

BEYOND HEGEMONY: AFRICAN RELATIONAL THEORY AND HOUSEHOLD RESILIENCE IN POST-CONFLICT OMUGO SUB- COUNTY, TEREKO DISTRICT, UGANDA

¹Christine John Oyokuru Amaa, ²Prof. Steve Ouma Akoth & ³Dr. Gladys M. M. Nyachio

^{12,3}Tangaza University, Nairobi, Kenya

Publication Date: October 2026

ABSTRACT

Mainstream development interventions in post-conflict agrarian spaces suffer from a profound conceptual blindness, relying on Western gender frameworks that reduce survival to individual material competition. This paper addresses this gap by deploying African Relational Theory to analyze the structural fracturing of reciprocity practiced by the Lugbara of Omugo Sub-County, Terego District, Uganda. Drawing on the six-month constructivist narrative ethnography with 77 interlocutors, the study rejects romanticized narratives of cultural endurance ideals and contemporary material realities. Acute land fragmentation, refugee-hosting pressures, and market commodification have rendered foundational mutual reciprocity institutions such as *Oya* (cooperative labor) and *Andri-azi* (in-law kinship alliances) structurally untenable except for *Kita* (the rotational like-minded labour-alliances). By isolating this friction, the article demonstrates that top-down policies misallocate resources, isolate men, and accelerate the decay of the very social infrastructure anchoring household resilience. These findings suggest therefore, that moving beyond hegemony requires sustainable livelihood interventions to abandon asset-only models and actively protect and reconstruct fracturing communal institutions.

Keywords: *Hegemony, Household livelihood resilience, Post-conflict Terego, African Relational Theory, Reciprocity, the Lugbara*

Introduction

The researcher would like to make it clear to the readers that because contemporary data on this topic is predominantly located within grey literature, the study intentionally anchors its theoretical framework in authentic, foundational literature to establish empirical legitimacy and conceptual rigor. Over the past three decades, gender, social relations, and household welfare have moved to the forefront of development literature and African social sciences. While Naila Kabeer (1994) exposed how traditional economics ignores intra-household inequalities, her later work (Kabeer (1999) provided the structural engine for Sen's (1999) Capability Approach. Both of them shift the focus of development from purely material wealth to human agency. According to them, a household welfare cannot improve if women lack the structural power to convert resources into real-world choices. This scholarship remains heavily lopsided and it completely changed how researchers and policymakers view men's roles and contributions.

While extensive research details women's constraints and agency in survival strategies, men's gendered practices are rarely granted the same conceptual and contextual nuance. As Andrea Cornwall (2000), Kabeer (1994), and Sarah White (1997) have demonstrated, mainstream development frameworks have long suffered from an "instrumentalist blind spot" when bringing men into livelihood analyses. Rather than being understood as complex social actors, men are frequently flattened into caricatures of raw dominance, an analytical trend heavily driven by the ubiquity of Connell's (1995) Hegemonic Masculinity Theory and other models prioritizing individual hierarchy (Kandiyoti, 1988). In other instances, men are treated as mere utility vehicles designed purely to fast-track women's socioeconomic independence. This "add-men-and-stir" approach ultimately reduces men to a background resource variable to be managed, completely bypassing their critical roles as relational partners.

Furthermore, as Kabeer (2024) notes, mainstream economic development programs consider women as atomized, individual financial units, isolating them from their broader domestic and institutional networks. She argues that this approach ignores women's relational safety nets and the negotiated interdependencies that truly drive household survival. According to her, this narrow focus on atomizing gender strips women of their long-term empowerment and security, thus undermining households of their actual lived realities. Therefore, Cornwall (2000), White (1997) and Kabeer (2024) argue that to correct this critical feminist scholarship, there is need for a definitive shift toward a relational gender analysis.

This scholarly perspective lays the theoretical foundation for the present study, moving past the treatment of men as tools for targeted outcomes to examine how both men and women mutually navigate power, vulnerability, and cooperation among the Lugbara society of Omugo Sub-County, Terego District, Uganda. Reciprocity which is the core of this study is defined by the African scholars as a moral framework of shared personhood, centering communal interdependence and horizontal accountability over individualistic, transactional calculations (Chilisa, 2012; Gyekye, 1997; Senghor, 1964). This definition conceptualizes reciprocity both as an ontological and moral framework of shared personhood, interdependence, and collective accountability. Ontologically, it serves as a framework of shared personhood, asserting that individual existence is principally co-constituted by and inseparable from community (Gyekye, 1997), while as a moral framework, it is centered on collective accountability, demanding horizontal mutual obligation and cooperative responsibility over individualistic calculations (Menkiti, 1984; Wiredu, 1996). The overarching implication is that these frameworks expose the conceptual blindness of individualistic development models by demonstrating how the material pressures of land fragmentation and livelihood logic trigger an ontological fracture in Lugbara men's shared personhood and dismantles the horizontal moral infrastructure of reciprocity. The study expands on the horizontal mutual obligation and cooperative responsibility.

