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**Healing from the Horror of War:**  
**A Study of a Post-Conflict Psychosocial Program for**  
**Refugees in Uganda**

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## **Abstract**

Uganda, a landlocked African nation of 41 million people, currently hosts 1.1 million refugees from surrounding nations including South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda. Many of these refugees have suffered significant psychological trauma as a result of their conflict experiences and through the process of fleeing from their homes and communities.

Tutapona is a non-profit organisation that provides group based psychosocial trauma rehabilitation support among war affected populations. This research report examines the effectiveness of the 'Grow' program at empowering refugees. The study was carried out in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement in Western Uganda, which is home to 64,000 people from the DRC. Four refugees who had attended Tutapona's Grow program were interviewed in depth about their experience and subsequent decisions to ascertain the extent to which empowerment had taken place.

The research report concludes that Tutapona's Grow program has achieved a high degree of success at empowering refugees, especially on the individual and relational levels. More broadly, it suggests that psychosocial interventions in post- conflict settings should be more highly prioritized by humanitarian and development actors.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background and Rationale for the Research Topic**

In 1994 I was living in Cote D'Ivoire with my family. Early in the year my mother and I flew across the continent to visit relatives in Goma in the Eastern Republic of Zaire<sup>1</sup>. On the way we landed in Kigali and drove across Rwanda before returning home after a couple of weeks. A short while later I remember seeing images in a newspaper of Lake Kivu, in which I had swum with my cousins on the holiday. The lake was now covered with uncountable floating bodies from the Rwandan genocide. As a 12-year-old this incident to which I had a close personal link, had a profound impact. Those events started a fascination with the question of what could be done to support people who have been through the pain, loss and trauma associated with war and conflict. Twenty years on, I work as the Country Director of an organisation in Uganda called Tutapona that provides trauma rehabilitation to refugees and other war affected people. Some of the people served by Tutapona fled from Rwanda in 1994.

In recent years there has been an increase in international media attention and academic research in the field of mental health support for war affected populations in

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<sup>1</sup> The previous name for the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

developing nations. One of the key reasons for this trend is the growing awareness that many survivors of extreme trauma experience symptoms that limit their ability to engage in productive work, study or social activities thereby having seriously detrimental implications for development (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). However, the increased interest in this field has often not translated into much change in the provision of mental health support services to post-conflict populations. A report by the Refugee Law Project conducted in Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Uganda, found that there was one psychiatric nurse serving a population of 80,000 refugees most of whom had fled from active war zones (2015). NGOs and governments often give little more than lip-service to the mental health sector, perhaps due to the difficulty in engaging donors with these less visible needs and the challenges associated with measuring change (Chambers, 2010). Despite the shortage of clinical services, one area of interest for some organisations working with conflict-affected people is in psychosocial group programs. With resources stretched thin in most disaster responses, these programs offer a cost-effective, staff-efficient method to significantly reduce symptoms of psychological trauma and increase motivation for work (Sonderregger et al., 2011).

A number of studies have been carried out on psychosocial programming among post-conflict populations, however they often focus on quantitative trauma indicators to measure effectiveness. This means that the broader effects of psychosocial programs, currently receive limited attention. There are some notable exceptions to this trend, with studies that have examined such programming through the lens of empowerment, including Leslie's 2001 study in Latin America and Parsons 2009 study in Rwanda. One benefit of using the empowerment approach is that it not only considers the individual but also the impact on family members, neighbours and the wider community. This study will add to the literature on post-conflict development by considering the impact of a psychosocial intervention from the empowerment perspective. This research is

motivated by a desire to see an increased focus on effective mental health support for war-affected refugee populations.

## **1.2 The Research Context**

Tutapona is an international organization that has been operating in Uganda for ten years providing group-based psychosocial services. This Research Report is focused on evaluating Tutapona's new trauma rehabilitation program, entitled Grow. The study was carried out in mid 2018 in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement in Kamwenge District in the West of Uganda. This settlement has been open since 2012 and has a current population of 64,000. The Research Participants (RPs) were all refugees who have fled from the Eastern DRC.

Uganda currently hosts approximately 1.15 million refugees from surrounding war affected nations, with the largest groups coming from South Sudan and the DRC (UNHCR, 2018). The majority of refugees in Uganda end up in refugee settlements such as Rwamwanja.

## **1.3 The Research Aim and Methodology**

The research aim is:

**To investigate the extent to which Tutapona's GROW program empowers refugee participants.**

Qualitative research methods have been used, in particular semi-structured interviews. This approach has been selected in order to effectively uncover the lived experiences of Grow program participants and to better understand the impact of the intervention on their lives. The goal of the project was to provide RPs with an opportunity to express any ideas that they felt were relevant about the Grow program, whether positive or negative. It was decided that qualitative methods would achieve this goal most

effectively. Furthermore, empowerment is a concept that is broad and difficult to define. As will be discussed further in Chapter Two, empowerment involves people who are disempowered gaining greater awareness of power dynamics that affect them and developing skills to have increased control over their lives (McWhirter, 1991). This can occur at a range of different levels, including individual, relational and collective. Rowlands (1995) argues that effective empowerment evaluations must necessarily be qualitative.

Given the sensitive and personal nature of this research topic, a full ethics proposal was submitted and approved by Massey University prior to any contact with potential RPs or any data being collected. The steps taken to address the ethical risks inherent in this project are discussed further in Chapter Five.

#### **1.4 Report Outline**

*Chapter One* introduces the study by explaining the background and rationale behind the topic. The context is briefly discussed before a sketch of the aims and methodology. Finally, an outline of each chapter in the report is given.

*Chapter Two* reviews literature on empowerment theory. Competing definitions are explored before a discussion on the key themes of power, disempowerment and participation. Differing levels of empowerment are discussed and incorporated into an empowerment model that is used in Chapter Seven to evaluate Tutapona's Grow program.

*Chapter Three* reviews literature covering psychosocial approaches in post-conflict settings. The effects of psychological trauma are discussed, before helpful and unhelpful aspects of psychosocial interventions are extracted from a range of papers on the topic.

In *Chapter Four*, the context of this research report is described, beginning with an outline of the conflicts that have fuelled the Ugandan refugee influx. Uganda's refugee policies and the reality of life in refugee settlements currently facing more than 1.1 million refugees are outlined before Tutapona's programmatic approach is described.

In *Chapter Five* methodological aspects of the research process are presented. Qualitative research methods, namely semi-structured interviews, were considered the most effective method to assess whether empowerment had occurred. Ethical considerations and limitations of the research are also addressed in this chapter.

*Chapter Six* presents the results of the qualitative data collected from Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. Key ideas and themes from the four semi-structured interviews are described in detail.

*Chapter Seven* discusses and analyses the research findings. The key ideas presented by the Research Participants are examined through the lens of empowerment theory. The chapter also provides recommendations in terms of the wider application of this study to development theory, practice and research.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Empowerment: A Contested Term**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Given that this report will be evaluating psychosocial programs using a conceptual framework which draws on empowerment theory, it is important to discuss the parameters of this contested term. While many development buzzwords can be interpreted in a range of ways, the word 'empowerment' seems to be particularly contested. Despite widespread use of the term in the development field, it can be used to mean different things and to support a wide variety of, sometimes ideologically conflicting initiatives (Scheyvens, 2009; Cornwall & Brock, 2005). It is unusual that the same word is so enthusiastically adopted by feminists, Western politicians and the World Bank (Rowlands, 1995). Consequently, the absence of a carefully thought out and deliberate definition of the concept 'empowerment' in development practice is likely to render the term valueless. The following chapter will explore some key development theorists' perspectives on empowerment with a view to identifying commonly accepted characteristics that can be used as indicators of empowerment against which to measure Tutapona's Grow program.

#### **2.2 Power and Empowerment**

Foundational to the concept of empowerment is the term power. Power theorists have been categorized into two broad groups with those that view power as inherently conflictual and those that regard it as consensual (Csaszar, 2005). The former, regard power as finite whereby for one person to gain power, another must lose it. The consensual school of thought sees power not as a limited resource, and not always linked to conflict. Most commonly power is understood in terms of ‘power over’, in the sense that some people have power to control or dominate others (Rowlands, 1995). Frequently, powerful social, political, cultural or economic groups, in an effort to improve their own position, dominate the marginalized. This type of power is linked closely to the conflictual definition. The implication of this understanding of power for the empowerment concept is that if one person or group is empowered, then others will be losing. Therefore, empowerment will involve conflict as those in power will try to hold onto it (Parsons, 2009).

A contrasting view of power is described by Rowlands as generative. This kind of power relates to the positive influence that an individual or group can have on others when the goal is to see the position of others lifted rather than subservience achieved, and is described as ‘power to’. This is not zero-sum competitive power, whereby the increase in power of one does not take away the power of the other. Further examples of generative power include “power with” which describes the increase in power for people who join a group or community that is trying to achieve a common goal, and “power within”, used to describe the power possessed by each individual stemming from self-confidence, self-respect and spiritual conviction (Rowlands, 2007; Csaszar, 2005). Refer to Table 2.1 below for a comparison of these four definitions of power, discussed in the text. When power is viewed as generative or consensual, empowerment does not necessarily involve conflict. Regardless of one’s preferred definition of power, it is obvious that many different forms of power exist and that it can be exercised in a myriad of different ways (Haugaard, 2002).

**Figure 2.1: Definitions of Power**

<b>Definition of Power</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Power over	Power is a limited resource; Conflictual; Power is seen as being primarily negative
Power to	Generative; Results in action; Focused on individual change
Power with	Solidarity; Comes from community engagement; Often aimed at social or political change
Power within	The strength that each individual has; Linked to self-confidence, self-respect or spiritual conviction

Adapted from Parsons, 2009

In this research report “power over” is acknowledged as being a factor in the lives of marginalised people. However, empowerment is seen to be a process that can generate activity in others leading to healthy changes in social relations. As Kelly argues: ‘I suspect it is “power to” that the term empowerment refers to, and it is achieved by increasing one’s ability to resist and challenge “power over”’ (1992, cited in Rowlands, 1997, p. 12).

### **2.3 Definitions of Empowerment**

Economic development theorists view empowerment as being mainly related to the acquisition of assets whereas the feminist perspective focuses on addressing unjust power structures and systems (Parsons, 2009). From a human rights standpoint, empowerment relates to the pursuit of justice across all areas of life, and grassroots thinkers define it as making progress or moving forward. Scheyvens (2009) generalizes this range of perspectives into two broad camps. Neoliberal theorists have used empowerment to describe development practices focused on enhancing the ability of the poor to meet their own needs, particularly in an economic sense. This has often had

the underlying objective of reducing the dependence of the poor on state support services. She describes post-development thinkers as focusing more on socio-political factors in their definitions of the term. From this perspective empowerment involves a challenge to existing power structures between dominant and minority groups. Despite these conflicting definitions there are some clear themes evident in development literature on the topic of empowerment that have broad, if not universal, support.

One important, somewhat obvious aspect of empowerment programs, is that they are focused on supporting people who have been marginalized in some way. Scheyvens defines empowerment as, “the activation of the confidence and capabilities of previously disadvantaged or disenfranchised individuals or groups” (2009, p.468). These groups or individuals may have been disadvantaged on the grounds of ethnicity, class, caste, age, gender, religion or a range of other factors. Many of the groups listed have never been in a powerful position, but were rather born disempowered. The term powerless can be used to describe the starting point of people before they are empowered (McWhirter, 1991). Friedmann’s (2011) discussion of the disempowerment model describes poverty as being multidimensional, and disputes the neoliberal claim that it can be reduced to a relative lack of income by an individual. Instead he argues that poverty is best understood as a collective problem, in particular that poor households are ones that lack access to the eight bases of social power. These are made up of defensible living space, surplus time, knowledge and skills, appropriate information, social organization, social networks, instruments of work and livelihood, and financial resources. Each of these refer to an important means of obtaining greater power and therefore the lack of these resources is catastrophic to a household’s prospect of advancement. This definition of poverty as collective disempowerment is a significant break from mainstream development and an important starting point when considering empowerment. Critically, empowerment is aimed at, and is most effective when dealing with, people who have been disempowered in some way. This research report will be examining a program that works with groups who have been

disempowered by forced migration, extreme poverty and psychological trauma largely stemming from the after-effects of war and conflict.

