

# Gender, land and conflict in Moroto

Results from testing Gender Analysis of Conflict Toolkit, in Moroto District in Karamoja, Uganda

Karamoja, in North-Eastern Uganda, has seen considerable changes in recent years in relation to both conflict dynamics and the gendered behaviours of women and men. In the past the region has experienced high levels of armed violence. Although this has reduced significantly following civilian disarmament campaigns<sup>1</sup> by the Government of Uganda, many of the underlying causes of conflict and insecurity remain unaddressed. Furthermore, the current period of relative stability has brought new challenges, including those resulting from the activities of multinational companies mining for gold, marble and limestone in Karamoja.

In order to address both new and long-standing tensions it is vital to analyse the different roles and experiences of women and men in these contexts. This includes examining how gender norms<sup>2</sup> – the ways in which societies expect women and men to behave, and which may vary according to factors such as class, age and marital status – interact with conflict dynamics.

Research for this briefing was conducted in Moroto District in Karamoja, as part of a pilot process to test a new toolkit for gender analysis of conflict developed by Saferworld and the Uganda Land Alliance (ULA).<sup>3</sup> The toolkit provides a methodology for conducting participatory analysis of conflict issues from a gender perspective, together with members of conflict-affected communities. In particular it is designed to analyse how gender norms can drive conflict and violence in different ways, an issue often omitted from conflict analysis. As such, this summary of findings focuses on analysing whether and how masculinities and femininities in Moroto are influencing conflict

dynamics. It also examines the impact of current conflicts on women and men and the different roles they have been playing.

The analysis examines conflicts at the community, family and interpersonal levels, with a focus on land and extractive industries as these are some of the most salient conflicts occurring in Moroto today.

## Methodology

The testing process was conducted over six days in March 2016, in the sub-counties of Nadunget and Rupa. Both are rural locations containing agricultural and pastoral communities, while Rupa is also home to marble and gold mines. Researchers from SOAS, Saferworld and ULA trained local facilitators, who then ran 12 focus group discussions with men and women separately in three locations in each sub-county. The discussions were based on exercises 3 and 6 in the Gender Analysis of Conflict Toolkit.<sup>4</sup> In addition, key informant interviews were carried out with stakeholders in Moroto town, including representatives from local government, police, health and education services. Further explanations of how the process was conducted can be found in sections 2, 3 and 4 of the toolkit.

The restricted time and resources available for the piloting of the toolkit imposed certain methodological limitations. We were not able to run every exercise contained in the toolkit and prioritised those most central to understanding gender norms and their relationship with conflict. More detail could be added to the analysis by running all of the exercises in the toolkit. Furthermore, the relatively small pool of respondents means the findings cannot be considered representative of Moroto District as a whole, or even of all the key actors in the conflicts described here. Nonetheless, the consistency of responses from women and men in all locations and their correspondence with other published research suggest a strong degree of reliability.

<sup>1</sup> Although the disarmament campaigns themselves were extremely violent, levels of violence in the region have since reduced, in part due to lower numbers of weapons available. However, the disarmament campaigns and lack of subsequent development investments have fuelled grievances against the government. See Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity (2013), 'Northern Uganda conflict analysis', available at <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/762-northern-uganda-conflict-analysis>.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the definition of 'gender norms', see Saferworld and Uganda Land Alliance (2016), *Gender analysis of conflict toolkit*, Introduction, pp 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> The toolkit is available at <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/1076-gender-analysis-of-conflict>.

<sup>4</sup> Saferworld and Uganda Land Alliance (2016), *Gender analysis of conflict toolkit*, section 3, pp 12-14, and section 4, pp 8-10.

## Gender norms in Moroto

Research participants were asked what it meant to be a 'real man' or a 'real woman' in Moroto in order to understand what notions of masculinity and femininity look like in Nadunget and Rupa. They were also asked to what extent actual practices live up to those norms, and how norms vary for women and men of different ages.

### Masculinity

#### Cattle

*"A man cannot be considered a real man without the possession of cows. It is by the ownership of cows that one acquires status in society and is respected. Those who own the most cows receive the highest respect."*

Female community member in Rupa

Participants indicated that the possession of cattle – a term used to encompass a variety of livestock, including cows, goats and donkeys – is considered the main marker of masculinity in Moroto. This relates partly to the need to use cattle to pay bride price and cows to provide meat, milk and butter, but ownership of cattle also confers social status on men in addition to its practical benefits. Several respondents likened a cow to a bank, in the sense that it is viewed as an investment that will grow in value as the cow reproduces.