Therefore, this article contextualizes within reciprocity how relational masculine practices through *Oya* (Communal labour, *Kita* (Rotational like-minded labour alliances), *Lumure* (men's reserved food production) and *Andri-azi* (Organized in-law labour support) foster household livelihood resilience in the post-conflict West Nile region of Uganda, specifically within Omugo Sub-County, Terego District. The central question this study addresses is therefore: *how do men's cooperative and relational practices function as mediating institutional mechanisms that build and sustain household livelihood resilience?*

The West Nile Context: Displacement, Demographics, and Lugbara Social Structure

The West Nile sub-region is situated in northwestern Uganda, it is an ethnically diverse borderland bordered by the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to the west, South Sudan to the north, and the River Nile to the east. West Nile Region is home to the Lugbara, Madi, Alur, Kakwa, and Kebu peoples. This geographical borderland has endured multi-layered, protracted social disruptions. For instance, the historian and anthropologist Mark Leopold (2005; 2009) recorded that the colonial boundary demarcations fractured the region by severing the Lugbara from their natural kin networks, placing some within the borders of the DRC and South Sudan.

This fractural fragmentation was severely compounded by post-independence political violences. The district weathered intense volatility from the late 1970s through the 1990s, forcing tens of thousands of indigenous Lugbara civilians into protracted internal displacement throughout greater Arua District (Leopold, 2005). Many were driven further to seek refuge in the neighboring territories of the DRC and Sudan (now South Sudan), causing instability that destabilized the West Nile region until 2006. This was followed by the subsequent predatory violences. Most notably, the activities by the West Nile Bank Front and the allied factions, alongside the two decades of the catastrophic indirect shocks from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict, deeply scarred Terego's socioeconomic landscape (Dolan, 2009; Tripp, 2010).

Concurrently, the territory functioned as a dense, complex borderland sanctuary, absorbing hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) refugees. These sought safety through either state-mandated settlements or spontaneous community-level integration (Hoil, 2007). According to Orach and De Brouwere (2006), by the time regional ceasefires were established in 2006, the greater West Nile administrative landscape hosted a combined, multi-layered population of over 200,000 individuals across urban and refugee settlements. Before the host community's own recovery process, another regional tension escalated in both South Sudan and DRC in 2013. It brought a massive refugee population of approximately 501,304 individuals within the broader host and settlement ecosystem. This new influx resulted into overpopulation in refugee hosting sub-counties of Uriama, Omugo and Odupi in Terego District apart from Rhino-Camp (UNHCR Operational Data Portal, 2025).

These domestic shocks culminated in over four decades of mass displacement and infrastructural disruptions across the wider northern region. This prolonged instability severely strained fragile communal assets, principally the agricultural infrastructure that historically anchored masculine identity. Eventually, these compounding disruptions precipitated a severe, long-term livelihood crisis (Dolan, 2009; Hovil, 2007; Orach & De Brouwere, 2006; World Bank, 2016), a devastation further exacerbated by what Schomerus and Allen (2006) document as the systematic dismantling of local governance structures. This historical trauma forms the background against which local host communities must now navigate the massive modern influx of refugees fleeing violence in South Sudan and the DRC.

While the ensuing humanitarian crisis drew a dense concentration of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to the area, their subsequent livelihood interventions have almost exclusively targeted women and youth. According to the UNHCR Refugee Livelihoods and Resilience Sector Strategy (2023) and the Uganda Country Refugee Response Plans (2024-2025), interventions in Terego District are mandated to split aid between displaced populations and the local host communities using a strategic 70/30 resource-sharing matrix. Out of the 30% program allocation earmarked for host communities, UNHCR and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) enforce a strict structural baseline: at least 50 to 53% of direct beneficiaries and leadership positions in host-facing interventions must be women. Conversely, the final data

released from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2024) National Population and Housing Census confirms that 67% household heads are men in host community.

Terego District, the primary site of this study, was carved out of Arua District in 2020 and comprises six rural sub-counties: Aii-vu, Bileafe, Katrini, Odupi, Omugo, and Uriama. Inferring from these allocation ratios, these programs overlook the specific, relational contributions of indigenous men, creating an acute programmatic blindness to the very structures holding the community livelihood together.

Deploying a constructivist narrative ethnography allows this study to examine how indigenous Lugbara men navigate these socio-economic pressures. By applying African Relation Theory (Gyekye, 1997; Metz, 2021; Wiredu, 1996), this study reframes social relations not as static capital, but as a dynamic, mediating web of claims and access. This reconceptualization directly expands the adaptive capabilities dimension envisioned by Chambers and Conway (1992), at the same time, it grounds the institutional mechanisms of access within the sustainable livelihood framework (Ellis, 2000; Scoones, 2009). By doing so, this paper critiques the shortcomings of Hegemonic Masculinity Theory (HMT) in African contexts, positions African Relational Theory (ART) as a viable alternative, and analyzes the relationship between relational masculine practices and livelihood outcomes. By extending this discussion to the contribution of indigenous knowledge systems through the findings, the article concludes with distinct implications for localized development policy and community-based programming.

While the entire district relies on agrarian subsistence, Odupi, Omugo, and Uriama are uniquely marked by the overwhelming presence of massive South Sudanese refugee settlements. This sudden demographic surge has completely transformed the local political economy. Beyond traditional subsistence farming, indigenous host residents increasingly navigate highly inflated local commodity markets and engage in precarious small-scale trade driven by the refugee economy (Impact Initiatives, 2018; World Bank, 2016). This reliance on agrarian survival aligns with data from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2024), which notes that while the majority of host households practice subsistence cultivation, they must now negotiate increasingly scarce communal lands and strained shared labor systems. Crucially, rebuilding the local social fabric neighbourhood work circuits, kinship networks, and communal solidarity mechanisms is not a passive cultural choice; it is an active, vital strategy for socio-economic recovery in a landscape where formal state support remains largely insufficient.

