

International Capital, Inclusive Planning and Post-War Recovery: The Case of Acholi Land, Northern Uganda

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ABSTRACT

As people of Uganda's Acholi sub region struggle to rebuild their livelihoods after more than two decades of armed insurgency and internal displacement, they remain suspicious of the government's motive to allocate their land to foreign investors. By taking Amuru District Land Board to court for allocating their land to Madhvani Group's Amuru Sugar Works in 2007, the local community has underlined its distrust of the government and its institutions. They hold that the idea of promoting large scale agro-based industrial production through Madhvani sugar project was a falsehood and that Madhvani was merely a smokescreen to disguise land grabbing by big people in government. The findings of this study highlight deep suspicion of government motive in allocating 1,200 hectares of land in Amuru district to Madhvani Group which, to them, strongly revives the historical perception of marginalisation of northerners (who include the Acholi). The conclusion from the study is that although international capital is vital for the recovery process, where it involves natural resources such as land, its effectiveness is likely to be affected negatively unless local communities are included in the planning process; which calls for an inclusive rather than a top-down recovery strategy.

Keywords: *international capital, inclusive planning, post war recovery, Northern Uganda*

INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this research was to establish whether international capital was vital and necessary for the recovery of Acholi sub region, in northern Uganda following the signing of the cessation of hostilities agreement between the government and the rebels in August, 2006. Evidence from this study shows that local communities agree with the thesis that international capital is vital and necessary in post war recovery efforts; even as they (the people), remain suspicious of the government motive in allocating (their) land to foreign investors (Rugadya et al., 2008).

As Acholi land recovers from more than twenty years of armed insurrection that swept through the region since 1986, international capital (Ott, 2008) has continued to play a significant role in the reconstruction process – not only in the public sector but in the private sector as well. Development capital and profit oriented investments of multinational corporations and small companies have all been important. While inflows into the public sector have been accessed largely through budgetary support and NGO project funding, the private sector funding has often concentrated on for-profit investments in different sectors. The position of Acholi people on the role of international capital in post war recovery appears to be in line with the advocates of Marshall Plan type of investment (Eichengreen & Uzan, 1992) for rebuilding economies of post war states. In this paper, therefore, we argue that although post World War (Western) Europe cannot be compared with sub-Saharan Africa in technological, economic, or human resources development levels, capital inflows remain an important source of funding for post war recovery in sub-Saharan Africa.

On the issue of land grabbing, evidence from the research shows that although government motive for allocating land to Madhvani for sugar production in Amuru district can be justified economically as a means of introducing large scale agro-industry in Acholi sub region and northern Uganda as a whole, given the long history of perceived marginality of the sub region and the unique cultural system of communal land ownership, the local people see the move as a deliberate act of the government to steep them further into poverty.

The controversies and suspicions surrounding the Madhvani project, which culminated into a court case against the government (Atkinson & Owor, 2013), have shown that if major decisions on locally targeted interventions in post war recovery are not negotiated and coordinated with the people at the grassroots, there can be very little benefit to hope for (Hilhorst et al., 2010). Since 2007 when the land was allocated, the Madhvani project has been steeped in controversies and has failed to take off. The main reason for this position is the suspicion that the allocation of the land was a form of land grabbing and not part of post conflict recovery strategy of Acholi land.

The first section of the paper consists of the introduction in which the research objective is stated. This is followed by explaining methodology and methods of data collection and characteristics of Acholi sub region. The next section briefly discusses the theory that underpins the study and links it to the reconstruction policy in relation to Madhvani investments in Uganda vis-à-vis inclusiveness and marginality of Acholi land and northern region in general. The section on people's verdict presents the findings and their interpretation before finally giving the conclusion.

METHODOLOGY

Using Acholi sub region as a case study, the research integrated both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. Qualitative data on the role of international capital and of the state in post war recovery vis-à-vis the claims of state aided land grabbing, was obtained from in-depth interviews of purposively selected 11 key informants who included local government officials, politicians, business executives, civic and cultural leaders in the two districts of Amuru and Gulu in Acholi sub region over a period of four months, between February and December, 2014. We also conducted 4 focus group discussions, two in each of the two districts. Each of the groups was comprised of between 8 and 12 members. Being a non-native Luo speaker, the researcher worked closely with two Research Assistants who also doubled as my interpreters whenever necessary. The first group in each district comprised of youth of between 18 and 35 years while the second group was made up of middle aged and elderly

men and women. We also conducted non-participant observation of the community's social economic conditions both at community and household levels in the district of Amuru and Gulu. We also reviewed important official documents and reports on post conflict recovery of northern Uganda. On the side of quantitative methods, data was obtained through a semi structured survey instrument that focused on the relationship between international capital, land, and post war recovery. Eighty eight (88) members of the community in the two districts were selected for interview on the basis of simple random sampling. The above methods were preferred because they enabled us to explore phenomena more deeply.

