

Researching livelihoods and  
services affected by conflict

# Livelihood recovery in post- conflict northern Uganda

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# About us

Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) aims to generate a stronger evidence base on how people make a living, educate their children, deal with illness and access other basic services in conflict-affected situations (CAS). Providing better access to basic services, social protection and support to livelihoods matters for the human welfare of people affected by conflict, the achievement of development targets such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and international efforts at peace- and state-building.

At the centre of SLRC's research are three core themes, developed over the course of an intensive one-year inception phase:

- State legitimacy: experiences, perceptions and expectations of the state and local governance in conflict-affected situations
- State capacity: building effective states that deliver services and social protection in conflict-affected situations
- Livelihood trajectories and economic activity under conflict

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) is the lead organisation. SLRC partners include the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) in Sri Lanka, Feinstein International Center (FIC, Tufts University), the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in Pakistan, Disaster Studies of Wageningen University (WUR) in the Netherlands, the Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research (NCCR), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

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Any errors are the sole responsibility of the author.

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# 1 Introduction

A number of questions and concerns are often raised by those seeking to support people's recovery from crisis. When does recovery start? How fast is it? How long does it take until it is 'over'? Who is being left behind? The answers to these questions matter – but so, perhaps, do the assumptions on which they are based. The questions encourage the idea that once the cause of a crisis is over, things will naturally start to get better again; that we can use a paradigm of a steady trajectory 'upwards' to monitor progress; and that this picture of recovery is the normal state for most people, with those excluded belonging to specific and identifiable population 'categories'.

Livelihood recovery, recovery from conflict and the role played by the state and state services in recovery are central themes of the six-year research programme of the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium. The SLRC programme combines qualitative research in eight countries with a longitudinal panel survey in five of these to collect data from a large sample and follow changes in people's livelihoods, their perceptions of the state, state institutions and the services they receive.

The subject of this report is recovery in northern Uganda, where the armed conflict that began in 1986 led to the forced displacement of almost the entire rural population.<sup>1</sup> The conflict was marked by widespread atrocities and war crimes committed by belligerents, including mass killings of civilians, deliberate and horrific physical injury to individual civilians, mass kidnapping or 'abduction', rape, forced recruitment and the looting and destruction of property (UHRC and OHCHR 2011). Although the armed conflict and mass displacement largely ended in 2007,<sup>2</sup> the legacy of these atrocities continues in physical injuries, the loss of family members and the psychological and social consequences of suffering abuse, abduction and forced recruitment and rape (ibid).

The SLRC longitudinal survey in the two most war-affected areas of northern Uganda, the Acholi and Lango sub-regions, was based on the survey used in other SLRC countries but included an additional section asking about the incidence and nature of war crimes and the extent of any continuing physical or psychological injuries (Mazurana *et al.* 2014a and 2014b). These injuries present a considerable financial burden on many victims and their families, including through the continuing need for medical services. These financial and personal costs have been studied in Mazurana *et al.* (forthcoming) and are therefore not investigated here. Little has been said, however, on other impacts of war crimes on people's subsequent livelihood trajectories – or, in aid jargon, on their post-war 'recovery'.

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<sup>1</sup> UHRC and OHCHR (2011) estimate that over 90% of the population in Acholi sub-region and 33% of the population in Lango were forcibly displaced. Displacement peaked at almost 2 million in 2005.

<sup>2</sup> No formal ceasefire was ever signed, but the influence and extent of armed conflict progressively waned throughout 2005-2006 and is generally recognised as having ended by 2007.

**Figure 1: Map of Uganda (showing districts in 2006)**



Acholi sub-region comprised Gulu, Kitgum, Amoro and Pader Districts. Lango comprised Lira, Oyam and Apac (where mass displacement occurred), and Dokolo and Amolotar Districts (where mass displacement did not occur). Some sub-division of these districts has since occurred.

## 1.1 The survey

The first survey round, conducted in 2013 (Mazurana *et al.* 2014a), asked about how well people were recovering, their access to basic services, their perceptions of government, the assistance they had received and their experience of war crimes (see Box 1).

### Box 1: An account of exclusion in Bhimapur

In accordance with international law (ICRC 2012) and within the context of the war in northern Uganda, the SLRC survey recorded the following as experiences of war crimes when perpetrated by belligerents against civilians (based on interviewee self-reporting):

*illegal killing; abduction; forced recruitment; forced disappearance; severe beating or torture; deliberate immolation; being a victim of and surviving a massacre; sexual violence (rape, forced pregnancy and child bearing, sexual enslavement); being seriously injured by a deliberate or indiscriminate attack; being forced to kill or seriously injure another person; and suffering emotional distress that inhibits functionality due to experiencing or witnessing the above.*

The belligerents included government forces, militias, Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels, and Karamojong raiders. For the purposes of this study, forced displacement was not included, because it would have required establishing for each individual whether or not their displacement could be seen as permitted by the Geneva Conventions,<sup>3</sup> which was not possible in the framework of this study.

This study sampled households where survey respondents had reported abduction, torture, having been set on fire, having survived a massacre, or crimes resulting in physical injuries. It was decided not to include the livelihood impacts of crimes resulting in self-reported psychological distress (including, for example, being forced to kill another person) within this study. In order to investigate the mechanisms by which these might have affected livelihoods would require a degree of psychological or psychiatric expertise beyond the competencies of the research team.

How well people were recovering (or their livelihood outcomes) was measured according to their ability to access food at the time of the survey<sup>4</sup> and how much wealth they had accumulated as measured by the assets they owned. The survey was designed as a panel study, going back to investigate the same households two years later.<sup>5</sup> Such a quantitative approach seeks to explain how well people have recovered by finding correlations between one factor (e.g. how much people own, how much difficulty they have in finding food) and some other (e.g. level of education, where they live, how much assistance they received after the war or whether or not someone in their household experienced a war crime). These patterns can generate important information, but correlations alone are limited in their ability to give insight into how processes happen (Devereux *et al.* 2013), reducing causality to co-variation, and effectively limiting conclusions to 'more [Y] happens in the presence of [X] than without' (Juden 2014). Mixed methods approaches use quantitative and qualitative research to complement each other, and this study is therefore to be read as one part of number of studies, including two rounds of a survey, that together constitute a mixed-methods study, and which will eventually be analysed together.

The SLRC survey in northern Uganda (Mazurana *et al.* 2014a) presented some intriguing findings. There was a very strong correlation between households that reported that one or more members had

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<sup>3</sup> 'The displacement of the civilian population shall not be ordered for reasons related to the conflict unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand. Should such displacements have to be carried out, all possible measures shall be taken in order that the civilian population may be received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition.' Article 17 of the 1977 Additional Protocol II.

<sup>4</sup> This was assessed using a combination of the coping strategies index and household dietary diversity score (HDDS).

<sup>5</sup> The second wave of the survey has been completed and the findings will be published later this year. This study was researched and written before those findings were known.



experienced serious crimes and those that had greater difficulty in accessing food at the time of the survey. However, the survey also found that the coefficient of this association, which is an indication of the size of the effect, was small. This is counter-intuitive. If there is an association, then one would expect the size of the impact, the coefficient, to be high. A lower correlation might also be expected, since the range of crimes is high (see Box 1) with a high diversity of physical, psychological and social impacts. This, coupled with the many other factors shaping people's livelihoods and food security, would have led many to expect the relationship to be less constant than the very high correlation suggested. This was something that needed following up using qualitative research methods, and so it became one of the research topics of this study. Other survey findings also raised further questions. Most people reported that they had not received aid in the 12 months preceding the survey (i.e. February 2012 to January 2013); but such aid as was given had been received disproportionately by people who were scored as better off. Was this because the aid had helped them become better-off or because it had been poorly targeted? Some correlation was found between livelihood outcomes and the degree of livelihood diversification, but these patterns do not give enough insight to understand how, when, for whom and how far diversification really helps, or what the implications are for how best to support people's recovery. There is even doubt about any causal relationship: did diversification help with food access, or was diversification impossible for people with very limited food access?

These are the kinds of questions where qualitative work is needed to explain change and to triangulate, illuminate and challenge the findings of surveys. Generating understanding requires that research is open-minded, not seeking simply to confirm (or reject) a predetermined theory, but exploring new ways of understanding what is happening – in technical jargon, taking exploratory rather than merely confirmatory approaches (Copestake 2014). This qualitative research study was therefore designed to investigate further some of the findings which emerged from the survey and to gain much deeper insight into processes of recovery, including the following specific issues:

- 1 The nature of 'livelihood recovery' more generally in northern Uganda over the five or six years since displacement ended.
- 2 The role played by aid in supporting recovery for different people.
- 3 The mechanisms by which livelihoods were affected by crimes which had been experienced several years earlier.

## 2 Understanding livelihoods

### 2.1 A livelihoods approach

*‘A livelihoods approach has at its core a preoccupation with wanting to understand ‘how different people in different places live’ (Scoones, 2009), and how and why people make the choices that they do. This rejects the idea that people’s wellbeing can be understood based solely on a simple technical or financial analysis of the sectors in which people earn their living, or that this would be an adequate basis for developing policy or interventions to support them.’ (Levine 2014)*

The use of livelihoods approaches to understand how people live and how to help combat rural poverty developed as a reaction to the dominant technical perspectives which assumed that economic formulae and agricultural or other technical possibilities determined how people could or should live. The livelihoods approach seeks instead to understand people on their own terms, and how the broader society within which they live – the economy, politics, how institutions act, the cultural rules – shapes their options and their choices. This broader picture also shapes how well people do from their choices, or what are called ‘livelihood outcomes’.<sup>6</sup>

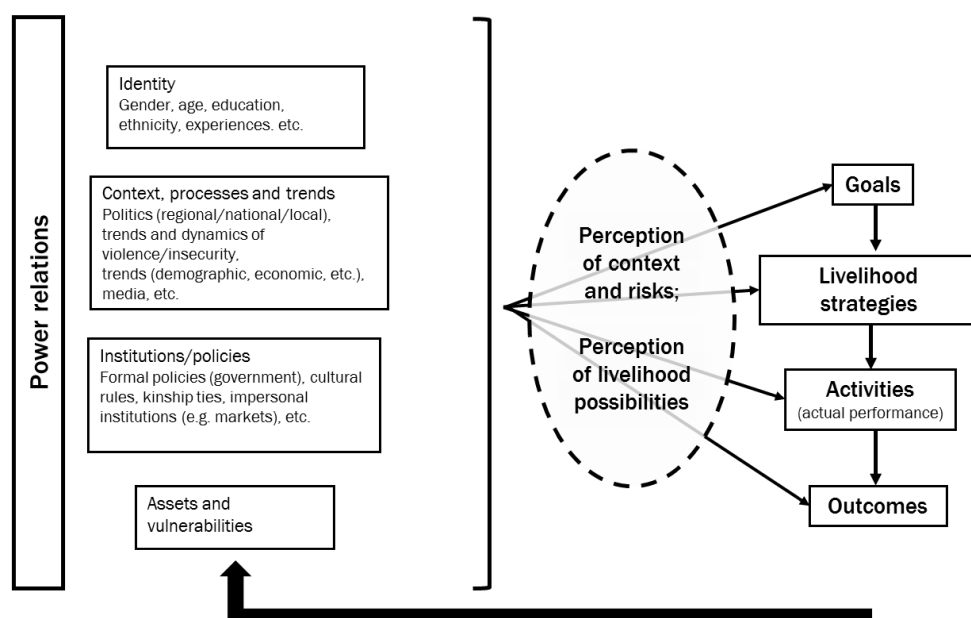
The livelihood approach thus provides a framework for combining several different perspective into a single explanatory analysis. At a minimum, it should include some form of political economy analysis (how people’s lives are affected by politics and power relations, including in the market, within extended families) and an actor-oriented analysis that starts by understanding what people are trying to do. Economic and other technical analyses can also be included. Several diagrams have been developed to show graphically how different forces interact to shape livelihoods. This study uses the diagram in Figure 2, from Levine 2014, which is based on DFID (2001) but with two added elements. In Figure 2, livelihood strategies are not just determined by what people have and their context but also by what they are trying to achieve – their goals, which will vary from person to person. Secondly, the figure leaves space for an analysis of how different people’s perceptions of the situation can be different, leading to different strategies. Neither of these changes are intended to be major theoretical innovations, but rather they make explicit what was already a necessary stage in using any of the previous frameworks.

