

# Journal of Public Policy and Administration (JPPA)

## **POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT SURROUNDING THE LAND CONFLICT IN AMURU DISTRICT ACHOLI SUB-REGION**

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## **POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT SURROUNDING THE LAND CONFLICT IN AMURU DISTRICT ACHOLI SUB-REGION**

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** To examine the political environment surrounding the land conflict in Amuru district Acholi sub-region.

**Methodology:** The study employed a descriptive research design involving both qualitative and quantitative studies where 5 focus group discussions with 40 women and 40 men from Pabbo, Amuru and Lamogi sub counties of Amuru district and key interviews with 4 participants from Area Land Committee members and other leaders in the above sub counties.

**Findings:** The findings indicate that over 90% of rural land is understood by the people who live there as under communal control/ownership. These communal land owners are variously understood as clans, sub-clans or extended families. Ethnic based land tensions fostered insecurity and instability in the Amuru as people could not walk around freely, access their gardens, were displaced and this in turn affected their ability to make a living through accessing the land. I also found that many women had relational access to land through their marriage and relationship with male kin and this seemed to give them fragile land rights. Men on the other hand had firm control over land and made final decisions relating to sales and land use.

**Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy:** Having a study on land conflict in areas such as Amuru District in the Acholi-sub region which is one of the recently created districts in west Acholi in northern Uganda is very important. In addition land in Amuru district is a vital resource that defines the livelihoods, identity and relationship with ancestors of people. Research into political environment surrounding the land conflict in Amuru District Acholi sub-region will devise long term grassroots land dispute resolution structures into to increase the capacity of these structures by training, along with 'sensitising' communities to their land rights, access, control and ownership rights. In the same way the study area and can be used to identify research gaps for further study.

**Keywords:** *Political Environment, Land Conflict*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Armed conflicts globally create social and economic shifts that affect women's and men's claims to land. Jacobs (2012) explains that land is crucial to the livelihoods and security of many rural women. Asiimwe (2001) and Tripp (1997) note that land rights in most parts of Africa are passed on from the male lineage and women who have lost their lineage ties through widowhood, divorce, not having sons, and separation become vulnerable and may be excluded. According to the National Media Group NTV Uganda reported ethnically -based land clashes between the Acholi and Madi in June 2017 in Apaa Amuru district which included threats of forceful surveying of land by government in the name of "development" this made land rights fragile. Most armed conflicts depict women as passive victims; Annan, Blattman, Mazurana and Carlton (2011) demystify the image of male fighter they note that although the iconic image of the combatant at war was a young man with an automatic weapon and women are typically depicted as victims; women and girls have fought or provided military support in most conflicts. Women are active agents during war, after war and greatly shape the reconstruction agenda one of which is land reform. It's based on this article the issue of struggles over access, control and ownership rights in relation to political environment surrounding the land in Amuru district Acholi sub- region is discussed.

In Acholi, the Joint Acholi Sub-Region Leaders' Forum (JASLF) a body comprised of parliamentarians, district government officials, and cultural, religious and other community leaders from across the sub-region has initiated a process directly focused on Acholi customary, communal land. The Forum has appointed a committee of community leaders knowledgeable about Acholi land matters to develop and coordinate a project of research, consultation and advocacy pertaining to customary land tenure as currently understood and practiced in the sub-region. The overarching goal of the project is to better understand not only core principles and practices of Acholi customary communal land tenure but the complex local-level variations that exist across the sub-region, in order to secure and enhance customary communal land rights and land use for both individuals and communities.

Acholi has emerged in this research as atypical of African land security issues, not, as often supposed, because the post-conflict environment is fostering rampant and unmanageable land conflict but rather the opposite. This picture is confused by conflicts in western Amuru and Nwoya Districts, involving large scale questionable land acquisition by powerful forces in the context of recent oil finds and past displacements of indigenous populations. Land conflicts in these areas have little in common with the picture across the rest of the Acholi Sub-region. Here a picture of declining rates of land disputes in a context of high rates of resolution is emerging, probably because internal resources for managing conflict within rural communities are recovering and increasingly effective. We do not think there are grounds for seeing this improvement as a consequence of external forces: the courts, police and other JLOS actors are operating at a very low capacity in rural areas and were not cited by respondents as significant. NGO inputs have been beneficial in some instances, but were cited by a small minority of respondents as a significant factor in dispute resolution.