In recent years, numbers of cattle have dwindled dramatically due to a combination of drought and cattle raiding from neighbouring areas in the post-disarmament period. Respondents gave different views on whether this new reality has reduced the strong cultural ties between cattle and masculinity:

*"In this era where cows have become fewer, ownership of cattle is not all that makes a man a man."*

*"It is also imperative to note that men who own large herds of cattle matter a lot in society in terms of decision making and they take executive positions in ceremonies."*

Exchange between male community members in Rupa

*"These days there are very few cows. Those [men] who used to have many have joined us in burning charcoal because they have no cows. Such men are not highly valued but this is the only way to survive these days."*

Female community member in Nadunget

Some men and women believed that economic activities such as cultivation, collecting firewood and burning charcoal, which were previously the preserve of women, now presented a respectable means of making a living for men. With the loss of cattle, men have had to find other ways of helping to provide for their families, something considered important for

masculinity (see below). However, as the quotes above illustrate, while people have had to accept that men participate in 'feminine' activities, cattle ownership is still held up as the ideal, despite their relative scarcity.

#### Marriage and fatherhood

Marriage and having children are seen as essential for men to achieve adult masculinity. Both male and female respondents felt that masculinity was enhanced when men were able to marry multiple wives. Again, cattle are vital here, as most families expected the bride price to be paid in cattle:

*"You will be despised and rated as worthless by society for your failure to bring the requested amount [of cattle for a marriage]. It is meaningless if you admire someone's daughter and then you do not give them what they request of you."*

Male community member in Nadunget

While unions do take place without the whole bride price being paid, they are not considered full marriages. In these cases, a man will be expected to pay a fine in order for each of his children to be considered his. Until the full bride price has been paid, another man may pay it instead and take his wife and her children away. The first man will not only lose his wife and children but be unable to receive the full bride price for his daughters when they marry.

#### Economic provision

*"A man has to cooperate with his wife so as to provide for their children. For example, when it is cultivation season both should participate. That's when he is regarded as a real man."*

Female community member in Nadunget

Unlike in many contexts across the world, Karamojong men are not expected to be the primary family breadwinner. However, they are expected to contribute economically to the household, ideally through their livestock. As noted above, men who do not have cattle may do work that was in the past reserved for women or, particularly in Rupa, seek work in the gold or marble mines. In the absence of cattle, many respondents noted that there are some men who refuse these activities, preferring to sleep during the day than to be shamed by appearing effeminate. While a few participants claimed these men were still worthy of respect, most felt that this was more shameful than doing 'women's work':

*"According to our ideas, a man must pick up a hoe and go to cultivate or look for work instead of sleeping under a tree."*

Female community member in Nadunget

*"If you choose to sleep under a tree, you will find your wife has escaped from your home. If you do not do anything productive to take care of your family, she will run away."*

Male community member in Rupa

## Initiation

*"Initiation means a lot to the Karamojong. If you do not initiate, you are taken as not a man at all."*

Male community member in Rupa

Participants noted that initiation – a ceremonial process through which men are inducted into senior positions within their clans and communities, giving them a greater say in decision making – is an important part of becoming a man. In the past men were initiated into a complex arrangement of generation and age sets. However, they now appear to be divided only into those who are initiated and those who are not. Again, cattle are crucial, as a man must kill a bull as part of his initiation, and they are needed for all forms of traditional ritual which initiated men must lead. The absence of cattle is hampering the chance for many men to be initiated.

## Land

*"[A man] has to acquire large chunks of land for growing food. For example, a separate piece of land for growing sorghum, beans and others."*

Female community member in Nadunget

Some respondents reported that ownership of land was important to being considered a man, in order that he can divide it up among his wives for them to cultivate. However, while the control of land is ultimately up to men, this was not seen as being nearly as central to masculinity as the ownership of cattle, marriage, having children, and initiation.

