CHAPTER 17

THE *KABAKE* PROGRAMME: POPULAR EDUCATION TO ADDRESS COMMUNITY CHALLENGES IN ACHOLI AND NORTHERN UGANDA

Francis Akena Adyanga
Faculty of Education
Department of Foundation of Education
Kabale University, Uganda
fakena@kab.ac.ug; adyanga1@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Connecting *Kabake* origin to political independence and ensuing civil unrests

Most sub-Saharan African countries gained their political independence from the colonial regimes in the 1960s. The transition from colonialism to independence had two major effects on the political landscape in Africa. It led to the formation of a political elite whose competition for state resources led to military and civil unrests across the sub-Saharan countries (Roessler, 2011). Most of these countries have in common certain political and economic characteristics. One such characteristic is the plethora of coups d'état and civil wars (Huff & Lutz, 1974). For instance, within a period of ten years from 1960, numerous army mutinies leading to both failed and successful coups with disruptions of peace and stability occurred in the following countries: Congo and Ethiopia in 1960; Togo, Dahomey (present-day Benin) and Congo-Brazzaville in 1963; Gabon and Zanzibar in 1964; Congo – Kinshasa, Dahomey, and Burundi in 1965; Nigeria, Upper Volta (present-day Burkina Faso), Ghana, and Togo, the Central African Republic, Uganda, Congo-Brazzaville, and Burundi in 1966; Dahomey, Congo-Brazzaville, Central African Republic, Somali Republic and Equatorial Guinea in 1969; Dahomey and the Congo-Brazzaville in 1970; Sierra Leone, Uganda and Chad in 1971 (Collier & Hoeffler, 2002; Huff & Lutz, 1974). Most civil wars occur due to the ability of rebel groups to build large organisations through persuasive and or coercive membership recruitment drives which require substantial financial resources to meet their needs and purchase armaments (Collier & Hoeffler, 2002). In Uganda, political independence from British colonial rule was granted in 1962. Shortly after, coups, civil wars, oppression of the masses, gross human rights violations and corruption characterised the new state.

Two decades of civil war in northern Uganda from 1986 led to disunity and moral breakdown of the affected communities. The traditional agricultural economic base was systematically undermined because of the instability and the government's response of creating Internally Displaced People's (IDP) camps as well as a harsh military policy. The Lord's Resistance Army

rebels (LRA) emerged in 1987 against a historical backdrop of antagonism and distrust between the Acholi people of northern Uganda and the politically influential tribes of southern Uganda. Led by Joseph Kony, its aims were to overthrow the government of President Yoweri Museveni, protect Acholi culture and rule Uganda in accordance with the teaching of the Ten Commandments (CSOPNU, 2006). After failing to win support of the population in northern Uganda, the LRA turned to forceful recruitment of children through abduction to swell its ranks, accompanied by mutilation, rape and sometimes, mass murder of civilians suspected to be sympathisers of the government army. In response, the government devised the strategy of forceful relocation of civilians to internally displaced peoples (IDP) camps protected by government soldiers, the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF). The government began moving people to what it described as "protected villages" in 1996, and by the end of 2005, around 1.8 million people had been relocated (UNHCR, 2012) to these camps scattered across northern Uganda. It was the austere conditions and socio-economic hardships in the IDP camps that gave birth to the *Kabake* programme, an initiative of the local people in response to the challenges of camp life.

Prior to the forced relocation of people to IDP camps, the government had, upon capture of state power in 1986, used a failed policy of arbitrary arrests and imprisonment of men ranging from 14- to 50-years-old from northern Uganda, on the assumption that this would be used as human resource to form a new rebel movement to challenge the regime using military force. Many were taken to military detention centres in Kampala, about 300 kms south of Gulu, a major Acholi city, and held without trial. The policy left broken families and spawned numerous forms of destitution. Some of the incarcerated men were murdered in cold blood while others either died on the way to Kampala, or in the prison cells due to starvation and the squalid overcrowded cell conditions (Christian Aid, 2007). The aftermath of this policy was a serious decline in agricultural production as homes were left in the hands of women, children and senior citizens. Traditionally in Acholi society, boys learn life-skills education from their fathers, uncles and grandfathers while the girls take their lessons from their mothers, aunts or grandmothers (Mosha, 2000; Ocitti, 1973). The policy of arbitrary arrests and imprisonment punched a huge hole in the heart of Acholi traditional education, cultures and spirituality since the task of educating the younger generation was denied to thousands of incarcerated men.

For the community, the civil war economically weakened them and turned the majority into displaced people in their own land. While the social, economic and political ramifications intensified as the war unfolded, society became tainted with many evils: oppression, land theft by those in position of power, HIV pandemics, violence, and poor social service provisions. As the

community struggled to make ends meet during such hardships, it engaged in a form of community organising, locally known as *Kabake* to raise social consciousness through open-air public dialogues, groom resilience and implement community learning. This programme has continued into the present day many years since the war ended.

This chapter is guided by considering the following key questions: How does the *Kabake* programme raise consciousness of the community about injustices? How does the community take action once their consciousness is invoked? How is collective learning facilitated and achieved within the *Kabake* programme? Is the process of collective learning helpful as a way of coping and of healing during and after the war?

With the brief account of the genesis of the *Kabake* programme above, I now structure the rest of the chapter as follows: The first part examines colonialism, education and development. It argues that colonial administration introduced a mediocre education system and development agenda aimed at extracting resources from Africa. This partly accounted for civil wars in Sub-Saharan Africa. The civil wars led to varying degree of social and economic hardships contributing to the birth of local community coping mechanism through programmes like "*Kabake*" for the case of northern Uganda. Part 2 briefly sheds light on the theoretical framework and research methodology used. Part 3 discusses the efficacy of *Kabake* programme as a form of community organising to confront the challenges engineered by the civil war. The fourth part examines the *Kabake* programme in post-war context, and the last part offers a conclusion.