As the predominant ethnic group in Terego District, the Lugbara maintain a social structure deeply anchored in decentralized clan alliances, extended kinship networks, and elder-based collective decision-making (Middleton, 1960, 1965). Historically, this framework relies on dense networks of reciprocal labor to cultivate food, construct homesteads, and secure community safety nets against environmental or political shocks (Middleton, 1965). Today, the Lugbara Council of Elders serves as an institutionalized forum where the friction between formal humanitarian interventions (UNHCR, 2022), refugee resource competition, and indigenous customary laws is continuously mediated. These localized coping mechanisms are deeply reflective of the relational ethics central to African Relational Theory (ART), which conceptualizes the individual not as an atomized agent, but as an embodiment of communal relationships (Gyekye, 1997; Metz, 2021; Wiredu, 1996). By viewing this context through Kopano Ratele's (2016) lens, masculine identity is decoupled from individual dominance and re-anchored in a man's capacity to contribute to the collective good. In post-conflict Terego, where war fractured families and refugee hosting has strained local resources, these structured commitments of reciprocal male labor extend far beyond the immediate domestic unit they form the indispensable bedrock for household resilience and community cohesion. The contextual narrative leads us to explore the theories.

Theoretical Framework

The Limit of Hegemonic Masculinity Theory (HMT) in African Contexts

Since its foundational articulation by Connell (1995), Hegemonic Masculinity Theory (HMT) has profoundly shaped gender analysis by conceptualizing masculinity as a dynamic system of social relations than static traits. In Sub-Saharan Africa, prominent gender theories have effectively deployed this framework to interrogate how colonialism, racial capitalism, and political liberation struggles forge layered hierarchies of male privilege and vulnerability (Morrell, 2001; Ratele, 2016). The theory demonstrates immense capacity to diagnose structural crises. For example, Dolan's (2009) work on northern Uganda illustrates how displacement strips men of their capacity to protect and provide, triggering severe identity fractures, while Wyrod (2016) shows how notions of male authority persist and adapt alongside shifting socio-economic realities and women's rights discourse. Similarly, Jewkes et al. (2015) highlight that development interventions must account for these deeply rooted hierarchies to avoid reinforcing hidden gender biases.

However, while HMT effectively maps rigid hierarchies and structural inequalities, its primary limitation in rural, post-conflict setting is that it under-theorizes cooperative obligations and collective reciprocity as vital sources of masculine standing. By assuming that male authority is maintained solely through subordination and exclusion, the theory struggles to account for how cooperative systems generate respect a basis for reciprocity. As Lindsay and Miescher (2003) emphasize, African male identities are co-constituted by domestic duties and intricate networks of communal accountability; viewing local dynamics strictly through a hegemonic lens risks misreading cooperative practices as anomalies or mere "patriarchal bargains" (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 274). Subsequently, ART (Gyekye, 1997; Metz, 2021; Wiredu, 1996) supplies this missing analytical piece. By centering horizontal interconnectedness over purely vertical dominance, it provides a precise vocabulary to evaluate indigenous social practices of reciprocity on their own terms. It is this relational lens that allows us to analyze how specific Lugbara practices most notably the mobilization of *Lumure* (reserved food production attributed to men), *Oya*, *Kita* and *Andri-azi* operate as complex systems of mutual obligation essential to sustaining household livelihood resilience in post-conflict Omugo Sub-County, Terego District, Uganda.

African Relational Theory (ART) and Relational Masculinities

ART reframes personhood as an ongoing social achievement sustained through communal networks rather than an atomized property (Mbiti, 1969). By balancing Menkiti's (1984) radical communitarianism against Gyekye's (1997) focus on individual agency, this framework treats communal bonds as an active, negotiated arena for moral life (Metz, 2021). Pragmatically, ART posits that male identity in agrarian settings is structurally tethered to domestic and kinship networks rather than raw dominance (Ratele, 2016; Wiredu, 1996). In practice, this relational masculinity manifests as active participation in collaborative farming, resource sharing and communal safety nets.

Integrating this framework into gender and development studies decolonizes analytical tools, replacing Eurocentric, individualist paradigms with localized epistemologies (Asante, 2003;

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Tamale, 2020). Significantly, this Afrocentric approach avoids romanticizing communal life or sanitizing patriarchal power, as treating communitarianism as a harmonious utopia obscures the material friction of post-conflict survival. Rather, ART shows that internal power, authority, and inequality are continuously negotiated and contested within foundational structures of mutual obligation that keep the community viable.

Household Livelihood Resilience: A Social Relational Perspective

This study defines livelihood resilience qualitatively as a household's socially negotiated capacity to adapt, pool resources, and activate communal claims amidst systemic shocks. This builds on the sustainable livelihood frameworks, where rural welfare is determined by a dynamic configuration of capital assets such as natural, physical, human, financial and social. Also, the institutional mechanisms through which households gain access to them (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Ellis, 2000). In post-conflict spaces lacking state safety nets, access is never a passive given: rather it is a continuously mediated by shifting social relations, age hierarchies, and kinship rules (Ellis, 2000; Scoones, 2009). This perspective directly expands Sen's (1999) capability approach by illustrating that in rural agrarian settings, substantive freedoms and the capacity to avoid deprivation are rarely individual properties. Rather, household capabilities rely essentially on the active presence of communal networks capable of providing shared labour, food, and mutual care during crisis.

