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Nested and Gendered Post-War Conflict:

Recalling the past, Negotiating present
claims on Land, Livelihoods and Social
Belonging in Northern Uganda

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Gender Justice, Livelihoods and Rights in Northern Uganda

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A dark green background image showing a group of people, possibly in a meeting or community gathering, with their faces partially visible. A thin white horizontal line is positioned above the text.

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1.0 Introduction: Overview of the GCRF - Gender Justice Hub Research at Makerere University

Ever since the guns went silent in Northern Uganda, the region has seen multiple Government programmes focused on reconstruction and compensation. There were, for example, the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) with its successor programme, the Peace Recovery and Development Programme (PRDP) as well as a number of compensation schemes for lost property.

Belatedly, these have been accompanied by accountability efforts at both International and domestic levels, using the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Crimes Division (ICD) to bring alleged perpetrators to justice. Despite the significant investments in post war recovery, myriad post-conflict conflicts continue to emerge and occur frequently in the whole Acholi sub-region.

This study identifies key particular areas of interest; inter alia, the land question, livelihoods and gender justice in the post-conflict Acholi sub-region. In particular, this study aims to:

- 1) Explore the existing post conflict conflicts and the gender layering within them.
- 2) Examine the dynamics within the rights claims on land; livelihoods and gender justice.

- 3) Examine ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has affected people's livelihood patterns, exposing gendered social and economic fragilities on the post conflict region.
- 4) Take stock of community's agency, resilience, efforts and initiatives, towards return to sustainable peace and social cohesion.

In pursuance of these objectives, the research team engages with the key question: ***what is it that continues to undermine possibilities for return to social cohesion and how does this influence the gender justice terrain?***

1.1 Methodology

The study focuses on Acholi sub-region in the four districts Gulu, Pader, Amuru and Omoro.

This study is a collaborative, action-oriented research project between Makerere University and Amani Institute, Gulu. The study draws on multi-disciplinary methodological approaches to investigate people's everyday experiences of return from displacement camps, their relationships on land, livelihood patterns, emerging post-conflict conflicts and how these influence and/or are influenced by gender relations.

Broadly, the study has drawn on a mixture of methods of collaborative knowledge production in different phases of field visits as illustrated in the table 1.

Table 1: Method and Study focus

#	Dates & Research Activity	Level of engagement	Methods of engagement
1.	Inception Workshop	Gulu District <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial dialogue with political leaders of Gulu, Amuru, Omoro, Pader Cultural leaders; religious leaders; local community leaders and mobilisers; women's rights organisations and Academia. 	
2.	November/December 2019; Pilot study on Gender justice, Livelihoods and Land rights in Northern Uganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gulu District - Bungatira sub-County Pader District - Acholi Bur, Lapul Sub-County 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrative Interviews Group discussions Community dialogues Reflection meetings
3.	April 2020: Follow-up study in districts of Amuru and Omoro Particular focus on women & Youth in post-conflict programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amuru District - Atiak Sub-County Omoro District - Odek Sub-County - epicentres of the 20-year-old conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrative Interviews Mixed sex group discussions Community dialogues Ethnographic observation of community interactions/ post conflict investments
4.	Media Mapping of popular narratives on land rights, livelihoods and gender justice in post-conflict situations	Critical mapping of interactions in online platforms - social media and conventional media platforms	Tracing media narratives - popular stories/narratives – to understand the pulse of post-conflict communities
5.	January - February 2021 Post-Covid-19 lockdown field Visit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focused on communities' experiences of & coping strategies in the context of Covid-19 pandemic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gulu District - Pokony Sub-County; Ker Kwaro Acholi cultural institution, Non-Governmental organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mapping common media discourses on Covid-19 Purposive Interviews

a) **Inception workshop** with political leadership of the districts; cultural leaders; religious leaders; local community leaders and mobilisers; women's rights organisations and Academia.

b) **Pilot study** in districts of Gulu and Pader – ethnographic focus on people's everyday experiences of return; focus group conversations with local communities; mini-community dialogues and in-depth conversations with leaders from Acholi cultural institution

c) **Follow-up study** in districts of Amuru and Omoro – picking up and exploring in depth, on emerging conversations on post-conflict conflicts, competing claims on land amid changing land tenure system and social belonging.

d) **Media mapping** of popular narratives in post conflict communities – animated by Covid-19 restrictions on human mobility and social gatherings

e) **Post-Covid-19 lockdown field Visits** to explore communities' experiences of the health pandemic, and their coping strategies in response to Covid-19.