Colonialism, education and development

Historical narrative is significant in understanding the roots of civil wars, its consequences and local people's organising to respond to resultant hardships and marginalisation. People's organising to challenge social injustices can be referred to as local education which helps to restore our humanity (Harley, 2015) that enables the oppressed understand the nature of existing injustices/hardships and gives them insight into how this can be overcome. To properly grasp how hardships and marginalisation come about, a re-examination of colonial and postcolonial education and development agenda in Africa is required. The concept of colonialism and its relationship to development and education in former colonies has attracted considerable debate over decades. While some scholars argue that colonisation laid the foundation for modern development in former colonies, others have rebutted that colonialism left legacies that are fundamentally detrimental to development (Adyanga, 2011; Fanon, 1961; Mamdani, 2001; Mawere, 2014). It is because of the influence of colonisation that most development organisations

and donor communities are arguably convinced that developing societies would better benefit from implementation of projects and education system engineered from the West (western paradigm of thinking), especially Europe and USA (Akena, 2014a; Dei & Adjei, 2014). The western model of development is by far the most preferred by donor communities and the most critiqued by some western and non-western scholars alike for its failure to salvage many underdeveloped societies.

Scholars have noted that the desire for development in Africa is informed by western understandings of what is best for developing Africa (Akena, 2014a; Murove, 2005; Samoff, 1993). Indeed, the implementation of a colonial agenda in Africa required getting rid of African cultural ways of life. African cultural formations were viewed as forms of resistance to modernisation which had to be subjugated (Akena, 2014b; Dei & Adjei, 2014; Mamdani, 2001; Tucker, 1999), dominated and purged. The subordination of African Indigenous education, knowledge, cultures and belief system was entrenched through formal education and religion (Akena, 2014b; Harley, 2015; Mosha, 2000; Nyamnjoh, 2014). The introduction of formal education suffocated different elements of African informal learning such as age set system, popular/community education, sex and reproductive education, among others. With African cultural ways of life and education regarded by colonial administration as static and an obstacle to civilisation, activists for such education and traditional cultures were not spared either as they came under criticism. With reference to the Maori society in Australia, Smith (1999) points out that:

> Debates about authentic voices or authentic communities are designed to fragment and marginalise those who speak for, or in support of, indigenous issues. They frequently have the effect also of silencing and making invisible the presence of other groups within the indigenous society like women, the urban non-status tribal person…. At the heart of such a view of authenticity is a belief that indigenous cultures cannot change, cannot recreate themselves and still claim to be indigenous. Nor can they be complicated, internally diverse or contradictory. Only the West has that privilege (p. 72).

These words apply equally to the African situation. The inaccuracy of viewing non-western communities as static and non-progressive denied the traditional African society of the agency of community development that had sustained them in harmony prior to colonial contacts. Agrawal (1995) and Nyamnjoh (2014) warn that this systemic denigration of indigenous education risks undermining the power that indigenous people have over their knowledge and eventually, their

education for development. It compromises the agency of African people to contribute meaningfully towards solving Africa's pressing problems.

It is important to note that the 19th century Industrial Revolution in Britain saw colonies as sources of raw materials and markets for manufactured goods (Adyanga, 2011; Murove, 2005, Sale, 1995). For proper exploitation of raw materials, the social fabrics upon which the strength of colonised communities relied had to be broken. The sacred ideology of indigenous education was replaced with a mechanistic, capitalist-based model which views nature as something to be subdued for commercial gains (Murove, 2005). In tracing the rise of the capitalistic economic model, Sale (1995) in her History of the Luddites, laid the responsibility for the breakdown of colonised community on the English Industrial revolution. She states:

> All that community implies self-sufficiency, mutual aid, morality in the marketplace, stubborn tradition, regulation by custom, organic knowledge instead of mechanistic science – had to be steadily and systematically disrupted and displaced. All the practices that kept the individual from becoming a consumer had to be done away with so that the cogs and wheels of an unfettered machine called 'the economy' could operate without interference (p. 38).

The destruction of traditional society, customs and education was accomplished through the instrument of western formal education and religion. Formal education was introduced in the colonies as an instrument to train a few of the colonised subjects who would cooperate with colonial masters in providing markets and raw materials (Adyanga, 2011; 2012). To illustrate this, the governor of colonial India, Macaulay (Bureau of Education, 1920, n.p.) emphasised in a Minute of 1835 that:

> We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the western nomenclature.

Although this statement was made with reference to India, the British colonial administration applied it to other colonies. The edifice and philosophy of education was thus constituted in the frameworks and needs of colonial powers. Retrogressively, the postcolonial regimes in Africa have mimicked the colonial system of education with little adjustment. They do not realise that such a system of education had failed to develop African societies from the onslaught of colonisation in the 1880s to its end in the 1960s. Sceptics may cite civil wars, corruption and poor governance as bottlenecks to Africa's economic development. However, my counter argument is

that destructive as they are, civil wars and their ramifications are not a new concept in human history. Many western societies that have reached the zenith of their development in the 21st century have experienced some of the most devastating armed conflicts but have managed to pull through the path of economic development. Also, the level of corruption in some of the developed countries is alarming. Take the USA, for example, where many senior politicians have fraudulently benefited from the wars in the Middle East for years and yet have remained on the course of economic development. And, consider too the scandals such as the Mike Duffy in Canada (Barton, 2015), notwithstanding the Chinese corruptions (Rose, Blanchard, Hua, & Rajagopalan, 2015) that have rocked their economies for years.

