Aid under contestation: public works, labour and community based food security programming in post-conflict northern Uganda

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Introduction

After a period of intense conflict and displacement prior to 2006, households in northern Uganda are facing the challenge of rebuilding their livelihoods upon returning to their homesteads. Most aid programmes and government services that support this process are focusing on food security. They typically favour projects that aim to support livelihoods while simultaneously creating the infrastructure for development through public works. Seeds and other agricultural support are made available to communities in exchange for labour for public works.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) (FAO et al., 2012 p29) argue that for 'agricultural growth to include the poor, to reduce hunger and promote poverty reduction, it should utilise the assets typically owned by the poor.' They further state that 'in all cases, the poor own their own labour, and in some cases this is all they own'(ibid. p29) - a logic used to inform many food security development interventions that build on labour contributions, often in the form of Public Works (PWs).

Promoting food security in combination with public works is a standard formula in post-conflict scenarios. In Pader district, northern Uganda, at the time of research (between 2009 and 2012), over fifteen actors including international and national Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), United Nations agencies, community and church-based organisations were implementing projects with a focus on food security. They included elements of public works, and participants in the programme thus had to contribute labour. The assumption that poor people in post-conflict conditions have labour available often goes untested. This chapter focuses on this assumption and looks closely at how labour considerations shaped the responses to one food security programme in Pader.

Using a unique methodology that combined interactive research with recurrent household and thematic interviews over sixteen months, we analysed how people rebuild their lives during a return process. The ways in which people respond to food security interventions was one of the aspects we followed. In addition, we implemented a case study of a food security intervention on the part of a Dutch NGO that formed farmer groups to organize labour parties working on road construction in exchange for vouchers and money to buy seeds. As the years went by, increasing numbers of participants opted out of the programme and this paper examines the reasons for this. As part of the investigation we analysed the ways in which policy paradigms about food security shaped the form and content of the food security intervention.

The chapter first highlights our theoretical perspective, bringing together paradigms on food security with parallel approaches to humanitarian aid. The next section on methodology is followed by an introduction to the study area. We then go into the details of the programme and how it was implemented, focussing on the

dynamics that revolved around it. The chapter ends with a concluding analysis that also draws out the implications for practice.

Changing food security, public works paradigms and humanitarian aid: a theoretical perspective

The discussion on food security, public works and labour is relevant in conflict–affected areas such as northern Uganda, where either during displacement or return processes, humanitarian assistance is a key feature of people's everyday life. Conflict-affected areas are often characterised by wicked problems where complex factors interplay, such as disrupted rural livelihoods, high levels of vulnerability, weak state institutions and large gaps in service delivery. This means large groups of people are exposed to increased uncertainties in access to food over a considerable period of time.

After receiving little policy attention for several decades, food security has reappeared prominently on international and national policy agendas. We can observe two diverging views on food security. The first emphasises the economic value of food and increased production, and that rural *farmers* should be supported to integrate and produce for markets (AGRA, 2009). This approach calls for investment and initiative to improve productivity with new and improved inputs. There is an implicit push for large-scale commercialisation, standardisation and modernisation of agriculture of the type envisaged by the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (McMichael and Schneider, 2011). The second paradigm argues that rural communities are not well placed to take advantage of the highly discriminatory markets which entrench inequalities. In this view, *peasants* are regarded as part of the rural countryside where the right of nations and people to control their own food systems and markets is central (Wittman et al., 2010).

Both views are recognisable in post-conflict scenarios. The push for improvement in agricultural production and productivity is part of the commercialisation agendas that increasingly dominate in post-conflict contexts. However, especially in the first years after conflict, approaches to food security are predominantly geared towards small-scale producers, and focused on household self-sufficiency. At the same time, food security programming in these contexts is imbued with language and objectives of the importance of community ownership, participation and people's counterpart contribution to food security and other development related interventions. Aid programming often emphasizes that individuals and communities should be in charge of their own recovery and development, sometimes with explicit reference to the so-called dependency syndrome that is assumed to have crept into aid-society relations during the years of relief.

Humanitarian programming has generally seen a push towards more integrated and comprehensive approaches as part of the shift from temporary relief to recovery. This means that the primary objective of providing services to vulnerable populations is overlaid by objectives about production, infrastructure, re-starting basic services and societal organisation. At the heart of this integration and amalgamation of objectives (such as infrastructure developments and improving production) and values (such as public participation and ownership) is the rise of Public Works (PWs). There is a tendency among donors to consider this 'volunteer work' as the main yardstick for measuring local communities' contribution and commitment to post-conflict reconstruction projects (Hickey and Kothari, 2008).