## Femininity

### Marriage and motherhood

For a woman in Moroto, entry into adulthood is marked by marriage and giving birth to children – ideally more girls than boys, so that the family can receive cows when their daughters are married. It is particularly important to a woman's status in the community that her husband has paid the full bride price for her. In this sense, cattle are important for a woman, not for personal ownership, but because her husband's cattle also confer status upon her:

*"Generally in Karamoja, a cow is life. If your husband has no cows then why should you marry him? Then they start calling the woman the wife of a dog, because he doesn't have cows."*

Female community member in Nadunget

Several respondents noted that, while women are not initiated in the way that men are, being fully married is

their equivalent. Others thought that a woman's husband's initiation was a better approximation, giving her status within the community.

*"Initiation for women is through the marriage ceremony that occurs with the payment of the bride price. However, when a man is initiated, his wife is also elevated in social status, becoming an elder."*

Male community member in Rupa

Mothers are expected to raise their children, including teaching their daughters the skills they will need to become good wives.

Both women and men reported that husbands and wives played decision-making roles in the family. Many also indicated that ultimately, women were expected to be deferential toward their husbands, although women often do not conform to this norm:

*"Men want their wives to respect them. They don't want a wife who talks a lot or who talks back at them. So as to show respect to your husband you have not to contradict him very much. If he asks the woman something harshly, she should reply gently."*

Female community member in Nadunget

### Economic provision and household duties

*"A woman is brought to join your family because of her hard work. For example, she fetches you water for bathing, prepares food, even welcomes and takes care of your visitors. A bad woman actually does the exact opposite of these."*

Male community member in Rupa

Participants reported that women in Moroto are responsible for providing most of what the household needs, particularly food and water. If a woman's husband is unable to pay for medical care and schooling for the children then she must provide for these too. Women provide for their families economically largely by growing crops, especially sorghum; if they have cows, producing milk and butter both for subsistence and for sale; burning and selling charcoal; brewing alcohol from sorghum; providing casual domestic labour in town, such as cooking or doing laundry; and, in Rupa, mining for gold or marble.

Women are also expected to build huts and granaries for their families, which is seen as an important mark of womanhood, while men build the fences around the *manyattas* (village compounds):

*"A woman is also expected to build her own hut. Not building one invalidates her as a woman because the hut is a symbol of responsibility."*

Male community member in Rupa

Just as it was seen as shameful for a man to be seen carrying out a woman's duties, so participants felt that



women should not take on men's roles. One participant indicated that this was because any perceived inadequacies in performing that role would be attributed to her gender:

*"It is very bad for a woman to carry out a man's duties. If something goes wrong you are blamed as a woman."*

Female community member in Nadunget

## Gender analysis of key conflicts

Participants were asked to describe what conflicts were happening in their communities. While the questions placed a specific emphasis on conflicts over land and extractive industries (the latter particularly in Rupa), respondents also raised other types of conflict they were experiencing, particularly within and between families. They were asked to describe the different roles that women and men are playing in those conflicts, and the different impacts of the conflict on women and men.<sup>5</sup> Using this data, our literature review and the perspectives on masculinity and femininity outlined above, we produced the analysis set out in the following sections.

It is important to note that many of the participants felt hunger was now a bigger problem for their communities than conflict. However, as our analysis shows, hunger is both a cause and consequence of many of the most prominent conflicts in Moroto.

## Cattle raiding and small arms

Following the liberation of thousands of AK47s from the state armoury in Moroto in 1979, gun ownership became an important marker of masculinity, and gun violence became prevalent in Moroto. Small arms were used in cases of domestic violence, inter-clan and intra-clan disputes and theft, for example the hijacking of vehicles. Cattle raiding by younger men, which had become increasingly violent in the colonial period, escalated with the proliferation of weapons, and was often accompanied by rape and the killing of men, women and children.<sup>6</sup>

Participation in a cattle raid was historically an important way that young men could prove their manhood. However, in the 1980s, the proliferation of guns made this much more violent. Researchers

noted the troubling association between masculinity and cattle raiding. This, coupled with the prevalence of small arms, was fuelling particularly serious forms of violence, often sparking a cycle of revenge attacks.<sup>7</sup>

Following civilian disarmament efforts carried out by the Government of Uganda, there are now far fewer weapons in the hands of civilians, and many participants described the region as peaceful:

*"I am very thankful for the person who brought peace. Now even if darkness finds you in the bush, you can just sleep there with your charcoal till morning."*

