Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium

Researching livelihoods and services affected by conflict

‘She told me that life here is so easy’

Urban migration of Acholi youth, Uganda

Working paper 68

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March 2019

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Cover photo: In the Acholi Quarter, Kampala, the most common livelihood activity for women was bead-making.
Annika McGinnis/reachoutmbuya.wordpress.com

Preface

The Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) aims to generate a stronger evidence base on state-building, service delivery and livelihood recovery in fragile and conflict-affected situations. It began in 2011 with funding from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), Irish Aid and the European Commission (EC).

Phase I: 2011 - 2017

SLRC's research can be separated into two phases. Our first phase was based on three research questions on state legitimacy, state capacity and livelihoods, developed over the course of an intensive one-year inception phase. Findings from the first phase of research were summarised in five synthesis reports produced in 2017 that draw out broad lessons for policy-makers, practitioners and researchers.

Phase II: 2017 - 2019

Guided by our original research questions on state legitimacy, state capacity, and livelihoods, the second phase of SLRC answers the questions that still remain, under three themes:

- Theme 1: What are the underlying reasons for continued livelihood instability in post-conflict recovery situations?
- Theme 2: Through what mechanisms do perceptions, definitions and experiences translate into behaviours that aids or hinders post-conflict recovery?
- Theme 3: How can more inclusive and higher quality-service delivery be achieved in fragile states while supporting evolving political settlements?

Theme 1: Livelihoods instability

This paper is one of eight pieces of research from Theme 1 conducted in Afghanistan, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Uganda. The research was conducted by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA - Sri Lanka), Feinstein International Center (FIC, Tufts University - Uganda), Nepal Institute for Social and Environmental Research (NISER), Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI - Pakistan). The research lead was Vagisha Gunasekara.

The studies under this theme question currently held assumptions about the nature of exchange and economic behaviour in rural economies. These studies demonstrate that livelihoods in conflict and post-conflict settings are in socially embedded economies - driven by patron-client relationship and non-contractual obligations.

In Afghanistan, we delve into the role of informal borrowing as a buffer in sustaining livelihoods. In Sri Lanka, we examine the suitability of 'entrepreneurship' promotion as a development intervention for people in war-affected areas. The study in Nepal looks at work and livelihood patterns of women in migrant households. The Pakistan study investigates how households access credit, the impact of indebtedness on families, and develops a framework that explains household indebtedness and its impacts. Lastly, the research in Uganda focuses on the internal migration of young people and their experiences with employment, the livelihoods realities of the war-wounded, and how livelihood trajectories of the war-affected influence decisions related to education of young people.

The evidence generated by the studies offers a number of insights into why people in conflict settings can no longer sustain their own lives through direct access to a living wage, why policies and aid interventions aimed at socio-economic recovery fail and the mechanisms people use in order to stay afloat within these economies.

For more information on who we are and what we do, visit: www.securelivelihoods.org/about-slrc

Acknowledgements

Project funding was generously provided by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and Irish Aid. We thank the team at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) for their support and feedback throughout the research process. We would like to thank the following people for their contribution to the research and for reviewing drafts: Anastasia Marshak, Vagisha Gunasekara, Dyan Mazurana, Marieke Schomerus, Jessica Hagen-Zanker and George Richards. At Tufts we wish to thank Jessica Cote, Ann O'Brien, Greg Gottlieb, and Anne Radday for their support, assistance, and guidance. Claire McGillem provided research assistance. Finally, we want to thank all of the respondents who contributed their time to speak with us for this research.

Acronyms and glossary

CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
IDP	Internally displaced people
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
PRDP	Peace, Recovery and Development Program
SLRC	Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium
UGX	Ugandan Shillings

Boda boda	A motorcycle taxi
Senior Four	Final year of junior High School, or 10th grade
Split-household model	A situation whereby immediate family members of a migrant or migrants remain in the place of origin.
Snowball sampling	A survey method where research participants suggest and recruit other research participants
Purposive sampling	A survey method where research participants are chosen based on particular characteristics related to the objective of the study

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Executive summary

This report presents findings on the migration of youth (aged 15–35) from Acholi, Uganda to the urban areas of Gulu and Pabbo in northern Uganda, and to the Acholi Quarter neighborhood in Kampala. The findings draw on qualitative data made up of semi-structured, open-ended individual interviews with both men and women in Gulu, Pabbo, Kampala, and two rural areas. In total, 112 qualitative interviews were carried out.

Key findings

- Acholi youth migrate into urban areas for a diverse range of reasons; top among these are the lack of economic opportunities in rural areas, inadequate land access, and family disputes.
- Female migrants in particular also cited being pushed off land and physical and sexual abuse as reasons for migrating, in addition to economic pull factors.
- Many migrants maintain strong economic, livelihood, social and emotional ties to their rural places of origin, with split-household models being extremely common. Those who did not maintain such ties – mostly women – were among the most vulnerable.

The findings of this report have important implications for national and international programming and interventions, especially given the expanding role urbanisation plays in Uganda and across the developing world. The provision of urban services, especially education, must meet the needs of the continuing influx of migrants, many of whom prioritize education. Decision making around migration involves not only concerns for the migrant, but also their family, whether or not family members also move.

This research illustrates the extent to which many households are split between rural and urban areas, with a regular flow of people, food, and cash in both directions. In some instances, the split-household model was a long-term livelihood strategy, while in others it was short-term and in support of a desired outcome (such as amassing adequate savings for a rural investment). Some respondents moved back and forth on a regular basis (weekly, monthly, or seasonally) between rural and urban areas, while others were based in an urban location, with children or other family members traveling back and forth. This dynamism and mobility is important for policymakers and programmers to consider when designing and implementing both urban and rural interventions.

This research finds significant differences between male and female respondents. Female respondents tended to be in employment that is poorly paid, lower skilled and in less-formal sectors than their male counterparts. Women also experienced more stigma related to their urban occupation. For example, employment in the service sector is often not considered ‘acceptable’ by family back home and can have negative impacts on a woman’s reputation in her rural village. Interventions should seek to analyse the influence of social expectations and their repercussions on the type of work people engage in. In taking this analysis into account, interventions should aim to improve the quality of work and levels of pay for both women and men.

Unsurprisingly, female migrants were generally more vulnerable than men, with those without ties to their rural homes being the worst off. Social networks and connections appear to play a critical part in wellbeing. Women without these ties do not have critical support networks and lack access to an array of coping strategies, such as sending children home to relatives or receiving food from rural areas. In the absence of social and economic capital, these women are likely to miss out on services and opportunities that might be available to others.

1 Introduction

This research was carried out as part of the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium's (SLRC) Uganda programme, which aims to better understand the processes of livelihood recovery, service delivery and state-building following conflict. Previous research under SLRC, Uganda included a representative panel survey of households in Acholi and Lango sub-regions in 2013, 2015 and 2018, which examined livelihoods and recovery in the post-war period, and a mixed-methods study of livelihood options for urban youth in 2015 (Marshak et al, 2017; Mallet and Atim, 2016).[1] Findings from the first two rounds of panel data and the study of urban youth highlighted the importance of urban livelihoods and urban migration for families in the post-war north. We undertook this qualitative research to investigate these patterns and trends more thoroughly, with a focus on young people who had moved to urban areas in the past decade. This study contributes to the literature on internal migration and urbanisation, particularly in the post-conflict period, and intentionally highlights the perspectives of youth in their own words.

An important trend visible in the quantitative SLRC, Uganda panel data was the high level of volatility from year to year in household wellbeing. This finding was in contrast to the belief that after conflict there is a relatively steady progression of recovery influenced by a growing economy, or by national and international development interventions. We found that the volatility was most pronounced in the most vulnerable households. On average, households responded to these yearly changes by taking advantage of all available opportunities, increasing livelihood diversification and moving some members out of rural subsistence agriculture into casual labour as an additional source of income. However, the data did not point to a consistent relationship between migration and household wellbeing, despite the fact that one-tenth of all households reported having a migrant (Marshak et al., 2017). Moreover, an analysis by Mallet et al. (2016) of youth in urban areas (a growing population) showed that over half of them fall below the Ugandan national poverty line. In addition, their analysis showed that conditions of employment in the urban areas exposed many of these young people to exploitation. Viable alternatives to these jobs are lacking, and many of youth appear to be stuck in often dangerous and low-return employment (Mallet et al., 2016). Despite these trends, the data points to continued and increasing migration in northern Uganda. Thus, this specific research

1 Reports on the quantitative data and findings 2018 and across the panel are forthcoming.

study set out to examine the push and pull factors behind the migration of Acholi youth and the impact of migration on their lives and livelihoods, including economic and social outcomes.

This report focuses on the experiences of Acholi migrants to the northern municipalities of Gulu and Pabbo and to an Acholi-dominated neighborhood of Kampala known as Acholi Quarter. We also selected two rural areas where we conducted interviews with individuals with family members who had out-migrated. These interviews helped provide a rural perspective on migration. This report is exclusively concerned with domestic internal migration – i.e. movement between rural and urban areas within Uganda.[2]

Credit: Young woman carrying a mat in Gulu town, Uganda. Thomas Cole.

2 Based on the quantitative data, very few households reported that a member of the household migrated internationally for work, ranging from approximately 1–3% of households. International migration appeared to increase temporarily, but significantly, in 2015 (compared to 2013) and then declined again to 2013 levels by 2018.