## **2.4 Empowerment as Participation**

Another commonly accepted characteristic of empowerment is that it occurs as a process that directly involves the participation of the target individual or community (Batliwala, 1994). In line with this, Friedmann (2011) who is often regarded as being responsible for bringing the term empowerment into mainstream development literature, asserts that households must play an active role (beyond consultation) in increasing their own social power instead of relying on external support agencies to generate change. Rowlands (1995) concurs, claiming that genuine power comes from within and cannot be given from without. While well thought out external support can work as a catalyst, it cannot replace involvement in the process by the disempowered group. Key components of a successful empowerment program therefore involve a high degree of respect for and confidence in the people being worked with. Development organizations or workers that retain too much control over the process may therefore be stifling genuine empowerment.

Conversely, before the extremely poor or marginalized can have the opportunity to play an active role in increasing their social power, some external involvement is needed. Particularly vulnerable groups might include victims of famine and war, landless rural labourers or women-headed households in the urban squatter areas (Friedmann, 2011). Even those who are less destitute face huge obstacles in this process and external agents are critically important. In many countries there are significant constraints on what can be achieved locally, with structural conditions that keep poor people in a state of day-to-day survival. Genuine empowerment therefore, successfully balances the twin concepts that the disempowered must be actively involved in their own empowerment, and that external support is often critical to this process.

Empowerment involves work that is sequential although not linear. People are led from a position of being powerless, to developing an understanding of the power dynamics at work in their lives and then to developing skills and strategies for increasing their level of control. Furthermore, such programs are focused not only on individual transformation, but on modifications to an individual's relationships to others close to them and their wider community (McWhirter, 1991). Programs that follow this sequential and communal model of empowerment, often utilize a form of community based group work with the role of the outside professional being one of helper and facilitator (Rowlands, 1995, p.104). These community aspects of empowerment in particular have strong links to the characteristics of psychosocial programs discussed in Chapter Three. All the steps in this process are centered on the capabilities and actions of the people who are being empowered, not external workers.

Empowerment therefore, is often seen as being closely linked to another popular development term, participation. Shetty (1991) argues that empowerment is a modern replacement for the term participation, in so far as communities are encouraged to determine their own development. Critically this is a strong break from traditional development which is directed from the outside without much participation. Empowered people will be able to participate more fully in all facets of society and reap benefits associated with this (Friedmann, 1992). While participation may be seen as both a process and end goal of development, it is participation as a summative end that is linked more closely to the concept of empowerment. Therefore, if real empowerment has taken place one important result will be increased participation for previously marginalized people.

## **2.5 The Complex Nature of Empowerment**

Empowerment can occur at different levels and at varying rates. Friedmann (1992) uses the terms psychological, social and political to explain different kinds of empowerment. Psychological power results in increased self-confidence and comes from an individual's sense of potency. Social power is seen as increased access to resources such as information or finances and political power is the ability for people to influence decisions that affect them (Friedmann, 1992). Rowlands also points out that empowerment can occur at the individual, relational and collective dimensions. Individual empowerment involves the development of increased personal confidence and ability to carry out tasks. Empowerment in the relational sense involves an increased ability of an individual to relate to and influence others. Collective empowerment is when individuals work together to have a greater impact. These three layers build on one another and ultimately have the power to generate significant change at an organizational or political level.

These differing levels and kinds of empowerment have implications for development organizations seeking to facilitate the process. It is sometimes desperately slow. While most funding agencies require fast and measurable results, the work needed for raising levels of confidence and self-esteem among poor and marginalized people in such a way that will enhance their ability to take charge of their own needs is necessarily time-consuming (Rowlands, 1997). This can render empowerment-focused programs less likely to gain funding. A key characteristic of empowerment therefore, is that it must be carried out in a way that fits the context. Cornwall and Brock argue,

That any way of worldmaking that gives us one-size-fits-all development recipes stripped of any engagement with context or culture, politics, power or difference, does violence to the very hope of a world without poverty (2005, p.1058).

Empowerment does not fit well with generic, mass scale development programs.

While empowerment has often been promoted most actively in participatory, feminist, alternative and grassroots approaches to development, the implications of empowerment are generally seen to reverberate far beyond the individual or the small

community levels. Munck (1992) in an analysis of empowerment literature concluded that most of the prominent authors do not shy away from politics. This, despite the frequent tendency for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) casting themselves as apolitical. He concludes that empowerment is ultimately about addressing uneven power relations, even when this process involves conflict. Friedmann balances these seemingly conflicted positions. He advocates two methods of intervention by which empowerment can occur, which are interconnected. The first is what he describes as 'small improvements in the life of the poor' geared at increasing their access to one or more of the eight bases of social power (2011). These actions need not be large-scale or grand, but need to be accessible to households and encourage increased social power acquisition. While these small changes are unlikely to create systemic and widespread change, they may create conditions in which more sweeping political upheavals can occur. To overcome disempowerment, fundamental political change is also needed whereby, "leaders are elected who are prepared to work towards a more equitable, people-centered development, the energy for which would come 'from below'" (Friedmann, 2011, p.88). Empowerment that starts at a household level and is sometimes very subtle, can eventually result in a political power shift and significant change at community or national levels.

The characteristics of empowerment that have been described make it a very specific and challenging form of development to successfully implement but these same aspects are what allow the approach to be so appropriate and effective with certain groups of people. In an article that examines the impacts of gender-related violence perpetrated against women in Latin America, Leslie (2001) argues that due to the high levels of disempowerment present among this group of people, effective approaches to healing must address the notion of empowerment. Her study of a program that worked with these women and used an empowerment approach, led her to the conclusion that the approach has the distinct advantage of treating the psychological trauma as a social rather than a medical issue, making it more culturally relevant and therefore more

successful. She explains that one of the effects of conflict on survivors is a much reduced level of social connection and trust, often replaced by persistent fear and a sense of disconnection from others. Interventions that attempt to rebuild a sense of community rather than to label and treat people as mentally ill, are more helpful. Leslie surmises that an approach to healing for the women involved in her study should be rooted in the notion of empowerment, including both increased social engagement and participation, enabling them to pursue individual and collective strategies for social change in ways that are appropriate to the political and cultural nature of the trauma.

Similarly, Tutapona's program works with people who have fled war zones in countries including South Sudan, the DRC and Rwanda where significant and prolonged violence has taken place. The characteristics of empowerment programs described in this chapter are seen to have particular relevance to these people due to the critical importance of rebuilding a sense of community and providing opportunities for increased participation and 'power to'.

## **2.6 A Model of Empowerment**

As discussed, empowerment can be divided into personal, relational and collective levels (Rowlands, 1997). McWhirter (1991) identifies similar themes:

The process by which people, organisations or groups who are powerless (a) become aware of the power dynamic at work in their life context, (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) exercise this control without infringing on the rights of others and (d) support the empowerment of others in the community. (p.224)

It is therefore a complicated process that starts with people who are powerless or unable to effectively direct the course of their lives, affecting not just the individual, but also the individual's relationships with others and their place in society. People gain an awareness of the power dynamics at work in their community before developing the skills to gain greater control over their lives. Explained differently, those who understand

their situation are more likely to take steps to change it (Rowlands, 1995, p.103). However, while individual development is involved in the process, that is not the summative goal. These people then support the empowerment of others in their community (McWhirter, 1991). Ultimately it is about bringing people who are outside the decision making process into it (Rowlands, 1997). The table below provides a summary of the different dimensions of empowerment discussed in the chapter. It will serve as a useful guide to measuring whether or not empowerment has taken place among Tutapona’s Grow program graduates.

**Figure 2.2: Dimensions of Empowerment**

Dimension	Definition	References
Disempowerment	Empowerment necessarily begins with previously disadvantaged, disenfranchised or powerless individuals or groups.	Scheyvens’ (2009) definition of empowerment specifically mentions those who are disadvantaged and disempowered. This concept is supported by Friedmann (2011), McWhirter (1991) and many other prominent empowerment authors.
Participation	Empowerment occurs as a process that directly involves the participation of the target individual or community.	Batliwala (1994) and Rowlands (1995) discuss the importance of active participation by the target community or individual to the empowerment process.
Personal empowerment	An individual develops an increased sense of	Related to Friedmann’s concept of psychological power (1992), and McWhirter’s explanation of an

	confidence and capacity.	individual's increased awareness of power dynamics and development of the skills to have increased control over their lives (1991).
Relational empowerment	Individuals develop the ability to negotiate and influence decisions made within their relationships.	Linked to Friedmann's 'social power', whereby households become more productive through improved decision making processes (1992).
Collective empowerment	Individuals work collectively to achieve a greater impact in social, economic or political decisions than each could have achieved alone.	McWhirter's concept of people supporting the empowerment of others within their community or at the least, exercising their increased power without infringing on the rights of others is an important concept linked to Rowland's 'collective empowerment' (1991).

Modified from Rowlands, 1997

## 2.7 Conclusion

Empowerment can be interpreted to suit the objectives of some very different development interventions (Scheyvens, 2009). However, as has been explored, there are some common themes that many development writers in this field agree on. In order to effectively evaluate the degree of empowerment in Tutapona's Grow program, these factors will need to be examined. Empowerment begins with people who are poor, disadvantaged or oppressed. It involves a process where the people being empowered

must play an active role, but where there is often need for external assistance. One sign of genuine empowerment is when formerly disempowered people develop a greater sense of community and begin to help others around them. According to Rowlands, empowerment can take place at many different levels, including personal, relational and collective. Critically, it is about increased participation and the challenging of existing power structures that have curtailed the life opportunities of the powerless. These widely accepted characteristics of empowerment make it a suitable framework against which to examine Tutapona's Grow program. Chapter Three will discuss some key characteristics of psychosocial programming among war-affected populations and provide a summary of some of the literature that evaluates the impact of these programs.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Psychosocial Approaches in Post-Conflict Development Settings**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Despite what might seem like an obvious need, post-conflict development projects often do not engage with psychosocial support (Parsons 2009). The difficulty associated with measuring progress is one deterrent. It is also a field in which it is notoriously difficult to establish culturally relevant and effective programs. There is an awareness that too often psychological interventions in developing nations have been designed in developed nations and transplanted without adequate consideration of local needs and practices. A recent article in *The Guardian* compared this approach to an imagined group of healers from Mozambique supporting survivors of the 9/11 twin towers attack through rituals to sever relationships with the dead (Leach, 2015). These factors combine to mean trauma focused psychosocial interventions are often avoided by development and humanitarian actors.

However, there is a growing recognition that psychosocial programs have the potential to enable rapid recovery from the psychological effects of war and to improve the effectiveness of other development interventions. Such approaches have also been found to be more cost-effective and culturally relevant in non-Western contexts than

more intensive individual counselling programs (Bass et al., 2013). In this chapter a range of psychosocial projects among conflict affected populations in East and Central Africa will be explored, before an overview of academic literature exploring the potential advantages and dangers of psychosocial activities among post-conflict populations.

### **3.2 Scope and Variety of Psychosocial Programmes in Post-Conflict Settings**

Chambers (2010) asserts that many NGOs and governments remain largely disinterested in mental health, perhaps due to the difficulty in engaging donors with these needs, despite a recent WHO-led study estimating that for every \$1 spent on treatment of common mental disorders, there is a return of \$4 in improved health and productivity (WHO, 2017). Even in disaster zones with many humanitarian actors present, psychosocial programs addressing the psychological needs of conflict survivors are often significantly deprioritized. This lack of funding and attention is not helped by the challenge of finding reliable program models and clear definitions in this field. Writing in 1988, Cnaan et al. surmised that there are a growing number of organizations that claim to utilize a psychosocial approach, while providing widely varying services (p.65). This argument has even more validity today. The term 'psychosocial' can be used to describe many different kinds of programs. Some use a set curriculum designed by psychologists, while others favour a more open-ended approach with minimal external structure. The people facilitating the process can also vary from trained professionals to local or international volunteers.