The contribution to Public Works (PWs) is used as a standard measure of a community's ownership and willingness to contribute to development projects as part of

the participation rhetoric (White, 1996). Ownership is put forward as a means to ensure sustainable development and peace building even in fragile and post-conflict contexts (Donais, 2009). McCord (2012) argues that the interest in PWs among governments, the international development community and humanitarian organisations is due to their potential to address diverse concerns simultaneously. She mentions they can 'not only address basic consumption needs but also contribute, directly or indirectly, to tackling the challenge of unemployment at both household and aggregate levels, thereby addressing the key current challenges of promoting productivity, growth, and stability, while also promoting graduation and preventing 'dependency' i.e. to graduate out of poverty and away from ongoing reliance on state support (ibid. p1).

As the quote from the FAO report in the introduction illustrates, the underlying assumption of PWs is the availability of labour. This paper aims to review this assumption in the case of post-conflict northern Uganda. It brings out how the different paradigms of food security play out in the region, and zooms in on one of the food security programmes to understand people's – often negative – responses to these programmes.

Methods

We used an ethnographic-interactive methodology to undertake the research. Interactive research refers to collaborative research practices shaped through dialogue and interactions between the researcher, staff from aid agencies and/or the community that is studied. Thus research relationships and knowledge are co-produced and continually negotiated between researchers and research subjects (Van der Haar et al., 2013). These arrangements include some form of collaboration and participatory elements but also misunderstandings and disagreements. Interactive research does not always translate into fully-shared ownership of the research or its findings. In this case, our study was negotiated and shaped in practice with a Dutch aid agency's Food Security Programme (FSP) which is the subject of study in this paper. It entailed 'following' its on-going community based food security and agriculturally based livelihood interventions in Pader District, northern Uganda.

Ethnography includes mixed or multiple data collection methods. Data were collected using a questionnaire survey in March 2011 in two villages in one sub-county. Wii Lungoyi[1] was a 'new' village i.e. 2011 was the first year they participated in the FSP. The second village - Wil pii Ngora[2] was 'old' and 2011 was the second year in which the programme was implemented in the village. In total, we captured 121 households in the survey and thirty households were purposely chosen for recurrent qualitative in-depth household visits. The selection criteria included a diverse number of factors, including participation in aid and government projects, return phase and movement patterns back home. Regular follow-up visits were used to capture events in households as they happened using a semi-structured interview guide. This part of the visit always covered the same topics. In addition, every visit dealt with a specific theme (e.g. conflict experience). In total we carried out 206 visits among the case study households plus numerous informal interviews and household visits with other families in the study district.

The general characteristics of the 121 survey and 29 households that were studied in depth are summarised in Table 1 below. One household became increasingly difficult to find. Of the other 28 cases, 15 households were participating in the FSP and the rest were non-participating households. The intention was not to compare but to

understand the dynamics within different households. Data from the two villages were validated during meetings and discussions held in other villages, the neighbouring sub-county and broadly in the district. The major strength of our methodology, combining quantitative methods with systematic ethnographic enquiry, is that it allowed us to witness the nature, dynamics and processes within households over sixteen months, thus capturing events which could easily be lost when using a single visit or less structured methodology.

<TABLE 1 HERE>

Study location and the farming system

Pader District is located in northern Uganda. It emerged as the battleground during the later years of the complex war between the Lord's Resistance Army/Movement and the Government of Uganda. Violence became a part of everyday life, and the results were catastrophic.

The main feature of the conflict was forced displacement into camps of over 90 per cent of the 326,338 inhabitants of the district. This happened in two major waves: in October/November 1997-1999 and 2001- 2002. A 2005 study found that on almost all indicators related to service provision, infrastructure and security, Pader camps scored worse than neighbouring districts (Boas and Hatløy, 2005). Recently, many of these households were able to return to their villages, escaping the extremely poor living conditions in and around the camps, but facing additional structural challenges related to land.