Analysis of qualitative data involved various forms, including data triangulation to ensure validity. After collecting the data and transcribing interviews recorded on audio devices, we coded, patterned, and thematised the data in the field notes and check-guides in order to generate analytical categories. Quantitative data on the other hand was analysed using Microsoft Excel to draw simple patterns and categories. Inductive analytical categories (from qualitative data) were compared with deductive analytical categories (from quantitative data); as a means of drawing objective research conclusions.

POST CONFLICT CHARACTERISTICS OF ACHOLI SUB REGION, NORTHERN UGANDA

This study was conducted in Acholi sub region, Northern Uganda which was also the epicentre of the war between Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and Uganda government forces between 1987 and 2006. Specifically, the research is restricted to Amuru and Gulu districts. Amuru district is home to Amuru Sugar Works, a subsidiary of the multinational Madhvani Group that was allocated 1,200 hectares of land (Atkinson & Owor, 2013), while Gulu district is important as the regional headquarters and also as the parent district from which Amuru was cleaved in 2006. It holds most of the archival data on various issues in the region and its oldest serving staffs are an invaluable source of information on various issues concerning the sub region.

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurrection was the longest armed conflict in Uganda's history has devastated Acholi sub region since 1987 and worsened its level of development which was already the worst in the region and the country at large. Post war recovery programmes and projects were thus not only important for Acholi people in rebuilding their livelihoods; they were equally an important aspect of the region's re-integration into the national economy as envisioned in the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) framework. In terms of land size, northern region is the largest region covering 35% of the total land surface (Acholi land alone: 14%); followed by central region with 25% (GoU, 2003). But in spite of the largest land size, it remains the poorest, with a high population growth rates that supersedes other regions. The average population growth rate for the north is 4.6% p.a. far above the national average of 3.2% (UBOS, 2013). Such a high population growth rate is potentially damaging to the recovery process as it is a catalyst for increased unemployment and worst household poverty. Apparently, the large masses of land in the region have so far not provided any respite as most of them have been and remain either unused or under-utilised. But they do offer enormous potential for large scale agro based investments; which probably explains the government's enthusiasm to allocate part of the land to Madhvani Group in 2007 for large scale sugar cane production (International Alert, 2009).

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Post-conflict recovery has become an important theme in the development discourse in recent years following the reduction in inter and intra-state conflicts in the developing world (Nkurunziza, 2008). This is more so in Africa where in mid-1990s alone, close to one third of sub-Saharan Africa had active civil wars. Hence, the concept of *post conflict/post war* becomes an important subject for Africa (Blattman, 2010).

The concept appears to have become prominent after the Second World War when the American funded Marshall Plan succeeded in Europe. The successful economic recovery achieved in the allied Western European states after the war had convinced the world of

the position of neo-classical economic theory that it was possible for a nation to return to its steady incomes and growth paths after capital shocks (Blattman, 2010). In the recent past, however the top-down approach to recovery embedded in the neo-classical theory has come under serious criticism. The new paradigm, which has been variously named as *participatory post conflict recovery*, *community driven reconstruction*, *reconstruction from below*, etc. (Hilhorst et al., 2010) seems to be gaining the confidence of international development agencies such as the World Bank (1998) and national governments. The genesis of the new theory stems not only from the critique of technocratic nature and external controls of the traditional top-down reconstruction, but also from the scarcity of micro level foundations (Blattman, 2010). By adopting the policy of post conflict reconstruction from below, the agency not only overcomes the loophole of inadequate data but also addresses the most up to date needs of the communities involved. The principle is to go beyond the physical and economic factors which have hitherto been the main focus of top-down post conflict reconstruction; to pay attention to institutional power relations, including the people, both as beneficiaries and resources that make post war recovery possible and meaningful. Thus, with the new approach, it becomes possible to strengthen institutions so as to exploit all available opportunities and synergies for enhanced post conflict recovery. In line with this new perspective, we used the bottom-up theory of post conflict recovery to analyse the importance of international capital in post war recovery efforts.

