

## Ugandan men become idle in camps

### Summary and policy-relevant findings



Residents building a hut in Oromi IDP camp in Kitgum District, northern Uganda, May 2007. © Manoocher Deghati/IRIN [www.irinnews.org](http://www.irinnews.org)

Ugandan politics has been characterised by conflict in the north of the country. In response to the resulting insecurity in 2005 around 1.75 million people, or 80% of the population in the north of the country, lived in camps for Internally Displaced People. A unique survey of just under 900 households looked at the effects of camp life on the employment of men and women. Contrary to most research, this study concentrated on the issues affecting displaced men. The main finding was:

The longer a camp had existed the less likely men living in that camp were to work. This was not true for women.

This is explained by the development of different social norms for men and women.

How did this culture of male idleness develop? Restrictions on their freedom of movement outside of the camp meant that men spent more time drinking and socialising than before. The longer the camp existed the more these activities became the normal thing for men to do.

Since 2007 violence in northern Uganda has decreased and the population has in large parts moved back to their villages. However there has been no formal settlement of the conflict.

Policy conclusion:

To find effective countermeasures to this culture of male idleness, a systematic evaluation of existing employment programmes should be undertaken. Employment programmes, such as brick making or pig raising, need to balance the economic and social benefits with the increased risk of attack from rebel groups that comes with greater wealth.

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## Policy context

In 2005 nearly 24 million people were displaced in 51 countries. According to UN figures for 2005, Uganda had the third highest number of internally displaced people at 1.74 million.

Internal displacement was a problem in northern Uganda where the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) had terrorised the local population through murder, torture, rape, mutilation and abduction.

## Project background

The research focused on 2 out of 18 districts in northern Uganda: Pader in the Acholi region and Lira in the Lango region. Pader and Lira districts were some of the districts worst affected by the insurgency of the LRA.

A variety of data on employment and other circumstances was collected by surveying 885 households living in one of 32 camps. Households with children between 6-17 were randomly sampled.

Most studies have concentrated on the impact of displacement on children's health and education. This study's main focus was on the impact of camp life on the work decisions of men and women.

On average, camp residents had spent just over 3 years in a camp. However, this masks a wide range of variation. In particular the residents in Lira district had spent on average about a year less in the camps than the residents of Pader district.

## Project findings in more detail

The key finding was that the longer a camp had existed the less likely men were to work. However the age of the camp had no effect on the likelihood of women working. This is shown in the graphs opposite.

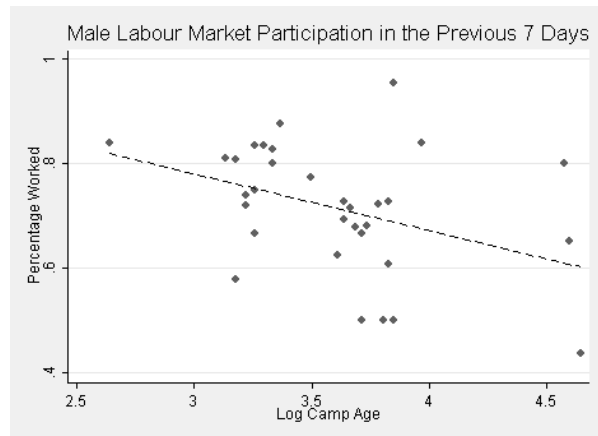


Figure 1: This shows the percentage of all men that had worked in the preceding 7 days mapped against the age of the camp.



Figure 2: This shows the percentage of all women that had worked in the preceding 7 days mapped against the age of the camp.

What could be the reasons for this difference in male and female working habits?

Certain circumstances in the camps made it difficult for the men to fulfil their traditional roles in farming. These were that:

- 1) Camp residents were confined to the surroundings of the camps for security reasons. For example, 29 out of the 32 camps surveyed had had camp residents attacked or threatened in the camp or its surroundings in the last 12 months. This means that although the homes and fields of the residents were, on average, only just under 5 miles away, residents could not leave their camps safely to cultivate their larger fields.
- 2) The nearest towns and markets were also too far away to get to on a daily basis.
- 3) The food aid, on which all camp residents depended for survival, was only given out to

women unless there was no woman in the household. This made it less urgent for men to contribute to the household income.

However, these circumstances also applied to women. The study found that although fewer men worked than before displacement, more women worked in the camps than before being displaced. This then leads to the question of why fewer men were working than previously.

The suggested explanation for this male behaviour is that there were more opportunities for men to drink and socialise in the camps at times when previously they would have been working. This type of drinking and socialising are not considered acceptable activities for women. So the combination of the restrictions on traditional male activities and the easier access for men to drinking and socialising explain the difference between the working patterns of men and women.

However this does not explain why in some camps more men were working than in others. What causes the difference in rates of male working between the camps? Researchers compared the reasons for the camps being formed, such as the timing, their location and the intensity of the conflict, with the characteristics of the residents to see whether a systematic difference between the residents of different camps could explain the different rates of male working. The statistical analysis did not reveal underlying differences between the camp residents that could explain the difference in men's working between camps.

This is supported by anecdotal evidence about the reasons for forming camps: the LRA's attacks were random, most people went to the camp nearest to their home as they thought this was a temporary situation and camps were formed in response to violence.

The best explanation for this variation in men's working patterns across different camps is that over time, the more men spend time drinking and socialising, the more it becomes normal for men to drink and socialise.

In other words a culture of male idleness develops.

The study did not analyse whether the reduction in male working is the direct cause for the increase in female working.

### Future research

Future research will look at what impact the conflict and subsequent move into a camp had on children's general health and parents' decisions to educate children. Children's health will be studied using indicators such as: height, weight and iron levels. Their educational achievements will be measured using the school enrolment status of the children, their average attendance and their test scores.

This is important as research has shown that an interruption to spending on food and education at critical points in a child's life can have permanent effects on that child's development and the well-being of a family.

### For more detailed information

Kim Lehrer 'Gender differences in labor market participation: Evidence from displaced people's camps in northern Uganda'. The paper is available from [kim.lehrer@economics.ox.ac.uk](mailto:kim.lehrer@economics.ox.ac.uk).

#### ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

**Kim Lehrer** is a Research Officer at the CSAE under the research programme on 'Transforming economic policies towards the poor'. This briefing paper is based on Kim's dissertation. Her dissertation investigates men and women's labour force participation and children's education and health outcomes using original data collected in Ugandan Internally Displaced People's camps in 2005 and 2007. Her research areas are development economics, applied microeconometrics, project evaluation, the economics of education, labour economics, and gender issues.

The Centre for the Study of African Economies (CSAE) is an economic research centre within the Department of Economics at Oxford University. The CSAE carries out economic research with a particular focus on Africa. Its aim is to improve economic and social conditions in the poorest societies. CSAE researchers often use unique data which give them unrivalled insight into the underlying issues. The resulting policy recommendations address questions in the economic and political spheres as well as in civil society in developing countries. These recommendations based on quantitative analysis are the distinctive feature of the CSAE's work and set it apart from many other research institutions. CSAE research is funded by the UNIDO, the World Bank, the ESRC, the Department for International Development (DFID), and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the funding bodies. **Briefing paper prepared by Karin Loudon. Series Editor: Karin Loudon.**