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**“It’s Better to
Sweat than to Die:”
Rural-to-Urban
Migration, Northern
Karamoja, Uganda**

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USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



Cover Photo: Abim town, showing the small granary huts commonly found in rural areas

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Towns in northern Karamoja are growing due to an influx of people, commercial enterprises, non-profit organizations and public sector institutions. Research by the Feinstein International Center of Tufts University sought to specifically examine the migration of individuals and families from rural locations to the urban centers of Abim, Kaabong and Kotido. The objective of the research was to better understand the factors leading to migration, the livelihood strategies pursued by those moving into towns, and the opportunities and challenges associated with urban life. Teams collected qualitative data from 83 individual migrants in the three urban areas in January and February 2014. This study took place in partnership with Mercy Corps International under the Northern Karamoja Growth, Health, and Governance (GHG) program funded by USAID.

Findings from this study provide insight into broader trends in migration and urbanization taking place in northern Karamoja. Perhaps most importantly, the majority of respondents in the urban centers retained links to their rural communities: these connections allowed urban migrants to access key assets such as land, social networks, and food, and allowed rural residents to receive remittances and other forms of support. Those individuals in the study population who were not able to retain connections to the rural areas were frequently the most vulnerable and were mostly widowed or abandoned women. Their situation is covered in depth in this report. The importance of the links between the rural and urban areas indicates that those moving into towns are not fully abandoning the rural components of their livelihood strategies. Rather, these individuals and their households are pursuing more diversified livelihoods when and where possible. This diversification includes taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the growing urban centers.

While rural linkages were extremely important for migrants, most respondents did not envision returning to their rural areas. The study found

that a majority of respondents planned to remain in town permanently.

The research sought to better understand the process through which people came to Abim, Kaabong and Kotido, and the study investigated duration of stay, demographics, and push and pull factors. For all three locations, the largest proportion of respondents moved into town within the previous two to four years (47% of overall responses). Migrants most commonly arrived alone (35%), followed by moving with a spouse and children (24%), or with children only (24%). Those who traveled alone were more likely to be male (63% of this group) than female (37% of this group). The average age of the men who came alone was 27 years; for females the average age was 30 years.

Wide variations existed by location in the distance that people traveled to the urban centers. Most respondents in Abim came from Kotido District and from locations that were at least two days away by foot; only 12% of respondents in Abim were from locations less than a day's walk. In contrast, the majority of respondents in Kaabong and Kotido came from locations that were four or fewer hours away by foot.

The primary reasons for migration were loss of animals, hunger, and death of a family member. These aspects were closely linked as many people lost their animals in violent raids that resulted in a death, and the loss of animals brought the subsequent hunger. Widows in the study population most commonly cited the death of a family member as the main factor in their decision to migrate. The strongest pull factor to town was economic. Respondents strongly believed that they would find a better life in town and be in a better position to support their families. Improved security was also an important consideration in the decision to migrate, particularly for those who had lost assets or family members to violence.

The study sought to better understand the strategies, networks, opportunities, and challenges associated with the move towards a more urban-based livelihood system. Most migrants in the study population pursued at least two livelihood activities. Most respondents were engaged in unskilled labor with standard variations by gender, with women more likely to be engaged in domestic tasks and men in heavy manual labor. In the few instances in which specific skills were required (butcher's assistant, *bodaboda* driver, mechanic, etc.), the respondents had learned the skills on the job after moving to town. Finding work was less difficult than might be expected; the larger challenges were about finding regular and consistent employment, the low rates of pay, the physical demands of the labor (especially for men), and the dependence on employers.

Respondents considered their "most important" livelihood activity to be that which brought the most income or took the most time, such as agricultural labor. Clear gender divisions existed in this regard. Casual labor was the most important for men, followed by butchering, unloading buses/lorries, brick making and construction. For women, the brewing industry was the most important primary livelihood, followed by fetching water for homes or businesses, domestic work, agriculture and casual labor. Somewhat surprisingly, collection and sale of firewood and/or charcoal did not rank high on the list of reported livelihood activities. However, the continued population growth and industries such as brick-making will take a heavy toll on the already limited natural resources in the area. There were few differences in the livelihood activities pursued by widowed or abandoned women as compared to other women in the study population.

Paying for accommodation was the main financial challenge for migrants to towns in northern Karamoja. Approximately one-half of the study population paid rent, while the other half stayed free of charge with relatives or friends, owned their own homes, or had accommodation in their place of employment. Rental rates ranged from UGX 7,000 to UGX 35,000 (US\$ 2.67 to \$13.38 at the time of the

research) per month, with UGX 10,000 being the most common rental amount. Making rent was a major stretch for many members of the study population and hindered the ability to save money for investments, school fees, or to support rural relatives. Those who owned their own homes were considerably better off than other members of the study population. Respondents who were able to live rent-free stressed the importance of retaining access to the free accommodation. One way of avoiding rent was to commute into town on a daily or regular basis; a small number of commuters to Kotido town are included in the study population.

Widowed or abandoned women were slightly more likely to stay with friends or relatives than the general population. Single women who paid rent stressed the difficulties of paying for housing on the income from one individual.

The need for cash extended beyond rent and included paying for water and the purchase of most food items in local markets. Latrine access was free of charge in all cases but only 43% of respondents reported being able to regularly access latrines where they lived. This access varied by location, with almost all respondents reporting latrine access in Kaabong and only one-third accessing latrines in Kotido. Abim had equal proportions of respondents who did and did not access latrines.

Education was an important benefit of life in town, and the vast majority of respondents with school-age children in their households reported sending some or all of the children to school. The most frequently cited reason for keeping children out of school was the cost of books, uniforms, and associated expenses. The data did not indicate a gender preference for education, but several fathers expressed concerns that they would not see the "return on their investments" once their educated girls married. Findings do indicate a specific vulnerability for adolescent girls who fall pregnant with the child of a teacher, classmate or businessman and then drop out of school. The frequent occurrence of this situation even in a small sample points to the existence of a widespread problem.

Respondents did report discrimination from long-term urban residents and, particularly in Abim, from members of different ethnic groups. In addition, however, numerous respondents recounted acts of kindness and generosity by strangers who provided food, housing, or employment.

Overall, the respondents in the study population had established successful town-based livelihoods, in part through maintaining connections with the rural areas. People accessed agricultural areas in their home villages or rented new areas closer to town. They kept livestock herds at home and sent children to live with parents, siblings or co-wives. Men lived alone or with one wife in town, leaving an additional wife or wives in the rural area. Food moved in both directions depending on the harvest, the markets, and the availability of relief items. Nearly all the respondents who did have rural connections reported sending cash or in-kind support to rural relatives on a regular basis. The importance of the two-way rural-urban dynamic is central to the successful development and growth of a diversified livelihood system in northern Karamoja.

Kotido is by far the largest urban area in the north and will remain the center of economic development in the region. Even so, the rural links for those living in Kotido are extremely important, as visible in strategies of commuting and systems of exchange. Kaabong is the smallest of the three urban areas and is, in all practical terms, an extension of the social and financial systems of the surrounding villages and rural areas. Abim will remain an important agricultural market center, and will continue to attract agricultural laborers from other areas in Karamoja, including those exiting pastoral-based livelihoods.

The growth of Abim, Kaabong and Kotido is important for economic development. Local and national officials should recognize the potential for poverty alleviation and development created by the arrival of new migrants eager to find work. Comprehensive urban assessments and planning are required to ensure that the expansion of accommodation and services in

these locations is sustainable and appropriate in a way that contributes to poverty alleviation. Long-term investments by the private and public sectors will be needed to realize the economic potential of the population growth. Improved natural resource management is critical to ensure that the development of these areas does not come at the expense of the fragile surrounding ecosystems. International actors can play a role in supporting the economic potential through assistance to local officials in urban planning, natural resource management, and the expansion of infrastructure and services.

There are various opportunities and avenues to support the rural-urban migrants in northern Karamoja, with possible involvement for international organizations as well as the Ugandan government and private sector institutions. Financial services for low-income individuals are lacking and barriers exist to accessing established institutions. Training needs are great for the largely unskilled migrants moving to towns. However the trainings need to be high quality, market-based, appropriate, sustained, and include adequate start-up capital or ready access to credit to enable successful application of new skills. Support to families to allow for enrollment of all children in school would bolster the existing interest in education among the urban population; female-headed households would particularly benefit from such support. The increased reliance on markets requires support of market infrastructure; the same applies for improved accommodation. Any such projects would have to proceed carefully and be targeted at the community (as opposed to the individual) level so as to avoid aid-induced migration.

The specific vulnerabilities of widowed and abandoned women are discussed throughout this report, and there are numerous possible means of support for female-headed households living in urban and peri-urban areas in northern Karamoja. Many of these women lack ties to the rural areas and are likely to remain permanently in towns; support should be geared towards long-term sustainable urban livelihoods that allow for diversification of activities in an urban environment. Appropriate projects would

include the interventions listed above (financial services, high-quality trainings, support to children's education, etc.), and could be expanded to urban-gardening, training in perma-gardening, provision of key livelihood assets and inputs, targeted business skills training, and functional adult literacy.

INTRODUCTION

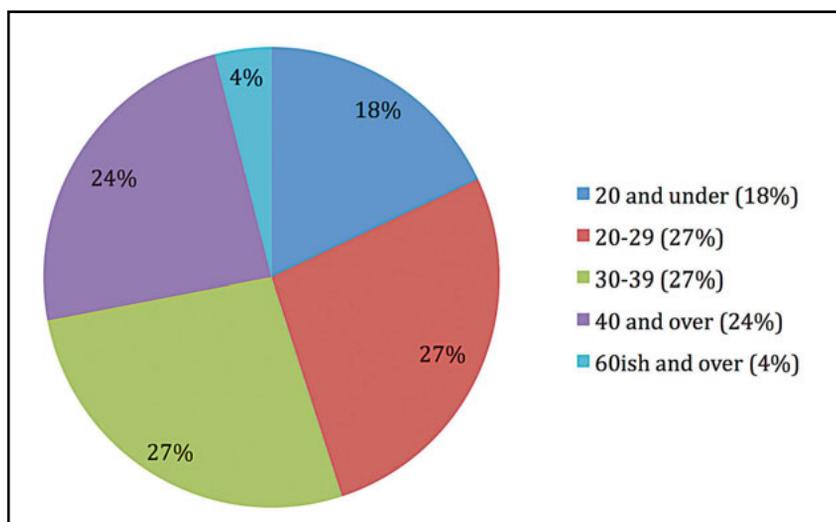
This report is based on fieldwork conducted in January and February 2014 in Abim, Kaabong, and Kotido Districts in northern Karamoja. This study emerges from the five-year partnership between Mercy Corps International and the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University under the Northern Karamoja Growth, Health, and Governance (GHG) program funded by USAID. This partnership allows for quantitative and qualitative data to generate evidence to inform the work of Mercy Corps and other national and international partners working in the Karamoja region.

Methodology

This particular study sought to examine the migration of families and individuals from rural to urban areas in northern Karamoja. “Urban” is a relative term in this context, and refers to the district centers and environs in Abim, Kaabong,

and Kotido Districts.¹ This work was qualitative and based on semi-structured open-ended individual interviews with respondents chosen through convenience sampling, with a total of 83 interviews conducted in the three locations. While we sought to balance age, gender, types of occupation, and location of interviews (e.g., town centers, place of employment, peri-urban areas, etc.), we also intentionally skewed towards a greater representation of women (48 women, versus 34 men) in order to investigate the specific characteristics of women who move to town alone. Our female population includes 27 widows (n=21) or women abandoned by their husbands (n=6). We also skewed our study to have a greater number of respondents in Kotido, as this is the largest of the three towns and the economic driver in northern Karamoja. In total, we conducted 43 interviews in Kotido, 22 in Kaabong, and 18 in Abim. The age breakdown of respondents was as follows:

Figure 1: Age of respondents (n=82)²



¹ Population estimates are unreliable and do not take into account either seasonal fluctuations or recent migration, but Kotido is the largest of the three towns with probably over 200,000 people; Abim is the next largest with under 100,000; and Kaabong is a distant third with under 30,000 inhabitants. These numbers are pulled from various internet sources and should not be considered reliable but are listed to give a sense of the relative size of the three locations.

² The given “n” varies based on the how many respondents we had data for in a given instance. For example, although we have 83 total respondents, we only had age estimates for 82 of them.

In addition to the 84 individual interviews, we held a focus group discussion with miners at the Lodepo Parish gold mines in Kaabong. The team also interviewed 11 key informants consisting of members of the more educated and skilled classes, those working in local service provision (hotels and financial services), several long-term migrants, a German doctoral student, an NGO employee, and a representative of the Office of the Prime Minister. Data collection for this study focused on the experiences of local residents; we do not have data from local politicians or officials, but during this and previous studies we engaged in a series of informal conversations with public officials, local elites, members of civil society, and staff from international organizations about the changing nature of Karamoja. These conversations are reflected in the conclusion and recommendation section.

To note, most livelihood research focuses on the household as the unit of analysis. For the purposes of this study, we chose instead to examine individual respondents. We did collect information on household members (including, for instance, livelihood strategies of spouses, school enrollment for children, extended family in rural areas, etc.), but we did not examine the broader household in depth. We choose to focus on individuals for three main reasons: a) migration is often a means through which an individual breaks free of his or her household and establishes new connections that might not yet qualify as “households;” b) a desire to collect potentially sensitive data from respondents, particularly women, about their migration and livelihood experiences that might not be forthcoming in a household setting; and c) practical considerations caused by the divided rural-urban nature of many households, which would make triangulation of data difficult (in other words, we could not easily conduct interviews with multiple household members).

