionary biology and the concept of 'parochial altruism', which is a widespread evolved response to external threats (Yamagishi and Mifune, 2016; Bernhard *et al.*, 2006). Parochial altruism consists of increased altruism and solidarity in collaboration towards one's 'in-group' members (i.e. members of one's own identity group). The point of such solidarity is a survival and protection strategy especially in the context of inter-group conflicts. This raises the question of whether our results are relevant to only the 'in-group' or whether they could be extended to the 'out-group'.

14 On the long-term effect of the slave trade on trust (and by extension on economic development), see: Nunn and Wantchekon (2011).

Our research – having been conducted in an environment where people experienced the conflict in broadly similar ways – does not answer the question of whether they would behave less collaboratively were they playing experimental games with a group of people more clearly defined as 'the other'. We observed that priming about the conflict makes people more altruistic towards their broadly defined in-group (and even this finding comes with the caveat that people might not feel part of the in-group in the way the experimental set-up suggests). What we do not know is if they would behave in the same way were they playing with their 'out-group'. In a different kind of conflict setting, an important question to answer would be about the conditions under which people would shift their social preferences for their in-group, as well as the out-group.

Our results – that the 'conflict mindset' increases altruism – hold for our prosocial measures ('Are participants only prosocial and willing to collaborate towards the in-group?') as well as our antisocial measures ('Would participants be antisocial towards the out-group?'). Most studies that found an effect of conflict on altruism mostly looked at in-group behaviours. Only a few studies have looked at this effect for the out-group. One study found heightened empathy response towards refugee distress (out-group) for people exposed to a high degree of violence during the Liberia civil war (Hartman and Morse, 2018). In the Ugandan context, the Acholi people constitute a group distinct from other groups in the country, which could make the 'in-group' effect even more salient. However, in-groups are also defined differently by people: not every Acholi will feel that the Acholi as a broad category are their in-group.

3.3 Collective and personal identities in post-conflict recovery

The disconnect between how people judge their own behaviour and the expected behaviour of their group or individual peers takes us towards a broader post-conflict dilemma: collective recovery might be hindered by individual perception, yet individual perception is shaped by the collective experience to only a limited extent. Using our data drawn from storytelling, behavioural experiments and qualitative interviews, we can see that, obviously, having experienced conflict is a collective experience as well as an individual experience – but the former is not simply the sum of the latter.

By extension, social norms are not an aggregation of individual behaviour. Instead we see that individual behaviour might be influenced by recalling conflict in one way, whereas the collective perception of how war influenced behaviour is quite another. The individual and the collective experiences can overlap, but they can also create contradiction. This sets up a disconnect or a nuance in what shapes social norms around good behaviour. If everyone thinks that sharing money is good behaviour, sharing money may become a social norm. But if everyone thinks sharing money is good behaviour only if they think everyone else is sharing, this social norm does not necessarily materialise if collective perceptions of individuals' behaviour do not match actual individual behaviour.

Collective behaviour is also closely linked to identity. One can only talk about how groups of people behave or have changed due to the war if this group is somehow identifiable. Many people we interviewed talked about an Acholi group identity, as well as how this identity had changed due to the war. Of course, the group identity is not experienced in the homogenous way the term might suggest: a group identity can be articulated and experienced quite differently by people within the same identified group.

We encountered many markers of identity for the broad group identity of Acholi in our interviews, pointing towards the multiplicity of identities that individuals hold. Some respondents described the identity of their group as oppressed, as victims or as being unable to forge a better fate for themselves. Others were proud and feel that the Acholi identity invites such oppression as an expression of the envy of others – and the fact that the Acholi had survived political marginalisation and the war was proof of the strength of the group. The different views also came through in how people assessed the impact of the war on their communities. It was common for people to suggest that the experience of war had made it more difficult for the Acholi to collaborate, to find ways of working together and to use their collective power to improve their situation. As discussed above, this perception does not correspond with what we found in our research: those who had remembered conflict act more in the collective interest than those who had recalled a more recent experience.

4 How do people experience prosocial behaviour in the games?

How well does the experience of playing the games capture altruism and collaboration outside the lab when compared to how people talk about their experience of both playing the games or more generally about how they view altruistic behaviour in their communities?