Female community member in Nadunget

Cattle raiding has also decreased dramatically. During the disarmament programmes of the 2000s, groups who had been disarmed quickly lost their cattle to groups who still possessed weapons. The Karamojong lost most of their livestock to other groups, including the Turkana across the Kenyan border and to other groups in Uganda. While respondents described ongoing cases of cattle theft, usually involving a small number of animals, they explained that large-scale cattle raiding has not happened in Moroto for some time. As a result, some participants suggested that the norm which defined cattle raiding as essential to young masculinity had also changed:

*"In the past, a man was rated and qualified by his ability to raid animals from the neighbouring communities, however, today men get the resources to buy animals by selling farm produce."*

Male community member in Nadunget

However, while cattle raiding is no longer possible for most men due to the lack of weapons, it is not clear that this norm has shifted a great deal. Just as the norm associating masculinity with cattle ownership remains despite the scarcity of cattle, norms linking manhood to gun ownership and raiding may also persist. Some men felt that the disarmament programmes had been a deliberate attempt to disempower Karamojong men. Some indicated that their frustrations had reached a point where they would consider taking up raiding again:

*"We have realised that the reason as to why the disarmament programme was conducted was to make us weak and susceptible to exploitation as hunger and famine resulted from the forceful disarmament that was conducted by confiscation of our cows, destruction of farms, water sources etc."*

Male community member in Moroto

*"If a few men decide to resume raiding then all of us will join in."*

Male community member in Moroto

<sup>5</sup> This was done using exercise 6 in section 4 of the toolkit. Further details are also given in section 4, page 10, of how the exercise was run in Moroto.

<sup>6</sup> Akabwai D, Ateyo P (2007), *The scramble for cattle, power and guns in Karamoja*, (Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University); Jabs L (2007), 'When two elephants meet, the grass suffers: A case study of intractable conflict in Karamoja, Uganda', in *American Behavioral Scientist*, **50**(11), pp 1498-1519; Mirzeler M, Young C (2000), 'Pastoral politics in the northeast periphery in Uganda: AK-47 as change agent', in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, **38**, pp 407-429; Stites E (2013), 'A struggle for rites: Masculinity, violence, and livelihoods in Karamoja, Uganda', in Tripp A, Marx Ferree M, Ewig C (eds) (2013), *Gender, violence, and human security: Critical feminist perspectives*, (New York: New York University Press), pp 132-162.

<sup>7</sup> Eaton D (2008), 'The business of peace: Raiding and peace work along the Kenya-Uganda border (part I)', in *African Affairs* **107**, pp 89-110.

It is difficult to assess how likely this scenario is, or to what extent it was a way for participants to underline the seriousness of their complaints. However, it highlights the need to avoid becoming complacent about conflict dynamics in Moroto – a point that is further underlined by growing tensions over land grabbing.

## Land grabbing

*“Men supposedly exercise full control over their land but there is growing interference by government agents allotting themselves public land and grabbing it away.”*

Female community member in Rupa

Pressures on land use in Moroto have increased markedly since the improvement in the security situation has made investment there worthwhile. There are a number of reasons for this, including: interest from private companies keen to exploit the region's natural resources; climate change reducing the available arable and pastoral land; the designation of large amounts of land as wildlife reserves, which cannot be farmed; and Karamojong who left the area during the worst of the violence, and others, now looking to set up home in Moroto.

Historically, land in Moroto has been collectively owned by clans through a system of customary ownership, in which mostly male elders are empowered to make decisions on the use of the land. Because clans cannot prove legal ownership of the land, this has left them vulnerable to land grabbing. While local and national government have encouraged communities to register their land, the process has been slow and costly for community members, who often cannot cover the associated expenses.

In some cases, respondents blamed what they saw as individual greed on the part of local people or Karamojong who have returned to the region since it has become more stable – particularly the well-educated, mostly young men – who chose to register land and sell it to investors. Older men are usually the decision makers when it comes to land use. However, some younger, educated men had taken advantage of the fact that the older generation were not literate and were less likely to have registered their land. Several respondents also believed that local government officials were either taking land for their own benefit or taking bribes to sell it to others. The discussions revealed a deep mistrust of government agencies among both women and men. In the case of land that had been designated as a wildlife reserve, some participants believed that this was a way to remove inhabitants from the land so that it could later be leased to mining companies.