These sequential series of engagements – through multi-disciplinary approaches – have enabled inductive and exploratory opportunities to establish and follow on dominant narratives in post-conflict communities on land rights, livelihoods and gender justice struggles; the contexts that animate these and diverse forms of agency in negotiating post-conflict conflicts.

2.0 Framing the Debate and Conceptualizing Post-Conflict Conflicts

The study has drawn on different theoretical debates to make sense of post conflict situations. These include studies that conceptualise properties (e.g. land) as a social institution - Social institution of Property (Bruun, Cockburn, Risager & Thorup, 2018; Obika, Otto, Babiha & Whyte, 2018); the nestedness of post conflict situations (Mackay, 2014) and propositions on post-conflict and the loss of social vitality (Card, 2003) (social identity, belonging and cohesion).

2.1 Social Institution of Property

Social institutionalists argue that rather than assume that property rights are universal and stable, exclusively held by one and denied from another, property rights and relations are subject to multiple claims, contestations and negotiations, as people do claim particular rights including in contexts where these rights might be limited. Such a discursive framework enables us to explore ways in which women and men negotiate their relations on land and livelihoods especially amid competing interests and shifts in the land tenure systems in the post conflict Acholi sub-region.

Maja Hojer Bruun and others (2018) have advanced the notion of “the social institution of property” which provides an interesting

ground to understand property relations especially in contexts of changing norms, rules, social practices and expectations that guide ownership of properties. They argue for instance:



... property is always unstable. Property regimes have to be constantly enacted and negotiated to be maintained; they are the result of social struggles, and in a world of flux, they will bring about new struggles”. [They add that] “People do not just have property rights, formal, customary or political, but they also have to have the ability to claim and defend their rights in front of states, cities, courts or other authorities. In these struggles, actors adopt or invent different registers of speech and action, sometimes far from property law and legal systems.

Bruun et al., 2018: Xi



Understanding properties (e.g. land) as social institutions enabled us to look at how land in post conflict Acholi is not merely an economic resource and a capitalist, transactional means of production, but also a cultural heritage, a cultural terrain upon identity, social belonging and cohesion (or the lack of these) is constructed and experienced and/or contested.

2.2 Nested Newness

Furthermore, we drew on Feminist institutionalist Fiona Mackay and her conceptualisation of moments of **newness**. In her study, Mackay (2014) proposes a framework within which gender reforms can be cautiously integrated into institutions, especially in contexts of broad restructuring processes, political transition, and constitutional or institutional “engineering”. Mackay presents nested newness as “a metaphor used to capture the ways in which the new is embedded in time, sequence, and institutional environment”.

Notably, newness (new changes in a reforming institution) is often interwoven in considerable complexities of the past, what Mackay refers to as the “legacies of the past”, which include “material legacies and existing patterns of power distribution” but also cognitive and normative legacies – “frames of mind” and “habits of the heart”. We use this concept to understand how the people’s post-conflict

experiences are intricately woven in the memories of the past, as well as the possibilities of change that came with the disruptive effect of a protracted war (Ahikire & Mwiine, 2020).

2.3 The Notion of Social Death

The study also drew on Claudia Card’s (2003) proposition of “**social death**” - described as the loss of social vitality or the loss of identity and thereby meaning for one’s existence. Card’s proposition enables us to read into the dynamics of conflict and post-conflict social relations especially when she observes that:



...when a group with its own cultural identity is destroyed, its survivors lose their cultural heritage and may even lose their intergenerational connections. ... They may become ‘socially dead’ and their descendants ‘nationally alienated’, no longer able to pass along and build upon the traditions, cultural developments (including language) and projects of earlier generations

Card, 2003: 73



We note that the concept of social death has the potential to account for the nature of war that happened in Northern Uganda, the atrocities committed and their effect on the community's social capacities to return to social harmony. We particularly deploy the notion of lack of social vitality to understand post-conflict everyday life and its associated tensions in current post-conflict Northern Uganda. These tensions relate to the lack of return to social cohesion, the precarious social identities emerging from war and the impact these identities have on ancestral land as a cultural and an economic resource, struggling cultural institutions, crippled livelihood patterns and the "floating populations" (those without a cultural heritage).