## **1.2 Statement Problem**

Amuru district is one of the recently created districts in west Acholi in northern Uganda. It was carved out of Gulu district and had remained reliant on Gulu for a number of services that included: the judiciary: police, teachers and others but currently infrastructure and many services are now functional. The district has had many land related conflict: these conflicts have included acquisition of large tracks of land for development, and land grabs as a case in point being the Madhvani group of companies. Rugadya & Kamusiime (2010) note in the case of Amuru that there is the unresolved issue of the East Madi Game Reserve and the migratory route for elephants including that of the black gold that is believed to lie in the plains of Amuru. The Sunday Monitor (11/6/2017) clarifies that as of June 2017 there have been violent clashes in Apaa in Pabbo Sub County that are believed to be fueled by politics that will deepen ethnic tensions between the Acholi and Madi. In most of these clashes, women and children are the most affected.

## **1.3 General objective of the study**

The main objective of the study was to examine the political environment surrounding the land conflict in Amuru district Acholi sub-region.

## **1.4 Specific Objectives**

The study was guided by the following specific objectives.

- i. To establish how land is accessed in Amuru district Acholi sub-region.
- ii. To identify the causes of land conflict in Amuru district Acholi sub-region.
- iii. To analyse the effects of land conflict Amuru district and the surrounding areas of Acholi sub-region
- iv. To assess the role of political actors in the land conflict of Amuru district Acholi sub-region.
- v. To suggest possible measures to land conflict of Amuru district

## **2.0 THEORETICAL REVIEW**

The Uganda Land Policy reinforces that land is a vital resource that defines the livelihoods, identity and relationship with ancestors of people. Agriculture is the backbone of Uganda's economy and accounts for 37% of its Gross Domestic Product. Amanda, Manuel and Blackden (2005) explain that almost 70% of the Ugandan labor was employed in agriculture related activities by 2003 and that had not changed much for over a decade. They explain that women provide the bulk of this labor but lack control over land. Yngstrom (2000: 26) notes in general that African women gained most of their access to land through marriage as wives; they acquired both the right and the obligation to cultivate land as a result of marriage. They may also be expected to fulfill certain other labor obligations, commonly existing in food provisioning. Custom and culture of a community in relation to land tenure are very strong factor that weakens or strengthens people's land claims. This research is underpinned by customary laws, norms and values towards land distribution. Chanock (1991) sees custom as a weapon in the battle against

the economic independence of dependants; these include rights claimed by elders over the labor of the young and by men over that of women. Chanock quotes the colonialist Lugard's description of land use.

In the earliest stage the land and its produce is shared by the community as a whole; later the produce is the property of the family or individuals by whose toil it is won, and the control of the land is vested in the head of the family. When the tribal stage is reached, the control passes to the chief, who allots unoccupied lands at will, but is not justified in dispossessing any family or person who is using the land (F.D. 1922: 280- 1 in Chanock 1991: 69).

In this excerpt, the land was vested in the head of the family and at the tribal level to the clan head that were all male. Women were invisible in land administration and governance right from pre-colonial times. Parwez (2011), in the case of India, also noted that in most of the patriarchal and patrilineal tribal group's inheritance and succession rules followed the male line. Women married or unmarried did not have the right to inherit clan property. Gender inequalities were very prevalent in Amuru district where this research was carried out. It was evident that in the favoritism of boys over girls in education, women lack voice over assets and reproductive rights, invisibility of women in leadership at community level, therefore making women's land rights farfetched and fragile. Land rights are supposed to be enjoyed within the framework of the broader bundle of human rights. These structural inequalities were usually rubber stamped by custom which was used to justify why men needed to make major decision pertaining to land. Grabe, Grose and Dutt (2015) explain that women are rarely consulted about decisions that related to disposing off or selling land, transferring land and distributing land. Any attempts by women to raise their voices could result into gender based violence and fragile familial relationships.