Accordingly, resilience is conceptualized not as static coping, but as an adaptive, transformative capacity to renegotiate the local social fabric as external pressures change (Folke, 2006). In Omugo Sub-County situated in Terego District marred by historical conflicts and massive refugee hosting strains, social networks dictate access to vital inputs like communal land, cooperative labour, and indigenous ecological knowledge. As argued by Kabeer (1999), gender relations constitute the principal institutional matrix through which resource access is structurally organized, contested, and actualized. By developing ART, the performance of male gender roles shifts from an individualistic pursuit of dominance to an active arena of cooperative obligation. A man's pursuit of horizontal relational standing becomes the foundational mechanism through which his household activates livelihood assets (Ellis, 2000). Hence, this lens demonstrates how specific Lugbara practices most notably; Lumure (reserved food production), Oya (Mutual Communal work), Kita (Rotational work alliance) and Adri-azi (in-law labour support) operate as complex systems of mutual obligation currently buckling under severe contemporary strain.

Empirical Literature Review

Relational Livelihoods and Customary Governance

Sub-Saharan economic anthropology illustrates that rural survival relies not on atomized households, but on rotational labour and mutual assistance networks that generate security in volatile, post-conflict settings ((Moore, 1988; Stites et al., 2024). Within sustainable livelihood frameworks, these indigenous arrangements serve as formal transforming structures that pool community resources to mediate input access and distribute ecological risks (Ellis, 2000; Folorunsho et al., 2025; Scoones, 2009). Significantly, these cooperative paradigms demonstrate where a man's social maturity and moral standing derive from active participation

in communal obligations rather than raw domestic dominance (Ekeke & John, 2025; Ratele, 2016). Accordingly, non-participation triggers severe social and material sanctions, directly undermining a man's capacity to claim reciprocal labour support in successive agricultural seasons (Metz, 2021; Wiredu, 1996).

These labor circuits persist through indigenous kinship governance systems that operate as high-friction sites of diplomacy and structural interdependence instead of static spaces of patriarchal dominance (Tamale, 2020). In segmentary lineage configurations, while corporate title and patrilineal inheritance remain vested in the paternal line, Middleton (1965) noted that the Lugbara maintained the horizontal distribution of land-use rights that operate through contested matrilineal allocations tied to a mother's status within the estate. The operational fluidity of these customary fields relies on strict protocols of intergenerational respect (*Inzita*) and a bilateral kinship obligation (Metz, 2021). Within this relational economy, this study infers that collective resilience is never a passive cultural byproduct, rather it is an actively engineered and heavily policed outcome of institutional deference and inter-clan friction management.

Accordingly, analyzing these networks requires framing household survival within contemporary debates surrounding Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), which challenges Eurocentric development paradigms and policies that pathologize traditional African gender configurations through individualistic, adversarial binaries ((Kabeer, 1994; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Tamale, 2020). Recent decolonial scholarship exposes an alternative ontology of gender complementarity and reciprocal obligation that prioritizes structural mutuality over atomized competition (Ekeke & John, 2026; Metz, 2021). Within sustainable livelihoods frameworks, this gender-differentiated knowledge base acts as an indispensable intangible asset, allocating specialized ecological, structural, and domestic responsibilities along reciprocal lines to optimize community survival (Ellis, 2000; Scoones, 2009; Stites et al., 2024). Fracturing these intergenerational transmission lines through top-down development initiatives triggers a systemic erosion of social capital, an invisible institutional loss that standard income indicators completely fail to capture.

According to Kabeer (1994), mainstream development programming relies on Eurocentric, individualistic models that pathologize traditional configurations as adversarial, zero-sum spaces. Cornwall (2000) extends the literature that it creates a conceptual blindness that directly reduces men to two-dimensional, obstructive gatekeepers instead of their being complex relational actors. Ratele (2016) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) argue that this blindness distorts rural social realities and risks fragmenting the cooperative networks essential to household survival. Therefore, top-down interventions misallocate resources by imposing individualistic templates onto communitarian spaces (Ellis, 2000; Scoones, 2009). This study sought to explore the anchoring of a household resilience through horizontal networks.

Methods

Research Design and Sample Size Selection

This study deployed a constructivist narrative ethnography, drawing from Bruner's (1996) focus on storytelling, Guba and Lincoln's (1994) framework of locally constructed realities, and Gubrium and Holstein's (2008) narrative ethnography. It anchors its field design in recent

East African qualitative precedents (Karangu, 2023; Somjee, 2020). Using a stratified purposive sampling design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shaheen et al., 2019), recruitment was halted at absolute data saturation with (n=77) articulate adult interlocutors (39 women, 38 men) across four parishes of Angazi, Anyufira, Bura and Duku and five distinct institutional, state-led actors, customary leadership, domestic strata, and Indigenous Social Spaces.