With the British colonial rule firmly established in Uganda, three classes of people emerged in hierarchical order of importance: the whites on top, Asians in the middle, and the native blacks, who were the most oppressed placed at the lower echelon. Provision of social services was also arranged in that order. Quality education which would equip African children with skills required for development was discouraged but instead offered a mediocre education in elementary schools (Adyanga, 2011; Mamdani, 2001). Informal adult learning was swept aside as adults were required to grow cotton and other cash crops such as sisal, coffee and tea whose demand was high in Europe, and, at the same time, pay high taxes. Time for informal adult learning was thus denied. Within this environment, African intellectual assertiveness which would engender development from African canons was diluted (Nyamnjoh, 2004). Fanon (1965) focused his attention on the way in which violence became a means by which the subjugation of African cultures, education and intellectual creativity was executed. He states:

> colonialism obviously throws all the elements of native society into confusion. The dominant group arrives with its values and imposes them with such violence that the very life of the colonised can manifest itself only defensively, in a more or less clandestine way. Under these conditions, colonial domination distorts the relations that the colonised maintains with his own culture (p. 130)

This distortion of relations and disruptions of the native cultures led to contempt and resistance by the natives in most African states. Resistance to colonial disruptions and occupation therefore became the underlying rationale for physical violence exacted to subdue the colonised. In Africa, when acts of resistance were exhibited, the colonial authorities reacted with violent rapidity (Fanon, 1961; Kabwegyere, 1972; Wa Thiong'o, 1986) to subdue the colonised uprisings with unmatched martial forces. The motive was to keep the colonised African in a state of hegemony where control over their land, natural resources, education, cultural norms, and human resources was left in the hands of colonial authorities. Arguably henceforth, colonial education and

administrative policies in Africa set the groundwork for resentment by the colonised leading to agitation for independence. This was done through political negotiation for some countries while for others, it took the form of civil war. The liberation civil unrests and the successive ones after acquisition of independence led to a profound degree of social and economic hardships forcing affected communities to devise appropriate coping mechanisms like the *Kabake* programme in the case of northern Uganda.

Situating the *Kabake* programme within Freirean theory

This discussion of the *Kabake* programme is situated within the theoretical perspective of Freire's philosophy of praxis and taking transformative action to change the world. By anchoring the discussion of the *Kabake* programme on Freirean theory, effort is made to explicate how the community came to terms with and responded to the challenges ushered in by civil war in northern Uganda. At the core of his theoretical perspective on human actions through reflections, Freire (1982) posits that humans are:

> Being of 'praxis' of action and of reflection. Humans find themselves marked by the results of their own actions in their relations with the world, and through the action on it. By acting they transform; by transforming they create a reality which conditions their manner of acting (p. 102).

Acting to change the world goes concurrently with dialogues on issues to be changed. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1974) challenges humans to act as subjects in the world instead of being objects to be acted upon. The subjects vis-à-vis objects standpoint championed by Freire is an unswerving appeal to humans, specifically those burdened by oppressive systems or status quo, to critically examine their oppression and take action to change it. According to Freire (1982), human beings as subjects are constantly evolving, are in a better position to transform their reality and can transcend into "a state of being, in search of becoming more fully human" (p. 145). Without necessarily naming their action as popular education, participants in the *Kabake* programme used the power of social gatherings, formal education and historical memory to awakened consciousness to take actions on issues of concern to them. Therefore, the consciousness to understand oppressive and dehumanising forces, compounded by the impulse to take action against such forces, are the key features of Freirean theory that feeds into the discussions of the *Kabake* programme. The theory speaks to the lived experiences of the victim community in northern Uganda during the armed conflict and in post conflict situation. In the words

of Mohanty (2003), it makes their "personal experiences and individual stories communicable" (p. 191).

Data collection methods

Three methods of data collection were used in this qualitative study. The researcher used purposive method of sampling to recruit two reporters (a male and female respondent) from *Mega* FM radio station for the email interviews. *Mega* FM radio station was chosen for this study basing on its history in broadcasting the *Kabake* programme for over ten years. The selection of the radio station is therefore a convenience sampling by virtue of its accessibility and monopoly in broadcasting the programme under study. First, data were gathered using email interviews (McCoyd & Kerson, 2006) with two reporters at *Mega* FM radio station that broadcasts the programme. Email interviews as form of computer-mediated communication (CMC) were used due to the geographical distance between the researcher and the respondents (McCoyd & Kerson, 2006). In lauding CMC in data collection, Sherry (1995) argued that participants tend to confide in machines that are viewed as non-judgemental rather than directly with another person.

In addition to the two participants from the radio station, 15 members of the local community who participated in the *Kabake* programme meetings in Kitgum district were recruited using purposive sampling. Here, homogenous sampling method articulated by Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2007) was used to recruit the 15 participants (eight women and seven men) based on the criterion of their previous participation in the *Kabake* programme. The 15 participants were recruited from Akwang Subcounty in Kitgum district. Akwang subcounty had one of the largest IDP camps in the region during the period of intense armed insurgency. Several *Kabake* programme meetings were held in this camp during the war. In homogenous sampling, "participants are selected for the study based on membership in a subgroup or unit that has specific characteristics" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007 p. 112). In selecting the 15 participants, the researcher wanted to understand their lived experiences and how the *Kabake* programme shaped and empowered them during and after the war. Further, the researcher wanted to understand the evolution of the programme and its contribution to post-conflict resettlement and rehabilitation.

The snowball method was used to recruit the 15 participants (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Under this method, the researcher, also originally from Akwang sub-county, contacted the local leaders to provide names of prominent *Kabake* programme participants. After initially receiving four names (two women and two men), the researcher reached out to the four who then made referrals to other participants. In total, 15 participants were recruited. Participants were informed

of the study's objective and were asked to give oral consent to participate since they were not formally educated and hence could not read and write.