Gray and Kevane (1999) explain women's vulnerability in Africa from the standpoint that women's rights to land are associated with their position to men as mothers, wives, sisters and daughters and as such, men use their position of dominance to expropriate women's rights to land. In addition women's independent rights to land through the land market policy of willing buyer or willing seller are not entertained as women are expected to be under the man "who has paid bride wealth for her, and considers her his property".

Asimwe (2001: 174) argues about the obscurity of women's land rights in Uganda and highlights that though statutory law does not bar women from owning property, the reality within which they live effectively denies them this right. She realizes that there are many socio-cultural practices that discriminate against women, discouraging women from owning land or sanctioning them for it. She cites the paying of bride wealth and polygamy as some of the practices that reduce women's security on land thus denying women their right to land. She further argues that payment of bride wealth works to deny women their land claims; a woman may be viewed as the husband's property, nullifying any claims she might have to land and transferring her property rights to her husband. My study substantiates this claim and found that men had strong sentiments about unmarried women whose bride wealth had not been paid making claims and decisions about land. The Acholi custom viewed unmarried women as visitors who could not lay claims on land even if they had born children in that family.

Adoko and Levine (2005: 10) while examining land rights in Apac district in northern Uganda, noted that the main difficulty relating to customary rights was the erosion of the authority of customary elders, and the ability of individuals to by-pass the checks and balances in the system. They noted that land had become a marketable commodity with a cash value in its own right, rather than a family heritage whose value came from the rights to use it. They further argue that a woman's vulnerability stemmed from the idea that under customary law, the woman did not own land in her own right. A woman's claim to land still relied on her parents until she married, thereupon her husband, and if he died, on her children. This meant that she was always dependent.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

#### **3.1 Methods and data**

This research was carried out in Amuru district northern Uganda in May 2017. It mainly employed qualitative research paradigms that used in-depth interviews, key informant interviews and focus group discussions to understand the discourse. Three sub counties were purposively chosen in the district based on their characteristics of violent land conflicts, cross-district conflicts, rampant and massive land sales and displacement resulting from inter-clan conflicts. These were Pabbo, Amuru and Lamogi sub counties. In all the sub counties, I engaged with 40 Area Land Committee members (30 male, 10 female) to provide me with the nature, trends and dynamics of land conflicts. In addition, I held focus group discussion with 40 men and 40 women in separate groups in each of the parishes mentioned above. Borrowing from feminist ethics, I had separate groups for men and women; this was critical given the gender and power imbalances in those communities that would render women voiceless and men positioning themselves as spokespersons.

### **4.0 FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS**

#### **4.1 Response rate**

Response rate (also known as completion rate or return rate) refers to the number of people who answered the survey divided by the number of people in the sample. It is expressed in the form of percentages (AAPOR, 2008).

Response rate=  $\frac{\text{Total number of tools received}}{\text{Total number of tools given out}} \times 100$