This report discusses data from a small study population based on convenience sampling. Our discussion of the trends and patterns is thus only verifiable for this small group. Additional research with representative data would be required to confirm the extent to which the patterns and findings discussed here can be extended with confidence to a broader

population in the region. That said, we do not believe that the study population is unique or extraordinary in any systematic way. In the absence of confirmation from representative data, we make tentative assumptions that many of the patterns visible within the study population would hold true more broadly. Readers should, however, keep in mind the limitations of the data and analysis.

We used NVivo9 software for qualitative data analysis. Select quantitative information is discussed in this report, but we stress that the data are not representative beyond the study population.

The report now turns to a brief literature review on rural-urban migration to small towns and secondary cities in East Africa. Then we examine the findings from the data collection and analysis, organized in three sections. The first section covers general themes that emerged over the course of the data collection and analysis. This discussion paints a broad picture of rural-urban migration in northern Karamoja and relies on the data from the informants as well as our observations, key informant interviews, and a number of informal conversations with those working in and on the region. The second findings section provides the details and the specifics from the data that support the broad themes, and details the experiences of the migrants themselves. The third section provides additional discussion on the livelihood shifts and discusses some of the variations among the locations, including those with implications for planning. The report ends with conclusions and recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Urbanization is a global phenomenon with often profound impacts on rural and urban economies, household livelihoods, politics, and development. Although the process of urbanization is shaping the character of many African communities, Africa on the whole is not urbanizing as rapidly as other parts of the world, particularly Asia. East Africa is the least urbanized region in Africa, and is urbanizing at a slower rate than West and Southern Africa (Potts 2008, UN-Habitat 2010). UN-Habitat estimates Uganda to be approximately 13% urban, with predictions of a population that is 20% urban by 2030.

Small/Secondary Towns in East Africa

Satterwaite and Tacoli (2003) argue that small and medium urban centers play a critical role in poverty reduction in rural areas, but definitions of these centers vary widely. “Small urban settlements” can have a variety of meanings, and in the last few years, politicians in some nations have been pushed to declare formerly rural areas as towns, and towns as municipalities or cities. City governments are deliberately overestimating population growth so that they can receive more funding and gain political significance (Potts 2008). In Uganda, for example, a settlement with

a population of more than 2,000 people is classified as urban, and one with 60,000 or more residents is classified as a “city.” In northern Karamoja, this means that both Kotido and Abim are technically cities. Regardless of the appropriate moniker, the three largest settlements in northern Karamoja discussed in this report serve as important economic hubs for the extended geographic area.

The process of urbanization is often neither definitive nor final for those who relocate from rural areas: this trend is visible throughout the data for this report. Potts’s research on urban migration in sub-Saharan Africa found that farmers and pastoralists often moved to peri-urban areas while continuing to cultivate or to keep livestock herds. The move is usually spurred by a desire to be closer to markets and have better access to basic services such as health care and education. As Potts points out, “Are the growing settlements essentially rural, enhancing farmers’ livelihoods (a good thing), or are they, simply due to crossing a size threshold, urban areas which are unable to meet the non-agricultural employment and planned housing needs of their populations (a bad thing)?” (Potts 2008, 13).



Automotive services, Kotido Town Center

Other research on East Africa explores town-based pastoralism and the functioning of urban centers as safety valves for pastoralists against negative impacts of drought and population growth. Small towns can act as intermediaries between rural and urban settings, and can serve as alternatives to farther or more permanent outmigration for pastoralist communities. These towns often allow for livestock keeping and serve as a point of integration between the pastoral and the national economy (Ornas 1990).

Small towns can play important roles in economic development and poverty alleviation. Jonathan Baker (1990) is one of the few authors to look exclusively at the importance of small towns to economic development in Africa. He argues that small towns can help spur economic development and are critical to the “promotion of social solidarity and continuity, particularly during periods of transition and change” (Baker 1990, 20). Small towns also seem to provide a function that larger cities do not as a migratory destination. Luc Christiansen et al. (2013) examined data from over 3,000 individuals from Kagera, Tanzania from 1994 to 2002. Over fifty percent of them were able to exit poverty by transferring out of the farm/rural economy to the rural/non-farm or secondary town economy.³ This is in contrast to the much lower proportion (only one in seven) of people who were able to exit poverty by migrating to a larger city. This study supports the hypothesis that secondary towns are crucial for inclusive development and urbanization and should be an area of focus for poverty reduction, as compared to the increasing livelihood insecurity that exists in larger cities.

Rural-Urban Linkages

Several authors argue for a less rigid dichotomy in the concepts of rural and urban, and this is strongly supported by the data for this study. Baker (1990) argues that there is increasing intensification of rural-urban links, and that African markets have never been divided into the exclusive categories of rural and urban, formal and informal. Networks of friendship,

kinship, and family ties have become complex and blur distinctions. In addition, there is “circulatory migration” between rural and urban sectors and formal and informal sectors. Similarly, Tacoli (1998) argues that “rural” and “urban” are closely linked through flows of individuals, commodities, and money. Households themselves can be “multi-spatial,” combining farm and non-farm activities and rural and urban residences.

A report by UN-Habitat (2008) contends that rural linkages contribute to the development of smaller urban areas, thereby reducing migration driven by desperation to larger East African cities. Small- and intermediate-sized towns may provide better access to education and health care than either rural areas or teeming metropolises. For households, maintaining connections and ties in both urban and rural areas can provide an important safety net in times of economic uncertainty or unemployment. De Brauw et al. (2013) makes the important point that migration is often a household decision, and not an individual one; the data on northern Karamoja illustrate both individual and household decision-making at work in migration strategies.

While most of the literature examines rural to urban migration, there is also evidence of increasing reverse migration, particularly from large cities such as Nairobi. Falkingham et al. (2011) found that rural areas often pull older people in particular (age 50 and above) back home. Customary land tenure is also a factor, as migrants may have to occasionally demonstrate their claim to land in order to retain it; this can be done by visiting to claim ownership, building a structure, or leaving some family members to live in the rural area. Falkingham found that reverse migration differs by gender, with women with an intention to return home were more likely to do so than men. At the same time, gendered customary law and inheritance practices meant that more men (71%) than women (36%) in the Nairobi sample reported having assets in their rural communities. As discussed below, the this study on northern

³ According to Satterwaite and Tacoli, rural non-farm economic activities are all activities outside the agricultural sector, but do include manufacturing and services related to processing or transformation of agricultural produce (2003, 20).

Karamoja indicates that there are a number of people who continued to have assets and/or relatives in the rural areas, and some respondents voiced specific plans to return home.

Outcomes of Urbanization for Pastoral Communities

Urban migration can alleviate poverty and bring better access to services in many instances, but the benefits of sedentarization for pastoralists in particular are mixed and under-studied (Nathan, Fratkin, and Roth 1996; Fratkin, Roth, and Nathan 1999). Children often experience negative nutritional changes, possibly from having less access to fresh milk from camels, as in the case of Rendille communities (Nathan, Fratkin, and Roth 1996). Maternal malnutrition has been studied among pastoralist groups in northern Kenya, and pastoral women in small towns showed lower nutritional status than nomadic women (Shell-Duncan and Yung 2004).

Pull factors for pastoralists to urban areas include employment opportunities and livelihood diversification as well as access to services. Push factors include the loss and degradation of land, development-induced displacement, natural disasters, repeated drought, urbanization, and lack of recognition of rights (Kipuri 2010; Nathan, Fratkin, and Roth 1996). Violent conflict among pastoralist groups has also been a major cause of displacement and migration (Hagmann and Mulugeta 2008). Restrictions on mobility greatly hinder pastoral livelihoods and are exacerbated by the nationalization of pastoral lands and denial of pasture and water rights (Mcdowell and De Haan, 1997). Climate change and land-use and land-cover (LULC) changes have important implications for pastoralist communities in the Horn of Africa, particularly as many political, social, economic, and ecological crises have resulted from the pressures put on already fragile ecosystems (Suliman and Elagib, 2012).

Gender Dynamics in Migration

An increasing trend in migration to cities is the rising number of single women and female-headed households settling in urban areas. Women may move to urban areas in search of

the same economic opportunities and services as male migrants, but many widows are also driven out of rural locations due to the death of their husbands, mistreatment, and a lack of inheritance rights to land and other assets.

Once in urban areas, female household heads often face an increased burden of domestic duties and income-generating activities. For instance, Fratkin and Smith (2011) found that towns allowed pastoral women who resettled to spend less time collecting water, but increased their time spent preparing food, in childcare, and finding firewood. While urban centers may have fewer formal employment opportunities for women than for men, females are often able to find work in the informal sector. Some authors argue that the need to provide for children drives women to become more effective entrepreneurial agents (Silberschmidt 2001).

FINDINGS

General Patterns and Themes

The findings from this study illustrate several important and perhaps surprising aspects of migration in northern Karamoja. An important overarching finding is that the vast majority of study respondents interviewed in Abim, Kotido, and Kaabong had not made a complete break with their rural livelihoods. If we assume that our small sample is typical, the pattern of urbanization taking place in northern Karamoja does not herald a definitive abandonment of rural areas or a shift away from a rural economy that is based on mixed pastoral, agro-pastoral, and agrarian livelihood strategies. Rather, the migration and settlement patterns illustrate livelihood adaptations and diversification that take into account the growing importance of the district centers. In many instances, individuals in our sample made calculated decisions to take advantage of the economic and other opportunities in the urban locations, which include labor in the emerging construction and services markets, access to better-quality education for children, entrepreneurial possibilities, and the potential for saving for greater investment in rural assets such as land and livestock.

The continuing links to the rural areas were apparent in many asset categories, including social and financial networks, physical capital (i.e., livestock and food supplies), and management of human capital. Very few people in our study population had moved their whole family permanently to the urban destination or had entirely severed ties with their rural home. Most respondents had strong links back home and engaged in regular exchanges (of food, cash, relief items, market goods, etc.), went back home on a regular basis (to visit, drop off or pick up exchanged items, or engage in seasonal cultivation). This was the case even in the many instances in which individuals saw their move (on an individual level) to town as a permanent one. Assets, including land, food sources,

livestock, and labor, were shared between the rural and urban locations, allowing for spreading of risk, livelihood diversification, and consumption smoothing in accordance with ebbs and flows associated with seasonal shifts, security, and household demographics.

The typology of these rural linkages normally fell into one of the categories detailed below:

- a) Some household members (i.e., parents, wives, or children) continued to live in the rural area, and the respondent visited regularly and engaged in the exchange of food, market commodities, school fees, etc. These migrants were normally male and had left one or more wives in the rural area (though many men had one wife living in town as well). In a number of households in a better-off area on the outskirts of Kotido, called Lodipdip, the male household head had eventually saved enough money to build a home and had then brought some or all of the wives and children to town.
- b) The respondent returned to his or her rural area seasonally to cultivate and only lived in town during the dry season. Alternatively, some people had been able to acquire new (and reportedly more fertile) plots in new settlement areas and were cultivating these areas while still living full- or part-time in the towns. This division based around cultivation was most common around Kaabong, where fertile land could be accessed relatively nearby.
- c) The respondent perceived his or her time in the town to be temporary and hoped to return to the rural area in the near future. In many instances, this move was pegged to a specific goal, such as saving a certain amount of money or acquiring enough animals to restock.⁴
- d) The respondent commuted into town on a daily or near daily basis for employment purposes.⁵ This last category was observed

⁴ While many respondents said they “hoped to return to their village,” in the coding of the data we deemed “permanent” those who had had been living in town more than three years.

⁵ To note, we intentionally excluded from our sample those individuals who brought firewood or charcoal into towns for sale. These are important livelihood strategies but have been discussed elsewhere (Stites, Fries, and Akabwai 2010). In addition, these strategies take advantage of town markets, but not town employment opportunities or other pull factors.

the most frequently in Kotido, where several respondents travelled approximately an hour by foot each way for domestic work (female respondents) or various construction jobs (male respondent). In one case, a woman commuted for three hours in each direction between Kotido town and Rengen Sub-county, leaving her six children at home while she did domestic work at a hotel.

An exception to the pattern of maintaining rural ties is the case of women who left their rural homes after being widowed, abandoned, or mistreated. These women were normally in the urban centers with their children and appeared to be generally worse off than their married counterparts. Most reported no or limited connections with their in-laws in the village they had migrated from.⁶ This lack of rural connection has important implications for vulnerability, as migrants rely heavily on land and/or relatives in rural areas for food supplies and assistance with children (many respondents reported one or more child living with relatives in a rural area). One widow in Kaabong had been able to acquire access to a plot in one of the new settlement areas, but was not able to clear or cultivate due to limited human capital and the financial inability to hire agricultural workers.

The next broad pattern is the perceived *permanence* of this livelihood shift among the majority of respondents: 67% of overall respondents said that they planned to remain based in town. (Substantial variations existed by location and are discussed later). The fact that the majority of respondents planned to stay may at first appear to be a contradiction to the above pattern regarding the continuation of rural links. To remember, however, in most cases settling in town is not a trade between a rural and an urban existence, but rather an expansion of livelihood strategies at the household level to include both rural and urban opportunities. An exception is for those who did not choose to move to town and have retained few rural ties, i.e., widowed or abandoned women.

The concept of choice is important to consider. As discussed in more depth in the next section, common push factors for rural-urban migration among the study population include general insecurity, repeated crop failure, loss of animal herds, the death of a family member, or flight from specific raids. These situations certainly call into question the voluntary nature of migration. However, the relative duration of people's stay, the widespread opinion that life in town had many advantages despite its challenges, and the ever-present opportunity for people to return home, should they wish, indicate that most respondents in the study population ended up in town and choose to stay. In other words, we assume that, by and large, the sample that we have captured for this study is largely comprised of the success stories, whether this success is over a few months, years, or longer. Single women are an exception in many instances and hence this report will continue to specifically highlight the vulnerabilities and experiences of this group.