2 Methodology

2.1 Site selection for qualitative research

Gulu is the main urban area in northern Uganda, with an estimated population of 150,000 as of 2014. The city has experienced pronounced and rapid growth in the decade since the end of the conflict between the state and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), both in terms of economic investment and number of residents. As such, Gulu was an obvious choice as a study site. In addition, Gulu is predominately Acholi in ethnic composition, making it a popular destination for young people from the surrounding rural districts.

We also wanted to collect data in a smaller and less-established urban area in the sub-region, and selected Pabbo as it met these criteria. Pabbo, a municipality in Amuru District, was the site of one of the largest internally displaced people (IDP) camps in the north during the war with the LRA. Pabbo lies 40 kilometers from Gulu on the recently-paved road to Nimule on the South Sudan border. The Pabbo IDP camp was disbanded in 2010, but many people who settled in the camp during the war have remained in the Pabbo area or have established homesteads on the ground of the former camp (Mergelsberg, 2012). The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in southern Sudan in 2005, and the referendum that created South Sudan in 2011, brought economic development to Pabbo as it is an important way-station for goods and transportation moving to and from South Sudan. We selected Pabbo as the second urban site in the Acholi sub-region in order to examine who was settling in a town with these characteristics, what type of work they were engaged in, and – for those who saw a town-based future – if they aspired to remain in Pabbo or move to a larger urban centre.

We also sought to understand how rural households and communities viewed people who moved to urban areas. We selected the sub-counties of Koch Goma, in Nwoya District, and Paicho, in Gulu District, because many respondents in Gulu town originated from these locations. In Koch Goma, we sampled respondents in the main trading centre and in three nearby villages. In Paicho, we worked in one village in Pagik Parish. In the rural locations, we used snowball sampling, where research participants recruit other participants, to locate respondents who were known to have household members who had out-migrated.

In addition to examining rural-to-urban migration in the northern Acholi region, we wanted to investigate patterns of movement of young Acholi to Kampala. We selected

the high-density neighborhood known as Acholi Quarter, a zone of Banda parish in the Nakawa Division of Kampala. Acholi first settled in the area in the 1940s as World War II veterans, and skilled and unskilled labour migrants from the north. Sudanese migrants began to settle in Acholi Quarter in the 1950s, and individuals from other conflict-affected areas continued to migrate to Acholi Quarter through the early 2000s. Informally, the area became designated as a settlement for displaced communities (Anyanzu, 2016).

2.2 Qualitative data collection

Field work was conducted in March, April and early May 2018. We used qualitative data collection methods including semi-structured, open-ended individual interviews and key informant interviews. Areas of inquiry included push and pull factors for migration to urban areas, types of livelihoods, views on the nature of the work, challenges experienced in urban areas, social and economic networks, access to services (health, education and water), connections to places of origin (including communication, exchange, visits, and perceptions of those who migrated), impressions of life in urban areas, and future aspirations.

We used purposive sampling and snowball sampling to create the study population, and sought to maintain balance across the following variables: gender, age (below 20 years, 20–30 years and over 30 years), duration of time in urban area (less than one year, 1–5 years, 5–10 years, and more than 10 years), and type of livelihood (e.g. manual labour, domestic work, petty trade, skilled labour, etc.). The small size and relative homogeneity of Gulu and Pabbo allowed us to move through the municipalities in search of respondents in different employment categories. In contrast, in Kampala we intentionally selected one neighborhood with a high number of Acholi residents and conducted all our interviews in this location. We still sought out people engaged in different types of livelihood activities, but we were not able to be as deliberate in this selection process as we were in the northern locations.

Table 1 shows the numbers of respondents by gender and location, with a total of 112 individual interviews. In addition, we did seven key informant interviews with local councilors (in Gulu, Pabbo and Kampala) and with staff from local organisations who work with youth in Gulu.

Most interviews were conducted in the Acholi dialect, although some respondents and key informants preferred to speak in English. Three female researchers collected data for this project, two working in their native Luo and one working in English through translation. We used small digital audio recorders to capture the interviews as well as taking notes by hand. The audio files were translated and transcribed by a professional transcriber who is familiar with the context of northern Uganda. Analysis of the data was done through inductive and deductive coding and memoing with the assistance of Nvivo12 software.

2.3 Limitations in the data

Even though we aimed for a gender balance, Table 1 illustrates that there are many more female than male respondents. This was due to several factors. First, women in Gulu and Pabbo are more likely to be engaged in activities that allowed interviews to take place during the day and at their work place, such as in markets, shops, salons, or restaurants. In contrast, many men are working in busier roles or areas under supervision, such as carpentry shops, garages, or as security guards. These conditions contributed to a higher rate of acceptance among female respondents, whereas men more frequently rejected interview requests. Second, in the rural areas of Koch Goma and Paicho sub-counties, women are more likely to be the ones remaining at home to give details on male migrants. Third, women are also more readily available to be interviewed in Acholi Quarter in Kampala.

Table 1: Location and gender of respondents

Location	Gender	
	Female	Male
Gulu municipality	22	14
Pabbo municipality	7	12
Acholi Quarter, Kampala	22	11
Koch Goma sub-county, Nwoya district (rural)	8	3
Paicho sub-county, Gulu district (rural)	12	1
Total	**71**	**41**

Men are more likely to hold jobs in the city centre, whereas women are more likely to engage in livelihoods within the neighborhood. We sought to interview men at their place of employment in Kampala but found very few who were willing to speak with us while on the job. Lastly, we intentionally sought out females who are engaged in sex work in Gulu. If additional work was possible with a larger sample and more time, we would seek to ensure parity between male and female respondents.

Another limitation is a result of a bias towards certain types of work in which people were engaged because of the way we structured data collection. As already mentioned, it was difficult to interview people in places of more formal employment. This skewed our sample towards women, and also meant that we had more unskilled than skilled workers, as the latter were less accessible. This is perhaps most apparent in the absence of professional livelihoods represented in the data, as we did not seek to interview office workers or others in similar occupations. This bias is especially evident in our Kampala data, as we opted to focus on one Acholi-majority neighborhood and to work during daylight hours. Hence, the respondents were those who lived and worked in that impoverished and high-density area and were therefore more likely to be engaged in informal and unskilled forms of livelihood activities.

Our data is also biased towards *successful* migration experiences. Because we collected data in urban areas and with families of urban migrants, we were primarily collecting information on those who were able to successfully navigate urban life. Those who gave up and returned home or opted not to go at all due to lack of adequate skills, connections, or capital are not included in the study.

3 Background

3.1 Displacement and return in the northern region

The armed conflict in northern Uganda between the LRA and Government of Uganda lasted nearly two decades and displaced over 1.8 million people – about 90% of the region's population (IOM, 2015). Displaced persons occupied 251 camps across 11 districts of northern Uganda (UNHCR, 2012). While significant displacement can be attributed to the LRA/Government of Uganda conflict, the longstanding policies that economically isolated northern Uganda exacerbated these effects. A lack of political will by the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government to proactively contain the conflict led to mass displacement across the northern regions both in rural and urban settings (Mazurana et al., 2014).

The LRA employed brutal methods against civilian communities in the north, kidnapping people as recruits or terrorising them to maintain control. The LRA targeted youth, in particular, to manipulate them into fighting and committing violence against their neighbors and families. Army soldiers were also accused of use of excessive force and of failure to adequately protect civilians (Human Rights Watch, 2005). The Ugandan Amnesty Law passed in 2000 gave LRA members an opportunity to defect from the rebels without facing prosecution. This legislation, plus military pressure and shifting conflict dynamics in southern Sudan, pushed the LRA out of Uganda in 2006. While the situation has remained peaceful in Uganda, the group has continued to operate in the Central Africa Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan.

The 2004 IDP policy is the national Ugandan legislation that created the legal framework through which Ugandan authorities registered and legally recognised IDPs with a view to their eventual return to their home areas or resettlement to other locations. The Peace, Recovery and Development Program (PRDP) in northern Uganda laid the strategic vision for post-conflict recovery in the region, with implementation beginning in 2007. However, both the IDP policy and the PRDP narrowly defined IDPs as exclusively those who lived in IDP camps or in 'protected' villages (Republic of Uganda, 2004). IDPs who settled in urban locations were labeled as economic migrants by the Government of Uganda, thereby excluding them from potential government support.

By 2011, about 74% of IDPs had returned to their rural areas of origin or resettled (Lehrer, 2013). In certain cases, civilians who were abducted by the LRA to fight

faced additional barriers to returning to their communities due to stigmatisation and rejection. Youth who were recruited as child soldiers were disproportionately affected by reintegration challenges. This was especially true for abducted female youth who returned with children born of war, as they were then unable to access land to which they were entitled as a result of social exclusion (Ekvik, 2016).

3.2 Rural-to-urban migration

Following the cessation of hostilities between the LRA and the Government of Uganda in 2006, economic recovery for ordinary citizens in the north has been slow. The quantitative SLRC, Uganda work found that, overall, access to basic services and educational opportunities remained inadequate in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions, even nearly a decade after the conflict ended (Mazurana et al., 2014). Families remain vulnerable to small shocks with potentially significant impacts, indicating that ‘recovery’ is tenuous in the north (Mallet et al., 2016; Levine, 2016).