Total number of tools given out

$$\frac{72 \times 100}{85} = 85.7\%$$

84

#### **4.2 Demographic Characteristics**

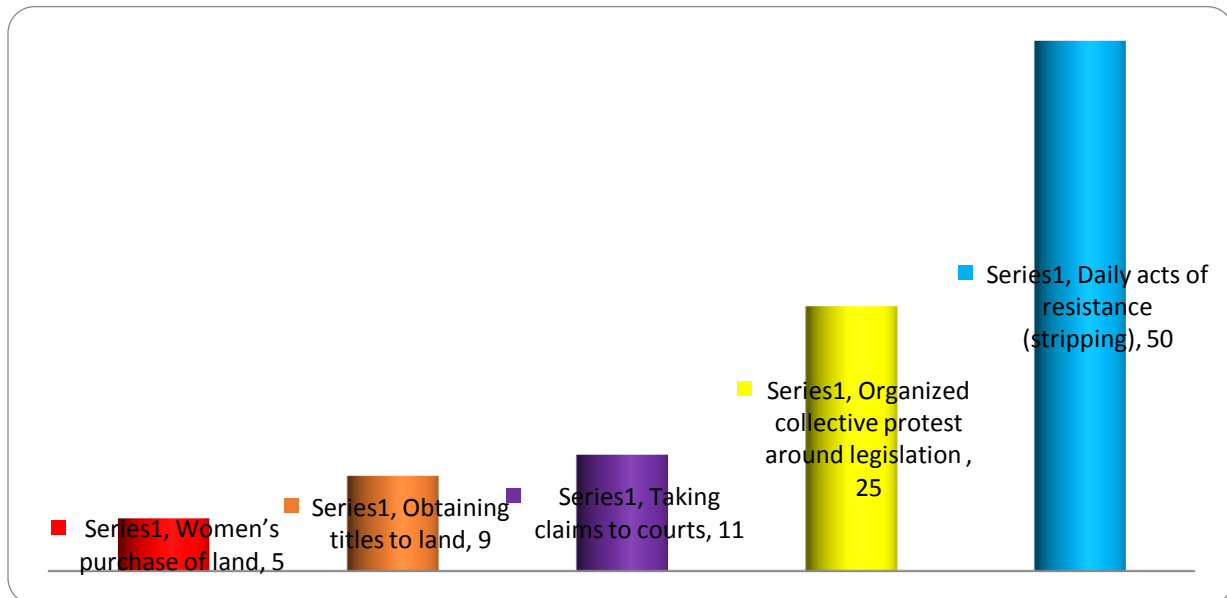
The demographic information of the respondents indicated that majority of the respondents represented by 56% were male respondents followed by female respondents. As regards to the

marital status, majority of the interviewees represented by 50% revealed that they were married people these were followed by 35.7% of the respondents who said they were single.

### 4.3 Descriptive Statistics

#### 4.3.1 How land is accessed in Amuru district

Numerous responses were put forward when respondents/participants were asked of the way how land is accessed in Amuru district these were as follows; the biggest percentage of participants represented with 50% said it was through daily acts of resistance, these were followed by 25% of participants who revealed that they accessed land through organized collective protests around legislation, 11% of participants revealed through claims to courts of law, 9% revealed through obtaining titles to land and lastly were participant who said through women's purchase of the land.