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<sup>6</sup> The phrase is somewhat misleading, because livelihood outcomes are not a final state. They are constantly changing, partly as a result of feedback mechanisms – as people earn more or have better harvests (i.e. have better outcomes), they are sometimes able to save, invest and earn more – but sometimes makes them targets for violence so that they then become worse off.



**Figure 2: How livelihoods are shaped**



Source: Levine 2014

Because a livelihoods framework tries to capture as much of the real world as possible, and so has to make space for as many different *kinds* of explanation as possible (or in other words, as many theoretical perspectives as possible), it does not lend itself to a straightforward presentation of findings, discussion and conclusions. Different examples may contribute some understanding to very different kinds of explanation of people's livelihoods, and part of the explanatory mission of a livelihoods analysis is to understand what would count as findings, which factors of people's lives help us to understand, for that person or household, why they live as they do. This report is thus necessarily discursive and even conversational, using the stories of several interviewees to illustrate possible explanations for their strategies and situation.

## 2.2 Methodology

The qualitative research design built on the survey results, drawing the sample of households interviewed from the survey respondents. The study set out to interview households that were successful, less successful and struggling in relation to economic recovery. The survey had assessed the success of livelihood recovery using measures of food access and of wealth accumulation (see Annex for the relevant questionnaire sections). Food access was measured using questions about food access and food consumption in the week prior to the survey to create coping strategies index and HDDS scores. Questions about ownership of assets were also asked in the survey, and a Morris score (Morris *et al.* 1999) was constructed for each household.<sup>7</sup> From the distribution of both the food access and asset scores, ranges were constructed to establish a higher, middle and lower group, leaving an interval in-between each group to avoid borderline cases. (Around half the survey respondents fell into one of the three groups for each parameter; the rest fell in between.) In order to avoid more doubtful cases, for the purposes of this sampling only households that scored high, middle or low on both asset

<sup>7</sup> The Morris score weights each asset in accordance with the number of people who own it. The fewer people who own that asset, the higher it scores.

and food access scores were considered as successful, middling or struggling respectively. (The majority of households did not score in the same group on the two scores and were therefore excluded.) Each of the three groups was then divided into those where the survey respondent had indicated that a household member had experienced a war crime and those where they had reported that they had not. This created a 3 x 2 matrix of six categories (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Number of households interviewed by 'success' and by experience of war crimes (as classified by survey response, Jan-Feb 2013)**

	'Successful'	'Middling'	'Struggling'
Suffered war crimes	3	11	12
No war crimes	5	8	5

The categorisation of households as successful, middling and struggling was based solely on scores based on the households' answers to questions in the SLRC Uganda survey in January and February 2013. The division here between those that reportedly experienced war crimes and those that did not are also based solely on the survey answers.

During the interview, there was sometimes a suggestion that the categorisation by crime was unreliable (see below). In other cases, the description of the households from food security and asset scores based on survey responses did not match the impressions gained of relative success from the more detailed interviews.

Households were selected for interview randomly in a two-stage process. It was not feasible to select households randomly from these six categories directly, because this would have entailed visiting too many villages, which would have been logistically impossible because of time required both for travelling and for the necessary protocols and introductions at the sub-county and village levels. Instead, all the villages in both Lango and Acholi sub-regions were chosen where there were households in all six categories, and then villages were randomly chosen where there were households in five categories. In all sampled villages, all the households that fitted into the groups were then interviewed. This enabled the study team to maximise the spread of interviewees across the six groups whilst minimising time and resources wasted. No attempt was made to balance the number of households where a war crime had or had not been reported. All the Districts of Acholi and Lango which had suffered displacement were included in the study. Those living in urban areas were excluded from the sample because it was believed that their experiences may be so different as to require a separate study.

One potential distortion may result from this sampling methodology. It is possible in theory that villages chosen because of the presence of households in all six groups may not be entirely representative of the sub-regions as a whole: for example, some villages may present conditions which predispose more favourable or unfavourable outcomes, making it less likely to find the full range of outcomes in the same village. However, this is disregarded for two reasons. First, the definition of successful, middling and struggling was based on households scoring on two parameters, in order to remove as much doubt about their status as possible. Having households in all groups did not therefore necessarily indicate a greater spread of success. Secondly, this research study is intended to understand better what success and the lack of success look like and how they come about. The study does not make any quantitative connections, so this kind of potential bias, even if it did exist, would not affect the analysis. (For example, the prevalence in the sample of households where a war crime had been suffered was deliberately higher than in the general population.)

Interviews were conducted with single individuals in their homes. The first adult encountered was invited to be interviewed, whether or not they were the respondent in the survey. 25 men and 19 women were interviewed. All interviews were conducted in the local languages and lasted for around one-and-a-half to two hours. People were asked to recount the stories of recovery of their households since the end of the war or, for those who had been displaced, since return. Issues that were raised by interviewees were followed up, but no prompting questions were asked about the legacy of war, experience of war crimes, institutions (see below) or support they had received. In order not to bias the conversation, interviewees were only asked about any assistance they had received at the very end of the interview. This approach was used to ensure that the stories reflected the perspective of the people themselves and was not influenced by the interests or preconceptions of the interviewers. However, as a result, the fact that a person did *not* mention a particular issue cannot be taken as evidence that the issue was not relevant to their lives.

Any mention in the discussion below about the prevalence of various issues must therefore be understood with two caveats. First, any numbers are for reports, and are thus the minimum number affected by the issue. Others may simply not have mentioned the issue. Second, though the selection of interviewees was made to achieve a wide spread (of both recovery outcomes and experience of war crimes), it is not a random sample of the population and is not presented as being representative.

## 3 Recovery trajectories

Almost every interviewee reported that the first steps of recovery involved returning to their land, clearing it and growing food crops. Whatever subsequent livelihood diversification took place, this was the first priority for every rural household interviewed. However, the ways in which they did this, what they were able to achieve from farming and their other strategies for gaining a living all varied from household to household. The rest of this section looks at a few of the interviews to see what can be learned.

### 3.1 Why the typical is not so typical

Looking first at the households considered to be succeeding, the experience of O\_\_\_ might initially be considered fairly typical – indeed on the very trajectory that development policy and aid practice are designed to encourage and support.

O\_\_\_ is a young man living together with his two wives and one child aged two, and also his elderly mother. He returned from the camp in 2007 and in that year was able to harvest a total of five sacks of maize and soya, a disappointing yield for him, which brought an income from sales of USD 50. The following year he planted sorghum and soya and harvested eight sacks. The soya price was low that year, but he earned around USD 240 from sorghum, making a total of almost USD 300 from crop sales. He had wanted to plant sunflower, a crop which has been grown for a long time in northern Uganda, but for which new oil-rich varieties are available that are marketed directly to an vegetable oil company. The seeds, though, are expensive and he couldn't afford them. By 2009 he took some seeds from his mother's sunflower harvest and planted these, but they didn't germinate.<sup>8</sup> Harvests were down in 2010 because of birds eating so much of his sorghum, so he switched to maize in 2011, earned around USD 150 from crop sales, and also began growing sesame (a traditional food crop in northern Uganda). In 2012 he added groundnuts (another traditional food and cash crop), though rodents caused a lot of damage to these, and pigeon peas. His reported income from crop sales has never exceeded the USD 300 he earned in 2008. O\_\_\_'s story seems one of a fairly rapid recovery<sup>9</sup> to a reasonable plateau. The first year he established basic food security, the second year he was able to expand his farming to make a reasonable profit, and from then on he showed skill and experimentation in trying out a few additional crops to maintain his position.

Such a story of rapid recovery in three years through expanding and then consolidating farming may be believed to be the norm, but it was rare among our interviewees. Indeed, the story is more complicated than portrayed so far. As well as farming, O\_\_\_ is also a builder and carpenter. As a result, he could earn around USD 5 a day when there was work – around three times the rate paid for unskilled labour. He also had a steady income from selling rabbits, his four breeding females producing an income of around USD 100 a year. His reported income from crop farming was not more than half his total annual income, and his non-farm income may also be more reliable in years of poor harvests, of which he had already had two (2010, 2012). His success was not simply based on the most usually noted characteristics: youth, strength, diversification. Indeed, though diversification is often claimed to be the key to resilience, O\_\_\_ had neither diversified his farming (growing only three or four crops in any quantity) nor his other income sources (having only two apart from his crop farming). Compared to most others, this showed less diversification in two ways (as confirmed by the 2012 survey). O\_\_\_ was also less diversified over time, as

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<sup>8</sup> His mother had probably been growing the new F1 hybrids, which are grown for an oil seed company. They were quickly replacing the traditional varieties of sunflower as a cash crop. However, the seeds were expensive, not always in supply, and, as F1 hybrids, need to be purchased afresh each season.

<sup>9</sup> The ability to farm was greatly constrained by very limited access to land when in the camps. A 2003 study in the camps found that only around 5–10% of households were able to earn more than USD 225 a year from crop sales (Acidri *et al.* 2003).

the interview was able to capture. As discussed below, many households had engaged in a dozen different economic activities over four or five years. Although O\_\_\_ would not be seen as a rare or extreme case, his household's economy was on the less diversified side of the spectrum.

Instead of over-diversifying or constantly having to find new activities to cope, his strategy was to establish himself with two very different and lucrative activities: building/carpentry and rabbit breeding. These both had rapid turnover, did not have the same lean seasons as crop farming and had very different 'vulnerabilities', so that a shock to one would not necessarily affect another.

The story takes on a further aspect if we look at the speed with which he was able to establish his basic food security. Most others struggled to grow enough to eat in their first year back, while he was already selling surpluses. O\_\_\_ was lucky to have an uncle who was able to lend him money as capital (e.g. for farming in the first year) or to cover sudden expenses. For example, he lost a young child in 2011 and for most people, the costs of a funeral would wipe out all the cash that had been accumulated that year or necessitate selling a bull. He had access to enough emergency credit from his uncle which meant that the personal tragedy of the loss of a child did not also set the whole family back economically.

The success stories show much individual variation. A few had salaried employment and they were thus better off than most, both because their consumption was secure but also because even a modest monthly salary of USD 100 provided a ready source of capital. USD 100 was a typical start-up investment in the family 'projects' that we heard about (e.g. purchase of livestock or bicycle, start-up capital for trading, etc.). Many of the other successes were able, like O\_\_\_, to re-establish their lives very quickly because of some support from family members. Almost all interviews, including the struggling, reported incidents where relatives had provided some assistance but the level of aid varied enormously. Some had relatives who gave them some seeds or cuttings to plant; the elderly or widows often had relatives who helped them prepare land or weed their crops. The more successful, on the other hand, had relatives who bought them livestock, mobile phones, bicycles and wheelbarrows and, crucially, were able to give them money (sums of USD 100 to over USD 500) either as gifts or loans.

