Assessing Impacts of Women's Dispossession from Land and Home

The Case of Amuru District, Acholi Sub-region, Northern Uganda
Report on Violation Impact Assessment (VIA) of Assets and Potential Losses

Shelter and settlements Alternatives | Uganda Human Settlements Network

Housing and Land Rights Network •
Habitat International Coalition

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Kampala and Cairo, March 2021

Cover photo: View of a typical homestead in Amuru. Source: SSA: UHSNET.

Disclaimer

The author bears full responsibility for the data and information presented in this report. The data and information presented herein is based fieldwork work carried out by the consultant supported by a research team from SSA: UHSNET. The subsequent views based on this data and information do not necessarily reflect those of Shelter and Settlements Alternatives – Uganda Human and Settlements Network (SSA – UHSNET) or Housing and Land Rights Network – Habitat International Coalition (HIC – HLRN).

Executive Summary

Since 2019, Shelter and Settlements Alternatives: Uganda Human Settlements Network (SSA: UHSNET) has been implementing a project, 'Assessing the Impacts of Women's Dispossession from Land and Home,' in collaboration with Housing and Land Rights Network of Habitat International Coalition (HIC-HLRN). In 2020, the project assessed the impacts of women's dispossession from land and home due to customary practices in Northern Uganda, a case study of women in Amuru District. The research team applied the Violation Impact Assessment Tool as the analytical method to measure human rights deprivation of a sample of women potentially affected due to the customary practices in the area.

Amuru District in Northern Uganda is among several districts that were heavily destabilized by the 20-year-long Lord's Resistance Army insurgency that afflicted the Acholi Sub-region from the late 1980s to 2006. Communities were systematically uprooted from their rural villages and resettled into 'camps.' With the end of the conflict in 2006, various state and donor-funded 'rehabilitation' programs were implemented in attempts to restore community livelihoods. However, many returnees found themselves dispossessed of their ancestral land, a vital asset in relation to their long-term livelihoods, wellbeing and welfare.

The VIAT-based survey showed that dispossession of female-headed households from their homes was rampant in the area. Using a random sampling approach, 100 households in total (86 female-headed and 14 male-headed) were engaged in this survey. The majority of female respondents (90%), reported that land-related conflicts were prevalent among them and between different communities. These conflicts have manifested in displacement and dispossession of households from their land, a situation accentuated by the loss of life, propagating family and community feuds (tension, fights and hatred) that often culminated in dispossession and displacement, as well as loss of valuable assets/property (e.g., by the burning of houses). Cases where women were subjected to gender-based violence, forced eviction and denial of their heritance rights have been documented through mediation, locus visits, alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms and court cases for those where ADR mechanisms could not remedy the violations.

The study's findings clearly showed that socio-culturally induced gender-based land dispossession has had a significant effect on women/female-headed households. This highlights the urgent need to conceptualize the gender dimensions to habitat-related human rights, impacts of land evictions and mechanisms for redress. The limited space enabling women to share and report their experiences within the socio-cultural settings need enhancement. The study also showed the uncertainty about the exact quantification of cases in the area, due to the absence of effective reporting and monitoring mechanisms. As a result of the interactions and engagements with various stakeholders during the survey, the following interventions were highlighted to address the challenge of land and home dispossession of female-headed households at the local level in Amuru:

I. Scaling-up the promotion of locally driven multi-actor dialogue and mediation framework among households, families and clans where land-related conflicts have been reported;

II. Instituting a socio-cultural campaign to transform existing socio-cultural norms and values, with specific focus on addressing the intersectionality of land rights/ownership and women's rights;
III. Mobilizing and training women and men from local communities, local leaders, public officials and other non-state actors to plan, build and implement a 'social architecture' for providing access to support for affected women.

It is further recommended that there be further interventions, as follows:

(a) Mobilization and support of the documented cases through an actionable legal-aid schedule. This would enable redress for existing cases, while documenting the outcomes to create a system for monitoring and sharing.
(b) Increased awareness to change, strengthen and rebuild the socio- cultural systems to support women enjoy their rights to land and home, as well as other rights in the different regions and districts in the country.
(c) Targeted micro-scalar interventions around appropriate settlement planning and housing technologies to promote live-able human settlements for improvement of welfare and wellbeing of affected communities.
(d) The need remains to undertake more research to better understand this form of dispossession in its various dimensions of magnitude; triggers and drivers; and mechanisms for optimum outcomes by the wide range of non-state and state actors.
(e) Mobilization and development of a multi-actor working partnership/working group focusing on gender-based dispossession that enlists all relevant state and non-state actors at various scales to harness a diverse range of resources.

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Figure 1: Livestock (ducks and goats) maintained by households in a typical Amuru District homestead. See details of these assets on p. 18. Source: SSA: UHSNET.

1. Introduction and background

1.1 Introduction

The spectre of socio-culturally induced displacement and dispossession is given far too little attention, partly due to the limited research on the matter, especially within the broader field of development. Notably, despite the obligation states parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (which Uganda ratified in 1987) to report every five years on forced evictions and their impacts, no current Goal, Target or Indicator under the current 2030 Agenda captures these poverty-deepening impediments to development. Emerging anecdotal evidence, however, indicates that this form of displacement is a pervasive element of life for inhabitants of every region, the magnitude and scale of whose socio-economic impacts are quite significant, but untold.

Recognising this monitoring and policy gap is critical to ensuring that universally agreed international development agenda commitments meet local expectations aligned with common interests and values, as well as codified human rights and corresponding state obligations. Otherwise, livelihoods will continue to be disrupted and irreversibly impacted, exacerbating impoverishment, social conflict, violence, destitution and environmental degradation, reducing all of which are the subjects of promises for 'transforming our world.'[1] The apparent deficiency in data regarding socio-culturally induced displacement and dispossession demands directing more efforts to develop and test new frameworks, and/or apply due diligence to monitor existing human rights obligations, not only to understand the various inherent dimensions, root causes

[1] UN General Assembly, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1, 25 October 2015, at: https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda.

and consequences of this phenomenon, but also to enhance other existing approaches toward remedies and greater development sustainability.

Socio-culturally induced displacement and dispossession are realities in many communities, especially in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, where deeply entrenched traditional socio-cultural norms, values and systems pervade everyday life. While this is a global phenomenon, it is especially more pronounced in largely under-reported rural areas, although the impacts also spill-over into peri-urban and urban areas, given the fluid socio-cultural interactions that occur across rural-urban spatial continuum.

Map of Uganda, highlighting Amuru District: Like most Ugandan districts, Amuru District is named after its 'chief town,' Amuru, where the district headquarters are located. Amuru District was established by the Ugandan Parliament in 2006. Prior to that, the district was part of Gulu District. Amuru District, together with Agago District, Gulu District, Kitgum District, Lamwo District, Nwoya District and Pader District, is part of the larger Acholi sub-region, home to an estimated 1.5 million Acholi, according to the 2002 national census. The district is composed of four sub counties, 29 parishes and 387 villages. Source: mapingpro.

As is also universal, this form of displacement and dispossession disproportionately affects women, as learned through significant evidence generated from cross-cutting thematic investigations, revealing a trend of increasing frequency and severity. Its short- and long-term social, economic, environmental and political impacts cannot be underestimated. Socio-culturally induced displacement and dispossession create cleavages that deepen vulnerability to further discrimination and deprivation, exposure to various livelihood risks and untold material and human costs.

1.2 Background

In partnership with Housing and Land Rights Network of Habitat International Coalition (HIC-HLRN), Shelter and Settlements Alternatives: Uganda Human Settlement Network (SSA: UHSNET) undertook a Violation Impact Assessment of several communities in Pabbo, Lamogi and Kilak in Amuru District, Acholi Sub-region, Northern Uganda. Amuru District is among several other districts that were heavily destabilised by the long 20-year-running LRA insurgency that afflicted the Acholi Sub-region from the late 1980s to 2006.[2]

Communities were systematically uprooted from their rural villages and resettled into 'camps.' With the end of the conflict in 2006, various state and donor-funded 'rehabilitation' programs were implemented in attempts to restore community livelihoods. However, the process has been far from satisfactory, with many returnees finding themselves dispossessed of their ancestral land, a vital asset in enabling their long-term livelihoods, wellbeing and welfare.

Through interviews and discussions with key development actors in Amuru District, the study team how rampant eviction of female-headed households was in the area. An initial assessment of the case was made by SSA: UHSNET with a local partner, West Acholi Cooperative Union (WACU) in August 2020. Subsequently, the partners modelled a VIA Tool around the local asset base (household, community, social, civic, economic and materials, as well as intangible) and drafted an estimated household expenditure schedule. The tool generally explored the complex dimensions of issues involved and values at stake that underpin conditions of displacement and dispossession. The team then pretested and validated the VIA Tool before surveys commenced in November to generate information that could be adopted to develop, implement and institutionalize relevant remedy and reparation mechanisms.

Amuru District lies in the Acholi Sub-region, Northern Uganda, bordering South Sudan. (See map above.) In total, 120 households were purposively selected from the three divisions of Pabbo, Lamogi and Kilak, in Amuru Town Council. Though designated an urban area, by classification under Uganda's Local Government legislation, the town is predominantly rural, characterised by several small trading centres along the Gulu-South Sudan highway with sparsely located households.

In these centres, wholesaling and retailing in various household goods and food supplies dominate economic activity. Services such as motorcycle repair, salons, tailoring and mobile money transfer complete the ensemble of economic activities that characterise these centres. The livelihoods of the latter are largely based on agricultural subsistence. Households grow crops including sorghum, maize, sesame, ground nuts (peanuts), millet, sweet potatoes, cassava and beans.

Recently, a shift has taken place toward cultivating upland rice, which concurrently meets essential household food needs, and the surplus is sold for income. Animals reared by

[2] Norwegian Refugee Council, "Profile of Internal Displacement: Uganda" (as of 10 August, 2005), at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/93AA7EAD7E739FF4C125705A00412A1E-globalidp-uga-10Aug.pdf.

households in the area include cattle, goats, chicken, pigs and rabbits. Many households supplement their income by harvesting high-demand fruits such as mangoes and soursop[3] from their land lots when in season.

2. Land policy, legal framework and politics in Uganda

2.1 Land policy and legal framework

Land and livelihoods are inseparable in a country like Uganda, where agriculture remains the single largest employer and main means of survival. The success of state-led efforts for reducing poverty and striving to achieve both a qualitative and quantitative improvement in human welfare are contingent upon the existence and operation of an effective policy and legal framework/processes for the adjudication of gender-based dispossession. Unfortunately, these processes and institutions appear to be largely skewed away from addressing development-induced displacement and dispossession, overlooking the complex challenges that the socio-culturally induced dimension poses. Thus, the challenges posed by these entrenched practices have been rendered invisible. The convergence of various factors (e.g., the armed rebellion that engulfed much of the northern[4] region between 1987 and 2006 etc.) has led to the gradual erosion of social structures in areas such as Amuru District. Prior to the rebellion, these structures acted as important buffers against land displacement and dispossession.

Figure 2: Agriculture activities by households in Amuru. Source: SSA: UHSNET.

The government of Uganda and its development partners have made significant progress in addressing development-induced displacement through vital tools such as the Constitution of Republic of Uganda (1995), Local Governments Act (1997), Uganda National Land Policy (2013),

[3] Also known as annona, custard apple, or cherimoya.

[4] The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency resulted in the displacement of more than 1.7 million people from their ancestral lands in Acholi sub-region.

Uganda Land Amendment Act (2010), National Resettlement Policy, the National Policy for Internally Displaced Persons (2004) and the emerging guidelines for land evictions.[5] However, this framework provides only partial protection for communities threatened, or at risk of land dispossession, especially where the socio-cultural dimension is a factor.

This study provides valuable learning that can be harnessed toward a more-holistic approach to dispossession, particularly in relation to highly vulnerable and at-risk groups such as women. It is hoped that the insights and perspectives generated, thus, will help to further enhance and broaden the policy, institutional and legislative frameworks for more equitable, balanced and sustainable social transformation.

2.2 Contextualising international, regional and national policy and legal frameworks

The ongoing displacement and dispossession of communities in Amuru District contravenes many of the above local, as well as international norms and standards, including state obligations under treaty[6] to respect, protect and fulfil fundamental and inalienable human rights. Consistent with the human right to adequate housing, the international law prohibition against forced eviction classifies such forced evictions as a 'gross violation,'[7] invoking the entitlement of reparation for victims.