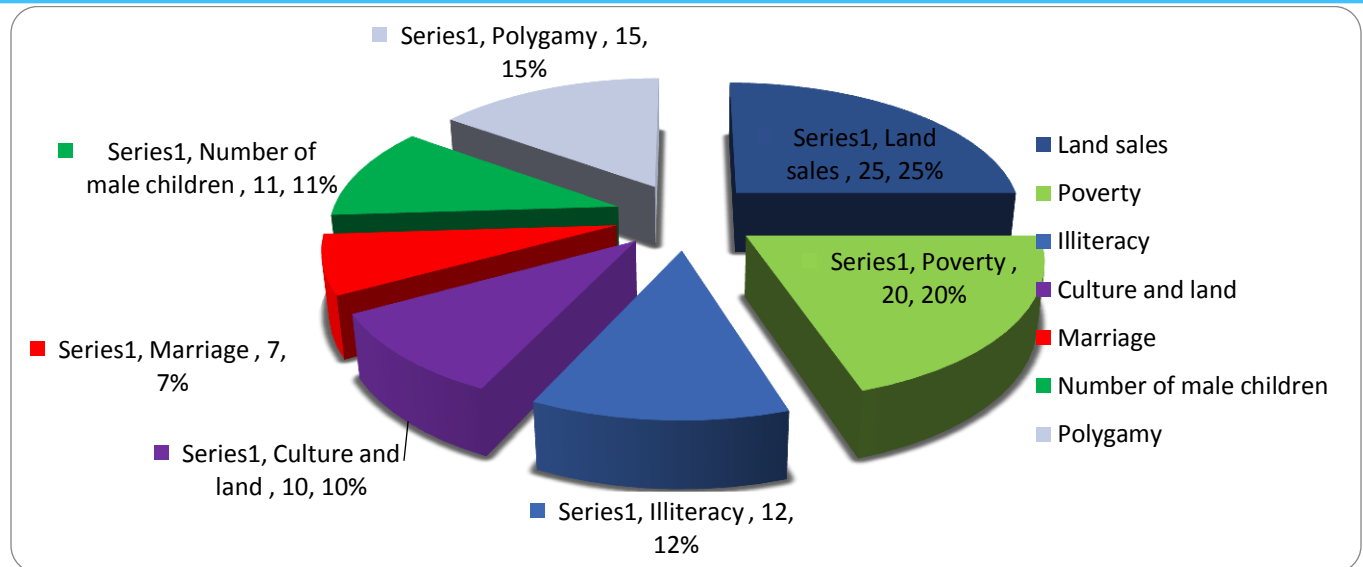


**Figure: 1. shows how land is accessed in Amuru district**

**Source: Primary data (2019)**

#### 4.3.2 Causes of land conflict in Amuru district

From the figure 2; an assessment of the causes of land conflict in Amuru district was as follows, majority of respondents represented with 25% revealed that land conflict is as a result of land sales, this was followed by poverty represented with 20%, followed by polygamy represented with 15%, also was illiteracy among the community members represented with 12%, 11% said the number of male children, 10% of respondents revealed culture and land are the causes of land conflict and lastly was marriage.



**Figure 2: shows the causes of land conflict in Amuru district**  
**Source: Primary data (2019)**

#### 4.3.3 Effects of land conflict Amuru district

According to table 2: majority of respondents represented with 35.7% revealed that Peasant modes of production were brought to an abrupt end due to land conflict, these were followed by 20.2% of respondents who revealed that there was loss of life and imprisonment, followed by 17.8% that land conflict led to destruction of the property (borehole, houses), 14.2% said there was sexual harassment and lastly 11.9% said there was loss of land rights.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Peasant modes of production were brought to an abrupt end-	30	35.7
Sexual harassment	12	14.2
Destruction of the property (borehole, houses)	15	17.8
Loss of life and imprisonment	17	20.2
Loss of Land rights	10	11.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 1: shows the effects of land conflict Amuru district**  
**Source: Primary Data**

#### 4.3.4 Key informants interviews

Most of rural Uganda one way women access land is through marriage. A woman's marital status is very important in determining how she will be affected by land registration; widows are particularly vulnerable because land is generally registered in the husband's name and upon death of their husband they are not considered heirs.

In the study, it was clearly articulated and loudly amplified that unmarried women had no voice in land matters. Marriage, which meant bride wealth being paid to a woman's family, was the



main ingredient to any woman having a voice over land. “I had problems with my husband and came back home, my brothers gave me a small portion of land to farm but clearly told me this was temporary as they expected me to reconcile with my husband and return where my share of land was” (In-depth Interview, Pabbo).

Marriage formalized a woman’s position in the family and provided her with some form of authenticity in a homestead. Since married women become full members of a clan. Logically, it takes on that unmarried women are temporary residents and invisible in decision making spheres. Even though marriage legitimized a woman’s position, marriage still relegated a woman to be under her husband’s authority when it comes to decision making over land which in my view is the essence of land rights. A married woman in Acholi is still unable to make independent decisions pertaining to land sales, transfer and use putting her in a precarious situation.

Polygamy is a socially accepted practice in the Acholi community of northern Uganda and many ethnic groups across Uganda. In the Acholi context, a man can bring in a new wife on the grounds of bearing only female children, laziness, sexual dissatisfaction, witchcraft and persistent illness. However, polygamy results into a family having too many children and it strains the land especially as women fight to keep the land for their sons. “Land conflicts are worse in polygamous families, where each woman wants more land for her children and should they mostly have boys the situation is worse because boys stay in the home unlike girls. Each woman would want to secure a lion’s share for her son” (In-depth interview, Lamogi Sub county). Polygamous families are competitive in nature; a woman with adult sons will have a lion’s share of the land while a woman with a son or only daughters may find it difficult to defend her need for more land.