Youth seem to be particularly marginalised and complain of receiving little government assistance following the conflict. Even though many displaced people regained access to rural land following the conflict, this did not necessarily incentivise youth to return to rural areas. Secondary data indicates that young men in particular settled in urban areas (ActionAid, 2012); young men being more likely to migrate than other demographic groups is also supported by quantitative data across the three rounds of SLRC, Uganda quantitative research. As in other contexts, social networks based on national and ethnic identities have helped to facilitate movement to urban locations (see Palloni et al., 2001; Massey and Aysa-Lastra, 2011). Migrants, displaced persons, and refugees share information on employment opportunities, accommodation and availability of basic services. These social networks can reduce the time, cost, and uncertainties associated with moving to urban areas (Osman, 2017).

Uganda’s urbanisation level increased from 22.4% in 2002 to 29.3% in 2010. In the northern region, urbanisation increased from 7.5% to 15% during this time (Osman, 2017). Higher inequality in urban areas such as Kampala is linked in part to this urban expansion because there are insufficient economic opportunities for migrants (ibid.). Data shows that the proportion of the Ugandan population working in agriculture has increased despite increased urbanisation since the early 2000s. This potential contradiction may reflect the low capacity of urban industrial and service sectors to absorb the growing supply of migrant youth, some of whom therefore continue to remain diversified into agriculture (ibid.). This report adds to these findings by illustrating that much of the Acholi youth population in cities is in flux, moving regularly between rural and urban areas.

4 Findings: themes and patterns from the data

4.1 Why do young Acholi settle in urban areas?

A broad range of factors contribute to the rural-to-urban migration of Acholi youth, including family structure, household dynamics, economic opportunities and responsibilities, competition over rural resources, the appeal of urban life, desire to access better services, and the pull of social networks. This section investigates the narratives of Acholi youth interviewed for this project, identifying commonalities and patterns across their experiences both pre- and post-migration.

4.1.1 Changes in family structures and shifting responsibilities

Changes in family structures and the responsibility to support family members emerged as common push factors for migration. Many migrants had lost one or both parents when they were young, often due to the war. Coming from a single-parent household had both economic and social consequences, with the remaining parent often struggling to cover school fees or to provide general financial support. Other migrants left because of disputes or other problems that emerged when the remaining parent re-married, particularly when mothers moved in with men who were not the fathers of the children.[3] These problems included physical violence, emotional abuse and refusal to provide support for step-children. For example, a young woman engaged in sex work in Gulu explained how her step-father's preferential treatment of his biological children had contributed to her decision to leave home:

> ***He doesn't want to see us, and he only likes the children he has produced. He was the one who paid my mother's school fees, and so whatever my mother works for, he normally takes it and uses it to pay his children's fees at school.***[4]

Many young people had left home in search of economic opportunities. This was often tied to an increase or shift in responsibility – e.g. the young person needed to provide support to aging parents or grandparents, or pay the school fees of young siblings. Relocating to urban areas was seen as the logical means of meeting these expanding responsibilities. In some instances, migrants reported that they were in urban areas in the hope of

3 Research on women engaged in sex work in Lira in northern Uganda also found that many had left their homes due to disputes with step-parents following remarriage. See Atim (2008).

4 Woman engaged in sex work, Gulu, March 1, 2018.

raising funds to continue their own education, as low educational attainment was a common characteristic of respondents. For instance, a young man working as a security guard in Gulu had taken his Senior Four exams, but had no money to continue further; he was hoping to earn enough money in town to continue with his studies.[5] In Pabbo, we met a 20-year-old woman who had moved there to attend Senior Four and live with her elder sister, who was going to pay her school fees. There was not enough money for the full fee amount, so the young woman was working in her sister's restaurant to help raise money to cover the shortfall.

4.1.2 Struggles over resources in rural areas

The struggle over resources in rural areas and/or within families was a commonly cited push factor for rural-to-urban migration, although this struggle manifested in various ways. Inadequate land access was the most frequently cited resource constraint. This was particularly common for single women and for people of either gender who had lost parents (especially fathers) during the war. The fall-out from family tussles over resources also drove people out. A 20-year old woman in Kampala explained how not only lack of land, but also the emotional and physical struggle over land with her family members, had contributed to her and her husband's decision to move to Kampala:

> ***I saw that at home, life was very difficult. There are lots of land wrangles at home. So, I wanted a place to relax our minds … When we came back from the camp, because my father had died, my uncles said that there is no land. Then they started fighting. At my husbands' home, his uncles were also struggling for land … his uncles have been saying that [his father] never married his mother, so he belongs to his mother's people.***[6]

Women in the sample faced a number of specific challenges in accessing land in rural areas, including after the demise of a marriage. For example, a 29-year old woman interviewed in Gulu had left an abusive marriage and returned to her natal home, where she had inherited land from her father. Her uncles and brother, however, obstructed her claim to this land. In a bold and relatively unusual move (at least within our sample), she took the case to court and won the right to her portion of the land. Although she had been granted legal rights to the land, she soon found that remaining in proximity to these male relatives was unbearable due to harassment, and opted to relocate to Gulu.[7]

Problems over land were not exclusive to women. Many males reported moving to urban areas because of land issues at homes. At times, these issues were disputes with neighbors or post-displacement uncertainty over property boundaries. In other cases, there was simply not enough land to share among large families. Poor agricultural yields were also a common driver of urban migration. A young man working as a gardener in Gulu explained, 'I would plant my crops, but they were not yielding. I would harvest three basins-full only, and so I decided to come and look for a job here.'[8]

Some respondents reported moving to urban areas after experiencing witchcraft in their home villages. In these cases, there was almost always an element of resource struggle involved. For instance, a young woman working in Gulu had moved to town with her immediate family in 2013 to escape witchcraft that began following a dispute between her father and uncle over land. In another case, a woman from Kitgum (a district in the Acholi sub-region) felt that her husband's siblings were directing unlucky spirits his way to prevent him from trying to claim land. Her husband had experienced a number of serious accidents in recent years, and she wanted him to keep away from his home area in order to stay safe.[9]

4.1.3 Hoping for better economic opportunities

A lack of economic opportunities in rural areas was central to the decision of many migrants to leave home. As discussed above, in many instances this was due to a specific need to support family members. In other cases, the jobs that respondents wanted to pursue simply did not

5 The question of why someone left school and/or if they wished to continue education can often elicit tailored responses. This is because it is clear to respondents that the researchers are highly educated, and hence respondents may adjust their answers to these questions to be in line with what they believe the interviewers value or find important. We have not tested this theory, but the data is consistent in this regard. For example, there are no respondents who reported that they stopped schooling because they disliked school, didn't see the value, etc. The very fact that we ask 'Why did you stop school?' indicates to respondents that we view this decision in a negative light.

6 Woman washing clothes for a living, Acholi Quarter, Kampala, 27 April 2018.

7 Woman supported by boyfriend, 28 February 2018.

8 Man working as a gardener, Gulu, 2 March 2018.

9 Woman working in petty trade and bead-making, Acholi Quarter, Kampala, 25 April 2018.

exist or the demand for services was too low in the rural areas. Examples of such professions included working as a motorcycle mechanic, in a hair salon, or as a computer technician. In some instances, respondents wanted to have the exposure and experience that they could only get in an urban centre. For example, one woman who had been working in a lodge in a national park moved to Gulu to find work in a busier hotel where she could both earn a higher salary and bolster her resume.

While aspects of life in rural areas may drive people to leave, urban locations are also appealing destinations for Acholi youth in and of themselves. In particular, aspirations for accessing the better economic opportunities available in urban areas are a strong pull factor. A female tailor in Pabbo expressed a common sentiment when asked what she had come to town to do: 'I came to look for money.'[10] Due to its size and post-war economic growth, Gulu exerts a particularly strong pull on the region. The city attracts investment as well as unskilled migrants; an established trader explained that she chose Gulu over several other cities as the best option for opening a shop.[11] Kampala has an even stronger economic appeal for those able to move a greater distance. For instance, a single mother trained as a pharmacist explained that, while she preferred living in the north, she realised that she could make a significantly higher salary working in a private clinic in Kampala. This choice would enable her to better support her children who remained at home with her mother.[12] While Kampala attracts people from all over the country, individuals with skills and an education who want to be in the north are drawn to Gulu as the most promising place for them to find work. This work, however, might not always be directly related to their skills, as evidenced by a young woman who was working as a waitress in Gulu after moving to the city in hopes of getting a job in computers in line with her qualifications.[13]

Although Gulu is the hub of the region, Pabbo is becoming known as a place with economic opportunities and lower costs of living. A 33-year old man from Lira explained that 'it was impossible even to get a house to rent' in Lira town, and that a friend told him that 'mobile money and salons were good business ventures' in Pabbo. He moved to Pabbo in 2017 and opened a barber shop, while also charging phones and working as a mobile money agent. He was happy to stay in Pabbo long-term if business continued to be good.[14] A female petty trader confirmed that starting a business in Pabbo was easy if you had the money to find a space. On the other hand, as explained by a young man working as a motorcycle mechanic, the fact that Pabbo was still 'just developing' made it difficult for those without financial capital to secure employment.[15] Overall, however, people saw promise in Pabbo. A woman engaged in smuggling cigarettes into Uganda from South Sudan described the changes she had seen in Pabbo:

> ***During the time when people were living in IDP camps, things were confused, but right now things are very organised and beautiful. There are even [permanent] buildings now … People are still not very okay financially, but they are gaining slowly slowly and I trust that in about two or three years from now, Pabbo will be a completely different place.***[16]

4.1.4 The appeal of urban life

Urban areas are also appealing to youth because they symbolise modernity and opportunity. A young woman engaged in sex work explained that she wanted to come to Gulu because of the life she saw her sister living: 'She told me that life here [in Gulu] is so easy, because every time she goes home we would see her with very beautiful things.'[17] A number of young people in the study population moved to urban centres because they found rural life unappealing. Many spent their early years in the crowded internal displacement camps, and hence were accustomed to the bustle of a more urban environment. A district official in Pabbo shared his view on this matter (and later clarified that he was referring specifically to male youth):

> ***I could say most of the youth … they are just staying within the town … the reason could be they are used to staying in the camp … most of them were born in the camp so they are used to [living in] the camp …***

10 Woman working as a tailor, Pabbo, 5 March 2018.
11 Woman with her own shop, Gulu, 26 February 2018.
12 Woman working in a private clinic, Acholi Quarter, Kampala, 24 April 2018.
13 Woman working as a waitress, Gulu, 3 March 2018.
14 Man with a barber shop, Pabbo, 5 March 2018.
15 Man working as a motorcycle mechanic and selling spare parts, Pabbo, 5 March 2018.
16 Woman working in smuggling and petty trade, Pabbo, 2 March 2018.
17 Woman engaged in sex work, Gulu, 2 March 2018.