There is one other factor that may have been important in helping O\_\_\_ to accumulate savings and advance: he had no children of school age. Families who could be said to be progressing or at least holding their own (in the 'middling' group) were typically accumulating around USD 200 from crop sales or other income sources in a good year. However, the concept of 'saving' needs to be treated carefully, as that might imply excess income which is somehow above and beyond basic needs that can be used for advancement. This kind of saving is perhaps more accurately thought of as cash accumulation, for it was usually used at least in part for necessary expenditure requiring large sums at one go (e.g. school fees). The lowest amount that we heard being spent on school expenses was USD 50 a year. (The only families where expenses were less than this were either households with no children going to school or households where the children were being supported in education by a relative.) Most households were paying between USD 100 and USD 200 a year for education:<sup>10</sup> in other words, almost the entire cash accumulation ('savings') of households was being spent on education, and this was, almost without exception, the reason why households said that they were working so hard. Families who could send their children to secondary or post-secondary (vocational) education were paying around USD 1,000, which was clearly impossible for all but the succeeding. A young family without children could make much quicker progress in economic accumulation if they had started a married life with a reasonable asset base, as they could use the money on, for example, buying an ox every year instead of paying for schooling. Few households, though, remain without children for any length of time.

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<sup>10</sup> Although in principle primary education without school fees was available, payments towards the school and for scholastic materials, etc. still had to be made. Not all children were able to attend these 'free' schools, which were also considered of poor quality. Secondary education was not free.

An elusive objective of research is to understand the pattern that explains success in order to support and replicate it for everyone. O\_\_\_'s experience, though, is not archetypal but in fact quite rare. It has been presented here in some detail precisely because it is instructive to see how far our diverse set of life stories differ from it. The various stories of success were simple to understand as individual cases, each with its own individual circumstances (a job, a well-off father or uncle, good luck). However, no common explanation for success in recovery emerged, at least none that could be reduced to one or two simple factors. This is an unwelcome finding, since such factors, if they existed, could then possibly be addressed through development policy or aid.

### 3.2 Managing change: keeping a head above water through rapid adaptation

O\_\_\_'s strategy for success was to concentrate on just three lucrative income sources, aiming to maximise his income rather than to reduce his risk further because he based his 'coping' instead on security capital accessible through relatives. This contrasts with the majority of people we spoke to. In fact, the range of activities that people were undertaking, and the speed with which they had to change them, was very striking, even to researchers familiar with the details of rural livelihoods in the region. As an illustration, the story of A\_\_\_ is more typical (or, given that this study seeks to question the concept of a 'typical life story', seems at the very least *not untypical*).

#### The ups and downs of life: the story of A\_\_\_, a family of medium success

A\_\_\_'s household's strategy shows a very different approach to recovery from O\_\_\_. In particular, the strategy is highly dynamic. It is interesting to keep count of just how many different new activities his family took on over just five years.

In February 2007, A\_\_\_ left the camp and restarted with nothing, not even a house. The family had no food, and so went back to the camp to get food aid. He managed to get some vegetable seeds from an NGO, was given some maize seed and his wife went to find sweet potato vines to plant (1a). He managed to accumulate USD 110 in the first year. He invested in poultry (2), but could only afford three hens because demand was high and supply very limited.

To feed his family, he had to look for casual (agricultural) work (3), but the demand for labour was low.

In 2008, he planted two additional crops (1b) but the harvests were poor and he had much less money at harvest than in 2007. His wife fell sick and he had to borrow USD 200 from his brother – more than his total earnings from his 2008 harvests. He joined a group that dug people's fields on credit (4), and with the money paid at the end of the year, he invested in a bicycle (5).

In 2009 he cultivated three additional crops (1c), getting seeds from his brother. His wife had recovered and was making alcohol (6). He started making bricks (7), though the demand was low, so he also dug pit latrines (8) from February to August. (Latrines are dug in the dry season: bricks need water, and are made in the rainy season.) Demand was not high enough to continue for another year, though. Some of his friends were earning well from trading fish, so A\_\_\_ decided to join them (9). It was a seven-hour ride on a bicycle to the landing sites, but he persevered for two years. He invested the savings in four goats (USD 135) (10).

Harvests were exceptionally good in 2010 and crop sales yielded USD 800, which went on paying bride price for himself and his younger brother (at a cost of three cows and seven goats).

In 2011 life was much harder as they started with no working capital after paying bride price. They carried on farming and A\_\_\_ was still trading fish. One his brothers died (reportedly from long-term complications from a bullet wound received during the war), and he spent any remaining savings on the burial. He had to take responsibility for his brother's four children, so he was now paying for a total of eight children in primary school and one in secondary school. His wife started selling thatch (11) to help keep the family. One child got sick, which cost USD 45.



In 2012, he had no strength to continue trading fish so he went back to brick making, now helped by his wife and children (who collected water and cut the firewood for burning the bricks), alongside farming. He started trading flour with capital of USD 80 (12). He made USD 430 from harvests and invested in a cow (13) that died after a month. He sold the meat, though, and bought three big sows (14) with the money (USD 110). All three were killed by bees two days before Christmas.

They were carrying on with farming, making alcohol, and making bricks, and in 2013 he said he wanted to try pigs again. He was also planning to plant bananas. Meanwhile, his last-born child was sick and he had already spent USD 30 on healthcare. His wife lost six weeks' earnings in 2013 because she had to stay with her sick sister in hospital.

A\_\_\_ and his wife have engaged in 14 different economic activities or investments in five years since returning from the camp, on top of which they have changed the composition of the crops they grow almost every year. Though this is slightly above average, it is fairly typical for a physically strong active couple. We spoke to several households who had engaged in an even greater variety. The entry cost of most activities was around USD 75–USD 100. (Farming had a similar upfront investment, though the costs of preparing land to farm is rarely considered as a capital investment in monetary terms). Cattle involved a higher investment, costing USD 125–USD 250, but goats or pigs were cheaper, and those who did not have enough in any one year to buy a cow could buy one 'in stages'. First goats would be bought and, if these multiplied, some could be sold to finance the move up to cattle.

How was one family able to take on board so many new activities so quickly? Across our interviewees, we found that the ability to find new activities often came from advice and encouragement given by friends, as A\_\_\_'s ventures into fish trading and pig rearing illustrate. Others reported following friends into 'farming as a business' (using hired labour on rented land); tomato cultivation (three people); growing sugar cane; growing rice; fishing; growing cabbages (three people); repairing bicycles (two people); and trading sorghum in Karamoja. It would be useful to understand whether some people are 'better' at getting ideas from friends – whether because they have better and more diverse networks or because they are simply more open to hearing about new ideas and following them. Sadly, though, too little has been studied about endogenous experimentation and innovation compared to the work done in understanding who is receptive and who is a laggard in following the good advice that 'we' give them. The idea that resilience lies not only in material or financial assets but also in what is sometimes called 'social capital' also demands more attention (Aldrich, 2012).

A\_\_\_'s family story also illustrates how hard it is to discern any kind of smooth trajectory in their recovery. The extent to which life has constant ups and downs should not be underestimated and nor should the precariousness of life in recovery. A\_\_\_'s family has faced economic 'shocks' almost every year: sickness of relatives, death of relatives, taking on four additional children, death of livestock (twice) and harvest failure. All of these shocks were suffered by at least half of our respondents. Too often this is under-appreciated: projects often seem to assume that livestock are a way to multiply assets and wealth. In fact, just over half of those who had invested in livestock (18 out of 34) reported the death of the livestock they purchased within a short time. Perhaps the most important insight from the research is indeed that policy-makers and those designing interventions need to think less in terms of promoting an upward trajectory called 'recovery', and more on how to support people through a rocky up-and-down pathway called life in difficult circumstances.

### **3.3 How successful is success?**

The story of A's relative, if modest, success tells us more about the difficulties of recovery than do the stories of those struggling just to cope. As well as the ups and downs and the precariousness of recovery, his life also shows clearly just how shallow his 'recovery' and 'success' are. In his best year,

his total family earnings (including the monetary value of food produced and consumed) were almost certainly between USD 1,000 and USD 1,200. Shared between himself and his nine dependent children, this comes to around USD 0.40 to USD 0.45 per adult per day.<sup>11</sup> Medium success, in other words, involved a peak income *in the best year* of around one-third of the international poverty line.<sup>12</sup>

Putting some concrete figures on poverty – and, more to the point, on normality – is important, because any policy or intervention to support livelihoods has to be based on some understanding of the scale of what is already happening and what more is needed. Because so much discussion of livelihood support looks only at the purported benefits of a project without reference to the overall context of total household incomes or poverty thresholds, describing moderate success as under half the poverty line may sound surprisingly low, but aid interventions can sometimes be predicated on people having much less than this. A recent study (Blattman et al. 2013) found that a post-war economic intervention targeted at poor women in northern Uganda has ‘nearly doubled’ their cash earnings. ‘For the average...beneficiary, monthly cash income increased by UGX 16,211 [c.USD 7] to UGX 32,692 [c. USD 14], a 98% increase over controls.’ Such a measurement of individual cash income would give a household with two adults a combined annual cash income of under USD 150 – just 10 cents per person per day if they have five children. This study found such a sum to be within the normal range of annual household expenditure on education costs alone.

Another thread common to almost every story we heard (of all degrees of success) was also present in A\_\_\_’s history. One of the first priorities for most households for a large cash spending is not an economic investment at all, but to pay bride price. Few people paid bride price during the war, and once the war was over, they faced enormous pressure to regularise the relationships they had taken up during the war. No one suggested to us that they could or would try to avoid paying. The social obligation to pay outweighs the incentive to keep the money to invest directly in economic advancement. (Social obligations, of course, have economic implications, especially in places where inter-dependence is high and the risks from social non-acceptance may be high.) Because there had usually been several years’ delay in meeting this obligation, most of those who bought cattle had to use them immediately to pay bride price, but one or two people who bought cows tried to wait a year or two in order to multiply the number, and to then use them to pay their in-laws. This would be a more usual strategy in normal times, as a widow with no immediate bride price obligations illustrated.

*My aim of rearing goats is to have them multiply so that I can later exchange them for a cow.  
I want the cow to multiply so that I can pay bride price for my son when he grows up.  
(Widow, relatively ‘succeeding’)*

The typical bride-price payment made in any one year that we heard of between USD 200 and USD 400, though these often represented instalments. Total bride price was usually a mixture of livestock and cash, with a total value of around USD 500–USD 1,000. It was beyond the scope of this study to ascertain how far the acceptance of the need to pay bride price represented the acceptance of the cultural rule (i.e. that the payment ought to be made) and how far it was because the costs and pressures of not paying were too high (i.e. acceptance that there was no choice but to pay).

In spite of everything, A\_\_\_ was somehow better off in 2013 than he had been in 2007. Six years into recovery, his total asset accumulation is just three cows and one second-hand bicycle, but this is not failure. He was succeeding in putting his many children through school. He would not be classed as among the poorest in his village. This leaves us with no clear picture of what ‘recovery’ is about, or when people can be said to have ‘recovered’, or even whether it makes much sense to speak in those terms

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<sup>11</sup> Calculating a child as 0.6 of an adult.