#### **4.3.5 Effects of land conflict Amuru district**

Peasant modes of production were brought to an abrupt end-One informant of 37years narrated that she had crops, sorghum, millet and maize some she had harvested but part of it was still in the garden they were destroyed and others looted.

Loss of shelter houses were physically pulled down by the security forces and the people were taken to Pabbo County with no food or shelter. The lucky few are quarters with relatives. Sexual harassment due to poverty, lack of shelter and displacement.

Loss of employment by a few women who used to work at the only community primary school built and managed in Apaa village.

Destruction of the borehole which was the only source of good water was destroyed by the game rangers and military personnel which led to water borne diseases due to lack of clean water. Women had to move long distances to access water.

Loss of life and imprisonment of youth. In 2011 during the operation of UWA women and children suffered the most. There were two pregnant women who went into labour one died after giving birth and the child died slightly after mother because of the rain and coldness.

Loss of Land rights for the current and future generations which is a disruption of women's rights since cultivation cant take place without land. The land act 1998 and Constitution of Uganda 1995 indicate that compensation should be paid whenever communities are deprived of their

rights to land and restitution be considered especially in post conflict areas. However, this hasn't been considered. Loss of dignity by the old women undressing before the ministers which decays culture.

#### **4.3.6 Focus Group Discussion findings**

There are massive land sales generally in Amuru district. This was more prevalent in Amuru sub county but, however, is a wide spread problem in the whole of the Acholi region. Many youths especially were reportedly selling away large tracks of land for little money just to be able to buy motorcycles for business. The conflicts start as they sell land without the consent of the parents or family and to multiple buyers. It was reported that in many instances the same piece of land could be sold to as many as three people. This has created fragile land rights for the persons the land is sold to, and yet ironically the local council represented by one and two chairpersons would all be present at those land sales and sign off as witnesses to collect "their percentage".

This shows the level of corruption of some of the local leaders who do not care how many people have bought the same piece of land but instead how much they can collect from each sale. Many men were also selling off land without the consent of their wives and many women said that if they asked the men would retort "I just brought you to my home therefore you have no rights to ask about the land, you are like property and can be taken back. You have no voice over this land" (Focus Group Discussion, Women Apaa).

Poverty was one of the factors contributing to fragile land rights and heated tensions over land. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions with the Area Land Committees (ALCs) revealed that people were desperate and looked at land as the only resource left for sale and this had brought about heated tensions and instabilities with close families and clans. They attributed poverty to one of the main reasons people kept selling away land cheaply and would end up becoming squatters on their own land in the future. Poverty in families is attributed to alcoholism among men who sell off household agricultural produce for a cheap drink and the population boom. "Many men you see here end up selling off food stuff stealth fully to aid their alcoholism. At the end family's end up poor and food insecure and in the vicious cycle of poverty" (FGD, Men Guru-Guru Lamogi Sub County).

One man said, "For me I cannot allow my wife to use family planning, other women secretly use family planning without their husband's consent, this shows disrespect and can cause violence in the family" (FGD, Men Ober Abic Amuru Sub county). This increases on women's care roles and burdens in the home.

Illiteracy impacts on secure tenure of land as will be explained. It became apparent during the study that many people who were selling off their land could not read or write contracts pertaining to that sale. A case in point was a man who had leased off land to another more elite man to use it to cut trees for his charcoal, the elite and more powerful man used a lawyer to convert the agreement to a land sale instead of a lease. Illiteracy is worse among women than men and this is attributed to the gender stereotypes associated with education of girls. "Parents still value boy's education more than girl's education, when girls are in primary six they are already encouraged to get married and yet they are under age between 15-17 years" (FGD, Men Amuru Sub county).