Dispossession of communities in Amuru District against their will and without consent in the absence of redress and reparation—including restitution, return, resettlement, rehabilitation, compensation, guarantees of non-repetition and victims' satisfaction[8]—is illegal and unjust. The Republic of Uganda is obliged to take appropriate measures to protect against such dispossession and the accompanying costs, losses and damage to victims.[9]

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[5] Taddeo Bwambale, "Draft land eviction guidelines ready," *New Vision* (20 May 2019), at: https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1500581/draft-land-eviction-guidelines-ready; "Stakeholders Discuss Land Eviction Guidelines," The Judiciary of the Republic of Uganda (1 August 2019), at: https://www.judiciary.go.ug/data/news/723/Stakeholders%20Discuss%20Land%20Eviction%20Guidelines%20.html; Tom Malaba, "Judicial officers propose land eviction guidelines," *Daily Monitor* (1 August 2019), at: https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Judicial-officers-land-eviction-guidelines-Bart-Katurebe/688334-5218836-rsvbx7/index.html.

[6] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Uganda in 1995, Articles 2.3, 6.1, 7, 9.1, 25 and 26; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Articles 11, 12, 21.1; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles; in addition to recognition of the human right to property in Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 17.

[7] See Commission on Human Rights, "forced eviction," resolution 1993/77, 10 March 1993, at: http://www.hlrn.org/img/documents/ECN4199377%20en.pdf; "Affirms that the practice of forced evictions constitutes a gross violation of human rights, in particular the right to adequate housing;" para. 1; "Prohibition of forced evictions," resolution 2004/28, 16 April 2004, para. 1, at: http://www.hlrn.org/img/documents/E-CN_4-RES-2004-28.pdf.

[8] For the definition of the internationally recognized standard of reparation, see Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law," A/RES/60/147, 21 March 2006, at: http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/remedy.htm.

[9] Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), Concluding observations on the initial report of Uganda, E/C.12/UGA/CO/1, 8 July 2015, para. 30, at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/UGA/CO/1&Lang=En; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDaW), Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Uganda, CEDAW/C/UGA/CO/7, 5 November 2010, paras. 25–26, at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/UGA/CO/7&Lang=En.

2.3 Politics of land in Uganda

Uganda's deeply ineffective regulatory and institutional framework has perhaps become one of the major barriers to Uganda's development goals and objectives. Although significant investment has been undertaken toward reforming the land sector, little progress has been made to untangle the complex politics around land access, ownership claims and tenure rights.

Land is a highly emotive and contentious issue across much of Uganda, particularly in areas such as Amuru, Northern Uganda. Previously held communally, administered and adjudicated through established informal customary rules and norms. It was primarily treated as a 'common good' in the interest of the collective community. However, this rapidly changed toward the end of the LRA insurgency in the mid-2000s with the privatisation of land rights.

This process accelerated thereafter, and proceeds apace today. Subsequently, communal rights have been overtaken by private tenure rights and claims, a process characterised by land-grabbing and rampant evictions. This has, in turn, fuelled socio-culturally and gender-based land dispossession, livelihood disruptions and escalation of conflict and violence at a scale and magnitude never seen before. The introduction of private land rights and formal mediating institutions during the colonial era certainly has played a significant part in shaping these emerging land politics (Green, 2005; Nkurunziza, 2007). The above is driven, in part, by the involvement of numerous (state and non-state) actors interacting through a complex geometry of informal/formal power relations that are driving land market segmentation and speculation. It is through these processes that land in Uganda has become highly commoditized (Shuaib, 2010). The convergence of the above factors has contributed significantly to creating an enabling environment for the rising cases of gender-based land dispossession in areas such as Amuru, Northern Uganda.

Figure 3: Survey team meeting in the field to discuss findings. Source: SSA: UHSNET.

3. Conceptual framework and methodology

This study set out to establish and deepen understanding of the impacts of socio-culturally induced home and habitat loss on women, particularly female-headed households in Amuru District, Northern Uganda. It enabled a critical analysis of how socio-cultural norms are shaping the emerging gendered social geographies around land rights and housing.

Using the collective experiences of selected households that had faced evictions, or were facing eviction to assess the extent of rights violations affecting their wealth, wellbeing and habitat, including security, family cohesion and social networks. (See Conceptual framework below.) The study provided valuable insights for devising and implementing interventions to open up transformative social dialogue for action to address the ongoing violation of women's rights as a result of deeply entrenched socio-cultural practices.

Conceptually, the study sought to provide critical insights into the multi-dimensional impacts of dispossession and the modes of violations that circumscribe them, to establish means of redress for groups like women who are particularly vulnerable to socio-cultural induced displacement.

3.1 Conceptual framework

The project's conceptual framework combines the logic of human rights methodology with the international law framework for remedy and reparations for victims of gross violations. The former considers adequate housing to be a universal human need and, therefore, everyone's right to a life with dignity. That specific human right, as well as other indivisible human rights related to habitat such as water and land to meet physical and livelihood needs, lies at the normative centre of the circle depicted in the graph below. With habitat-related human rights at the centre, the cycle that is the subject of any remedial human rights intervention involves the corresponding obligation on the part of the state to (1) respect the right (i.e., refrain from violating it), (2) protect the right (from violations by third parties) and (3) fulfil that right (by measures that promote the human right through various means, facilitate and assist its realization).

When incidents (exemplified in the right-hand column) cause violations of the human right, that causes impacts that the present study has investigated to inventory the issues involved and values at stake. The composite impacts (costs, losses and damage) arising from the violation warrant remedy to restore the various material and non-material values affected. While this conceptual framework seeks reparative justice, rather than retributive justice, its primary objective is to seek remedy for the victims and affected persons and households. While the state remains the primary duty holder in human rights law and methodology, the duty to make reparation to the victim as a priority—with or without apprehension, prosecution and conviction of other perpetrators—the state's guarantee of remedy should be sufficient incentive to pro-actively inhibit recurrence of the violation, for it engages further cycles of deprivation, impacts and needs for further remedy. Naturally, the state's dutiful and diligent pursuit of other perpetrators should prove incentive for those parties not to repeat the gross violation.

To the left of the model is a summary of the entitlements of reparation for victims of gross violations of human rights such as forced eviction. These are defined in general principles of international law and adopted by the UN General Assembly as the indivisible composite of elements in the reparation formula, namely: (1) restitution to the situation before the violation; (2) consensual return; (3) resettlement under favourable conditions, if needed; (4) rehabilitation of all kinds; (5) compensation for values physically impossible to restore; (6) effective guarantees of non-repetition of the violation; and (7) satisfaction on the part of the victims that justice has been done.

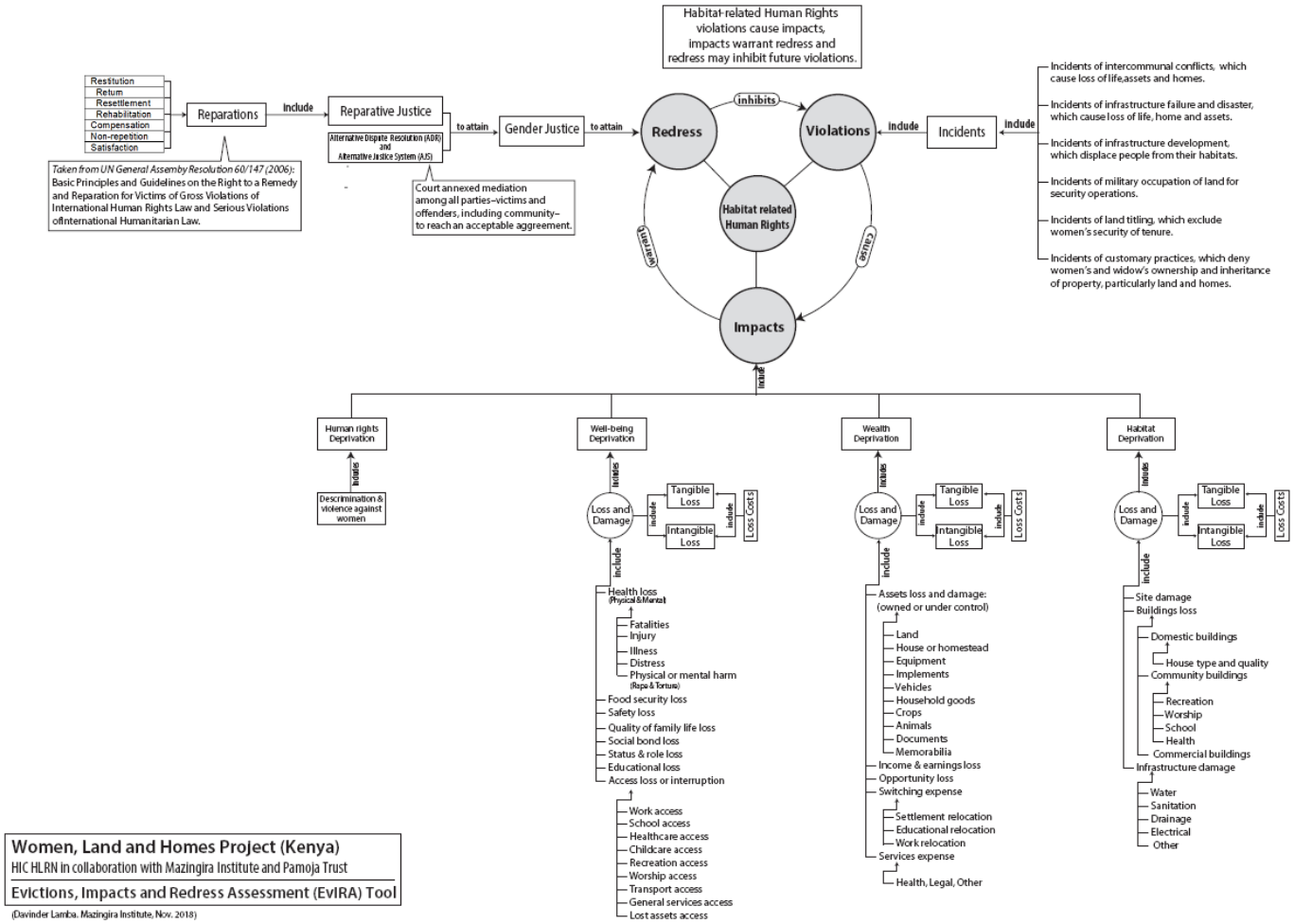


Figure 4: Graphic depiction of the conceptual framework for analysing socio-culturally gender-based evictions in Amuru in pursuit of reparative justice for victims. Source: Davinder Lamba, Mazingira Institute, Nairobi, Kenya.

3.2 Methodology

Preliminary field visits were carried out by SSA: UHSNET to better understand how socio-culturally induced displacement and dispossession had impacted communities in Amuru District, as reported by the area local partner, WACU, in August 2020. These preliminary field visits were undertaken by SSA: UHSNET field staff and were vital in collecting information

regarding the physical, socio-demographic and economic characteristics of the community, in addition to verifying the claims of displacement and dispossession.

Subsequently, after several follow-up meetings to discuss the cases in-depth, a VIA survey employing mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) commenced. The survey was carried out under a collaborative approach where a selection of WACU executives, members and community leaders helped in testing the data collection tool and executing the data collection process. Given the prevailing conditions as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the research team was strictly advised to adhere and follow Ministry of Health-issued SOPs in all field activities.

Figure 5: Research team engaged in brainstorming session after data collection. Source: SSA: UHSNET.

The team adopted a mixed-methods approach for the study, involving the use of a survey questionnaire with a predetermined sample, key person interviews, observation, photography and secondary information from both grey and published literature. Ten officers from WACU were constituted into a local research team to help collect data for the survey. They were engaged in a 3-day basic research training session, in which they also undertook a fieldwork to pre-test the VIA Tool. The training involved grounding the research team in the objectives of the assignment, basic data collection skills and research ethics, in addition enhancing their comprehension of contextual issues including gender, women, land/property rights, vulnerability, depravation, displacement and dispossession. Twenty targeted households[10] were selected from Amuru Town Council for the VIA Tool pre-testing.

After the pre-testing and training, the VIA Tool was revised in line with recommendations made by the research team. Data collection commenced in November 2020. The assistant researchers were issued with masks, hand sanitizers and also advised to follow social distancing rules during field visits.

[10] These included 15 households headed by women and five households headed by men in Pabbo, Lamogi and Kilak, Amuru Town Council.

Figure 6: Supervision of data collection process during fieldwork in Amuru. Source: SSA: UHSNET.