Table 1: The Sample

Location	Sampling Stratum	Age	Selection Criteria	Data Collection	Composition Breakdown		Participant Number		
		Bracket	Stratified Purposive Sampling (SPS)	Method	Individuals	Groups/Circles	Female	Male	Total
Terego District	District Officials	40-65	SPS	Interview Conversation	3		1	2	3
Omugo Sub-County	Sub-county Officials	35-45	SPS	Interview Conversation	2			2	2
NGO Omugo	Gender & Livelihood Program Officer	40-49	SPS	Interview Conversation	1			1	1
Bura Parish	Clan Elders/Kwete sharing circle	40-70+	SPS	Kwete Sharing		1	3	5	8
	Household heads	40-65	SPS	Interview Conversation	3		1	2	3
	Women's Kwete sharing Circle	35-69+	SPS	Kwete Sharing		1	7		7
Angazi Parish	Men's Kwete sharing Circle	25-65+	SPS	Kwete Sharing		1		8	8
Anyufira Parish	Women's PDM group	18-70+	SPS	Focus Group Sharing		1	13		13
Anyufira Parish	Mixed PDM group	18-70+	SPS	Focus Group Sharing		1	12	7	19
Duku Parish	Mixed PDM group	18-65+	SPS	Focus Group Sharing		1	2	11	13
Total					9	6	39	38	77

Data collection triangulated observations, document analysis, open-ended conversational interviews, and Kwete sharing circle guides. The raw data material was processed using NVivo

and analyzed through thematic narrative analysis. Navigating an insider-outsider positionality during a six-month field engagement, the researcher established trustworthiness, dependability, transferability and credibility via prolonged engagement and transcribing member-checks. Strict ethical integrity was maintained through participant anonymity, informed consent, and formal clearance from Tangaza University and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology.

Limitations

This qualitative study prioritizes deep conceptual insight over statistical generalizability; it intentionally excluded the refugee population to prevent analytical clarity regarding the Lugbara's (the host community) traditional reciprocal networks. While living within a shared 70/30 resource-sharing matrix, refugee households exhibit an inverted 74% female-headed structure compared to the 67% male-headed host community baseline. Consequently, all claims regarding "stable welfare" or "efficiency" are presented as experienced, structural realities articulated directly by the host community.

Empirical Findings

The Structural Mechanics of Oya, Kita, and Andri-azi in Terego

Our ethnographic immersion reveals that host communities depend entirely on subsistence land cultivation, navigating demanding seasonal cycles with rudimentary tools such as hoes, folk-hoes and harrowing sticks. As a state-led government official noted "*rural men are overwhelmingly engaged in peasant farming at subsistence level, with the exception of very few men who grow for economic purposes.*" To manage accelerating land fragmentation, households increasingly rent extra plots for production; as a household head, Kelvin, explained; "we mostly hire or rent land for cultivation while we leave women to till the ancestral inherited pieces of land." Survival across this shifting landscape according to various strata is sustained through reciprocity, which operationalizes three distinct, gender-complementary labour networks: (These themes emerged from across all strata).

- "Oya" (cooperative labor): A mechanism where a man mobilizes collective abled labour to accomplish "*in a single day, work that would otherwise take the household more days or more single-handedly,*" balanced by female-led food and traditional beer (Kwete, Nguli) preparations
- Kita (the rotational like-minded labour-alliances): is a resource-conscious alternative favoured by most households and Kwete circle members because "*it does not attract food and other preparations.*" It operates as a "*tight structures, highly disciplined rotational labour exchange among the like-minded alliances*" to complete intensive tasks within compressed seasonal timelines.
- Andri-azi (in-law kinship alliances): This affinal safety net is an inter-clan labour deployment triggered when a woman mobilizes her natal clan (Andri) to provide structural labour (Azi) on her husband's homestead. Elders observe these celebrations serve as "*crucial spaces for youth from both clans to meet... fostering future inter-clan marriages. It also indicates collaboration that their daughter is married in a good home.*"

However, contemporary land scarcity and knowledge gaps has severely disrupted this infrastructure. Parish Development Model (PDM) groups noted that severe land shortages have rendered these communal practices (Oya, Kita and Andri-azi) almost impossible. They stated “Oya, Kita and Andri-azi are becoming impossible to bring more people on the small plots” forcing men to hand smaller garden fragments over to women for localized horticulture while traditional collective networks fracture.

Marriage Alliances, Matrilateral Land Tenure, and the Politics of *Inzita* (Respect)

Traditional Lugbara structures rely on decentralized clan alliances and elder-led governance, where marriage functions as a dense collective bond rather than an isolated contract. A government official noted that “marriage was a cultural value: when a man married his wife, in actual sense, he marries the woman for the clan, meaning the woman would be able to cook food that is eaten by everyone around.” While this setup “accords respect for the woman,” ensuring “a man has no right to batter the woman” under the arbitrations of the Council of Elders (Ba amba), access to this customary safety is based on the behaviour of both a spouses. For instance, if a wife demonstrates the behaviours described by the local idiom of having “hands in her pocket,” clarified by the elders as being “selfish, arrogant and does not welcome anyone into her home,” the communal canopy falter, conditioning livelihood security on compliance with hospitality norms.