<sup>12</sup> In 2005, the World Bank set the international poverty line at USD 1.25 per person per day. This was updated in 2015 to take account of inflation, and is now USD 1.90 per person per day. This report uses the 2005 poverty line.

at all. Recovery is not a sustained period without shocks or a constant year on year improvement in living standards. It is not even a progressively increasing ability to deal with shocks ('resilience'?) since the nature and scale of shocks varies so much, as does the ability to deal with the following one. Recovery is played out as *persistence in coping* with each year as it comes. Livelihood recovery is not simply an economic trajectory. It would make little sense to say that paying bride price, which involves a reduction in economic assets, 'delays recovery'. Rather, should we not say that paying bride price is a part of recovery, a sign that life – and social obligations – are slowly returning to normal?

It is difficult to guess from an interview in 2013 where A\_\_\_ is now, in 2016. It is possible that things could be better if the family has had three good (lucky?) years, but the assessment of their situation will perhaps depend most on the particular point in time in which the assessment is made. And that, as much as any shortcomings in the ways in which we are trying to capture an assessment of 'the state of recovery' of households, may make it difficult to draw too many easy conclusions about the trajectory of livelihoods in post-war northern Uganda.

## 4 The legacy of the war: the continuing impact of war crimes

The SLRC survey had found a very close statistical connection between a household member having suffered a serious crime during the war and the household subsequently having more difficult food access. As discussed above, one of the explicit research objectives of this study was to better understand how these were linked; the methodology by which interviewees were selected was designed specifically to be able to do this.

We had hoped to find patterns in people's stories that might help to explain the statistical correlation found in the survey. One difficulty in spotting patterns was that the stories recounted in interviews did not always match what had been answered in survey interviews. Interviews with several households selected as having suffered a war crime suggested that they were possibly not victims. In more than one case, the attacks had been unrelated to the war (e.g. predating it, or involving domestic violence) or had occurred to others. If some other family member had perhaps suffered some war crime, we found no clues from this or any link to their livelihood stories. There were also cases where households which had reported not having suffered war crimes then told us of experiences which might well have been war crimes. In small-sample research, such as this study, even a few such mis-categorisations are enough to obscure any patterns.

As already discussed, the study did not look at cases of lasting psychological injury, because of the professional expertise needed for diagnosis. There were two main reasons for believing that suffering crimes which involved physical effects might have a longer-term impact on livelihoods: the ongoing costs of healthcare can be significant; and physical injuries can limit people's ability to work and to earn a living. A third possible reason is that enduring physical injury could cause social exclusion or could deepen the stigma of having been a victim of a war crime.

The economic costs of the healthcare associated with war crimes was the subject of a parallel study within the overall SLRC research programme, and so was not the focus of detailed study here. This study found that the high costs of healthcare were a very serious drain on household resources for the majority of people. Of the 26 interviewees classified from the survey as from households where at least one member suffered a war crime, the issue of high healthcare costs came up in 14 interviewees. At first sight, this appears much higher than in interviewees with people who came from households where no one suffered a crime (only six interviewees out of 19). However, apart from the fact that the samples are too small to draw conclusions, the attempt at such a comparison would be fallacious for a more serious reason. Of the 14 households who had experienced a war crime and who spoke about high healthcare costs, it was only in one interview that these costs (of over USD 175) related to an injury from the crime. In the others, it was either a household member who had not suffered a crime (in more than half of the cases, the stories were about children), or it appeared to be for an unrelated condition (though without medical expertise, this could not be assessed definitively). This study sought to examine the effects of having suffered a war crime and did not target specifically only those who as a result had lasting serious physical injuries. It has already been well established (Mazurana *et al.* 2014a and 2014b) that there are a great many with ongoing sickness, injuries or disabilities, who are left with financial burdens of healthcare and the difficulty of accessing healthcare of appropriate quality.

Those with pre-existing injury or chronic sickness aside, it seems almost impossible to predict or even make any generalisations about healthcare costs incurred by families for two reasons. First, ill health seems to strike people almost randomly. Secondly, and importantly in discussing the legacy costs of experiencing war crimes, health-care costs are not simply associated with ill health. Many people have

no health-care costs because they cannot access treatment. This includes both those still suffering the physical effects of war crimes and those with injuries and illnesses unrelated to war.

The economic costs of the loss of labour because of war crimes were more evident. Of the 24 people believed to come from families which suffered a serious crime during the war, 17 spontaneously described significant limitations in the work they were able to do because of serious ongoing physical complications from injuries suffered as a result of crimes during the war. As a result, these 17 (i.e. more than two-thirds of those who had reported in the survey to have suffered war crimes) have household members unable to engage in a normal rural workload or in some cases in any work at all. Most of the complaints related to injuries to legs or chests. One woman says she is now HIV+ as a result of rape by LRA rebels. Some alleged victims of war crimes were completely dependent on other household members or relatives, while others were largely dependent on relatives to help them with basic work tasks such as weeding and even the lifting involved in brewing. Apart from one man, all of their stories clearly told of circumstances where they had lower household incomes than they would have had otherwise. The one exception was a man who had to abandon fishing because he was not physically able to do the work: he instead used his boat to provide transport, from which he earned more than he would have done from fishing.

What is at first surprising is that these physical limitations did not correlate with people's livelihood outcomes, as measured by the asset scores and food access scores from the survey. Of the 17 who continued to suffer lost or reduced labour capacity, only five had been classified as struggling: three were 'succeeding' and nine 'middle'. More detailed examination of the stories shows that of the three households that were succeeding, two had men with employment (one as a teacher, one with an NGO), while the third had been able to study at university (with some support from an NGO) and the person's injuries did not prevent them so much from physical work. The picture is thus confused and confusing. The stories of the interviewees supports the intuition which had been challenged by the survey findings. Although the survey found a very tight correlation, but a small coefficient, connecting experience of war crimes and reduced food access, people's stories suggested that having suffered a war crime can sometimes have a huge economic impact, but that the connection is actually quite weak. There are a wide diversity of outcomes both among those who have and who have not suffered war crimes.

Apart from the more obvious physical injuries left by war crimes, the study investigated possibly indirect impacts, such as economic losses arising as a result of social stigma. All interviewees were asked about how they perceived the social integration of people in their communities who had suffered war crimes, including those who had returned after abduction. Almost all reported that there were no problems, and that everyone was accepted. How far this reflects an idealised picture of their communities is impossible to say.

Two stories appear to include an impact of stigma from having suffered a crime. One young woman had been abducted (though not left with any physical injury) and had chosen to move into an urban area on her return. There she ended up with an abusive and drunk husband who constantly stole her earnings. Her choice of moving to town rather than back to her village may have been partly due to fear of stigma, though she did not describe it in this way. Similarly, staying for so long with an abusive husband may be linked to a perception she had that there were no better options for people like her – though her story is a common one and, if she was limited for years by self-perception, it is hard to say how much this was due to any war experiences. She was living alone in a village at the time of the interview, but she had problems with her tailoring business because people often simply refuse to pay her. She said that they openly abuse her for 'having been with the rebels'. On a personal level, her story is very distressing, but from a narrower livelihoods perspective it is hard to know how to interpret it. Stories of people not paying debts to those of lower social status are not at all uncommon, and they will usually look for some convenient excuse to justify their behaviour. It is hard to say, therefore, how far non-payment in her case was the result of her war experience or how far people were able to avoid

paying her because of her low status in general (a woman with a lack of wealth, lack of husband, lack of strong family member in the village) and they would otherwise simply have found another excuse. Her passivity to the abuse she receives in the village may be a contributory factor in it continuing, since abuse thrives on weakness. This passivity may in turn be caused partially by her self-perception that this is the best that someone like her can hope for – and this self-perception may in turn have been shaped by her war crime experience of abduction. Many interpretations are possible and several may have some truth to them. Several days of interviews with the woman would be needed to gain a fuller understanding of her situation, without which a simplistic narrative is to be avoided.

The second story is one in which the victim is affected individually, but not the livelihood of the household. It concerns an old woman who had to stay in the camp until 2011 because, she says, her husband only built a house for his second wife as ‘he considered me to be weak and useless and never wasted time on me’ following her disability caused by her injury from the war. Again, it is not uncommon to find an older wife abused by a husband who has taken a younger wife, but the physical injury which she had suffered was very likely to be a strongly contributing factor.

This study confirmed the findings of the survey that few people had received assistance from the state or from aid agencies, and assistance has not gone more to those who have suffered specific crimes or injuries because of the war. Of the 26 interviewees classified as having suffered war crimes, none had received aid related to any enduring condition. None received aid of any significant monetary value, except for a widow who received sponsorship for school fees for one year (although this was unrelated to her war injury). Three others received small quantities of seeds from National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) or an NGO through groups of which they were members; one man received a local-breed goat as part of a group of 30; and one woman received a sewing machine.



## 5 Institutions: the importance of the rule of law

Failings in the state institutions of law and justice in Uganda have been well documented (e.g. IoG 2008, Afrobarometer 2008, TI 2008, TI 2010). These failings relate both to the lack of protection of their basic rights by the police and the judicial system and to corruption, incompetence and abuse of power by these same institutions.

*In 2007, Global Integrity introduced the 'implementation gap' metric to capture the gap between a country's anti-corruption laws 'on the books' and the actual enforcement of those same laws.*

*Uganda has the largest 'implementation gap' of all countries covered in the Global Integrity Report. (IoG 2010)*

This study did not look directly at the functioning of those institutions, but rather at how people's livelihoods were affected by their contact with institutions, especially of law and justice. The main institutional issue raised, unsurprisingly, was difficulty in defending land rights, which is discussed on its own. Other issues are subsequently discussed together.

### 5.1 Land rights

As already discussed, almost every interviewee reported how clearing land and growing food was their first priority on return from displacement. (All the interviewees were selected from rural areas.) Although most of the more successful households had non-agricultural sources of income, the survey results and detailed interviews both gave evidence of the primary importance of crop production as the basis of a secure livelihood and of people's plans for the future. Land rights are therefore the prerequisite for food security and recovery. The lack of attention to land rights by agencies who were trying to support return, food security and economic recovery is therefore hard to understand. Previous studies have shown that a vacuum in land administration and a generally dysfunctional justice system have been a fertile environment for land disputes and land-grabbing in northern Uganda (see LEMU 2009b, LEMU 2009c, Mabikke 2011, Rugadya *et al.* 2008). This study confirmed the high prevalence of land grabbing and also showed some of its impacts on livelihoods.

Even though the interviewers asked about the recovery life-story and did not ask unprompted questions about land rights,<sup>13</sup> 21 out of 44 interviewees spontaneously mentioned land disputes since their return from the IDP camps in 2007.<sup>14</sup> Eleven of the 21 who mentioned threats to land rights recounted actual land disputes, the majority involving attempts by other family members to take possession over land that the interviewees claimed as theirs.<sup>15</sup>

Three themes ran through these stories. First, most of the interviewees who reported being the victim of attempted land grabbing were classified as 'struggling' from the survey data on food access and asset

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<sup>13</sup> Land rights are exceedingly difficult to research for many reasons, including the need for interviewers to have an excellent grasp of land law and customary land tenure, because it is an extremely sensitive subject in N Uganda, and because interviewees may not be aware of their own land rights under either state or customary law, and thus not report a land grab as such.