POST CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION POLICY

Although international capital refers to both development capital and private direct investment, this study focused on the latter in general terms. It is important to note that all post liberation governments in Uganda since the overthrow of Idd Amin's government in 1979 have tried with varying degrees of success to attract foreign direct investment to rebuild the shattered economy, given the lack of, or inadequate domestic savings and technologies. But it is under the government of Yoweri Museveni that the greatest milestone has been made. The success has been attributed to Museveni's adoption of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in 1987 as the policy framework

for post conflict economic recovery following the war of resistance against the post-Amin government. Within five years, Uganda's national economic recovery was firmly on course. Multinational companies were once again getting interested in Uganda's economy. By enacting economic liberalisation policies and privatising public enterprises, Uganda had opened its gates to international capital inflows. The immediate outcome was apparently macro-economic growth at an average of 6.4% per annum, a position, which has been largely maintained since then (Kreimier et al., 2000). However, the criticism is that benefits of the neo-liberalist policies associated with structural adjustment were exhibited in macro-economic growth at the expense of poverty reduction at the micro level implying that focus was mainly on raising national average incomes by enhancing the wealth of the better off rather than by lifting the status of the poor (Adams, 1998). Indeed, the impressive growth rates celebrated at the national level were not reflected at the grassroots; more so in Acholi sub region which remained steeped in armed insurrection throughout the 1990s and the better half of 2000s. In fact, whereas Uganda's post 1986 recovery was praised by the donor community for consensus building between the government and the international community, and dubbed a 'model reconstruction' (Kreimer et al., 2000); apparently, the consensus did not go far enough. The inclusive approach was not extended to the grassroots. Anecdotal evidence suggests that consultations between central government and local communities in Acholi sub region on post war recovery strategies involving land have been quite minimal.

INCLUSIVE POST CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION

In highlighting the importance of inclusivity we begin with the American funded Marshall Plan. Although this aspect is seldom highlighted (Barakat & Zyck, 2009), the Marshall Plan's resounding success has been largely attributed to participatory planning that involved the US and recipient countries. Within the three years of the Marshall Plan, among other things, the GDP growth in recipient countries had grown by an average of 35% while the budgetary deficit had reduced significantly. Barakat and Zyck (2009) have strongly argued that the quick turnaround of European economies was not

so much because of the huge amounts of funds invested but rather because of the participatory approach to the fund. Hence, Barakat and Zyck (2009) emphasise that the mutual understanding between the parties involved was quite important and hence, it should be the way to go for all post war recovery efforts involving foreign capital. The authors go on to illustrate how some countries in the recent past received more funds than the Marshall Plan but the aid did not make impact because of the way it was given. George Marshall himself emphasised the importance of inclusive post conflict recovery in his inaugural speech of the Marshall Plan on 5 June 1947. The simple but important lesson was that exclusion of the target community significantly affected outcomes of the interventions. In the case of Uganda's Acholi sub region, the controversies surrounding the land allocation to Madhvani's Amuru Sugar Works offer a good insight into the argument.

MARGINALITY OR POST CONFLICT RECOVERY?

Both research and anecdotal evidence suggest that northern Uganda has been marginalised since colonial times (Amone & Muura, 2014). This view presents the region's unfavourable position on the nation's development scale as not being entirely the function of the LRA war, but rather an outcome of deliberate political manipulations. Colonial policy was not to develop northern region in general or its peoples but to instead use the area as a labour reserve for the cash economy of the southern parts of the country (Amone & Muura, 2014). The outcome was late introduction of cash crop agriculture which culminated into delayed inter and intra-regional trade in the north. Apparently, over the years, the situation has not changed much; hence, the region continues to lag behind. Basing on the above thesis it is apparent that the LRA conflict merely worsened what was already a bad situation. For example, the destruction of the few infrastructures that existed only worsened problems of poor service delivery while at the same time affecting sustainable livelihood security in the aftermath of the war. Even the overarching PRDP has not resolved the issue as it has had its own fair share of challenges and problems which have greatly affected its credibility and limited its impact. First is that even when it was designed as a participatory framework for post war recovery of