This study did not show clearly that these conflicts over land were fuelled by gender norms among communities in Moroto, despite there being clear

gendered patterns in land ownership and control. However, it was beyond the scope of this research to analyse the gendered behaviours of some other key actors in these conflicts, such as investors, younger men who were selling off their communities' land, and government officials, which may yield different results. The research did highlight different gendered impacts of the conflicts: they prevent both women and men from fulfilling their culturally prescribed roles, as well as meeting their basic needs: men whose land has been taken cannot graze cattle on it if they have them, while women cannot cultivate, and there are few places available for them to collect water and firewood.

Furthermore, women and men play different roles in efforts to resolve conflicts over land grabbing. Where negotiations take place between clan leaders and investors or government officials over land use, these are usually led by older, initiated men, though some respondents did indicate that women were playing a greater role than they used to:

*“In the olden days only the male elders participated in decision making in meetings on matters regarding the community. However, today women have been allowed to have a say in community matters and issues relating to them. We are no longer despised as women as we used to be.”*

Female community member in Nadunget

Conflict resolution was mostly described as being men's job, with women taking on more of an advisory role. In some cases, women also participated in acts of resistance against land grabbing:

*“We caution our husbands against being corrupted into the sale of land.”*

*“We have also adamantly refused to leave our homes when told to do so by those agents.”*

Exchange between female community members in Nadunget

The Land Act (1998) asserts that when a decision is made to sell land that is owned under customary tenure, the decision must not deny women, children or people with disabilities access to ownership, occupation or use of the land.<sup>8</sup> Local government officials who participated in the research noted that, although it is often ignored, this provision offers the potential for women, children and people with disabilities to play a much greater role in decision making. They suggested that the fact that this clause of the Land Act is often not implemented when land is sold could provide an entry point for women and people with disabilities to make legal challenges to decisions over land which were perceived as unjust.

<sup>8</sup> Government of Uganda (1998), The Land Act, available at <http://ulau.org/files/downloads/The%20Land%20Act%20-%201998.pdf>

## Extractive industries

As noted above, mining for marble and gold are relatively new economic activities for people in Rupa. However, the arrival of DAO and Jan Mangal – multinational companies who are (or, in the case of Jan Mangal, have been until recently) mining in Rupa, has brought a number of conflicts. These include conflicts between the mining companies and local communities over rights to mine, land grabbing and the lack of provision of community benefits in exchange for the land, and conflicts between artisanal miners and mining companies over pay and working conditions.

### Land rights and lack of community benefits

*“Land belongs to the community but we do not know what our elected leaders do in their offices. We just notice that some plots of land have somehow been sold.”*

Male community member in Rupa

Since 2001, the loss of arable land to limestone mining companies has made communities wary of new corporations arriving on their territory. As a result, relationships between the international corporations DAO and Jan Mangal and local communities in Moroto have been fraught from the beginning. Both moved into Moroto with little consultation with local people. Although a few elders allegedly agreed to host them, they were never clearly told what they were agreeing to, and were unable to read the documents their names and thumb prints are affixed to, as they are illiterate. The mines are guarded by government soldiers and the local population has received little if any compensation for the use of the land. Large amounts of arable land have been fenced off for exploration, preventing communities from using it even though it is not in use and is not legally owned by the mining companies. As with other types of land grabbing, this is stopping women from cultivating the land, collecting water and firewood, and preventing men from grazing what cattle they have left, worsening hunger and fuelling resentment against both the government and the mining companies.

In addition to depriving communities of the use of the land, the companies have at times closed off local water sources. Artisanal marble miners who participated in this research reported that the only nearby borehole was destroyed by truck drivers from DAO. Gold miners reported that Jan Mangal installed a pipeline which diverted water away from the local community. This has meant that women have had to travel further to collect water, and left people to drink from streams, which they report has resulted in the spread of typhoid and diarrhoea. This in turn increases the burden on women, who are responsible for looking after those who are sick. It has also resulted in a lack of water for irrigation and domestic use for farming communities in the plains.

Furthermore, memorandums of understanding agreed with community leaders, in which the mining companies committed to providing facilities and benefits for the communities, have not been fulfilled. Miners in both the gold and marble mines reported that DAO and Jan Mangal had promised to provide facilities such as health centres, a school or scholarships for local children, and a borehole, but these benefits never materialised. The lack of nearby healthcare services is a particular problem for women, raising the risk of complications in childbirth. Female gold miners explained that the nearest health centre is 30km away and people often die on the way there.