This relational matrix extends to customary land stewardship, which operates through a unique, matrilaterally allocated framework horizontally anchored by women. A district official detailed this distinct logic “*A man does not inherit land directly from his father’s autonomous individual line; rather, he inherits the specific acreage that was structurally allocated to, and cultivated by his mother, even today, when polygamy is almost extinct.*” Council of clan elders emphasize that this system accommodates “*Children and orphans to secure their agrarian livelihoods precisely through these maternal allocations.*”

However, this customary protection leaves host households highly vulnerable to modern programmatic shocks, as external initiatives fail to grasp this dual reality. Because the “most used resource for implementing the most of livelihood programs is land which is culturally under the authority of a man but horizontally used by women; bypassing men by these institutions triggers a volatile “dual complex issue” where frustrated husbands either strip a woman of the access or withdraws. As a result, feminization of labour is introduced where “mostly women are left alone to feed the family” while the system has driven men to excessive consumption of alcohol and asset liquidation by both men and women. This institutional decay according to interlocutors is accelerated by a generational rupture regarding “*Inzita*” (intergenerational respect), where horizontal complementarity has been replaced by market logic. This was captured in the interview with one of the district officials:

“We are in the years of the jungle law ‘survival for the fittest’ you are either consumed or you consume the other... a competition that is eating the fabric of our families, to the extent of leaving the vulnerable disadvantaged members without respect.”

Intra-Household Deliberation, Quota Tensions, and the Decentred Storage Matrix

Collaborative livelihood planning anchors post-conflict precarity management, yet it remains under severe contemporary structural pressure. Kwete sharing circle transcripts demonstrate that a man refusing intra-household consultation faces immediate informal resistance: *“his wife may actively withhold her localized labor networks or decline to mobilize her own affinal safety nets (Andri-azi) during peak agricultural deficits.”* A key government official, Ayikoru, challenged top-down frameworks by noting that *“engaging everyone is resource intensive,”* arguing that state toolsets must *“revisit our policies”* and *“prioritize the mindset change through more community engagement.”* Accordingly, household heads noted that *“rather than transforming structural inequalities, these rigid external indicators force our households to perform compliance while we rely entirely in practice on informal, relational assets to manage survival.”*

This superficial compliance stems from deep institutional friction between statutory program designs and customary practices. While NGO interventions enforce a baseline requiring at least 50% female representation in leadership, census data establishes that 67% of host household heads are male-headed. According to a government official, *“this demographic mismatch positions women into public-facing NGO roles to secure international resources,”* while everyday asset management remains negotiated through informal domestic circuits. The Council of Elders reiterated that when interventions default to *“a common challenge facing the communities due to one sided empowerment,”* men *“actively withdraw from domestic accountabilities.”* Lacking relational coordination, a government official noted that some actors (both men and women) turn to unsustainable extraction, noting that *“some are involved in charcoal burning including women who have surpassed men in this business today.”* This manifests as a profound failure in state delivery:

Many of the men and women are now engaged in nonproductive activities such as alcohol and substance abuse... Most of the PDM money has not achieved its aim, it has gone to waste due to the attitude that it is free government money given to the electorate. They use the funds for purchasing alcohol till it is over.

This structural erosion directly undermines the purpose for PDM and the indigenous practice of *Lumure* (a traditional, male-led mechanism historically operating as *“a highly formal, male-led mechanism of collective agricultural production designed to build multi-generational food reserves.”* These surpluses were historically preserved in specialized structures such as *Era* (a four-pole elevated granary) for collective food stocks, and the *Cucua* (a one-pole elevated granary) for mostly smaller food preservations for seeds. However, fieldwork reveals that *“Lumure”* *“has almost become a preserve of the past.”* Due to widespread theft, termed by participants as *“Ogu Joa”* (Theft within the Walls) an external property crime, and land fragmentation, the tangible infrastructure of this safety net has collapsed. The researcher observed no standing granaries (either *Era* or *Cucua*) in the landscape. Evaluating adaptive capacity therefore, requires abandoning macro indices to track the active strength of horizontal obligations, genuine domestic consultation, and inter-household reciprocity.

Discussions

The empirical material gathered from Omugo Sub-County reveals a complex socioeconomic landscape that fundamentally challenges conventional, asset-centric development paradigms. By deploying African Relational Theory (ART), this study moves beyond the vertical constraints for Hegemonic Masculinity Theory (HMT) to analyze how household resilience is generated horizontally. The findings illustrate a profound tension: while the indigenous framework of reciprocity conceptually holds the architectural blueprint for post-conflict survival, contemporary structural shocks such as acute land fragmentation, refugee-hosting pressures, market commodification, and flawed state policies are actively dismantling this very infrastructure.

The empirical data strongly converges with foundational Sub-Saharan economic anthropology and contemporary decolonial scholarship, which assert that rural survival is never an individualistic, atomized pursuit (Moore, 1988; Stites et al., 2024). The operational realities of male-led labour mobilization (*Oya*), rotational labour pooling (*Kita*), and affinal safety nets (*Andri-azi*) confirm that host communities depend entirely on institutionalized networks of reciprocity to distribute production and ecological risks (Ellis, 2000; Scoones, 2009). Furthermore, the study validates Kabeer's social Relational Approach, illustrating that gender relational constitute the foundational matrix through which resource access is structurally organized and contested (Kabeer, 1994, 1999). When household heads note that a man who refuses intra-household consultation faces immediate informal resistance such as wife without her localized networks or *Andri-azi* labour support, the empirical data confirms that household capabilities are principally relational assets instead of isolated individual properties (Chambers and Conway, 1992; Sen, 1999).