> *very few of them are going back home [to where their family is from]. And you find that even in the town here, I could say they are doing nothing.* [18]

Some migrants expressed a distaste for farming in particular. An 18-year old woman, who was brought to Kampala by her aunt when she was four, explained her impressions of rural life on her visits home to her parents in Lamwo:

> *Interviewer: What do you think when you go there? How is it for you?*
>
> *Woman: I hate doing the garden work.*
>
> *Interviewer: What do you hate about the garden work?*
>
> *Woman: When it's hot and [when] you are harvesting, like beans and millet, sometimes it hurts you.*
>
> *Interviewer: When you went back when you were in Senior Three, did your parents want you to work in the garden the whole time?*
>
> *Woman: Yeah.*
>
> *Interviewer: Did they know that you didn't like it? Or did you keep quiet?*
>
> *Woman: I kept quiet.*[19]

The notion that youth do not like the arduous work of farming is repeated anecdotally in multiple conversations in northern Uganda. While further investigation is required to ascertain how widely held this sentiment is, the perception highlights some specific aspects of the rural dynamic in northern Uganda. Although agriculture forms the subsistence base for many households, it remains under-supported, under-valued, and considered the purview of the uneducated and the poor. Evidence from elsewhere in Africa confirms that these views are often held particularly strongly by youth (see Sumberg and Wellard, 2012). Failed or inadequate harvests contribute to poverty and encourage some migrants to seek paths that are considered more stable. However, as illustrated by this study and discussed in more depth below, many of the jobs that await urban migrants are themselves unstable and without benefits.

4.1.5 In search of better services

The services that are available in urban centres, particularly education, are a major draw for some respondents. A male youth leader in Pabbo explained that he had moved his family there from a rural parish solely 'because of the children's education ... there is nothing more important than education.'[20] Like most respondents, he felt that the schools were better in towns and cities than those in rural areas. Commonly cited differences were longer school days, better teacher attendance and better trained teachers. A number of respondents in Kampala expressed the desire to return to their rural homes but said they would not do so in the short term because they wanted their children to remain in urban schools. The vice-chairman of the Acholi Quarter neighborhood in Kampala explained that he would like to move back to the north, but the pull of educational opportunities for his children, and his younger siblings who he was also supporting, was keeping him in the capital:

> *Actually, what makes me stay here, is [my] children and ... my sisters who are still studying. One is in Kyambogo, one is in Makerere. And my children are also still studying. I'm still here because of them. Because we have quality education for those young children.*[21]

4.1.6 The pull of family and friends

Social and family connections were a major draw for people moving to urban locations. Such connections were central in helping respondents to procure employment or find accommodation. Respondents moved to urban areas to follow siblings, cousins, and husbands who had previously established themselves. Others benefitted from the generosity of aunts, uncles, or grandparents who owned houses or provided educational support in Gulu or Acholi Quarter. Respondents reported that these connections were particularly important when they first arrived in the urban area, as they often provided a safety net or base from which people were able to establish their own homes.

18 Assistance Community Development Officer, Pabbo, 2 March 2018.

19 Woman doing a catering course, Acholi Quarter, Kampala, 26 April 2018.

20 Male youth leader, Pabbo, 3 March 2018.

21 Male vice-chairman of Acholi Quarter, 24 April 2018.

4.2 What is life like for those who have moved to towns and cities?

Livelihoods in urban areas are much more diversified than in rural locations and the breadth of opportunities is one of the pull factors for youth. Respondents in this study, however, found that the available jobs in the cities were predominantly ad hoc and poorly paid, especially for women. The data shows that women also engage in a greater number of economic activities than their male counterparts. Many migrants discussed the challenges posed by the high cost of living in urban areas. When combined with the irregular work and low wages, this created a precarious situation for the more vulnerable respondents, who described making ends meet on a day-to-day basis. Coping systems included relying on social connections to secure jobs, find housing, and for support in emergencies.

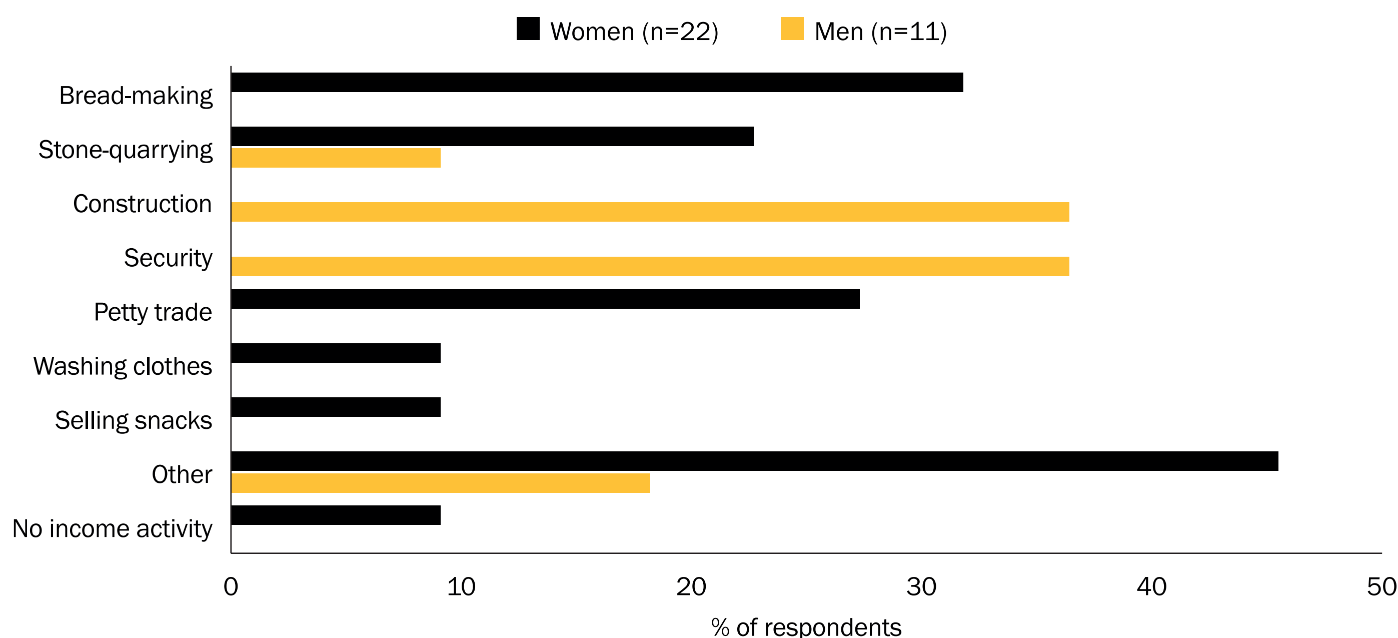
4.2.1 Variations in economic activities

Respondents in the qualitative study population engaged in a range of economic livelihood activities that generated income or in-kind payments.[22] In the Acholi Quarter, Kampala, these were primarily unskilled; the most common livelihood activity for women was bead-making, followed by petty trade and working in the stone-quarry (Figure 1). For men, construction and work in the security sector (most often as a security guard at a home or business) were the most common livelihoods.

Figure 1 illustrates several important points about livelihood activities in the Acholi Quarter. First, women were engaged, on average, in approximately one and a half livelihood activities each, while men were engaged in one activity. However, approximately half of the 22 women interviewed in Acholi Quarter listed only one or no income-generating activities. The remaining women were all engaged in two or more such activities, with some engaged in three of four. In marked contrast, while the 11 male respondents all reported some form of income-generation, they each only listed one activity.

Second, women’s livelihoods were much more diversified than men’s were, with ten out of 22 women engaged in activities not reported by others in the sample. These activities included restaurant work, domestic service, urban farming for wages, selling firewood, preparation and sale of animal hides, selling second-hand clothes and hair styling, among others. In contrast, only two men reported activities outside of construction or security work. Although the sample is small, the snapshot

Figure 1: Livelihood activities as reported by gender in the Acholi Quarter



Note: activities with two or more responses listed.