The third method of data collection was autoethnographic study in which the researcher reflected on his lived experiences having participated in the *Kabake* programme between the year 2006 and 2007. According to Ellis (2004) and Jones (2005), autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) to understand cultural experience (ethno). In using autoethnographic study, the researcher acknowledges limitations associated with this method such as subjectivity, emotionality and the researcher's possible influence on the outcome of the study (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). To play a responsible researcher role to counteract these possible limitations during data discussion, I interlaced retrospective, selective personal memories arising from my participation in the *Kabake* programme with interpretative analysis of the interview results from the study participants. I then linked the discussions to existing literature that examined local community organising in other contexts using the power of radio. For protection of participants' privacy, aliases were used in data transcription. In the reporting of the findings, descriptions of participants such as "a male or female participant/respondent said" were used for verbatim quotes. This was to ensure that no information/data could be traced back to a participant based on what he/she had said. In terms of recruitment order, two participants from Mega Radio Station were first recruited and interviewed in 2016, and 15 community members were interviewed in October 2017.

DISCUSSION OF THE *KABAKE* PROGRAMME

Kabake Programme for community resilience

The war in northern Uganda as mentioned earlier, affected all sectors of the economy with intense impacts on civilian population. According to *Civil Society Organisations for Peace in Northern Uganda* (CSOPNU) (2006), over 1.8 million people had been driven into the IDP camps by the end of 2005. The communities had become homeless in their own land. The harsh conditions of the IDP camps and the inadequacy of provision of basic goods and social service delivery forced the internees to devise ways of responding to the hardships. It is from this background that *Kabake* popular adult education programme was initiated. A female interview respondent elucidated that "*we used to travel to different IDP camps collecting views and facilitating a culture of dialogue with people on issues of concerns to them, issues that were being ignored or inadequately addressed by government.*" Literally translated, *Kabake* means to gather and

dialogue, specifically public dialogue. *Kabake* public dialogues are open-air discussions where the community debates current issues of concern to them and tries to seek solutions. In the process, adult learning also takes place. A local radio station called *Mega* FM in close collaboration with the community facilitates the programme. *Mega* FM radio is stationed in Gulu city. Responding to my email inquiry about the origin of the *Kabake* programme, a male reporter at Mega FM radio station stated that:

> "*The programme was initiated by the community in 2003, our radio station only picked it up and sought funding for the programme. We managed to get donor funding for this programme from the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Foundation. This is a German based political foundation that supports peaceful resolutions of conflicts and building a democratic society. So Mega FM has been the only media house airing and promoting the programme since its initiation in 2003 during the peak of the LRA war in [northern Uganda] our region.*"

The above claim is supported by a female respondent from Mega Radio Station who avowed:

> "*Honestly, credit must be given to the rural community. They realised that there were enormous sufferings during war time, that nobody was going to get them out of the sufferings, that they needed to do something on their own if they were to emerge from the war alive. It is from this realisation that the Kabake programme was born. On our part, we only facilitate the dialogues through the extensive outreach of the radio.*"

In agreement with the above, a female respondent from Akwang sub-county reiterated the postulation that "*I feel my identity and life experiences in the IDP camp and thereafter mirrored in this dialogue programme that our community founded at the height of the civil war.*" The participants argued that life in the camps was extremely challenging due to the austere living conditions and insecurity but the open discussions and sharing of experiences during the dialogue meetings gave them hope that built resilience.

Asked about the origin of the programme, the same participant added:

> "*I was not among the initial group who founded the Kabake but its relevancy out-spurred the founders who are in Gulu. The efficacy of the programme was embraced by all communities across northern Uganda.*"

By attributing the founding of the programme to another city (Gulu) located about 120 kms south of Akwang sub-county in Kitgum Municipality and yet emphasising its receptibility locally, the

participant paid homage to the generalisability and transferability of the programme to diverse contexts where the brunt of the civil war had manifested. The participant also rearticulated and repurposed the transformative capability of African community in disrupting and changing objectionable status quos.

Sponsored by the DFID during the war time, *Mega* FM was launched in Gulu city in 2002 as a strategy to ease the suffering of the population, and to advocate a negotiated end to the northern Uganda civil war (Brisset-Foucault, 2011). Applauding the power of radio, Staub, Pearlman, Weis, Hoek (2007) recounted how radio broadcasts were used to promote healing, reconciliation, and the prevention of new violence in Rwanda in 2004, Congo in 2006 and Burundi in 2005, supported by Langdon and Larweh (2015) who expounded the intricate roles radio *Ada* played in the social movement organising in Ghana. In their narratives, radios became a prototype for broad-based social change in societies through open dialogues that gave the locals greater voice over the destiny of their communities.

In Acholi language, the word '*mega'* means mine, which buttressed the community ownership of the radio station and programmes. As with *Ada* radio in Ghana that broadcasted in local language, the main language of communication on *Mega* FM is the Acholi language. Many programmes were run on this radio station and key among them, was '*dwog paco'* or 'come back home' in literal translation. It is a programme that urges LRA fighters to abandon rebellion, embrace government amnesty and reintegrate into the community. In similar vein, *Kabake* was initiated, but it is unique in that the programme facilitators from *Mega* FM would travel to the community to have open-air dialogues on diverse issues of concern to them. The community where the dialogues are held identifies the key problems that they want deliberated. The identification of the problems to be dialogued is in line with Freire's (1974) philosophy on dialogues when he asserted that:

> Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection (p.76).

In the light of the above concern raised by Freire, the community after naming the problems that they want to deliberate, set tentative dates and venues for the meetings. This, from my experience, was done in close collaboration with the facilitators at *Mega* Radio Station. A typical example from my experience of attending a *Kabake* programme involves a community that wants to host the next programme sending their representative (usually a leader) or a letter to *Mega* FM

expressing their intention to host the next meeting. Because of the many applications/requests from different communities, the letters/requests are vetted by facilitators in order of urgency of the issue/s raised for discussions. By going through this process, the community delineates a greater level of social agency. They are not mere helpless conformists to oppressive forces yearning for external actors to define and liberate them. This analysis feeds into a male respondent's interpolation that "*the Kabake gave hope to the community displaced by the war that their adversities were temporal, and that to end their adversities, they must be actors and not spectators, actors working for change.*" They must name their adversities and collectively seek workable solutions.

