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## Women, Land tenure security and livelihoods in Amuru District, Uganda.

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### **ABSTRACT**

Amuru district in northern Uganda has had intense land rights violations over the past fourteen years. There have been large scale land investments for commercial agriculture and other activities with limited community engagement. In many families men have sold off family land to 'investors' without consultation of their wives. The wave of commercialization and individualization of land has negatively affected women's tenure security and livelihoods.

### **Goals and Objectives**

This paper analyses the nexus between women's tenure security and livelihoods in Amuru District.

### **Methodology**

The study used an explanatory sequential mixed methods design and a total of 159 women were reached in Amuru, Lamogi, Atiak and Pabbo sub-counties of Amuru District.

### **Results**

Women were facing intense land rights struggles as communal land tenure was losing its grip to a more individualised and commercialised tenure system. Women's livelihoods mainly attained through agriculture were under threat, however women have demonstrated agency and resilience which this paper will document. Women have used their income to buy land and solidify their land claims by documenting their land jointly or independently. Women have also used their farming groups to open up more land and their village savings group to finance their livelihood activities that besides agriculture include charcoal burning, trading and brewing alcohol.

### **Keywords:**

*Women, land tenure security, livelihoods, agency, Amuru, Uganda*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Access to or ownership of land greatly strengthens women's bargaining position in the domestic sphere and provide the opportunity to secure other social and economic rights (Palmer, 2002). Paradza, Mokwena and Musakwa (2020:3) argue that women need secure access to land because they are highly dependent on the resource for their welfare, productivity, and empowerment as well as fulfilling their productive and reproductive responsibilities. They note that when women control land, they have increased bargaining power in their communities and households; in addition, access to land has a positive impact on children's welfare and education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Chigbu substantiates that women's right to access land is a critical factor for their empowerment and household socio-economic wellbeing in sub-Saharan Africa. Women's right to land access is a factor in social capital, independence of cultural identity and participation in local decision making (Chigbu, 2019:127). Women's access to and control over resources and economic decision making is fundamental to the achievement of their rights (NAPE, NAWAD& WOMANKIND,2018).

The debate on women's land rights has been growing since the 1970s with many scholars and world bank taking the lead. The Evolutionary Theory of Land Tenure (ETLT) prominent in land discussions from the 1980s contended that population pressure, together with commercialization of agriculture, would put pressure on land resources and would lead to increased individualization of land access, increased conflicts between land users and a growing demand for more formal property rights (Plateau,1992 in Whitehead and Tsikata 2003:81).

Evidence has shown that women lose out in the process of formalization particularly in land titling programs since many cannot afford the process of land registration. There is a huge debate among feminists whether customary or statutory systems are more gender equitable or inequitable (Fonjong,2016, Jackson,2003, Rugadya,2020). Lastarria argues that women who became heads of household were particularly vulnerable, when their access to land was through their husbands and fathers; they often lost their property rights as a consequence of widowhood, divorce, or desertion (Lastarria, 2009:2). Another debate arises from whether women should have joint ownership with their husbands or independent rights. Co-ownership it is argued would promote women's participation in decisions about use of land and provide security of tenure which would create incentives for women to improve and invest in land (Asiimwe 2001:80). Agarwal argues that independent rights would be more preferable than joint titles because with joint titles it would be difficult for women to gain control over their share in case of marital break down; women would be

less able to escape from marital conflict or violence. In addition, wives may have different land use priorities from husbands, women with independent rights would be better placed to control the produce and with joint titles the question on how the land would be inherited would prove contentious (Agarwal 1994:1460).

## **2. The Trajectory of Land Rights in Amuru District, Northern Uganda.**

Amuru district in northern Uganda has had intense struggles for land rights for nearly a decade. Amuru district is a post-conflict community recovering from the brunt of the Lord's Resistance Army rebellion that caused internal displacement, sexual and gender-based violence, a breakdown of the cultural and moral fabric and great impoverishment. Internal displacement left lands unutilized for years, a distortion of land claims and new interests in land. The district is mainly inhabited by the Acholi ethnic community although there are small pockets of other ethnicities like Baganda (who majorly come to trade) and Madi who neighbor the district.