22 For the purposes of this discussion, these activities do not include unpaid domestic or reproductive duties primarily performed by women.

illustrates the extent to which women are often more diversified in their income activities than men.[23] In line with global trends, men in this sample were more likely to find jobs in the formal (or less informal) sector. These jobs offered or required more hours, if not better conditions. Men therefore have less time to diversify. In addition, women are often unable to work long hours at one job that takes them away from home given their domestic and reproductive duties. They are therefore more likely to cobble together different small-scale economic activities (Peterson, 2003).

Third, nearly all the female respondents interviewed were engaged in unskilled work, with the exception of the pharmacist and the woman pursuing her catering certificate. Men were more likely to be in semi-skilled work and to have undergone professional or on-the-job training as security guards, construction workers or factory workers.[24]

Fourth, almost all the respondents in Acholi Quarter were working in the informal sector and had no contracts, set hours, benefits or insurance. This was true not only for women working in home-based or resource-extractive activities, but also for most of the men who worked in semi-skilled positions in security and construction. In fact, some of the men we interviewed faced the most difficult conditions in regard to hours and pay. Even a contract did not necessarily improve working conditions, as was the case for a 24-year old security guard in Kampala. He had a contract and received 200,000 Ugandan Shillings (UGX) (about $54[25]) per month in salary, but had never been given a day off in the several years that he had held his job. He alternated working seven days with working seven nights.[26] A security guard at a bank in Gulu worked 10.5 hour shifts, mostly standing, and was not given breaks for meals.[27] While self-employment may seem preferable to these conditions, we found that a number of female petty traders in Acholi Quarter were not in business for themselves, but rather were paid a set amount (usually 50,000 UGX ($13) per month) to sell on produce on behalf of someone else. We did not hear of a similar pattern of female petty traders selling produce for others in Gulu and Pabbo.

As in Acholi Quarter, respondents in Gulu and Pabbo engaged in a range of livelihoods, with more women than men listing multiple activities. The most common secondary livelihood activity for respondents in Gulu and Pabbo was farming, with a number of people moving back to rural areas on a seasonal basis to farm. Others employed people to work the land at home or directed a portion of their remittances specifically towards supporting farming or livestock investments. Although less common, some respondents in Kampala were also investing in rural improvements. For instance, one man who worked as a security guard sent 60,000 UGX ($16) each month to his family to buy a goat. This was in addition to what he sent for daily expenses, school fees and emergencies.[28] Many respondents in Gulu and Pabbo were also making investments that provided direct supplementary income. For example, a man in Pabbo opened a motorcycle spare parts store and trained young men to be mechanics. They worked in front of his shop and provided a market for his spare parts. In addition, he owned a motorcycle that he leased and a speaker system which he rented out for parties or discos.[29]

4.2.2 'Everything needs money'

One of the most widely expressed difficulties of being in town was the cost of living. The top three expenses listed by nearly all respondents, though with variations in ranking, were rent, school fees, and food. Medical expenses were also a major expense, but, for most households, did not occur with the regularity of the other three. Most migrants to Gulu and Pabbo rented grass-thatched huts, while some lived in semi-permanent or permanent dwellings of one or more rooms. Rents in Gulu were consistently reported as 50,000 UGX ($13) per month for a grass-thatched hut. In Acholi Quarter, rental rates ranged from 25,000 to 180,000 UGX ($7–$49) per month, the latter being for several rooms in a house. A small number of respondents owned their own home,

23 This pattern of greater diversification for women is common in conflict settings and was also found in Dolan's 2002 study of rural Ugandan households and a Krause-Vilmar's 2011 report on refugees in Kampala. However, Smith et al. (2001) compares two rural Ugandan districts and found greater livelihood diversification among men than women.

24 As a reminder, the nature of our data collection in the Acholi Quarter means that we were likely missing workers who commuted into Kampala city centre to engage in higher-skilled professions.

25 All UGX to USD conversions in this report carried out on 18 January 2019 with rate of 0.00027 UGX to USD and rounded to the nearest whole dollar.

26 Man working as a security guard, Acholi Quarter, Kampala, 1 May 2018.

27 Man working as a security guard, Gulu, 1 March 2018.

28 Man working as a security guard, Acholi Quarter, Kampala, 1 May 2018.

29 Man with a spare parts store, Pabbo, 2 March 2018.

were living with a relative who owned the home, or were provided accommodation as part of their job. Given the high portion of a monthly income dedicated to paying rent in most instances, those who owned their own homes had a substantial financial advantage.

The high cost of living in urban areas combined with the ad hoc and poorly-paid jobs led, for many, to a precarious situation in which they were meeting economic needs on a day-to-day basis. This was particularly true for women, who often bore the brunt of providing for their families by engaging in multiple ad hoc and small-scale activities (Fantone, 2007). Ironically, many people who left rural areas in search of better opportunities, or to be free of the uncertainty inherent in farming, end up in economic situations that provide perhaps even less stability. Drawing on the work of Wood (2003), this is in line with the 'Faustian bargain' faced by many poor people, whereby the actions required to meet immediate needs – such as making enough cash to cover day-to-day urban expenses – prevent them from developing the longer-term prospects or investments that would allow them to build a more stable future.

For those who had arrived recently from a rural area or who were struggling to get by, the fact that *everything* cost money was a particular challenge. Even those who had lived in town for extended periods often lamented having to pay for food, as opposed to growing it in their gardens. A young female *boda boda* driver in Gulu, who had moved to town with her parents eight years earlier, explained:

> ***Life in town is really not easy because everything needs money, but at home in the village, you just dig and get most of the things. Others, you get for free. But here, even water you have to buy. Even toilets you have to pay for. Yeah, things are not easy in town.***[30]

A young man employed as gardener lived with relatives and didn't pay rent, but still felt burdened by the high costs of living in Gulu, particularly in comparison to village life:

> ***Man: Village life is easy.***
>
> ***Interviewer: It's easy? How?***
>
> ***Man: It is because of one thing. All the food is inside the house. All food items like beans, groundnuts and everything is in the house and garden ... But if you come to town here, number one, you need money! Even the food that is in the market, you have to buy them, including water ... Your money doesn't stay.***[31]

Most respondents sent financial support to family members in rural areas (discussed in more detail below). The amount sent home varied greatly based on the situation and needs of both the urban family and those back in the village. For example, adults who were in Kampala alone and had children or other relatives to support back home sent money regularly, and in larger amounts, than those who were supporting families in the city. People who were supporting larger families in the city and those who received irregular or minimal salaries did not send money home on a regular basis, but rather when they had some 'extra' funds on hand or when there was an emergency back home.

This report focuses on those people who have established themselves in a town, even if precariously or on a temporary basis. Those without adequate income are likely to struggle to do this and are more likely to return to the rural areas. The vice-chairman of Acholi Quarter explained that the main reason people went back home was lack of employment:

> ***In Kampala, if you don't have anything to do like work, there is no way you can support your family ... Without money to rent a house, there is no way you can stay here in Kampala. You'd rather go back home where you have free land, you dig, and you get food for feeding your family.***[32]

Economics are important components of being able to succeed in town, but such success is nearly impossible without the required social status and connections, as covered in more depth in following sections.

4.2.3 Social connections are important for life in town

We asked several questions about the type and nature of social connections that people had in towns and cities. These included: who could you turn to in an emergency (such as needing medical care in the middle of the night); who could you borrow money from if you needed it right away; and, if your friends were people you had known

30 Woman working as a *boda boda* driver, Gulu, 26 February 2018.

31 Man working as a gardener, Gulu, 2 March 2018.

32 Male vice-chairman of Acholi Quarter, 24 April 2018.

before you migrated or had met since living in town. Overall and unsurprisingly, respondents who had lived in urban areas for longer generally had more people they could turn to in an emergency. Respondents who had attended secondary school in town often had a diverse social network; this was particularly true for young people in Acholi Quarter, many of whom had friendships that cut across linguistic and ethnic lines and, in some instances, included people from Congo and South Sudan.

Respondents also formed friendships with work colleagues and these relationships at times appeared to provide an important safety net. For example, a young man working as a carpenter in Gulu explained that he and his co-workers invested in a savings group each month that provided capital for their shop but also served as pooled funds from which each could borrow as needed with 10% interest. If he needed more, he explained, 'I then borrow from my friends I work with in the workshop.'[33]

One of the most essential functions of the social network was helping people secure a job in the urban area. The presence of someone who had a job to offer, knew of a job opening, or could arrange a meeting with a potential employer was highly valuable and one of the most important economic pull factors for people moving to town. In parallel to migration patterns found elsewhere, almost all respondents in the study population who had moved to town within the past one to three years had secured their job through a connection.[34] Those who had been in town longer had often switched jobs at least once, using connections they had made once employed or once they had been living in town for some time. Finding employment through social connections was particularly common for those who had work they did on a regular basis, such as working as a security guard, mechanic, car washer, domestic helper in a home, restaurant or hotel worker, or as a sex worker. A woman who worked in a restaurant in Pabbo said it was 'easy' to find a job 'when you know someone'. On the other hand, if you didn't have a connection, 'it's not easy, you can find it, but after looking for a really long time.'[35] Ad hoc work, such as beading (in Acholi Quarter), stone-quarrying, and occasional construction or other manual jobs, were less likely to be the result of social connections. Jobs that were procured directly and through people's own initiative (as opposed to social connections) included petty trade, selling of snacks, and, in some cases, *boda boda* driving.