Using a random sampling approach, 100 households in total (86 female-headed and 14 male-headed) were engaged in the survey to generate data and information for the assignment. The ten research assistants worked in groups of two while administering the VIA questionnaire to the selected households under two cooperative members of WACU: Keyo and Pabo. The consultant and SSA: UHSNET staff supervised the process and provided additional support needed by the research assistants throughout the data collection. Once the data collection was complete, the questionnaires were coded, data entered and analysed using SPSS and subsequently interrogated to generate the findings herein.

Figure 7: Coconut palm growing in one of the Amuru District compounds. Source: SSA: UHSNET.

4. Findings of VIA survey

Survey population characteristics

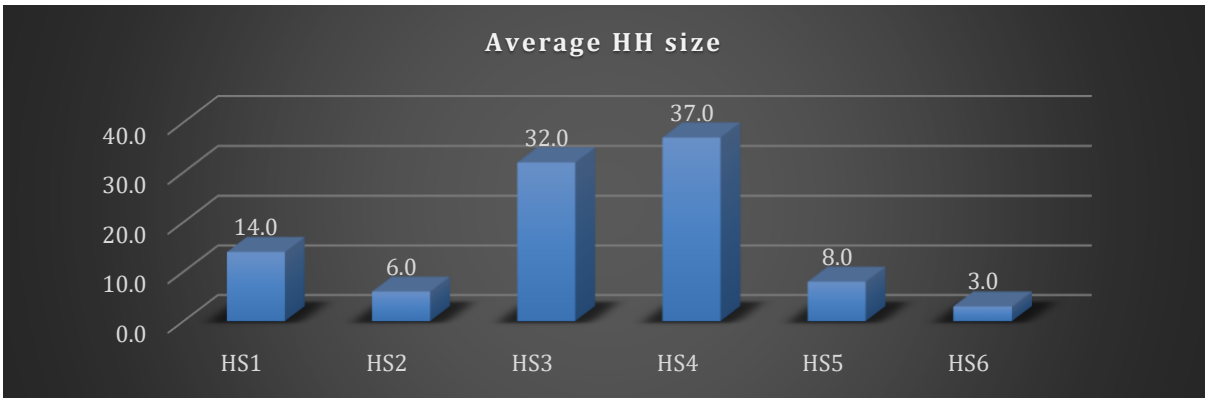
As indicated in the prior, 100 households were selected for the VIA survey. The survey sample was largely drawn from among the WACU members as highlighted in the table below:

These were also the same households that were involved in the validation of the emerging findings.

	Area	Proportion of HHs (%)
1.	Kilak	10
2.	Pabbo	46
3.	Lamogi	44
	Totals	**100**

A. Household size

The households enrolled in the survey had an average size of 3 members, though the majority (37%) recorded a membership of four (4), which is close to the national average.



	Min HH Size	Max HH Size	Mean	Std. Deviation

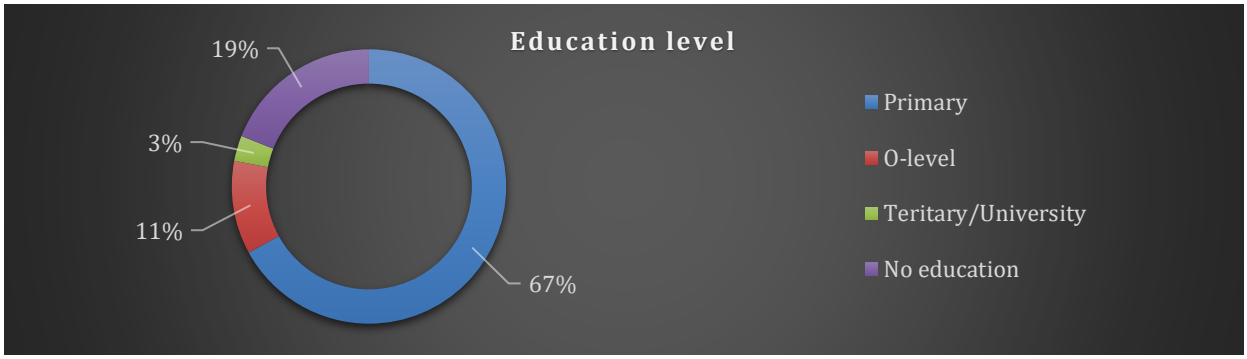
Household size	1	6	3.29	1.258

B. Ages of Household Members

The average age of the respondents surveyed was 45.44 years. This implies that on average, most households in the area are led by relatively young and active individuals. This could indicate a significant shift in the local socio-cultural dynamics where the role of elderly individuals who played important parts as community leaders has been diminished due to a combination of factors.

Age of respondents	
Valid tools	100
Mean	45.44
Median	42.00
Standard Deviation	15.371

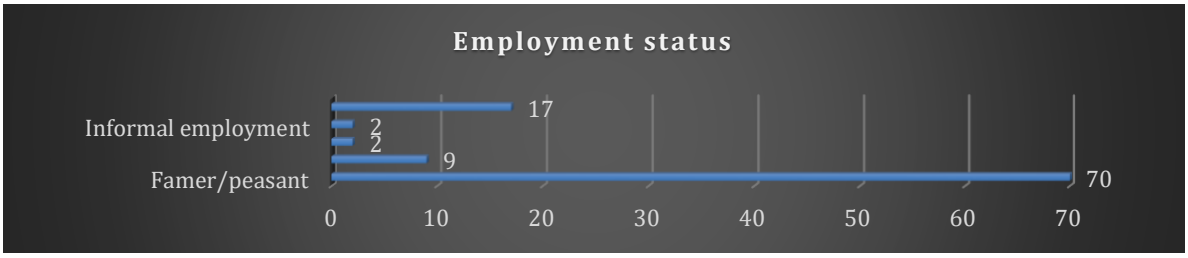
C. Education levels



The education levels of the respondents engaged in the survey varied widely with 67% primary level education; 11% secondary school (Ordinary Level) education; 3% tertiary/university level education and 19% with no formal education. This suggests that the area's population has a relatively good level of literacy which is important for raising awareness about human rights so as to address pervasive challenges such as socio-culturally induced displacement and dispossession.

D. Employment status

70% of the respondents were farmers/peasants; 9% owned small businesses; 2% were working as teachers, nurses and civil servants with the town council; 2% engaged in informal employment as taxi conductors, cleaners and mechanics and 17% were unemployed. This clearly highlights that farming remains the dominant source of livelihood in the area.



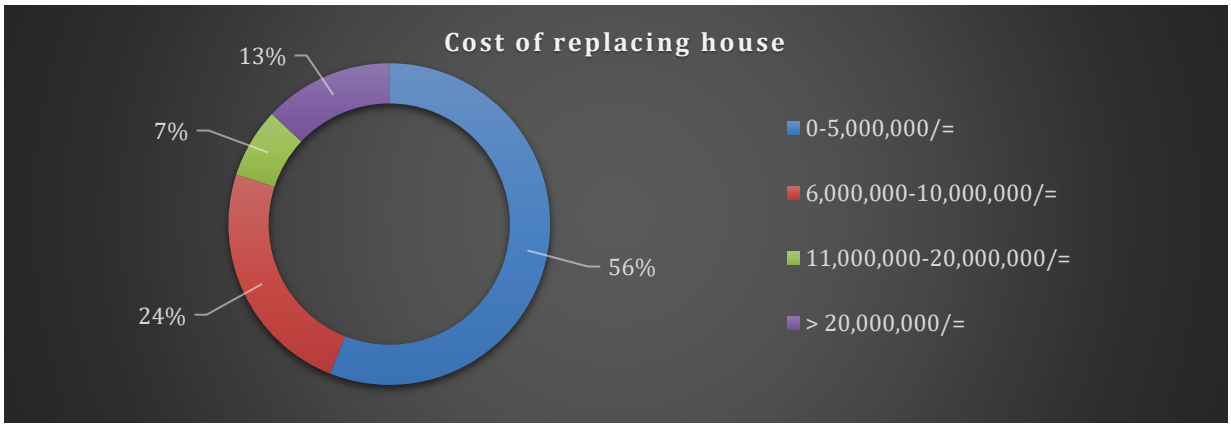
E. Discrimination

Among the household heads surveyed, 30% claimed that they had experienced some kind of discrimination. Such discrimination was attributed to the fact that they had no social connections to the areas they had moved to, while others claimed they were not liked by their neighbours. More importantly, others attributed such discrimination to land disputes as a consequence of having been denied their family inheritance because they were women. Evidence of discrimination involved destruction of crops by neighbours or family members due to unresolved disputes.

F. Economic value of assets

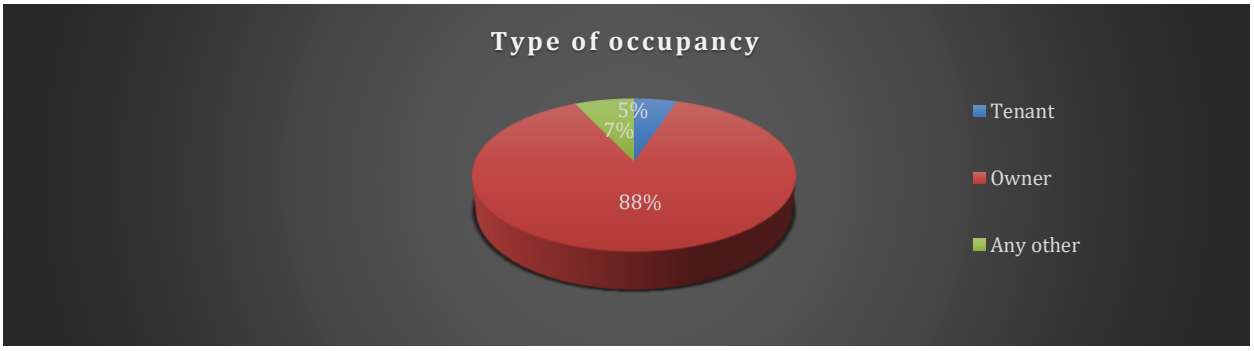
Cost of house replacement

56% of the respondents estimated the cost of replacing their house to range between Uganda Shillings (UGX) 0 to 5,000,000/ 0-1,362 USD; while 24% estimated this cost to range between UGX 6,000,000 and 10,000,000 (1,635 – 2,725 USD) and fewer than 20% placed this estimate above UGX 11,000,000 / 2,997 USD.



Type of house occupancy

The majority of interviewed respondents owned their houses, with a small proportion living under tenancy and caretaking arrangements.



Land/house occupancy *vis-à-vis* gender

About 6% of the female-headed households in the survey sampled are renting/tenants while the majority (86%) were landowners. About 8% were acting as caretakers.

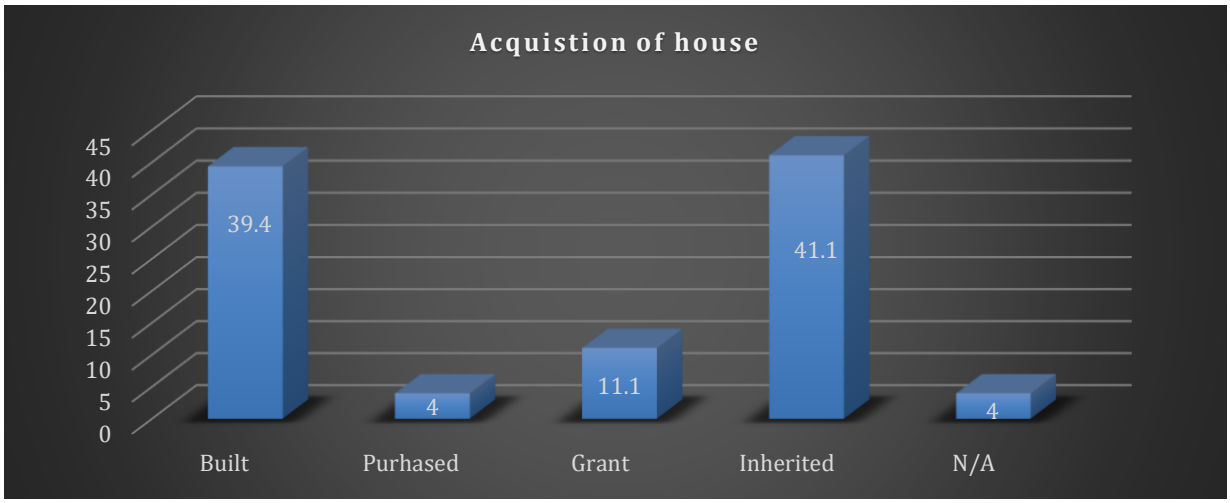
Rental costs

On average, renting households incur about UGX 13,642 (3.72 USD) per month to meet their housing needs. Some households incur costs above this average especially those living around the trading centres where typical property values are relatively high.