Based on applications and proposed dates from the different communities, the facilitators draw up the final programme for all the communities that applied and notify them of the dates and time when the *Kabake* programme would be held in their respective area. Depending on the issues raised by the host community, facilitators may propose additional sub-topics for deliberation. On the meeting date, the community gathers at an agreed venue in their respective IDP camps (during the war) and at a village square or market place (after the war) well before the arrival of facilitators. The proceedings start with an opening prayer usually presided over by a local spiritual leader from among the community. Key ground rules that guide the meetings are jointly brainstormed and agreed upon. In the one meeting that I attended which took place in my community on a Sunday, the rampant teen pregnancy was the key issue that the community wanted deliberated to agree on action plans that would ensure teenaged girls stayed at school. After a long-heated deliberation with some parents arguing that they had every right to give their daughters away for early marriage, the meeting reached a consensus through voting by show of hands. The girls would stay at school if they were younger than 18. Parents who contravened the resolution of the meeting were to face the long arms of the law (referral to police for follow-up). Every community member was to play a policing role to ensure that girls' education was not interrupted. It was also agreed that local leaders were to meet with all the school administrations in that community so that awareness-creation workshops were organised for the girls. Also, during this meeting, an elder of about 80 years of age spoke of courting during his youthful years. He took the audience through the rightful Acholi traditional process of identifying a marriage partner and challenged the youths in the meeting to emulate it. He argued that the process would involve the consent of both the girl and boy's parents which left no room for early marriage. The audio records of the meeting would be replayed the following weekend on *Mega* FM. The dialogues are usually uncensored, and, because of this, some participants have made statements that are critical of government policies or, in some cases, highly offensive to government officials. The

candour displayed by the people in open-air public dialogues intensely influences and shapes ways in which the community frames political and ideological discourses with critical attacks on unscrupulous community members, leaders, political and religious leaders. Extending this articulation, a male responded and appraised the programme that:

> "*Throughout my participation in the programme, I have realised that the Kabake programme provided a platform to discuss social, economic and political issues like rising crime rates, polygamy, early marriages, diminishing social service delivery, health care, bad roads, and creation of new districts among others. Because of the awareness created, some communities have voted out of office local leaders after assessing their performance through dialogues at this programme*."

The participant's perspectives resolutely demonstrate how community informal learning can occur through struggle. This is in line with Freire's judgement that our presence in the world is not merely to adapt to it but to work towards its transformation.

With the damaging effects of the civil war, the *Kabake* programme was also initiated to sustain transition towards a more democratic and pluralistic society. To support a culture of dialogue, various public meetings were held to discuss other social, political and economic challenges. Although the programme focused largely on conflict prevention through peaceful reintegration of former combatants, other issues like domestic violence, HIV/AIDS care and prevention, education for children, school curriculum, market prices for peasants' subsistence produce, care for senior citizens and orphans were explored. With the overcrowded conditions in the IDPs, basic health and hygiene standards were also discussed and set during the meeting. The community leaders would follow the implementation of the basic health hygiene such as mandatory construction of pit latrines (washrooms) and proper drainage at family/household level. During each meeting, the moderator introduces topics while the communities seated in the open, usually under trees, brainstorm by show of hands the root causes of the identified hardships or problems. The setting of the programme is not just a town hall-styled convention but involves multiple layers of social learning and awakening social consciousness for those who are unaware of the issues under deliberation. Elsewhere, Macrine (2009) succinctly points out that "education involves learning to question the world by cultivating an epistemological curiosity. As such, critical pedagogy encourages educators to imagine, dream and struggle towards building the foundation of a new democratic society" (p. 114). With *Kabake,* the dialogues progress for a long time to allow most members to contribute as the minutes of deliberations are audio-recorded. At the beginning of

each meeting, practical activities like setting ground rules are jointly conducted. According to a female respondent, the objective is:

> "*to strengthen democratic processes, promoting the principles of transparency and accountability from participants. This help to avoid or overcome conflicts wherever ideological differences arise over contentious issues during the open dialogues*."

The example of some parents defending early marriages of their teen daughters for material gain became a heated disagreement that threatened to tear the meeting apart. However, a local chief in the meeting intervened by reminding members that early marriage was untraditional and contravened the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda. To get consensus, the facilitator asked members to vote by show of hands, those in favour and against early marriage, resulting in the setting of law by the community as mentioned earlier.

During the *Kabake* meetings, community learning to raise social consciousness involves telling stories by those who feel marginalised or violated. For instance, in one of the meeting's deliberations replayed on Mega Radio Station, a young lady of about 18 years old (in 2006) narrated how a group of ten rebel soldiers from the LRA raided their home, bound up her mother and killed her father while she and the siblings watched. After looting food stock from the family granary (barn), she was forced to carry part of it to the rebels' hideout in the jungle. There, a senior commander handed the abducted girl to another junior commander in rank (who also happened to have been abducted from the same community few years earlier) as a wife. She managed to escape three years later with two little children born from the forced marriage. However, her nightmares were reawakened when eight months after her return from captivity, the perpetrator "husband" was rescued in a fire fight by the national army, the UPDF. He was returned to the same community after being rehabilitated and receiving amnesty from the government. He attended that particular *Kabake* meeting in person. He confessed and asked for forgiveness arguing that he was simply complying with "lawful" orders from superiors – his commanders. Following the deliberation, the elders recommended that the two undergo some set of traditional Acholi cleansing rituals to cleanse them of psychological trauma and emotional injuries inflicted during rebel captivity. Because both victim and perpetrator received an amnesty certificate from the government signifying renunciation of rebellion, the community could embrace and live peacefully with a consensus against stereotypical comments/gestures. Listening to the story, one starts to appreciate the intricate dynamics and operationalisation of the elusive rebel group labelled by the US government as a terrorist organisation (Akena, 2014b).