The linkages in movement, information, and commerce between the rural and urban areas in northern Karamoja illustrate the relative ease of mobility between these areas. Coupled with widespread improvements in security in most rural areas, most people could return to their rural homes if they wished, and we hypothesize that many *do* return home upon realizing that town life with its associated many challenges is not for them. (These people, with perhaps one or two exceptions, were not captured in the study sample). In addition, while this specific piece of research examined only the urban side of the rural-urban link, we know from previous research that the vast majority of rural households engage in at least some form of interaction with the towns on a regular or periodic basis, whether to buy staple commodities (cereal, salt, sugar), medicines (animal or human), clothing, or other items; to seek medical care; or to trade in natural resource or livestock products. In other words, most households in northern Karamoja are already engaging in an adaptive rural-urban exchange,

⁶ Although marriage patterns are shifting, most women move to the home of their husbands upon marrying. We did not ask if these widowed or abandoned women were maintaining ties with their natal kin, but in no instance was this information volunteered.

but do so from a rural base. This study examines the minority who has managed to carve out an (at times tenuous) existence from an urban base.

The final overarching point calls attention to the differences in the data as opposed to their similarities. While this study entailed a relatively small sample, we feel that the differences apparent among the three locations are relevant and noteworthy and that they very likely mirror more widespread differentiations. The detailed findings in the next section on the experiences of migrants examine these variables and their implications.

The Experiences of Town Migrants

This section examines the data in more depth. We group the findings by broad topical area, with differences by location when relevant. The first section covers the migratory process and examines how long respondents have been in town, whom they travelled with, where they come from, and the push and pull factors resulting in leaving the home area or shifting to new livelihoods. The second section examines life in towns: the activities that make up people’s livelihood strategies and the relative importance of these activities, accommodation, commuting to towns, available sanitation, access to education, the specific vulnerabilities of adolescent girls, and the challenges associated with living in towns. The final section looks at people’s longer-term plans and aspirations.

Migratory Process

The study sought to better understand the process through which people came to live in Abim, Kaabong, and Kotido. We asked a series of questions to investigate timing, push and pull factors, decision-making, and the demographics of migration.

Duration of Stay

Various anecdotal reports and informal conversations point to a surge in population growth of the towns in northern Karamoja in recent years. This was backed up by the data⁷ on duration of stay to a certain extent, but with potentially important differences among locations, as illustrated in Table 1. To note, we asked this question of both people whom we classified as living permanently in the town and those who were commuting daily, seasonally, or on a temporary basis. These data thus refer more accurately to a shift in livelihood, which normally but not always also included a change in location.

The largest percentage of migrants in all locations arrived within the past two to four years (approximately 2010 to 2012). This time period corresponds with a decrease in the most intense period of the recent forced disarmament campaign,⁸ the (official) disbanding of the protected kraals (see Stites and Akabwai 2009, 2010; Levine 2010), and improved security in many areas—all aspects which may have decreased the push factors from rural areas. In

Table 1: Duration of stay in urban location

Years	Overall (n=83)	Abim (n=18)	Kaabong (n=22)	Kotido (n=43)
1 or less	6%	17%	0	4%
2 to 4	47%	50%	59%	40%
5 to 7	27%	11%	27%	33%
8 to 10	7%	0%	5%	12%
>10	12%	17%	9%	12%

⁷ To note, all data representing duration (including age) should be taken as an approximation.

⁸ The most recent forced disarmament campaign implemented by the Uganda People’s Defense Force (UPDF) began in 2006 and was gradually implemented throughout the region, with the most intense periods falling in the 2007 to 2009 window. Among the study population, the Jie population in Kotido District had probably the highest number of violent confrontations with the UPDF. For more information, see Stites and Akabwai 2009 and 2010.

terms of crop production, however, 2007 to 2010 were all noted as years of poor or failed harvests across the study areas (Burns, Bekele, and Akabwai 2013), and households were likely eager to diversify their livelihood base after years of crop loss and livestock stress. This period of poor harvests may have resulted in an influx of migrants in the period immediately following.

The next greatest period of migration to urban areas among the study population was in the five- to seven-year period (approximately 2006 to 2008), which corresponds with the start of the forced disarmament campaign, the establishment of the protected kraals, and widespread animal loss from raiding in many areas due to the initially uneven nature of the disarmament. This also overlaps with the string of bad crop years as noted in FIC's baseline study cited above (Burns, Bekele, and Akabwai 2013).

Interestingly, no respondents reported arriving in Kaabong within the past year. This could be a result of the small data set, but may also be due to the growth of new livelihood opportunities elsewhere in Kaabong (i.e., gold mining in Teuso Lopedo, the growth of Karenga Sub-county center, see text box on mining) and the greater diversity in livelihood zones in Kaabong (a mix of pastoral, agro-pastoral, and agriculture), which may allow for better overall risk-management than in the uniform districts of Kotido (primarily agro-pastoral) and Abim (primarily agricultural). Also of note, there was a

sizeable long-term population in each study site (greater than 10 years), with the highest in Abim (17% of respondents). Many of these longer-term residents (all sites) came to establish businesses, escape earlier periods of drought and insecurity, or take advantage of town markets.

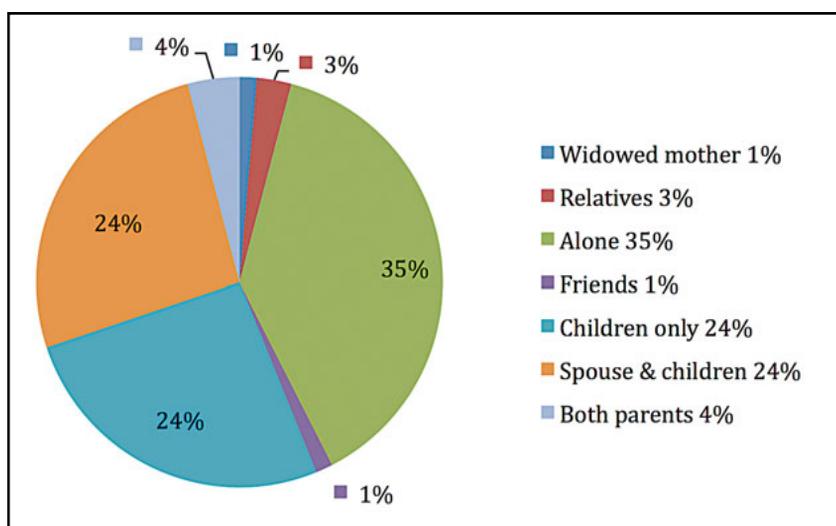
Traveled with Whom?

We asked respondents whom they came with when they moved to town. (We did not ask this question of those who were commuting on a daily basis.) The data, shown in the pie chart below, illustrate that migrants most commonly traveled to town alone (35%), followed by traveling with both a spouse and children (24%), or with only children (24%). This last category was widows or abandoned women in all but one case, in which a man moved to Abim with his seven children after his wife died in childbirth. Not surprisingly, those who traveled alone were much more likely to be male (63% of this group) as compared to female (37% of this group). The average age of the men who came alone was 27 years; for females the average age was 30 years.

Who is moving to the towns?

We collected data on distance from the rural location to the towns, as well as on ethnic or group affiliation of the respondents. The table below illustrates the estimated distance of the respondents from the town to their place of origin if traveling by foot. To note, these self-reported data reflect different walking speeds: as one woman explained, traveling with small

Figure 2: Whom did you move to town with?



children added a day to her travel time. The table is not comprehensive and is designed to show the general pattern as opposed to every result for the specific sites.

Tables 2–4: How far is it from town to your rural place of origin (by foot⁹)?

Table 2

Abim (n=14)	
Travel Time	%
< 1 hour	6%
1 hour	6%
2 days	33%
3 days	28%
4 days	6%
Total*	79%

Table 3

Kaabong (n=23)	
Travel Time	%
< 1 hour	17%
2 hours	13%
3–4 hours	8%
6 hours	21%
7–12 hours	20%
2–3 days	12%
Total*	91%

Table 4

Kotido (n=41)	
Travel Time	%
<1 hour	14%
1 hour	16%
2–4 hours	45%
5–7 hours	11%
2 days	5%
Total*	91%

*Totals do not equal 100% because outliers and “do not know” and “no data” responses were excluded from these tables.

In addition, we collected data on ethnic or group identity of respondents in each location, which break out as follows:

Tables 5–7: Group/ethnic affiliation of respondents by location

Table 5

Abim (n=18)	
Group	%
Labwor	11%
Dodoth	6%
Jie	78%
Teso	6%
Total	100%

Table 6

Kaabong (n=21)	
Group	%
Dodoth	71%
Nyangia	10%
Pian	5%
Bokora	5%
Matheniko	5%
Ik	5%
Total	100%

Table 7

Kotido (n=43)	
Group	%
Jie	91%
Dodoth	7%
Bokora	2%
Total	100%

⁹ In all instances in our study population, people reported commuting on foot into towns.

Although not representative, the patterns visible in tables may apply more broadly to characteristics of migrants in the towns in question. In the case of Abim, for instance, the majority of respondents came from locations that were two or more days' walk away; only 12% of respondents came from less than a full day's walk. This is confirmed by the high number of migrants from other districts (i.e., non-Labwor respondents), many of whom were drawn by the prospect of agricultural land (discussed in the next section). In contrast, the majority of respondents in both Kaabong and Kotido towns came from rural locations within the same district (i.e., Dodoth, Nyangia, and Ik respondents in Kaabong; Jie respondents in Kotido). Accordingly, 59% and 75% of respondents in Kaabong and Kotido respectively came from villages that were four hours or less away. The implications of these findings on livelihoods, rural-urban linkages, and experiences of life in town are discussed in more detail in the next section.

Why did you leave the rural area?

In seeking to understand push and pull factors, we asked respondents why they had left their rural homes or had established a presence in the

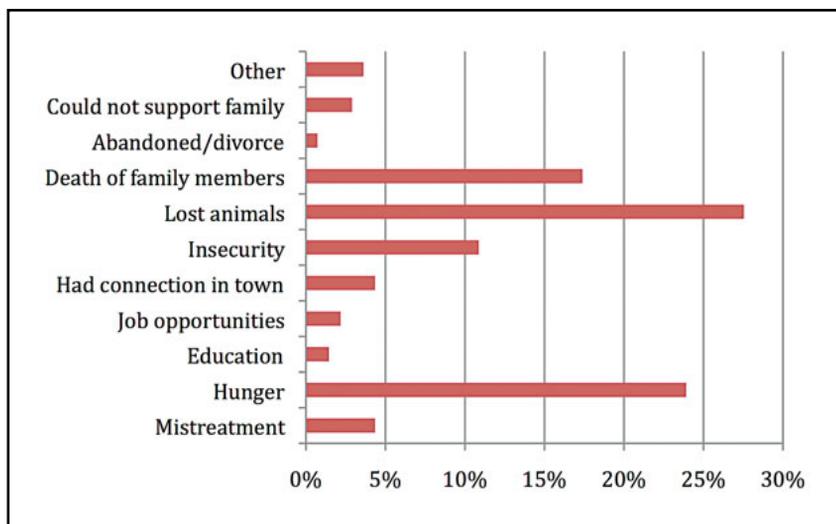
towns. Multiple responses were allowed from each respondent. The results are displayed in Figure 3 below.¹⁰

Interesting differences exist in these factors from one location to the next. In Kotido, for instance, of 43 respondents, 26 listed “lost animals” as the primary reason they had left and moved to town (60% of Kotido respondents). Of these 26 respondents, 19 listed “hunger” as the secondary reason for migration (44% of total). In most instances, the loss of animals occurred as a result of uneven disarmament followed by raiding, and the loss of livestock herds led to hunger and an inability to support the household. As one young man from Kotido explained:

It is hunger that has chased me to town...some years back before disarmament we used to have cows and we had no problem with food as the oxen enabled us to grow enough food. Even if the drought came we could sell off some animals to buy food. But when all those animals got raided we became poor and hungry. We had to head to town to survive on casual jobs.¹¹

Another young man living in Kotido stressed how few options he had left following the loss of his animals in Rengen Sub-county:

Figure 3: Why did you leave the rural area? (n=138, multiple responses allowed)



¹⁰ Overlap exists between some categories in Figure 3—such as “lost animals” and “insecurity”—but we sought to remain as true as possible to the narrative provided by the respondent. In this particular example, “insecurity” as a push factor had normally been experienced for an extended period, whereas “lost animals” was a more sudden and cataclysmic event that led to hunger and relocation.

¹¹ Individual interview, Kotido town.

I lost my cattle to raiding and we were hungry. I had to support my kids and the only place to do this is in town. I had thought of raiding myself to get revenge and steal back my cattle, but I decided moving to town would be preferable as I might get killed. It's better to sweat than to die.¹²

In contrast, general insecurity was a major push factor in Kaabong, often coupled with hunger or the death of a family member. Responses were more varied and evenly dispersed among respondents in Abim, and included hunger, death of a family member, loss of animals, and education and job opportunities.

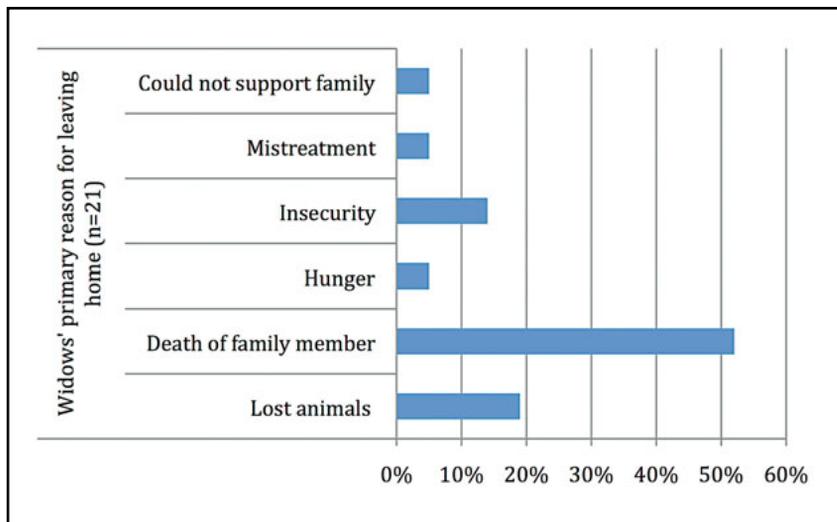
The death of one or more family members was the primary push factor for the widows in the study population (Figure 4). (Note that some of the widows in the study population lost their husbands subsequent to moving to town). Fifty-two percent of the widows listed death as the primary reason, as compared to only 6% (n=4) of the general population excluding the widows (n=62). The next most common primary push factor for widows was the loss of animals. In the common situation of violent raids, the loss of animals was often simultaneous with the death of the male household head.