While a strict definition in this field is elusive, some common characteristics of psychosocial programs do exist. Such approaches usually aim to assist people with emotional or psychological disabilities, to a restoration of their optimal level of independent functioning. There is almost always a strong focus on enabling and encouraging readjustment to community living. The above goals are achieved through group-based programs with facilitators who assist participants with self-care skills,

psychoeducation, normalization of their challenges and an emphasis on social rather than medical supremacy (Cnaan et al., 1988, p.62). Usually interventions involve a de-professionalization of services and are carried out as an early intervention after a decline in mental health (p.73). They are often tied to a particular mental health framework such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) or Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET). Such approaches have the potential to align well with the characteristics of empowerment theory discussed in the previous chapter, but come not without their critics.

### **3.3 The Effects of Psychological Trauma**

As has been established, a foundation of empowerment is that it applies to people who have been disempowered or marginalized and this research report examines a program that supports people who are experiencing the effects of psychological trauma as a result of conflict exposure. Therefore, the question of how exposure to conflict results in psychological trauma and reduced mental health needs to be explored.

Populations living in areas affected by war and conflict often endure significant and adverse psychological affects stemming from witnessing or having direct exposure to acts of violence. Van der Kolk asserts that “Trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body... Trauma results in a fundamental reorganization of the way mind and brain manage perceptions” (2014, p.21). These experiences diminish the capacity of individuals and groups to provide for their own needs and cope with future challenges (Kumar & Willman, 2016). Studies of people who have directly experienced trauma through conflict have shown that these people earn smaller wages (Searing, Rios-Avila & Lecy, 2013), have lower levels of employment (Shemyakina, 2015), higher food insecurity and lower educational achievement compared to the general population (Betancourt, McBain, Newnham, & Brennan, 2012). There is a clear negative correlation between

mental illness and people's ability to work. Poor mental health therefore, generally leads to greater poverty (Chambers, 2010).

Many war-affected people have also suffered from gender related violence, particularly in Central and East Africa. In a report examining the effects of and appropriate responses to sexual violence experienced by women refugees of warfare, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees cited terror, intense self-disgust, powerlessness, depression, denial, and an inability to function in everyday life, as some of the psychological effects of gender-related violence (UNHCR, 1995). The study concluded that all such victims experience psychological trauma and that in the worst cases this trauma can lead to chronic mental illnesses. Similarly, a study investigating the impact of gender-related violence on women in El Salvador, concluded that "it is hard to imagine that such women experiencing these forms of violence could escape psychological traumatisation" (Leslie, 2001, P.53).

Parsons (2009) points out that in non-Western societies the concept of self exists in relation to others in the community. When war involves fighting between members of communities the implications for individuals are felt more severely due to the high cultural emphasis on community and the damage done to this institution. All of these factors combine to mean that people who have experienced or witnessed trauma through war and violence are likely to have reduced mental health and to feel disempowered. The widespread negative impact of psychological trauma is therefore a "central development challenge" (Kumar and Willem, 2016, p.2).

### **3.4 The Empowering Effects of Psychosocial Interventions**

Given the severity of the effects of psychological trauma discussed in section 3.3, it is important to explore how psychosocial programs can support populations where psychological trauma is common and how effective they are.

An important aspect of social empowerment in populations affected by war and conflict is increased community cohesion and access to resources such as information (Friedmann, 1992). Psychosocial projects commonly aim to repair the sense of community through the formation of groups and a strong emphasis on trust building (Sonderegger et al., 2011). Leslie (2001), argues that as war and violence usually result in the destruction of the social fabric of society, the trauma experienced is often social rather than medical in nature. Therefore, interventions that aim to repair community connectedness are critical.

Group based mental health programs have been shown to be highly appropriate to many African cultures, with the strong emphasis on community. In all of the psychosocial programs in East and Central Africa examined by literature referenced in this chapter, groups were formed. For example, in a Burundian program, large groups were formed, before participants broke into pairs to share on a series of topics including trust and inter-ethnic relations (Yeomans, 2010). The results of the interpersonal dialogue opened up by this paired exercise were found to be particularly significant in distress reduction. The suggested reason for this was the collectivist nature of the Burundian culture and the importance of interpersonal exchange in the wake of neighbour-to-neighbour violence such as was perpetrated in Burundi (Yeomans, 2010, p.19). The group format of psychosocial programs can therefore provide the opportunity for social empowerment to occur, through the repair or strengthening of community ties and the effective impartation of new knowledge.

Importantly, psychosocial programs are also widely accepted as being extremely effective at addressing mental health issues. According to the Director of the National Institutes of Mental Health in the USA, “while psychosocial interventions have received much less marketing attention than pharmacological treatments, the results are arguably more encouraging” (Harvey and Gumport, 2015, p. 29). One piece of evidence

of this effect is that psychosocial programs are often also successful at supporting their target populations in recovery against clinical measures of mental health disorders. For example, in a pre to post intervention comparison, a DRC program was found to reduce probable anxiety and depression diagnoses among program participants from approximately 70% to 10%. The program was also successful in reducing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms and improving functioning in female survivors of sexual violence. These significant benefits were maintained 6 months after the treatment ended (Bass et al., 2013). The Burundian intervention was also shown to result in a significant reduction in traumatic stress symptoms in program participants when compared to a waitlist control group (Yeomans, 2010). While the clinical results from these programs do not necessarily translate to full empowerment, they can be shown to support certain aspects of this concept. These results support Friedmann's afore-mentioned concept of psychological empowerment. Psychological power, defined as an individual's increased self-confidence and sense of potency, is directly strengthened by a reduction in trauma symptoms, anxiety and depression (Friedmann's, 1992) and can have significant secondary benefits.

Psychological trauma can be clearly shown to disempower in a wide range of tangible ways as previously referenced. It is therefore logical that if people can experience healing from psychological trauma, then empowerment has the potential to take place. This can be evidenced in small but positive decisions and changes that people are able to make once their symptoms have lessened in severity. For example, increased motivation to do chores, to parent or to plant and tend crops. The positive effects of reduced trauma symptomology might also extend to include greater rates of employment, higher wages, increased educational achievement and food security (Searing, Rios-Avila & Lecy, 2013; Shemyakina, 2015; Betancourt, McBain, Newnham, & Brennan, 2012). On a more holistic level, a greater capacity to cope with future challenges and improved community cohesion can also result from effective psychosocial programs (Parsons, 2009; Kumar & Willman, 2016). Through achieving a

marked and sustained trauma symptom reduction, the disempowering effects of psychological trauma can also be arrested.

While it has been demonstrated that partial (psychological and social) empowerment was likely achieved in the studies referenced so far, a specialized study is needed to determine if more, or less, empowerment is taking place than inferred in this report. However, Parsons (2009) thesis evaluated a World Vision project in Rwanda directly in terms of empowerment. The results of the thesis showed that participants were empowered on personal, relational and community levels. Parsons describes the program as successfully increasing hope and self-confidence among individuals as well as breaking down relational barriers. Communities have also been inspired and equipped to help others (Parsons, 2009). This report paints an optimistic picture of the empowering impact of a psychosocial intervention among one of the world's most highly traumatized populations.

### **3.5 Academic Critiques of Psychosocial Programming**

Despite the ways in which psychosocial programs can empower post-conflict populations, there are voices in academic literature that contest the positive assessments presented above. One important question that relates closely to the empowerment capability of psychosocial programs is whether or not they are culturally relevant. Summerfield (1999) argues that some psychosocial programs are reliant on the presumption that Western psychological approaches apply to conflict affected people worldwide and that victims will experience healing only if they emotionally ventilate their experiences. In contradiction of this idea, many non- Western cultures have little place for the disclosure of personal struggles outside a close family circle. Bracken et al., argue that as concepts such as PTSD are derived from a Western ontology and value system, their use in non-Western groups should be tentative at most (1995, p.3).

Important questions that should be considered in this field are, ‘whose knowledge is being talked about?’ and, ‘have these programs been asked for by trauma survivors?’

As discussed, an important aspect of empowerment is that the disempowered are involved in the process (Batliwala, 1994). Clearly, a Western model without contextualization or local input will be much less likely to engage a non- Western group. According to Summerfield, “social healing and the remaking of worlds cannot be managed by outsiders” (1999, p.1461). While these cautions warrant careful attention by development practitioners, it should be noted that the programs referenced in this study were found to be culturally relevant, and supported rather than undermined the fabric of local communities (Parsons, 2009; Sonderegger et al., 2011).

Some academics have also questioned whether the positive elements of psychosocial interventions have been oversold. This is attributed to an over-reliance on PTSD diagnoses (Summerfield 1999). The DRC, Burundian and Ugandan programs investigated in this chapter had a heavy reliance on quantitative, PTSD diagnoses and could be accused of neglecting more holistic measures. More alarmingly, there are suggestions that psychoeducation programs may not only be achieving less than they claim, but actually causing harm. Yeomans (2010), argues that certain types of PTSD psychoeducation may unintentionally exacerbate symptoms. This is attributed to particular teaching often present in these programs that normalizes reactions to trauma potentially inducing an expectation that trauma exposure is debilitating and that this expectation, in turn, can become a self-fulfilling prophesy. This means that at the very least careful consideration must be given to the tenor of messaging around vulnerability or resilience attached to psychoeducational content (Yeomans, 2010).

According to Summerfield (1999), another potential consequence of psychosocial programs can be victim isolation. In interventions where a particular event, such as sexual violence, or a sub-sector of the population group, such as children, are focused

on, differences between some victims and others can be exaggerated. Such programs risk disconnecting their target group from their community. With this in mind, Summerfield warns that significant amounts of donor money have been spent on programs whose as yet poorly evaluated impact may include negative effects on survivors' traditional meaning systems and coping strategies (1999). Of the programs examined in this study, one could be seen to fall into this category, with the DRC program working with females who had experienced sexual violence (Bass et al., 2013). The other three programs worked with groups of mixed gender and types of trauma exposure.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In summary, the literature examined shows that there is a significant gap in psychosocial services available to war affected populations in East and Central Africa despite the clear link between conflict exposure and decreased mental health. Psychosocial programs have been shown to have the potential to foster strong positive effects in war affected people and communities. Individual psychological empowerment can occur through a marked and sustained trauma symptom reduction, and social empowerment through the facilitation of increased interpersonal dialogue and community cohesion.

Of the elements of empowerment discussed in this report, the only significant area that has not been shown to be addressed by psychosocial interventions is Friedmann's concept of political empowerment, linked to the challenging of power structures (1992). This could be because the studies referenced lack sufficient longitudinal reach, or because these interventions were unsuccessful at addressing this aspect. In this relatively niche and recent field, there are also some voices of caution. These are generally centered around concerns that insufficient credible research has taken place. Almost all the authors referenced in this paper, whether positive or negative in their summative judgements, concur that there is a need for further research in this emerging

and potentially very important development field. The next chapter will provide the context for this particular study.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Context: Tutapona's Psychosocial Programming in Uganda**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Uganda is a landlocked country in East Africa with a diverse and beautiful landscape, including the Rwenzori mountain range in the West, the immense Lake Victoria in the South East and the upper reaches of the White Nile. Uganda currently hosts 1.15 million refugees from many other African nations, with the majority coming from South Sudan and the DRC (UNHCR, 2018). In this chapter the context for this research report will be described, including a brief discussion of Uganda's modern political history, a summary of the major conflicts that contribute to Uganda's massive refugee population and the options available to these refugees. The work and programmatic approach of Tutapona, the focus organization of this research report, will also be examined.