<sup>14</sup> There may have been others who did not mention incidents relating to land rights – particularly if they were only in the first steps of a land grab. It is likely that others had lost land rights through processes that were illegal but so common as not even to be considered a land grab or to have created a dispute. This is especially the case for those with less well respected rights, such as widows, divorced women, unmarried mothers and the children of unmarried mothers. Divorced women have clear land rights in law in northern Uganda (KKA 2008, LCF 2009), though they are often violated. The rights of separated women are much less clear, making it harder to determine when behaviour against them is illegal.

<sup>15</sup> It is obviously impossible for the research to address the question of the rights and wrongs in these disputes, but the interview report is probably reliable evidence of the existence of a dispute.

ownership, and the evidence from their recent experiences reflected a high degree of poverty. The two exceptions were both widows. Other research has shown that being a victim of an attempted land grab is very much about a lack of perceived strength (what is called 'atek'), and both economic poverty and widowhood are forms of 'weakness'.<sup>16</sup> It is clearly impossible to prove any relationship between suffering land disputes and livelihood status from either the sample size or the research methodology. The interviewees' testimonies suggest that in some cases the land dispute has been a cause of poverty due to a significant loss of land and income. In other cases, it is likely that the interviewee's poverty or lack of resources was itself a contributing factor to an opportunistic land dispute. This is particularly the case with the widows.

Secondly, intra-family land disputes are very common, and were the explanation of seven out of eleven stories of land disputes that we collected. Disputes involved brothers-in-law (claiming land from widows), uncles (claiming land from an orphaned child and the children of unmarried mothers) and brothers, who gave their divorced sister a very small share in their parents' land.

A third theme is the failure of the institutions which are supposed to regulate land rights by providing systems of administration and justice. The research made no attempt to judge the rights and wrongs of different claims, and so no comment can be made about the quality of decisions given either by the state justice system or the clan system, both of which were used by those claiming to suffer attempts at land grabbing. In some cases people have been satisfied with the justice they were given by the clan or the courts, in other cases not. However, the dysfunctionality of the systems is clear from the stories of decisions being granted but simply unenforced ('the owner won case, but failed to pay brokers [i.e. bailiffs] to evict the man') and by the way in which disputes had to be followed from court to court and the time taken for disputes to be resolved. Most cases were still in dispute years after they began. State institutions also appear to be unaware of the land rights that people have, both under statutory law and in customary law, which enjoys legal force in Uganda.

### Land rights in northern Uganda

The combination of statutory and customary land rights enjoyed by people in northern Uganda is significant:

- The state cannot seize private property without due process and full compensation (statute).
- The entirety of family land remains with a widow (custom).
- Children are allocated land on marriage. A woman receives rights from her parents-in-law, but a divorced woman has the right to a share of her parent's land (custom).
- An unmarried mother receives land from her parents, as a son would on marriage (custom).
- Taking someone's land is a criminal offence (statute).

An example is the case of the widow who suffers permanent physical weakness from her abduction and physical abuse by the LRA. She reported that she was now being thrown off her land near a (state) health centre:

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<sup>16</sup> See LEMU (2009) for an analysis of strength and weakness in relation to land grabbing in northern Uganda. A weakness in one area (e.g. gender, physical strength) can be made up for by strength in another (e.g. wealth, connections to power, etc.)

*The government wants us to leave and they are not willing to compensate us. We don't have anywhere to go because this is where our family has inherited its land. We involved the Local Councillors, but they have done nothing to help us. They are supporting the government, saying that this is a government programme.*

Land law in Uganda is very clear that the state has the right of compulsory acquisition of land in the public interest – which would include the development of a health centre. However, compensation including the full market value of the land and additional compensation for disturbance must be paid (Land Act S77). In all probability, neither the District government trying to develop the health centre nor the local councillors will have understood that their conduct is illegal. Development agencies have been similarly ignorant of land rights when asking ‘the community’ to donate land for the development of infrastructure. Communities rarely own land, except for grazing land in and around wetlands. The land on which infrastructure is developed is almost always private family land, for which development agencies in northern Uganda have not offered compensation.

### **The anatomy of a land grab: when justice goes missing in action**

J\_\_\_’s story is similar in many aspects to many other cases of land grabbing and provides a good illustration<sup>17</sup> of the failings of land justice in northern Uganda.

*‘My neighbour returned from the camp before I did, and when I got back he and his three brothers had encroached on to my land. They claimed that their father had lent the land to my father and now they wanted it back. [A common excuse of land grabbers is to tell an unverifiable story about a ‘loan’ of land that is conveniently only mentioned when all parties to the transaction are safely dead. Such stories usually only appear when it is convenient to grab land – on the death of a man, the widow may hear the story, or, in J\_\_\_’s case, when the neighbours took advantage of his absence to unilaterally take the land.] I went to clan elders, but leaders only work for money, and the others were rich and I am poor. [A common complaint. Clan leaders in another village in N Uganda openly said to this researcher ‘if MPs in parliament take bribes, who are we to refuse?’] They determined that the land belonged to others because they measured and the land was closer to their houses than to mine. [Judging a case by criteria which have no bearing whatsoever on land rights is also remarkably common and a convenient device for legitimising a land grab.] I had to go to the LC1 and pay a court fee of USD 2.50. [This was less than most people pay, but the actual legal limit for a court fee is 1,500 shillings, then worth around USD 0.75] The LC1 called all of them, and they explained that now they had children, they needed the land back. The LC said that in that case, then I should leave the land. [Again, the use of irrelevant criteria to judge claims to land rights.] I told the LC that the land had been in my family for many years but he said that something so small could lead to confusion in the community, so I should leave it so I can stay in peace.’ [It has been found to be very common in mediation and other dispute resolution to place the obligation to maintain good relations on the victim of land grabbing, either to cede their rightful land ‘in the interests of harmony’ or to compromise and cede half. This demand for compromise has led to the development of a common strategy of land grabbers in northern Uganda: ‘grab two and give one back’.]*

J\_\_\_ did not have the funds to pursue the case to a proper court and it was clear to him that he would have to face opposition in his village from the powerful, such as the LC1, whose orders to give in ‘for the sake of peace’ he would have to disobey in order to proceed with the case. He lost his land.

There has been an understandable fear that people who were abducted could face threats to their land rights on their return. Fears have included that boys could be chased away from their villages if they were associated with crimes committed in the village; and girls who returned with children would be denied rights for their families. This study did not find such patterns, and the disputes we heard

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<sup>17</sup> The use of the case for illustration does not imply that the story, as told by J\_\_\_, is accurate.

affected similarly those who had suffered from war crimes and those who had not. However, since this was not the specific purpose of the research, no conclusions regarding land rights and those who are victims of war crimes can be made on the basis of our interviews.

There are several clearly identifiable livelihood impacts from an institutional environment that is so conducive to land disputes. Perhaps most concerning is the close association of violence and land disputes. Land disputes have been linked to violence both at a domestic level and between communities and clans in northern Uganda (Vaughan and Stewart 2011, Rugadya 2009).

*You're not going to find a person who hasn't been affected by land issues.*

*In Acholiland, land disputes are the most significant form of conflict, with many escalating into violence. (Vaughan and Stewart 2011)*

The interviews for this study reported violence occurring in five out of the eleven reported disputes – resulting in at least one death and several serious injuries. A second set of impacts is directly economic. For almost everyone, land is either the only, or by far the most valuable, possession that they own. Its loss essentially leaves them with no economic assets. Further, since exploitation of land is the main source of food and cash income for most people (and indeed often the only major source), loss of the ability to exploit land represents a huge economic cost. In some areas, people were able to rent land but at a cost of around USD 70 a year for two acres. For the struggling, this was close to a typical annual accumulation for all investment (see above). Rental agreements also come with restrictions: for example, cassava can usually not be grown. Landowners often rent out less productive land or land which needs the greatest effort for clearing and weeding, which they take back to exploit themselves the following season. Most, though, were simply left with very small land areas to cultivate and with no areas where rice could be grown.

*I've lost the three gardens in the swamp where I used to grow rice, and I'm only left with the poorest of my two upland gardens. I lost the three best [upland] gardens that my late husband owned. (Widow, victim of land grabbing with violence)*

Such a typical story represents a loss of the vast majority of the widow's income-earning potential and, in an area with few non-agricultural income opportunities, almost certainly condemns someone without exceptional skills or capital to deep poverty.

A third, badly neglected impact of land disputes is the cost of the actual dispute itself. Interviewees reported spending USD 50–USD 75 just on taking a case to the clan authorities or the lowest state courts, the Local Council 2 (at parish level). If any case had to be heard outside the village itself, the transport and subsistence of witnesses had to be paid, and one respondent detailed spending USD 45 on witnesses alone: again, this has to be interpreted in the light of a household economy where typically people need to accumulate at least USD 100 a year just to maintain themselves at their level of deep poverty. The high costs of land disputes are also critical to their resolution. Previous research has described how a key strategy of land grabbing is to win by forcing the poor victim to give up a struggle that they cannot afford to continue (LEMU, 2009a). One interviewer spoke of someone who had succeeded in winning a case in the formal courts, but because the costs of enforcement are the responsibility of the complainant, was unable to repossession his own land.

A fourth impact of endemic and uncontrolled land grabbing is the way in which it forces people into making choices that they may not want to take. In addition to the 11 cases of land disputes (out of the 44 interviews), a further ten – almost a quarter of people interviewed – reported that fear of losing their land had forced them to make specific choices to move or to undertake costs in cultivating land in order to secure their land rights (the constant physical occupation and use of land being necessary in order to deter land grabbers).

*Our land in O\_\_\_ was on the verge of being grabbed, so now we have to go there [regularly]. This year ...my son constructed a hut there and has also planted 1 acre of sesame. (Widow, 'struggling')*

*I bought a plot in O\_\_\_ trading centre for 500,000 shillings [then worth around USD 220] and I was planning to build a house there, but in October I decided to go back to the village because I got a report from there that people were encroaching on my land. (Man, 'struggling')*

*I was living in Lira town where my in-laws were helping me to rent a house. I had to come back to the village because I heard about so many land problems and I feared that I would lose my land and then my children would have nothing. (Widow, 'struggling', who reported later suffering a violent land grab)*

It is impossible to quantify the economic or social cost of these decisions to occupy land in order to protect it, rather than to use it optimally or to optimise the use of other opportunities. In some cases, people may be foregoing more profitable uses of their time (which was beyond the scope of this study to analyse); they may be undertaking otherwise unjustifiable expenses to cultivate land, or farming sub-optimally in order to show occupation. In other cases, people reported being forced to live in places that they would not choose to in order to avoid losing their only assets.

A more general *indirect* impact of endemic land grabbing is much wider. From both the interviews carried out by this study and other research, it is evident that there is a huge, albeit unquantifiable, social and wider economic cost to the scale of intra-family conflicts and the erosion of any remaining confidence in social structures associated with the state and the clan system, both of which have responsibility for land administration and land justice. Among the 11 disputes that we heard, one concerned a relative of a local MP grabbing land and another concerned the father of policemen, who was allegedly using his sons to support his land grabbing. The accusations themselves are evidence of a poor degree of trust in power: whether or not they are true in those specific instances, the fact that respondents offered them is in itself testimony to the perception that such accusations against the powerful are credible and likely to be believed. If they are true, then the stories are also evidence of the reasons why the holders of power are generally held in such low esteem.