However, the findings sharply diverge from early structural-functionalist anthropology that historically framed segmentary lineage societies as harmonious, self-regulating systems of collective equilibrium (Middleton, 1965). They also challenge contemporary romanticized narratives of unyielding cultural endurance. While Middleton (1965) mapped out a stable horizontal distribution of land-use rights operating through matrilateral allocations with large pieces of land in which *Lumure* was possible, our field data reveals that this customary safety net has become structurally untenable. The severe land shortages caused by refugee influx and structural policy blind spots have induces a critical point; because external interventions default to the land-owner as the primary vector for resource injection, by passing this matrilateral duality triggers a volatile "dual complex issue." Frustrated men, feeling isolated from the livelihood programs withdraw from their reciprocal duties, leaving women to fee the family. Others retreat to substance abuse. This material decay is most starkly illustrated by the total collapse of *Lumure*. Historically functioning as a formal mechanism to build multi-generational food reserves in specialized granaries (Era and Cucua), *Lumure* has receded into a preserve of the past. The complete physical absence of these granaries across the landscape demonstrates that under a predatory market logic, what interlocutors term as the "jungle law" of survival storing visible communal reserves now invite criminal targeting and property theft from within and from outside.

Crucially, this study extends both sustainable livelihoods frameworks and ART by exposing the profound “Conceptual blindness” of individualistic state interventions like the Parish Development Model (PDM). Heavy reliance on models like Hegemonic Masculinity Theory (HMT) effectively diagnoses vertical hierarchies of male privilege (Morrell, 2001; Ratele, 2016), and work by Dolan (2009) documents how displacement triggers identity fractures when men cannot provide. However, our study goes further. It demonstrates that top-down policies misallocate resources because they impose a strict, individualistic 50 to 53% gender quota onto a customary space where 67% of households are male-headed. This demographic mismatch forces a performance of compliance; where women secure state cash and services, but the everyday asset management reverts to informal, fracturing circuits. When the state treats community programs as individualistic hand-outs, assuming it will have a trickle-down effect for household benefit, it actively isolates men from their collective obligations. Lacking relational coordination, men withdraw from domestic accountabilities and liquidate the cash into alcohol, viewing it as free government money.

Therefore, this paper extends the literature by illustrating that the contemporary livelihood crisis in Omugo Sub-County, Terego District is not merely a material shortage, but an ontological fracture in Lugbara men’s shared personhood. When material pressures render Oya, Kita, Andri-azi and Inzita impossible on shrinking plots, they do not just reduce yields; they dismantle the horizontal moral infrastructure that holds community survival together. Livelihood programming must therefore, abandon asset-only metrics and actively design interventions that protect and reconstruct these collapsing relational assets.

Conclusion

This article illustrates that relational masculinity practices manifested in reciprocity through rotational labour exchanges, collaborative domestic decision-making, and inter-household solidarity networks is vital, yet is undertheorized, assets for household livelihood resilience in post-conflict Omugo Sub-County, Terego District, Uganda. By de-centering classical Hegemonic Masculinity Theory (HMT), this study decouples masculine authority from Eurocentric notions of atomized dominion, reframing it around the horizontal, cooperative networks that keep the local social fabric viable. The empirical tracking of Lugbara institutions such as Oya, Kita, Andri-azi, and Lumure demonstrate how collective practices function as a living, contested system of social organization driving material survival amid modern structural pressures. Finally, the decolonization of gender and development analysis is a practical prerequisite for structural change. African Relational Theory offers the vital, transformative framework necessary to design policies that actively support these indigenous networks, instead of bypassing them through individualistic, asset-only templates.

References

- Asante, M. K. (2003). *Afrocentricity: The theory of social change* (Rev. and expanded ed.). African American Images. <https://books.google.com/books/about/Afrocentricity.html?id=OFYaAQAAIAAJ>
- Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education*. Harvard University Press. google.com
- Chambers, R., & Conway, G. (1992). *Sustainable rural livelihoods: Practical concepts for the 21st century* (IDS Discussion Paper 296). Institute of Development Studies. <https://www.ids.ac.uk/files/Dp296.pdf>

- Chilisa, B. (2020). *Indigenous research methodologies* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications. <https://www.sagepub.com/shop/buy-a-book/indigenous-research-methodologies-2-241776>
- Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Polity Press.
- Cornwall, A. (2000). Missing men? Reflections on men, masculinities and gender in GAD. *IDS Bulletin*, 31(2), 18–27. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2000.mp31002003.x>
- Ekeke, E. C., & John, E. O. (2025). The African masculinity and values in contemporary society. *African Journal of Social Work*, 15(2), 21–30. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ajsw.v15i2.3>
- Dolan, C. (2009). *Social torture: The case of northern Uganda, 1986–2006*. Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.3167/9781845455651>
- Ellis, F. (2000). *Rural livelihoods and diversity in developing countries*. Oxford University Press. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227467497_Rural_Livelihoods_and_Diversity_in_Developing_Countries_Oxford_UP
- Folke, C. (2006). Resilience: The emergence of a perspective for social ecological systems analyses. *Global Environmental Change*, 16(3), 253–267. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2006.04.002>
- Folorunsho, S. (2024). Sociological analysis of stress management among farmers and rural development in selected communities in Kwara State. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 7(1), 1–9. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/sociologydiss/87/>
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105–117). Sage Publications. google.com
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (2008). Narrative ethnography. In S. N. Hesse-Biber & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Handbook of emergent methods* (pp. 241–264). The Guilford Press. google.com
- Gyekye, K. (1997). *Tradition and modernity: Philosophical reflections on the African experience*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195112252.001.0001>
- Hoil, L., & Okello, M. (2007). Confronting the reality of gender-based violence in Northern Uganda. *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 1(3), 433–443. doi.org
- IMPACT Initiatives. (2018). *Livelihoods and resilience baseline assessment: Host community and refugee settlements in Terego and Madi Okollo districts, Uganda*. IMPACT. impact-initiatives.org
- Jewkes, R., Flood, M., & Lang, J. (2015). From work with men and boys to changes of social norms and structures. *The Lancet*, 385(9977), 1580-1589.
- Karangu, P. K. (2023). *Kenyan national teachers teaching in schools in a long-term refugee camp: Addressing education crisis in the refugee camp* (Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia). UBC Open Collections. <https://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0427397>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications. google.com