northern Uganda, the majority in Acholi sub region say they do not know what it is all about. And considering the way the government went ahead to allocate 1,200 hectares of land in Amuru district to Madhvani Group when people were still in IDP camps grappling with basic issues of food security; just enhances the perception that the government deliberately intended to impoverish Acholi people. The government promise of benefits to local communities from the project was therefore not convincing (Serwajja, 2012). The end result was that although the Madhvani sugar project had been allocated such a big chunk of land, both its land ownership and user rights have not been useful so far. The allocation has been challenged (Atkinson & Owor, 2013) socially and legally. Demonstrations by old women in Lakang village (Lawino, 2012), Amuru district, and the case filed in court, were the epitome of this challenge. Respondents told us they had asked many questions which were not answered: 'Why did the government allocate the land in 2007 when people were still in Internally Displaced People's (IDP) camps? Could they not wait for people to resettle in their original homes first? Why couldn't the company purchase land in line with Uganda's market economy policies and principles? Or was the investor riding on the back of politicians to grab the people's land? ...' Respondents told us that no one had responded to their questions; and that all this had made them to doubt whether the sugar investment was aimed at economic recovery. Apparently, a related pattern of issues was highlighted by Rugadya et al. (2008). The authors indicate that people of northern Uganda felt that 'the government, the army and rich people have taken a lot of interest in our land without clearly elaborating their motives'. Thus, it was not surprising that the local community in Lakang, Amuru district where the land is located mobilised public demonstrations and other forms of civil disobedience to express their opposition to the land allocation. Associating the allocation with land grabbing machinations, and marginalisation of the region in general, the local community decided to go to court to seek justice. But the High Court ruling delivered on 2 Feb 2012 was that they, the community of Lakang where the land is located did not have proof of ownership. So, the ruling was in favour of the defendant. It was only through appealing to a higher court that on 28 September 2012 (Atkinson & Owor, 2013), that they secured an injunction which barred Madhvani or the government to commence the project on the land. This study

found that one of the major problems was suspicions people had of the intentions of government rather than the investor. Fifty nine per cent of the respondents did not believe the reason for allocating land to Madhvani was sugar cane growing. They thought oil has been discovered on the land, so some big people in the government wanted to use the Madhvani project as a smokescreen when the real owners remain unknown to the public. One of the respondents even linked the formation of Amuru district with the allocation:

These people are very clever. They only created Amuru district in order to make easy for them to allocate the land to Madhvani. Don't you see? They created the district in 2006, and in 2007 they are giving away the land.

THE PEOPLE'S VERDICT

Shortly after Museveni came to power, Uganda adopted neo-liberalism economic policies; and soon returned Asian's properties which had been nationalised by Idi Amin's military regime in 1972. By mid-1990s, Uganda's economy had recovered from the ashes, largely as a result of capital inflows (Blattman, 2010). Foreign investor-confidence in Uganda had improved significantly. Apparently, it was the return of Madhvani's Kakira Sugar Works in Busoga sub region which had done the trick. Being a high profile investment, its hand over back to Madhvani symbolised government commitment to the restoration (Kreimer et al., 2000) of Asians' properties that had been nationalised and the protection of foreign capital. Since then both development capital and foreign direct investment started to flow. And to consolidate it, the state also offered a plethora of incentives to foreign investors, which included loan guarantees, tax waivers, government guaranteed offers of 'free' land, and the right to repatriate their profits.

So, just like the government had played the Madhvani card to win investor confidence in the early 1990s, so did it hope to do the same for post war reconstruction of northern region (read, Acholi sun region) twenty years later (Hetz & Giovarelli, 2007). Amuru Sugar Works was envisioned to lead the way into mega agro based investments in

the region with the hope this would eventually attract other capital investors thus, speeding up the post war economic recovery. The strategy was meant to allow wider livelihood alternatives through multiplier effects to local people, most of whom had lost their assets in the war. The original investment was expected to create linkages within and without the agro industry sector, to construct vital infrastructure such as roads, electricity generation, offer more than 7000 jobs to the local population and ready income to out-growers, provide improved seeds and agro based extension services to the post conflict communities, and enable them to diversify their livelihoods (Serwajja, 2012). We asked the post conflict communities in the region whether they expected the above mentioned benefits to come from the sugar project. Only 13 participants (14.7%) answered in the positive, while 53 (60.2%) did not think the sugar project would benefit local people as claimed by state officials. The above position was supported by results from focus groups. One of the men in the focus groups in Gulu offered his case as an illustration.

When the war came and people were forced to go into IDP camps again in 2002, this time I did not want to be confined in the camp. So I took off with a friend who had a relative working in Jinja, eastern Uganda. On reaching there we were quickly employed in Kakira Sugar Works as sugar cane cutters because that was the only job available for us since we did not have an education. We worked there for over three years. However, in spite of the fact that we were working, we could not afford to send any money home to help our parents. In fact, even the transport that brought us back to Gulu in 2006 was fundraised from home in Gulu.