### Artisanal and small-scale mining

Both women and men participate in artisanal mining for marble and gold. In the marble mine, female miners reported that they are responsible for searching for stones, while the men break them. In the gold mine, the division of labour appears less clear-cut, with women and men sometimes mining together in the same pit. Couples pool their gold for sale, and divide the proceeds. In the marble mine, men receive more payment than women for their work, which the female miners perceived as justified on the grounds that men's work requires greater physical strength than women's.<sup>9</sup>

DAO has persuaded some local men to work for them, but miners say DAO refused to pay the wages that were originally agreed, often let six months pass without paying them, and then let the miners go without paying anything. Artisanal miners have been allowed to take small stones to sell, while leaving the larger ones for DAO. However, the health impacts of marble mining have been severe, particularly for the men breaking the stones, who report suffering chest pains and vomiting blood as a result of the work. This situation has been exacerbated by DAO's failure to provide the promised healthcare centre, or health and safety equipment.

Artisanal gold miners who participated in this research reported that each time they found new places to mine, Jan Mangal moved them from the land and mined the gold themselves. Male gold miners reported that they have been displaced three times, and were now working in a location where there was very little gold left for them to mine. They also stated that Jan Mangal had destroyed their equipment so that they could not continue to mine – a claim it was not possible to verify or put to the company as it no longer operates in the area:

*“Our property was destroyed but our leaders have never followed up on how we should be compensated for the property we lost... for example our hammers and basins.”*

Male gold miner in Rupa

<sup>9</sup> It is common in many contexts for women's work to be thought of as less skilled than men's, often because women's skills are constructed as being inherent to their feminine nature, and therefore not viewed as skills at all.



*“All the gold was taken away by [Jan Mangal]. Taking this gold away from us on a daily basis was as painful to us as stealing a very young daughter would be.”*

Male gold miner in Rupa

Both DAO and Jan Mangal have engaged in negotiations with local community leaders, and participants reported that both male and female community members were involved in those discussions, although they were deeply unhappy with the outcomes:

*“Both men and women [were involved in negotiations with the mining company]. We negotiated but it was not fair at all. When we complained, he would just turn the tractor to face us and we would feel intimidated and take off. In the end there was nothing we could do because the investor even threatened the women and they ran away with their children on their backs.”*

Male gold miner in Rupa

The presence of government soldiers around the mines also raised questions about gendered impacts, particularly given evidence from other contexts of an association between the presence of armed personnel and sexual exploitation and abuse against both women and men.<sup>10</sup> Community members did not raise this issue, which may indicate that it has not occurred in Rupa or that people did not feel able to talk about it. Instead, the community raised some more positive interactions with the soldiers: female gold miners mentioned that they fetched water for the soldiers and sold them charcoal and firewood when they were unable to find enough gold to live on that day.

Although extractives have provided some economic opportunities for women and men in the post-disarmament period, they have not provided enough income to overcome persistent hunger. Environmental degradation resulting from mining and the displacement of communities has generated resentment against the companies. It has also fuelled previously existing grievances against the government over their perceived corruption and failure to protect communities' rights. Although Jan Mangal has ceased operations in Rupa, a deep sense of injustice remains. While for the most part these conflicts have not escalated into violence, as noted above, some male community members indicated a willingness to seek out weapons again:

*“The government seems to be happy about our suffering and exploitation. However, it is just a matter of time before we find our own solutions for these problems, even if it means resorting to violence and getting arms – we shall look for guns again.”*

Male community member in Moroto

This may be a further indication that, while long-

standing notions of masculinity linked to cattle raiding and gun ownership can no longer be fulfilled by the majority of men, the norm remains in place. It therefore has the potential to contribute to an escalation of these conflicts into armed violence. If so, it is important to note that, while this particular masculine norm is problematic for peacebuilding in Moroto and needs to be addressed, so too do the legitimate grievances of communities whose land and labour has been exploited by investors and government alike.