The concept of social death offers us an opportunity to look beyond post-conflict recovery programmes that often tend to focus on material and financial costs of recovery. Such approaches tend to assess war "in terms of its ruin of individual careers, body counts, statistics on casualties and material costs of rebuilding" (Card, 2003: 64). Understanding post-conflict everyday life through the conceptual lens of social death and of social vitality re-centres the research focus on the often taken-for-granted contemporary struggles around issues of identity, belonging, social cohesion and one's meaningful existence.

We link these conversations to the broader research focus, on existing post conflict conflicts since communities returned to

their ancestral homes after 'end' of war, the dynamics within the rights claims on land from a gendered perspective and situate women's agency in post-conflict conflicts in the region. These conceptual debates provide a plausible lens within which to identify and understand the cultural and economic fluidity that characterise post-conflict Acholi sub-region. For instance, through these conceptual lenses, one is able to identify common, subtle and taken-for-granted post-conflict social struggles which viciously affect people's everyday claims on land, livelihoods and gender justice.

Issues such as intra-household conflicts on land – 'wealth war', disruptions in the marriage institution, waning public trust among cultural institutions, lack of social identity and belonging, psychosocial trauma manifesting in high male suicide rates, spiking rates of gender based violence, represent contemporary priorities of the post conflict Acholi sub-region.

3.0 Contemporary Post-Conflict Conflicts in Acholi

3.1 On the Post-Conflict Land Conflicts

Land conflicts remain the most widespread and complex forms of social discontent in the region. Conflicts on land were noted as the most biting and widespread (Ker Kwaro Acholi, 2008; Obika et al., 2018) in the Acholi sub-region. All participants decried conflicts over land, what we shall term competing land claims, as the most prevalent form of conflict affecting almost all the spheres of community.

In an interview with Otong Charles, a male adult community leader in charge of mobilising farmers (Rwot Kweri), he noted “What we remained with after war is now “lara ngom” (land disputes) and secondly “kukukuku” or Gender Based Violence (GBV). Those are the kind of new conflicts which are currently common among our community”. Land conflicts are woven in a complex terrain of changing household relations, changing land tenure system, increasing commercialisation of land, among others.

Conflicting claims on land - widespread, domesticated and most complex

Participants point out rampant competing land claims, as the most prevalent form of conflict affecting almost all the spheres of community. “What we remained with after war is now “lara ngom” (land disputes). Those are the kind of new conflicts which are currently common among our community”. These Land conflicts happen at a massive/macro level – conflicts between communities and large-scale land acquisition for commercial agriculture or between communities and government institutions e.g. forests, game reserves and district borders. See for instance Apaa land conflict . They too are occurring within clans and within households.

Land as a new war-front: These conflicts manifest in form of contests over land boundaries, shifts in customary land tenure system, increasing numbers of children with multiple identities – Okeyo (nephews) and Lakeyo (Nieces) – rich individuals grabbing land, discontent on the CCOs, among others.

Land claims tied-up with social belonging: Okeyo, Lakeyo and their claims on land

Notable in post-conflict northern Uganda is the increasing intolerance of nephews and nieces (Okeyo, Lakeyo) for fear that when they

grow, they will claim land. This signals failure in social systems that promoted harmonious co-existence (*ber bedo*) before war. Intolerance is animated by increasing marketability of land (post-conflict commoditisation of land for economic investment). Land conflicts are also traced from the post-war political rhetoric on land as the only remaining Acholi resource – “do not let anybody tamper with your land”

Discontent on CCO as a capitalist instrument to transform customary land

Participants, especially the elites expressed their discontent with government and CSO's promotion of Certificate of Customary Ownership (CCOs).

Notably, World Bank supported the development of the 1998 Land Act, a legal framework that saw the emergence of CCOs premised on ending conflicts over ownership of land; promotion of women's rights to own land and subtly setting a pattern through which land, historically owned through custom, increasingly started to be converted into freehold. The Act indicates, “*Any person, family or community holding land under customary tenure on former public land may acquire a certificate of customary ownership in respect of that land in accordance with this Act*”. Section 9 of the Act provides for conversion of customary land to freehold – “*Any person, family, community or association holding land under customary tenure on former public land may convert the customary tenure into freehold tenure in accordance with this Act*”.

Indeed, the registration form for certificate of customary ownership (CCO) we obtained from the area land committee, Bungatira, Laliya sub-county, is entitled “*application for conversion from customary tenure too freehold tenure/grant of freehold*”. Notably, while freehold and customary tenure systems are both recognised by article 237 (3) of the Constitution as independent tenures through which land in Uganda can be owned and managed, the conversion of customary tenure into freehold constitutes customary tenure as inferior to others (Alobo & Rebecca, n.d.; Adoko, 2017).