Pader is inhabited by the Acholi sub-ethnic group who are traditionally mixed smallholder farmers (Atkinson, 1989), heavily dependent on very labour-intensive agriculture and unpredictable rainfall. Crops grown include finger millet and sorghum as staples and small-scale production of maize, sweet potatoes, cassava, cow and pigeon pea, beans, sesame, groundnuts and vegetables. Cash crop farming (cotton and tobacco) was traditionally integrated into the production cycle and did not compete with food production (Martiniello, 2013). Currently, a few households own cattle and small animals, having lost most to raids in late 1980s, and later during conflict and displacement. Other activities that complement crop production as the main livelihood activity are summarised in Table 2 as a percentage of households having additional activities); 74% of households is engaged in one or more of the mentioned activities.

<TABLE 2 HERE>

Extensive farming happens within two seasons on land typically owned through inheritance. Land is cleared for several consecutive seasons spanning two to three years, then left fallow, with fallow periods dependent on factors like the ability to open new plots and crop sequencing. Reliance on elaborate crop sequencing and intercropping practices helps to optimise the use of land. Focus group discussions put the likely order of rotations as sesame, groundnuts, maize/beans, sorghum, and cassava or millet, sesame, pigeon pea, sorghum, cassava. Our field observations showed two to five crops intercropped on a typical plot.

Discursive social differentiation: who qualifies for aid?

During the return process, food security programmes took on mixed methods between relief and development and used socially differentiated forms of targeting. One category was described as the 'Extremely Vulnerable Individuals and Households' (EVI/Hs) and 'People with Special Needs' (PSNs). This was used to refer to people with disabilities, women, children, the sick, and the elderly (IDMC, 2010, RLP, 2006) and they gradually became the only people provided with food aid. For others, in order to reduce the 'dependency syndrome' the trend was to 'wean' people off food aid.

By the time of research, the trends in programming had shifted, driven by the need to increase production and productivity as a pathway to food security. This was a push for an agricultural peace dividend with heavy modernisation and commercialisation undertones (Wairimu, 2014). The focus shifted largely to households that were able to do well, building on their potential capacities to expand and demonstrate progress - and not those necessarily in need of assistance. This is a trend also noted elsewhere and referred to as choosing the 'viable versus vulnerable' (Banfield and Naujoks, 2009, Gelsdorf et al., 2012). Recently, the Agricultural Sector Development Strategy and Investment Plan, the government's main guide for public action and investment in agriculture picks up on the trend. It notes that the 'single best method to increase cultivated area and labour productivity in the north…(..) is that the target group needs to be selected on the basis of their *willingness* and *capacity* to maintain….' (MAAIF, 2010 p75) This is in line with broader transformations in Ugandan policies and strategy towards growth, wealth creation and transformation to a modern rural economy as the key to achieve food and income security. The assumption in 'picking winners' (Christoplos et al. , 2010) as pursued in agricultural recovery and development, is that these categories are better placed to take advantage of the opportunities for economic development. However, as we will show in this case, this premise ignores the ensuing dynamics within the recovery context and in some cases might trigger subtle forms of social protest.

The Food Security Programme

Public Works (PWs) are a preferred mechanism for food security programming in conflict-affected areas and incorporate the assumption that people can make a counterpart contribution through their labour. Broadly, the PWs modality to improve agricultural livelihoods was implemented in northern Uganda as early as 2007 by the World Food Programme (WFP) (Tusiime et al., 2013). The two other large-scale public works based programmes included the Agricultural Livelihoods Recovery Project I (ALREP 1) implemented by FAO through various partners, targeting over 15 districts and engaging over 42,000 individuals in public works (CEM, 2010)[3] and the government programme Northern Uganda Social Action Fund II (NUSAF 2), targeting 40 districts and engaging over 77,000 individuals (McCord et al., 2013).[4] From 2007 onwards, public works in northern Uganda increasingly took the form of vouchers for work. Contributions to PWs by 'farmers' was 'paid' in vouchers which could be exchanged for seeds in seed fairs.

The case study intervention that we looked at was typical for food security programmes in Acholiland at the time of the research. It served social, economic and political objectives and combined elements of basic service provision, institutional development and community participation. Our interactive research partner started programmes in Pader District in 2007. Their aim was to support returning persons to re-

establish their livelihoods. The case study intervention was their largest and longest running programme (2007-2013). It targeted over 6000 'farmers' with the main objective of enabling the participating households to increase food production and income.

