

The gender and power relations nexus: a contextual perspective of Ugandan societies previously affected by civil unrest and cattle rustling: a case study of Acholi, Teso, and Karamoja regions of Uganda

Dektar, Benbella; Lofter, Kristin B.; Walters, Stephanie; Stiefel, Norman L.; McEnany, Gregory; Liebermann, Amanda

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**THE GENDER AND POWER RELATIONS NEXUS: A CONTEXTUAL
PERSPECTIVE OF UGANDAN SOCIETIES PREVIOUSLY AFFECTED BY CIVIL
UNREST AND CATTLE RUSTLING
A CASE STUDY OF ACHOLI, TESO, AND KARAMOJA REGIONS OF UGANDA**

Authors:

Benbella Dektar* *PGD-M&E., PGD-PPM., MMS., MPH (Corresponding author);*

Correspondence email: dektarb@gmail.com

Kristin B. Lofter, Ph.D.;

Stephanie Walters, MPhil, Ph.D.;

Norman L. Stiefel, MSc., MPH.;

Gregory McEnany, Ph.D.;

Amanda Liebermann, M.A.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Many Ugandan societies have a lot in common. However, contextual differences continue to prevail following our long history of civil unrest since the 1970s (MGLSD, 2018). Particularly, Northern, Eastern and the North Eastern corridor of the Karamoja regions have been severely affected and continue to bear the brunt of the aftermath decades later. Recovery from the aftermath of war comes along with numerous societal challenges of which gender power relational challenges, control over resources and property are no exception.

Moreover, the gendered nature of livelihoods in Uganda and sub-Saharan Africa as a whole for analytical and policy purposes cannot be over-emphasized. The promotion of women-secure societies is stymied by inequitable access to property and openness in claiming what would have otherwise belonged to them. This is not only a longstanding concern but a major huddle. This has resulted in more urgency in the present conjuncture of global crises such as the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic and financial crises and economic downturn which currently manifests in Europe, U.S, and soon in the global south—particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

With labour insecurities, land conflicts which often lead to revenge attacks, and poor livelihood outcomes for the majority of people in rural Uganda, the gender and power relations nexus comes to play.

Critically, several crises have highlighted experiences of people based on the permutations of their identities, social norms, relations and kinship play roles in addressing gender and development (True & Davies, 2021).

1.1. Rationale

Despite the existing gender disparities in our communities and societies, inequalities still exist and continue to widen the already glaring gap in masculine and feminine power relations. Moreover, if left

unabated can exacerbate social challenges such as violence against women and girls and worse still injuries and trauma associated with gender-based violence (GBV).

Conversely, policy and decision-maker ought to be very mindful of the major aspects of most, if not all socially ascribed gender disparities and the specific needs of men and women (Conroy, Ruark & Tan, 2020).

2.0 STUDY PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the study was to generate data and inform the societal differences as far as gender and power relations are concerned and potentially develop a cross-cutting gender strategy and framework that can inform gender and development actors in the regions of the study to address the root causes of gender inequality and support female empowerment.

Specifically, the study set out to attain the following objectives:

1. Analyze the root causes of gender inequality in the context of COVID 19 at individual, household, and community levels.
2. Identify programming opportunities, gap, strengths, lessons learned and enumerate strategies for addressing any glaring gender disparities.
3. To contribute to wider learning on how to develop and integrate gender responsive strategies and parameters in community development interventions with the aim of maximizing positive development outcomes.

3.0 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This was a cross-sectional and descriptive study which deployed both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques.

Both primary and secondary data were collected and analysed. For purposes of triangulation, a survey questionnaire, key informant interviews, in-depth interview, and focus group discussions were used.

Table 1: Response rate (%)

| S/n. | Data collection method | Sample size | # of responses | Rate (%) |
|------|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------|----------|
| 1. | Survey questionnaire | 400 | 386 | 97% |
| 2. | Key Informant Interviews (KII) | 20 | 17 | 80% |
| 3. | In-depth Interview (IDI) | 20 | 20 | 100% |
| 4. | Focus Group Discussion (FGD) | 28 | 24 | 86% |

The study was conducted in nine districts—three in each of the three regions of Acholi, Teso and Karamoja located in the north, East, and north-eastern Uganda respectively. The study was conducted from March—August, 2021.