#### **4.2 Ugandan Context**

The current population of Uganda is estimated to be slightly higher than 41 million (Worldometers, 2018). Since gaining independence from Britain in 1962, Uganda has endured the brutal military dictatorship of Idi Amin in the 1970s and a 20-year civil war in the north between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Ugandan People's Defense Force (UPDF). For the past 32 years, the country has been led by Yoweri Museveni and

his National Resistance Movement (NRM). While he took power through a military overthrow in 1986, there have since been five national elections starting in 1996. Most recently, in February 2016, President Museveni was re-elected for a fifth term of office with 60.6% of the vote (Vokes & Wilkins, 2016). Museveni's rule has been largely peaceful with the important exception of the protracted Northern civil war. Most of the nations surrounding Uganda have also been heavily affected by war and conflict. As a result, Uganda has been inundated by a massive influx of refugees in recent years. Two protracted conflicts in particular have generated the majority of these refugees and will thus be briefly explored below.

### **4.3 War and Conflict in the Region**

#### **A. South Sudan**

South Sudan became independent from Sudan in 2011 after two long and bitter civil wars. In December 2013, fighting broke out in the newly formed South Sudan between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and those backing the then Vice-President Riek Machar. The war subsequently spread from the capital Juba to incorporate most of the young nation (Johnson, 2014). There have been multiple attempts at brokering peace agreements between the warring sides. To date all have failed to hold for any substantial period of time. Most recently, in late June 2018 a new 'permanent' ceasefire was agreed by Kiir and Machar in Khartoum (Mbah, 2018). Within a few weeks however, there were already unconfirmed reports circulating here in Uganda that the peace terms have not been upheld by rebel groups. The war has severely disrupted agricultural production with millions being pushed to the brink of famine and oil production has been reduced to a trickle of the 300,000 barrels per day being produced at independence (Gettleman, 2017). Another key characteristic of this conflict has been massive displacement of people with the creation of Africa's largest refugee crisis since the 1994 Rwandan genocide. UNHCR figures put the number of refugees to have fled South Sudan since

December 2013 at over 1,500,000 (UNHCR, 2017). A further 1,870,000 have been internally displaced over the same time period (IOM, 2017). Uganda has been the largest receiving nation of South Sudanese refugees, currently hosting more than 750,000. The majority of these people have been directly and adversely affected by the violent conflict in their home country.

## **B. The Democratic Republic of the Congo**

In the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide in which 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed, millions of Rwandan refugees fled to the Eastern DRC (Severine, 2008). In 1996, war broke out in this region and has continued in a sporadic manner to the present day. The war is extremely complex with the involvement of multiple rebel groups and several external African nations, including Rwanda, Uganda and Angola (Eastern Congo Initiative, 2018). Between 1998 and 2008 it is estimated that there were more than five million conflict related deaths in the region (National Center for Biotechnology Information, 2008). Ethnic hostility, mineral wealth and political ambitions have all been causal and sustaining factors in this war. About one quarter of a million of the displaced people from the DRC have fled to Uganda as refugees or asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2017). The prevalence of war-related traumatic events among these Congolese refugees in Uganda is extremely high (Ainamani et al., 2016).

### **4.4 Refugees in Uganda**

Uganda currently hosts a population of 1,154,352 refugees and asylum seekers from surrounding nations (UNHCR, 2018). This huge population is made up of 785,104 South Sudanese and 284,265 from the Democratic Republic of the Congo as well as significant numbers from Burundi, Somalia and Rwanda (Ibid). This is attributed to the scale and severity of the conflicts around eastern and central Africa as well as Uganda's generous refugee policies. This refugee population poses a very complex problem both for the

refugees themselves and the Ugandan nation (Hovil, 2007). For Uganda, these refugees are in a sufficiently large number that their arrival has resulted in competition and tension in refugee receiving districts over land, natural resources and employment. Options for these refugees are limited as will be explained further below.

Repatriation of refugees is often made impossible by continuing conflict and instability in the nations of origin. Where the possibility still exists, desire is often absent, especially for second or third generation refugees who do not know the 'home' to which they are supposed to return (Long, 2014). Consequently, there has been a sharp decline globally over the past decade in the number of refugees who have been successfully repatriated. As evidence of this trend the average length of time spent by refugees in asylum nations increased from 9 to 21 years between 1993 and 2008 (Hunter, 2008: 1). This trend is also apparent in the Ugandan context. Citing the nearly 500,000 DRC refugees living in neighbouring countries, Den Boer explains that the on-going insecurity in the DRC makes voluntary repatriation an unrealistic option for most (2015).

Resettlement to a third country is also unlikely for refugees living in countries like Uganda. Hansen argues that as the global number of refugees have grown significantly in the past twenty years, developed nations in particular have sought ways to circumnavigate the spirit of international refugee laws (2014). Measures have been introduced to stop asylum seekers from touching their soil and triggering their rights, and the corresponding obligations of the asylum state. These include but are not restricted to expanded visa requirements, the introduction of substantial fines for airlines carrying asylum seekers without an appropriate visa, the classification of airports as international zones and increased use of off-shore detention centres (Hansen 2014). Some Western nations have also developed national laws to undermine the 1951 Refugee Convention emphasis on the obligations of non-refoulement, which is the practice of not forcing refugees or asylum seekers to return to a country in which they are liable to be subjected to persecution. One way in which this has been achieved is

through a sharp increase in the number of deportations of non-citizens. The UK and the US together deported a total of 144,000 people in 1997 and 467,000 in 2009 (Hansen 2014: 259). It is estimated that only 1 per cent of refugees will be successfully resettled (Long, 2014).

For most refugees, repatriation and resettlement are unrealistic or unviable options, leaving the vast majority of these people in a “protracted liminal situation” (Den Boer, 2015: 490). By law, officially registered refugees in Uganda are free to move, access primary level education and healthcare services, work and own a business (Amnesty International, 2017). This progressive ‘local integration’ stance has been upheld internationally as a model of how a large refugee influx can be managed, upholding the rights of refugees and possibly even generating an economic advantage. Tens of thousands of refugees have decided to ‘self-settle’ amongst the host community particularly in and around Kampala (Hovil, 2007). Integrated refugees have been shown to be helping the Ugandan economy through the payment of taxes, and the filling of natural gaps in the economy and labour market. In theory, they are freely able to choose to work in areas that suit their skillsets and can enrich the Ugandan economy as well as themselves (Ibid.).

However, Uganda also has a large system of refugee settlements where refugees can opt to live. Only refugees in settlements have access to humanitarian assistance (Hunter 2009). The net result of this is that for the majority of refugees who have very limited financial means or locally viable employment skills, local integration outside these settlements is not feasible. As evidence for this, only around 5% of the current refugee and asylum seeker population within Uganda’s borders are living outside the country’s 13 refugee settlements (UNHCR, 2018). Despite official acceptance of refugees with all the rights of Ugandan citizens, the local response has often been shown to be negative in the experience of integrated refugees. Through her research of Congolese refugees living in Kampala, Den Boer surmises that these people often “suffer from a sense of

worthlessness and exclusion”, shown most clearly through the lack of police protection and health services available to them (2015, p.491). According to Uganda’s Refugees Act of 2006, refugees are granted the right to work. Yet, self-settled refugees in Uganda often struggle to find employment. In Den Boer’s research group none of the Congolese refugees living in Kampala had formal employment (2015). Education, healthcare and legal services for self-settled refugees are also often uneven to those of Ugandan nationals. In short, national citizenship holds little reward if, at a local level, it is not recognized and actively promoted (Hovil, 2014).

To complicate the issue however, developing host nations currently house more than 80 per cent of global refugees (UNIRCWE, 2017). The population of Uganda stands at 41 million with a population density of 190 people per square kilometre of land (Index Mundi, 2017). Eleven per cent of this population is officially unemployed with another large sector being underemployed (Fortune of Africa, 2017). It is important not to trivialize the impact of Uganda’s decision to accept and host more than 1.1 million refugees and the impact that this number has on local resources, regional population density and employment opportunities for Ugandan nationals. This is especially true when consideration is given to the stance taken by many developed nations of severely restricting refugee inflows by the thickening of borders and aggressive deportation of failed asylum seekers (Hansen, 2014).

For many refugees living in Uganda, moving home remains unsafe, resettlement abroad is highly unlikely and local integration has many barriers. The remaining option therefore, is continuing to live in one of Uganda’s refugee settlements indefinitely.

#### **4.5 Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement**

The site selected for the data collection for this research report is Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, located in Kamwenge District in Western Uganda (see Figure 4.1 below). As

one of 13 currently operational refugee settlements in Uganda, Rwamwanja currently hosts 64,088 refugees, almost all from the DRC (UNHCR, 2018). After opening in 2012, the site was officially declared full and closed to new refugees in December 2017, with the exception of reunifications (new refugees with family already living in Rwamwanja). Tutapona, the organization that is the focus of this study, has been providing trauma rehabilitation services in this site since 2014 and is currently operating there with a team of 8 full time staff who live on site. The team is made up of a Program Coordinator, a Clinical Therapist, a Finance and Operations Assistant, four Program Facilitators and a Driver.

**Figure 4.1: Map of Uganda with Kamwenge District Highlighted**



Source: Uganda Investment Authority, 2018

#### 4.6 The programmatic approach of Tutapona

Tutapona is a charitable, non-profit organization registered in the United States with the mission to bring emotional healing, through best practice rehabilitation, to individuals and communities affected by conflict and traumatic conditions in war-affected regions.

In August 2008, Tutapona started work in Uganda with a team of trained local facilitators, providing trauma rehabilitation programs in Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps<sup>2</sup>, schools and remote villages throughout the Northern Region of Uganda. Tutapona expanded operations in 2013 to include refugee settlements and this has since become the main focus of the work in Uganda. Currently, Tutapona operates out of four field offices in Uganda- Adjumani Refugee Settlement, Nakivale Refugee Settlement, Oruchinga Refugee Settlement and Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. Between 2008 and the present over 35,000 refugees and nationals have graduated from Tutapona's trauma rehabilitation programs in Uganda.

Tutapona currently uses two different community based group program curricula in Uganda, entitled 'Empower' and 'Grow'. Empower has been utilized by Tutapona since 2008 and is still the main program used in Adjumani, Nakivale and Oruchinga Refugee Settlements. Empower, written by Australian Psychologist Dr. Robi Sonderegger, is based on Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (TF-CBT)<sup>3</sup> with unrestricted group sizes and average participation of about 50 people per program.

Grow, first printed in 2017, is authored by a team of experts in Clinical Psychology, Trauma Counselling and Family Therapy. In particular, Dr Robi Sonderegger, Carl Gaede, Dr Rhiannon Bell, Sarah Harriott, Francesca Finelli, Dr Lize Andrews, Peter Ryan, Jennifer Ryan, Noleen Sonderegger and Nikki Nucifora have made significant contributions to the curriculum. The program content was compiled and edited by Dr Robi Sonderegger. It is currently being facilitated by Tutapona in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement and in Kurdistan. More detail about the Grow program is provided in section 4.8.

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<sup>2</sup> These Ugandan people were forcibly displaced by the LRA conflict but had not crossed an international border so were not classified as refugees.

<sup>3</sup> TF-CBT is an evidence based psychotherapy that aims to provide psychoeducation to people with post-traumatic stress disorder to help them to identify and cope with emotions, thoughts and behaviours.

Tutapona's trauma rehabilitation services are delivered primarily by local Ugandan staff, although recently some refugees from the DRC and South Sudan have been hired. Most staff have a Bachelor's level qualification in Social Work, Counseling or Education. Before starting to facilitate the trauma rehabilitation programs, new staff are taken through an intensive training by Tutapona's Clinical Specialist before a one-month period of induction involving observation and learning from experienced staff in the field office setting.

Tutapona field staff mobilize participants in each community by first seeking permission to facilitate the program from local community leaders. Attendance is voluntary with participants free to attend as much or little of the trainings as they deem useful. The program is delivered at a location and time selected by community members. Both programs (Empower and Grow) consist of two-hour group sessions delivered on consecutive weekdays over two weeks. After each initial program, a second one-week "Follow-Up" program is facilitated approximately three months later in the same community. In total, each community is given access to 15 group-based trauma rehabilitation sessions. The programs are usually facilitated for mixed gender, adult (over 16-year-old) groups. However, some communities request separate programs for men and women.