The programme aimed to build different local-level institutions. Rural communities were mobilised to 'self-organise' into 'farmer groups' of 20-30 individuals with a requirement of fifty per cent representation of women. These groups formed the primary basis of interaction between the aid agency and the farmers. The aim was to restore the social fabric through working in groups. Within each group four individuals were elected as the Project Management Committee (PMC). The PMC set up routines for meetings and mobilisation for various activities related to the programme, guided by rules set up within each group. The groups provided labour for public works. In Lungoyi, groups earned and redeemed vouchers in seed fairs while in Ngora, groups earned money which was deposited in the group account for communal cultivation, rather than individually. With these earnings, complemented with agricultural extension, groups were meant to progress towards being market-oriented producers. The approach thus combined infrastructural and institutional development, agricultural inputs provision, private sector development, and extension services with the end goal of improving the food security situation of the households.

The group's contribution to rebuilding community assets was through a Public Works modality. Roads were the most common form of PWs. Initially, construction of markets, cattle crushes and tree planting (in schools) were included. The emphasis on roads came as agencies increasingly wanted to support the development priorities of the local government, and it fitted the agricultural modernisation ideal. The roads however, were disconnected from the immediate and direct needs of the people and mainly served long-term community development goals.

Ideally, each participant in the programme was to work 20 days paid at 4,000 Uganda Shillings (UGX) per day.[5] Those who worked in the scheme received vouchers to redeem in a seed fair while those already in the second year received 2,000 UGX cash per day. This was not to be used individually, but for group or communal cultivation. A seed fair was held when 80 per cent of the work by most groups in one sub-county was achieved. Groups working for cash also accessed their cash after similar conditions were satisfied.

Participation in the programme

The fieldwork for this research started in the fourth year of the food security programme. In the course of time, many participants decided not to continue with the programme resulting in a large 'drop out' rate. Ngora village started with 56 participating households (in two farmer groups). This dropped to 13 members at the start of 2011. By the end of 2011, the group had 7 households participating, while an additional 6 households joined the group. In Lungoyi, two farmer groups of 53 members had been formed. By the end of 2011, 5 households continued in the programme. This means that for the two villages together, 97 households out of 115 dropped out, and only 18 remained, providing a strong signal of dissatisfaction with the programme on the part of the population.

At the time of research, stories were constructed and sustained in the villages about the absence or lack of benefit in the food security intervention. During a discussion in Ngora, a young man mentioned that 'others (*village members*) tell us that we (*participating ones*) are detrimental to our own development'. During a household

visit, an elderly man noted that, 'the lazy ones are the ones who prefer to work on the NGO road rather than concentrate on their own garden'. The content of these messages varied but framed participating households as 'non-developmental' and 'non-progressive'.

The experiences of the dropouts and the constructed stories affected households in the villages in subsequent years. Indeed visits to other villages and particularly discussions with NGO extension workers revealed increased difficulty in convincing people to join the programme.

Explaining the 'dropouts'

This section discusses why households dropped out of the food security programme. The recurrent household visits revealed dynamics and processes which were not seen by the agency and which we use to explain why the households considered their food security situation was not improving. These unseen dynamics and processes resulted in exits from the intervention and contestation of the programme.

Labour scarcity

In interviews, participating households noted increased difficulty in opening and clearing land. An earlier study (Martin et al., 2009) showed that over a three-year period in the early return process, the area cultivated by households in Pader had steadily increased - from an average of '1.3 acres (1/2 hectare) in 2006-07 to 3.1 acres (1.25 hectares) in 2007-08 and 4.2 acres (1.7 hectares) in 2008-09'.[6] In our discussions and interviews, we heard that the steady increase in opened land was not possible under current conditions. Households struggled to open the same amount of land each year and to sustain this in other years. Table 3 shows the amount of land cleared, which includes the clearing of land owned, borrowed or hired by a household.

Many emphasised that their food self-sufficiency was still highly compromised. Table 3 shows that according to FAO standards, calculated as at least 4 acres for the district (FAO, 2001), 79% cultivated less than what is required for their self-sufficiency, while a further 11% are on the border of what is needed for self-sufficiency. However, as the table further shows, only 60% reported being food insecure, while a further 9% indicated that their food security status varied between years. The discrepancy between the figures (79% and 60%) points to the ability of some households to supplement their food requirements through means other than crop cultivation.

<TABLE 3 HERE>

Maintaining or increasing land under production is crucially important because households rely on agricultural production to provide a basis for their livelihood security and specifically to ensure access to enough food for most months in a year. Acholi peasants have a long history of practicing agriculture and keeping cattle. Other activities as Table 2 shows complement this, but agriculture remains the central activity for maintaining food security, especially because staple food prices tend to double in local markets during times of shortage.