- Kabeer, N. (2024). Renegotiating patriarchy: Gender, agency and the Bangladesh paradox. LSE Press. <https://doi.org/10.31389/lsepress.rpg>
- Kandiyoti, D. (1988). Bargaining with patriarchy. *Gender & Society*, 2(3), 274–290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124388002003004>
- Leopold, M. (2005). Inside West Nile: Violence, history & representation on an African frontier. James Currey Publishers. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2006.00359_38.x
- Mbiti, J. S. (1969). African religions and philosophy. Heinemann.
- Menkiti, I. A. (1984). Person and community in African traditional thought. In R. A. Wright (Ed.), *African philosophy: An introduction* (3rd ed., pp. 171–181). University Press of America. <https://universityofsaintthomas.github.io/sjlaumakis/reading%203-african%20view.pdf>
- Metz, T. (2021). A relational moral theory: African ethics in and beyond the continent. Oxford University Press.
- Middleton, J. (1965). Middleton, J. (1965). The Lugbara of Uganda. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York. ISBN-13: 978-0030496851.
- Moore, H. L. (1988). Feminism and anthropology. Polity Press.
- Morrell, R. (Ed.). (2001). Changing men in Southern Africa. University of Natal Press. <https://journals.ac.za/pins/article/view/8155>
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2018). Epistemic freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and decolonization. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429492204>
- Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). (2023). Uganda comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF): Progress report on livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion. Republic of Uganda. opm.go.ug
- Orach, C. O., & De Brouwere, V. (2006). Postwar health sector reconstruction: Options for the rehabilitation of the health system in Northern Uganda. *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, 22(4), 301–312. doi.org
- Ratele, K. (2016). Liberating masculinities. HSRC Press. <https://hsrpress.ac.za/product/liberating-masculinities/>
- Scoones, I. (2009). Livelihoods perspectives and rural development. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(1), 171–196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150902820503>
- Schomerus, M., & Allen, T. (2006). A hard homecoming: Lessons learned from the reception center process on effective interventions for former 'abductees' in Northern Uganda. London School of Economics. lse.ac.uk
- Scoones, I. (2018). Sustainable livelihoods and rural development. Practical Action Publishing. doi.org
- Sen, A. (1999). Development as freedom. Oxford University Press.
- Senghor, L. S. (1964). On African socialism (M. Cook, Trans.). Praeger. google.com
- Shaheen, M., Pradhan, S., & Ranajee. (2019). Sampling in qualitative research. In M. Gupta, M. Shaheen, & K. P. Reddy (Eds.), *Qualitative techniques for workplace data analysis* (pp. 25–51). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-5366-3.ch002>

- Somjee, S. (2023). *One who dreams is called a prophet*. Zand Press, Nairobi. ISBN-10: 1545513200
- Stites, E., Fitzpatrick, M., & Howe, P. (2024). *Gender dynamics, local networks, and child wasting in pastoralist livelihood systems in Africa (Special Report)*. Feinstein International Center, Tufts University.
- Tamale, S. (2020). *Decolonization and Afro-feminism*. Daraja Press.
- Tripp, A. M. (2010). *Museveni's Uganda: Paradoxes of power in a hybrid regime*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Uganda Bureau of Statistics. (2024). *The National Population and Housing Census 2024: Final report (Volume 1: Main)*. UBOS. <https://www.ubos.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/National-Population-and-Housing-Census-2024-Final-Report-Volume-1-Main.pdf>
- UNHCR. (2022). *Uganda country livelihood and economic inclusion strategy (2022–2025)*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. [unhcr.org](https://www.unhcr.org)
- UNHCR Operational Data Portal. (2025). *Refugee data finder: Uganda host and refugee demographics*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/uga>
- UNHCR Refugee Livelihoods and Resilience Sector. (2023). *Socio-economic assessment of host communities and refugees in West Nile sub-region*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/uga>
- Wiredu, K. (1996). *Cultural universals and particulars: An African perspective*. Indiana University Press. <https://iupress.org/9780253210807/cultural-universals-and-particulars/>
- White, S. C. (1997). Men, masculinities, and the politics of development. *Gender & Development*, 5(2), 14–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/741922357>
- World Bank. (2016). *An assessment of Uganda's progressive approach to refugee management*. World Bank Group. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/259711469593058429>
- Wyrod, R. (2016). *AIDS and masculinity in the African city: Privilege, inequality, and modern love*. University of California Press. <https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520286696/aids-and-masculinity-in-the-african-city>