There are a number of ways that Tutapona's program impact is currently being measured. Program attendance and participant retention rates are seen as important. Attendance is strictly voluntary with no incentives offered beyond the facilitation of the curriculum. Participants are able to opt in or out at any stage. Graduation is defined as attendance of 70% of the available sessions. Currently across all field sites average graduation rates are at 79%. This is seen as a strong indicator that interest in the program is high.

Tutapona also collects pre and post intervention data to show self-reported changes in trauma symptomology. A scale called the Screen for Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms (SPTSS) is used. The SPTSS is a globally recognized tool utilizing DSM-4 symptomology for initial indicators of PTSD. It is delivered in translation to anyone attending the first or the final session of an Empower or Grow program. A score over 20 indicates the individual likely is experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Tutapona's pre-intervention national average SPTSS score is currently 43.21 indicating the vast majority are likely suffering from PTSD and associated high trauma symptomology. The national post-intervention average is 19.23 demonstrating that self-reported trauma symptoms have on average decreased by 55% for program graduates. While it should be pointed out that these results are generated internally and have not been independently verified or published as yet<sup>4</sup>, they are consistent with the findings of other psychosocial programs in the region that track change against clinical measures.

The most recent external research generated that has direct relevance to Tutapona's work was a study by Sonderegger et al., published in the British Journal of Psychology in 2011, carried out among Internally Displaced People in Northern Uganda who attended the Empower program. The results showed significantly improved psychosocial functioning among participants in the EMPOWER program compared to those who did not receive the intervention (2011). It should be noted that this piece of research was carried out among IDPs, not refugees and the program was not being facilitated by Tutapona. This was a small pilot study comparing people who went through Empower against a wait list group. It did not contain a gender or age focus. The results of the study, (referenced in Chapter Three) were highly positive. Sonderegger et al's study and most of Tutapona's current program impact data use quantitative approaches. While these have provided some useful data, there is a need for more intensive and well-resourced studies to be carried out. In particular, there is a current lack of qualitative research

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<sup>4</sup> Independent research was conducted by Elsa Goninon from the University of the Sunshine Coast, on program participant SPTSS results from Tutapona's Empower Program in 2016, but the results of this study have not yet been published.

which would allow program participants to express their opinions on Tutapona’s programming.

Although it is not the main focus of the work, Tutapona’s field staff also provide one-on-one trauma rehabilitation sessions utilizing Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Critical Incident and Stress Debriefing (CISD)<sup>5</sup> and Mindfulness<sup>6</sup> techniques. These individuals are referred by partner organizations or self-refer. Participants of the group programs with SPTSS scores over 50 are also offered an individual trauma rehabilitation session by one of Tutapona’s Field Facilitators.

**Figure 4.2: Grow Program Design and Objectives**

Program Objectives	Program Design
The GROW program aims to help people grow through critical incidents (e.g. war, natural disaster, exploitation) and the subsequent effects of tragedy (e.g. loss of home, family, dignity).	Instructive concepts and practical activities featured in the Grow Program are based on more than a decade of cross-cultural therapeutic work (in clinical psychology) with refugees of war, survivors of natural disaster and human exploitation, and developing communities worldwide.
The GROW program is based on scientific research and ethical constructs. It aims to equip and empower individuals in five areas: (a)	The GROW program is designed to be easy to follow and is written in simple language for people of diverse cultures and educational backgrounds to facilitate.

<sup>5</sup> CISD is a specific, 7-phase, small group, supportive crisis intervention process. It is a simple, supportive, crisis-focused discussion of a traumatic event (which is frequently called a “critical incident”).

<sup>6</sup> Mindfulness is the psychological process of bringing one’s attention to experiences occurring in the present moment

<p>mental; (b) emotional; (c) behavioural; (d) relational; and (e) spiritual wellbeing. Any reference to spirituality or faith in a 'Divine Creator' is done so without prejudice against a person's particular ideology.</p>	<p>The Program Facilitator's Manual is made available to people who have completed comprehensive facilitator training.</p>
<p>The GROW program endeavours to help people who have survived critical incidence and tragic circumstances better understand their experience, and be directly equipped with the knowledge, skills and courage to grow through their personal challenges.</p>	<p>The GROW program consists of six parts, each of which aim to 'cultivate' key character qualities and core competencies for overall health and wellbeing. Each program section is built upon the previous, necessitating the program to be facilitated in sequential order.</p>
<p>While for some participants the GROW program may be therapeutic (effective in bringing about personal recovery and sustainable change), the GROW program is not counselling or therapy.</p>	<p>The GROW program is an educational program designed to equip participants with new life- skills, qualities and characteristics which promote mental and emotional resiliency, and in turn, enable participants to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives.</p>

Source: The GROW Program Manual, 2017

#### 4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the context in which this study was carried out. A brief summary has been provided of the major conflicts in eastern and central Africa that have

contributed to Uganda's growing refugee population. It has been argued that while Uganda has comparatively progressive policies, most refugees are still living in settlements without viable alternative options. Tutapona's various programmatic tools have been described and a summary provided of the current program impact measures that exist. A need has been identified for more qualitative research on Tutapona's program impacts, in order to provide greater opportunities for program participant input and critical feedback. This is particularly important given the context in which Tutapona operates. Uganda currently contains 1.1 million refugees, most of whom have fled from active war zones and have had high levels of exposure to traumatic events. Many of these people will very likely spend a considerable amount of time in one of Uganda's refugee settlements, with few other viable options available. Effective targeted mental health and psychosocial programs for such people must be considered a priority for humanitarian and development actors and further learning in this area is a necessary first step. Chapter Five discusses the chosen research methodology and the research methods employed.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Research Design & Methodology**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This research project has utilized a qualitative approach in order to allow the freedom and space for program participants to give their perspectives on their experience of Tutapona's Grow program. There is also alignment between empowerment theory and qualitative research methods.

This chapter will begin with a more detailed explanation of the reasons why a qualitative methodology was selected to investigate the effectiveness of Tutapona's trauma rehabilitation program at empowering war affected refugees in Uganda. The particular research methods will also be discussed, detailing the participant selection process, data collection and analysis techniques.

In all cross-cultural research, careful attention must be given to power dynamics. This is especially true in this case, given the positionality of the researcher. The second half of this chapter will examine the motives for this research, the background of the researcher and the ethical considerations inherent in this project. Particular attention has been given to the steps taken to minimize the impact of the potentially uneven power dynamics. The chapter concludes with a summary of the limitations of this paper.

## **5.2 Methodology**

O'Leary (2017) argues that there must be a 'goodness of fit' between the final question and the methodological design of a research project. The key consideration is the alignment of the question with the methodology rather than an allegiance to a particular style of research. It was decided that quantitative research, such as a pre to post intervention trauma symptom questionnaire could potentially be effective at determining whether or not trauma symptoms are reducing as a result of the program, but may fail to capture any broader and potentially pertinent perspectives that exist among program graduates on the topic of empowerment. A mixed method approach

was deemed to be overly ambitious for a report of this size. As O'Leary points out, there are drawbacks with the mixed method approach, including clashes of paradigmatic assumptions and the practicalities of time constraints and word limits (2017).

What Chambers (1983) terms professional bias, or research confined to the specialization and knowledge of the outsider, must be carefully considered and avoided here. Tuhiwai Smith argues that, "indigenous peoples have experienced unrelenting research of a profoundly exploitative nature" (1999, p.43). Given the context of a New Zealand student conducting research among a community of refugees in Uganda, careful attention has been given to the research design to reduce the likelihood of irrelevant, non-representative or even exploitative research.

The aim of this research report is:

*To investigate the extent to which Tutapona's GROW program empowers refugee participants.*

Empowerment has been shown to be broad in scope and subjective and therefore not well suited to measurement via a pre-written number-scale questionnaire. An appropriate methodology to provide information against this brief, must therefore actively allow space for research participants to express their ideas. As Rowlands explains, "qualitative indicators are, self-evidently central to the evaluation of empowerment" (1995, p.106).

Therefore, after careful consideration qualitative methods only, were selected and utilized. Stewart-Withers, Banks, McGregor, & Meo-Sewabu describe qualitative research as a range of approaches that uncover the perspectives and voices of the poor or the marginalised and seek to understand their complex social world, including "its richness in context, detail and experience" (2014, p.59). Qualitative methods are flexible, adaptable and sensitive in order to generate data on how people live, and view, their lives (Chambers, 1983). The approach accepts subjectivities and multiple

perspectives. Such methods were determined to fit most closely with the need for this research project to provide refugees with a less restricted voice in the evaluation of Tutapona's Grow program.

### **5.3 Research Methods**

#### **A. Participant Selection Criteria**

While Tutapona currently operates in four refugee settlements in Uganda, Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, in Kamwenge District was selected as the site from which RPs would be chosen due to the more homogenous nature of the population of this settlement. The site was opened in 2012 and remained a receiving settlement until December 2017 meaning refugees all have arrived at this location in a relatively small time window. They are also exclusively from the DRC, unlike other settlements where several nationalities are represented.

RPs were selected from the attendance list of a Grow Program training completed three months prior. The thinking behind this delay was to ensure that program participants had a window of time to see some of the potential results of the training in action. It also allowed for some of the potential immediate post-training excitement or euphoria to have worn off and for usual daily rhythms to have been resumed, meaning participants could offer a less emotional assessment of Grow. However, it was also critical that not too much time had elapsed as this would increase the likelihood of influences outside the scope of Tutapona's work to come in (either positive or negative). The Grow training is ten sessions long and is carried out over two weeks. Only participants who had graduated from the program (which is defined as having attended at least 7 of the 10 sessions) were considered. Once a list of people who met these criteria was built, the RPs were randomly selected. Finally, it was ensured that at least one male and one female participant were selected.

## **B. Semi-structured interviews**

Delving into qualitative methodologies therefore means working in a world that accepts and even values: the search for holistic meaning, research conducted in natural settings, emergent methodological design, small numbers. The goal is to gain an intimate understanding of people, places, cultures and situations through rich engagement (O'Leary, 2017, p.142).

Bearing in mind the characteristics of effective qualitative research outlined in the quote above, the decision was made to utilize semi-structured interviews due to their flexible nature and the ability for interviewees to share information that they feel is pertinent to the topic in question. This interactive type of data collection allows for issues that emerge along the way to be explored and is very much in line with one of the key goals of this research report, namely to give research participants a stronger voice (Snape & Spencer, 2003). The priority is to ensure that the interviewee is comfortable and relaxed and that the tone of the interview is conversational, rather than formal (Laws, 2003). To achieve this interviews are best carried out in naturalistic settings, so the place and time were selected by the RP (Stewart-Withers et al., 2014). Having a loose structure allowed the Research Assistant (RA) to steer the course of the conversation. The advantage of this style of interview is that, if it is carried out correctly, the interviewer can come up with all the data they intended but can also mine unexpected data that emerges (O'Leary, 2017).

Due to the word limit on this research report, and the preference for depth rather than breadth associated with the qualitative methodology, four research participants were selected and interviewed. The interviews were designed to take place over approximately one hour, which is considered to be a suitable length of time from a qualitative research perspective (Laws, 2003).

The RA utilized introductory comments and interview questions that were pre-screened by my supervisor, Dr Helen Leslie, to guide the dialogue. The first section contains critical information and was carefully delivered to each interviewee. The RA then used the set questions that follow to guide the interview direction. Both parts are listed in Annex A.

### **C. Data analysis**

Following standard qualitative data analysis methods, a categorising process with a coding system was used (Laws, 2003). Interview results were, where appropriate, categorised into three types of empowerment: personal, relational and collective. Negative responses about the program impact and other feedback that indicate that empowerment had not taken place were also coded. Due to the small number of interviews, this step was completed manually rather than with the help of coding software. Chapter Six will display the findings collected and discuss the results.