Mabikke (2011:5) notes that the most common land disputes arose out of illegal occupation by early returnees or shifting of boundary marks from original positioning. Bartlett and Dhizaala argue that differences between natural markers that had historically been known by the population and sanctioned by chiefs and other local leaders were now in contest with cadastral markers created by authorities and those who had the ability to map land with more modern tools.

There have been multiple interests and multiple actors in the land struggles in the district. Uganda Wild life Authority (UWA) has had intense struggles with communities over a supposed wild life corridor. Two sugar cane factories namely Madivani Sugar Works and Atiak Sugar works limited have also abused women's and community land rights in the district. Other scholars have witnessed individual investors coming in without community consent to override their land rights.

A case in point was noted by Serwajja (2017) in which local communities of Apaa village had been evicted from their land on numerous occasions with the sole purpose of paving way for its alienation to Lake Albert Safaris Ltd. Sjogren notes that there were already long-standing rumors of investors targeting land; the Madivani group in January 2007 made public its intentions to acquire land in Acholi to cover an out-grower plantation for sugar cane, the proposal triggered strong protests (Sjorgen,2014:69-70). Martiniello gives a vivid picture of some of the occurrences "On Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2012; between 80 and 100 women from Amuru District in northern Uganda stripped naked before representatives of the local district board and surveyors of the Madivani group." (Martiniello,

2015). The Madivani group were seeking 40,000ha of land in the area for commercial sugar cane farming. (Martiniello, 2015, Sjorgen,2014).

## **2.1 Women's Land Rights in Amuru District.**

Women in Amuru District have been victimized during land rights struggles. Women have majorly claimed their land rights through marriage and bearing a male child given that the tenure system is customary and patrilineal. Women accessed land mainly through their husbands and any misunderstandings in their marriage could severely impact on their land rights. I found that women's individual characteristics mattered a lot in their struggle for land rights that included age, marital status, number and sex of children, level of education and income or asset profile.

Manifestations of land conflicts were evictions and displacements, the loss of home and identity in which women and children suffered most. Ebila and Tripp describe another protest, 17 April 2015, Acholi women from Apaa in Amuru District, in northern Uganda undressed before two government ministers who had come to try to pacify the population and assure them that no one was to be displaced from their land. They provide this narrative; "the women, some stark naked, others baring their breasts, wept and threw themselves on the ground, revealing their utter contempt, frustration and anger against the Uganda government's orchestrated evictions of families in Apaa. As the women engaged the government officials naked, other community members, including men, burst into a chorus of wailing, drawing on funereal tropes" (Ebila & Tripp,2017:2).

Stripping naked by elderly women in the Acholi culture was at the core of protest and clearly portrayed their agency as land was almost the only asset left for the Acholi people. The two-decade armed conflict denied the Acholi sub-region education, loss of cattle, breakdown of the social fiber and humanity being confined in internally displaced people's camps for decades (Branch 2005). Apecu postulates that women had fragile land rights in Amuru district, as they faced a triple bound; the existent interests in land, the multiple tiers in tenure that complicated land rights and culture and custom that created gendered inequalities for women's land access (Apecu,2018).

The food and agricultural organization advance that land tenure is the relationship, whether legally or customarily defined, among people, as individuals or groups, with respect to land. They define security of tenure as the certainty that a person's rights to land will be recognized by others and protected in cases of specific challenges. They argue that full security could arise only when there was full private ownership (freehold) as, under such tenure, the time for which the rights could be held was not limited to a fixed period. They explain that only an owner enjoyed secure rights, and

holders of lesser rights, such as tenants, had insecure tenure because they were dependent on the will of the owner. It is then implied that security of tenure comes only with holding transfer rights such as the rights to sell and mortgage (FAO,2002).