The most widely cited pull factors for rural-urban migration among the study population as a whole were economic considerations: people strongly believed that they would be in a better position to support themselves through town-based livelihood strategies. The push factors discussed above often contributed to the decision to depart, but in most instances the move was deliberated and calculated based on risks and perceived opportunities in the urban areas. Somewhat surprisingly, this was the case even for women who reported that they had accompanied their husbands to town: most men and women said that they made the decision together with their spouse. For example, a woman who had moved to Kotido from Panyangara Sub-county explained:

It was me together with my late husband who discussed and came up with the decision to do business in town rather than staying in the village with hunger and many other problems.¹³

Exceptions do exist to this shared decision-making, of course, and include children who moved with their parents.¹⁴

Figure 4: Why widows left their rural area, primary reason (n=21)



¹² Individual interview, Kotido town.

¹³ Individual interview, Kotido town.

¹⁴ By and large, however, those children who opted to remain in town upon reaching adulthood are well-adapted to town-based life.

Improved security was also a pull factor in people’s migratory decisions; this is the converse of the push factor of losing animals or relatives to violent raids. The refuge provided by town was the determining factor in some cases in which calculated decision-making was not possible. Several respondents in Kaabong, for instance, had fled devastating raids on their villages and been separated from family members. One young woman had left her village in a chaotic raid twelve years earlier in which her parents were killed and her siblings scattered. She was taken in by a female soldier and eventually ended up in Kaabong town; she had heard rumors that her brothers were in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, but she had no way to verify this information. Unlike many who had been living in town for an extended period, this young woman felt trapped by circumstance:

I don’t see that I have any choice but to stay. I would consider going back to [the village] if I knew my brothers were there and could help me clear land for farming...The land in [the village] is in rocky valleys that need men to clear the heavy rocks. I have received messages through people from my brothers telling me to go to Kakuma but I fear that I would

go there and be stranded again. I have not actually talked to my brothers on the phone. I fear making the trip alone with my three kids. I would have to go on foot because I cannot afford the fare...¹⁵

This young woman is of Ik origin, and her perceptions may be shaped by discrimination experienced in Kaabong, as covered in the next section.

Life in Town

We asked a series of in-depth questions to understand the livelihood strategies, networks, opportunities, and challenges associated with the shift away from a rural-based livelihood. This section covers select aspects of these, including livelihoods in town, basic infrastructure and services (including housing, sanitation, and education),¹⁶ urban-rural linkages, and the challenges posed by a town-based existence.

Livelihoods

The table below includes the data on all livelihood activities pursued by respondents in the study population, shown both overall and by gender.

Table 8: Primary and secondary livelihoods (LHs in town)

ACTIVITY	OVERALL		MALE		FEMALE	
	Primary LH* (n=83)	Additional LHs** (n=97)	Primary LH* (n=34)	Additional LHs** (n=39)	Primary LH* (n=47)	Additional LHs** (n=57)
Works/runs small shop	4%	0	6%	0%	2%	0%
Unloads lorries/buses	5%	1%	12%	3%	0%	0%
Butchering	5%	3%	12%	5%	0%	2%
Fetches and sells water to homes	11%	8%	0%	8%	19%	9%
Fetches water for bricks or construction	4%	3%	3%	3%	4%	4%

continued on next page

¹⁵ Individual interview, Kaabong town.

¹⁶ We collected data on access to health care, but the analysis showed that in almost every instance people were using the same town-based health care facilities prior to moving to the urban area. Thus, there is a clear improvement in access based on proximity, but little of interest for discussion purposes.

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ACTIVITY	OVERALL		MALE		FEMALE	
	Primary LH* (n=83)	Additional LHs** (n=97)	Primary LH* (n=34)	Additional LHs** (n=39)	Primary LH* (n=47)	Additional LHs** (n=57)
Domestic service in hotel or restaurant	8%	0%	3%	0%	11%	0%
Domestic service in a home	4%	6%	0%	0%	6%	11%
Petty trade	2%	1%	0%	0%	4%	2%
Crafts	1%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%
Construction	4%	3%	9%	8%	0%	0%
Brick making	4%	5%	9%	10%	0%	2%
Casual labor (<i>lejaleja</i>)	13%	5%	18%	5%	9%	5%
Brewing industry	11%	6%	0%	0%	21%	11%
Collects firewood	0%	7%	0%	3%	0%	11%
Charcoal trade	4%	1%	0%	0%	6%	0%
Agriculture	10%	22%	6%	23%	11%	21%
Automotive repair shop	2%	1%	6%	3%	0%	0%
Cash for work***	0%	7%	0%	3%	0%	11%
Other ¹⁷	10%	3%	15%	5%	6%	2%
None	0%			23%		12%

*Only one response allowed.

** Multiple responses allowed.

*** Cash for work refers to donor-funded projects.

The above table and the associated qualitative narratives reveal various relevant aspects regarding livelihood adaptations associated with moving to town; a few of the more interesting are touched on here. Most evident is that the majority of respondents engage in at least two types of livelihood activities, with many engaging in more than two. The livelihood activity deemed the most important was

normally that with the highest pay or greatest regularity of employment, but could also be that which took up the most time, such as agricultural labor. The description below, by a 32-year-old woman with seven children who had been living in Kotido town for six years, is indicative of the extent of activities that might be pursued by just one individual:

¹⁷ “Other” responses for males (n=5 as primary livelihood) included digging latrines, trading goats, driving a motorbike (*bodaboda*), collecting fees for the water association, serving as a local councilor, and, as an additional livelihood, collecting and selling twigs for granaries, and breaking and selling stones. “Other” responses for females (n=3 as primary livelihood) included attending secondary school, making and selling donuts, and, as an additional livelihood, frying fermented *posho*, and selling honey.

In town here I decided to be buying charcoal in sacks, and then I retail it in small cans at UGX 500 each. In the end, I would get a profit of UGX 2,000 per sack.¹⁸ In addition, I am a member of the VSLA [village savings and loan association]. The village group loans me money for buying sorghum, and I make the local brew. I would get a loan of UGX 100,000, and when I sell the ebutia [local brew] from that sorghum I made UGX 150,000...I use the profit for other needs and business like buying charcoal and retailing it. I used also to make bricks...I sell them for UGX 100,000. On top of all that I cultivate our land [in our home village] for food to feed the family.¹⁹

This woman and her husband had been successful to the point that after several years

they were able to build their own house in Kotido, which allowed them extensive savings compared to those who paid high monthly rents (discussed below).

Although many respondents engaged in a diversity of activities, a number of respondents said they did not have any form of secondary livelihood—this was 23% of men and 12% of women. This can be ascribed to three main reasons: their primary livelihood was sufficient; their secondary livelihoods had failed; or they were not providing full information in the interview. The cases in which secondary livelihoods were not required can be seen, in most instances, as economic successes. The table below provides more information on a few of these examples.

Table 9: Examples of primary livelihoods for respondents who did not need to pursue additional livelihood activities

Individual characteristics	Livelihood activity	Reported compensation
Male, 18 years, Kotido	Domestic work at a hotel	Makes 60,000 UGX/month, plus meals, and a 3,000 UGX bonus on busy days
Male, 27 years, Kotido	Runs a shop for the owner	Makes 25,000 UGX/month, plus meals and housing
Female, widow, 25 years, Kotido	Casual but consistent work washing people's clothes	Makes 2,000–5,000 UGX/day
Male, 20 years, Kotido	Drives a rented <i>bodaboda</i> motorcycle	Makes 3,000 UGX profit most days
Female, 17 years, commutes daily to Kotido	Works as a domestic in a home	1,000 UGX/day, steady pay for past 5 years
Male, 38 years, Kotido	Works for a butcher	Is paid in meat, which he then roasts and sells
Male, 21 years, Kotido	Pumping station attendant; also mends tires	Makes 2,000 UGX/day, plus 2,000 UGX per tire repaired. Receives additional 50,000 UGX each month.
Male, 28 years, Kaabong	Works as a porter at construction sites	Makes 3,000 UGX/day, plus lunch
Female, 22 years, Abim	Sells drinks in a bar	Makes 60,000 UGX/month

¹⁸ One United States Dollar was equal to approximately 2,450 Ugandan Shillings (UGX) at the time of the field research, hence the profit here is less than one dollar.

¹⁹ Individual interview, Kotido town. Another woman, a widow, in Kotido also reported using VSLA loans to support brewing.

Several of the activities in the table above require specific skills, such as those held by the *bodaboda* driver, the butcher’s assistant, and the pumping station attendant. In each of these instances, the respondent learned the trade on the job or from a friend after arriving in the urban location. Only the shop manager falls into the category of more skilled labor, and his reported monthly income is below many of the other examples.

The daily cash income from the above examples ranges from 1,000–5,000 UGX (approximately US\$ 0.40 to US\$ 2.00)—still a very small amount of money for daily survival. What sets these primary livelihood activities apart is not, therefore, the rate of pay, but rather the regularity of the work. The young woman who worked as a domestic in someone’s home had held the same job for five years, thereby allowing her to save money and smooth her consumption. The widow who washed clothes had a more tenuous position as she went door to door, but had a set of regular clients who provided a degree of stability. The steady nature of these livelihoods is in marked contrast to those of most respondents, who report a range of often very physically demanding livelihood activities in order to meet expenses and make ends meet.

In contrast, other respondents who reported no additional livelihoods were either unable to engage in multiple activities for health reasons or had failed at efforts to pursue such activities at the time of the interview. One woman, for instance, had to stop work in a quarry due to chest pains; another said mental health problems prevented her from doing activities other than assisting in brewing operations. Several people said they had been trying to do cash-for-work projects but had been “deleted” from the beneficiary list. To note, while cash for work was

listed by 7% of respondents as a livelihood activity, it was only listed as a secondary or additional activity (by 3% of men and 11% of women, and almost entirely in Kaabong). No one specifically reported giving up other forms of labor to engage in cash for work, but the fact that several people were (reportedly) not engaged in any additional forms of activity *and* said that they had been deleted from cash-for-work rosters could imply that they stopped other activities in the hopes of being involved in these projects.

As shown in Table 8 above, there are important livelihood variations by gender, with some of these illustrated in Table 10 below.

The qualitative data include important details and variations regarding some of the livelihood strategies listed above. Brewing, for instance, was cited by the greatest percentage of females (21%) as their primary source of livelihood. Clear gradations, however, exist within the brewing industry. Most women in the study population who brewed did not run their own operation, which requires equipment, a steady supply of sorghum (either through own production or market purchase), and a safe place to store equipment (often only possible when a respondent had her own house). Some respondents were able to meet these conditions, such as the woman cited earlier who used loans to acquire sorghum for brewing, but the majority of female respondents who reported brewing either did so in small batches on an occasional basis (with no guarantee of sales) or found sporadic jobs assisting other (mostly also casual) brewers. Reimbursement was often in the form of residue for these casual hires.

Casual labor—called *lejaleja*—was the primary livelihood strategy listed by the greatest

Table 10: Most important primary livelihood by gender

Male* (n=34)	Casual labor (18%)	Butchering (12%)	Unloading lorries /buses (12%)	Brick making (9%)	Construction (9%)
Female (n=47)	Brewing industry (21%)	Fetching water for homes (19%)	Domestic work in hotel or restaurant (11%)	Agriculture (11%)	Casual labor (9%)

*Does not include the aggregate category of “other.” See footnote 17 above.

percentage (18%) of males. This entails daily and door-to-door efforts to find employment. Many of the activities within a *lejaleja* strategy are likely also shown on the above table—i.e., brickmaking, unloading vehicles, working construction—with the difference being that men who list *lejaleja* are more likely to be cobbling together an assortment of these tasks, as opposed to having regular if casual employment in a particular sector.

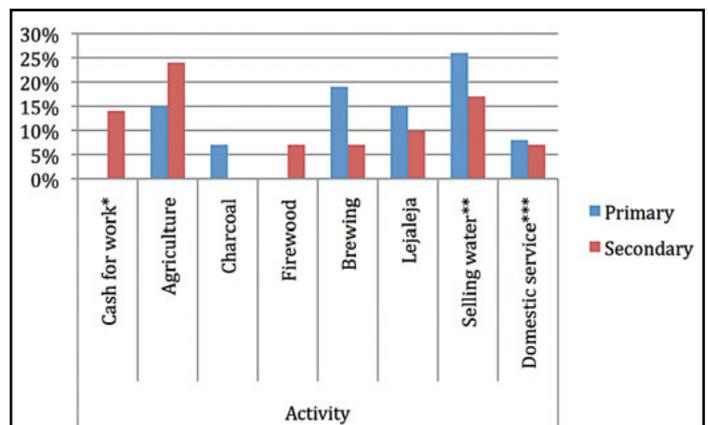
The differences in urban livelihoods for men and women align closely with traditional gender roles in the region. Men are primarily engaged in heavy physical labor, while women find employment in domestic or service industries. The move to urban environments highlights an important shift away from livestock-based forms of livelihoods, with the exception of butchering, which was the primary livelihood for 12% of men and an additional livelihood for 5%. Only one man in the sample was a regular livestock trader, while one other engaged in occasional livestock trade.