### **5.4 Exploring the Positionality of the Researcher**

I am 36 years old and married with three young children. Our family currently lives in Kampala, Uganda where I work as the Country Director for Tutapona and my wife is a freelance photographer. My Christian faith has played a major part in motivating me to engage in this field. Prior to this, I worked in New Zealand, the United Arab Emirates and Uganda as a Secondary School Teacher for ten years. My teaching role in Uganda in 2010 involved work with former child soldiers from Uganda's northern civil war and it was through this project that I first came into contact with Tutapona's Executive Director, Carl Gaede. While Tutapona's work has been covered in more depth in Chapter Four, in short it is a Christian organisation with a goal of providing psychological trauma rehabilitation for people affected by war and conflict. I quickly became very interested in the project, given my growing awareness of the levels of trauma that people in this country have experienced and how debilitating this can be. In 2014, my wife and I

started working for Tutapona based in Mbarara town in Southwestern Uganda. In this role I spent considerable time working out of one of Tutapona's field offices at a nearby refugee settlement called Nakivale. Through this experience my interest in trauma rehabilitation work increased and I was hired in January 2016 as Tutapona Uganda's Country Director.

Given my current professional role and that the focus of the research was to evaluate the effectiveness of one of Tutapona's main programmatic tools, there was the potential for a conflict of interests. As explained, I was originally strongly attracted to this work and over time my belief in the importance of mental health support for conflict affected populations has grown. I have dedicated the last four years of my career to this project. I am invested in this work and this had the potential to interfere with my ability to objectively assess its merits and limitations. There was also an uneven power dynamic at play with Tutapona's field staff in Rwamwanja who I played a role in hiring possibly motivated to influence the research process in a way that would show the program in a positive light. It would likely have been difficult for people who had completed the Grow program to give negative feedback to Tutapona field staff or directly to the Country Director.

One step that was taken to mitigate this power imbalance was to employ an independent Research Assistant to carry out the interviews. Careful steps were taken to ensure respondents knew that this person was not hired by Tutapona and that their responses would remain strictly confidential. The interviews took place with only the RP, the RA and a translator. No Tutapona field staff were present. While I was the one to collate the primary data, it was also made available to my supervisor to reduce the risk of misinterpretation. It should be pointed out that those being researched did hold some power in this research process (Honwana, 2006). A research model was intentionally selected to give participants as much freedom to express their opinions as possible. They had the opportunity to speak freely about the program.

My professional role also lent some advantages to this research process. I have worked in Uganda's refugee settlements over the past four years and have developed an understanding of some of the struggles, challenges and hopes of the Congolese refugees among whom this research was carried out. I have a detailed knowledge of the complexity of Tutapona's work and was therefore in a good position to understand comments made by refugees, whether positive or negative and how they relate to Tutapona's programmatic approach. Furthermore, because I am invested in this work, it was my strong desire to accurately portray the opinions of refugees. This research took place in my own time and at my own cost and I was committed to ensure that the results were not influenced by my position. I believe that it is in the best interests of the organisation to be aware of the shortfalls as well as the strengths of the program. Despite these factors, it is important that this report comes with clear transparency on this issue of positionality. The effects of my professional role on this research report will be discussed further in the 'Limitations of the Research' section at the end of this chapter.

## **5.5 Ethical Considerations**

With the nature of the research topic being an evaluation of a mental health intervention amongst refugees living in Uganda, ethics is an area that requires careful attention and thought. Firstly, as O'Leary points out, an ethical obligation of any researcher is to ensure "respondents have given informed consent" (2017, p.70). With the cultural and linguistic barriers inherent in this project, particular care must be taken in ensuring participants have been effectively informed. All participants were given a translated information sheet describing the purpose and scope of the research, the rights of the participants and a summary of the interview questions. This information sheet was also read out by the RA as some refugees in Rwamwanja have low literacy levels. Stewart-Withers asserts that research participants in sensitive environments "can

worry about any type of recording, written or oral ending up in the hands of the authorities” (2016, p.15). Therefore, participants were also given the option of how to signal their consent through either a recorded oral consent statement, or a signed consent form. Another strong indicator of consent using this methodology is whether or not people turn up and engage with the interview.

It is critical that researchers ensure that no emotional, psychological or physical harm comes to participants as a result of their involvement in the research process (O’Leary, 2017, p.70). There are a few reasons why this consideration was particularly pertinent here. The population amongst whom the research was conducted are refugees who have often experienced significant and complex psychological trauma in the war they have fled and in their lives in the refugee settlement, making these people more vulnerable. Secondly, given that the method of data collection involves interviews, there was the potential for intrusive memories to be stirred up in a way that causes emotional or psychological harm. These risks were carefully considered, monitored and mitigated.

To this end, the following steps have been taken. All participants were informed that they did not have to take part in the interview and that they could withdraw at any time with no questions asked. The guiding interview content was critiqued by a Clinical Social Worker, Alicia Searl, to reduce the possibility of unintended agitation or emotional arousal through insensitive or intrusive questions. Given that the purpose of the interview was a program evaluation, it was decided not to ask questions about the type of trauma that research participants have experienced or to ask for their ethnicity. Questions along these lines were deemed to have a higher possibility of arousing negative memories or making people defensive. The RA was carefully briefed on signs and symptoms of trauma so that she was in a better position to know when it would be advisable to switch topics or halt the interview.

A third ethical consideration is that confidentiality is provided for RPs (O’Leary, 2017, p.70). While this step was relatively straight forward in the write up stage of this assignment through name changes and the muddling of other bio data, it was more difficult during data collection. People who gave consent to be involved in the research process and who were interviewed, had the potential to attract attention from their friends and neighbours. RPs were the ones who selected the interview locations and time of day. A further strategy employed was to limit the use of vehicles to reduce visibility. Prior to each interview, key information regarding confidentiality was verbally disseminated to each participant including the confidentiality of the identity of the participant and the information provided.

In addition to these steps, I carefully read the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Human Participants and completed the online risk assessment questionnaire which indicated that I needed to complete a full ethics proposal. I had discussions with my supervisor, Dr Helen Leslie to consider the ethical risks involved in this project and ways to minimize these. I also received advice from Dr Rochelle Stewart-Withers. A full human ethics application was submitted to Massey University (SOA 18/23) and approved. Appropriate permissions were gained from the Office for the Prime Minister of Uganda to carry out this research project among Congolese refugees in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement which is under their jurisdiction. Tutapona’s Executive Director also provided written permission for this research project to be carried out with program participants.

## **5.6 Limitations of this Research Report**

The scale of the research was limited with only four participants. This is a very small sample and cannot be considered representative of the wider refugee population of Uganda, or even of Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. The reason for the small sample size was due to the intensive nature of qualitative research and the word and time

restrictions around the 60 credit Research Report for which this research is being conducted. Despite this limitation in breadth, a significant amount of valuable data was gathered from these four candidates which provided an insight into their program impact experiences. The qualitative research methodology strongly advocates the value of depth over quantity and works at delving into social complexities (O’Leary, 2017).

A second limitation of this project was the positionality of the researcher. While a number of steps have been taken to reduce the influence of my position on the data collected, it is vital that this study comes with transparency on this issue. The study would have been strengthened if it were carried out by an independent researcher. However, in this relatively recent and under-resourced field it has been a challenge to get field based research to be carried out.

The goal of this short report is to contribute in a small way to the understanding of whether psychosocial programs have the potential to empower people who have been traumatised by war and conflict. It is hoped that the findings will increase interest in this field and prompt further, much needed research.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

While this research topic is an important one and will provide helpful ideas from refugees about what effective and ineffective interventions in the field of mental health look like in this context, careful thought and attention was needed to protect the privacy and well-being of participants. This research topic seems to match closely with Stewart-Withers assessment that development research usually,

is cross-cultural, involves fieldwork and working with often vulnerable or marginalized populations. In working with such populations and in thinking through for example, consent, privacy, harm, or safety, researchers may find themselves in situations which do not marry well with various institutional requirements (2016, p. 31).

I am confident that despite the complicated nature of the ethics around this research topic, these challenges have been effectively navigated through careful consultation with my supervisor at Massey University and practical advice from people who have experience working with these refugee populations in Uganda. Throughout, a high degree of cultural sensitivity couched in respect for the participants has underpinned the research.

The next chapter begins to present the findings of my research through a detailed discussion of the RP responses. Key themes are highlighted.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Results- Key Ideas Presented by the Research Participants**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The research was able to uncover a range of rich ideas about the ways in which empowerment has happened in the lives of the RPs and the wider community as a result of the Grow Program.

The chapter begins with a brief introduction of the RPs as well as a summary of their experiences of the conflict in the DRC before presenting the main ideas, opinions and themes that were raised in the interviews.

## **6.2 Research Participant Information**

The following information has been structured to protect the identity of the RPs. However, it is important to introduce the people who provided the data for this research project.

- RP1 is a 19-year-old female. She is married and was breast-feeding a young baby at the time of the interview. She was born in the DRC and fled from her home country in 2012. She has been in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement since then.
- RP2 is a 42-year-old male from the DRC. He fled and became a refugee in 2012. He is married. No children were mentioned in the interview.
- RP3 is a 32-year-old male also from the DRC. He has been in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement for 6 years (so presumably fled the DRC in 2012). He is married, there was no reference to children in the interview.
- RP4 is a 35-year-old female who was born in the DRC. She first fled the DRC some years back but later returned home where she stayed for one and half years. Two years ago (2016) she came back to Uganda as a refugee. She has about 7 children most of whom were observed to be under 10-years-old. She did not mention a husband in the interview.

## **6.3 Participants' General Views on the Grow Program**

After the interview introduction and biodata questions, participants were asked to provide a general evaluation of the Grow program. All four RPs found the Grow program helpful and gave positive summative evaluations of its impact on their lives. They spoke of learning a lot of information that was still (3 months later) personally impactful and helpful. Ideas presented included, learning how to live well with others (RP4); RP3 explained that he had learned to refocus his attention and energy forward rather than backwards. RP2 spoke of increased self-confidence and hope for his future. He said, as a result of the Grow program he had learned that ‘even if you’re a refugee you can still live and develop yourself’.

How RPs believed others in their groups responded to the program varied. Two RPs said they thought everyone found the program helpful and that there was nothing unhelpful presented. The other two RPs commented that some people were less interested, particularly when they learned that there was no material support being offered. One RP commented that a few people threw away their completion certificates because they were frustrated that Tutapona did not give them any material support (money or food or non-food items). Therefore, while all four RPs found the program personally helpful, there were mixed evaluations of how others felt about it. The main negative idea raised was unmet expectations for material support from Tutapona.

#### **6.4 Theme: A Lack of Control**

The four interviewed refugees have all fled from conflict in the Eastern DRC within the past six years. Three RPs had fled in 2012 and one in 2016. The level of psychological trauma experienced by these people is extremely high. They explained that their reasons for seeking refugee status in Uganda included widespread theft and looting, the threat of violence forcing them from their homes and witnessed or experienced violence and killings in their home country. They had to move from one place to another (within the

DRC), often sleeping in the forest. They all came to the conclusion that life in the DRC was no longer livable. Two participants mentioned being caught in situations where bullets were flying around them. RP4 said that her younger sister was killed in the fighting and that as she was about to cross from the DRC into Uganda, all the possessions she had been able to carry were taken from her. RP2 said, 'the only news we had in our ears was like, someone was killed. The person I used to know was killed. This one was killed'. RP3 explained that he lived in a place where there was no security with people fighting all around them and as a result:

during the night we could not sleep in our houses because there was too much insecurity, so we would sleep outside, hiding from the night and people used to come and go in our houses and steal things and kill people.

While grateful for the peace in Uganda and their reception there, the RPs spoke of facing a myriad of significant hardships as they began their lives as refugees. Conflict and infighting between refugees in the settlement was spoken about by two participants. RP4 described broken relationships between her family members and a lack of control over her children. RP3 said that he (and others like him) quickly became very dependent on food aid. He would, 'just wait there, waiting for the time they are going to distribute food'. Two participants said that they did not save any money but would quickly spend anything they got. RP2 also spoke of feeling helpless, as if he couldn't do anything with his life because he was a refugee. In many different ways, these refugees spoke about a lack of control over their present lives and their futures.