## **5.2 Other problems with the rule of law**

A further ten interviewees reported being the victims of robbery, though none of them had obtained, nor expected, any justice. Thefts were of livestock, money, bicycles and crops. Most cases of theft involved the loss of assets worth from USD 70 to USD 250, though one family lost three head of cattle. Thefts were spread fairly equally across succeeding, middle and struggling respondents. For individuals and households living on the margins in particular, their impact is huge. Their direct impact is the loss of assets worth the equivalent of a year or more's total capital accumulation; as comes out very strongly out of this study, such capital accumulation is not first and foremost about getting richer, but is needed simply to maintain people in their poverty (having money for school fees, healthcare costs, funerals, etc.). The further indirect impacts are a loss of income, both from the asset itself and because people then give up those activities.

*I started taking sorghum to sell in Kotido [District]. It was my husband's idea, he heard of other women from the village taking sorghum to Kotido markets. We started with three-and-a-half bags, worth 100,000 shillings [then USD 55] here, and I could sell it for 200,000 [USD 110] on a market day ... My husband took over the business and we had built up 400,000 shillings [USD 220]. Then one day he came back with nothing because the money had been stolen. The business ended there.*

The woman was from a 'middling' family. It seems likely that had security allowed them to continue trading with capital of USD 220, they would quickly have established themselves as relatively 'succeeding'.

The economic importance of theft, and the perverseness of a situation where it is ignored by the institutions of justice and law and of society as whole, is best illustrated by the case of an old widow living with her young grandniece. Her story illustrates the importance of taking seriously the details and 'small things' that are too often ignored in the broader and more generic statements on which policy too often appears to rest.

L\_\_\_'s social vulnerability, as an old widow with no sons living with her, is already evidenced by the fact that she had lost her best land to a land grabber. She should though have been able to support herself from the sale of shea oil harvested from trees on her land. Other people had cut down many of trees for charcoal without permission, even though this is theft or criminal damage. Young people in her village also come in the night to harvest the shea nuts from her trees. She found it strange when she was asked if the police had done anything about the theft. Even the interviewing team did not regard her loss as a serious issue until the economic calculations were made.

According to yield and loss estimates,<sup>18</sup> she ought to be able to harvest two full sacks of nuts from the trees which remain, i.e. already writing off a sizeable loss from the illegal destruction of her trees for charcoal. (This is a low estimate compared to average tree yields.) If she sold the nuts at USD 0.25 per 300-millilitre cup, she would earn around USD 180 a year. If processed it into oil, as she usually did, the income is doubled (USD 350 a year). Instead, she was only left with about two basins a year, or a third of a sack. That means that suffered an annual theft of USD 150 of raw nuts, which would be worth around USD 280 to her in income from shea oil. At the highest prices that were reported to us, she could independently meet the annual food needs from the market for herself and for the young grandchild living with her at a cost of around USD 140.<sup>19</sup> Her destitution and her dependence on neighbours and relatives was thus the result of institutional failings: the failure of people in her village to respect her property rights, and the failure of the police and justice system to protect rights. This link between poverty or food insecurity and institutions receives little attention.

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<sup>18</sup> In order to minimise the risk that she would exaggerate her losses, these were not asked directly or at one time.

<sup>19</sup> Based on a basic diet of sorghum, pulses and groundnuts (for lipids). She would be self-sufficient in greens with little effort from cowpeas planted around the house.



## 6 Aid and support to recovery

The narrative from the Ugandan government and its development partners on support for recovery in northern Uganda has often stressed the need to look forward positively. It talks about economic regeneration in terms that are disassociated with the historical or political situation that has caused the problems and, as a result, there is little appetite even among donors to push an agenda of compensation or reparation for those who suffered in the war (e.g. as the victims of war crimes). Support to basic services such as education and health has been discussed in a national context and with a reluctance to consider that areas affected by war and forced displacement over many years might have additional needs related to that war. Apart from the huge impact of the war on the services themselves in northern Uganda, which was not the subject of this research, interviews clearly brought home the scale of the additional needs which continue to exist as a result of the war (Mazurana *et al.* forthcoming). This is due in part to the huge number of people who continue to live with physical disability and ailments as a result of injuries suffered during the war, a story that is largely absent from the narrative of recovery. In addition, the legacy of the war on poverty remains enormous. People's life stories were very much centred around the struggles which they faced in order to obtain even minimal healthcare or education for their children.

This section looks at the impact of the development investment that has been made, and examines its success on its own terms, i.e. on how far economic recovery has been accelerated as a result of external aid efforts.

As already stated, the SLRC Uganda survey had found that most households (84%) in Acholi and Lango sub-regions had not received assistance in the year preceding the survey. Much assistance has been in the provision of direct grants to households of various assets: most typically free seed distributions (around half of those who reported receiving any assistance in the survey). Other assistance included fertilisers, pesticide and tool distribution; agricultural extension services and vocational training; seed money for revolving funds (savings and credit). There has also been some investment in public works through cash-for-work programming (see for example McCord *et al.* 2013). The survey also showed major huge dissatisfaction with the assistance received, with over half saying that they had no benefit from what they received.<sup>20</sup> The survey also clearly showed that more successful households, as measured by food access and asset ownership, were more likely to receive aid.

This study was not an impact assessment of aid programming, but looked only at how far people's stories of their post-war livelihood trajectories reflected the role of any external assistance. In order not to influence people's evidence, respondents were not asked directly about assistance until at the very end of the interview.

After a one-off food aid packet given to those leaving the camps, the majority of households interviewed had received no direct development assistance since returning from displacement. This ought perhaps to be surprising: although they had lost their entire asset base, and almost always returned to find no home still standing and their land needing to be cleared to farm, the lack of assistance suggests an expectation that they would simply pick up their lives and resume a 'normal' upwards trajectory towards development.

Nonetheless, a minority of people had received some form of assistance: 11 out of our 44 livelihood stories included some external assistance. Four had received livestock: of these, two people each received one goat; one was given 'some piglets' and another a bull and a plough. Four had received

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<sup>20</sup> Those reporting having received assistance were asked: 'Did this help improve your agricultural production or other livelihood activity?'

seeds, ranging from 'five cups' (worth less than a dollar), to 10 kilograms each of maize and beans (worth around USD 7). Three families had received support for education – children in two families were sponsored at school and one man was sponsored at university. In addition, one old widow had a hut built for her by HelpAge so that she could leave the IDP camp, but she had received no further livelihood support.

The interviews confirmed the survey finding that assistance was targeted away from those most in need, whether by design or through the way in which those managing the targeting were allowed to choose beneficiaries. Only two of the aid recipients were struggling. Half were middling, and the rest were relatively succeeding. The group of those succeeding included the recipients who received the highest value support (a bull and plough set, university sponsorship, and sponsorship of two children at school and livestock). The correlations between assistance and wealth status found in the SLRC 2013 survey (Mazurana *et al.* 2014a) could not determine whether the aid was given to those already better off, or whether people became better off because they had received aid. The evidence from this study made it very clear that their success owed little if anything to the assistance. It is striking, indeed, just how little livelihood impact has been achieved through the support. Only two households (the recipient of the bull and a plough, and the recipient of university sponsorship) can be seen to have benefited significantly from aid.

The few animals which were donated, like those purchased by people for themselves, often quickly died. Apart from the bull, one household remained with a goat and three kids – four years after receiving the mature female goat.

### **The hopes and realities of aid impact**

Aid agencies love to give out livestock because they reproduce, and so one animal is seen to bring an endless stream of income that can even be spread to other households through groups. It is instructive to compare real life with the idealised multiplication rates beloved of interventions planning. In many cases, animals received died quickly (as has also been described for many of the animals purchased by people as investments). Even where animals survived and multiplied, reality is less successful than the predictions from the assumptions on which interventions are often based. The lady who received a mature female goat had a mother and three immature kids after four years. She reported that none had been sold. According to theory, the mother should give birth twice a year, so that even without twinning there are two additional kids every year. Assuming half are females, and allowing conservatively for the kids then to have a first birth only at two years (though 18 months is quite normal), the mature doe should have turned into a herd of at least 16 animals after four years. This does not include the increase that could be managed by selling any males born to invest in additional females. Since the local breeds in northern Uganda twin regularly, the herd should have been considerably bigger than 16. The outcome was less than 20% of what could have been hoped.

Three of the four recipients of seeds reported that they either did not germinate or did not yield because of poor weather. We heard no stories of households failing to plant staple food crops because of a lack of seeds, so the net benefit of the seeds given was in any case questionable. Sunflower was the only crop that any families reported wanting to grow but unable to obtain or to afford. We heard no cases of aid donations of sunflower seeds. The value of the assistance to recipients of seeds thus never exceeded USD 7.

Even the impact of school fees was negligible. In the two cases of families with children being sponsored by NGOs, that support only lasted for two years. Two children from one family were attending a vocational school on a three-year course, but they then had to drop out of school with a year left before they completed their studies and qualified. The children were not reported to be working in the vocation they had been studying. The livelihood benefit to an incomplete education in Uganda is questionable.

Although all these different aid packages seem to have little in common, they nevertheless represent a similar attitude to aid delivery. Aid is given *ad hoc*, *justified as an activity* and not as part of a systematic plan to enable people to reach any defined level of well-being. Project documents and monitoring systems all make it abundantly clear that aid is too often conceptualised as about what an agency<sup>21</sup> gives and not about what people are able to access or to do as a result of the work of an agency. If goats were handed out, then the activity was justified by reference to the number of animals distributed: the plan was not based on any attempt to understand how many animals would be needed to enable households to generate a given level of annual income from livestock sales, nor was any planning done about the necessary services or infrastructure needed in order for them to be able to manage their animals. (The lack of attention to animal health is the most obvious example of this lack of foresight and planning.)

It is hard to reconcile the small size of most of the asset transfers reported with an understanding of how household economies were working. As discussed above, even the households which had been classified as 'struggling' showed a typical income from an economic 'project' of at least USD 100 as a lump sum, in addition to any incremental benefits. (The main exception to this was the elderly and infirm who struggled to maintain any level of independent food security). Almost all had been able, for example, to make investments of this size. Out of 44 interviewees, nine had independently bought bicycles and 34 had bought livestock since their return from camps. It is hard to understand how it could be imagined that giving a household a goat worth around USD 20, or giving them seeds worth less than USD 10, would make a significant difference to their lives.

State aid, though, has had a pervasive negative impact, at least in rural society. State programmes have consistently preferred to give aid through direct transfers of assets to named individuals. As every interviewee reported, except for those in one village, people had to pay to be put on these beneficiary lists, though payment did not guarantee receiving aid. Giving aid in this way has the clear advantage of being a vehicle for patronage and permitting rent-seeking behaviour. Reports from the interviewees for this study indicate that long-standing practices on aid delivery continue to be successful in achieving the aims of patronage and self-enrichment.

*We only saw one person get two oxen from NAADS – he was the uncle of the LC [head of the village council]. The LC himself didn't get the oxen, he just got the money [i.e. the funds that people had been told to contribute to be on the list]*

*Of course I've heard of NAADS and NUSAF [Northern Uganda Social Action Fund]. I just hear that people have to pay money to get things, but then it's only the relatives of the officials that get the projects.*

*NUSAF, NAADS? The LCs and rwodi kweri [clan elders responsible for land administration] give the projects to their relatives, so I've not seen anything myself.*

*The beneficiaries are those with money.*

*The ones in charge are those giving projects to their relatives.*

*The ones in the ruling party are the ones who get projects.*

*I was in a group for NUSAF [2] 2010. We all paid 9,500 shillings [c.USD 5], we had our photographs taken, but we didn't get anything. The officials from the sub-county just took the money.*

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<sup>21</sup> 'Agencies' includes central or local Government departments and any other state institutions.