Somewhat surprisingly, firewood collection and charcoal production and sale were not widespread within the livelihoods data.²⁰ No woman reported carrying firewood as her primary economic activity, and only 6% of women listed charcoal as their main activity. (Eleven percent of women listed firewood within their additional activities,

as did 3% of men.) While we lack enough data to know definitively, our assumption is that firewood and charcoal sales remain important for those who live in rural areas close enough to town to access urban markets, but that this strategy is pursued less commonly by those who relocate to towns on a more permanent basis. This shift is likely in part practical due to proximity to resources, but may also be due to the broader range of more lucrative and regular economic activities available in the town setting. Another practical possibility relates to diversification of activities by gender: some of the women who reported charcoal production noted that they did this together with their husbands, who helped with the heavy labor of cutting branches and lifting the sacks. The lower-than-expected rates of charcoal production could, therefore, be due to the limited number of cases in which both members of a couple had the time or inclination to continue with charcoal production, particularly given other available economic opportunities. However, as shown in the next table, several widowed/abandoned women do list charcoal production as their primary activity, and presumably they do this without male assistance.

We examined the specific livelihood strategies performed by widows and abandoned women to see how, if at all, their livelihoods varied from those of females more broadly.

Figure 5: Livelihood activities of widows and abandoned women (n=27)²¹



*Cash for work refers to donor-funded projects.

** Selling water combines the sale of water to houses and as part of brickmaking or construction.

*** Domestic service combines domestic service conducted in a home and in restaurants/hotels.

²⁰ Importantly, although charcoal and firewood did not appear as important categories within the livelihood data, both of these inputs are used heavily in brickmaking, which was listed as the primary livelihood activity by 9% of men and as a secondary activity by 10% of men.

²¹ Figure 5 only includes those activities reported by more than one respondent. The list of those activities excluded from the figure includes domestic service in a hotel or restaurant, fetching water for brickmaking, working for a butcher, petty trade, making donuts, and breaking stones. In addition, three women (10%) reported that they had no additional livelihood (one said she had been “deleted” from the cash-for-work roster, one had mental health issues, and one was making enough washing clothes and said she did not have time or need for more work).

By and large, the data show no stark differences in the livelihood activities performed by women overall and those conducted by widows or abandoned women. These across-the-board similarities imply that marital status does not have a major impact on access to employment. However, an examination of the qualitative data shows that widowed or abandoned women often do struggle to engage in labor to the same extent as other women. For example, single women have more difficulty in accessing and clearing land and hence are more likely to work as agricultural laborers on someone else's plot than in their own garden. Those who brew are normally working for others, often being paid at least partially in residue as opposed to cash. Households are less vulnerable to the irregular and unpredictable nature of casual employment when there are multiple potential earners within the home. Most of the widows and abandoned women in the study population had young children, and hence the women were the main or only provider for their households. Their role as sole breadwinner and provider greatly increases their vulnerability and decreases their resilience to shocks.

While there is little overlap between the genders in the primary livelihoods shown in Table 10 above, agriculture was the most frequently cited

additional livelihood listed by both men and women (23% and 21% respectively). Engaging in agriculture took a variety of forms, with the differences driven primarily by location. In Abim, for instance, many respondents worked on farms in the surrounding countryside and were paid either in cash or in food. In Kaabong, those who engaged in agriculture were either working on plots in their home areas or were accessing new sites in some of the recently established agricultural settlements. In Kotido, where most respondents (75%) came from locations four or fewer hours away from town, many returned to their rural villages to cultivate. To note, in all instances agricultural labor was seasonal, and the rewards are tenuous due to the semi-arid environment and the frequency of years with poor rainfall. Further details on differences in most common livelihood activities by location are shown in Table 11.

While keeping in mind the small study population, the above table points to variations in the labor market and economy that are interesting if indicative of the broader reality. In particular, Kotido emerges as the most economically vibrant town, in which 14% of respondents are engaged in unique livelihoods that did not appear more than twice in the sample population (and are thus categorized as

Table 11: Most common primary and secondary livelihoods, by location

Location	Type	Livelihood activity		
Abim	Primary (n=18)	Domestic work in hotel or restaurant (17%)	Casual work (17%)	Charcoal (17%)
	Additional (n=19)	Agricultural (47%)	None (21%)	
Kaabong	Primary (n=22)	Casual work (27%)	Fetching water for homes (27%)	Agriculture (27%)
	Additional (n=27)	Cash for work (22%)	Firewood (19%)	Fetching water for homes (11%) and casual work (11%)
Kotido	Primary (n=43)	Brewing (21%)	Other (14%)	
	Additional (n=51)	None (20%)	Agriculture (14%)	Domestic work in homes (12%)

“other;” see footnote 17 for a list). This is further supported by the 20% of respondents in Kotido who did not engage in additional livelihood activities, at least a portion of whom did not need to do so in order to support themselves or their families. Similarly, 21% of respondents in Abim also reported no additional form of livelihood. Also interestingly, each location has one important primary livelihood that does not appear in the other two towns: domestic work in a hotel or restaurant in Abim, casual labor in Kaabong, and brewing in Kotido. Additional research would be necessary to understand how widespread these patterns were and their meaning. The data above also illustrate the importance of agricultural livelihoods in all three locations, and this underpins the importance of the rural-urban linkages discussed earlier in this report.

Accommodation

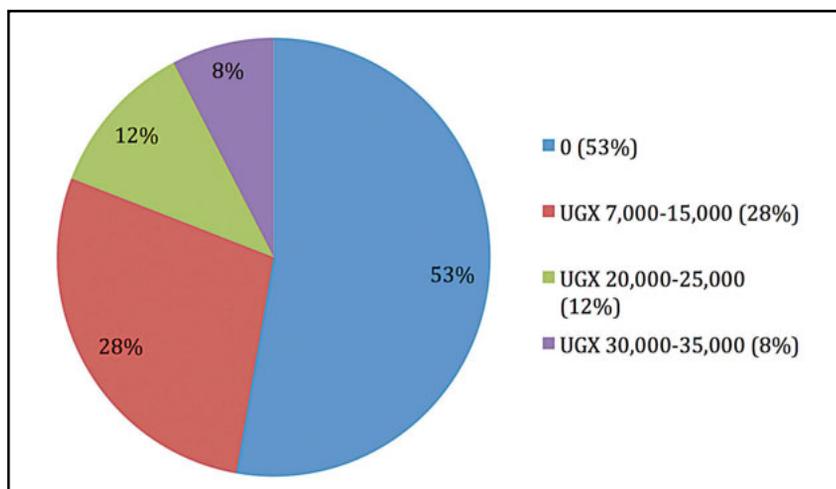
One of the biggest challenges facing migrants relocating to towns is securing and paying for accommodation. Of the respondents for whom we had data on this question (n=78), 53% did not pay any cash rent, and the remainder paid between UGX 7,000 and UGX 35,000 per month, as illustrated in Figure 6.

For those who paid cash rent, the most common monthly amount was UGX 10,000, paid by 18% of the study population. In most cases, rent was for one room that would house entire and often

large families, though in some instances people reported renting a house or more than one room. Those respondents who did not pay rent either owned their own home (15%), lived for free with relatives or friends (29%), lived where they worked (7%), or were squatting and not paying (1%). For those who lived where they worked, some received a lower salary in exchange for this benefit. Kaabong had the greatest number of respondents who did not pay rent (82%, n=22), with 17% owning their own homes and 64% staying with relatives or friends. Abim had the lowest percentage of respondents who did not pay rent (24%, n=17), and most of these stayed with relatives or friends. The fact that more people in the sample paid rent in Abim than elsewhere is likely due to the high number of outsiders living in Abim (see Table 5), who therefore had fewer connections to people with whom they could stay for free.

Kotido had the highest rate of respondents who owned their own homes, at 23% (n=40). About half of these respondents lived in an area of Kotido town called Lodipdip, a neighborhood that appears to be better-off than some other recently settled areas. Home ownership in Kotido was not a factor of duration of stay—several homeowners had lived in Kotido for ten or more years, while the rest had been in town for two to eight years. A number of respondents who lived in their own homes reported that the male household head had come to Kotido first

Figure 6: Amount paid each month in rental accommodation (n=78)



and worked until he could afford a home and had then sent for his other family members (which often included one or more wives, children, and parents). We interviewed one young man from Rengen Sub-county who was renting while in the process of this strategy:

I knew the town but I consulted people as well and decided to stay here in Lodipdip. It's close to the cattle market and I saw a lot of work being done nearby and knew I would find employment.

How did you support yourself when you first arrived?

I'd saved a bit of money by coming into town to do construction work. I then bargained with my current landlord to reduce the rent from UGX 30,000/month to UGX 20,000 and give me a week's grace period until I got work. With the balance of my savings I bought one goat, and I had a little money for food. This is how I managed.²²

This man's ability to save money for his family (he had already sent more than UGX 200,000 home) and to put towards his own home is likely linked to the range of livelihood strategies he was pursuing. He started by commuting from the rural area for construction work, he had the business acumen to start up a trading business, and the social connections and skills to negotiate a lower rent (in addition, the landlord turned out to be a distant relative).

In contrast to the example above, many respondents lacked the capacity to save money beyond their basic expenses and possibly some support for relatives back home. Affording the high monthly rents was difficult for those not fortunate enough to be hosted by friends or family members, and even these arrangements were often tenuous, short-term, or beset with personal problems. The sentiments of a woman

in Kaabong who had been living in town for the past two years were commonplace: "We have to squat in my sister's house, and they are not happy about it."²³ Few alternatives exist, and even for those able to pay, accommodation can be difficult to secure and is often inadequate and in poor repair. For instance, the rented hut of an elderly man (and his second wife and seven children) collapsed, and they were staying in a dilapidated hut while waiting for the owner to repair the first property. He said:

I do not have a house where I can keep my children. When I am told to move away I do not have anywhere to take the children. I would build a house...but I do not have the land. I am too old to afford rent.²⁴

Safety is another concern, as highlighted by an 18-year-old girl in Kaabong who fled her village in Loyoro Sub-county when raiders killed her parents:

I wish there was support for orphans like me; I need a house and hope I can make enough money to start renting. I get invited to stay in people's houses, but I don't trust them. My only wish and prayer is that I marry a good man that treats me well.²⁵

Many felt that having their own home was the best solution, as one man in Abim explained, "The payment of rent is giving me a headache and keeps reducing my already small capital. If I get money it will be to build my own house."²⁶ Acquiring a house requires not only land and capital but also permission to build.

Procuring housing can often be particularly challenging for widowed or abandoned women due to financial concerns, stigma, and discrimination. The figure below illustrates the type of accommodation for these women as compared to the general study population.

²² Individual interview, Kotido town.

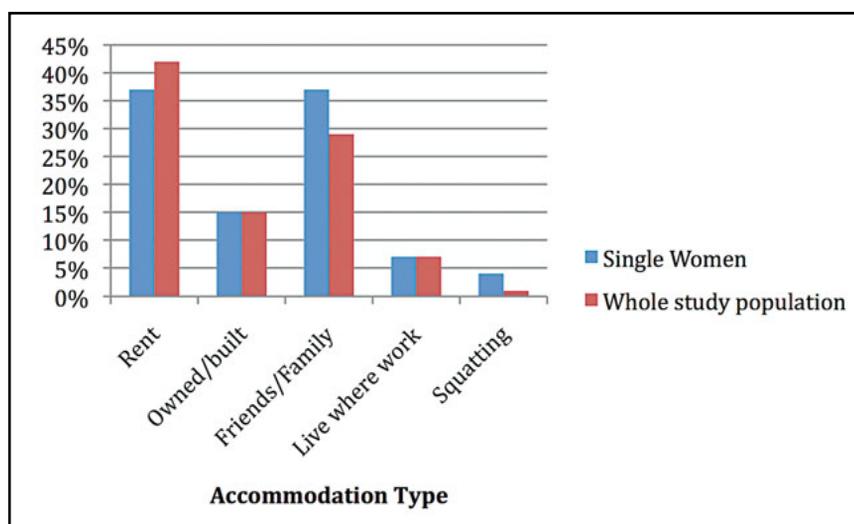
²³ Individual interview, Kaabong town.

²⁴ Individual interview, Abim town.

²⁵ Individual interview, Kaabong town.

²⁶ Individual interview, Abim town.

Figure 7: Accommodation type for widowed/abandoned women (n=27) compared to whole study population



Somewhat surprisingly, the figure above illustrates the similarities in types of accommodation for the general population as compared to widowed or abandoned women. The only category with significant difference is the greater number of single women who stayed with family or friends; this may be due to increased sympathy on the part of friends or relatives for these women and their children. However, the similarities in the data do mask some important nuances evident in the qualitative narratives. For instance, although the percentage of single women who lived in their own homes (owned or built) is the same as in the general population, in all instances these homes had been acquired by the women’s husbands prior to their deaths. In addition, while the percentages for rental accommodation are similar, single women face greater difficulties in paying rents on a single income. Rental rates were comparable, with half of the single women paying UGX 10,000 per month and the remainder paying more. Two young women in Kotido (one

widowed, one abandoned) reported paying UGX 30,000 per month in rent. In each instance, they required additional space; the 25-year-old widow had six children, and the 30-year-old abandoned woman had her own children plus those she had adopted after her brother and sister-in-law died from AIDS-related illnesses. While reiterating the limitations of relying on a small sample size, the widows and abandoned women in this study do not appear to be facing specific discrimination in accessing accommodation.

Commuting to Towns

Commuting from a rural area on a daily basis is one means of avoiding high rents. Most of the commuters in the study population were in Kotido town, where we interviewed five commuters out of a total of 43 respondents. While the characteristics of these five individuals are not representative, some of the patterns visible here may be reflected in the larger population.