Agarwal defines rights to land as claims that are legally and socially recognized and enforceable by an external legitimized authority, be it at a village-level institution or some higher level or executive body of the state. She notes that access to land could be through ownership, use or informal concessions granted by individuals to kin or friends. Control had to do with decision making about how land was used, how its produce was disposed of or whether it could be leased mortgaged or sold off (Agarwal 1994:1459). Wanyeki (2003) notes that land rights were not only rights to access and control land as a productive resource but also rights to information and decision making. Odeny (2013) strengthens this argument by adding that land was an important source of security against poverty in Africa, but unequal rights to land put women at a disadvantage, perpetuated poverty and entrenched gender inequalities. Women still lacked decision making power and effective land administration required women's participation. In many land structures I found only one woman among ten men in the committees which did not reflect the a third that Uganda was striving for.

Uganda's land problem emanates from the fact that as an agrarian economy the value of land is naturally high as a strategic socio- economic asset, where wealth and survival are measured by control of, and access to land. In addition, Uganda's population is growing at a high rate of 3.2 per cent and is projected to shoot up to 39.3 million in the year 2015 and 54.9 million in 2025 due to high fertility rate (6.7) this relatively high level of population growth has led to increased land scarcity (Rugadya 2006:1-2). The challenging elements of Uganda's land question are to do with disentangling the multiple and conflicting tenure rights and interests often overlapping over the same piece of land (Uganda Land Policy, 2013).

A woman's vulnerability stemmed from the idea that under customary law, "the woman did not own land in her own right". A woman relied on other people to validate her land claims, "her parents till she married, thereupon her husband, and if he died, on her children; this meant that she was always dependent" (Adoko & Levine 2005:19). Although Adoko and Levine talk about this in relation to Apac district also in northern Uganda, the plight of women's land rights was exactly the same in Amuru district. Customary tenure made women dependent on their male kin and made the execution of patriarchal norms easier in relation to women's land rights. One patriarchal norm that was over emphasised in Amuru district was the bearing of a male child as cementing a woman's tenure

security. Male children were referred to as “*okutu lango*” in the Acholi language translated as thorns that could not be removed or become extinct. In essence it meant that male children remained on their father’s land and protected it, unlike girls who were married into another clan.

Insecurities in tenure directly impacted on livelihoods; with multiple claims on land women became victims of land-related violence culminating into food insecurity. Displacements and evictions resulted into loss of homes, identity and social standing. Lack of social networks and friends as a result of displacement made labour seeking for farming, or joining development-oriented groups difficult. Women faced double-discrimination in relation to their land rights one emanating from gender and the other from displacement including the dehumanisation that came with it. Land tenure insecurity meant that women would not be able to enjoy other rights as well, the right to health, education, political participation for themselves and their children. We found a number of women who had been displaced from the conflict ridden Apaa village in the then Pabbo-subcounty and were being hosted by relatives and well-wishers in Lamogi sub-county and part of Pabbo sub-county. It’s important to note that Apaa village is now in Adjumani district and not Amuru districts as was the case when this study was conducted. The distortion of their livelihood trajectories was eminent, they had been reduced to beggars from productive farmers. These women were beginning to hire out land to farm and were determined to work hard and buy their own land.

### **3.Methods.**

The study used an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, it was carried out between July 2018 and July 2019 in Amuru District. We began by collecting quantitative data in the first phase, analysed the results and then used the results to build up the qualitative phase. We first collected quantitative data from 159 women in the sub-counties of Amuru, Lamogi, Atiak and Pabbo in Amuru district. We analysed the findings to purposively select the different groups of women we would later invite for focus group discussions and to formulate the focus group discussions guides (Cresswell, 2014).