Clearing land is very labour intensive. It involves first a clearing of the bush and shrubs. In the past, this clearing was done by burning the bush, a practice currently discouraged. In the process of this first clearing, large trees which are not protected

culturally are cut down for charcoal burning (Table 2). A second clearing involves 'digging' up the soil with a hand hoe - a time consuming activity where on average an acre can take up to a month depending on the household size and labour availability. Even where communal labour is engaged, individual households have to 'prepare' the land i.e. burn and/or clear the bush.

The availability of labour is often restricted due to poor health, particularly when women have to stay at home to tend children with malaria or nodding disease. The latter is a little known disease characterised by convulsions, head nodding and mental retardation (van Bemmel et al., 2013). Several case study households had 2-4 children affected and these children required a lot of care, especially in the rainy seasons when symptoms were worse according to our respondents. The shortage of labour is aggravated because livestock which buffered the household in times of shocks (Stites et al., 2006) is a 'missing asset' (Bjørkhaug et al., 2007 p36). Given the central role livestock and animals play in the food security and labour needs of subsistence farmers, people had indicated both livestock and food aid as top household priority needs for their return (ibid p36). A list of other requirements, including seeds and tools followed equally. However, humanitarian aid generally focussed on providing seeds and tools.

Discussions with staff of various humanitarian agencies revealed several reasons why aid did not address the priority need for livestock to the required extent. Investment in livestock would call for a substantial contribution and investment in households. On average, a household received seeds and some tools worth US$ 20-35 per project per year. An ox plough costs about US$ 60-66 while a pair of oxen costs US$ 370-590. An agency staff member explained that investing in oxen and ploughs would force aid agencies to report fewer beneficiaries and 'nobody wants to do that'. Another one said that donors rarely allowed for more than US$ 100 investment in livelihoods per beneficiary household per project. The absence of oxen and ploughs (Table 1) forced people to adopt hand cultivation adding to the pressure on labour and further limiting area farmed. Only a few isolated initiatives gave oxen to a select number of households.

In several focus group discussions, the importance of labour and cattle was highlighted. Highly dependent households were characterised as poor and lacking the means for production. When asked to define wealth, the term was related to assets and activities that remedy lack of labour or make its use more efficient such as oxen, oxen plough or households with several able- bodied persons. In the survey, the response 'we did not have able bodied men or enough labour' would feature in 70 per cent of cited reasons for not participating in the public works.

Even among those described as 'viable', interviews noted 'competition' with public works as a major labour problem. Others mentioned that public works 'threatened' their cultivation and this had a major impact on the food security situation of the heavily subsistence reliant peasants. A man said: 'last year I opened more land than this year since I was not working on the road'. This was supported by an analysis which shows that on average, non-participating households in Ngora opened an eighth of an acre more than their counterparts who participated in public works. There were households in our research who managed to open more land, but these were not found among the participants in the programme. In a focus group discussion with members of one group in Ngora during the public works, more than half indicated their intention not to continue once they received the seeds they were already 'working' for. This group later dissolved after the members 'dropped out'.

Ideally the PWs component was scheduled for twenty days, and meant to be completed before the start of the agricultural season to avoid labour competition. However, with drop outs and problematic group processes, the work took longer.

Discussions with field officers showed it took at least twice the number of scheduled days. In the study year, the PWs would start in late February, effectively coinciding with most of the cropping season.

The public works also competed with community labour. In addition to family labour, planting labour intensive crops and opening new land for the second season high value sesame or beans, most Acholi households engage in traditional social forms of collective labour and shared arrangements (labour gangs) as Table 1 depicts. These include *aleya* (rotational labour arrangements), *awak* (voluntary labour where food and drinks are provided) and *katala* (hiring labour mostly for cash or in-kind food contributions). Managed by *rwodi kweri* (designated hoe chiefs), these informal systems and practices allow for negotiated access, control and distribution of labour for agricultural subsistence production within a village and to a lesser extent for other activities like house construction. It is based on multi-layered social, family, clan and kinship relations and functions as a safety net, ensuring access for each household, including vulnerable households, to at least a minimum amount of tilled land. Both the survey and focus group discussions show that *awak* is very rare after the conflict because it requires substantial amounts of food and local brew to feed the workers, something that is difficult to produce for many of the newly returned population. Interestingly, the survey showed that households participating in these 'labour gangs,' mostly aleya, on average cleared 1.4 acres more than non-participating households, irrespective of whether they were engaged in the NGO programmes.