A full list of quotations from the interviews would be much longer. The plausibility of the stories is increased further because within any one village there was a consistency to the stories of fraud, including details of the exact amounts that people were charged to be put on lists – only to receive nothing. The impact of this behaviour goes beyond the loss of any help that people ought to have received. There was a perceptible bitterness, accompanied by resignation, in many reports of aid being fraudulently diverted.

*I was asked to pay 75,000 shillings [around USD 30] to get an ox plough – but I never saw anything again. I decided to leave group and never trust a Government programme again.*

The war had a devastating impact not only on people lives and livelihoods in the long term, but also on the relationship between the government and the people in the war affected areas (see for example, Dolan 2013). Post-war recovery aid should have been a vehicle for reconstructing citizen-state relations and a renewing the social contract: instead, it added to perceptions of a government that cared only for its own, and a state that did nothing to protect the rights of the 'ordinary people'. Although the stories we heard in almost every village are allegations of criminal acts of theft and fraud, we heard no reports of people who had sought redress through the police, nor did we hear any stories of the police investigating any cases in these villages. This is evidence of what ought to be an even more worrying phenomenon: the death of any remaining hope among most citizens that the end to war could finally bring the rule of law to protect them, or that the institutions of justice could ever be at ordinary people's service when those more powerful and influential than themselves commit crimes against them.

# 7 Conclusions

The study succeeded in capturing a wide diversity of life stories from people across northern Uganda with very different demographic profiles and experiences. Although no claims are made that this group of households is representative, the common themes running through such a heterogeneous collection do permit some more general observations to be made on the three research areas: livelihood recovery, aid, and the impact on livelihood recovery of experiencing war crimes.

## 7.1 Recovery

The first striking feature about recovery is how it means both so much and so little at the same time. There is no doubt that lives have been transformed in almost every way since the end of the war permitted a return to some kind of normality. Even the lives of those who are still struggling cannot be compared with the situation they endured in the displacement camps. There is no doubt that since 2007 northern Uganda has enjoyed several years of continuous recovery. However, what is entailed in recovery is also much less than may be imagined. During the war, those in camps (i.e. almost the entire rural population in Acholi and over a third in Lango) had not been able to survive through their own resources. Although their ability and determination to find money and food for themselves was often under-recognised, they remained dependant on aid from the international community for their survival.<sup>22</sup> Recovery meant first and foremost a very rapid establishment of autonomous survival. Within a year, all the respondent households were able to find enough food to eat and to establish some form of shelter, usually self-constructed but occasionally rented or with relatives in small trading centres or in town. However, the pace of progress from that first year was one of very small steps forward, even for those who can be said to be succeeding. Although household income was not exhaustively quantified in the interviews, from the details given about their farming and other sources of income, it is unlikely that more than one or two households in this study are above the income poverty line of USD 1.25 per person per day, and most will probably be below a half of that threshold. Even the stories of those (relatively) 'succeeding' would be depressing listening, full of misery and poverty, for any audience except one familiar with the lives they led before 2007.

At the same time, at a household or individual level, this journey called recovery is far from a story of uninterrupted progress, however slow. Individuals and households face almost as many setbacks as they do steps forward. Almost all the households interviewed, including most of the succeeding ones, remained highly vulnerable to even a small shock. Theft of assets, death of family member, sickness, a poor harvest could all throw them into extreme difficulty, consuming any economic progress that they had made in a year or even two. It will be a long time before most of those interviewed will be in a position to cope with the kinds of difficulty that almost inevitably will continue to affect them on a regular basis. As a result, a family which appeared to be relatively food secure when surveyed in January 2013 may be in a very different situation today. Recovery is thus not only fragile and uncertain but intrinsically unstable.

This has serious methodological implications for research to understand problems of poverty, most practically for common assessment tools used by agencies involved in aid delivery and implementation. The weak correlation between what is called 'food security' (i.e. difficulties in obtaining sufficient food at a particular point in time) and wealth, as measured by the ownership of assets, is just one example of the mismatch between economic realities and the simplistic theories underpinning so much assessment work (which would often assume, for example, that asset accumulation is both an indicator

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<sup>22</sup> See, for example, the quantification of food security in Acidri *et al.* (2003).

of past income and a cause of future income). Almost all assessments of food security rely on snapshots<sup>23</sup> which do not easily serve to understand lives typified by instability and rapidly fluctuating circumstances, as this study finds them to be.

## 7.2 Aid and recovery

The second striking feature about recovery is how insignificant aid has been in people's lives. It has long been practice in Uganda, as in many other places, for livelihood aid to be given as a discrete asset transfer to selected individuals or groups (e.g. the long-running cattle restocking programme, many of the grant-giving mechanisms under NUSAF, and even the way in which agricultural extension is implemented through NAADS). This aid, though, can be seen to have failed on a number of dimensions. First, it reached very few people. As both this study and the earlier SLRC Uganda survey found, aid was not targeted at or received by those most in need. Even for those who were recipients, the amount of aid received was largely insignificant to their lives and their recovery. Aid was not only insufficient, but largely irrelevant. Though free livestock is always appreciated, in general the kind of aid given conformed more to the standard thinking of aid givers rather than what would have been most important for people's lives and recovery.

Most crucially, the processes by which aid was given were riddled with corruption and rent seeking. This study found remarkable consistency in stories of fees charged and paid to various officials at village and sub-county level (even without aid necessarily following forth). The ubiquitous prevalence of these stories makes it implausible at best for such allegations to have been heard by officials at a higher level, including by the police. The failure to institute investigations and to treat the matter as a criminal offence strongly suggests state institutions' acquiescence in rent-seeking, even if not actual participation in that behaviour.

This problem of what is sometimes euphemistically called 'lack of transparency' is arguably the most important failing of aid for three reasons. Most obviously, it undermines any positive contribution that aid may have brought, because it prevents those who most need it from receiving it. Secondly, and perhaps of far more long-term consequence, it has a huge and negative impact on social cohesion and on the trust which people have in their institutions. If recovery is understood as a social and political process as well as an economic one, then the way in which aid was delivered in northern Uganda has probably even set back recovery, destroying the trust of citizens in their representatives at village and local level, and entrenching incentives for power that are based on the ability to pursue rent-seeking behaviour (known in Uganda more simply as 'eating'). The third reason why corruption in the delivery of aid is so important is that it explains, at least in part, why ineffectual aid continues to be given. The very design of support to recovery, the asset transfer to a named individual, maximises opportunities for aid to be used for elite profits in at least three ways. Aid given as an asset transfer to a named individual offers easy opportunities for elites to benefit from aid by (a) simple diversion of the aid to oneself or relatives; (b) using access to beneficiary lists as patronage or for direct bribe-taking; or (c) profiting from the assets by being the one supplying them at prices above real or market value.<sup>24</sup> The opportunities to reap these benefits are easily distributed as a form of patronage in itself to officials right down to village level. If support to recovery is given in less direct ways, it becomes much harder to distribute the patronage opportunities of aid as widely. From a political economy perspective, then, there are clear

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<sup>23</sup> Household economy analysis being an obvious exception.

<sup>24</sup> A previous (unpublished) study by the author found that the many of the cattle sold to the Northern Uganda Cattle Restocking programme were immature, local calves which were bought by the project at the price of a mature cross-breed or exotic animal – resulting in the project paying 800% of their market value. District officials interviewed indicated that their largest supplier of cattle, i.e. the person receiving 87.5% of the benefit of the funds used, was, unsurprisingly, very well connected.



incentives for requesting donor funds for support for recovery using modalities that are known to fail to reach their objectives.<sup>25</sup>

The stories of the interviewees also made clear why, even if the aid were well-targeted and transparently allocated, one-off asset transfers to a few individuals are not a recipe for recovery. Almost everyone we spoke to was running an undercapitalised household economy, meaning that they were constantly short of the funds that they needed to be able to optimise the opportunities which they would otherwise have had: people could not take advantage of opportunities to trade, or only a too small a scale, because they lacked working capital; their farm yields were sub-optimal because they could not invest enough in production, e.g. lacking inputs or labour; they sold their crops at low prices soon after harvest because they needed the money; and so on. And yet, one-off injections of capital ignore the fact that life is unpredictable, with ups and downs. The one-off injection of resources did *not* in fact help them over a threshold, though the assumption was perhaps that it would allow them to sustain their new-found well-being because a better capitalised household would generate more funds. Most of the injections of capital were so small that they came nowhere near helping people over any kind of threshold at all, but even where they were more significant, the model rarely works. Livestock die or are stolen, or they have to be sold to pay funeral costs or they are given away to pay long overdue bride-price. As discussed above, recovery was seen to be a very slow backwards-and-forwards process. Support for recovery must therefore be sustained: people need support which removes, reduces or mitigates some of their risks or which gives them a degree of certainty and predictability that they will be able to meet some of their needs over the medium term.

The two main expenditure problems for most people were health/death and education. Both of these reflect the situation with regard to state services: they are two sectors where the institutions and structures are already in place to make it easy for the state remove or reduce the risk (in the case of health) and the constant need for cash expenditure (in the case of education). There was and still remains a heightened need for education and healthcare in northern Uganda as a legacy of two decades of civil war. A whole generation of children suffered, if they were lucky, from poor education: the vast majority were unable to complete primary school. The legacy of injury and chronic ill-health caused directly and indirectly by the war has not been fully documented. The legacy of healthcare needs arising from injuries from war crimes is only beginning to be studied in any detail (Mazurana *et al.* forthcoming). This alone is considerable. Where injuries were caused by alleged war crimes, there are legal and moral obligations relating to restitution for ensuring access to adequate healthcare: whether or not the injuries were so caused, there remain powerful arguments for supporting recovery – economic and personal – through such an investment. A major scale-up of services, and support for user costs of education and health services (in the state and private sectors) would be a natural response to combating this legacy (itself a potential source of long term marginalisation and resentment) and supporting household recovery. It would reduce the constant depletion of assets at household level from the need to pay school fees, reduce the costs of chronic ill health, and reduce the risk of households suffering the direct and indirect costs associated with morbidity and death. Decreased insecurity would enable households to make longer-term plans and be a major step in removing the constant backsliding that was seen in recovery trajectories. Investment in this area, from government and donors, has been made, but this has often been focused on constructing infrastructure. Infrastructure projects have too rarely been designed, implemented or evaluated on their ability to provide any benefit in the medium term, i.e. beyond the completion of construction (see Ludi *et al.* 2016 for a discussion of this problem beyond Uganda.)

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<sup>25</sup> It is harder to explain the continued willingness of development partners to support these modalities. This question was beyond the scope of this study, but probably includes both bureaucratic considerations, such as a focus on monitoring aid spending, activities and outputs rather than what is much harder to measure, the change brought to people's lives; and political considerations, such as support for 'national policy', or in the case of loan funds, support for programmes requested by governments.

### 7.3 The impact of experiencing war crimes on livelihood recovery

This study was designed in part to understand better the mechanisms by which having suffered a war crime continue to affect people's livelihoods and their recovery from war.

This study found clear and unsurprising pathways by which serious physical injuries or the death of an adult household member affected a household's ability to make a living. One or two stories (e.g. the abductee working now as a tailor, see above) hinted at an element of lasting stigma, but almost all other respondents spoke of acceptance of those who had suffered war crimes. It is possible that this claim of universal acceptance can be taken at face value: if not, then much more research using anthropological methodologies is needed to reveal truths which are not accessible to a relatively simple livelihoods study.