Another learning dimension involved getting to understand and appreciate the behaviours of child soldiers while in active combat ranks, who, after being rescued, are rehabilitated through the different rehabilitation centres set up by NGOs before returning to live in the community, some of which they had wronged. Telling stories has become more than just retelling of the violations experienced, but it involves exploring redress. The stories evoke emotional responses. The most typical features of such stories are their collaborative nature and ability to encapsulate experiences through evoking traditional knowledge since the majority of participants did not acquire formal education. The stories provide multiple levels of collective learning that raises the consciousness of the listeners. By engaging the whole community, the stories become therapeutic to the tellers and the listeners who might have experienced similar levels of oppression or violations. The stories are therapeutic because narrators are encouraged to delve into as much detail that they are comfortable revealing which allows for prescription of appropriate healing rituals. The active involvement of the oppressed in changing the status quo during this programme aligns with what Freire (1974) would refer to as the ethical dimension of popular education. Individual historical remembrance during the *Kabake* programme enables the oppressed to analyse the ideological, economic and political forces at play, come to common comprehension that these forces are changeable, and jointly suggest action plans. Reiterating this position, an elderly female respondent asserted:

> "*I am bitter with the quality of social service delivery. The war has ended over ten years ago, IDP camps have closed but the government negligence to provide proper medical care is indefensible. As a community, we have complained about this in several Kabake meetings, but no action is being taken to address our concerns. For this reason, those elected leaders who gave us empty promises will face our wrath in the next election. We will vote them out of office!*"

The above respondent's frustration with the state of social service delivery delineates a degree of socio-civic learning that the *Kabake* programme empowers the community with. Through the programme, participants learn different ways of holding elected leaders accountable. They also learn strategies to demand better service provision from the local governments and mechanisms to channel their grievances without resorting to violent protests.

As with the case of Ghana, Landon (2011) buttressed the argument that learning happens in the process of social movement when people begin to realise that it is possible to challenge what seemed unchallengeable and learn the practicality of making the change happen. For example, the congregations for the case of the young lady who returned from rebel captivity unanimously

agreed to support her reintegration into the community. This was done through volunteering to build her a grass-thatched hut where she could live with her two children, plough her fields and avoid negative and derogatory remarks or gestures deliberately meant to re-traumatize her. For the *Kabake* programme as also with the *Ada* community in Ghana (Langdon, 2014), learning took place in the process of people coming together on open-air radio during the programme, brainstorming and confronting critical issues affecting their lives and asserting their voices over the future of their community.

As mentioned earlier, most participants in the *Kabake* programme did not acquire formal education. Most of them are already grown-up adults who did not have the opportunity to go to school but are committed to being agents of change in their society. By participating in the *Kabake* programme, many saw the need to acquire basic formal education offered by NGOs during the war as a fundamental mechanism to survive in their evolving society. Drawing a comparison from El Salvador, Hammond (1998) states that:

> The setting of (popular) education in poor communities and in a war zone also created an opportunity. The will to teach and learn grew out of the environment to struggle together for economic justice and dignity. The communities were locked in a vastly unequal combat, one that required using all available resources, especially human resource to the maximum. Because most people had grown up without access to education, those resources had to be developed. (p. 5)

The El Salvador case has relevance to northern Uganda. Since most of the participants (peasants) in the *Kabake* programme were uneducated (formally), many were encouraged to enrol in Basic Adult Literacy classes offered by NGOs to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. In the basic adult classes, many acquired skills such as vocational training in basic carpentry (making bee hives, coffins, tables, chairs, stools etc), basic trade and commerce, while others could start income-generating activities (small retail businesses) to improve their livelihoods. Therefore, by linking intellectual development to conscious arousal for conversion of proposed action plans into praxis, the *Kabake* programme developed talents and promoted self-confidence in people whose lack of formal education had made them doubtful of their abilities to foster change in their societies. The adults who acquired basic literacy from these classes became key contributors during the *Kabake* sessions. When asked about the direct benefit of the programme, a male participant responded:

> *"Yes, yes, the programme benefited me at personal level. During my second appearance [second time participating in the programme], I felt embarrassed of my inability to read a small book about health [public health awareness brochure]. But while there, I learned of*

the adult literacy classes being offered for free by an NGO. I enrolled for it and after nine months, I graduated with a certificate. Now I can read and write in Acholi language, I can keep record of my money. This helps me plan my income. Because of my ability to read and write now, I have also been elected to a secretarial position in the men's village saving scheme group."

Graduates from adult basic education classes played leading roles in settling inter (within village) and intra (between villages) community disputes such as land disagreements. Since the *Kabake* public dialogue took place once a month at the village level, the adults graduates took leading roles in extending the programme discussions at family and clan level by following the implementation of the action plans taken collectively. Accordingly, most study participants pointed out key indicators of change ushered in by the programme. These among others include a positive shift in attitude of the community towards people living with HIV/AIDS, care for orphans and the elderly, and acceptance and reintegration of former combatants into the very communities they had tormented out of forced compliance while in rebel ranks, and above all, improvement of personal hygiene at family, clan and village levels. In agreement, a male responded espoused that:

"Without this radio programme, the greatest challenge of northern Uganda post conflict society would have been how to peacefully return human rights violators [violators out of force compliance] to live in the same neighbourhood with their victims. In the absence of proper interventions, this is inconceivable. To know that the person who abducted or killed your loved one is now living next door - free of persecution, can provoke another wave of violence in vengeance. But our programme has taught people to learn during dialogues, to learn that anyone can be guilty under different circumstance, and to forgive, to forgive and move forward for the benefit of the whole society."