CCOs are advertised along economic lines – bank/collateral rather than promoting cultural security/ social cohesion and identity on land. While critiquing narratives on land promoting CCOs, Adoko (2017), the Executive Director of Land and Equity Movement in Uganda (LEMU), notes that since the approval of National Land Policy (in 2013) and the policy's call for CCOs, a handful of actors have only promoted the CCOs in Kasese and Nwoya districts - both of which happen to be post-conflict communities. Importantly, Adoko argues that - “*The sensitization that usually accompanies projects to issue CCOs focused on only one or two issues – that it provides one with better security and collateral for bank loans*”. It is this economic-centered perspective that strips the activism around CCOs the potential to promote social cohesion in predominantly conflict-affected communities.

NGO-centered campaigns on women's right to land: ambiguities around 'ownership'

The idea that land in Acholi is not for sale is strongly rooted in the nature of the tenure it is held. According to Ben Otto, Director Advocates for Research in Development (ARiD), regardless of the post conflict setting, land in Acholi is predominantly customary.

My experience in the land tenure system is largely customary owned and how customary land tenure system works according to patrilineal lineage where the line of inheritance is through the father's line. Customary is 'owned' by the ancestors, its being taken care of or being used by the present for the future. So, there are 3 generational issues of 'ownership' that makes it hard for somebody to say so and so owns the customary land because there is intertwined attachment with the ancestors, the present and those to be born.

Other descriptions talk of this land as held in trust rather than owned by individuals. Accordingly, the language of 'ownership' was characterised by the Ker Kwaro Acholi Prime Minister as an individualist and foreign term likely influenced by land policies of the World Bank whose intention is to put land on the shelf, for sale. Yet, there are a number of NGOs in the politics of land in Acholi sub-region whose narrative is dominantly on promoting ownership of land.

The ambiguities of the NGO Discourse on "land ownership"

While conducting research, we were alerted to the presence of NGOs that have shaped the politics of land rights particularly women's right to ownership of land in Acholi sub-region. The participant who alerted us to the NGO discourse on land rights in Uganda made reference to the works of Mahmood Mamdani, a renown political scholar and noted that the latter terms these as 'Land NGOs'.

- The NGOs were noted as working with traditional institutions which are ideally symbols and custodians of customary land yet at the same time, these NGOs draw on and promote the discourse of women 'ownership' of land in a tenure system that operates on patrilineality and no 'ownership'.
- Ambiguities of seeking to promote rights to ownership of land in a cultural context that knows no ownership. The concept of ownership and later women's ownership of land in a historically communal/customary patrilineal land tenure remains elusive and strange.

Indeed, CCOs as promoted in Northern Uganda have led to cases of women gaining 'ownership' of land along with other family members but this is perceived by participants as just be a temporal gain and a tool to achieve a long term goal of conversion of the historically customary land in Acholi into freehold land tenure, consequently enabling its marketability.

3.2 The institution of marriage in a Flux

Women's avenues to claim land rights – access, usage, ownership and belonging have all reduced with disruptions in the institution of marriage.

Previous and in some instances current dynamics on land indicate that women had diverse and agential relationships on land.

- 'Proper marriage' (especially with payment of dowry) was seen as one of the ways to access and use family land. In effect, both individual and collective conversations with women indicate that women are worried about declining 'proper' marriages in post conflict settings, which affects their usage and belonging to family/clan land.
- Land in Acholi was held jointly by the clan/family in trust of the current and the future generations. It was never owned individually. At the family level, land entrusted to a particular family was used jointly by all family members without worrying on who owned it. Claims of individual 'ownership' of land in the context of customary land tenure did not exist.
- Land, also termed as 'gardens' (Okang) (Obika et al., 2018) (Okang), was also passed onto the newly married women through their mother-in-law. The mother-in-law would allocate land to her daughter-in-law from her own portion she had been using.
- Because women constituted a bulk of those tilling the land, land around the homestead (gardens) was named after the women – 'the garden of Otim's mother'.
- Access to land was through hard work. The more gardens (a garden ranged between 2-3 acres of a single crop e.g. cassava, sorghum, Sim-sim, etc) a woman was able to cultivate, the more land she would have to till, to occupy and to belong to.

With disruptions in the institution of marriage, came the declining of women's rights to access, use and belong to land.