## Family and interpersonal conflicts

### Conflicts over land

In addition to community-level conflicts over land grabbing, participants related that conflicts between individuals or families over land were also frequent. A few common scenarios were repeated across research locations. For example, women coming into conflict with each other while out cultivating was mentioned several times:

*“Women bring conflicts by overstepping boundaries while digging or cultivating beyond the boundaries of their garden into another person's land.”*

Male community member in Nadunget

These incidents are driven by hunger and the need to provide food for their families. Women indicated that these disputes often turn violent:

*“As a woman you handle your land with care while defending your boundaries from those who want to grab it. If any attempt is made you fight that person even till morning.”*

Female community member in Nadunget

*“Conflicts are majorly caused by hunger, in that people steal from each other's gardens. They grab food and in the process of fighting to protect the food in the garden or other property, they end up killing each other.”*

Male community member in Rupa

Conflict between co-wives was also mentioned frequently. While men are the overall owners of land, women are given access to pieces of land in their capacity as wives and daughters. Daughters are usually given temporary plots of land by their fathers before they marry, and after marriage their husbands' families will allocate them a piece of land. However, when a woman's husband marries another wife, he may take some of her land to give to the new wife, creating conflict between the co-wives and sometimes with the husband:

*“If he gives my plot away, I will defend it and so if someone comes to grab it, I will defend my boundaries. This will cause conflict.”*

Female community member in Nadunget

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Dolan C (2009), *Social Torture: the case of northern Uganda 1986-2006*, (New York: Berghahn Books).

These customs regarding land ownership also leave widows in a particularly vulnerable situation, whereby other community members try to claim their late husbands' land, because the widow does not own it. Such cases are often mediated by male and female elders, who sometimes rule that the widow has a right to the land even after her husband's death. However, such rights only exist for women who were married with full bride wealth. Without this they have no customary rights to land from their husbands' clan and neither do their children, leaving sons without land to use for their own married lives unless their mother's clan has sufficient to grant them some.

### Domestic violence

Although domestic disputes have become less dangerous since most men no longer have guns, domestic violence – mostly by husbands against their wives – is still prevalent and may result in serious injury or even death.

Respondents cited several reasons why disputes arise between married couples, often centred on economic stresses. Wives become frustrated if their husbands sleep under a tree all day instead of working, while husbands may blame wives if they do not provide enough food for the family. Drinking alcohol is an important recreational activity for both women and men, and was cited as a major contributor to violence:

*"Our men, when they get drunk, they attack us and fight. Some men sell firewood just to drink and get drunk to fight us."*

Female community member in Nadunget

Some respondents noted that both women and men were more likely to commit adultery when drunk, which also creates conflict. There was also a perception that men may beat their wives when they believe that a woman has transgressed feminine norms by not being subservient to her husband:

*"A woman is beaten by the husband or even taken to the council of elders who use canes to discipline her with strong warnings not to oppose her husband again."*

Female community member in Nadunget

In the same vein, some respondents blamed women for their husbands' violence:

*"There are also instances when our wives ill treat us, for example when they are drunk they provoke us to beat them. In spite of this, we reconcile the next day."*

Male community member in Rupa

Research in other contexts has shown that a sense of emasculation can lead men to reassert their manhood by exerting power over their wives, including through violence.<sup>11</sup> While this study cannot confirm this

decisively, it is possible that men's inability to fulfil masculine norms in the absence of cattle and small arms contributes to the prevalence of domestic violence in Moroto.

While a few respondents, male and female, mentioned women being violent toward their husbands, they said that those women would usually get beaten much more severely in return. Men who were beaten by their wives were described by one male respondent as "weak". This reinforces the idea that it is men who should exercise power over their wives and not vice versa, or perhaps that women are weak and anyone who is beaten by one must be even weaker.

In most cases of domestic violence, the husband and wife reconcile, sometimes with mediation from elder women or men in the community. Most respondents attributed this to the bride wealth system, particularly in cases where the bride wealth has been fully paid:

*"Even if he beats you, you cannot leave because your bride wealth has been paid. You may quarrel, fight and later reconcile but you must stay together."*

Female community member in Nadunget

*"The payment of bride wealth has the impact of reducing a woman to 'mere property' and thus very susceptible to mistreatment as you are treated as a good."*

Female community member in Rupa

For this reason, female gold miners in Rupa explained that it is better for a woman if her husband has not paid the bride wealth in full, because it is easier for her to leave him if he is violent. However, they are in a different situation from other women because they do not need land to farm. Few other rural women are able to manage without land and so cannot easily leave their husband unless their birth families are in a position to allow them sufficient land for their needs. Thus, life for unmarried women in Moroto is difficult, and a woman's birth family may or may not accept her back if she leaves her husband.