The impacts of death, sickness and injury appeared to be the same whether or not they were caused by war crimes. This study suggests that interventions and recovery support should focus on addressing recognised problems: ensuring that those who have health problems (from whatever cause) can receive adequate treatment, that all young people have access to education, and that everyone has access to security and justice. The study would suggest caution in the use of criteria which target only some individuals (e.g. some of the war-wounded, some of 'the poor'). Those who have suffered specific losses or suffering from war crimes may have a right to specific reparation but this should be treated as a clear right and not confused with vague aid delivery. Being included as a beneficiary of some aid programme is not an adequate response to a claim for reparation. More broadly, aid should be underpinned by an understanding that livelihoods are not a simple equation adding up different types of assets, but are the ways in which people steer their lives through difficult seas, where the forces buffeting them are very diverse. This may sound obvious: but if more widely understood, aid would involve less use of broad criteria for the targeting of solutions unrelated to the problems they purport to address. For example, targeting distribution towards female-headed households will do little to help people whose real problem is defending their land rights.

### 7.4 The implications of the study findings

No simple recommendations follow from a study of this nature. Although the scope of the research was limited, the exercise of understanding the livelihood trajectories of 44 people from their own perspectives does suggest that notions of recovery and supporting recovery need some urgent reappraisals. The obvious ways of assessing progress in recovery are not helping us to see clearly.

*For research:* The up and down nature of life means that snapshots about access to food (e.g. the experience of missing meals during a week) tell us little about how well a household is managing to rebuild its members' lives over time. The answers given by people in surveys did not always help in understanding what was happening or had happened in their lives. Policy and aid would be better supported by the wider use of qualitative studies that look for explanation rather than relying on assessment-type tools. The use of mixed-methods approaches, where surveys are used in conjunction with qualitative research, would also help generate more meaningful conclusions.

*For development support:* Recovery remains a constant struggle with no clear direction of improvement, and the depth and breadth of poverty belie simple talk of success. Poverty is closely related to the failure of state and other institutions to perform their duties, though this dimension is almost universally ignored both by those who are supposed to help address that poverty and those responsible for the performance of those agencies. Aid is largely an irrelevance, for at least three fundamental reasons: it is too insignificant and too narrowly distributed to make a difference; it ignores the realities of people's lives, what people are trying to do for themselves and the actual constraints they face, especially in relation to access to basic services (including health, education and justice/protection); and the way in which it is designed and implemented make it useful mainly for feeding the corruption of the elites and the relatively powerful.

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## **Annex: Survey questions relating to livelihood outcomes (food access/wealth) and experience of serious crimes, or war crimes**

## E. Food security

I now want to ask you a few questions about eating patterns in the household.

**E.1** In the past 7 days, how often has your household had to take any of the following steps which I'm going to read out because there was not enough food or money to buy food:

Only one response allowed

Never - 0

Rarely (Once or twice in the past 7 days) - 1

Sometimes (three to five days out of the past 7 days) - 2

Usually (6 or 7 days in the past 7 days) - 3

<b>a.</b> Rely on less preferred and less expensive foods? (now read options)	
<b>b.</b> Borrow food, or rely on help from a friend or relative? (now read options)	
<b>c.</b> Limit portion size at mealtimes? (now read options)	
<b>d.</b> Restrict consumption by some members in order for other members to eat? (now read options)	
<b>e.</b> Reduce number of meals eaten in a day? (now read options)	

**E.2**

If you have to reduce meals, which members of your household eat smaller or fewer meals more often?

Select one answer

(Read out options)

Adult women - 1

Adult men - 2

Adults, both men and women -3

Female children -4

Male children -5

orphans or other children whom you take care of - 6

No difference / all the same - 7

Other (specify) - 8

**E.3** In the past 7 days, how often has anyone in the household eaten any of the following in their meals or in any snacks:

Only one response allowed. **Read options after each food category**

Never - 0

Rarely (once or twice in the past 7 days) - 1

Sometimes (three to five to ten times days out of in the past 7 days) - 2

Usually (6 or 7 days in the past 7 days) - 3

<b>A</b>	Any food made from grains? (maize, sorghum, millet, rice, etc.)		<b>G</b>	Any meat?	
<b>B</b>	Any food made from root and tubers (E.g. potatoes, cassava, yams)?		<b>H</b>	Any fish?	
<b>C</b>	Any pulses (i.e., beans or peas), nuts or seeds?		<b>I</b>	Any eggs?	
<b>D</b>	Any vegetables?		<b>J</b>	Any dairy products?	
<b>E</b>	Any fruits?		<b>K</b>	Any sugar or honey?	
<b>F</b>	Spices, beverages (E.g. tea), miscellaneous		<b>L</b>	Any oil, fat or butter?	

## F. Assets

House ownership		
F.1	What is the ownership status of this dwelling? (one response possible)  Own -1 Rented -2 Living without paying (offered by relatives/land owner) - 3 Living for working (housing as part of work) -4 Other (specify) - 5	
F.2	Do you own or rent any other buildings? (multiple responses possible)  No - 0 Yes, own one other - 1 Yes, own two others - 2 Yes, rent one other - 3 Yes, rent two others - 4 Yes, other (specify) - 5	
F.3	Have you ever bought any property (i.e. buildings) or land for building?  No 0 (go to F.5) Yes 1	
F.4	If yes to F.3 About how many years ago?  Insert number of years	
F.5	How many houses do you have on the compound?  Insert number	
<p>Now we are going to ask you some questions about <b>land</b> that you use. Please remember that what you say is confidential and your name is not attached to any papers with the information on it. We are only interested in understanding how people in general live in this area. If you do not want to answer any questions, please tell me and I will move on to another question.</p>		
F.6	Does your household own any land?  No-0 (go to F.10) Yes 1	
F.7	How many gardens does your household own?  Insert number	

F.8	Do you use your land for any of the activities I am going to read out...? No - 0 Yes - 1	
	F.8a Agriculture	
	F.8b Livestock	
	F.8c Land left fallow	
	F.8d Renting out the land	
	F.8e Not using the land because of a dispute	
	F.8f Not using the land for other reason (specify)	
	F.8g Other use (specify)	
F.9	Has your household ever bought any land for farming? No - 0 Yes - 1	
F.10	Does your household rent land?  No-0 (proceed to F.11) Yes-1 (proceed to F.10)	
F.11	How many gardens?  Insert number	
F.12	Did you hire other people to help you cultivate any gardens you were cultivating in either of the 2 seasons last year?  No 0 Yes 1	



<b>Read out:</b> Now we are going to ask you some questions about things that some households own.			
I'm going to read out a list of assets, please tell me if anyone in your household owns each of them.		No - 0 (Go to next item)  Yes - 1 (If Yes for any, go to b)	b  How many?
<b>Household items</b>			
F13.1	Mobile phone		
F13.2	Generator		
F13.3	Radio		
F13.4	Mattress		
F13.5	Solar Panel		
<b>Livestock</b>			
F.14.1	Small livestock e.g. chickens, rabbits		
F.14.2	Medium sized livestock – E.g. goats, pigs		
F.14.3	Large sized livestock – E.g. donkey, cattle If No, go to F.16.1 If Yes, go to F.15.1		
F.15.1	Do you use your livestock for agriculture? No - 0 Yes - 1		
F.15.2	Do you hire out your livestock for ploughing? No – 0 Yes – 1		
F.15.3	Do you use your animals for transportation? No – 0 Yes – 1		
<b>Tools and machinery</b>		<b>A)</b>	<b>B)</b>
F.16.1	Do you own hand tools for digging or weeding (E.g. hand hoe)		
F.16.2	Do you own hand tools for cutting , e.g. hand axe, pangas)		
F.16.3	Do you own a plough?		
F.16.4	Do you own any powered machines, E.g. hand-tiller, tractor, or milling machine?		
<b>Transport</b>			
F.17.1	Do you own a bicycle or a wheelbarrow?		
F.17.2	Do you own a cart for donkeys or oxen?		
F.17.3	Do you own a motorbike or car?		

F.18  Which of the following statements best describes your household's situation over past 12 months? (Only one response possible)  'Doing well: able to meet household needs by our own efforts and making some extra for savings or investments'. <b>1</b>  'Doing just okay/breaking even: able to meet household needs but with nothing extra to save or invest'. <b>2</b>  'Managing to meet household needs, but we have to sell productive assets or sometimes rely on help from others'. <b>3</b>  'We are unable to meet household needs by our own efforts. We depend on support from community or government. <b>4</b>	
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We'd like to know about people's experiences of serious crimes or harms since 1986. Please remember that if you don't want to answer any questions, you can tell me and I'll move on to the next question.

I will now read out a list of serious crimes and harms. Can you tell me for each household member if they ever experienced it since 1986.

**Ask for every household member above the age of six. Fill in not applicable (888) for household members younger than six.**

G.19	<u>G.20 Someone associated with parties to the GoU/LRA conflict or armed raiders took or destroyed their property?</u>  No - 0 Yes - 1	<u>G.21 Was taken (abducted) by a party to the GoU/LRA conflict or armed raiders?</u>  No - 0 Yes - 1	<u>G.22 Experienced severe beating or torture by parties to the GoU/LRA conflict or armed raiders</u>  No - 0 Yes - 1	<u>G.23 Was set on fire or put in a building that was deliberately set on fire</u>  No - 0 Yes - 1	<u>G.24 Survived a massacre ('gruesome group killing')</u>  No - 0 Yes - 1	<u>G.25 Was attacked with a panga, axe, hoe or other weapon by a party to the GoU/LRA conflict or armed raiders</u>  No - 0 Yes - 1	<u>G.26 Experienced sexual abuse by a party to the GoU/LRA conflict or armed raiders</u>  No - 0 Yes - 1	<u>G.27 Returned from captivity with a child born in the bush (only ask of females )</u>  No - 0 Yes - 1	<u>G.28 Forced into labor/ slavery by a party to the GoU/LRA conflict or armed raiders</u>  No - 0 Yes - 1	<u>G.29 Forced to kill or seriously injure another person</u>  No - 0 Yes - 1	<u>G.30 Received a serious physical injury due to the war (beating, torture, rebel attack, battle, etc.)</u>  No - 0 Yes - 1	<u>G.31 Suffers from emotional distress related to the GoU/LRA conflict or from armed raiders that inhibits their ability to contribute to the household</u>  No - 0 Yes - 1
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Serious Crimes EVER experienced		
<p>G.32 <u>Was a family member ever taken by force by a party to the GoU/LRA conflict or armed raider and never returned?</u></p> <p>No - 0 (go to G.35) Yes, 1 (continue to G.33)</p>		
<p>G.33 (if yes to G32) <u>How many family members were taken and never returned?</u> (enter number)</p>		
<p>G.34 (If yes to G32)</p> <p><u>What were their sexes and ages when they were taken?</u></p> <p>Male - 0 Female - 1</p> <p>Enter age when taken</p>	Sex	Age
<p>G.35 <u>Was a family member ever killed violently by parties to the GoU/LRA conflict or armed raiders?</u></p> <p>No - 0 ( go to H1) Yes- 1 (continue to G.36)</p>		
<p>G.36 (If yes to G.35)</p> <p><u>What were their sex and age when they were killed?</u></p>	Sex	Age





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SLRC Working Papers present information, analysis and key policy recommendations on issues relating to livelihoods, basic services and social protection in conflict affected situations.

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