

TOPIC

**Civil wars, Land conflicts, and the consequences of Violence: A case study of Teso Uganda
(Ca.1996-2014).**



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Declaration

I, **Samson Oolio** declare that this dissertation is my own original work and that it has not been previously submitted for the award of a degree or diploma at this or any other institution. All sources of information have been acknowledged through appropriate referencing.

Date: ___20th/6/2025. _____

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Abstract

This study examines the complex relationship between civil wars and land disputes in the Teso sub-region of Eastern Uganda between 1996 and 2014. Drawing on historical analysis, qualitative fieldwork, and interviews with local stakeholders, the research explores how decades of armed conflict-including insurgencies led by the Uganda People's Army (UPA) and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)-have disrupted land tenure systems, displaced populations, and eroded traditional land governance structures. The findings reveal that the conflict not only intensified land scarcity but also destroyed the oral and customary frameworks previously used to mediate ownership and access, especially in a context dominated by customary land tenure. The study further highlights how post-war legal reforms, including the 1998 Land Act, have inadequately addressed the realities of rural communities, often reinforcing inequalities due to the high cost of land registration and the exclusion of vulnerable groups such as widows and returnees. It is argued that sustainable land justice in Teso requires a hybrid approach that harmonizes formal legal structures with revitalized customary practices, while promoting gender equity, institutional trust, and grassroots reconciliation. The study contributes to a broader understanding of post-conflict land governance and provides policy-relevant recommendations aimed at fostering peace, social cohesion, and equitable land access in fragile regions.

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List of Acronyms

IDI	In-Depth Interview
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
KII	Key Informant Interview
LRA	Lord’s Resistance Army
UPA	Uganda People’s Army
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRA	National Resistance Army

LC Local Council
RDC Resident District Commissioner
UPDF Uganda People's Defence Forces
CSO Civil Society Organization
CCO Certificates of Customary Ownership

Chapter One: Introduction

1. Background to the Study

Uganda gained independence in 1962, but the post-independence period was soon marred by political turmoil. As Katusiime and Igba (2024) argue, the 1971 military coup led by Idi Amin ushered in a regime marked by violent repression and state collapse. His eventual ousting in 1979 did not restore stability but instead led to continued cycles of civil conflict. The subsequent years—often referred to as Uganda’s war of liberation—were defined by insurgencies and armed rebellions across the country, including the catastrophic conflict in the Teso region from 1981 to 1988, with intensified violence between 1984 and 1985. Although open hostilities decreased after this period, sporadic unrest and structural instability persisted until at least 2011 (Stevens, 2013).

The Teso sub-region in Eastern Uganda has historically been influenced by patterns of displacement, forced migration, inter-clan conflicts, and repeated civil wars (Tesfaw, 2022). Home to the Iteso people and one of Uganda’s major ethno-linguistic communities, Teso’s historical trajectory includes marginalization, militarization, and land insecurity. Rich in resources such as land, water, and minerals, the region has significant development potential (Carvalho et al., 2022). However, the very abundance of these resources has also fueled competition and violent disputes, often escalating into civil conflict (Birhan, 2024). Long before colonial boundaries were drawn, the Iteso and Lango ethnic groups migrated from the northeastern shores of Lake Albert into what is now Teso (Ingham, 2023). They established clan-based communities, and land was communally owned, managed, and distributed by elders. The Iteso, predominantly agro-pastoralists, organised their traditional society under the Ateso Kingdom, led by Obote chiefs (Masters, 2023; Nakanwagi et al., 2021).

Teso’s fertile land and relatively favorable climate attracted other ethnic groups over time, including the Baganda, Bakiga, Bakonzo, Basoga, Lugisu, Banyankole, Bafumbira, and Batooro. This migration introduced new layers of complexity to the region’s already fragile land governance system. Accusations and counter-accusations over land ownership frequently escalated into ambushes, armed clashes, and widespread destruction of

property. These tensions were exacerbated in the aftermath of the Teso civil wars, when displaced persons, ex-combatants, and opportunistic settlers returned or moved into the region (Davies et al., 2022).

Uganda's broader postcolonial context has seen repeated cycles of leadership crises and political repression, with successive regimes often rising to power through coercion and violence. These national-level conflicts inevitably permeated local dynamics, particularly concerning land rights (Stevens, 2013). Land in Uganda is not merely a physical resource but a core element of cultural identity, livelihood, and social structure. It shapes clan relations, inter-ethnic alliances, and even political power (Mniga, 2024). Uganda's fragmented ownership systems—featuring fertile plains, lakes, and protected lands—have contributed to both the geography and the biology of violence, creating overlapping jurisdictions and contested claims (Gochberg, 2021; Walter, 2023).

In Teso, these national tensions manifested through local crises. The region was severely affected by armed insurgencies, including those waged by the Uganda People's Army (UPA) and later the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) (Allen, 2023). The resulting destruction of infrastructure and displacement of communities disrupted traditional governance systems, particularly those that once mediated land conflicts through communal consensus and elder authority (Yang & He, 2021; Wolford et al., 2024). The vacuum left in land administration allowed for illegal land acquisitions, especially in Soroti and Kumi. Although the 1998 Land Act aimed to formalize tenure systems, it inadvertently heightened disputes by introducing statutory frameworks that clashed with customary norms. Weak legal enforcement, land grabbing, and the marginalization of vulnerable groups—especially women—intensified the crisis (Yang & He, 2021).

