PROJECT PROFILE

Beyond War Compensation

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About the Project

Ever since the guns went silent after a two-decade war, Northern Uganda has seen multiple government programmes focused on reconstruction and compensation. There were, for example, the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) and 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 already made by the state and the international community in these efforts, myriad post-war conflicts on gender inequalities, land conflicts and constrained livelihoods continue to persist in the Acholi sub-region of the country. These social and gendered inequalities, understood by communities as 'the new war fronts,' threaten social cohesion, gender justice and inclusive peace. These challenges were exacerbated even further by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdown measures.

Using a combination of interviews, observations, group dialogues, and participatory arts-based methods, such a community theatre performance, this project aims to improve understanding of the gender realities of post-war conflicts associated with land acquisition and livelihoods, including women and children's experiences and agency in land rights claims.

Key Findings

- **'Floating populations' and generational conflict remain unaddressed.** There are a range of people described as being a part of 'floating populations' including children born in camps, people who returned from the bush, people with no known parents born as a result of sexual violence, people with no clan identity, and people with no ancestral land. The feeling of us vs. them between the elder generation and the floating populations is deeply entrenched in communities' everyday practices and communication. Yet, these social struggles are not considered a priority in post-conflict recovery efforts.

- **Children born in this context are labelled as 'aguu' and are socially stigmatised, leading to new layers of community conflict.** Children born in captivity, or those whose fathers are unknown, are being denied social support and a sense of belonging. These children should be acknowledged as victims of the conflict. Many do not know their fathers, but these children could be brought into their mother's clan. However, the lack of post-conflict social cohesion mechanisms means they are denied access to land and a livelihood, forcing them to live on the streets and to steal to survive. This in turn creates a new layer of conflict and abuse in the community.

- **Land conflict is the most widespread and complex form of social discontent.** Land claims are the most prevalent form of conflict affecting almost all spheres of community in the Acholi sub-region. Land conflicts are woven in a complex terrain of changing household relations, changing land tenure systems, and the increasing commercialisation of land.

- **Commercialisation of land erodes community ties and trust.** There is a perceived erosion of ancestral restrictions on land, where elders who used to protect customary land are quickly giving in to the sale of such land in what is described as the "silent wealth war". This shift towards the individualisation and marketisation of land will have multi-generational impacts and it has already led to low public trust in places where capitalist venture is seen to trump cultural norms. This loss of trust is decreasing the perceived legitimacy and autonomy of cultural institutions to regulate social relations and offer guidance and mediation in post-war conflicts.

> **"**
> You are talking about absences, you are talking about abuses, and you're talking about denial of livelihood. **"**
>
> DR JOSEPHINE AHIKIRE

- **The COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictive measures introduced to reduce the spread of the virus were overwhelmingly disruptive and revealed gaps in post-conflict planning.** The pandemic negatively affected almost every aspect of people's lives, particularly their livelihoods. Yet, it was also revealing: the pandemic lifted the lid on the post-conflict communities, exposing the glaring gaps in post conflict programming – what the participants term 'our true colours'. The pandemic also exposed inadequacies in social recovery, bringing to the fore often taken-for-granted social aspects of the post-conflict situation such as increasing intra-family land conflicts, poverty, sexual and gender-based violence and trauma.

Photo Credit: Itote Rubombora on Unsplash

Recommendations

National and Local Government of Uganda

- **Post-conflict programming must account for economic and social community needs.** For example, the prioritisation of investment in physical infrastructure and economic ventures must take into account the social aspects of post-conflict recovery.

- **Children born in captivity and/or as a result of sexual violence (with unknown fathers) should have access to national identity cards and passports.** The issuing of national identity cards currently requires identification of a clan. In the case of children born of war who are not given a clan identity, this is a barrier to accessing national identity cards and passports. This then means they are denied access to many services. This barrier should be removed, and all children born of the conflict should be given citizenship.

- **Children born of war must be acknowledged as victims of the conflict, and the securitised approach to dealing with them must be replaced with one that centres social cohesion and their livelihood needs.** The response to the 'aguu' who are forced to steal from the markets for a livelihood has been overly patriarchal and securitised. It must be recognised that approaching these children as criminals is fracturing social cohesion attempts. Instead, inclusive programmes need to be developed to engage with this 'floating population' and to co-develop sustainable alternative livelihoods that move away from the culture of stealing to survive.

Communities and Cultural Institutions

- **New ways of community belonging need to be embraced when clan structures are broken.** To ensure the 'aguu' are rightly acknowledged as victims of the conflict, it must be recognised that the clan system has

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> In many cases, we tend to recreate stereotypes, recreate generalisations because we've not allowed the situation on the ground to speak to us. **"**
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broken down when they have been denied identity in either their mother's or father's clan. In this context there must be a community acceptance of new concepts of belonging that are not based solely on fatherhood and parental lineage, but on the basis of belonging to a specific community.

- **Prioritise post-war social identity through programmes to rediscover social connectedness, to encourage intergenerational relationships, and to give a cohesive sense of identity to the communities.** This cultural heritage and sense of identity in the Acholi community is a core aspect of returning to social cohesion, gender justice and inclusive peace. There needs to be ongoing community conversations to make post-conflict conflicts more visible and discussed. Communal approaches rooted in the practices of belonging and inclusivity should replace an overreliance on security frameworks.

Researchers

- Be reflexive throughout the research process. Research on gender justice and inclusive peace requires a constant process of challenging one's own assumptions and categorisations. This project challenged the research team to think critically and expansively about what counts as a 'gender issue'. Gender permeates the lived experiences of all those living in post-war contexts, and as this research showed, it can have particular impacts on the children's lives.

To learn more about this research project and read its publications visit: https://thegenderhub.com/stories/beyond-war-compensation/

This Project Profile was first published in the Hub's final report, *Gender, Justice and Security: Structural Challenges, Feminist Innovations and Radical Futures*. Go to **www.TheGenderHub.com** to read the full report and to learn more about all 38 research projects in the Hub.