Rental cost (UGX)	
Mean	136,428.86
Median	20,000.00
Standard Deviation	294,373.677

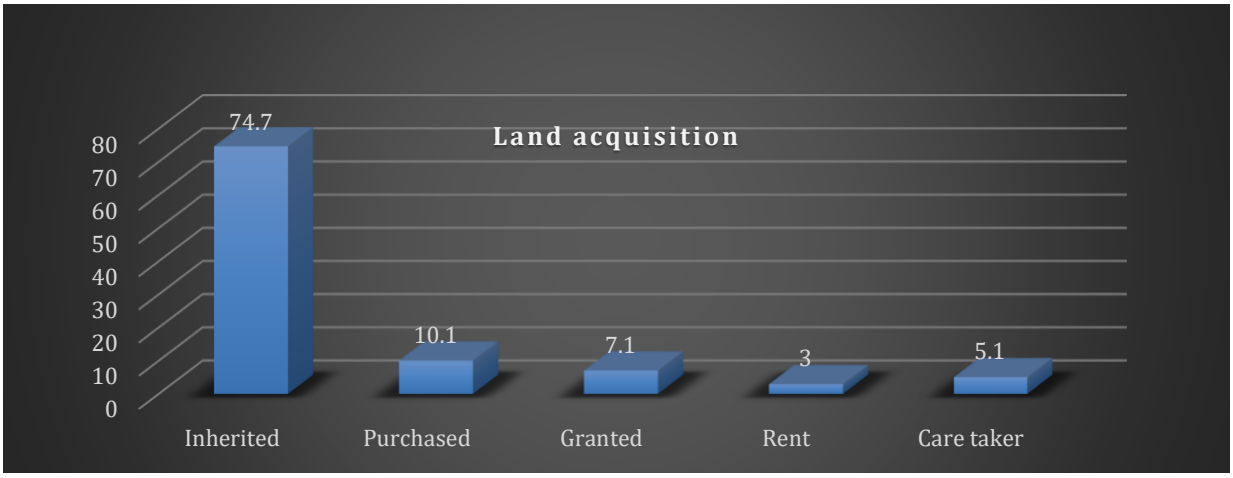
House acquisition

Of the households involved in the survey, most respondents inherited or self-built their housing. A few received their houses as gifts, while fewer still purchased the houses they are living in using their own resources.



Acquisition of land

The largest proportion of the survey respondents inherited the land they are living on, with 10.1% having purchased it while 7.1% were gifted the land upon which their livelihoods are dependent.



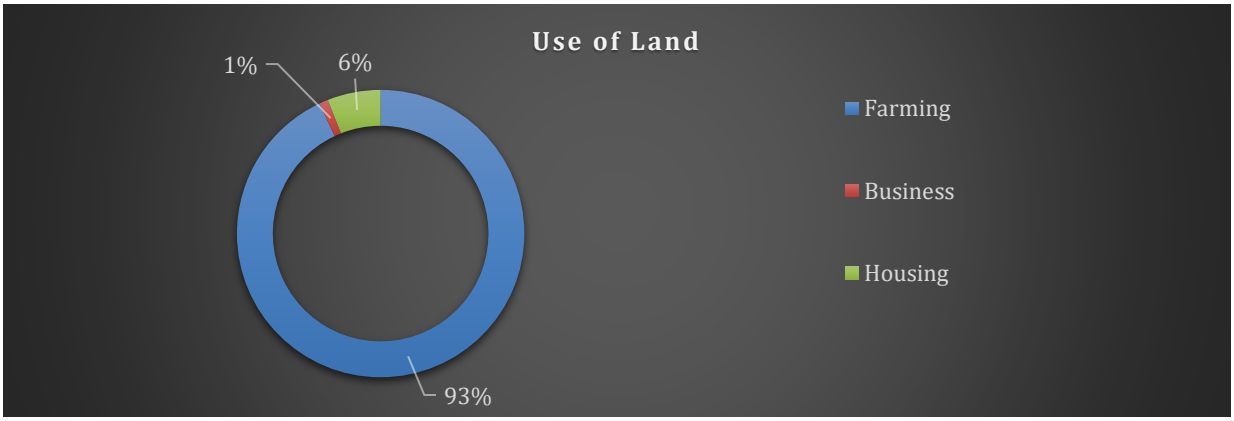
Size of land

On average, the acreage of land that the typical household in the study area occupies and owns is about 6.458. A few prominent households have land holdings far above this and other less.

Land size (acres)	
Mean	6.459
Median	4.000
Standard Deviation	8.9941

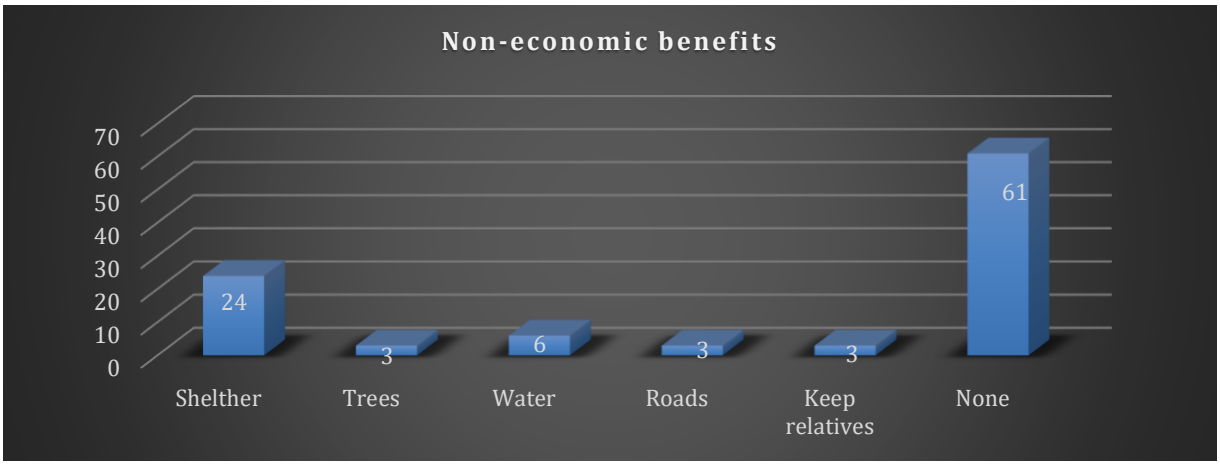
Use of Land

Farming/agriculture appears to be the dominant use for which land in the selected area is utilized. Other uses such as housing and business activities account for less than 7% of land use.



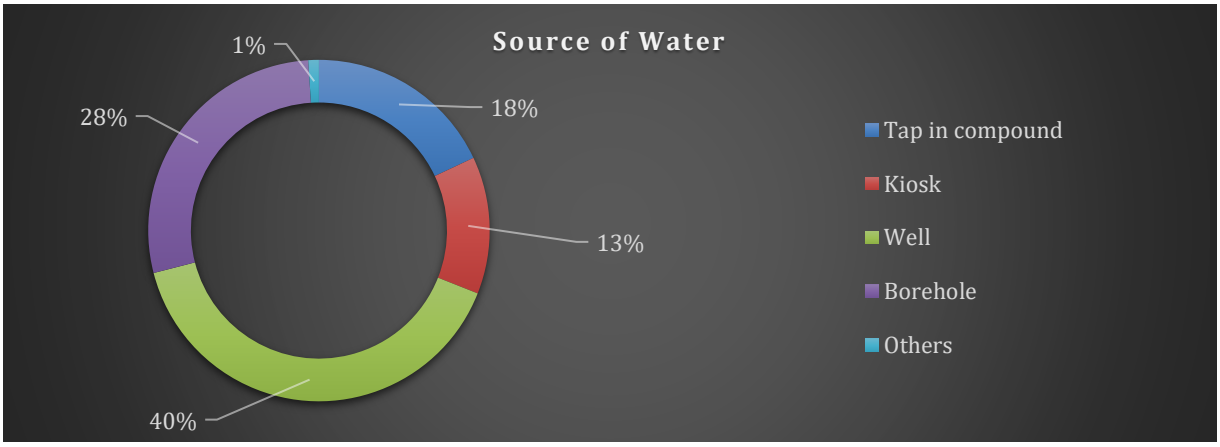
Non-economic benefits from land

61% of the respondents claimed not to derive non-economic benefits from the land they live on while 39% reported otherwise. From their land, the latter acquired various non-economic benefits including timber, firewood, water from the wells, road for accessibility and connectivity to their social networks.



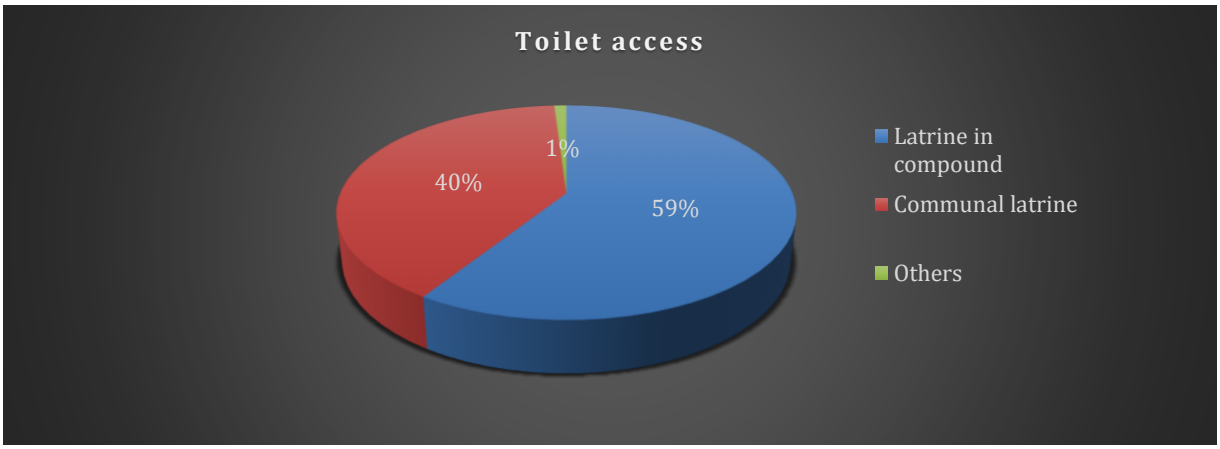
Access to water

40% of respondents reportedly acquired water from the wells, 28% from boreholes, 18% from piped water in their compounds and 13% got their water from kiosks. A negligible percentage reported rivers and other sources as their main means of accessing water for domestic use.



Sanitation

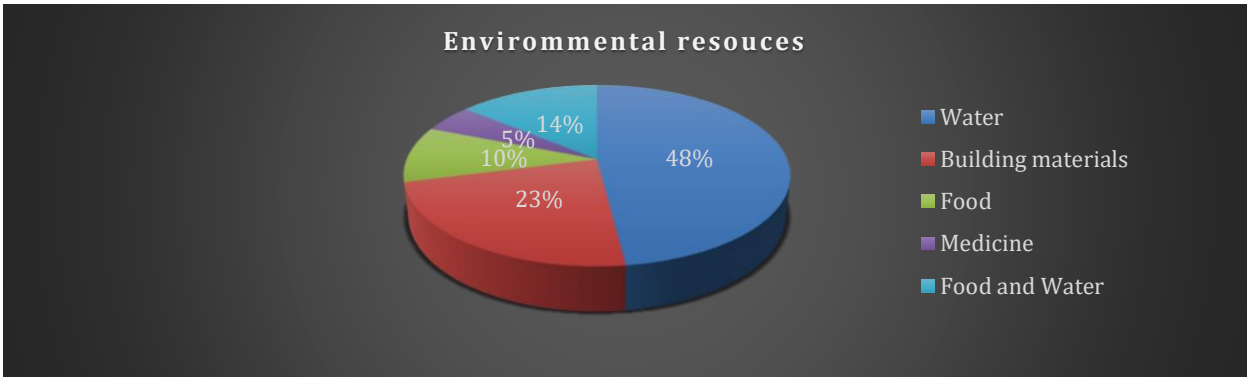
Toilet access for the sample population stood at 59% for those with private latrines in their compounds, while 40% used communal latrines.