Visits to several villages showed that parallel traditional labour arrangements continued to exist. New and formalised farmer groups formed under NGO projects existed in addition to these arrangements and did not replace them. The NGO interventions were premised on the idea that the social tapestry of communities was destroyed and hence there was a need for new farmer institutions. However, empirical research consistently shows that forms of social capital continue to exist in fragile contexts, with the prevalence of traditional relational networks and associations (Vervisch et al., 2013). Such informal institutions are not always the grand solution and neither are they always equitable (Ibid). However, in cases like this, they remedy labour concerns to a certain extent and so it is not surprising that traditional social organisation of labour continued to be valued.

Another labour-related dynamic was the opportunity for short-term employment in the form of casual labour during the cropping season (Table 2). People resorted to casual labour to address immediate food needs during shortages and for other household-related needs. As McCord et al. (2013 p13) also found, agricultural labour markets peaked during the growing season which is also the hunger season, 'hence not the most appropriate season for engaging in PWs construction activities, since supporting household income through PWs rests on the assumption that households have excess labour at the time of project'. However, in this case public works coincided with the cropping season and increased dropout rates meant the work took longer than expected. These parallel labour engaging activities thus led people to contest additional labour requirements by the PWs.

Tied payments
NGOs paid a higher rate per day than casual labour. This would lead us to question why people preferred daily casual work to contribution to public works. 'NGO money' was a one-off payment tied into seeds and tools through seed fairs. Working on other peoples' land for a lower rate allowed people to decide when and how to utilise the money. Although the range of agricultural inputs allowed in the seed fairs was enlarged, this did

not change the mind-set of the groups nor the general feeling that they were being 'cheated' of their labour as they referred to it. 'Cheating' was also used to refer to the relatively higher seed and tool prices in seed fairs compared to local markets, especially since those interviewed questioned the quality of the seeds. In this process, the higher rate paid for the work was therefore 'not felt' and thus undervalued or lost in the process. In addition, with the hunger season coinciding, both the survey and the regular visits showed the immediate need for health and education, which could not be addressed under the food security scheme. One interviewed farmer added, 'my family needs food and I cannot postpone that and wait for the seeds'.

Youth needs and preferences
Labour scarcity for agricultural production was also related to an exodus of young men from traditional agrarian lifestyles to more 'urbanised' livelihoods offered by the increasing number of small trading centres. In an interview, the district agricultural planner emphasised that, given the population of the area, labour should not be a problem, but war dynamics showed that this was 'a war of the youth'.[7] Agricultural livelihoods are unattractive to this generation. Branch showed that young people are migrating towards neighbouring towns, some as a result of dispossession of land, and also because they prefer the city lifestyle (Branch, 2013). We encountered many young people who prefer the 'urban' life and to 'hang around' the former camps that turned into trading centres rather than return to villages. In this case, the exodus of the younger generation from agriculture-based livelihoods has the potential to alter the structure of households that have high dependency rates (Table 1) and are highly dependent on family labour.

Empowerment or employment? Divergent views in framing public works
We established that differences in framing Public Works and their link to empowerment and seeds and tools was one reason why labour concerns remained invisible to the humanitarian aid agencies. A review of documents and interviews revealed that PWs are assumed to be a way of empowering the local community. Due to years of displacement, rural people were understood as disempowered, and empowerment was an important secondary objective in shaping the modalities of food security programmes. Working on the community assets was framed as a way to help them 'regain dignity' and learn how to work for themselves. On the other hand, those interviewed placed high value on the infrastructure and income created by the PWs, but questioned the empowerment logic. They saw the PWs as 'employment' generation schemes and not 'empowerment' projects. Related to this employment view, others questioned the PWs link and payment through seeds and tools as PWs did not provide additional income but rather substituted the income that would be gained from sources like casual labour (Table 2) or ability to open more land. The two views were not necessarily incompatible, but led to unclear programme arrangements and created contradictions in practice.

Concluding Analysis

This chapter discusses the widely promoted approach of food security programmes in post-conflict situations based on public works where people provide labour for the construction of a road or another public asset in exchange for seeds and services.