The research had two phases the qualitative phase and the quantitative phase. Quantitative data was used to provide statistical evidence of occurrences of land rights violations, who were involved, when it occurred, frequency of occurrence and if at all they were mitigated. On the qualitative side the phenomenological approach was used, phenomenology was concerned with human experience. The Phenomenological approach was useful to my research because it helped me explain land rights through the lenses of the age, gender, marital status, having male or female children, widowhood and so forth.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

### 4.1 The situation of Women's land Rights in Amuru District.

Table 1: Right to access land

Right to access Land	Frequency	Percent
No	7	4.4
Yes	152	95.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Work Data 2018.

The majority of women had access rights to land which included mainly the right to use land for farming in order to provide for the daily food intake and sustenance of the family. This right was attained upon arrival into a family as a prospective wife, which the Acholi referred to as 'poro'. 'Poro' is a trial marriage, it's an on-going practice and hard work is one of the yard sticks for a woman to begin to gain some land rights. In pre-conflict Acholi a garden was given to a prospective wife to test if she was hardworking before payment of bride price. Scheldt, Rowley and Babirye (2013:235) found out that formalized marriages were common before the conflict in northern Uganda and firmly established the relationship between the families of the bride and groom. In the post-conflict phase, it has become increasingly difficult for a man to pay bride wealth due to loss of cattle during the war and increased poverty.

Access meant that women were able to farm and plant crops which was the beginning of food security. It also ensured that women could invite labor in terms of friends, relatives, clan members or groups to assist in clearing the land throughout the agricultural period. This secured their livelihoods, the crops planted could be sold in the market to cater for basic needs and to open up more land; moving the family away from becoming vulnerable. Access rights were a precursor to gaining other rights that included control or decision-making rights and ownership rights. They were the starting point or foundation for gaining the bundle of rights as noted by a respondent.

*"Women have rights to use land and farm... but they don't own land because they are just married in the home... women have rights to make the garden free from weeds; planting of crops involves women and men respectively but weeding is solely the work of women. Women do all the work at home... they are beasts of burden. Women are stopped from making any decision over land ...it's the man's role. (FGD Atiak, 2019*

**Table 2: Right to control land.**

Right to Control Land	Frequency	Percent
No	102	64.2
Yes	57	35.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Work Data 2018.

The majority of women did not have the right to make decisions about the land they were working on; a marginal percentage had control over land as explained below.

*“Women’s voices were silenced when a woman brought out issues concerning land, she was stopped from saying anything because she was a mere woman and could not make any good decision over land. Women were susceptible to poverty because they did not have the right to decide what to plant without consulting men.”*

The lack of control rights for many women meant that they would not be able to add value to the land in terms of use of fertilizers and other agricultural inputs that improve yields. They are also unable to use the land as collateral for financial aid and to improve the infrastructure on the land. Doss, Summerfield and Tsikata argue that women’s changing relationships whether as members of landholding families, members of groups that do not own land, migrants and spouses of migrants, and divorcees or widows structure their access to and control of land. They argue that a woman’s relationship and social status would determine how vulnerable she was to being dispossessed in cases of land grabbing and growing land scarcity (Doss, Summerfield, & Tsikata, 2014). We find that a woman’s relationship with her husband’s kin and clan was critical for her continued security of tenure; in addition, her social status that included being hardworking, generous, hospitable increased her stake among her kin and community. Continued security of tenure on customary land for women was incumbent on her relationship with her husband’s kin rather than her legal rights as a married woman.

**Table 3: Right to ownership**

Right to own Land	Frequency	Percent
No	148	93.1
Yes	11	6.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Work Data 2018.

6.9% of women reported the right to use, control and transfer land either by, leasing or gifting but not selling. Selling of land could not be done by women entirely; they had to consult with other male members of the household for consensus. Elderly women like widows and mothers-in-law had authority in the home as senior members of the household to lease and gift land to their sons but not sell land. There were also some conditions set for women to be able to do this as explained in the focus groups.