G. Environmental goods and services

Environmental resources

Water, building materials, food and medicine were cited as the main types of resources that the sampled households derive from their environment. Fruits, herbs, poles, thatching grass and water from rivers and wells are the key resources households obtain from their land.



Trees/crops

Crops grown by surveyed households included millet, upland rice, soybean, cassava, sorghum, beans, groundnuts, sim-sim (sesame), maize, sweet potatoes, vegetables, cowpeas, cotton and tobacco, which provide food for domestic consumption. The surplus is sold to generate income. A variety of fruit-bearing mango, avocado, lemon, jack fruit, paw-paw (papaya) and soursop trees are kept, in addition to others such as pine and eucalyptus for timber.

	Min value of crops and trees (UGX)	Max value of crops and trees (UGX)	Mean crops and tree value (UGX)	Std. Deviation
Value of crops and trees	2000	10,000,000	352,865.38	825,552.760

Figure 8: Typical homestead showing crops (sweet potatoes) for subsistence in the foreground and house in the background. Source: SSA: UHSNET.

Infrastructure/services/utilities

The range of infrastructure that are currently accessible (with varying distances) to the sampled households in the Amuru Town Council includes hospitals, schools, banks, churches, mosques, community halls and amenities like markets, as shown in the table below:

	Access to social Amenities	Percent	Minimum distance (m)	Maximum distance (m)	Mean distance (m)	Std. Deviation
1.	Hospital	24.5	500	14,000	3115.15	2,822.771
2.	School	24.8	500	7,000	1,830.00	1,259.750
3.	Banks	7.7	500	46,000	12,681.82	10,106.324
4.	Church	24.5	20	9,000	1,854.70	1,399.681
5.	Mosque	4.5	2	16,000	3,261.22	4,493.458
6.	Community	13.6	500	8,000	2,231.58	1,998.138
7.	Other	0.5	2,000	2,500	2,250.00	353.553

Livestock and animals

Chicken, goats, pigs, ducks, cows and cattle are among the range of livestock kept by some of the sampled households in the focal area. On average, individual households valued these assets at about UGX 1,238,632.

	Min livestock value (UGX)	Max livestock value (UGX)	Mean livestock value (UGX)	Std. Deviation (UGX)
Value of livestock	10,000	6,850,000	1,238,632.91	1,792,738.295

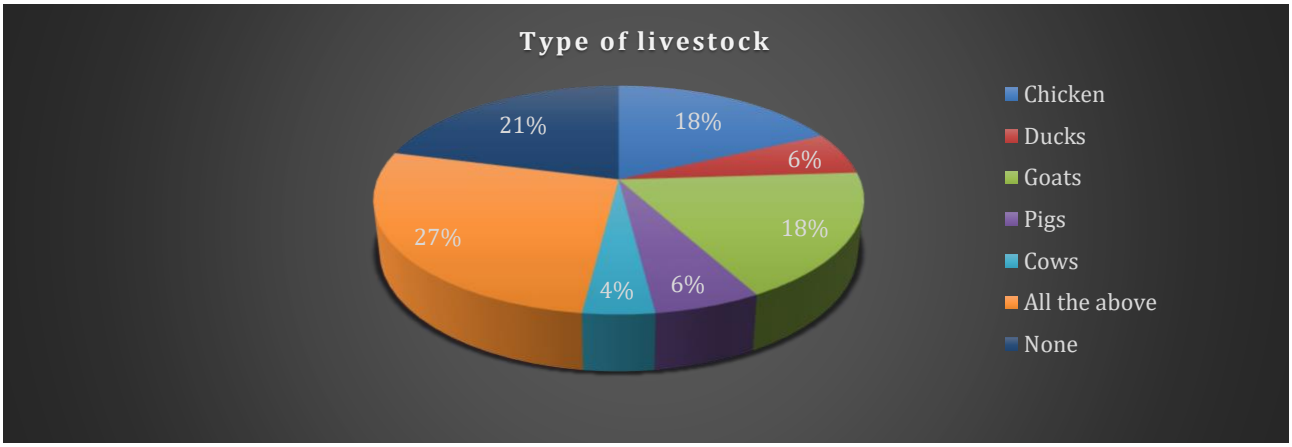


Figure 9: Livestock (rabbits and goats) kept by households for subsistence and income in Amuru. Source: SSA: UHSNET.

Subsidies and rations

At least 60% of the sampled households were recipients of subsidies and rations in form of free medicines, mosquito nets, water, immunization services and food, among others as indicated below:

Vital documents

National IDs, birth certificates, academic certificates, agreements, ration cards, ATM cards, driving/riding permits and other documents like medical forms constitute the wide range of vital documents held by most of the households which were involved in the survey.

		Responses	
		Number	**Percent**
Vital Documents	Academic certificates	25	13.4%
	National ID	97	52.2%
	Birth certificates	28	15.1%
	ATM cards	8	4.3%
	Agreements	12	6.5%
	Driving and riding permits	3	1.6%
	Ration cards	11	5.9%
	Other documents	2	1.1%
Total		**186**	**100.0%**

H. Work/livelihoods

Incomes and loans

The average monthly income of the surveyed households was estimated at UGX 405, 191. However, 54% of the households admitted they were servicing loans including 45% from VSLAs, 6% from micro financial institutions and 3% from banks.

	Min. Monthly Income (UGX)	Max. Monthly Income (UGX)	Mean Monthly Income (UGX)	Standard Deviation (UGX)
Income monthly	30,000	1,200,000	405,191.49	227,496.202

Loans were acquired for different purposes ranging from capital (25%), school fees (10%), buying food (7%), paying for medical bills (7%) and for house construction (5%). In the event of displacement, 24% indicated that they would only be able to repay their loans with difficulty, due to loss of their productive assets, while 5% admitted that they would be able to pay back their loans without difficulties.

Cross-tabulating the two data sets of income sources and loans shows that 18.6% of survey participants with businesses have loans, while the percentage is higher (70.4%) for those engaged in agriculture. Of those engaged in both agriculture and business, only a small proportion (9.3%) have obtained loans. The data suggests that loans are playing some role in sustaining livelihoods of many female-headed households in Amuru.

Furthermore, cross-tabulating the income sources and replacement costs in the event of dispossession, results indicated that 16.1% of households with businesses would require up to UGX 5,000,000 to start all over. 29.2% of business-dependent households would require between UGX 6,000,000 and UGX 10,000,000 while 14.3% would need between UGX 11,000,000 and UGX 20,000,000 to replace their losses in the event of an eviction.

On the other hand, in the event of an eviction, for households engaged in agriculture, 53.5% of them estimated that they would require up to UGX 5,000,000 to replace their losses while 23.9% estimated the costs to be between UGX 6,000,000 and UGX 10,000,000. A sizeable proportion (21.6%) estimated the replacement costs of their losses above UGX 11,000,000.

For households engaged in both agriculture and running businesses to earn a living, 85.7% of them estimated the costs of replacing their losses up to UGX 5,000,000 while 14.3% estimates these costs to be above UGX 20,000,000 in the event of an eviction. Elsewhere, 66.7% of the households without any meaningful income source estimated they would require up to UGX 5,000,000 while about 14.3% of them would require more than UGX 11,000,000 to replace their lost homes and habitat.

I. Household expenses

Bureaucratic and legal fees

Legal services available

68% of the surveyed respondents indicated that they have access to LC as legal services, while 32% indicated they had access to police for legal services within their community.

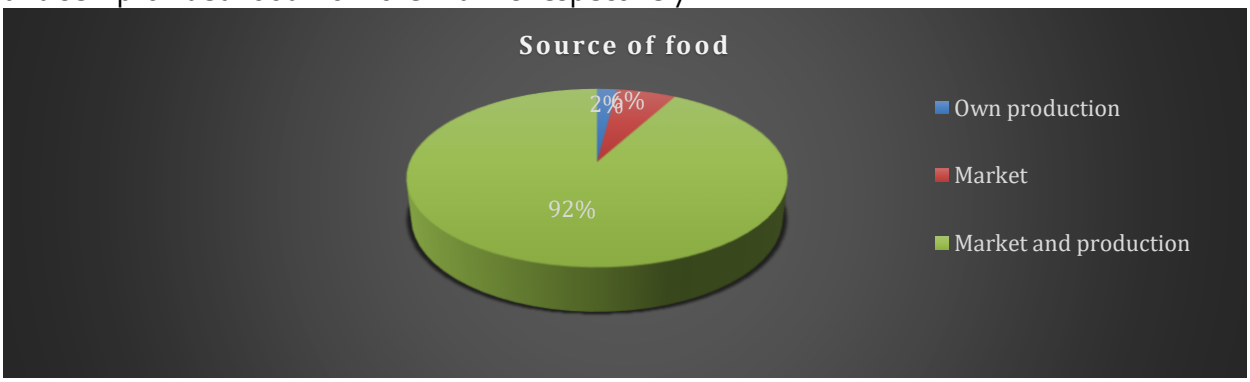
Benefits from the legal services

According to respondents, the benefits derived from these services include peaceful resolution of disputes and conflicts, offers of vital reference letters when searching for work/employment, acquiring free government goods like masks and mosquito nets, offering safety and protection for the residents in the event of violent conflict and mediation of the same. Some respondents, however, claimed that these services brought few benefits, especially where payment of fees/money was involved. According to the study data, households spend about UGX 21,855 on legal services.

Food supply

Source of food

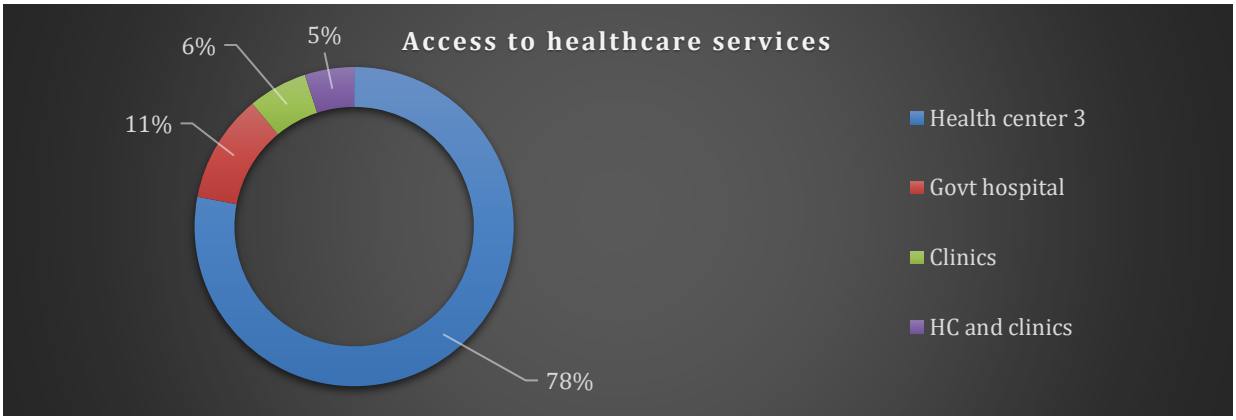
Data collected indicate that 92% of the surveyed respondents mainly source their food through both markets and subsistence. Less than 6% and 2% exclusively rely on the markets and self-provided food from their farms respectively.



Health care

Access to healthcare services

78% of the surveyed households access healthcare services from health centres III (Pabwo, Awer, Locar and Keyo, Kaladima). 11% access these services from a government hospital, while 6% access the same services from private clinics. A smaller percentage (5%) meet their health needs by accessing both options. These include ante-natal services, immunization and general medical attention. Children and mothers are disproportionately impacted by diseases that often result in loss of household resources (high cost of treatment and healthcare), loss of productive working days and children being unable to attend school. Households spend on average UGX 37,178 per month on healthcare.