The most striking finding of the fieldwork was, that at the end of the fourth year of the project, in our two case study villages, 97 out of 115 participating households had

dropped out of the programme, and only 18 remained. This trend was followed in other villages according to discussions with NGO field staff.

The main reason for households dropping out of the programme was related to labour. The assumption that people had labour available did not hold, and the programme interacted negatively with household's productive needs, including their ability to open land, to participate in community labour exchange and to earn cash income. Instead of a labour surplus that the programme could tap into, households were in fact facing a labour shortage. This resulted in difficulties for households to open enough land to sustain their food needs, amongst other difficulties.

There were also more specific reasons why households dropped out of the programme. In an attempt to restore community relations and encourage a more modern outlook on agriculture, the programme paid the participants for their work, but only after most of the public works were completed. The payments were rarely in cash but consisted of vouchers that could be exchanged – at unfavourable rates – for modern, improved seeds. This approach did not take account of the dire situation in which most households found themselves. They could not afford to invest their labour for a long-term return, but lived from day to day to make ends meet. The set-up of the programme was not meant to address the poorest of the poor, as these were supposed to be serviced through direct relief measures. The programme was meant, instead, for so-called viable households that are increasingly the targets of the commercialisation and modernisation paradigm in post-conflict contexts. However, even these 'viable' households were thus not really viable in relation to this projection of modernisation. Interventions where people were compensated for their labour with the market-based system of vouchers to help them through the next agricultural cycle, without considering the pressing needs of the day, were inappropriate for a vast majority of households.

One of the rationales for the food security programme was to restore the social fabric by forming labour gangs of 20-30 people working together on the road and sharing the returns. This approach did not take into account that traditional agricultural practices that build around labour exchange to some extent survived until today. Ironically, a situation evolved where the labour needs of the public works competed with these labour exchange institutions thus undermining local institutions rather than restoring the social fabric. Our findings thus challenge the assumption that interventions need to engineer new forms of farmer organisation to restore the social fabric. This tallies with a larger body of literature which suggests that interventions can better build on existing institutions than engineer new ones (Hilhorst et al., 2010).

All these factors contributed to the critical attitude people developed during the programme. There was a lot of talk about the programme, with people advising relatives and neighbours not to step into similar programmes. Most telling is the fact that some 84% of the participants dropped out. Rather than a token of dependency, we found this a pragmatic choice where people decided to reallocate their labour for better or more immediate returns. More than this, we have come to understand this response as a subtle form of social protest. What we saw was households 'voting with their feet' in response to interventions (Banzhaf and Walsh, 2008, Tiebout, 1956). By leaving situations they did not like or going to situations they believed to be more beneficial, 'voting with the feet' can be described as a tool for asserting freedom of choice and agency.

The findings of the chapter bring out several messages. First, they point to the need to critically evaluate assumptions of labour availability before engaging in programmes that seek a labour contribution in exchange for services. This is of particular importance for programming in post-conflict contexts where government

policies and aid programmes take on new modalities of delivering aid which may ignore the ensuing dynamics within the recovery context.

Secondly, in terms of targeting, the dire poverty in the region means there is a fine line between the poorest of the poor and the other poor. Not being part of the lowest segment does not turn households into viable prospects that can afford to invest today's labour in the next season's agricultural cycle. This is related to the third message that agencies have to be cautious in prematurely embracing policies for agricultural modernisation, as they risk leaving behind the large majority of households. This brings into question the implicit policy agenda for increased large-scale commercialisation, standardisation and modernisation of agriculture – an agenda that increasingly permeates post-conflict contexts, as part of the shift from temporary relief to recovery. The assumptions behind this agenda may be out of tune with the actual needs and realities of the target population. This implies the need for increased accountability to the population that is serviced by aid programming.

A final message concerns the assumption that post-conflict programmes can contribute to restoring the social fabric by creating community institutions. In practice, this carries the risk of undermining institutions that have survived the follies of conflict.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

[1] Subsequently denoted as Lungoyi.

[2] Subsequently denoted as Ngora.

[3] Implemented between 2007 and 2010.

[4] Implemented between 2011 and 2015.

[5] Exchange rate at time of research: 1 United States Dollar = 2000 Uganda shillings.

[6] The 2009 study by ODI was carried out before Pader district was split in 2010. The households studied are currently located within the neighbouring district of Agago.

[7] On the high loss of young men and abducted categories comprising thousands of children and adolescents, see Boas and Hatloy, 2005.