Table 12: Characteristics of daily commuters in Kotido

Gender	Age	Distance traveled	Years commuting	Relevant details	Type of work found in town
Female	26	< 1 hour	6	Stays home to cultivate in rainy season	Brews in dry season in town
Female	17	1 hour	5	Parents are deceased. Supports her siblings. Commutes with a friend.	Works as domestic in a home; has had this job for five years

continued on next page

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Gender	Age	Distance traveled	Years commuting	Relevant details	Type of work found in town
Male	30?	< 1 hour	5	Commutes with his wife to support their children	Digs latrines, fetches water, makes bricks
Female	17	< 1 hour	2	Stays home to cultivate in rainy season. Lives with her parents.	Washes plates in a restaurant. Also does domestic work in homes.
Female	20	3 hours	3	Widow with young children	Works in a restaurant/hotel

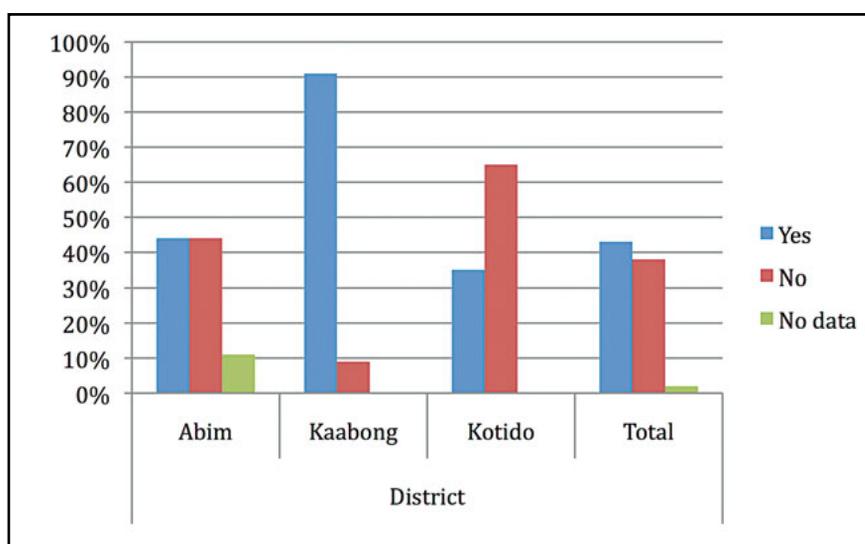
The commuters listed above are relatively young, are pulled to town by employment in services or hospitality, and all have strong family ties to their home villages. As with many other respondents in Kotido, each of the individuals in the above chart had started commuting to town following the loss of animals in raids and subsequent hunger. The 20-year-old widow lost her husband in the same raid that took the family herd. In each case above, the respondent acknowledged that while commuting was difficult, they believed that their livelihood

strategy of balancing town and village life was likely to be permanent or to continue for at least the foreseeable future.

Sanitation

We asked respondents living in towns about their access to water and sanitation. Nearly all respondents reported paying for water, at a rate of UGX 100 or UGX 200 per jerrican. Some also paid a monthly borehole maintenance fee. The findings on use of latrines were less consistent, as illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 8: Do you access a latrine where you stay? (n=83)



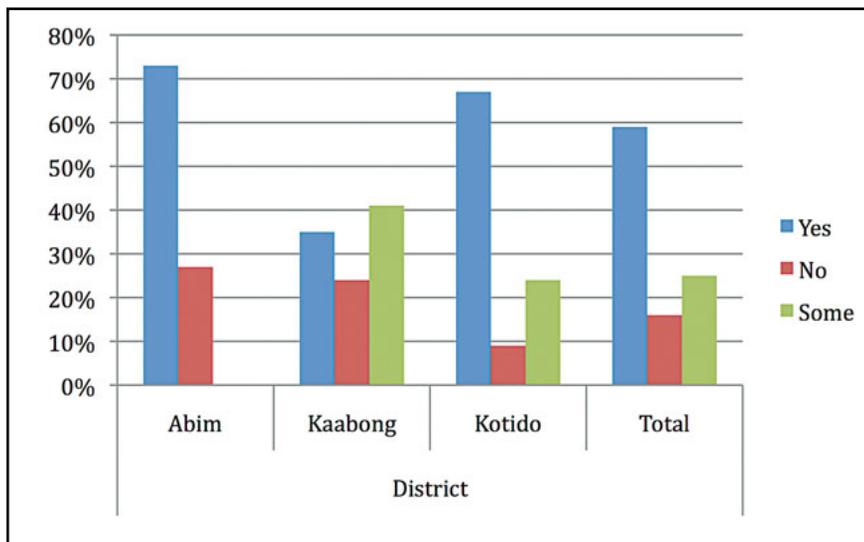
As illustrated in the above figure, when viewed in aggregate about half the population accesses latrines and half does not. These proportions hold true for those living in Abim, but are skewed in Kaabong and Kotido, where respectively 9% and 65% of respondents did not access latrines. While additional research would be needed to understand all the factors influencing latrine use, this is a case in which formal and informal policies and practices are likely to play an important role. For example, a number of respondents in Kaabong reported that they had been instructed by their local counselor to build a latrine: the higher rate of latrine use may reflect an official policy. In contrast, several

respondents living in Kotido town stated that they “were scared of using a latrine.” These respondents happened to be female, but we do not know if this fear is due to security concerns (i.e., they feel vulnerable to attack when using a latrine) or is borne out of a lack of familiarity with latrines.

Education

We collected data on whether or not the children in a respondent’s household were attending school, and found that the vast majority of respondents with school-age children were sending all (59%) or some (25%) of their children to school.

Figure 9: Are the children in your household in school? (n=61)²⁷



We included questions to ascertain whether gender-based preferences for schooling determined which children within a household attended school. Unfortunately, we did not have adequate data on this question to be able to conduct analysis, and it was rarely possible to establish causality over the course of an interview as to the reasons for certain children attending or not attending school. In the few instances in which this was discussed, male respondents reported reluctance to send their daughters to school as they would marry and

hence “not return the investment.”²⁸ Anecdotal evidence from this and earlier research confirm that this is a widely-held view on why girls should not be sent to school.

The most frequently cited reason for children not attending school was the cost of uniforms, books, and other associated expenses. As a widowed mother of three in Kaabong explained, “All my children are at home. One tried to reach P2 but came back home due to school requirements [i.e., expenses].”²⁹ A young mother

²⁷ The data in Figure 9 reference only those respondents who had children in their household (offspring, siblings, or foster children) of school-going age. The total number was 61 respondents out of a possible 83, with 11 in Abim, 17 in Kaabong, and 33 in Kotido.

²⁸ Individual interview, Abim town. Individual interview, Kaabong town.

²⁹ Individual interview, Kaabong town.

of several children who had been abandoned by her husband said, “I can’t afford to send any of them to school, there is a 5,000 UGX registration fee, and I don’t have this kind of money.”³⁰

When relevant, we asked for opinions on the quality of the education in the rural versus the town location. Many respondents lacked adequate information to comment on this difference. Those who did respond generally felt that the town schools were of higher quality than their rural counterparts. In particular, people commented that the teaching was more regular than in the rural area, and that there seemed to be more encouragement of children to stay in school. Being able to access these better schools was a factor in deciding to stay in the towns in some of these instances.

Some parents preferred the town schools for the additional benefits, such as meals, as well as their own ability to find enough work to support their children’s education, which was much more difficult in the rural areas:

The schools in town are better than in the village because here in the town I am able to work and buy them the school requirements; also here in town they even feed them [at school]. It was rather difficult to maintain them in the village schools back home.³¹

Adolescent Females

The research for this study indicates that adolescent girls have particular and pronounced vulnerabilities. In multiple instances, the team learned of girls who dropped out of school (primary and secondary) after becoming pregnant with the child of a teacher, classmate, or businessman. In no case did the father support either the woman or the child. Without finishing school, these girls and their children are destined for a life of continued poverty. The prevalence of this phenomenon also reinforces the view of some fathers that they should not send their daughters to school: a girl is more likely to drop

out, is vulnerable to exploitation, and the father is unlikely to reap the rewards of his financial investment in a girl’s education.

Challenges

The cost of living was the most frequently cited challenge of life in town. The high price of accommodation was a primary concern for both those who were currently paying rent and for those who were staying free of charge but not in their own homes, as these situations were almost always seen as precarious. Rent was just one of the many expenses associated with town life that did not exist in the rural areas: others included water, having to purchase nearly all food items, and school fees.

Some respondents also reported that finding work was a major challenge, although complaints about this were less common than might be expected. More widespread employment-related concerns were the irregularity of work, dependence on an employer (such as for food or accommodation), low rates of pay, and the physical demands of many of the types of labor.

Discrimination was an issue for some respondents; some of this was by ethnic or group affiliation, such as for Jie respondents living in Abim town. For instance, when asked if she accessed a latrine, one woman responded, “There are public toilets, but they lock them and say ‘Those are Jie, they are not allowed to enter.’”³² Most of the discrimination in Abim was in the form of abuse and name-calling, as well as some reports of preferential treatment in hiring. Respondents from other areas who were living in Kaabong also reported abuse, such as a Pian woman who said, “They call me a foreigner and discriminate in all areas of life,”³³ and a Nyangia woman who said, “People here are bad. They disturb and can beat you anyhow without cause. I hope to return [home] soon.”³⁴ Interestingly, discrimination and abuse in Kaabong was also reported by Dodoth migrants (i.e., the ethnic majority in the area). A 25-year-

³⁰ Individual interview, Kaabong town.

³¹ Individual interview, Kotido town.

³² Individual interview, Abim town.

³³ Individual interview, Kaabong town.

³⁴ Individual interview, Kaabong town.

old Dodoth man who had been living in town for two years at the time of our interview said, “The people are very discriminating and disturb us. They are not disciplined like in the village.”³⁵ Relatively few such incidents were reported in Kotido, although this may be due to the much greater ethnic homogeneity of the respondent pool, in which 91% were Jie.

Although there were numerous reported incidents of discrimination, there were at least as many stories of generosity and kindness. People were taken in by strangers upon arrival, allowed to share small living spaces, trained as apprentices or partners in new businesses, and given food, loans, and other basic necessities. A Jie man who moved to Abim town last year told his story:

*When I first arrived I slept under a big tree in the center of town (points). Then a gentleman approached and asked why I was there. He listened to my story and invited me to stay with him. He also fed me and gave me clothes. The gentleman is a local businessman...he is not a Jie. I am still friends with him.*³⁶

Some of these narratives do contain hints of exploitation, such as the account of a 30-year-old woman in Kotido with seven children who was abandoned by her husband. She moved into town four years earlier, and explained:

When we first arrived I used to go and beg for beer residue from the brewing lady. She decided to give us food and accommodation and so I started to help her...I don't get paid, but she looks after us. She gives us food and accommodation, and she gives me some of the beer she makes.

This woman was very appreciative of the kindness of her host, who also allowed her access to a plot of land where she was able to grow crops for food and to sell in the market to generate cash. However, when asked what problems she faced she explained:

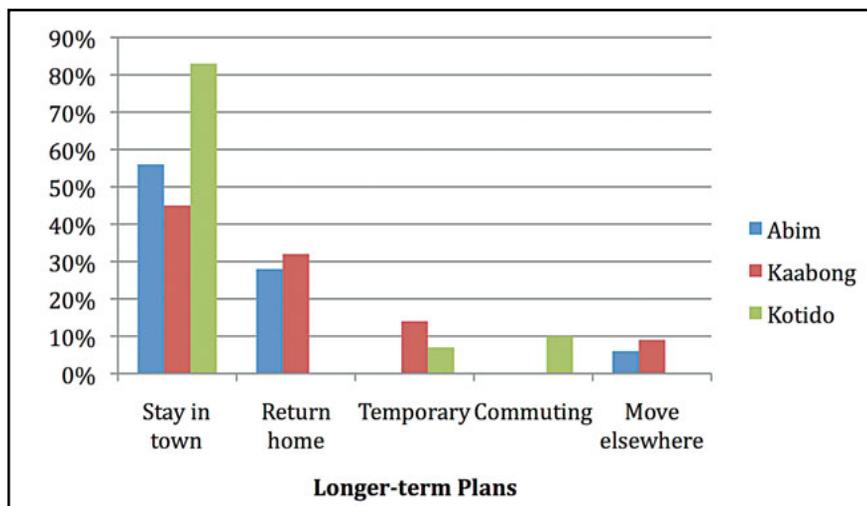
*It's difficult because I don't get paid for my work. So although I have food and accommodation I don't have any money except when I manage to harvest some crops...Also, my host sometimes gets angry with me when I make mistakes and this is torture because I'm dependent on her.*³⁷

There were many other similar cases whereby a respondent's well-being was entirely dependent on the continuing goodwill of their benefactor or employer.

Plans and Aspirations

We collected data on people's aspirations and future plans. Sixty-seven percent of overall respondents said that they planned to continue to be based in town. The figure below shows the variations in this response by location.

Figure 10: Longer-term plans by location (n=80)



³⁵ Individual interview, Kaabong town.

³⁶ Individual interview, Abim town.

³⁷ Individual interview, Kotido town.

As illustrated above, the proportion of respondents in Kotido who planned to remain in town was substantially greater than in the other two locations, which very likely reflects the greater vibrancy and economic opportunities available in the largest town in the region. Kotido was also the site in which the most respondents expressed outright enjoyment of town life. For example, a 41-year-old widow from Kaabong who had been living in Kotido for 14 years said:

To tell the truth I love Kotido so much that I will stay here all my life. I intend to settle well by getting land and building my own house...I will not move elsewhere. I will stay in Kotido until I die.³⁸

Those respondents who hoped to return home were often quite specific in their plans and aspirations for this move. Some of the many former pastoralists in the study population were determined to restock and to wait to return home until this was possible. Others had a degree of resignation, such as a 32-year-old Jie man in Abim:

I plan to return home in a year. I own a plot of land back home and plan to cultivate it. I hate farming. I am weak. I am a herder, but I have no choice but to farm to support my family. If I had money I would buy some livestock.³⁹

A number of respondents expressed ambivalence about whether to remain in town or return to their rural area, as captured in the following discussion with a 25-year-old man in Kaabong:

Mixed feelings, back in the village you can move freely and collect wild foods in the forest. You can also collect firewood and sell it. The village is also not crowded, so we rarely have disease outbreaks like here in town. Also, back when we had guns we could hunt, we even killed buffalo, and the whole family could eat meat for a long time...