### **6.5 Theme: Trust, Self-Control and Hope**

Some key concepts presented by the RPs included increased peace, knowledge, self-control and hope for the future after attending the Grow Program. All four respondents cited some ways in which they had more control over their lives now than before. More specifically, a common thread among the responses was a description of reduced trauma symptomology. RP2 said he used to have frequent and graphic nightmares,

which would 'wake me up with my heart beating so fast'. He also described being suspicious of everyone, thinking they meant him harm. Since attending the program, he said he is no longer having nightmares and his trust of others has grown. In summary of the effects he had experienced from the Grow program, RP2 said,

They strengthened me, they help me to have [a] peaceful mind. They helped me to have peace in my heart. I'm not having nightmares again and I'm not seeing those people as if they're again going to kill people.

RP2 commented that his self-control had improved after attending Grow. Whereas previously he had reacted quickly if he was insulted, he now has learned to pause and 'turn aside' and think about his response. RP3 described a similar change, saying the program had reduced his anger, which had been intense. He also said that he has learned not to dwell on past events and the things he has left behind in the DRC. RP3 talked about the importance of forgiveness in freeing him to plan for the future, 'I need to forgive for me to continue with my life'.

Another idea identified was increased hope for the future. RP2 said:

They make us feel like even if I'm a refugee I can also buy a car, I can also make a business and develop myself again... Being called a refugee doesn't mean that I don't have the right to develop or to live.

He described this idea as being important in motivating him to make plans and to start thinking about and working towards his future. This theme of increased hope is indirectly picked up by two other respondents, in their discussion of personal economic empowerment.

RPs 3 and 4 described changes in their personal economic decision-making processes. RP4 talked about how she has started to save money by selling things from her garden since attending the Grow program. The profit from this has allowed her children to eat better and in the three months since she graduated, she has purchased a piglet and a chicken. RP3 said that he and his family used to be very reliant on the World Food Program monthly food distributions. Since the program, his dependence on external

support has lessened. He and his wife have started saving the small money they make from the crops they grow on their land. With these funds, his wife has started a small business.

But nowadays when I get anything from my land or from [some]where, I plan for it. Like sometimes the time of distribution of food, it reaches when I have not even seen [that] it is time because I am planning for something else.

His description of now being focused on planning for the future and working with what he has, to the extent where he forgets that the food distribution date has arrived, is a profound change when compared with his previous attitude to the welfare support, 'Before we used only to live thinking about the time when they are going to distribute food, looking at my planning card for when they are going to distribute food'. This change from previously wasting money, to now using available resources effectively for personal gain and planning for the future was one of the biggest themes highlighted by RP3 and RP4. These decisions appear to be influenced by increased personal hope.

RP1 said the Grow program was helpful, but did not provide much explanation of how, other than that it had made her feel peaceful and 'strengthened my heart which was broken'.

## **6.6 Stronger Relationships**

All four research participants described ways that they had experienced or witnessed stronger relationships in their families or communities.

RPs 1, 3 and 4 described stronger relationships between them and others as a result of the Grow program. RP1 said that she had learned to live at peace with others. RP4 also said that she had learned to live peacefully with others. She explained how she used to have broken relationships with some members of her extended family but that since the

training she had taken steps to repair them. Specifically, she went and asked for forgiveness and she attributes this decision to ideas discussed in the Grow program.

There [is] no problem I have with neighbours or any other person living in the settlement because of those training[s] has taught me how to live peaceful[ly] with people and then now I'm living well with them. We share together, we eat together so I'm ok, thanks to those training[s].

RP3 also mentioned learning how to live at peace with others through forgiveness. He said that if he has a problem with a friend, he now has tools to solve it, instead of continuing to fight.

They had taught us how to forgive and even how to be the first one to take the first step to go to the one who has done wrong to you and even talk to that person even if that person is not the first one to come to you.

As three of the four respondents have described steps they've taken to forgive others and a link between forgiveness and better relationships, it seems that the Grow program has had a positive influence on interpersonal relationships in this community.

The Grow program was credited with being a catalyst in improving relationships in the immediate family of RP2. He said that he has learned to stop and think before reacting or taking a rash decision.

If I fight with my wife I don't actually take a decision before I think about anything. Because I have space to think about my future with the family, then I can take a good decision instead of taking a bad decision. Tutapona has trained me how to make a decision without considering what I'm facing at the moment.

It has also reduced the length of time that a fight will last between him and his wife. He gave the example of fights previously lasting up to two weeks before they were resolved, 'But nowadays it doesn't need to take two weeks. Like one day and I feel like I need to solve things with the wife and we live in peace'. He believes that his wife, who also attended the training, has been enabled to live peacefully with others. RP2 described the impact of this change on his marriage as profound. He said that it has strengthened his wife's heart and of himself, 'now I'm living like a free person'.

RP4, made a link between her economic empowerment, that she attributed to Tutapona's program, and better control over her children.

It [the Grow program] has empowered me. Like before I didn't know how to manage my money so that I can help my family well and control my kids but after those training now I have learned how to manage my money whatever the amount I have, so it has helped give me control of my home and my children.

She gave the example of her daughter, who the Research Assistant saw and estimated to be 14 years old, being in a relationship with a guy that she (RP4) did not approve of. After the training, the relationship stopped and RP4 attributed this change to the greater control that she had gained over her children, due to their stronger financial position. The link was not explained further than this, but the key idea presented by RP4 was that the Grow training had helped her to have more influence and control over her children.

### **6.7 Supporting Others**

One of the interview questions asked whether program participants had continued to meet with their respective groups after the conclusion of the Grow Program, without Tutapona staff. The two men said that there had been informal meetings post Grow, where the concepts learned were discussed further, 'We normally sometimes meet when we are neighbours, like men and then we cannot spend even an hour without involving things that we were trained in by Tutapona' (RP2). The two women said that their groups had not continued to meet. This could be because these participants belonged to different groups, and that some groups had continued to meet and some had not. Or it could be gender related. Perhaps men in this community have more time to socialize than women. One of the important goals of the Grow program is that it will pull communities closer together. On the measure of ongoing meetings, the results were variable.

An idea expressed commonly by the respondents, was that using ideas from Grow, they had witnessed community members helping to solve each other's problems. In response to a question about resiliency, RP4 said that even small problems used to overwhelm her, but now she has learned to go to others who attended the program for help. She explained that those people are able to remember skills learned in the training and advise her. Although not a direct beneficiary, RP2 also observed this collective support.

In our neighbourhood if someone has done something wrong and they are about to fight they [community members] just say that do you remember that in the Tutapona training they told us to do this and this. And you see like everyone is changing and everyone is getting the impact from what they have learned.

He went on to tell a particular story and it's moral, used in the Grow program, that village members have repeated to each other. This is an example of the community using ideas or skills developed in the Grow training to collectively solve problems, in this case conflict.

## **6.8 Conclusion**

The RPs described a range of positive changes in their own lives and the lives of people around them. The most common threads discussed included, reduced trauma symptomology, increased economic freedom, better relationships between family members and neighbours (often through forgiveness) and some degree of communal problem solving. Some of the more striking examples of these changes presented were, less reliance on food aid, a healthier marriage, greater control by a mum over her children and forgiveness of people leading to healed relationships. Some comments that were more critical of the Grow Program were made in relation to the lack of material support offered. In the next chapter, the RP ideas and themes will be analyzed in relation to empowerment theory discussed in Chapter Two.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Analysis, Discussion and Conclusion**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

Empowerment begins with people who have been disempowered or marginalized and must involve their increased participation. Critically it is about generating greater access to power of various kinds. This may be demonstrated through changes in decision making processes for people on personal, relational or collective levels. This chapter will compare the results discussed in Chapter Six with the theory of empowerment as defined in Chapter Two. Where possible, links will be established between the comments of the RPs and empowerment literature. Areas of misalignment will also be analyzed. Table 7.1 below provides a summary of the key findings in this chapter. These are explained in more depth in the sections that follow. Finally, comment will be made on the broader theme of the possibility of psychosocial interventions enabling empowerment in war affected populations.

**Figure 7.1 Dimensions of Empowerment**

Dimension	Definition	Evidence from RP responses
Disempowerment	Empowerment necessarily begins with previously disadvantaged, disenfranchised or powerless individuals or groups.	The RPs are all refugees that have fled from war in the Eastern DRC within the last six years. They have left behind land, homes and jobs and had to start their lives again in a foreign country. RPs described having experienced significant psychological distress as a result of fearing for their lives, the theft of possessions, witnessing violence and losing loved ones. These people have certainly been disadvantaged and disenfranchised.

Participation	Empowerment occurs as a process that directly involves the participation of the target individual or community.	RPs spoke of the importance of the Grow program facilitators to the support the progress that they had achieved. However, the areas of life change referenced centred around decisions and actions taken by the participants themselves. The empowerment that has occurred among Grow program participants involved their active participation.
Personal empowerment	An individual develops an increased sense of confidence and capacity.	RPs described several different examples of personal empowerment. These included, skills learned and applied to manage symptoms of trauma more effectively, increased hope for the future and changes in decision-making processes resulting in greater economic freedom.
Relational empowerment	Individuals develop the ability to negotiate and influence decisions made within their relationships.	There was significant evidence of RPs having stronger interpersonal relationships after attending the training. Examples included, restored relationships between friends and neighbours, a healthier marriage and more control by a mum over her children. Ways that RPs had effected this change included, deciding to

		forgive others or asking for forgiveness, resolving fights more quickly, not holding grudges and pausing before acting/responding when offended.
Collective empowerment	Individuals work collectively to achieve a greater impact in social, economic or political decisions than each could have achieved alone.	There was some (limited) evidence of individuals working together more closely after the training to solve communal social problems. There was not much evidence of increased collective economic or political power as a result of the Grow training.

Adapted from Rowlands, 1997

## 7.2 Disempowerment and Participation

Two important aspects of empowerment that are often cited in development literature are disempowerment and participation. The RP responses have been analyzed to look for the prevalence of these two concepts. As explained in Chapter Two, disempowerment is a key precursor to empowerment (Scheyvens, 2009). All the RPs described having fled terrible situations in the DRC and of continuing struggles in their lives as refugees in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. They spoke about a lack of control over their present lives and their futures. Clearly, all of these RPs have had life experiences that are highly disempowering.

The concept discussed in Chapter Two, that empowerment is a process that must directly involve the participation of the target individual or community (Batliwala, 1994),

is also important to explore in line with the RP responses. Some of the language used by RPs placed a heavy emphasis on the role of the facilitators, with comments like 'they make us feel' and 'they make us forget'. One RP commented that the community needed Tutapona's staff to come back and train them again, as they were forgetting some of the material. It is important to note that Tutapona's model involves a Follow-Up refresher trauma rehabilitation training three months after the initial program, and that this group had not yet received this Follow-Up training at the time of the interviews. This means that the RP request for a refresher of key ideas was shortly going to be addressed. Given this, these comments raise the important question of how much external support or intervention is needed in order to sustainably empower people to have more control over their circumstances. For Tutapona as an International NGO, this question is particularly pertinent. Against the goal of empowerment, it is vital that Tutapona's services do not generate dependence on external support.

To balance this caution, while all the RPs mentioned the important role of Tutapona's program facilitators in the teaching of new information and skills, it seems it is the RPs themselves who are carrying out the changes. It is evident from all four interviews that there have been significant changes in their lives and the lives of people around them following their attendance of the Grow program, and that they have been the key agents in the change process. Evidence of this is found in the many different directions taken by RPs after attending the same Grow program training. Some were prompted to make changes in their inter-personal relationships, others changed their financial decisions and some described using tools to help them lessen their personal symptoms of trauma. Friedmann's concept that before the extremely marginalized can play an active role in increasing their own social power, some external support is needed is applicable here (2011). These refugees have been through extremely challenging and disempowering life experiences, and if they are to be empowered it is important that some external support is provided to allow people to tap into their own creativity and resilience.

However, it seems clear that these four RPs were actively participating in the process of change and not passive recipients of services.

### **7.3 Levels of Empowerment**

Rowland's different levels of empowerment, discussed in Chapter Two as a helpful definition and breakdown of the empowerment framework, will be used to evaluate the degree to which empowerment has been achieved by the Grow Program in the lives of these RPs and the people close to them.