When asked how they would describe the experience of playing the behavioural games, respondents argued that they would have liked to be able to share some of the profits made in the game equally, rather than benefit individually.[15] This expresses a strong sense of the need for communal benefits, an angle on altruism that the individualised games cannot offer. And yet, perceptions on this phenomenon were again quite different.
One participant argued that people were not working well together outside their immediate in-group, and that the game was thus a kind of theatre in which people were not acting realistically but only pretending to be more altruistic.

> ***People in your game, they give a different story… People, they don't share equally or too much in the community. Only maybe if you have a contact, like a neighbour, a friend, a relative, or maybe somebody who has a problem (maybe sick), you cannot leave he or she to lie. But maybe if you are hungry, you cannot go to the next house like that, [saying] you are looking for meat. You cannot do that.***[16]

This respondent also explained that playing in the game without knowing the other person had been a challenge since he wanted to base his decision on whether or not he could expect good behaviour from the beneficiary.

> ***How is the condition of the person I am giving? Am I giving it out to a lunatic who does not know money? Or am I giving as a statement to the community? That is the difference. Because if I give you all, I remain with nothing… And if I remain with nothing that would not be nice for me or the other person… Because moral obligation does not even need people to say thank you. Because to give is a moral obligation, so if I don't say thank you, it is the same.***[17]

15 Male respondent 18.

16 Male lab participant 3.

17 Male lab participant 3.

For others, the fragile public goods game was an exercise in inclusion, as they played what they perceived to be fair, 'to give the money equally no matter who the person was'.[18] Anonymity in this case was experienced as liberating as it allowed the player to bypass social conventions, unlike in real life where giving is never anonymous.

> ***The system was very good. You will be playing with someone you don't know and that is very good. If I know it is my friend, you may not be very free: she may be annoyed if you only give 1000… The system made us to be very generous, and share exactly what you want without fear. In fact, you were doing something in confidence, and no one knows. If it was exposed, people might fear.***[19]

Others had quite strong ideas about how they would have played differently had they played with a friend or not. One respondent explained that she would have shared her resources equally with a friend, but would not have given 'even a single cent' to anyone she did not know.[20] Friendship was her reason to expect reciprocity.[21] Personal relationships also allowed for necessary negotiations to make sure that no side would lose out[22] or to make sure that, after the game was over, profits would be shared equally, no matter what the outcome of the game.[23]

Others very clearly expressed that, in the situation of the game, they did not feel altruistic but that reciprocity was what governed their decisions: 'When I give you this, you have to also pay me back like this.'[24] However, when asked if not receiving the same amount back as sending had felt unfair, answers pointed towards the fuzziness of the category of fairness. With people being of such different characters that not everyone could be expected to return the same amount of money, even receiving less money had been 'fair' – it had just meant that someone was acting according to their own character.[25]

Others felt that they had been mistreated and, if they were to know who their 'unfair' counterpart had been, there would even have to be revenge. One woman explained that she would confront the person: 'You really have a bad heart. I've shared the money, but you gave me little. Next time we're going to meet at home, I'm going to pay you back.'[26]

Others felt that not knowing who their counterparts were simply meant they were missing out on joint learning: 'I wanted to know because it can help also sometimes. In so many ways, we can even sit and make some discussion together and sharing some ideas on how you've been earning.'[27] For some, it was immaterial with whom they were playing: whether or not things worked out well was a matter of luck, rather than relationships, decisions and negotiations.[28] If you had been paired with someone who allowed you to take away a lot of money, you were simply lucky.[29]

These various opinions given about how to properly play the fragile public goods game point again towards the different notions of good and bad behaviour. We also see, within how people judge how they played and how they wanted others to play (which was not always exactly the same way), an emerging difference between individual and collective expectations, pointing us towards a difference in those two experiences.

18 Female respondent 6.
19 Male respondent 19.
20 Female respondent 13.
21 Male respondent 23.
22 Male respondent 14.
23 Female respondent 8.
24 Male lab participant 8.
25 Male lab participant 9.
26 Female lab participant 6.
27 Male lab participant 10.
28 Female respondent 15.
29 Male respondent 22.