Buttressing the voice of the above participant, a female respondent tied the programme benefits to the improved hygiene and sanitation in her village. She asserted:

"Immediately after return from Akwang IDP camp in the year 2006, most men in our village took to excessive alcohol consumption leaving the burden of caring for the family on us the women. This was so stressful. Things however, gradually changed after we had the fiery exchanges at one of the Kabake meeting in which women openly pointed out one by one the names of all the careless and negligent drunkards. With support of the programme moderator acting as mediator, some basic harmonization of discordant behaviours was

consensually reached. Two months later, pit latrines; rubbish dumping pits; plates/dish drying racks were built by men in most homes that had lacked them. That Kabake meeting became a turning moment for my village. It taught men an abrupt lesson that they had no option but to comply due to pressure from women."

The participant's articulation of the programme efficacy feeds into Foley's (1999) concept of incidental learning that take place when people become involved in voluntary organisations and social struggles to resist and alter oppressive status quo. The guiding principle of the *Kabake* programme is embedded in the Afrocentric standpoint of greater society and, the *Ubuntu* philosophy in particularly. *Ubuntu* is an African traditional philosophy that offers our understanding of the self in relation with the world. Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999) summarily projected the cardinal principle of *Ubuntu* in the following way:

> It is the essence of being human. It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in yours. I am human because I belong. It speaks about wholeness; it speaks about compassion… A person with Ubuntu is welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, willing to share. They know that they are diminished when others are humiliated, diminished when others are oppressed, diminished when others are treated as if they were less than who they are. The quality of Ubuntu gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them (pp. 34–35).

Participation in the *Kabake* programme empowers the local community's intellectual competency to take actions against social, economic and political injustices that concern them. For example, forceful land evictions by those in positions of power are often discussed and peaceful ways to resist such acts, consensually reached by the community which is in line with Foley's (1999) notion of learning in the struggle. Tying this to the context of Ghana regarding local people organising to resist government attempts to expropriate the lagoon resource for a petrochemical processor, as reported by Langdon and Larweh (2015), participants of the *Kabake* programme developed a democratic reflective process that became the cornerstone for dialogues and actions on critical issues affecting their society. Langdon's (2011) concept of learning through the struggle often emerged during the *Kabake* programme. A case in point is the example of the child mother who returned from rebel captivity only to discover that her tormentor "husband" also lived in the same community. This realisation brought contentious debates which threatened to rip that open-air public dialogue apart as the girls' relatives were furious over the decision to allow the "perpetrator husband" to attend the gathering in the first place. According to Langdon (2011), learning through struggle emerges from moments of conflict over resources, issues or policies

that lead to a deepen awareness on the socio-political terrain in which movement operate. Learning through the struggle in this case involved the intervention of elders' strong appeal for calm and reiteration that the atrocities of the LRA rebels had impacted every family in the greater northern Uganda and all families were victims in one way or the other either directly or indirectly through distant relatives. Members thus appreciated the fact that anyone could be victim and that concealing hatred would not move society towards collective healing, a prerequisite for post conflict development. Relating this to the South African society for example, the *Kabake* open-air public dialogues are analogous to People's Education described by Harley (2015) who posits that "it is the education that happens within movements of the poor, that happens when people who are oppressed and marginalised reflect on their lived reality" (p. 75) to act for the wellbeing of the collective.

Situating *Kabake* in the post-war era

By late 2005 and early 2006, the government of Uganda came under intense pressure from the international community to bring the over two decades' conflict to an end through political solutions. Consequently, peace talks mediated by Dr. Reik Machar (former South Sudanese vice-president) were initiated in Juba, South Sudan capital. The cease-fire agreement that followed in mid-2006 restored relative peace and stability across the greater northern Uganda, as the LRA rebels were given safe passage to South Sudan, and later Congo and Central Africa Republic where they are still active. People started returning to their original homesteads as the government progressively dismantled the IDP camps.

The *Kabake* programme became very instrumental in this process. It was taken by the facilitators to the different resettled communities to deliberate post-conflict challenges and work with government and other stakeholders to address them. Other broad-range issues such as public health, ecological sustainability for future generations through responsible land use, planting trees and safeguarding of communally owned natural resources such as hunting grounds and water bodies are discussed during the *Kabake* meetings. This invariably speaks to the guiding tenets of Afrocentricity. In agreement, Molefi (1990) points out that "Afrocentricity contends that human problems become problems when humans no longer appreciate the connectedness to nature" (p. 169). Other indigenous and indigenous-oriented scholars such as Dei (2011), Langdon (2009) and Wane (2006) have tied the principles of Afrocentricity to local/grassroots political organising and intellectual activism. Afrocentricity provides local people with an avenue for creativity and resourcefulness (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010; Dei, 2011; Romm, 2015). This is because it pulls to the forefront key community virtues such as compassion, hospitality, generosity, forgiveness,

reconciliation, and the collective, thus positioning these at the centre of community education/organising (Adyanga, 2014; Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010). With this awareness, *Kabake* public discourse enables participants to examine the destructive nature of the war on human beings, fauna and flora and explore coping strategies. According to Freire (1974), this is humility anchored in the politics of love when he states, "Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of profound love for the world and people" (p. 70). In expressing humility and love, the community explores ways through which this wasteful war could have been avoided. This lays the ground for the prevention of similar occurrences in the future while offering solutions to the socio-economic and political hardships the war has generated, which fits with *Ubuntu* philosophy.