J. Civic assets and psychological wellbeing

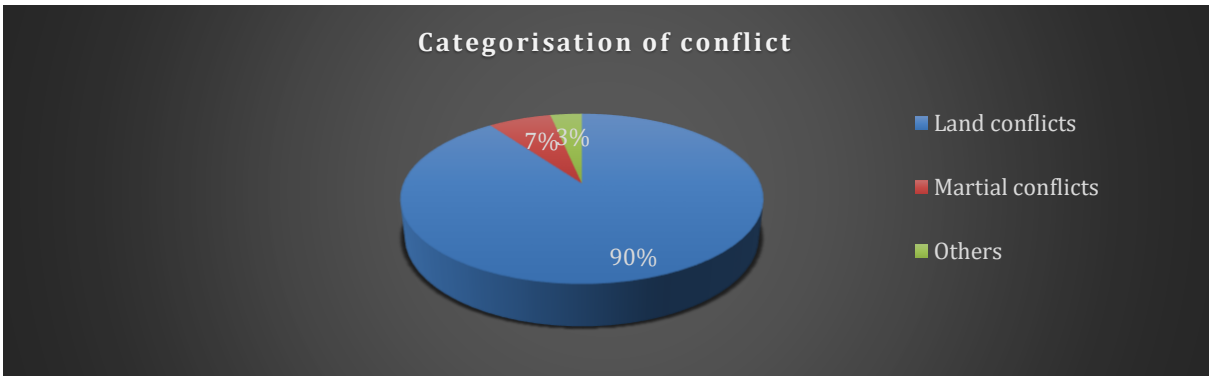
Experiences of dispossession in the past

At least 35% of the respondents engaged in the survey indicated that they had experienced displacement either due to the LRA insurgency or evictions by family members from their land. The experience of displacement and dispossession in past had affected these households emotionally given the subsequent loss of their properties, loss of businesses, employment and homes. They were experiencing difficult times adjusting accordingly having lost their family and social networks.

Status of social relations and land-related conflict

The majority of respondents claimed to have good relations with their neighbours. The reasons offered to back up these claims include the fact that they shared resources and services such as schools and water, the absence of conflict and tension, in addition to the existence of a strong and close kinship bonds given they shared culture (as Acholi). However, according to a small number of female household heads (4%), the social relations between neighbours and other communities were perceived to be poor, due to feelings of discrimination that had resulted in them being denied access to land.

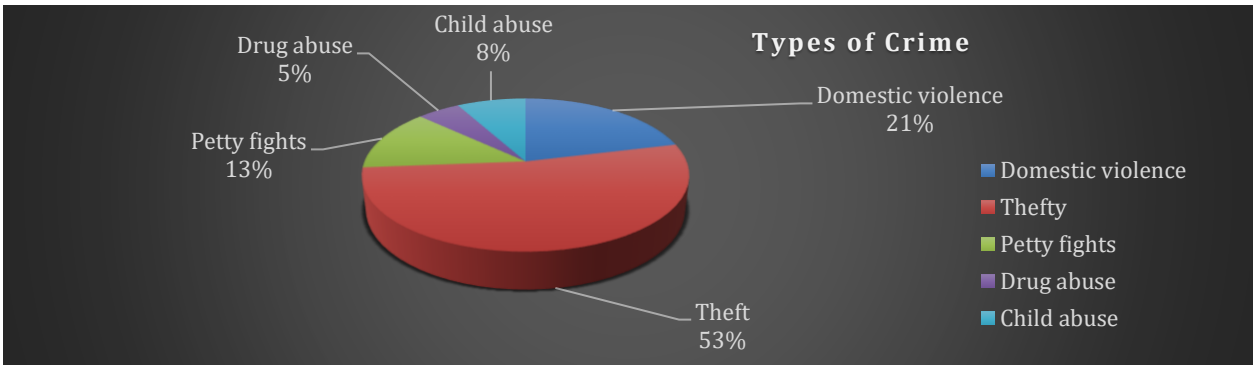
The majority of female respondents (90%), reported that land-related conflicts were prevalent among them and between different communities. These conflicts have manifested in form of displacement and dispossession of households from their land, a situation accentuated by the loss of life, propagating family and community feuds (tension, fights and hatred), which often culminates in dispossession and displacement, as well as loss of valuable assets/property (burning of houses).



K. Civic order

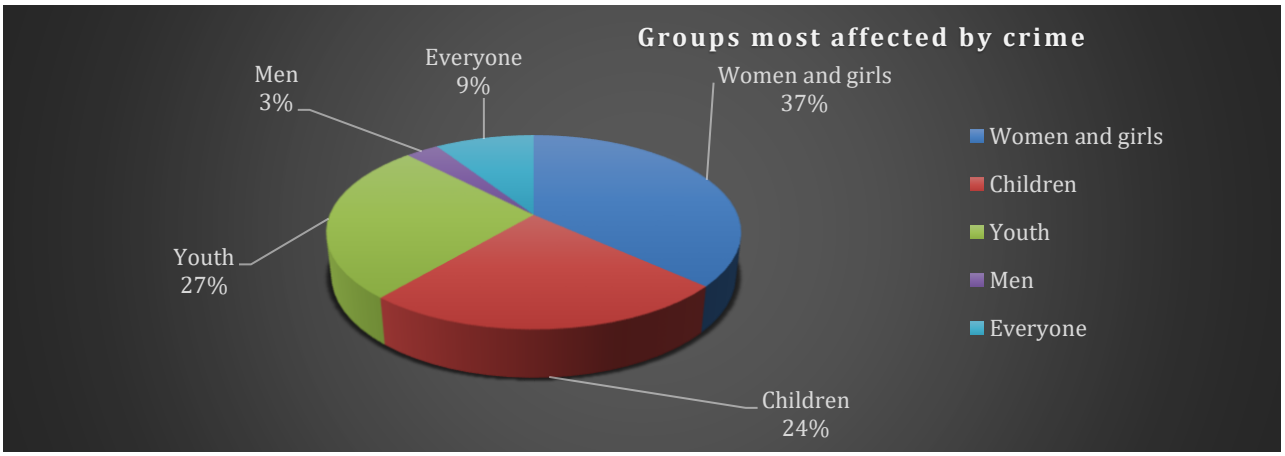
Conflict, crime and handling mechanisms

Respondents reported that conflict was resolved mostly through mutual negotiations/agreement, mediation and arbitration through community meetings and involvement of the police. Women reportedly also play important roles as mediators in conflict resolution processes. When asked about the nature of crime experienced in their area, respondents noted that theft, domestic violence, child abuse, drug abuse and petty fights were the most prominent.



Groups most affected by crime

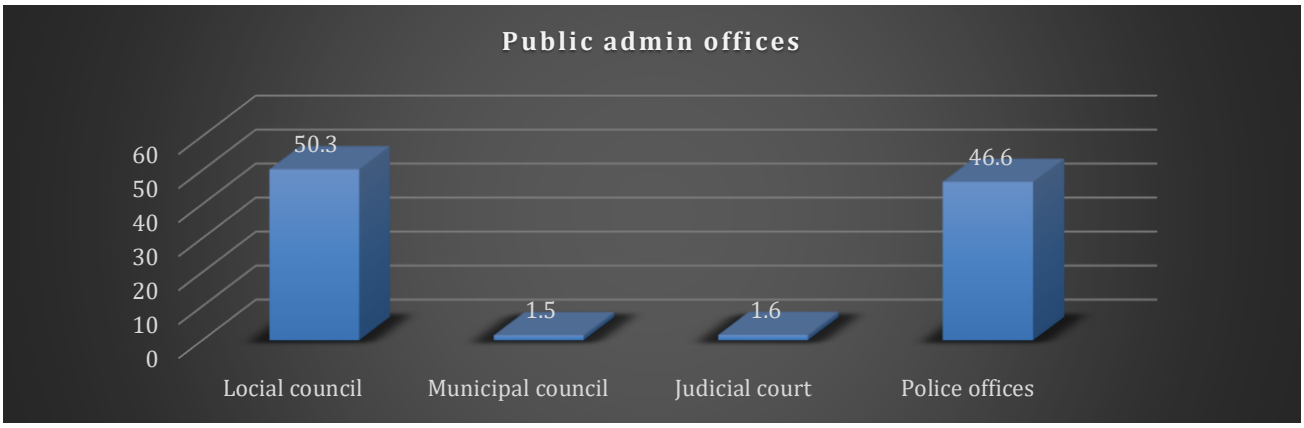
According to the data, women and girls appeared to be equally most affected by crime and violence (37% each), closely followed by children (24%) in form of child abuse and domestic violence. Men appear to be the least affected (9%).



L. Public/state services/expenditure

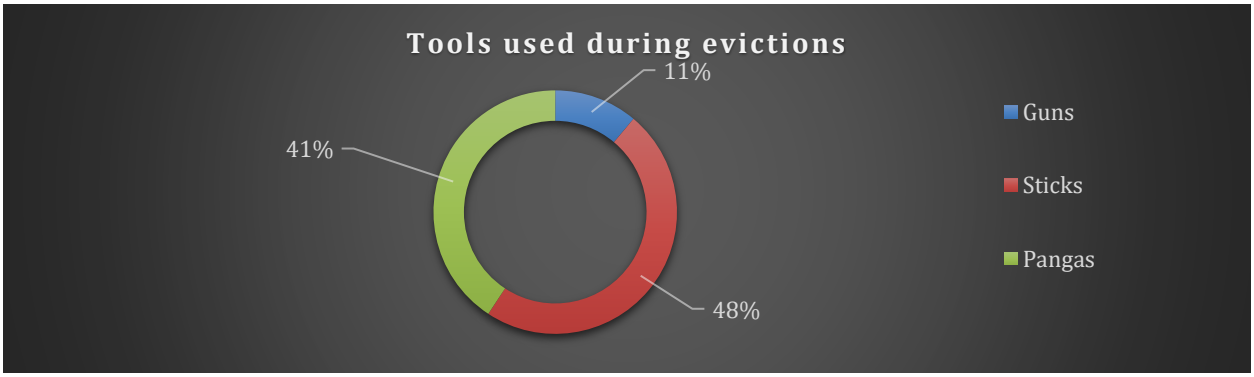
i. Bureaucracy and administration

Local council offices were ranked as the most accessible by survey respondents, followed by police offices, judicial courts and municipal offices respectively. Although these offices exist in varying proportions, 62% of the respondents pointed out an existence of costs involved to access them hence most (67%) reporting less than optimal satisfaction with their performance. This was attributed to corruption and unprofessionalism, especially by the police.

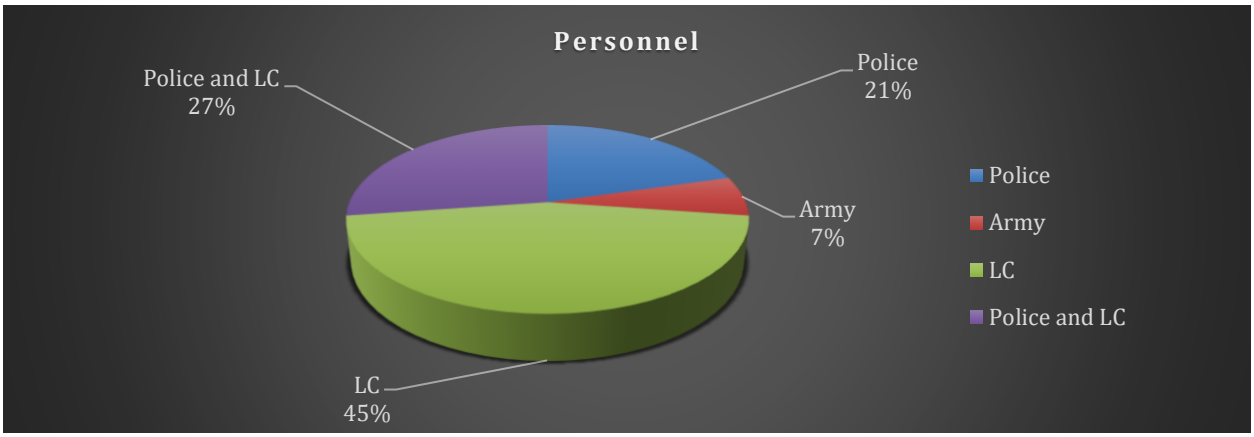


ii. Evictions: Personnel involved, prevalence and general conduct

46% of the surveyed respondents reported having witnessed family and clan members evicting/chasing other family and clan members from land. In some cases, clan leaders were explicitly involved in these evictions. Tensions over land ownership had escalated into physical fights between families and different clans. The gravity of these evictions was exemplified by the tools used, which included sticks, pangas and guns.