### **7.4 Personal Empowerment**

As discussed, the refugees interviewed have been through extremely disempowering experiences. They were starting from a place where they had recently lost their homes, jobs and land and been forced to flee to a foreign country. In addition, they described going through terrible life events. In light of this, Friedmann's concept of empowerment necessarily happening at different levels, is highly relevant. He described small, accessible improvements in the lives of the extremely poor or marginalised geared at increasing their access to social power as being the necessary starting point (2011). A number of examples were presented by the four RPs of personal empowerment experienced after attending Tutapona's Grow program.

Personal empowerment, which can be defined as the process whereby an individual develops an increased sense of confidence and capacity is an important layer of empowerment (Rowlands, 1997). All four respondents cited ways in which they had developed more control over their lives. Some key concepts presented in line with this layer of empowerment included increased trust of others, knowledge, self-control and hope for the future. These ideas align well with Rowland's definition of personal empowerment. Decreased trauma symptomology as a result of applied skills learned

from the Grow program was described a number of times. Examples included, increased trust of others, a cessation of intrusive nightmares and a 'peaceful mind' (RP2). The concept of improved self-control was also mentioned by two RPs.

Increased hope for the future seems to be most relevant to personal empowerment and was referenced both directly and indirectly in all four interviews. The decisions and mindsets described that relate to personal empowerment seem to stem from the powerful idea that the future can be better than the present. RP2 described it like this, 'They make us forget that even if we come far, we come from the war, still I am human and I can still develop myself'. The examples of the RPs deciding to save money or actively work at improving their situations can be linked to first having increased hope. An analysis of the RP responses indicates that these particular program participants gained significant personal empowerment stemming from increased hope.

### **7.5 Relational Empowerment**

A second important aspect of empowerment is relational empowerment or an individual's ability to negotiate and influence decisions made within their relationships as defined by Rowlands (1997). The RPs explained ways in which they had learnt how to positively influence relationships, including with neighbours, relatives, spouses and children. Some of the ways that RPs explained how this change had been effected included, learning how to live at peace with others, deciding to move on from past hurts, asking for forgiveness or forgiving those who had wronged them. There were several examples presented of RPs taking active steps to resolve conflicts that had been causing significant angst or distress. RP2 explained that the Grow program had taught him how to forgive, 'and even how to be the first one to take the first step to go to the one who has done me wrong... I now know that I need to forgive him to continue with my life'.

RPs also described having learnt skills to better resolve arguments or conflict. Both male RPs described having learnt how to pause before acting when something bad happened. In reference to fights with his wife, RP2 talked about resolving conflicts more quickly rather than letting them linger. These skills or tools cross-over between personal empowerment and relational empowerment, in that they were skills of self-control which were being used to positively influence relationships with others.

Concrete examples of relational empowerment were described in all four interviews. These often involved the act of forgiveness. RPs spoke of the impact of this on their lives as being significant. A number of RPs spoke about now having peace in their hearts as a result of resolved conflicts or forgiven grievances.

## **7.6 Collective Empowerment**

Collective empowerment is defined by Rowlands as when individuals work collectively to achieve a greater impact in social, economic or political decisions than each could have achieved alone (1997). RPs were also questioned on the impact of the Grow program on this layer of empowerment. The responses were more mixed than the previous two categories.

One idea expressed by some of the respondents, was that using ideas from Grow, they had witnessed community members helping to solve each other's problems. This can be viewed as a form of social collective empowerment. McWhirter describes empowerment as being when people develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives and exercise greater control without infringing on the rights of others and eventually support the empowerment of others in the community (1991, p.224). The examples cited by the RPs in Rwamwanja usually involved people stepping in to resolve conflicts between community members using tools or concepts presented in the Grow program. One RP described people recounting stories with

messages of reconciliation to each other. Another RP explained that she had been the recipient of support from her neighbours who had also attended Grow, that these people had advised her on how to overcome her problems. These instances of people empowering one another in the community are evidence of collective empowerment.

In the literature referenced in Chapter Two, an important characteristic of collective empowerment is the stimulation of fundamental political and economic systemic change (Munck, 1992). There was little evidence in these interviews of this. While it appears that some forms of collective empowerment have taken place, namely that community members have been given skills and ideas that they've used to solve social problems, there was a lot less evidence of profound systemic change where people were now more able to get involved in settlement politics or to jointly generate more wealth. This is unsurprising given the situations in which these people live and the degree of disempowerment that they have experienced. As referenced in Chapter Two, Friedmann argues that for people to overcome disempowerment, fundamental political change is needed. Given this he also points to the possibility that small, accessible changes in the lives of the poor, can lead to more favourable conditions in which more systemic, widespread change might be more likely to occur later. In the research on psychosocial programs referenced in Chapter Three, significant individual and relational empowerment was shown to have been achieved, while there was also not much evidence of collective empowerment.

## **7.7 Conclusion**

Many of the ideas presented in the four interviews point to a significant level of empowerment being achieved by Grow Program participants. The key themes presented were increased hope for the future, skills to manage and reduce trauma symptoms, greater self-control and stronger relationships. Some of the tangible results of these changes included individuals and families working harder and saving more

money, people choosing to forgive those who had wronged them and people experiencing internal peace. These results demonstrate that for the four RPs a significant amount of personal and relational empowerment was achieved through Tutapona's Grow program. Speaking on behalf of his family, RP3 said, 'we are now living well, we are strong. We are ok. We don't only have to wait for others to come and give help. We can help ourselves'. This comment is evidence that these people have become active participants in the empowerment process.

There was some limited evidence of collective empowerment through community members supporting one another more. However, the higher level forms of collective empowerment, like systematic political and economic changes, were not mentioned in these interviews. This is an area that the authors of the Grow Program and the leadership of Tutapona could consider. Might there be changes made to this program design or facilitation that could support greater collective empowerment?

The population of refugees from the DRC with whom this research was carried out face massive barriers to participation and involvement in decision making. As refugees they usually arrived in Uganda with no financial resources, are afforded some basic support, but usually struggle to find work and often face linguistic, cultural and attitudinal barriers to integration. In addition, many of these people bring with them very troubling memories of traumatic experiences from the war that they have fled. Considering the level of disempowerment among this population, these results demonstrate significant success by the Grow Program in increasing the level of confidence and capacity as well as the ability for participants to negotiate and influence decisions within their relationships.

The positive results of this study point to the importance of psychosocial support for people affected by war and conflict. While this study is small in scale, the results support the weight of academic literature on psychosocial interventions which show the success

of such programs in facilitating healing from psychological trauma and the many follow on benefits of this for individuals and communities. In particular, that psychosocial support can lead to increased outcomes in other sectors including education, livelihoods and healthcare. In the specific context in which the study was carried out, it seems that a group-based approach using a specialized curriculum is highly effective. It is hoped that this research will further highlight the need for humanitarian and development practitioners to prioritize targeted psychosocial support more highly among post-conflict communities.

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***Annex A: Psychosocial Empowerment of Refugees in Uganda: An Evaluation of Tutapona's GROW Program***

INFORMATION SHEET (RESEARCH PARTICIPANT)

### **Researcher Introduction**

My name is Tim Manson, and I am undertaking a Masters of International Development at Massey University. I currently work as Tutapona Uganda's Country Director. I live in Kampala, Uganda with my wife and three children.

### **Research Assistant**

My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I have been hired by the researcher, Tim Manson to carry out the interviews. While Tim Manson works for Tutapona, this is a private research project that is not funded by Tutapona. He has hired me to ask these questions independently. I am in no way affiliated to Tutapona but am completely independent.

### **Project Description**

The aim of this research project is to evaluate the extent to which Tutapona's GROW program empowers refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo living in Uganda. The term 'empowerment' can be divided into individual, relational and collective levels. These categories will provide the opportunity for participants to comment on a wide range of ways in which the program might have impacted them. I am interested in hearing directly from people who have completed the program, about how GROW has helped them, or not helped them.

### **Participant Identification and Recruitment**

Participants have been chosen from the attendance register of a GROW training. Only adult (18 years and older) participants who have graduated the program (attended at least 7 of the 9 sessions) were considered. Once the list of people who have met these criteria was created, the research participants will be randomly selected. Four people have been selected to carry out these interviews.

### **Project Procedures**

Interviews will be conducted at a location and time selected by the research participant. The interview consists of 14 questions. There is no anticipated risk to you. However, you may feel uncomfortable talking about personal issues when discussing the impact of the GROW program. You do not have to answer all the questions if you do not want to and you may stop the interview at any point or decide to leave the research altogether. Your identity will be carefully protected. Only the Researcher will have access to your interview responses. In the research report a pseudonym (fake name) will be used and your personal information changed so that you will not be identifiable. This means that your identity will not be known to anyone else.

### **Data Management**

All of the information I gain from the interview will be used for research purposes only. The information will be stored as a password protected digital file. After the completion of the field research, a summary of the project findings will be made available to you in Swahili. All interview data and consent forms will be destroyed on completion of this research project and when the project has been marked in 2019.

### **Participant's Rights**

Please note that you do not have to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to

- decline to answer any particular question
- withdraw from the study until two weeks after the data collection
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is finished

If at any point you feel uncomfortable during the interview, you may ask for the recorder to be turned off.

### **Participant Consent**

Before we begin, I will need to obtain your informed written consent for participating and would also like to ask for your permission to audio-record and transcribe our conversation. This will help us in accurately understanding what you have to say and analysing and comparing the results. If you are prepared to engage in this interview and have your answers recorded, please sign the consent form. If you do not feel comfortable signing a consent form, but you would still like to participate, you have the option of having your verbal consent recorded instead.

### **Project Contacts**

Should you have any further questions, please feel free to contact the Researcher, Tim Manson, +256 778989261 or [tim@tutapona.com](mailto:tim@tutapona.com),

Alternatively, you may contact my supervisor at any point during the study.

Dr. Helen Leslie

Institute of Development Studies, Massey University

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[H.Leslie@massey.ac.nz](mailto:H.Leslie@massey.ac.nz)

### **Committee Approval Statement**

*This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 18/23. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Lesley Batten, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone +64 6 356 9099 x 85094, email [humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz).*

### **Standard bio-data and background questions**

1. What is your name and age?
2. In which country were you born?

3. How long have you lived in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement?
4. When did you complete Tutapona's GROW program?
5. How many sessions did you attend?
6. Have you received any trauma rehabilitation services separate from the GROW program? If so, please provide details of these services (organization(s), dates and type of intervention)

**Semi-structure Interview Questions**

<b>Aim: To evaluate the effectiveness of Tutapona's GROW program at empowering refugees in Rwamwanja refugee settlement.</b>	
<b>Key Topic</b>	<b>Question</b>
Life challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. For what reason(s) did you decide to leave your home country?</li> <li>2. Have you experienced traumatic or challenging life events?</li> </ol>
General evaluation of the GROW program	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Do you think the GROW program was helpful for you? If so, in what ways did you find it helpful?</li> <li>4. Were any aspects of the GROW program unhelpful for you? If so, what did you find unhelpful?</li> <li>5. How do you think other people in your group responded to the GROW program? Do you think they found it helpful or unhelpful?</li> </ol>
Individual empowerment questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Has the GROW program influenced your resiliency to face future problems?</li> <li>7. Has the GROW program influenced your level of motivation for work?</li> <li>8. Has the GROW program influenced your degree of planning for the future?</li> </ol>

<p>Relational empowerment questions</p>	<p>9. Has the GROW program had any influence on your relationships with family members?</p> <p>10. Has the GROW program changed the amount that you interact with neighbours and other living in the settlement?</p>
<p>Collective empowerment questions</p>	<p>11. Has the group that was formed for the GROW program continued to meet together without Tutapona staff, since the program finished?</p> <p>12. Have you noticed any changes (positive or negative) in your community since the GROW program was facilitated there, that you think were caused by the GROW program?</p>
<p>Conclusion</p>	<p>13. Overall do you think the GROW program has empowered you? Please explain why you think this.</p> <p>14. Do you have any further comments that you would like to make about the GROW program?</p>