3.3 Cultural fluidity and its impact on social (gender) relations

Research team noted dominant conversations on social disruption and psychosocial trauma that hardly gain precedence in the post-conflict recovery agenda.

a) Perceived erosion of ancestral restrictions on land - elders who used to protect customary land are quickly giving in to the sale of customary land in what participants have described as the silent wealth war.

b) An emerging set of „new elders“ whose respect for cultural norms and values is low. Participants noted that ‘new elders’ have “an insatiable love for money that is stronger than the respect for ancestral rules”, leading to low public trust.

c) People’s loss of trust in cultural institutions. Communities increasingly doubt cultural institutions’ autonomy and legitimacy to regulate social relations and offer guidance and mediation in post war conflicts.

These cultural fluidities, amid growing capitalist-oriented investments are often times the social foundations upon which relations on land play out in the sub-region.

Below: Oola Stephen Amani Institute Director and Ahikire Josephine, Principle CHUSS making a comment on floating populations in post war Northern Uganda.



3.4 On the “floating Population” in the post-conflict social imaginaries

One of the currently dominant discourse in post war Acholi is on the emerging categories of population that some of the participants refer to as “floating populations”. The notion of “floating population” refers to emerging categories of people with precarious identities in the post conflict setting. These are categories people “detached from Acholi history and culture e.g. those born in camps (lutino camp) or returned from the bush, or people with no known parents, no clan identity and no ancestral land (Identity)”.

These categories of the population are also characterized by potentially denigrating labels - those born in camps as “Lutino Camp”, “returnees” “the Aguus”. These labels which feature in evaluative descriptions include looking at youth as “children with no values, humans who are empty shells, lazy and not interested in work at all, alcoholics, [disrespecting] elders and [those who] do not want to return in the villages”. According to some participants, these emerging populations are highly visible in trading centers (formerly protected villages) and have no cultural structures that can hold them accountable.

Tensions between the young and old generation:

Most reminiscent stories about pre-war and post-war Acholi, point out the frustrations with the current youth in terms of their attitude towards traditions and general ways of living.

Often, these youths are labelled, in denigrating ways, as ‘lutino camp’ – those children born in the camp. Evaluative descriptions of the youth included, children with no values, humans who are empty shells, lazy and not interested in work at all, alcoholics, they disrespect elders, and they do not want to return in the villages.

The feeling of “US” (old generation) vis-à-vis “THEM” is deeply entrenched in communities’ everyday communication. The construction of the children/youth born in the camp has a potential to denigrate them and project them as a symbol of social disruption, loss of social values and a generation out of touch with the Acholi traditions of integrity, trust, hard work, among other virtues. Yet, these social struggles are hardly a priority of post conflict recovery efforts.

4.0 Enter COVID-19 Health Pandemic

Recent engagement with post conflict communities indicate constrained choices in the context of Covid-19 pandemic and its restrictive preventive measures.

The closure of informal and formal employment to prevent the fast spread of the virus strained the urban poor. Covid-19 lockdown triggered human mobility from public spaces (urban informal employment, schools and other social spaces) to domestic sphere (turn to the family) increasing tensions on land use, domestic conflicts.



4.1 Between a mask & a meal: Covid-19 Pandemic, gender justice struggles & the constrained livelihood patterns

Community members' struggles to meet their livelihood needs were accentuated by the advent of Covid-19 pandemic. People's inability to meet their everyday livelihood demands were worsened by new demands of observing health standard operating procedures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Community participants narrated the difficulty of making choices between buying a mask to prevent COVID-19 spread or a meal to save the family members from hunger.

These competing health and livelihood demands (between a mask and a meal) represent the dilemma that poverty-stricken post-conflict communities are faced with, especially as the COVID-19 community infections skyrocket in Uganda.

4.2 Spiking cases of Gender Based Violence, Teen Pregnancies and Psychosocial Trauma

In April 2020, the country was shocked with the social media stories that carried a horrific short video in which a youthful man was recorded beating an 82-year old grandmother in Omoro District.

The social media reactions were limited to the immediate issues. These urgent calls included the arrest and detention of the abusive young man, medical attention to the grandma that was tortured physically and perhaps emotionally, the arrest of the one who recorded the torture for his/her complicity in the abuse given that they could not step in to rescue the victim and many other suggestions. While these are very essential suggestions and readings of the incident, given their call for pragmatic response to avert any consequential harm, these social media outcries remain silent on possible underlying concerns that animate such kinds of horrific manifestations in a post-conflict setting. Reading this incident outside the post-war social context in Acholi sub-region, is to strip the incident of the complex history that possibly informed this and many other social tensions that may not have received media coverage. Clearly the Horrific Torture – was a tip of a social “iceberg”.