On the other hand, you can get casual work in town and “booze” is available every day. In the village,

they don't brew every day. There is also a market here every Monday, and if I'm hungry I can always go and see if a relative from the rural areas is selling an animal. If they succeed—he will give me money to buy food for the family.⁴⁰

As he illustrates, there are a wide range of opportunities available in town that are not always present in the rural areas, but the rural area did have consistency that is not part of town life.

Urban Growth and Livelihood Shifts in Northern Karamoja

This section provides additional discussion and analysis on aspects of urban growth and livelihood shifts in northern Karamoja.

Migration, Vulnerability, and Resilience

At first glance, rural to urban migration in Karamoja appears to be characterized by hardship and difficulties. When looking at the individual migrant we see that housing is expensive, inadequate, and scarce; work is hard to find, exploitative, poorly paid, and irregular; and food, water, and all other necessities are expensive. The towns themselves seem to have little capacity to absorb the migrants and little effort has been put into planning for expansion of services and infrastructure. The data confirm many of these aspects: most migrants are living hand-to-mouth and being paid—when paid at all—the equivalent of a dollar a day. There is a complete lack of job security, and securing employment is largely based on luck and perseverance.

When examining the complete data in more depth, however, a more complex picture emerges. This narrative illustrates that, although many of the migrants came to town due to economic necessity or even desperation, those in the study population have, by and large, made a success of their new town-based lives. They have found piecemeal work, they have secured accommodation (with or without paying rent),

³⁸ Individual interview, Kaabong town.

³⁹ Individual interview, Abim town.

⁴⁰ Individual interview, Kotido town.

they are mostly sending their children to school, and they are earning enough funds to purchase food in the market. Many are even sending money back home to support relatives in the rural areas. Most people in our study population feel that, overall, their lives in town are an improvement over their lives in the rural areas.

A successful town-based existence, however, requires certain characteristics, access to assets, and ability to pursue specific strategies.⁴¹ An in-depth comparative study would be required to say for certain, but these findings lead us to hypothesize that it is more likely the *better off* who move to urban areas *and stay*. In other words, we can assume that a good number of people move to towns but are unable to get by. Most of these people then return home or possibly move elsewhere.⁴² Those who stay are not necessarily better off from an economic standpoint, but appear to have the social, human, and political capital (connections, business acumen, perseverance, adequate strength for manual labor, etc.) to make an urban existence work.

Most respondents who had made a success of urban life have retained connections with their families in rural areas. These connections vary from occasional contact and visits to a regular exchange of supplies, staple food items, and cash. This is largely a two-way and symbiotic relationship: urban residents leave children, wives, and the elderly at home; they return to cultivate and/or receive crops or food aid; they maintain livestock herds. Likewise, many rural households are reportedly receiving financial or in-kind support through their urban connections. These linkages allow extended households to manage risk and (ideally) their consumption patterns and to make adjustments

as needed in response to seasonal and economic fluctuations and external or internal shocks. We hypothesize that the strong rural-urban linkages are key components to increased resiliency of households, particularly in times of stress and in the face of changing livelihood systems in the region.

In the absence of additional data, it is difficult to ascribe clear causality between a strong rural connection and a successful life in town. That said, the importance of these rural-urban linkages is further highlighted by the cases in which they are absent. This is most apparent in the continued vulnerability of widows and abandoned women who do not or cannot maintain their links to the villages. Most of these women lack connections to their home areas or fled these locations due to abuse, mistreatment, or neglect. Dependent on towns, these women and their children lack the rural component that appears to underpin the success of many other urban migrants. For example, these female-headed households do not receive crops or livestock from the rural areas, they do not travel to these locations for seasonal cultivation, and they cannot send children to rural relatives for assistance with their upbringing.

The majority of respondents in this study had been living in their respective urban locations for five years or less. It is possible that the importance of the rural connection diminishes over time as an individual and his/her household members become more deeply enmeshed in the urban economy and way of life. In other words, in cases of “successful” migration, will urban livelihood strategies eventually crowd out the need for rural linkages? Certainly some members of the study population who had lived for a longer period in the urban setting could be

⁴¹ “Successful” as used here should be seen as relative to the overall situation and extent of hardship in Karamoja. We are not implying that living on USD \$1 a day or less and engaging in grueling and exploitative manual labor is a preferred outcome. The ideal study would be a representative analysis of rural and urban consumption patterns, nutritional status, access to services, and health and education outcomes with intra-household data.

⁴² Those who leave seem to do so relatively quickly and were not captured in our sample. Only 6% of the study population had been in town for less than two years, with only 1% for less than one year. This may be partially due to sampling bias, as we purposively excluded people who had been in town for less than a year so as not to end up with an entire sample made up of temporary or cyclical migrants. We assume that a number of these people return to their rural homes (and we have met many such individuals in rural areas in previous studies), but this group may also include those people who move on to other urban locations such as Mbale, Jinja, and Kampala.

considered more established or better off, such as a man who had been in Kotido for more than ten years and owned his own small shop, and another who had lived in Kotido for seven years and had a regular job at the petrol station. A widow who had lived in Kotido for more than ten years was making a profit of up to UGX 14,000 a day selling donuts, while another widow and eight-year resident had a successful brewing operation using loans from her VSLA.

These examples point to greater economic stability over time, but it could be that these individuals were destined for successful outcomes regardless of the length of their stay in towns. In contrast, some other longer-term residents were doing the same work and facing similar challenges as those who had been in town for a much shorter time period. This included two Jie men who had lived in Abim and had irregular work in construction and brickmaking, an elderly man in Abim whose rented house had collapsed and was squatting in temporary accommodation while waiting for the landlord to carry out the repairs, and a woman who had lived in Kaabong for ten years and survived by selling water door-to-door, often receiving pay in residue.

Taken as a whole, the study data do imply that economic stability increases with the amount of time that an individual has been living in the urban area. Again, those people that stay may be doing so *because* they are successful, but the fact that the widows in the study population who had been in towns for longer were (generally) doing better than the more recent arrivals (remembering that most widows/abandoned women report that they have no rural home to return to) implies a connection between duration of stay and successful livelihood outcomes. We stress that the data are limited and more research would be needed to draw definitive conclusions in this regard.

Variations by Location

Kotido is the main urban center in north Karamoja and is likely to continue to grow. The diversity of opportunities in Kotido is greater than that in either Abim or Kaabong; this appears to be reflected in the aspirations of respondents and in their general feelings about

life in town. Kotido also seems to be relatively hospitable to newcomers. This combination of pull factors makes it an obvious location for those exiting pastoralism in the surrounding sub-counties and beyond, and Kotido will likely continue to see a population influx.

Kotido may have more economic opportunities than its urban counterparts, but rural ties continue to be important. Many people commute into Kotido on a daily basis in order to take advantage of the buying power and the markets; some of these commuters may settle in town given time and adequate accommodation. Better-off individuals may opt to establish homes in town while retaining a homestead in the rural area, especially if access to agriculturally productive zones is possible. The ability to have a base in town while continuing to cultivate appeared to be driving the two-household trend that we observed in Kaabong.

Kotido faces a number of challenges to continued expansion, the largest being the lack of services. The limited water supply is the most potentially serious issue and will likely limit continued expansion and exacerbate sanitation problems. An in-depth technical assessment is needed to understand the extent of available water and possibilities for upgrades or improvements to the delivery system. To note, mechanized water delivery (such as piped water) will put a number of people out of work. Women in particular rely heavily on carrying and selling water as a component of their livelihood strategy.

The lack of regular rubbish collection or disposal in Kotido is also of concern to growth and overall sanitation. Given the availability of labor, the inability to manage rubbish removal is likely indicative of a broader problem in municipal management and/or facilitation of resources. The situation is in marked contrast to that in Kaabong, where business owners sweep and burn their refuse on a nightly basis; this appears to be a local ordinance. Likewise, the Kaabong local council reportedly mandates latrine construction: this is evidenced in the data on latrine access, with only 35% of respondents in Kotido reporting latrine access compared to 91% in Kaabong. Kotido's longer-term economic and

population growth will only be sustainable if these and other aspects are addressed in a proactive and planned fashion.

Kaabong is scarcely more than a large village in comparison to Kotido, but is still likely to increase in population. At present, respondents rely on Kaabong for economic opportunities, but a larger percentage of respondents than in Abim or Kotido planned to either return home, move elsewhere, or to stay only on a temporary basis (a combined total of 55%). However, the potential for crops, livestock, and gold could ultimately turn the town into an important economic hub for the region.

In regard to planning, Kaabong is probably best thought of as part of a broader economic and social system that encompasses the extended surrounding area (within at least a three-hour walking radius). In other words, Kaabong is an extension of the villages just as much as the villages are settled expansions of Kaabong. The majority of people are equally dependent on both the town and the villages for their livelihoods, and the rural-urban balance provides a safety net against shocks.

Abim provides essential markets for populations living in the surrounding agricultural areas, but most of the respondents in our study living in Abim had migrated from farther afield. Abim will likely continue to attract agricultural laborers, including those exiting pastoral livelihoods. In addition, recent grazing lands near Abim have been re-opened to Jie herds, and the town markets provide important locations for herders and their families while accessing these locations. If, as reported, the administrative center of Abim is moved to a new location, the current town will likely become primarily an agricultural trading center.



This woman was working a mining claim with her daughter in hopes of generating funds for the daughter's school costs.

Miners in Teuso Lopedo Parish, Loyoro Sub-county, Kaabong District

As part of our examination of livelihood shifts in northern Karamoja, we visited a gold mining camp in Teuso Lopedo Parish in Loyoro Sub-county in Kaabong. We held a focus group discussion with respondents (six male and two female). Estimated to be one of thirty small-scale gold mines in the district (Howe 2013), the Teuso Lopedo gold mining camp was originally established in 1987 but fell into disuse and was abandoned for many years. At one point, there was a school at the camp, but it was destroyed in approximately 2004 by looters.

Most of the settlers in the Teuso Lopedo camp came from the Kakuta area, which is approximately a three-hour walk from the mine. Two of the respondents in our focus group were Turkana and from Kakuma, Kenya. The miners live in rudimentary shared huts in the small settlement. They use the latrines at the abandoned school and rely on one borehole for domestic consumption, as well as for water for the mining operations. Those from the Kakuta area return regularly to their home villages to visit and cultivate, and some also cultivate near to the mining settlement. While respondents said that many of the miners left their family members back home, there were many young children visible in the camp, as well as some elderly people. Many children who attend school in their home areas reportedly come to the camp during school holidays to help with the mining. The lack of services at the current camp hinders the establishment of a more permanent settlement, and respondents prioritized boreholes, a clinic, and the refurbishment of the school. That said, the camp is clearly more than a temporary residence, and families do live there for an extended period of time. A nearby army barracks ensures good security.



Gold dust is the main commercial output from the artisanal mines and is produced through an arduous process of digging, sifting and panning.

Mining occurs throughout the year in Teuso Lopedo. Mining is easier during the rainy season when water is plentiful, but the population in the camp increases during the dry season when people are no longer cultivating. People also travel from farther afield in the dry season.

Activities at this site included both panning for gold in riverbeds when water is present and digging pit mines along a dry gully. Individuals and groups stake a claim to a particular pit and work together. These claims are informal but appear to be well organized. At the time of our visit, the two Turkana respondents worked a shared claim with four Dodoth men and were excavating a large pit in the eroded gully. They had spent one month digging to a depth of approximately 20 feet and believed there to be a gold reef at 35 feet (this information reportedly dates to the mining that took place in 1987). The proceeds from any gold are shared evenly among the six men. The main challenge is to dig deep enough during the dry season, as the rains bring silt and landslides along the gully, filling in the pits.

Women at the mine continuously fetch water from the one borehole and carry it to the pits where the miners (including women) pan for gold. The miners also collect rocky soil and stones and break the stones and grind them into powder, which is then washed. The team observed women and young children doing this grinding; we presume this is predominately a female task as it is similar to grinding millet or sorghum.

Artisanal mining requires extensive physical exertion, but the profits can be high. A gram of gold was selling for 100,000 UGX at the time of our field visit. An earlier assessment for Mercy Corps found that it took between one and six days to mine a gram (Howe 2013). While town-

based respondents likely receive more regular payments than the miners, the discussants at Teuso Lopedo felt strongly that gold mining was their most lucrative livelihood option. They reported sending money back home to be invested in restocking, building brick homes with metal roofs, paying school fees, and buying food and clothes.

The miners sell their gold in Kaabong to Indian (from Kampala) and Somali traders. Some traders come to the mines to purchase directly. The traders use scales that the miners trust, except for the electronic ones, as “the computer scales cheat.” They receive information on gold prices from the radio and newspaper, and explain that the gold prices are linked to the US dollar. “If the dollar goes up so does the price of gold,” and hence they like it when the dollar strengthens against the Ugandan shilling.

The miners have purchasing power but lack access to specific supplies. For instance, they need spades, wheelbarrows, specific types of hammers and chisels, metal (as opposed to plastic) basins, stronger buckets, etc. The focus group respondents said they had trouble procuring such items locally. In addition to the artisanal tools, the miners expressed keen interest in renting heavy equipment to allow them to dig the pits more quickly and effectively. They were prepared to pay 5,000,000 UGX (almost 2,000 USD) to lease a backhoe for three days to clear all the existing claims. They said that they could pay this amount off in two to four weeks. In addition, they wanted to rent a tractor to clear and level land in the vicinity for cultivation, as “farming provides us with food and mining provides us with money.” They lack access to an operator or owner prepared to provide such machinery on credit.