Respondents' descriptions of these cases and the way they are perceived in their communities clearly suggest that gender norms play an important role in causing and perpetuating domestic violence in Moroto. In particular, the assumption that men should be the heads of household and women should be submissive, and the bride wealth system, which underpins the norm that regards women as the property of their husbands once they are paid for, fuels this type of violence. This is the case even though in practice few women are subservient to their husbands. However, in situations where increasing numbers of men feel emasculated, insisting on their

in *Journal of Political Power*, 5(3), pp 475-492.

<sup>11</sup> Harris C (2012), 'Gender-age systems and social change: A Haugaardian power analysis based on research from Northern Uganda',



masculine prerogatives may appear to them as one of the few ways they can try to reclaim their manhood.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to understand the norms relating to masculinity and femininity in Nadunget and Rupa sub-counties, and whether and how these play a role in driving the conflicts that are happening there, particularly over land and extractive industries. The results give a mixed picture.

Persuasive arguments have been made that gender norms, which link manhood to cattle raiding and gun ownership, have – together with drought, poverty, the proliferation of small arms, poorly executed disarmament campaigns, abuses of power by government soldiers, and the bride wealth system – fuelled high levels of armed violence between communities in Karamoja in the past. In the post-disarmament period, the types of conflict occurring in Moroto have shifted, and violence has reduced significantly. The vast majority of men are no longer able to fulfil the former masculine norms, and their practices have shifted toward activities that were formerly reserved for women, resulting in a sense of emasculation. This has knock-on effects for women, who have had to compensate for men's reduced ability to provide for their families economically, and it may also contribute to some men's violence against their wives.

At the family and interpersonal level, a great deal of conflict over land is driven more by hunger than by the gendered expectations of women and men when it comes to economic provision. However, there are some conflicts in which masculinities and femininities, and the social structures that both result from and entrench them, clearly play a role. For example, violent conflicts between co-wives over the land allocated to them by their husbands are driven by a system in which land belongs to clans who are represented by senior men. Likewise, domestic violence committed by husbands against their wives is enabled by the bride wealth system and notions of male power and female subservience.

At the community level, the most prominent conflicts happening in Moroto today are over land grabbing, which occurs on a large scale, particularly when arable and pastoral land is fenced off by mining companies who have been granted exploration and/or excavation licences by the government. These conflicts are driven primarily by the non-implementation of provisions in the Land Act (1998) that enshrine communities' rights over their land, abusive business practices, and perceptions of government corruption. This small study did not clearly show that gender norms in Moroto play a key role in causing conflicts over extractive industries, though there may well be ways in which they do. For example, one angle that was beyond the scope of this study to explore, but which may provide more insight

on this question, would be an exploration of gender norms and practices among decision makers in both the multinational companies engaged in mining in Moroto and the government officials who facilitate their operations.

What this study has shown is that powerlessness in the face of mining companies and their government backers further exacerbates a pre-existing sense of emasculation and injustice felt by many men in Moroto, which could lead to more serious outbreaks of violence. While this must be taken seriously, addressing it should not entail a return to the somewhat idealised yet problematic masculine practices of the pre-disarmament period. This research indicates that some men are considering taking up arms again if they are able to secure them, and that long-standing notions of manhood may support such a trend. When thinking about peacebuilding responses, it is important to take into account gender norms and practices as part of a larger picture, which also considers how to address the injustices which women and men face. These injustices include displacement, the removal of resources necessary to their survival, exploitative trade and employment practices by investors, and the policy and legal frameworks which enable (or fail to prevent) these abuses. While gender norms and practices are never the whole story, they are an important aspect without which it is impossible to fully understand the drivers and impacts of current conflicts in the region.

## About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe that everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from insecurity and violent conflict.

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## About Uganda Land Alliance

The Uganda Land Alliance (ULA) is a membership consortium of national, regional and international civil society organisations and individuals, lobbying and advocating for fair land laws and policies that address the land rights of the poor, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and individuals in Uganda. ULA was established in 1995 as an independent non-governmental legal entity, registered as a company limited by guarantee.

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