Whereas a 100% response rate was not reached for two of the qualitative data collection techniques, the response rate is acceptable given that a point of saturation was reached with all the data collection techniques. Verbatim from KIIs, IDIs and FGDs was quoted in the main report.

4.0 MAJOR FINDINGS/ RESULTS

The study revealed the following:

- ☑ Women from the poorest households are the most vulnerable to loss of prime property such as land.
- ☑ Women with less decision-making power regardless of status and class are susceptible to being oppressed.
- ☑ 73% of the respondents reported that women are still seen as property and therefore not valued in many societies.
- ☑ Early marriages continue to prevail in at least 63% of the communities visited.
- ☑ Poverty perpetuates early marriages because parents are in dire need of bride price often paid in form of livestock and cash in addition.
- ☑ Despite enforcement of gender laws and policies (though limited), informal gender biases dominate most levels of rural communities and deters women's access to some needed social services and social amenities.
- ☑ Over half (52%) of the women and girls interviewed reported low self-confidence, low self-worthiness and limited ability to influence decision-making at household and community levels.
- ☑ 81% of women reported that there is no meaningful representation of women in existing community governance structures. This does not only expose the glaring gaps in gender mainstreaming and equality but also shows that women are still discriminated against.
- ☑ Socio-cultural beliefs exacerbate harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, body tattooing and piercings for identity, sign of bravery, femininity, etc.
- ☑ Distinct but complementary roles and tasks exist because of masculinities and femininities which are socially and culturally defined.
- ☑ Gender stereotypes and harmful traditional practices continue to undermine women empowerment.

5.0 DISCUSSION *(Redacted for submission and presentation)*

The study noted that women and girls are responsible for most if not all domestic and reproductive duties. In essence, this restricts their capabilities to improve their socioeconomic status as women and diminishes their decision-making power. However, the recent improvements in women's status and existing opportunities to support women, such as village savings and loans associations (VSLA) or self-

help groups, have somewhat strengthened their socioeconomic status, especially in the Acholi sub-region.

Moreover, women who are more empowered through job opportunities, education, and leadership roles are likely to be more articulate and able to exercise their rights and influence and make critical decisions relative to their lives in their households, communities, and wider institutional structures.

Conversely, the prevailing constraints pertaining to nurturing and equipping women with the right moral character and values aimed at improving their status and power relations relative to men continue to hamper the attainment of positive development outcomes in as far as gender equality is concerned in communities previously affected by war and civil unrest in Uganda.

In addition, gender disparities as far as access to economic resources (including credit), land and economic power-sharing and making significant decisions within households directly affect women's potential to achieve the economic and social autonomy they deserve and need to provide a better quality of life for themselves and their dependents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To harness better outcomes and reduce the glaring gaps and challenges associated with gender and power relations not only in the study areas of this study but the country at large, based on the findings, the study suggests the following actionable recommendations:

1. Promote women participation and meaningful representation in key administrative units and structures in their communities;
2. Promote affirmative action for leadership positions at lower grassroots levels;
3. Develop community social networks and neighborhood watch against the silent vice of child marriages;
4. Strengthen existing savings and credit loan schemes to enable women access credit and finance so as to minimize the dependency on their spouses (men);
5. Extend social services to remote areas and offer counselling and psychosocial support to victims of gender-based violence.

CONCLUSION

On a conclusive remark, we note that gender and power relations intersect with sex as the common denominator. The increasing skewing of power and decision-making authority which is often skewed to men undermines females leading to unbalanced gender relations. Inadvertently, women have not only borne the brunt of cutbacks in employment opportunities in both the formal and informal sectors, access to social services and benefits but have also been left out either intentionally or unintentionally in opportunities for leadership and decision-making authority in their societies.

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