Relatives and friends helped with accommodation. Numerous respondents explained that they first stayed with someone they knew upon their arrival into town. For instance, a woman who had only been in Kampala for three months was living with her brother, who was supporting her and her two children via his construction job. Some respondents in the Acholi Quarter lived with family members for extended periods, but many relied on relatives only temporarily until they were able to acquire their own space. This ranged from a period of one month to a year or longer. In some instances, a relative gave them the financial incentive or assistance that they needed to get set up on their own. For example, a 20-year old woman who worked selling snacks had lived with her aunt for one month when she first arrived in Acholi Quarter. Then, she explained, 'My aunty gave me 10,000 [UGX ($3)] and told me to find a way of increasing the money so that I can rent my own place and survive.'[36] The young woman had used this money as start-up capital for her business and was making 8,000–15,000 UGX ($2–$4) per day and paying 25,000 UGX ($7) per month for her own space.

4.3 How connected are young urban dwellers to their places of origin?

Most of the respondents interviewed in Gulu, Pabbo and Acholi Quarter had economic, livelihood, and social or emotional connections to their place of origin. The extent and degree of these connections varied by age, extent of time living in the urban environment, and circumstances surrounding their departure from their rural home. Regardless of the extent of the connection, the rural home and place of origin loomed large in people's minds; this was the case even for some interviewees in Acholi Quarter who had not been home in years and even for some who had been born in Kampala.

4.3.1 Variations in economic ties to home

As discussed above, most respondents dedicated a portion of their income to remittances to support relatives at home. These funds were often transferred via one of the mobile phone-based transfer services (often called 'mobile

33 Man working as a carpenter, Gulu, 7 March 2018.

34 Much has been written on the role of social and ethnic capital in regards to economic and social integration of migrants and refugees. See, for instance, van Meeteren et al. (2009); Danzer and Ulku (2011); and Drever and Hoffmeister (2008).

35 Woman working in a restaurant, Pabbo, 3 March 2018.

36 Woman making and selling snacks, Acholi Quarter, 27 April 2018.

money’ in Uganda, after the popular MTN service). At times, an intermediary (such as a neighbor or other relative) received and delivered funds sent via mobile money if the recipient did not have a mobile phone. People in Gulu and Pabbo who made regular visits to their home areas were more likely to carry money and other goods with them than to use transfer services. Improvements to the main roads in the north in the past decade have significantly decreased travel times to many areas, thereby improving rural-urban linkages. For example, a man working as a gate keeper at a house in Gulu went home weekly to see his family and to check on his garden in Koch Goma in Nwoya District, taking salt, sugar, soap, and money with him. He would return to Gulu with food for his own consumption.[37] This arrangement has more in common with the model of split-household urban commuter than an urban migrant and is one of the many ways that the economic and social landscape in northern Uganda has shifted in the post-conflict period.[38] Among the study population, men in particular were more likely to be working in the urban areas on a weekly or daily basis, while their wives and children stayed in the rural area and farmed. As also found in a study in northern Karamoja in 2014, this split household model is unlikely to work for the most vulnerable, as it requires a certain amount of capital to support livelihoods in two locations, such as money to rent in town while maintaining a rural home, enough human capital at home to farm the land, appropriate skills to engage in profitable urban-based activities, and adequate funds for transportation back and forth (Stites et al., 2014).

The frequency and amount of money sent home varied based on the type of work an individual had in the urban area and the needs of those at home. For example, when asked if she sent money home, a female pharmacist in Acholi Quarter who had two young girls (one of whom was disabled) living at home with her mother replied, ‘Of course I have to give them the assistance, that’s why I’m here!’[39] She sent money once a month via mobile money, and also occasionally sent commodities such as soap, sugar, beans, and clothing via bus. Others sent money sporadically and when they were able to, such as a man working as a security guard who reported that he had not sent any money home in the previous year.[40]

Family dynamics, gender roles, and birth order also played a role in transfers to the home area. A man working as a barber in Pabbo explained that because he was the first-born in his family, he was responsible for paying school fees for his younger siblings. He added, ‘Actually, I am responsible for doing everything at home.’[41] The allocation of remittances specifically to school was common across the data, reflecting a nationwide pattern. Some of the mobile phone carriers now offer an option to provide direct payment to schools via mobile money. Studies undertaken from 2005–2008 showed that between one-quarter and one-third of recipients of remittances in Uganda used the funds primarily for educational purposes (the majority used the funds for consumption) (Ngugi and Sennoga, 2011).

The economic exchange also operated in the reverse direction. Many respondents received food from rural relatives, especially in the post-harvest period. This was cited more frequently by those in Pabbo and Gulu than by those living in Acholi Quarter. The receipt of these items could be helpful in times of hardship – a young woman in Acholi Quarter explained, ‘if we are badly off, my mother can also send something’[42] – but were often sent as gifts from the harvest, as a taste from home (many reported receiving *odii,* a groundnut or sesame paste), or as a token of affection within the family: ‘Small, small things. For their happiness, the family gives to you, or the clan [gives to you].’[43] Some urban respondents also received cash from family members back home, especially when they were first getting established in town or in response to emergencies. For example, a young woman who had been in Gulu for less than a year and was working as a waitress had received money twice from her mother.[44]

Many respondents felt unable to adequately support relatives back home. Those who move to a city –

37 Man working as gate keeper, Gulu, 5 March 2018. Travel from Gulu town to Koch Goma in Nwoya (home to a number of respondents) previously took approximately one hour by *boda boda* or vehicle compared to 15 to 20 minutes after the road was paved in the past two to three years.

38 For an overview of literature, see Ouma Owuor (2006) and Evidence Facility: Horn of Africa.” Accessed March 29, 2018. https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresearch/2017/08/29/rural-to-urban-migration-of-refugees-in-uganda/

39 Woman working in a private clinic, Acholi Quarter, Kampala, 24 April 2018.

40 Man working as a security guard, Acholi Quarter, Kampala, 27 April 2018.

41 Man working with a barber shop, Pabbo, 5 March 2018.

42 Woman working in petty trade and bead-making, Acholi Quarter, Kampala, 25 April 2018.

43 Woman working in a private clinic, Acholi Quarter, Kampala, 24 April 2018.

44 Woman working as a waitress, Gulu, 3 March 2018.

particularly larger areas such as Gulu or Kampala – are often assumed by those who were left behind to be doing well. This can increase requests for support and creates pressure upon those who have migrated. Some respondents reported being regularly asked for money or feeling obligated to provide assistance even when they were not in a position to do so. For instance, a young woman who had recently arrived in Acholi Quarter said, 'They ask for money for farming, and money for school fees for some other children there, but I tell them that I earn very little.'[45] Others expressed a sense of helplessness at not being able to do more, as with a woman selling snacks in Acholi Quarter: 'If I could I would send for them every month, but since I don't have [anything] I send after every three or four months.'[46]

While many urban dwellers only provide ad hoc support to rural relatives, others regularly pay school fees or support elderly parents. Some, particularly those with steady work, are able to make a more consistent contribution to rural livelihoods. For example, a young man working as a carpenter in Gulu explained that while he sent commodities (such as soap and sugar) to his immediate relatives in Nwoya District, he often also provided cash loans to members of his extended family. These requests normally came around planting time and his relatives would repay him after the harvest.[47]

4.3.2 Maintaining livelihood linkages when possible

Migrants used remittances and exchanges of commodities to maintain ties to relatives in rural areas. In addition, many people in the study also actively maintained their own livelihood ventures in rural areas. These respondents fall into three broad (although not mutually exclusive) categories:

1. Those who had immediate family members remaining in the village engaged in farming. These can be thought of as a split-household model.
2. Those who saw their time in town as open-ended but were also making ongoing livelihood investments in their rural places of origin. Such investments differed from ongoing financial support for expenses such as school fees or subsistence costs, although those in this category were normally also covering such recurring costs.
3. Those who were working in town on a temporary basis with the specific aim of raising funds for livelihood improvements back home. For these respondents, working in town served as a means to a clear and specific end.

Overall, the three above categories apply primarily to *male* migrants who were either in town on their own or with dependents. Female migrants were more likely to be in town with their husbands, because of a collapse of family support systems, or as a last resort to provide for family members (normally children) back at home.