This has affected women's leadership in most sub counties, as women who do not meet the academic threshold are not confident to stand as leaders and depend on the good will of their husbands. "Many people lack legal literacy, they do not understand their rights in relation to land are misinformed and can be easily manipulated or exploited" (FGD, Area Land Committee).

Women are traditionally given an "okang" that is a garden allocated to a woman for mainly subsistence production and the right to use that land. The rest of the family land will be under the control of the family head namely the man. In almost all the meetings, both women and men agreed that the family head who was the man had the rights to distribute, transfer and sell off land, but women could also be consulted in matters concerning land sales but not make major decisions. In all my focus group discussions, it was firmly established that land was never transferred to girls, the phrase 'anyira obedo pot obiya' literally translated 'girls are like flowers that will be plucked and taken' was used rhetorically. "

As fathers we cannot transfer land to our daughters because they will be married off and go to their homes, then who will take care of the land. That is why we give the land to boys because they stay with us and are more permanent" (FGD, Men Guru-Guru Lamogi Sub County). It means that girls would eventually be married off and relocate, shifting loyalties and therefore would not qualify to control family land. A girl's share is seen as being in her husband's home where her loyalty now lies. This kind of thinking has created problems for women who return from failed marriages to seek refuge in their natal homes. They are considered burdens, given the fact that land is relatively scarce and should they return with male children the situation is worse as these would be ostracized in the future. These nephews by Acholi culture are expected to get land from their 'fathers' who may be unwilling to provide them land given the sour relationship with the wife and possible remarriage in some instances.

Land rights for women are secured by producing male children within a marriage. Female children are still largely considered inconsequential in relation to land as will be explained. Girls are unimportant in securing family land according to my respondents because "they will go away to another family and cannot defend the land when under threat, boys stay and keep the land. Girls are usually more uneducated than boys and may not document the land, are weak and emotional and can be swayed and cannot make firm decision about land" (FGD, Men, Teddi Amuru Sub county).

Male children are more cherished, valued and expected than female ones. A woman's failure to bear sons can cost her severely; she can lose her marriage and be replaced quickly with a potential son bearer. One woman commented on this, "My husband brought another woman because I have 5 girls and that new woman is given better treatment by both my husband and his family because she has a son. She has more authority than me over land matters and my husband has asked me to leave if I feel uncomfortable".

Each sub county chosen had specific dynamics in relation to land conflicts, Amuru Sub County had lots of rampant land sales with one land being sold to multiple owners, Pabbo Sub County was characterized by intense inter-clan land conflicts where clans displaced other clans and took over their gardens. Lamogi Sub County had low intensity but had many cases of widows fighting more pronouncedly for their rights.

## **5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Summary**

From the field finding, the biggest percentage of participants said they accessed land through organized collective protests around legislation, through claims to courts of law, through obtaining titles to land through women's purchase of the land. On the cause of land conflict it was revealed that land sales, poverty, polygamy, illiteracy among the community members and number of male children. As regards to the effects, peasant modes of production were brought to an abrupt end due to land conflict, loss of life and imprisonment, destruction of the property (borehole, houses), sexual harassment and was loss of land rights among others.

### **5.2 Conclusions**

In conclusion, political conflicts which are prolonged, like in the case of northern Uganda, alter social settings including land tenure. The peace process that ensues may not focus on gender equitable land distribution as a priority but on infrastructural development, thus losing out on the core discussion. Fragile land rights for both men especially nephews and women who return from failed marriages, unmarried women, married women with daughters only, women in polygamous households are a reality and affects gendered livelihoods.