5 Conclusion and implications

Our research into understanding the effect of recalling conflict on individual behaviour has shown that it makes individuals more collaborative and willing to share resources than those who think about their more immediate past. It is striking that the collective impression that the war has broadly created 'bad' selfish behaviour is not reflected in how individuals actually behave. In fact, we found the opposite. This means that our findings in this particular research point towards a post-conflict Acholiland that is a lot more collaborative and less 'selfish' than is assumed by the people in their own assessment of their environment. In short, it looks to be the case of a prosocial society where everyone perceives this to be distinctly not the case, which has implications for programmes seeking to support the recovery process. We find that people act in a more collaborative spirit if they have just reminded themselves of an experience they had during the war.

This behaviour and priming is individual, while development/humanitarian programmes in recovery situations seek to improve situations for groups of people. However, the mechanism through which these programmes seek to work is by supporting individual behaviour change. As a result, if the collective perception of group behaviour is more negative than individual behaviour suggests, changing perceptions of a situation through individual action and experience will remain challenging.

> **We find that people act in a more collaborative spirit if they have just reminded themselves of an experience they had during the war.**

What are the real-world implications of our findings from the Acholi community? The fact that we observe a considerable increase in prosocial behaviour in the treatment group has important links to post-conflict policy and practice as it presents increased opportunities for cooperation and collaboration (assuming that this finding applies outside the in-group). Since much of peacebuilding practice relies on strong collaboration and coordination between and within groups, this finding is encouraging and would seem to indicate that policy-makers and practitioners

should seek to have stakeholders and actors within peacebuilding recall the conflict in order to further heighten prosocial behaviours. This of course poses an ethical dilemma – is it ethical to request continuing discussion about the conflict in order to use that experience as a behavioural nudge? While prosocial behaviour might improve, this might contribute to other mental health concerns and make other processes such as reconciliation more challenging (Cilliers *et al.*, 2016).

However, since programming in the aftermath of conflict is explicitly dealing with a given conflict, one could also assume that this priming happens naturally – although the length of an 'aftermath' of conflict is often undefined. This does pose the question of whether one reason why post-conflict programmes often do not have the broad impact on people's perceptions that life is improved is that the emphasis is naturally on the building of peace. Thus programmes might inadvertently act as a prime that supports collaborative behaviour but, in their articulation of their goals, suggest that such behaviour does not exist sufficiently. This would amount to targeting affected groups in the wrong way, putting emphasis on the need to work together, which is what post-conflict societies might naturally be inclined to do.

War acts as a unifier because it feels like an external influence on a group. Even though people individually might not feel as if war has strengthened the collective, we see from the behavioural experiments that linking current actions to the war seems to have built a more communal-minded spirit. However, this is not how people perceive their environment. Individuals can be judged quite harshly for their behaviour by the community. And, individually, which is what our research looked at, positive changes are often not noted or recognised – quite the opposite. This mental model of an individual working against poor behaviour of the community undoubtedly creates an extra challenge for post-conflict life: it is difficult to see at which point perceptions of the community become positive. The individual and the collective experience, as well as perceptions and behaviour, can be very disconnected, possibly making it that much harder to achieve social cohesion.

This finding comes with huge caveats and can only act as a pointer towards thinking about the difference in perception and behaviour in an alternative way. It does not take away from the fact that individuals continue to struggle hugely in coming to terms with the effects of war, with personal loss and grief. Our research does not examine individual mental health and should not be read as such. It does not systematically measure long-term effects of war on families, economics and politics. It does not judge whether political marginalisation has improved. But it does raise questions about whether programmes that seek to support post-conflict life and prevent future conflict within communities may misjudge how post-conflict communities behave, and how big a challenge this provides for the success of such programmes that people might perceive a situation more negatively than it actually is.

Life in northern Uganda certainly presents a huge number of challenges, but it has also in many ways improved since the war. Based on our findings on experiencing improvement and perceptions of collaboration, a post-conflict setting might be particularly challenging in ever being experienced as improving.

Programmes coming into such contexts need to be aware of this gap between expressed behaviours (reality) and perceptions around behaviours, because ultimately they will involve assumptions around levels of collaboration and coordination. As much as our research suggests that a post-conflict environment may be an opportunity for increased collaboration, many people perceive the war as having made others 'selfish'. This may require an extra push, or effort, to be factored and resourced into programmes in order to challenge that perception.

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Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium
Overseas Development Institute (ODI)
203 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NJ
United Kingdom

T +44 (0)20 3817 0031
F +44 (0)20 7922 0399
E slrc@odi.org.uk
www.securelivelihoods.org
@SLRCtweet

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Kitgum, Uganda.