*“For a woman to be able to lease or gift land, she should have been married in that family all her life, have had good conduct, birthed a son, known the history of the land including its boundary markers and neighbors, have had knowledge of the land conflicts and resolution processes (FGD with men, Amuru 2019)*

Asiimwe explains that land in Uganda was normally passed on through the male line from father to son. Patrilineal descent remained predominant in most rural areas of Uganda and as such there was the prevalence of male control over decision making, preference for male heirs that worked to the detriment of women’s land rights (Asiimwe, 2001).

Santos, Fletschner & Savath (2014) in the case of Rwanda note that women’s involvement in land related decisions was dependent on their age, marital status, their husband’s knowledge of women’s rights to land and community-level perceptions of the extent to which women’s land rights were mediated by their husband’s or kin. A lot of similarities tie in with the patriarchal ideologies discussed by Asiimwe and that we found in Amuru district. We noted more stringent measures attached to women with daughters only, divorced women returning home with male children than men. The rigidities attached to women were not attached to men, resulting into gender discrimination and an unfavorable situation for women to diversify and sustain their livelihoods. Women we engaged with throughout the study were unwilling to plough more hectares of land in situations where their husbands continued to solely make decisions on sale of proceeds from the land they had cultivated.

#### **4.1 The nexus between land tenure security and livelihoods.**

Holden and Ghebru (2016:22) emphasize that the rights of holders of land could be divided in three types of rights; user rights, mortgaging rights and transfer rights. This affects who produce on the land, whether they produce for home consumption or for the market and how this affects food security of owners and users of land as well as the supply of food through the market. Stronger user rights to land are likely to enhance investment and there by land productivity.

**Table 4: Livelihood’s women were engaged in Amuru District.**

Livelihood Activity	No of Responses	% of Responses
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Farming	147	43.2%
Charcoal Burning	65	19.1%
Brewing Alcohol	88	25.8%
Trading	35	10.2%
Others	5	1.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Work Data 2019.

### **Farming**

The majority of women were involved in agriculture, doing mostly subsistence farming to provide for the daily needs of their families. Some planted crops that could be sold in the market to earn additional income. Rice, groundnuts, simsim, maize, millet, cassava, beans and peas were the major food crops grown. Since almost all women had use rights to land, they were able to provide food for their families, however major decisions on land improvements leading to better crop yield could only be made by men.

### **Charcoal Burning**

Women were also involved in the charcoal business as charcoal burners or dealers. In the last ten years the 'black gold' or charcoal has been heavily mined in Amuru District by mainly traders from 'Kampala' the capital city who hired out hectares of land to fell trees for charcoal. In the last two months or so the game had changed to Kampala traders buying charcoal from the indigenous as forests had been depleted. There was a ready market for the product in the urban areas like Kampala and Gulu where charcoal was quickly sold off to an eagerly awaiting population. Women were part of the charcoal trade, they provided like fetching water and packaging; the actual burning of charcoal was mostly done by men. Notably some women also hired men to burn for them charcoal, this income directly went to them. On average a bag of charcoal was sold at 15,000-25,000 UGX (approximately 4-6\$) per bag at the burning site but when it reached Gulu city it fetched 40,000-50,000 Uganda shillings (approximately 11-13 \$) during peak season.

### **Brewing Alcohol**

Women were also involved in brewing alcohol to substantiate their income. They mostly brewed alcohol from cassava and millet which were largely available in the area. Alcohol sold out easily, there were local bars willing to buy, sometimes customers bought from the compound at which it was being made or it was sold on market days. Brewing alcohol although a quite labor-intensive activity quickly brought in money but also exposure to sexual and gender-based violence. Having a group of men drinking in a woman's compound could easily expose her to sexual violence especially if she did not have a husband.

### **Trading**

Some women were involved in petty trade in the market, selling mainly food items from their gardens or small golden fish locally referred to as 'lacede' which was acquired from Payimur in the West Nile region of Uganda. A number of women were also taking sweet potatoes and vegetables to Adjumani and Gulu districts for sale. These districts neighbor Amuru however it's important to note that transportation remained a major challenge in the district.