In addition to the above, a female respondent argued that the programme is empowering to groups that are traditionally marginalised in society such as women whose voices are often unheard due to patriarchal dominance. Specifically, she stated:

> *"The programme allows local leaders to intently listen to the complaints of their people and respond directly. In this way, the programme builds bridges between the leaders and the people they lead which reiterates and nurtures the Acholi institutional culture of dialogues. The most important aspect of the programme is the equal opportunity accorded to women to air out issues affecting them such as men/husbands defaulting their child rearing obligations. Women voices are given equal weighting in this programme. Because women are always the majority in attendance, they shape the dialogues and action plans collectively agreed upon during the programme."*

The proceedings of the open-air public dialogues are audio recorded and replayed every Sundays for about two hours on *Mega* FM radio for the community to review and make follow-up of the action plans. It also sets the stage for the next meeting in another community. Similarly, Langdon (2015) found that during a participatory social action research study of social movement learning in Ghana, consultative "meetings were held in the open-air studio of the local community radio, Radio *Ada*, and as such anyone passing could listen in" (p. 286). In the same vein, radio in northern Uganda has become a valuable means of educating the masses on issues of concern to them. They are the most efficient way to reach rural peasants with new information and allow them to phone in to share ideas thus utilising their knowledge and experiences. In the words of a male participant:

> *"Our community radio programme acts as deterrent to domestic violence and other social upheavals in society. This is because community members, particularly women have been*

empowered through the Kabake programme to know their rights in marriage, they can report domestic abuses during the Kabake meeting in their community. They can also phone in our radio programme and lodge open complains about domestic violence and other issues happening in their community allowing their leaders to make follow-up and take actions."

From the above participant's response, it is evident that the *Kabake* programme provides the nexus between the transition from civil war era to the building of a peaceful, democratic and ideologically pluralistic society where healing, reconciliation, empowerment and emancipatory principles are gradually embedded. Specifically, the programme has empowered rural women to be active debaters on critical issues affecting their families during the regular community gatherings. As with the case of the *Ada* community in Ghana (Langdon, 2011), the uniqueness of the programme is rooted in its informal learning dimension constructed and shaped by women who dominate the gatherings in terms of attendance. Steadily, they are becoming opinion leaders, brainstorming topics for discussions and following implementation of consensually agreed action plans and holding their democratically-elected leaders accountable. The existence of radio broadcasting and its accessibility by the rural community has become the central conduit around which the success of this community-initiated programme revolves.

The challenge for radio broadcasters is to ensure that their audience understands and find relevancy in the message being broadcasted. Otherwise, the media can become determinant factor in the beliefs, and construction of meanings and feelings which could be a potential source of conflict (Atton, 2013; Li, 2004; Rodríguez, 2011). To avoid this, media houses should use programmes and languages that are easy to understand by the local participants as typified by the experiences of *Ada* social movement organising in Ghana (Langdon & Larweh, 2015) and the usage of radio broadcasts to promote healing, reconciliation, and the prevention of new violence in Rwanda, Congo and Burundi (Staub, Pearlman, Weis, & Hoek 2007). It is primarily because of this that the language of communication in the *Kabake* programme is the local *Acholi* dialect since it creates meanings and resonates with participants. The radio programmes are also community-driven and owned. Again, in espousing on Afrocentric epistemological issue, Molefi (1990) adds, "Language exists when a community of people use a set of agreed-upon symbols to express concepts, ideas, and psychological needs" (p. 10). The use of local language during *Kabake* proceedings and radio broadcast of the programme encourages participants to assess local problems, determine practical solutions, and collectively participate in the evaluation and take ownership of the programme. In brief, the *Kabake* programme is anchored on the traditional

cultural institutional arrangements of the Acholi people that put much emphasis on informal education of children, youth and adult and finding sustainable solutions to local challenges. The informal teaching and learning took place throughout the different stages of growth (Mosha, 2000; Ocitti, 1973) and the immediate natural environment was the classroom space.

Conclusion

Various studies in Africa and about Africa have focused on undemocratic governance, civil war, insecurity, famine, droughts, epidemics such as the HIV/AIDS scourge and interventions foreign to Africa in responding to these challenges. However, lacking in most of the research is Africa's agencies in providing practical solutions to problems affecting their societies. With this realisation, I have, in this chapter, articulated my experiences together with participants' narratives espousing how Afrocentricity empowers communities with practical solutions to local challenges. Again, this is articulated by Molefi (1990) in the statement "an exploration, to be Africa-logical, must be based on sound intellectual and philosophical foundations which maintain the centrality of the African experience and primacy of classical traditions" (p. 56). By centering my own experiences and interlacing these with participants' voices, I have come to understand that *Kabake* programme plays a vital role in raising consciousness about injustices in community and offering solutions that resonate with the affected community. The *Kabake* programme meets the benchmark of peasants' learning and consciousness awakening described by Freire (1974), whose social awareness had to be awakened for action against existing status quo. The goal of the programme is to learn new knowledge and skills that would bring changes in the peasants' living conditions. It enables participants to practise self-awareness by asking questions that seek to challenge and alter the status quo. The *Kabake* programme community dialogue was fundamental to the transition from violent civil war to coping with many challenges of the post-war society. Drawing cross-contextual reference from SA, Balwanz and Hlatshwayo (2015) in their study based on Freirean theory, found that dialogue was a strong tool for understanding how a community in Sedibeng was being tainted by issues of crime, drug abuse, and violence. Their study further revealed how researchers had proposed to have a drop-in centre for rehabilitating youth from drugs, an action plan resulting from dialogue.

Finally, by discussing the voices of participants and existing literature, I have attempted to extrapolate how the *Kabake* programme produced an organic process of social learning, resilience building and social change through local people's organising in a time of distress. This is a demonstration of the awakened agency of African people to alter an undesirable status quo through collective efforts. Because of the limitation in the number of study participants, the

opinions expressed in this chapter cannot be claimed to fully represent the overall experiences and views of the numerous *Kabake* programme participants across northern Uganda. Therefore, further research is needed in other districts of northern Uganda to determine the efficacy and generalisability of the programme.

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