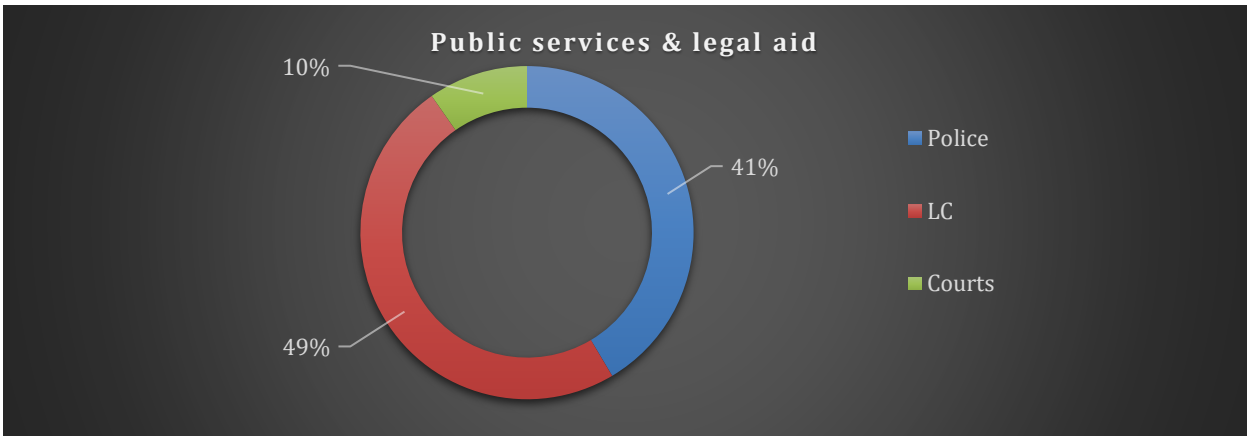


Local leaders (including clan leaders) acting unilaterally appear to be the ones who coordinate and effect the majority of forced evictions in the area under focus. These are closely followed by the police and LCs (working together), with the army being least involved in committing evictions.



Public services and legal aid

According to the survey, 49% of the respondents admitted to seeking support from their local council leaders legal-related services while 41% opt for the police. A very small proportion (10%) access the courts of law for legal support.



Police presence

According to the study, the average distance to the nearest police station is about 3.38 km. This translated into a minimum distance of 1 km and maximum distance of 5 km. The majority of survey respondents (59%) considered police services to be inadequate because police personnel always asked for money, were generally rude and very slow. Only 36% of the respondents considered police services to be satisfactory in terms of personnel availability, professionalism and acceptable levels of commitment to advise and help when needed.

Military presence

The majority of survey respondents reported no military presence in their community. For the few who affirmed otherwise, they attributed the military's presence to the need for protection of civilians, helping to maintain peace and also working as auxiliaries in supporting the central government's program to distribute PPE during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore,

they expressed preference for the military's presence over that of the police. This was attributed to the military being viewed to be considerably more professional in its work than the police.

Other public services

Respondents reported varying levels of accessibility to other equally critical public services. These include the array of infrastructure for healthcare, education, urban planning, sanitation, public information access and issuance of national documents. Healthcare (health centres) and education services (specifically primary education) appear to be relatively the most accessible based on the survey data.

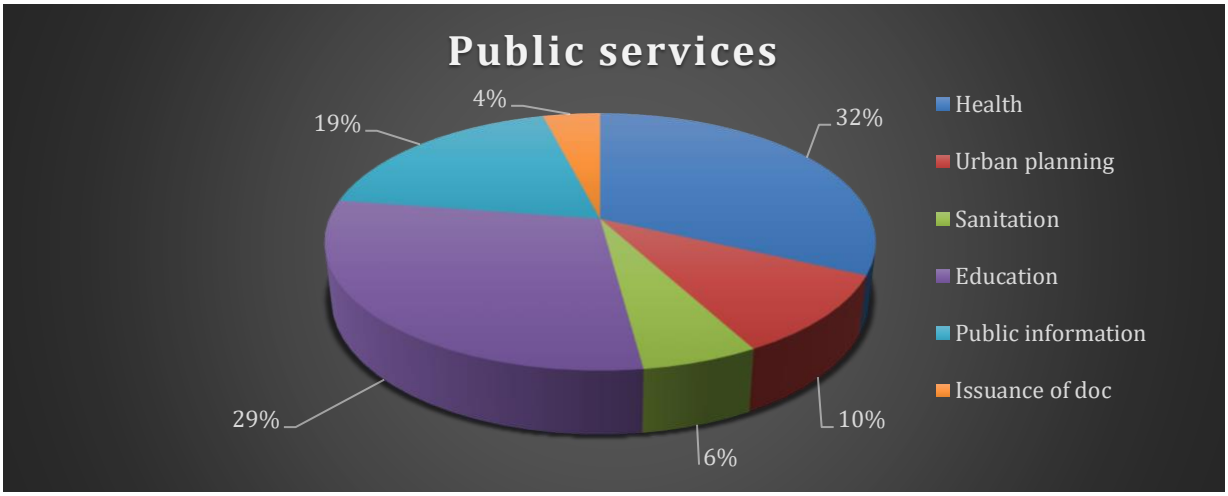


Figure 10: Survey researchers taking a break in the field. Source: SSA: UHSNET.

5. Evictions in Pabo and Keyo, Amuru District

It is clear from the emerging information that land is a critical resource on which the majority of households' livelihoods in Amuru Town Council are dependent. However, socio-economic and political disruptions have created immense challenges which continue to persist. Evictions, it appears, have become constant features of everyday life as people grapple with the multi-faceted impacts experienced at various levels of society (communal, clan, family and personal) be it economically, socially, emotionally, physically and psychological trauma.

5.1 Selected cases of affected women

From the broader group of the survey sample, a select group of women who have been personally impacted by gender-based land dispossession was documented and their first-hand accounts provide a basis for immediate intervention in form of legal aid/support.

Box 1: Selected cases of gender-based land dispossession

Amony Margaret got married in 1993 and settled with her first husband in Amuru. They had six children (four boys, two girls). During her marriage, she was subjected to domestic violence by her husband who would at times resort to using his machete. She ran away one day however, she returned and the violence resumed to the extent that the husband threatened to spear her.

On another occasion, he locked her in the house and set it on fire, but she was rescued by the neighbours. All the house property was destroyed during this episode and fearing for her life, her brother-in-law advised her to leave the man. Margaret left her husband in 2006.

Five years after she had left, her husband decided to sell all the family land without leaving anything for the children. He bought himself a small piece of land in Alero but never considered the children. Her children from this marriage could not make any claims on their father's land because he effectively disowned and abandoned the family.

Margaret eventually remarried and currently has two children in addition to the six from her first marriage. She only has about three acres of land which is not adequate to support her current family of four, in addition to the six children from the previous marriage who are living with her parents. Margaret is not receiving any support from her first husband to take care of their six children. She has sought assistance from the various authorities but has failed to get any assistance to help her secure support from her first husband.

Abu Grace was previously married with four children (three girls and one boy). In 2007, toward the end of LRA insurgency, her husband was killed when she was two months pregnant with their last child, the boy. After she lost her husband, her brother-in-law dispossessed her from her late husband's land. She tried to resist her removal from the land, but her in-laws eventually forced her out.

The in-laws exploited the traditional patriarchal norms that because, by then, she had only daughters. She would presumably have no use for the land, since all the girls would eventually get married off and move away. Grace's brother-in-law took her back to her parents.

When she eventually had her last child, the boy, she tried to secure some land from the brother-in-law, but experienced resistance from him and other in-laws. They insisted that her son would only be offered some land once he was of age. When her son eventually came of age and returned to claim his inheritance from the in-laws, he found that the land had been sold off. Instead, he was offered two acres, which was too small. Later on, an uncle sold off one acre of this land. The son eventually got fed up and went to live with his mother. Grace has also failed to find the support she needs to seek restitution after she was dispossessed by her in-laws.

The previous cases are not dissimilar to the situations of other women who have been, or are living under the threat or have been affected by gender-based land dispossession.

Box 2: Selected cases of gender-based land dispossession

Apiyo Idah, a 64-year-old widow came from Ofwal, Apac. She lives in Lamogi division, Palema parish, Pakiri village with her two-primary school-going grandchildren. Her husband's death triggered land conflicts that escalated between herself and his relatives. Her in-laws destroyed her home as the conflict escalated and that forced her to move from Apac to her current home. She bought the land she occupies currently and uses the land for crop growing and keeping livestock, which are her main sources of income and sustenance.

Achom Julian was abandoned by her husband several years ago, leaving her to take care of their children on her own. Later on, the land on which they had started a home was later grabbed by her husband's relatives. This left her homeless and without a means of livelihood to take care of her children from the failed marriage.

Lalam Susan, who is currently living in Palema, left her marital home in Pabbo due to gender-based violence. She now lives on her uncle's land but her uncle's children keep threatening to chase her away because she's a woman and, culturally, she has no claim to their father's land.

Lamwaka Christine, a 36-year-old widow living in Lamogi division, Palema parish Amilobo village is living under the threat of eviction. She and her four children (two boys and two girls who are all still in primary school) face an uncertain future as a result. She is a farmer growing upland rice, sorghum, beans and cassava which she depends on for subsistence. She came from Lacor in Gulu when she got married to her husband in Palema. She built the house she lives in and inherited the land.

Anena Santa, an illiterate 50-year-old widow, living in Pabbo division Kal Parish, Lumule village acts as a caretaker on the land where she is living. She cultivates a range of food crops for subsistence and earning an income. She is originally from Poko, Amuru, where she was chased by in-laws after the death of her husband.

These selected cases are only but a few that illustrative of the typical, deeply socio-culturally rooted nature of gender-based land dispossession as it is unfolding in Amuru District, Northern Uganda. Aside from corroborating the disproportionate impact of dispossession and displacement on women and by extension, girls, they specifically highlight the impacts of land-based evictions on specific groups of women like widows and women whose marriages breakdown due to domestic disagreements, abuse and violence. The continued failure to address these evictions is likely to worsen the condition of women and girls in relation to equitable access to vital livelihood resources such as land.

5.2 Community conflict resolution and restitution mechanisms: A potent tool for addressing socio-culturally induced gender-based land dispossession

The existence of numerous cases that require investigation and detailed documentation notwithstanding, evidence elicited through the field survey and additional interviews discussions with local actors suggests that community conflict resolution mechanisms hold significant potential as a starting point toward building a template for more sustainable structures to address the pervasive challenge of socio-culturally rooted gender-based dispossession in Amuru District and elsewhere in Uganda's northern region. This was exemplified by another case that emerged during discussions WACU, a key local development actor in this area.

Box 3: Local mediation and conflict resolution

Santa …, a senior community leader and a board member of West Acholi Cooperative Union (WACU), demonstrated the value of locally based community conflict resolution toward addressing issues related to dispossession and displacement. Following the case of a woman whose husband, a solider deployed in Mbarara, southwestern Uganda, had abandoned her with their five children, Santa intervened when the woman's in-laws tried to evict her and the children from the land where she had been left by her husband. Santa led efforts to mediate in the matter, first by counselling the woman, because she had become suicidal. After successfully counselling the woman, Santa hosted took her in her home for a year, until the two parties (the woman and her in-laws) reconciled recently in 2020. The woman was allowed to reoccupy the land from which she had been evicted.

The value of the above community-based conflict resolution was reinforced by the Palokere LC 1 chairperson. He confirmed that, as local leaders, they receive many cases like the above and they try to help resolve them by acting as mediators and also to support enforcement of agreed resolutions, where possible/necessary. They have also tried to educate the local communities about the rights especially of widows who are highly vulnerable by enabling them to reacquire land where they have been evicted. In other cases, they intervene where absentee fathers neglect their responsibilities in the event that they develop irreconcilable differences with their wives, which often lead to family breakups. For the more-complex cases where mediation fails, they refer them to higher authorities, including the police.

5.3 Impacts of socio-culturally induced gender-based land dispossession

Data and information generated from this study suggests that the scale and magnitude of habitat and home evictions in Amuru District and other parts of this region are manifesting in various ways. A sizeable proportion of respondents have witnessed socio-culturally induced dispossession, which is a strong indicator of a pervasive problem that remains under-reported. The explicit identification of actors like some family and clan members evicting other families and clan members from land, aided by clan leaders as a result of tensions over land ownership is valid evidence to support further interrogation of the complex dynamics behind this phenomenon. The impacts of socio-culturally induced dispossession and displacement of households from their land and homes has cascaded into a series of multi-dimensional socio-economic challenges: resulted in loss of life, escalation of family/clan land-related conflicts, homelessness, splintering of families, socio-cultural alienation, as well as resulting in the loss of valuable assets.

