

Strengthening inclusive development and equal access to resources for marginalised citizens in Uganda

Introduction

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with 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.

In August 2019, Saferworld and RICE-West Nile conducted a gender and conflict analysis in the two districts of Nwoya and Adjumani, which identified and analysed key conflict drivers and their correlation with gender norms; inequality; access to, use, control and ownership of land; and the different ways men, women and young people are affected by these conflict drivers.

This briefing presents the main conflict drivers in Nwoya and Adjumani districts. It also provides recommendations for policymakers and programming.

Key findings

Analysis of conflicts and their drivers

1. Natural resource governance and related conflicts

Natural resource conflicts in the two study districts were found to cut across different levels – from household, family, clan and community to sub-county and district. One of the challenges is the increased population, which has resulted in an increase in the amount of land and associated land resources being used.

2. Relationship between communities and investors

The existence of investors mining rocks to make ceramic tiles has created tensions and conflicts in in Pakele sub-county. The community's contention is that they feel sidelined by the local authorities and government at large on natural resource management and yet they own the land. In addition, the communities (involving both men and women) are concerned that they will be evicted from their land by the investors without prompt payment of fair and adequate compensation. Upon learning of land takeover and possible eviction, affected community members reported the case to the local authorities, set up barricades on the road and camped in the disputed area, which in the long run stopped the investors from accessing the area.

Land acquisition process: The commercial actors (investors in agribusiness, tourism) visited were aware of the basics of the legal framework governing land in Uganda and of the tenure systems practised in northern Uganda. They indicated that with the customary tenure system, most land owners have no official documentation to prove legal ownership. For this reason, land acquisition processes are usually done through the district officials and clan leaders. However, communities were concerned that they are never consulted and, with limited due diligence, investors end up getting involved in boundary and family conflicts. The Nwoya District officials also reported that there are a number of investors operating in the district without their knowledge; the reason for this is because investors prefer to deal directly with authorities at the national level.

Environmental degradation: Opening up land for commercial agriculture has left the ground bare (no tree planting has been done to compensate for those that have been cut). Most investors, especially those in commercial agriculture, did not carry out an environmental impact assessment. Communities are concerned about river and stream water contamination by chemicals used on farms. Cultivation without leaving a buffer zone has led to silting as a result of soil erosion. Authorities and communities reported that the discovery of oil in the Murchison Falls National Park and subsequent oil development activities have, over the years, interfered with the ecosystem, pushing animals into community land and destroying crops and lives. In order to regulate investments in Nwoya District, a district investment policy was recently developed by the Nwoya District local government. The policy stresses the need for potential investors to follow the right channels of land acquisition and how they can identify and resolve all conflicts relating to the land that they would like to purchase or hire.

3. Climate change and migration effects

Climate change is also reported a driver of conflict. Oruka sub-village in Purongo sub-county, Nwoya District, is currently experiencing a longer dry spell than before. For instance, there were nearly no harvests of maize, rice and groundnuts in the second season of 2018 and the first season of 2019 in particular. In Adjumani, the long dry spell has led to substantial crop failure and losses. People used to plant sim-sim in the months of July and August, but have now resorted to cultivating it between April and June. This conflict analysis observed that these changes in weather patterns affect community and household livelihood patterns and cause domestic conflicts and families to separate

To cope with the threats to their livelihood, such as prolonged drought, pastoralists (commonly known as Balalo) from Western Uganda have migrated to Northern Uganda to access water and pasture for their animals. The pastoralists (mostly men) have been accused of trespassing and grazing their animals in gardens belonging to the local communities, destroying crops. Grazing boundaries and animal theft among the pastoralists and indigenous communities have also been instrumental in causing conflicts.

Boundaries and land conflicts

Most land-related conflicts were found to be at the household, family, clan and tribe levels. However, contextual variances were observed. For instance, in Nwoya District, conflicts were at the community and investor level. These conflicts result from issues relating to boundaries, ownership claims and inheritance, rights to access land, and rights for passage or transit. Failure to resolve these issues has in most cases escalated into gender-based violence (GBV) between individual women and men and conflict between communities and families.

4. Clan conflicts over ancestral and clan land

Land that is predominantly customary in nature is held in trust by either clans, family heads or individuals. A recent phenomena is traditional leaders using customary regulations that are enshrined in the clan principles, practices, rights and responsibility of the customary tenure system. This is specific to the Madi and Acholi people of Adjumani and Nwoya districts respectively. Under this tenure system, decisions on land management and administration are made by household heads, who are usually men. Although the principles, practices, rights and responsibilities of customary tenure in Madi and Acholi defend the rights of marginalised groups (including women, people living with HIV/AIDS, people with special needs and youth), significant disparities between the rights of women and men still persist, and continue to fuel rights violations.

Recommendations

Government of Uganda: ministries, departments and agencies

- This analysis suggests that an emphasis on social norms, including gender-related norms, should be a major focus for any programme intervention and could be differentiated by location and context.

- A gender-sensitive conflict analysis that examines the links between gender norms and conflict, as well as gender inequalities, should be pursued as part of government programme design.
- The government should employ and adopt mechanisms to engage communities and ensure there is meaningful participation of women and ensure their concerns are addressed.
- National-level authorities, such as the Uganda Investment Authority, should insist that all investors consult with local-level authorities and other key local-level stakeholders in order to understand existing social and gender dynamics in their areas of interest before starting operations.
- Build up sustainable livelihood strategies and strengthen community resilience against conflict and environmental changes. These should mainly target youth, given their contribution to peace and stability, but also men and women given the impact on GBV.

District authorities

- Engage in dialogues with investors, communities and government authorities using community days and radio talk shows, ensuring that women participate meaningfully in all dialogues and that women's concerns are addressed.

Investors

- Under take conflict sensitive land acquisition through a consultative process that engages all parties concerned in a transparent manner to reduce risks of land-related conflicts.
- Undertake gender- and conflict-sensitive participatory impact assessment studies prior to large-scale investments to avoid community outcry and environmental pollution. This will lessen tensions, reduce costs for the investor/company, and improve the relationship between communities and investors, while addressing gender inequalities and gender drivers of conflict.

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