#### **4.2 How land tenure security impacted on women's livelihoods.**

##### ***Women's ability to meet educational needs:***

Half of the respondents were able to pay their children's fees on time, while the other half had their children always sent home for fees. In cases of arson, crops were burnt leaving women without income to pay school fees, during land contestations livestock were killed decreasing household assets that helped pay school fees. House hold income reduced as it was used to facilitate court related fees that ensued from tenure insecurity. Due to rampant land conflicts women argued that their children were always sent home for school fees, scholastic materials, because their crops were being destroyed in the garden.

##### ***Food security:***

Food production with reference to this study included both crop and livestock production. Less than half of the households in the study were able to grow enough food, growing enough food meant growing food that would last a family the whole year. A considerable number were unable to grow enough food as a result of fragile land rights emanating from evictions and displacement or threats and violence that ensued when a woman went to plough contested land. A significant number of women were also denied land to use for farming, this meant that they would have no place to farm and if they were not able to hire land or go to farm in their natal homes their ability to have food throughout the year was problematic. Women were already seen as temporary visitors in their natal home and as a result could not attain permanent land rights if marital problems arose. 19.6% had their crops destroyed as a result of land conflicts, as was the case the assailants would wait for the crops to almost become mature and then destroy them.

##### ***Ability to meet health needs:***

47.8% of the respondents could afford health services while 46.5% were not able to afford health services. There was a thin line in terms of percentages of those who said they could afford health services and those who said they were not able to afford health services. Affordability of health services meant that the household would have been able to control minor ailments like malaria, typhoid, diarrhoea, dysentery, respiratory infections and common cold

The majority of women reported that they could not afford health services because the government hospital did not provide most of the medication they needed and with the destruction of their crops

as a result of land conflicts; they couldn't get money making it hard for them to access good health services. Most respondents said they could not afford health services because they had no money which they obtained through sale of crops they produced.

*"One woman was in labour and needed to be taken to the hospital, the husband had gone to see the co-wife, nobody could help her with money, by the time she was taken to hospital, and the child had died in the womb."*

#### **Impact on Income:**

The majority of women admitted that their household income had reduced as a result of land rights violations that resulted into arson or burning of food items in the huts. Families had also had their foods slashed and destroyed in the gardens or left their land in fear of being killed or endangered. Women reported that they had become vulnerable to poverty and gender-based violence as a result of land rights abuses, their vulnerability arose from displacement from their homes and its' resultant effect of being dependent on relatives for livelihoods. 18.4% said that their income had remained the same; they were not farming more hectares or making improvements on their land because of land conflicts. 16.5% reported an increase in income that was a combination of agriculture and charcoal burning while only 2.5% felt that they were credit worthy and could easily be lent money to improve their livelihoods.

Women in Sub-Saharan Africa are generally limited to usufruct or users' rights to land; a situation that makes their holding to land insecure and renders them unwilling to invest resources to ensure a sustainable exploitation of the land. Quisumbing, et al. (1995) argue rightfully that because women cannot generally own land in their own right in Sub-Saharan Africa, they tend to have small farm plots or be allocated poor-quality land which easily deteriorate. This partly explains why many studies have shown that women's farm plots have lower yields than those controlled by men what Mugisha et al refer to as the 'Gender Yield gap' (Mugisha, et al;2019).

In my study most women cultivated between half a hectare to two hectares on average, while men cultivated almost double what women cultivated. Clearly women could not attain very high yields on small plots combined with land rights abuses and other structural inequalities they faced.

Menon et al argue that strong land rights serve as an incentive for farmers to invest in their land, which in turn could contribute to increased agricultural output; stronger land rights could make it easier to obtain loans in the credit market. She further explains that borrowing could give households the capital required to finance not only expenditures but also entrepreneurial activities and land-based investments. Households could also have the opportunity to generate gains from trade in land sales and rental markets when land rights were transferable. (Menon, 2016).