The first category – split households – has been discussed. In the second category, livelihood investments in rural areas included primarily agrarian activities or natural resource extraction. Some respondents were dedicating a specific portion of their urban wages to invest in building a house or to purchase land, livestock, or other agricultural inputs. A young security guard who had been working in Kampala for four years was sending 50–60,000 UGX ($13–$16) home each month specifically to buy a goat, as well as 20,000 UGX ($5) for general support for his relatives. At the time of the interview, he had a herd of 18 goats, though explained that he would have had more but some had been sold to cover emergencies among his family members.[48]

Other respondents were investing in farming or resource-extractive businesses in rural areas, such as brick-making.[49] A man based in Gulu was involved in multiple livelihood ventures, including *boda boda* driving and leasing, and ran a brick-making enterprise in his home area during the dry season. He hired teenagers to do the work while on school holiday, and the sale of bricks often amounted to his greatest source of annual income. In addition, he purchased five acres of farmland in a different area to his place of origin and hired workers to farm it for him.[50]

Included in this second category are migrants who see the city as their primary residence but still dedicate a portion of their own labour to rural livelihood activities,

45 Woman who had recently arrived, Acholi Quarter, Kampala, 25 April 2018.
46 Woman selling snacks, Acholi Quarter, Kampala, 24 April 2018.
47 Man working as a carpenter, Gulu, 7 March 2018.
48 Man working as a security guard, Acholi Quarter, Kampala, 30 April 2018.
49 Brick-making is an extractive industry due to the large amounts of clay and firewood that go into the production of bricks. See Francis (2000) and Sheldon et al. (2013).
50 Man working as a *boda boda* driver, Gulu, 26 February 2018.

most commonly seasonal agriculture (reported by both men and women). The extent of time dedicated to farming depended on distance, viability of agriculture, and available time. Some move back and forth regularly to balance livelihood activities and responsibilities in both locations, such as a young mother engaged in petty trade in Gulu. During the rainy season, she would go home to Koch Goma every other week for one week at a time, and then return to Gulu the next week to sell produce by the roadside and look after the house and children.[51] Other respondents went home on a seasonal basis to cultivate the garden, as was the case for a young man working as a carpenter in Gulu, who went home to nearby Nwoya District for two to four weeks each year to work in the garden.[52] Some people shifted their place of residence and livelihood seasonally, such as a young man who had worked as a mechanic and welder in Gulu for the past two years, but only during the dry season. He returned to his village each year to plant crops and stayed for the remainder of the rainy season to work in the gardens. He explained the dual purpose of this model, saying that in town you ‘look for money and you buy seeds’ before going home to plant.[53] In each of these cases, people considered the town to be their primarily place of residence.

Men in the third category, those working in town on a temporary basis, mostly had a clear and specific purpose for being in town. Most planned to leave the town upon achieving their stated purpose. For example, a man in Gulu had arrived three months earlier and had found a job delivering goods via wheelbarrow. He has a wife and four children back in Namokora sub-county in Kitgum, and explained that he came to Gulu with very specific goals:

> ***When I came, I had a plan. When I achieve this plan, I will go back to Namokora … Actually, I have two plans – first, I want to get two oxen for farming. Second, I want to get a motorcycle. But the oxen are the main plan.***[54]

He has set himself six months to meet this goal and estimates that to do so he must save 10,000 UGX ($3) per day. He earns approximately 20,000 UGX ($5) per day, and the portion he does not save goes to cover rent for his room, rent for the wheelbarrow, wheelbarrow association fees and food.

4.3.3 Social and emotional connections as a safety net

A key finding from this study was the extent and depth of the social and emotional connections between urban residents and their rural places of origin. These often overlapped with economic and family ties, and were reinforced through the exchange of remittances, food and other commodities. Importantly, almost all of the respondents interviewed in urban areas had either immediate household members (spouse or children) or close family (such as siblings or parents) living in rural areas. Very few respondents described a situation in which the entire family had relocated. The presence of close relatives and immediate family members in the rural areas means that, for many, the social connections are deep, and these connections are maintained with regular visits and phone calls between family members. Those with better-paying jobs (such as a hotel worker at a good hotel in Gulu) were able to afford more regular calls and might talk to their absent family members daily.[55] Otherwise, respondents generally reported talking to immediate family members once a week and close family approximately once a month.

Regular visits to the rural homes were important to social connections. Not surprisingly, the frequency of visits depended on distance, with respondents living in Kampala making the journey home less often than those in Gulu or Pabbo. Although it was a challenge for respondents in Kampala to make regular visits home, many reported that they sent their children back to their home villages for the Christmas school holidays. For instance, a woman selling snacks in Acholi Quarter had not been able to afford the trip home herself for three years but sent her children north every December: ‘I always make them go to the village even if I’m not going.’[56] Numerous other respondents in Acholi Quarter sent their children north for the holidays when they could afford it.

The practice of sending children north for the holidays speaks to the strong emotional ties between many

51 Woman working in petty trade, Gulu, 27 February 2018.

52 Man working as a carpenter, Gulu, 7 March 2018.

53 Man working as a mechanic and welder, Gulu, 7 March 2018.

54 Man working pushing wheel barrows, Gulu, 27 February 2018.

55 Woman working in a hotel, Gulu, 7 March 2018.

56 Woman selling snacks, Acholi Quarter, Kampala, 24 April 2018.

respondents and their rural place of origin. It also highlights an economic support relationship, in that the rural relatives serve as childcare for working urban parents. These connections were particularly apparent among respondents in Acholi Quarter. Many in the Acholi Quarter – especially those who had been in the city for an extended period – described their ethnically diverse social circles. Many had not been home to the Acholi sub-region in years. However, when asked if their children thought of themselves as being Acholi, Kampalan or something else, all respondents replied that they were raising their children to consider themselves Acholi. For example, the vice-chairman of Acholi Quarter, who himself had been living in Kampala since being brought there by his parents 28 years earlier, explained that his children were 'Acholi children, not city children'.[57] This sentiment of 'being Acholi' was not only something cultivated in children through visits to the north, but was also a sentiment among respondents who rarely go home themselves. One young man who had been born in Kampala and had gone to the north only once as a child, called Kitgum his 'home'. He explained that his mother 'taught me a lot: I am not from here. I am from the north.' When asked about his aspirations for the future, he expressed his desire to 'be a man who has a family with my wife' and to 'go back home' to Kitgum, a place he has never lived and barely seen.[58]

A number of respondents living in urban centres reported that some or all of their children lived in the rural area. In most cases, this arrangement further strengthened the social and emotional connections to these rural locations. This was most commonly reported by single women, whether widowed, divorced, separated, or single parents. While some males in the study also had children at home, the female partner was, in most cases, back with the children as well. Reasons for women to be separated from their children varied, but included economic considerations, loss of custody, family pressure, or a decision based on what seemed to be best for the child or children. These arrangements were at times temporary – or intended to be temporary – such as in the case of a separated woman who had recently arrived in Acholi Quarter and left her two children in the north with her brother. She explained, 'I still don't have the capacity to bring [my children] to Kampala, so for now they will have to stay in Omot.'[59] In other instances, single women came to urban locations on their own specifically in order to make enough money to support children who remained behind.[60] Raising children in the city is costlier than in rural areas, and this dictated the decision of some women to leave their children behind in the village. Some married couples sent their children to rural areas for similar reasons.

Some female respondents had sent children to live in rural areas at the request or urging of other family members. One woman had been brought to Kampala as a child by an uncle during the war, while her elder brother stayed behind in the north. Now married with five children, she explained that her brother had urged her to send her first-born to live with him in Agoro. The woman sent the girl, now age 12, to live with her brother when she was only three years old. She has not seen her daughter since.

> ***Interviewer: Why did he want you to send the child?***
>
> ***Woman: Because he wanted to take care of the child like he would have taken care of me.***
>
> ***Interviewer: How often do you see this child?***
>
> ***Woman: Since the day they took the child I haven't seen her.***
>
> ***Interviewer: So, you haven't seen her since she was three?***
>
> ***Woman: Yes.***
>
> ***Interviewer: How do you feel about that?***
>
> ***Woman: I feel the pain in my heart, but I don't have money. I want to try to save and go this December to see her.***[61]

57 Vice-chairman of Acholi Quarter, Kampala, 24 April 2018.

58 Man working construction, Acholi Quarter, Kampala, 27 April 2018. This young man explained that his mother had returned to the north occasionally over the years, but that she had actively discouraged him and his younger half-sister from making the journey. He suspected that this was because his mother had seen four of her children die from disease in Kitgum prior to moving to Kampala, and she feared that her two surviving children (both of whom were born in Kampala) would be cursed if they were to travel to the north. Despite this, she raised them with a strong sense of their Acholi ethnicity, and to understand that their 'home' was in the north.

59 Woman working making beads, new arrival, Acholi Quarter, 26 April 2018.

60 Woman working in a private clinic, Acholi Quarter, Kampala, 24 April 2018.

61 Woman working making beads, Acholi Quarter, 26 April 2018.

Loss of custody of children following divorce or separation is common for women in Uganda, and a handful of female respondents reported that they were unable to see their children who lived in rural areas with their fathers or other relatives (International Federation for Human Rights, 2012). This forced separation often contributed to a severing of ties with rural areas, the topic of the next section.

4.3.4 What about those with weak connections?

While most respondents either visited their rural homes on a regular basis or expressed a desire to do so, a subset of study participants had weak or non-existent ties to their place of origin. Almost entirely female, some had been pushed out of rural areas after struggles over land. The young woman mentioned earlier who had left home due to harassment from male relatives, even after winning her land in court, had been seeking land after the collapse of an abusive marriage. At the time of our interview, she had no ties to her natal home and no contact with her two children who were in the custody of her ex-husband. She saw the children 'only in my dreams.'[62] She reported no livelihood activities and said she was being supported entirely by her boyfriend, a solider stationed in the nearby barracks with a wife and children of his own back home in Lira District. This woman's situation may have been particularly precarious due to her economic dependence on her boyfriend, but her story contains patterns that were evident across the experiences of other mostly female respondents who had weak ties to their home areas. These patterns include abusive inter-personal relationships, whether with male partners, parents, step-parents or in-laws; unsuccessful attempts to access land; and loss of connection to immediate family members.