A. A. Homelessness and broken families

Female-headed households that have been evicted or threatened with the same have subsequently lost their homes. Being uprooted from their more familiar surroundings has forced evicted families to move and relocate to rebuild their livelihoods. Based on the accounts of affected households, many tend to move from previously decent and adequate surroundings to less acceptable conditions. Inevitably, evictions have almost always been followed by the systematic disruption and breakdown of families.

B. Loss of assets and livelihoods disruption

Dispossession had significantly disrupted household livelihoods given the fact that vital assets such as houses, tools, personal documents, furniture and crops were more than often lost in the process. Evictions in Amuru were generally reported to be sudden and violent. Reports of houses being burned and crops destroyed appeared to be the norm. Subsequently, vital assets were almost always lost during these processes.

C. Fractured social relationships/networks and socio-cultural alienation

Socio-culturally based land/home evictions in Amuru were also reported to have affected commonly-held cultural norms and values. Evicted female-households had become more isolated after losing important kinship bonds/ties as a result of growing mistrust and suspicion which in turn are fertile breeding ground for feuds, violence and conflict. Families have been broken up in cases where widows remarry or become estranged from extended family/in-laws.

Propelled into hopelessly and desperate situations, many of these families are struggling to meet their basic needs, being dependent on relatives and NGOs. The evictions that have mostly affected women in Amuru have also led to extensive loss and collapse of vital social networks and relationships that had been nurtured over time.

Social networks are those ties between actors, defined by the extent of interactions that shape how these actors are able to work toward certain common goals and objectives. These networks mediate the flow and exchange of resources. Social networks, when universally accessible undoubtedly impact the overall wellbeing of individuals and the collective community. The evictions create gaps within the social fabric, which manifest in differentiated levels of vulnerability and deprivation, especially for evictees. Respondents and key informants reported that the loss of familial or kinship and friendship ties had led to heightened levels of physical and emotional insecurity.

D. Socio-psychological trauma

This was another notable impact of these evictions taking place in Amuru. In sharing and narrating their stories, many women were evidently emotional, especially given the violent experiences they have endured. The pervasiveness of these evictions points to a widening mental-health gap that requires urgent attention. Many women who had experienced an

eviction, or were threatened by such, were observed to be distressed and disturbed by these experiences, which appear to have affected their self-esteem, confidence and identity in society.

E. Mistrust, suspicion and anxiety in land-related discussions

The scale and magnitude of gender-based land dispossession in Amuru has created an environment of deep mistrust, suspicion and anxiety over any discussions regarding land especially by state agencies and others external actors. According to information from key informants, the apparent failure by the government, as duty bearer, to address the gross human rights violations that have accompanied land and home evictions has fuelled a discernible wave of anxiety, mistrust and doubt in the intentions of the government and other actors regarding any land-related discussions, let alone potential development programs.

F. Uncertain futures

Further discussions with key informants raised critical questions regarding the futures of generations of children raised in this kind of disruptive and unstable environment. It appears the impacts of these gender-based evictions will have far-reaching repercussions not only on the women who have been primarily affected, but also children who have inadvertently become the 'invisible' victims. There appears to be an acute absence of any reparative mechanism for addressing this. Aside from the day-to-day hardships, children are exposed to in relation to accessing adequate shelter, food and water, the evictions force them to drop out of, or change schools, rebuild new friendships, while also denying them of the emotional stability offered by the extended family. Growing up in such an environment has affected their sense of self-worth and confidence as members of their local communities, which is complicating community efforts to build meaningful and sustainable futures.

G. Escalation of land-related abuse, conflict and violence

The continued gender-based land dispossession has contributed to fuelling conflict, violence and abuse within communities in Amuru. Local leaders reported that land-related conflict, violence and abuse was among the major problems they have to deal with on a daily basis. Given that they lack the capacity acquired from relevant training, tools and facilitation, they are inadequately equipped to respond effectively to the many cases that are reported. The failure to adequately respond to the escalating violence, abuse and conflict related to gender-based evictions is gradually eroding the socio-culturally constructed values that the home and land have traditionally provided in the form of wellbeing, stability, belonging, important memories, life experiences and aspirations.

5.4 Triggers and drivers of socio-culturally induced gender-based land dispossession

The nature and process of land evictions unfolding in Amuru District has been triggered and driven by several notable factors. The key triggers and drivers identified during discussions with respondents and key informants include:

I. The LRA insurgency played a key role as both a trigger and driver of the evictions that have disproportionately affected women/female headed households in Amuru. The insecurity and

uncertainty created by the insurgency disrupted and weakened both the traditional socio-cultural and contemporary institutional infrastructures that were meant act as checks and balances to ensure order, justice and accountability, by opportunists. Households were forcefully removed from their ancestral lands in rural areas such as Amuru to 'protected camps/settlements,' and this helped to perpetuate evictions especially of female-headed households.

II. In a largely patriarchal society, where women remain excluded from matters regarding land usage and rights coupled with the absence of any kind of arrangements to cater for families in the event of the loss of the male household heads, widows and orphans are vulnerable to being dispossessed and evicted, especially by in-laws. Findings suggest that the sudden loss of male family heads, either during the LRA insurgency, or under other circumstances, has played a major role in triggering and driving evictions, especially those perpetrated by predatory and opportunistic in-laws.

III. The subsequent fracturing of the area's previously paternalistic socio-cultural institutions as a result of the LRA insurgency created a 'socio-cultural vacuum.' This situation created the perfect opportunity for predatory individuals and groups to take advantage of the absence of social institutions. This is corroborated by the data that suggests that the diminishing and weakening of traditional socio-cultural systems has forced many to resolve land-related conflicts through mutual negotiations between/among feuding families/groups themselves. Conflict resolution through communal meetings and police involvement appears to be employed as a secondary option or last resort where the former fails. With the collapse of the traditional social institutions built around clan elders providing leadership and guidance, any protections that would have been used as recourse against unlawful evictions were lost. Thus, this set in motion the numerous evictions that have affected the region up-to-date.

IV. Coupled with an inadequate, ineffective and highly compromised land adjudication mechanism, land commodification is another important trigger and driver of socio-culturally induced dispossession in Amuru. A surge in demand for land especially for development given the high population growth rates has created adequate conditions for land evictions. A class of politicians, military officials and entrepreneurs has emerged, seeking to access cheap, fertile and apparently vacant land in areas such as Northern Uganda. Without adequate state regulation of the highly informalized land market, these predatory group of actors are using their political and economic position to profiteer from the displacement of communities in Northern Uganda from their land by conniving with local actors to secure them large tracts of land for developments such as large-scale commercial agriculture.

6. Key reflections and recommendations

These findings strongly suggest that socio-culturally induced gender-based land dispossession, though still relatively 'invisible' in the broader conversation around development in Northern Uganda, is an existential challenge that is having a serious impact on the welfare, wellbeing and quality of life of communities in areas such as Amuru District.

6.1 Key reflections

Without a doubt, the study's findings clearly show that socio-culturally induced gender-based land dispossession has had quite a significant effect especially on highly vulnerable groups like women/female headed households. The scale and magnitude of the disruptions rooted in this phenomenon have especially raised several issues that need deeper reflection by the different actors involved in facilitating the region's development process:

I. There appears to be an urgent need to reconceptualise habitat and home in the wider discussions around development in the region. More importantly, this discussion needs to consider how to mainstream gender as a critical aspect when conceptualising habitat-related human rights, impacts of land evictions and mechanisms for redress. Embedding this aspect in this discourse is critical to provide an adequate understanding of gender-based dispossession and developing ways of addressing it.

II. Secondly, it appears there is limited space or the existing ones are not accessible to enable women not only to share and report their experiences, but also to find means of seeking

redress for the injustices that they have and continue to suffer as a consequence of socio-culturally induced gender-based land dispossession.

III. Thirdly, although the impacts of socio-culturally induced gender-based land dispossession are obviously pervasive, based on emerging data, personal and anecdotal accounts, uncertainty remains about the exact quantification of their scale and magnitude, partly due to the absence of effective reporting and monitoring mechanisms.

6.2 Recommendations

Community voices for addressing socio-culturally induced gender-based land dispossession

Following discussions with key actors and some of the survey respondents during fieldwork and the validation of the findings, the following were highlighted as key for addressing the challenge of evictions faced especially by female-headed households in Amuru:

I. Scaling-up the promotion of locally driven multi-actor dialogue and mediation framework amongst households, families and clans where land-related conflicts have been reported. Respondents and other key informants recommended that this process needed to involve area local leaders (LCs) and clan elders with authorities such as police providing support where mediation was unsuccessful.

II. It was also recommended that a major socio-cultural campaign was urgently needed to help transform the existing socio-cultural norms and values, with specific focus on addressing the intersectionality of land rights/ownership and women's rights generally. The relevance of this particular aspect was exemplified by a WACU board member who explicitly pointed out that '...Acholi culture is bad...,' in reference to the entrenched patriarchal Acholi culture, which forbids and excludes women from owning land.

III. Mobilizing and training women and men from local communities, local leaders, public officials and other non-state actors to plan, build and implement a 'social architecture' for providing access to support (including counselling, aid – legal, in-kind compensation such as alternative land) for particularly vulnerable groups such as women who are disproportionately impacted by gender-based land dispossession in Amuru.

Proposed interventions

The data from the study provided a particularly interesting perspective about the unfolding geographies of socio-culturally induced gender-based land dispossession. Certainly, it provoked deeper thinking about how to engage more innovative solutions to this challenge through raising awareness of local communities and other development actors about it and the existential threats/risks it poses, the extent, scale and magnitude of its impacts/disruptions, how to provide reparations (restitution, return, resettlement, rehabilitation, compensation, guarantees of non-repetition and satisfaction) and support for those who are affected, in addition to anticipating future actions that might accelerate/perpetuate this challenge.

Subsequently, several issues emerged as vital entry points especially for testing immediate, low-cost interventions with potentially high returns in contributing toward addressing the challenge of socio-culturally gender-based land dispossession specifically in Amuru:

(a) First and foremost, it is proposed that the select group of women, whose cases have been documented through this study as having been disproportionately affected by evictions, be mobilized and offered legal aid following a set timetable. Support should involve legal advice and follow-up of their cases in courts of law until some form of redress is actualized. Periodic follow-up and updates would then be provided for each case before new cases are taken on.

(b) Targeted micro-scale interventions around appropriate neighbourhood/settlement planning and housing technologies to promote liveable human settlements can potentially provide a platform for helping to address the impacts of gender-based evictions by through improvement of the welfare and wellbeing of affected communities. This reclassification of a predominantly rural settlement implies that over the next decade, urbanisation will accelerate in Amuru with an increase in specialised urban land uses, along with significant demographic shifts. These are likely to be accompanied by new pressures and, therefore, targeted interventions prioritising vulnerable female-headed households who can be mobilised into housing cooperatives should be explored, piloted and scaled-up to act as a catalyst for appropriate land use planning, adoption of more sustainable and affordable housing technologies will go some way in promoting liveable human urban settlements that will ensure greater social and tenure security, services such as sanitation, waste management, water supply, human mobility/accessibility, personal safety, in addition to land use optimisation for higher productivity.

(c) The need exists to undertake more research to better understand this form of dispossession in its various dimensions. The study triggered several pertinent questions that need to be examined further if this phenomenon is to be better understood. Key questions that need to be addressed in future research include the following: what exactly is the scale and magnitude of the (un)known cases? What are the specific triggers and drivers? Who benefits/gains from these processes? How can the capacities of key state actors (i.e., local governments such as the town councils, police and the judiciary) be improved to better handling the challenges created by socio-culturally induced displacement? How can the different mechanisms be integrated for optimum outcomes? How can the traditional socio-cultural structures be rebuilt, strengthened and transformed to help generate local solutions to socio-culturally induced dispossession? How can non-state actors such as social movements, cooperative unions and NGOs be co-opted to help address this challenge? What role have programmes ongoing across the northern region played?

(d) Mobilisation and development of a multi-actor working partnership/working group focussing on gender-based evictions that enrols all relevant state ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), the local government, local communities and civil society, the private sector,

professional bodies, academia and development partners at various scales. Through this multi-actor partnership/working group/arrangement, a diverse range of resources (financial, capacities/expertise, data/information and influence can be harnessed to deliver targeted interventions for social transformative change.

The above are more immediate proposed interventions that could open up possibilities and opportunities for more concerted, long-term interventions to both prevent and remedy gender-based dispossession in Amuru and other areas in Northern Uganda.

Figure 11: Cultivated area in rural Amuru District. Source: Amuru District Local Government.

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