Nahalomo contends that access to land was essential for the rural populations in developing

countries because agricultural production was often their major livelihood option. She argues that in low income, subsistence-dependent economies; peasants rely heavily on access to land to feed themselves and their families, through directly consuming the food produced and through income generating activities that allow the purchasing of food. (Nahalomo, et al;2018).

## **5.CONCLUDING REMARKS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY.**

Land tenure insecurity directly impacted on women's livelihoods and were gender based in nature stemming from cultural connotations that positioned women in the inferior and men in the superior. Women affected by land rights abuses became landless, destitute or subject to exploitation by those their hosts, those they worked for and those whose land they rented. Land rights abuses directly impacted on the attainment of a woman's human rights; the right to education for her children, the right to food security, right to income, to health, dignity enshrined in human rights commitments and protocols towards women. Women were further marginalized by both their brothers and sisters-in-law when they returned to their natal homes with male children. Male children were considered a threat because they could lay claims in the future unlike girls who left the home. Perpetrators of land rights abuses included women themselves in the form of mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law and co-wives.

Daley and Pallas (2014) argue that social norms and customary practices often restrict women from owning land, in addition statutory legislation may prevent women from holding land rights independently of their husbands or male relatives. The customary nature of land holding in the Acholi sub-region prevented women from owning land as land was held in trust for the present and future generations by men who individually owned land under this arrangement but marginalized women. The Uganda National Land Policy (2013) does not provide for joint-registration or co-ownership or independent land holdings for women, although women with the money can register land in their names. A revised gender inclusive policy is needed to protect the vast majority of women without money to register land.

The second national development plan for Uganda 2015/16-2019/20 reveals that agriculture has remained the backbone of Uganda's economy with women constituting 77% of the 72% of the total labor employed in agriculture (NDPII,2015). There were also significant disparities in poverty levels across the county with the highest levels of poverty being reported in northern Uganda and second highest in eastern Uganda. Although we would like to attribute the high levels of poverty in northern Uganda to the two-decade war, it would not hold much water because a lot of resources for reconstruction have been poured in the region. Insecurity of tenure and the lack of capital and infrastructure for modernization of agriculture remain critical contributing factors. This means

that affirmative action in relation to economic development needs to be construed with particularities for the region and not generalized development. The peculiarities of northern Uganda as a post-conflict society needs to be seriously considered in development planning. This research offers the following recommendations to policy makers to ensure tenure security for women: The Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Lands Housing and Urban Development should strengthen customary land tenure to make it benefit women and train land governance stakeholder on gender inclusiveness, equity and rights. Women should constitute at least two thirds of customary institutions by law. Most women had very low level of education that affected their understanding of their rights, had limited legal knowledge and didn't know the pertinent institutions that aided their tenure security. Therefore, deliberately strengthen girl's retention and completion of secondary education. There is urgent need to increase women's awareness of their rights to inherit and own land and participate in land governance. This can be done through land rights education programs on radio, and sensitization through the local institutions like the traditional institutions and women's community groups.

The discussion on joint-registration of land by spouses that was lost in 1998 needs to be re-tabled for debate. Customary tenure is slowly losing its grip to free hold tenure and women will lose out if the co-ownership debate is not reawakened. More research has to be done around joint registration and its effects on women's land rights in Uganda.

In order to achieve Sustainable Development Goal Five on Gender Equality and empowering all women and Girls; the starting point is ensuring security of tenure for women since agriculture remains the backbone of Uganda's economy. Importantly there is a need to increase women's participation in land governance structures to at least two-thirds and increase girls' enrollment and completion of secondary education at worst. There is progress with a few women buying their own land and registering it independently and a few men understanding the need for daughters to inherit family land.

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## **7. Author Contributions**

The first author carried out the field work and did the writing, the second author was part of the field work, writing and supervised the entire work.

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## **9. KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

**Land tenure:** is the relationship whether legally or customarily defined among people, as individuals or groups with respect to land.

**Livelihoods:** are the means of making a living, the means that allow human beings to construct a living and satisfy daily needs.