Reported spike in the cases of male suicides in Koro sub-county

While both men and women experience social trauma, participants noted a trend in which most of the mental and suicide cases registered especially in Koro sub-county occur amongst men. Chris Dolan (2002) noted the trend of men committing suicide as early as 2002 in northern Uganda. At the time, cases of men taking their own lives were related to their failure to live up to expected hegemonic model of men as provider of food and other necessities to their families.

Most of the suicide cases narrated to the research team involve youth and middle-aged men between 18-40. The research team was told that in Koro alone, 64 young men took their lives in a span of 8 years (2010-2018). While there is no known universal cause of these deaths, most participants traced cases of suicide along financial disagreements, whether these are among men or between women and men in families.

5.0 Resilient communities: Initiatives Towards Return to Social Cohesion

While there are numerous post war conflicts on land, livelihood patterns and gender relations, there are myriad ways in individual women, men, youth, and social groups, cultural institutions, religious institutions and the state are creatively countering social tensions. There are deliberate efforts by women to organise collectively to cope with livelihoods constraints while meeting group members' psychosocial needs, deliberate investment in engaging men towards gender equitable and non-violent homes.

Other initiatives include dominant calls for peace and conflict resolution through working with cultural institutions that fostered social cohesion before the war. Below we share a few insights into ways communities are coping with post-war conflicts.

5.1. A turn to Culture for Social Cohesion

Despite widespread social struggles around land, not everything is lost with regard to women and men's access and usage of land resources. Participants shared ways through which they creatively lay claims on different rights to land in their everyday life.

- Elders administering curses to scare land buyers and sellers - an old man 'undressed' to curse his son and scare him from selling the family land.
- The cultural practice of Aleya (community gardening). Aleya (communal gardening) is one of the practices participants noted as a collective framework through which women accessed and used land but also generated extensive knowledge on land. A cultural division of labour that afforded women knowledge on land and central to land conflict resolution
- Women collectively organising through VSLAs – the groups are financial but they also offer social and therapeutic functions.

When they meet, they are visibly jolly, they chat, laugh, they dance what they called Apiti dance (women's dance), they encourage each other. From an observer point of view women's VSLA weekly meetings offer a moment of joy and collective comfort that individual women or men may not get outside such groups.

Joyce Atim, female councillor, Atiak sub-county noted that women groups enable them cope with post-war trauma. She argued that "women stay in groups to help them cope up, groups are mostly for saving but they help people stay in unity, when you have issues/problems the group members come in to visit, sometimes when you cannot dig, they come in to help too"

- Deliberate investment in responding to psychosocial needs and interests of men in post-conflict programming. See for instance GWED-G strategy of engaging men as peer educators, champions of change and as victims of psychosocial trauma.
- Ker Kwaro Acholi and the revival of cultural institution.
- Promotion of rights to land through Certificate of customary ownership - though without doubt, there is need to interrogate the aspect of ownership in then CCO given the fluid nature of customary land tenure



5.2 Conclusion: Learnings and Key messages

Beyond the gun silence are multiple, subtle yet vicious new war-fronts in post conflict Acholi sub-region

Different phases engaging with communities and the different methodologies used provide a greater opportunity to understand complex yet often taken-for-granted post conflict conflicts that constrain the regions return to sustainable peace.

1. One particular learning is on how economic centered post-conflict programming (e.g. prioritised investment in physical infrastructure and economic ventures) often takes for granted social aspects of recovery. The centrality of social vitality or the loss of it and its implication for the return to social cohesion in post conflict communities is apparent. This has been brought to bear most especially through Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic helped remove the lid on the post-conflict communities, revealing the glaring gaps

in post conflict programming – what the participants termed ‘our true colors’. The pandemic exposed inadequacies in social recovery revealing taken-for-granted social aspects of the post-conflict situation (increasing intra-family land conflicts; poverty, SGBV, trauma and many others).

2. The need to prioritize post-war social identity: Importantly, the pandemic, as a critical juncture within the trajectory of post-conflict programming pointed to the need to prioritize social vitality, - that which exists through relationships, contemporary and intergenerational, that create an identity that gives meaning to a life (Card, 2003: 63).
3. Rediscovering social connectedness, cultural heritage and a sense of identity in the Acholi community, might be one of the core aspects needed to enable a return to relative social cohesion

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