Some respondents, such as the woman discussed above, had weak connections to rural area and relatives by no choice of their own. Others, however, did not want to be in touch with those at home. This was the case for several young female respondents engaged in sex work. They sought to limit information about their lives from reaching their home areas to protect their family members and also to preserve their reputations. For instance, a young woman and her sister who both engaged in sex work in Gulu told their grandmother that they sell shoes to make money. They also kept their address a secret so as to prevent unexpected visitors from home.[63] While these women sought to limit what those at home knew about their urban lives, it was often the circumstances at home that pushed these respondents to leave initially. Although the sample is small, the narratives include patterns of being orphaned at an early age or of suffering abuse or neglect.[64] For instance, a young woman who had been engaged in sex work in Gulu described how her step-father refused to cover any expenses for the children born from her mother's previous marriages. The girl and her sister left home after the step-father attempted to rape her sister. She had not had contact with her mother in four years and did not know where her biological father was living.[65]

Some respondents had inadvertently lost contact with rural family members. An adolescent girl working as a domestic servant in Gulu had been in town for two weeks and had no contact with anyone in her family. Her father was deceased, and her mother was living with her new husband in Kotido. The girl explained that her mother sent her to Gulu to work because she was not in school, although the girl said she preferred to be in the village caring for her grandmother. She had no phone and had lost a piece of paper containing contact numbers. At the time of the interview she was extremely homesick, sad, and lonely. She did not feel she could share her feelings with her employer, who had told her not to socialise in Gulu and to focus on her work.[66] Being a new arrival into Gulu may have exacerbated the sense of isolation of this young girl, but similar vulnerabilities for young women without strong connections to their rural homes were a common pattern across the data.

4.4 What do rural relatives think about urban migration?

We sought to understand the perspective of rural family members who had one or more relatives living in an urban area. Not surprisingly, experiences varied widely and depended on personal relationships, duration of separation, type of work performed by the migrant, and frequency of remittances, visits, or other forms

62 Woman supported by boyfriend, Gulu, 28 February 2018.

63 Woman engaged in sex work, Gulu, 2 March 2018.

64 Research on women engaged in sex work in Lira town showed similar patterns. See Atim (2018).

65 Woman engaged in sex work, Gulu, 1 March 2018.

66 Woman working as a domestic servant, Gulu, 27 February 2018. Recognising her vulnerability, the study team helped the girl (at her request) to connect with an aunt who was living in Gulu town.

of exchange. Overall, those households who received regular support from their migrant relative viewed the migrant and the process of migration more favourably. In general, the migrant was either seen as making a positive contribution to the sending household's wellbeing and/or the lack of economic options in the home area was viewed as an understandable reason for migration. A smaller number of rural respondents, who had limited or no contact with their urban-dwelling relative, expressed annoyance at the situation.

Views also differed within households, depending on the relationship of the individual to the migrant. For example, the mother of a young man was resentful that he did not send money, but it turned out that he was providing regular remittances to his wife who lived in the same household as his mother. The mother reported, 'When he is coming home he buys soap and sugar, but when he is going back he gives me five thousand [UGX ($1)] only.' When asked how much he sent to this wife (who had recently given birth), the mother replied, 'I don't really [know]. Because it becomes very difficult to know otherwise they will think that I want to take authority over my son's money.'[67]

We also asked the migrants themselves what their relatives back home thought about them living in town. Most respondents in Gulu and Pabbo said that their relatives viewed it positively because they were receiving support and/or it was a joint decision as to what was best for the family. For example, a man working as a gate keeper in Gulu explained that he waited to contact his family until he had a decent job. When he did, he explained to them, 'This work is not mine alone, it is for all of us. Because if there is any help needed I will give you also.' After this they blessed him and his work.[68] A number of respondents in Acholi Quarter had been in the city for a longer period and had moved during or immediately following the conflict in the north. For this segment of the study population, living in the urban area was no longer something that was weighed as positive or negative – it was a long-standing fact of life.

Some female respondents described potential social ramifications accrued by living in urban areas, particularly if they worked in a bar, hotel, or restaurant, as these occupations are often assumed to be linked to sex work (Atim, 2018). A young woman working as a waitress in Gulu reported that her mother feared that she was not safe working at night and in a place where people were drinking.[69] A woman working in a restaurant in Pabbo knew that her relatives and others in the village held assumptions about what she was doing in town. She explained that this was specifically because she was working in a restaurant, and that this would not hold true if she had a job in an office or a non-governmental organisation. She explained, 'They are seeing that you are not even educated, and the only thing you can do is prostitution.'[70]

4.5 What are people's longer term hopes and aspirations?

Overwhelmingly, urban respondents stated that they wanted to return to their rural homelands. This was the case for respondents in Gulu and Pabbo as well as those in Acholi Quarter. Timeframes for such a move differed, with some migrants describing imminent plans to return home and others stating that it would take place 'when they were old' or 'when the children finished school.' Importantly, many of those who expressed a desire to move 'home' in the short term had been living in an urban area for an extended period, and such plans may have been more aspirational than realistic.

Some respondents explained that they wanted to settle in the rural north but not in their original village. This was particularly the case for those who had been unable to access land in their place of origin or who had experienced abuse; most of the respondents in this category were female. A few respondents, mostly better-off and relatively well-established, said that they wanted to stay in town but to own property in the village and visit on a regular basis. Lastly, the sample contained a handful of respondents who had no intention of returning home. A young woman engaged in sex work in Gulu, for instance, was happy to have disposable income and to be enjoying life. She had no aspirations of returning to rural life.[71]

67 Woman with son working in Kampala, Paicho Sub-county, Gulu District, 6 March 2018.

68 Man working as gate keeper, Gulu, 5 March 2018.

69 Woman working as a waitress, Gulu, 7 March 2018.

70 Woman working in a restaurant, Pabbo, 2 March 2018.

71 Woman engaged in sex work, Gulu, 2 March 2018.

5 Conclusions and next steps

The majority of Acholi migrants interviewed for this study moved to urban areas in search of economic opportunities. While many had made lives for themselves in the cities, ties to rural areas were deep and strong for most respondents. Many expressed their financial obligations to relatives back home, and a number explained that they were in the urban area with the sole purpose of providing for their families. Split-households were common, as was seasonal or regular movement between urban and rural areas. Economic exchanges – in both directions – were frequent, with differences based mainly on household demographics and finances. Policymakers and programmers should recognise the dynamic nature of households and the mobility of individual household members, whether on a monthly, seasonal, or more ad hoc basis. These trends have potential implications for the design of rural development programs, urban planning projections, and service delivery.

Livelihood activities in urban areas are diverse, particularly for women, but most jobs are primarily un-skilled, ad hoc, and poorly paid. Job security and opportunities for career advancement are nearly non-existent. However, most migrants said that they would encourage friends or family members in rural areas to move to the city. The promise of wage labour is compelling, despite the poor quality of available employment. While the allure of the town is strong, most migrants in the study population were seeking to retain a foothold in farming or other rural endeavors.

The implications of these findings for national and international programming and interventions are significant. Urban areas will continue to expand, and services – particularly education – need to expand in response to these needs. Importantly, parents are weighing the quality and affordability of education for their children in their decisions about moving to or from urban areas. Interventions should continue to improve the quality of, and access to, both urban and rural schools to allow families the greatest flexibility and range of options.

Respondents in urban areas are making decisions about migration, employment, and duration of time in municipalities based not only on themselves but also on the needs and expectations of family members back home. Relatives of migrants generally expressed support for the move to urban centres, primarily because they recognised that there were limited economic opportunities in the rural areas. Most migrants confirmed that they had support from their families back home. An exception to this was women who worked in the service industry, who

sought to prevent their families from knowing what work they did due to its negative associations. Unsurprisingly, the same was true for women engaged in sex work, who were either estranged from their rural families or successful in keeping their work a secret.

While economic networks and skills are important for life in urban areas, social networks and connections appear to be even more important for many people. People used their urban social networks to get jobs, find housing, borrow money, take goods and money back home, and cope with emergency situations. Social networks extending back to rural areas were an important source of emotional support, and remittances of cash, food, and other commodities regularly flowed along these channels. A sizable proportion of migrants used urban earnings to pay school fees for one or more family members. Interventions often measure outcomes in terms of skills learned or incomes improved. This study implies that what people do with their money or skills – who they help, support, and educate – is potentially an even more important outcome than personal skill acquisition or income growth.

Key differences exist between males and females in the sampled respondents. Overall, women worked more jobs in poorly-paid, less-skilled, and less formalised sectors. Men were more likely to have jobs that provided training, and to work more hours in a single and often better-paying activity. In addition, the range of ‘acceptable’ livelihood activities are constrained by gender, with women who find work in the service sector having to defend their reputations back home and among relatives. Interventions should seek to analyse the influence of social expectations and repercussions in the type of work people engage in. Taking this analysis into account, interventions should aim to improve the quality of work and levels of pay for both women and men.

Another important gender difference relates to vulnerability. The most vulnerable in the study population were women who did not have ties to their rural home or kin. Other respondents sought to balance support networks across rural and urban settings, but these women had no ability to fall back on rural food stocks, to send children home to relatives, or to move back to a village if things became too difficult in town. Given their lack of connections to rural households and their often-marginalised positions in urban areas, these women are the most likely to struggle to access services, social safety nets, and sustainable economic opportunities.

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Cover photo: In the Acholi Quarter, Kampala, the most common livelihood activity for women was bead-making.
Annika McGinnis/reachoutmbuya.wordpress.com

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