In addition, politicization of land in Amuru is creating a lot of tensions and uncertainties in the communities. NTV 9 pm news on 3/8/2017 showed the Minister of Lands Betty Amongi explaining how members of parliament were being hypocritical; by sending controversial messages about Madvani and Government in the recent bid to survey land in Lakang Amuru district. In defense members of parliament said they were with the people and lands would not be surveyed forcefully but in consultation with the communities. As a result, the ordinary woman or man's land rights will be affected by these political maneuvers. Ministry of Lands, members of parliament and local communities need to succinctly enter into dialogue to prevent the consequences of repeated violence and displacements that are creating fragility.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

#### **5.3.1 To government:**

The 1995 Constitution and the 1998 Land Act were both widely hailed as landmarks in respect of customary land rights in Africa, but have failed to deliver strengthened customary land security, in part because of the costs and difficulties of establishing land administration bodies at very local levels. We urge that the challenge of establishing these bodies is pursued as they have the potential to do important work that more centralised bodies, we would argue, simply cannot do regarding securing customary land rights. This is because it seems that understanding and protecting the rights of those with what might be conceived as second tier claims – for example women and 'guests' requires a very local focus.

With regard to Certificates of Customary Ownership (CCOs), this paper urges the recognition that these in their present form are appropriate only in instances of already individualised land, which is a very small proportion of rural Acholi land. In contexts of communally owned land, CCOs run a severe risk of fuelling conflict and undermining natural justice by alienating land

from those who have real and historical rights to it. We therefore support the Joint Acholi Sub-Region Leaders' Forum (JASLF) position that the issuance of CCOs on customary communal land be suspended.

In this manuscript it is recommended there should be continued search for legislative instruments and policy ideas that are pro-customary, pro-communal land holding, on the grounds that available evidence suggests that these are the most likely vehicles for strengthening the land security of the rural poor, and in particular, women and vulnerable people, and hence reducing rural poverty.

### **5.3.2 To development partners:**

The paper recommends supporting further research into the nature and variety of customary collective land holding in Acholi and in other Ugandan and African regions where population pressures or other factors have not so far led to large-scale individualisation of land holdings. We also suggest further research into how customary land practices in respect of women and vulnerable groups are evolving, and note the importance of methodologies that explore actual practice sometimes discernible through what is contested - rather than historical norms and rehashed stereotypes.

The paper further recommends limiting or even ceasing programmes that focus on legal aid or legal solutions in theory or in practice - in respect of conflicts over customary communal land. Mediation and alternative dispute resolution may have an important place if carried out with sufficient skill and in appropriate coordination with other actors, particularly local traditional ones. We are particularly doubtful about the positive impact of training local actors in land law in the absence of government-level clarification of the status of customary land law and the role of formal law in customary disputes, as this is likely to lead to misconstrue of the law, confusion and miscarriages of natural justice.

Also to note are similar doubtful of the benefits of sensitisation campaigns in relation to communities' land rights. As matters stand, community members are likely to have a far better understanding of these than external agencies can hope to have. Positive interventions probably lean more towards learning than teaching.

The paper strongly support the proposed initiative of the Joint Acholi Sub-Regional Leaders' Forum to strengthen the understanding of customary communal land in Acholi as actually practiced at the local level in order to strengthen customary land security. In particular, the JASLF have shown a high degree of consensus across sectors and party lines, and in selecting the committee to undertake the programme have include some of Acholi's most respected peace advocates and skilled legal minds. This is a remarkable initiative, which may be able to find solutions to a so-far intractable problem how can the strengths of African customary land rights, in particular with respect to the poor and the vulnerable, be accommodated and protected within a state legal framework. The findings of this research suggest that customary land in Acholi is unusually propitious in respect of some features of that custom and the relative lack of pressure on land.

### 5.3.3 To civil society:

The article also recommends self-examination on the part of organisations working with paralegals, and/or providing mediation, and/or providing legal aid in the area of rural land disputes. Are your workers and volunteers, your training and sensitisation programmes, and your policies well-versed in how customary communal land in Acholi and formal law connect (or, as is usually the case, do not). It is likely to be true that skilled local mediators working within community and customary structures, bringing their local understanding as community members and with an interest in natural justice and an awareness of individuals' rights under the constitution, have an important role to play. This role is likely to be much more relevant than any a skilled specialist land lawyer could play in respect of disputes over customary land. This is because formal law has little to say about customary land rights.

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