His point was that the types of jobs people were being promised in the Madhvani sugar project did not amount to anything worthwhile. Key informants pointed out that the two sugar projects that have been in Busoga sub region in eastern Uganda since 1950s have not demonstrated significant benefits to local people. The jobs offered by a sugar project were mainly for unskilled labour which is not well remunerated. This, they pointed out, is the reality in Busoga that hosts two of the oldest and largest sugar projects in the country but whose people have not had exceptional benefits emanating from the

sugar industry. They pointed out the large number of unemployed and unskilled youth in Acholi sub region who would have benefitted from the Madhvani project; but quickly mentioned that Uganda's lack of a minimum wage implies that the investor reserves the right to underpay casual labour hence, jobs to be created by the company were not likely to solve youth unemployment.

Another key issue was the land question. The timing of the land give-away to Madhvani was, to the local people, very suspect. 'Why didn't "they" (meaning the government) wait for people in IDP camps to go back to their villages before they could give out the land to the so-called investor?' they asked. They claimed the offer of land to Madhvani was nothing less than a land grab. One elder put it quite succinctly when he said, 'We are not opposed to investors but the government should not deprive us of our birth right'. This view was similar to Rugadya et al. (2008). They point out that there was a high level of distrust of the Central Government's intentions toward land in the region, and such land deals made that suspicion more real.

In 'The Foreword' to *Investor Guidelines* published by International Alert (2009), Kitara McMot, the former Gulu District Vice Chairperson illustrates that people of northern region were not opposed to foreign investors. He gives a list of investors who have been offered land in the region in the recent past. They include religious institutions, charitable organisations, and even individual foreign investors. This seems to be reflected by 79 respondents (89.7%) who said that in spite of the arguments about marginalisation, they were not opposed to Madhvani's sugar project. It was the method in which the company had been brought into the sub region that gave people a negative attitude.

Respondents said that local people would have preferred to negotiate with the investor directly in line with the principle of demand and supply rather than the government just offering the land freely to a company that is going to make profits in millions.

The government does not wish us Acholi people to prosper; otherwise, how can it give away our land when the 1995 National Constitution says very clearly states that land belongs to the people?

This was said by a local civic leader in Amuru district. He pointed out that the community chose to take legal action against Amuru District Land Board which allocated the land because they did not want another war; but stressed that no one can predict the future. Apparently, part of the land being contested is claimed by the Lamogi clan which is famous for the Lamogo rebellion against British colonial rule in 1911.

Fifty-two (59%) of the respondents said they think oil wells recently discovered in the region were the real reason behind the land allocations to 'the investor'. They argued that some highly placed people in government must have been aware of the oil deposits in Amuru and so such people were hiding behind Madhvani's name. They didn't consider as genuine the argument that the government wanted to use the sugar industry in post war Acholi sub region to promote agro based industrialisation for economic development. In the discussions respondents pointed out that if that had been the case, the government would have waited for people to resettle in their villages to determine whether any people lived on the land in question before they went into IDP camps. On the other hand, people should have been sensitised to participate in the industry beforehand either as sugar cane out growers or as employees the way they had been mobilised for NGOs' livelihood projects when they were leaving IDP camps. The general position of the people therefore, was that the Madhvani sugar project was not intended as a recovery strategy but simply a trick to steal their land.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although the need for international capital in post war recovery of Uganda's Acholi sub region is apparent, testimonies from Busoga sub region where the first two sugar production industries were established have convinced people in Acholi land that the proposed sugar project in Amuru district will not necessarily lead to post war economic recovery. The people's mistrust of the government motive in allocating their land to Madhvani when they were still grappling with basic necessities of life in IDP camps reminds them of the historical marginalization which they have suffered since colonial times. Even the challenges of corruption and embezzlement being experienced in PRDP were now seen as if they were deliberately orchestrated by the

government so that northerners can remain poor. This distrust was practically demonstrated when the local community took Amuru District to court. For them, if the government and its institutions cannot defend their right to land, then it ceases to be relevant.

The conclusion from the findings is that although international capital is vital for economic recovery of Acholi sub region, where it involves natural resources such as land, its effectiveness is likely to be affected negatively unless local communities are included in the planning process; which calls for an inclusive rather than a top-down recovery strategy. In view of the mistrust exhibited by local people about the government and its institutions, this study recommends that the government should strengthen participatory governance structures at all levels so that the system reflects homogeneity of purpose between all stakeholders in the recovery process. The other reason why government needs to engage local communities of Acholi sub region in its proposed post conflict recovery interventions stems from their unique communal land ownership and management system. Although some of the systems are currently being seriously undermined by the changing economic realities and a fast growing population, there is still need for state institutions to respect constitutional provisions of the existing law, such as the customary land holding tenure which is currently in force.

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