Artisanal gold mining in Kaabong provides an important livelihood strategy for those individuals able to engage in the strenuous manual labor required. Howe (2013) found people of all ages, including young children and pregnant women, working in the mines in Kaabong, and stressed that there are various costs associated with mining, although the exact nature of these costs remain unknown. What, for instance, is the relationship between truancy and mining, or maternal and child health and mining? What are the medium- and long-term environmental impacts of artisanal mining? Accidents appear to be common and five people (including one pregnant woman) were killed when a mine collapsed in 2011. In addition, while security at the Teuso Lopedo mine was reportedly good, Howe writes:

The gold buyer in Kaabong explained that “Everyone in the Kaabong mines is vulnerable to attacks” by the Jie, Sudanese and the Turkana. The week before the interview, one mine was “captured” by Jie and twenty people were held hostage. At the time of the interview, women had been released and were receiving treatment at the Kaabong Hospital, but the men were still missing. (2013, 31)

Investing in the artisanal mining sector provides an opportunity for the expansion of private sector and financial services, possibly with the facilitation of Mercy Corps. That said, the growth of artisanal mining in insecure areas (such as the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo) is often polarizing and can lead to violent conflict and unsustainable livelihoods. Additional research and investigation would be needed before Mercy Corps or other organizations considered investment in this sector in northern Karamoja.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Planning for Urban Growth

This study did not assess the capabilities of the urban areas in northern Karamoja to handle population influxes. Observations and anecdotal conversations, however, imply a relatively low level of capacity and planning to cope with growth in these areas or to provide services in response to increased demand. This challenge is certainly not unique to Karamoja or Uganda, and the literature review demonstrated that very few small towns in East Africa undertake urban master plans. This does not, however, prevent politicians from declaring a given locale “urban” or “a city” in an effort to garner more national government support.

While proactive urban planning is relatively rare, national governments at times seek to erect barriers to restrict rural–urban migration in an effort to reduce the proliferation of urban slums or to ensure an agricultural labor force. For example, Ethiopia discourages relocating to cities and has laws requiring urban registration cards for employment, although this regulation is not uniformly enforced (De Brauw, Mueller, and Lee 2013). The Kampala government attempts to actively prevent residents of Karamoja from settling in the large urban centers in the south of the country (namely Jinja and Kampala) through policies of abuse, incarceration, and forced return (Lochomin 2010, Delaney 2011). At the same time, however, the government encourages the abandonment of pastoral production systems in favor of agriculture in Karamoja.⁴³ The combination of these policies, coupled with the ecological unsuitability of much of the region for regular cultivation, will likely lead to the continued growth of urban centers within Karamoja’s borders. Long-term and sustained investments in these areas will therefore be central to poverty reduction and development. Such investments would include natural resource

management, transportation and communication infrastructure, and financial services. Ideally, the local and national authorities would also seek to facilitate and maximize remittances, monitor circular migration, ensure the rights of migrant workers in both rural and urban areas, and manage labor supply and demand (Black et al. 2006). Gender considerations are largely absent from legal and policy frameworks related to migration in Uganda (Mulumba and Olema 2009), but should be taken into account in planning on how to support the migration and livelihood strategies of men and women of different ages.

International actors could consider working with local councils and district officials to increase their awareness of and capacity to respond to the growth of the urban centers. This would include assisting local officials to recognize the reality and inevitability of growth as well as the potential positive aspects brought by new migrants. Technical assistance and input on creating growth and zoning plans is essential. Problems of sanitation and rubbish disposal, particularly in Kotido, should be stressed through comparison to Kaabong or other locales, where these issues appear to be addressed more effectively. In short, urban migration can be a story of opportunity and success not only for the migrants and their rural relatives, but also for the economies of their destination locations. Successful migration is more likely when migrants are able to find accommodation, have equitable access to services which are supported and maintained (sanitation, education, transportation, health care, financial services), and can find employment. A lack of funds from the federal government frequently hampers effective service delivery at the district level, but this is only likely to change when district officials have the knowledge and capacity to advocate for the aspects that are required. In

⁴³ The government continues to promote sedentarized agriculture as a livelihood in Karamoja, as evident in, among other sources, its Karamoja Action Plan for Food Security (KAPFS 2010), which is almost entirely about agricultural production. The negative view of pastoralism reaches high up in government, as indicated in a 2010 letter from Janet Museveni, Minister of State for Karamoja, to the head of the EU delegation: “We know that the dangers of pastoralism outweigh its benefits, and Karamoja is a perfect testimony of that. The people suffer endlessly, generation after generation, because they are depending on old methods of work and their knowledge is never informed by any input from elsewhere.”

order for this to occur, district officials must view population growth as an opportunity for development, as opposed to a nuisance.

Financial Services

Numerous respondents in the study population had good ideas and business acumen but lacked access to capital. Credit for small-scale loans is available primarily through the village savings and loans associations (VSLAs) at present; the strength and size of these differ from one location to the next across the region (Howe 2013). Larger individual loans are available from the savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs), but qualifying for a loan is difficult and the system is not tailored to the poor or illiterate.⁴⁴ Loans are also available from the larger banks, such as Stanbic and DFCU in Abim, but these institutions provide loans only to salary earners.

There are plenty of opportunities for international actors to expand financial services in northern Karamoja through microfinance delivery, trainings, support, and capacity building. There is a model for sustainability and success based on the existing capacity and longevity of some of the VSLAs. The most appropriate intervention likely consists of assisting in the establishing of VSLAs where they do not exist, providing support as needed to those VSLAs already in place (business trainings, assistance with creating by-laws, facilitation, etc.), and then working with the district SACCOs and private sector institutions to expand financial services to the poor.

Trainings and Education

The training needs are great for the largely unskilled and uneducated group of migrants moving to urban areas. Many of these individuals are natural entrepreneurs, but most have limited financial literacy and little knowledge of business. Vocational skills training (VST) programs may be appropriate but need to be based on careful and accurate market research

and need to be high in quality. VST programs often have limited impact due to an inadequate training period and/or a lack of start-up capital; such programs are a waste of donor money and beneficiary time and patience. Programmers should consider targeting skills, literacy, or business trainings specifically at the widows and abandoned women who have less diversity in their livelihood strategies. This population is likely to remain in the urban areas for an extended time, thereby increasing a positive spillover effect for neighbors and family members. Trainings for these women, however, will need to be designed carefully so as not to increase their time burdens or to crowd out activities which ensure an adequate food supply for their children.

Educational opportunities were a pull factor for a segment of the migrants sampled in this study, while others appreciated the improved access to education for their children once in town. Approximately 75% of respondents with school-age children had some or all of their children in schools. Although this data is not representative and we do not have comparable data for the rural areas, we feel confident that ease of access and greater integration into the cash economy means that these enrollment rates are higher than in the rural sending areas. Furthermore, when migrant families are not sending their children to school the barrier appears to primarily be financial; this is in contrast to rural households who, while also facing financial barriers, may keep children out of school because of reliance on children's contribution to household livelihoods through herding, collection of natural resources, childcare, and other chores.

International programs could further increase the enrollment rate in towns through targeted support to families with school-age children (through vouchers to cover school expenses, uniforms, etc.) or through targeted and monitored support to schools to allow these institutions to decrease the extent of operating costs that are passed on to families.

⁴⁴ To join the Abim SACCO, for example, an individual must pay 20,000–30,000 UGX in application and membership fees and initial shares upfront. They must also be able to fill out an application form and list their collateral. There is no grace period for repayment, and interest rates are 3% a month. There is a penalty of 2% of the total loan for each month of non-payment. Individual interview, Manager of Abim SACCO, January 31, 2014.

Natural Resources

Development policy makers often assume a dichotomy between rural and urban areas, in which poor rural residents are perceived as dependent on natural resources, and their urban counterparts are assumed to be dependent on employment that demands physical labor. In reality, many urban residents rely on natural resources found in peri-urban areas or rural surroundings. In addition, many people in urban areas rely on “hidden” natural resources that exist in the settled areas but are rarely appreciated for their contribution to urban livelihoods (e.g., urban farming, use of waste or public areas for grazing of livestock, extraction of soil or rocks for brickmaking or sale from peri-urban locations, etc.) (Twyman and Slater 2005). Karamoja is a prime example of the continuum of rural and urban livelihoods, described by Twyman and Slater, in which natural resource extraction supplements urban lifestyles, and where urban livelihoods continue to overlap with rural systems even after migration.

While this continuum allows for rural-urban linkages and the associated diversified household livelihoods, the continued reliance on natural resource extraction by a growing urban population in northern Karamoja has serious consequences for the environment in the surrounding rural areas. The most obvious problem is deforestation through fuel collection. Most people in the three towns covered in this study cook with charcoal and firewood, as do restaurants, street vendors, etc. Cultural and economic factors make it unlikely that people will transition to electric stoves even if the power grid does eventually reach these towns. Charcoal and firewood are also used for brickmaking, which has become a major cottage industry. Observations of trucks loaded with sacks of charcoal on the road near Abim suggest that charcoal is also being exported out of the region. There have been some initiatives to discourage the cutting of whole trees, and most people seemed to be aware of this and claimed to cut only branches. Heavy charcoal production,

however, very likely entails the taking of entire trees. Additionally, the sale of building poles for construction is one of the more lucrative uses of natural resources for men from rural areas; this normally requires the removal of an entire tree.

Other natural resources are increasingly important in livelihood strategies in Karamoja as individuals and entire households exit pastoralism. These include gravel and marble quarrying, gold mining, and excavation of soil for brickmaking. Many of these industries are informal, unregulated, and workers (including children) are subject to exploitation. That said, employment in these sectors is an important component of the livelihood strategies of many households, including those in urban areas or split between rural and urban locations.

Natural resource extraction and sale is almost always segmented by gender and generation. In Karamoja, women are primarily responsible for the collection of firewood and water; children assist their mothers and may bear the primary responsibility for gathering wild fruits and vegetables; men traditionally managed the natural resources associated with animal husbandry (pasture and water) and assisted with charcoal production in some areas. In recent years, men have increasingly turned to new forms of natural resource extraction, including sale of building poles, quarrying, and gold mining. Recent data from a FIC study in southern Karamoja indicate that changing livelihood patterns in the region have also brought important shifts in gender roles and relations around natural resources. For instance, both male and female respondents reported greater involvement by men in firewood collection and charcoal making (Stites et al. 2014).

The assumption by many governments that urban residents are no longer relying on resource extraction can lead to poor policies and the mismanagement of these resources (Twyman and Slater 2005). In Karamoja, there are few effective policies in place to regulate the use of the various natural resources; where these policies do exist they are rarely aimed at poverty alleviation.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ For a discussion of the allocation and mismanagement of mining rights in Karamoja see Human Rights Watch. 2014. “How Can We Survive Here? The Impact of Mining on Human Rights in Karamoja, Uganda.” Human Rights Watch. New York. February.

There is room here for international organizations to be involved at various levels. Many people currently do use fuel-efficient stoves, but this is unlikely to be a long-term solution to the problems of deforestation and associated environmental impacts. For change at the household and industry level, more sustainable and efficient alternatives need to be identified and widely promoted, including, perhaps, solar cookers, efficient brickmaking kilns, the use of crop and animal products as fuel, etc. At the official level, the appropriate district technical officers need to be identified, trained, facilitated, and encouraged to work with local communities (both urban and rural) on resource management and conservation.

Physical Capital

Successful urban livelihoods depend much more heavily on physical capital (in the form of housing, roads, electrical systems, markets, shops, etc.) than do most rural equivalents (Twyman and Slater 2005). Not surprisingly, almost all respondents in the study population discussed concerns about accommodation—finding it, paying for it, or maintaining access to free accommodation where possible. In addition, the much greater dependency on the cash economy and hence on stores and markets for most food and essential items means that investment and repair is needed in these structures. Likewise, transporting food and goods to these areas requires the establishment and regular maintenance of the road system. National investments in the road and electric infrastructure is gradually taking place, but the extent to which these systems will be maintained once built remains uncertain.

International organizations could consider accommodation support for certain sectors of the migrant population. Such programs would have to be designed carefully so as not to create aid-induced migration. A key target group could be widows and abandoned women, perhaps through broad-based support to benefit relatives or others who host such families, thereby making living conditions for single women and their children less precarious.

Widows and Abandoned Women

As discussed throughout this report, many of the female-headed households in towns face specific and pronounced vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities arise from a variety of factors, including limited social, human, and financial capital and a high dependency ratio. Most of these women also lack the linkages to rural areas, which provided other respondents with access to agricultural land, a place to send children, food crops, and social support. Unlike many other respondents in this study, the women who had been widowed or abandoned prior to moving to town did not migrate out of free will; most did so because they had no other choice, and some were forcibly driven from their homes by abusive husbands or other relatives.

There are numerous possible avenues for support to the female-headed households living in urban and peri-urban areas; some of these have already been mentioned in this section. These women are unlikely to return to the rural areas, and hence support should be aimed at developing secure urban livelihoods over the longer term (i.e., not short-term emergency relief except in severe cases). One of the areas in which these women struggled was in accessing land for cultivation; even those who could access land had difficulty in clearing the land without male relatives. With this in mind, an urban gardening project could be successful, with women working in groups to help each other prepare and cultivate their individual plots. An intervention could include perma-gardening demonstrations, provision of initial inputs, and training in accessing markets for those interested or able to sell a portion of their output. Other programs targeting female-headed households could include microloans, accommodation support, educational support for children, and specifically tailored high-quality trainings for vocational skills, business skills, or adult literacy.

We end this report with a reminder of the important role that small towns can play in economic development and poverty alleviation (Baker 1990). The findings for this study support this and indicate that, while there is much to be done to support effective and sustainable growth in the urban centers in northern Karamoja, there is also much potential to be realized.

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