The militarization of the region not only displaced thousands but also undermined local authority. Government forces, in the name of security operations, engaged in artillery shelling and aerial bombardments, effectively turning Teso into an ungoverned space and a sanctuary for armed groups (Kern et al., 2024). The Iteso concept of *obwangkettora*, a customary mechanism for land access through clan blessings, was dismantled. In its place, state authority over land enabled arbitrary confiscation and long-term disputes that remain unresolved today (Ngcukaitobi, 2021).

Despite the significance of these issues, academic focus on Teso's unique historical, political, and cultural dynamics remains limited (Kilama et al., 2021; Nardi & Runnström, 2024). This study addresses that gap by investigating the intersection of civil wars and land disputes in the Teso Region between 1996 and 2014. Through ethnographic fieldwork, including interviews, archival analysis, and documentary review, the study examines the underlying causes, conflict-driven consequences, and approaches to resolving land disputes in the Teso region, with particular emphasis on how these disputes influence post-conflict peacebuilding and socio-political stability.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Teso sub-region of eastern Uganda has been profoundly shaped by a history of political marginalization and violent civil conflicts, most notably between 1996 and 2014. Insurgencies by the UPA and later incursions by the LRA not only caused mass displacement and destruction but also dismantled traditional governance structures that once regulated land ownership and dispute resolution (Allen, 2023; Wekesa, 2023). As internally displaced persons, former combatants, and opportunistic actors returned or resettled, overlapping land claims emerged, often escalating into violent disputes (Yang & He, 2021; Wolford et al., 2024).

The erosion of customary land tenure systems such as the Iteso concept of *obwangkettora*—and the introduction of post-war policies like the 1998 Land Act, which formalized private ownership, further complicated the land governance landscape (Ngcukaitobi, 2021; Kilama et al., 2021). These developments contributed to tenure insecurity, land grabbing, and marginalization, particularly of vulnerable groups such as women, the landless, and the elderly (Mniga, 2024; Gochberg, 2021). While customary institutions and formal legal frameworks coexist, both have proven inconsistent or inadequate in effectively resolving disputes, often due to weakened legitimacy, legal ambiguities, and the politicization of land governance (Walter, 2023; Kern et al., 2024).

Despite widespread recognition of land's centrality to Uganda's socio-economic development and peacebuilding efforts especially in agriculture, tourism, and energy (Wolford et al., 2024), limited academic focus has been given to the unique dynamics of land conflicts in Teso. There is a pressing need to explore the historical roots of conflict in

the region, understand how civil wars transformed land relations, assess the effectiveness of both traditional and formal dispute resolution mechanisms, and evaluate the adequacy of post-conflict recovery policies aimed at restoring land governance (Nardi & Runnström, 2024). Without such an understanding, efforts at sustainable peacebuilding, social cohesion, and equitable development in Teso will remain incomplete.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

General Objective:

To investigate the root causes, conflict-related impacts, and resolution mechanisms of land disputes in the Teso region, with a focus on how these disputes affect post-conflict peacebuilding and socio-political stability.

Specific Objectives

- i. To identify and analyse the key factors contributing to land disputes in the Teso region.
- ii. To examine the impact of civil wars on land ownership and the resulting socio-economic and political implications of unresolved land disputes on peacebuilding in Teso.
- iii. To assess the effectiveness of traditional and formal mechanisms in resolving land disputes in post-conflict Teso.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. What are the key factors contributing to land disputes in the Teso region?
- ii. How have civil wars affected land ownership in Teso, and what are the resulting socio-economic and political implications of unresolved land disputes on peacebuilding efforts in the region?
- iii. How effective are traditional and formal mechanisms in resolving land disputes in post-conflict Teso?

1.5 Scope of the Study

Geographical Scope: The study focuses on the Teso sub-region in eastern Uganda, specifically districts most affected by conflict and land disputes such as Soroti, Katakwi, and Amuria.

Time Scope (1996–2014): The research covers the period from 1996 (when major hostilities intensified) to 2014 (when relatively stable peace and policy interventions began to take root).

Thematic Scope: The study examines civil war dynamics, displacement, land tenure systems, land disputes, and mechanisms of dispute resolution.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study offers valuable insights into the relationship between conflict and land governance in post-war societies, with a specific focus on the Teso region of Uganda. It highlights how civil wars can fracture traditional institutions, disrupt tenure systems, and lead to long-term instability. By presenting a focused regional analysis, the study enriches our understanding of how conflict reshapes land relations at both household and community levels.

Importantly, the study has implications for policy reform. It assesses how formal legal instruments, such as the 1998 Land Act, interact with disrupted customary practices in the aftermath of war. The research findings can inform the development of practical, community-sensitive frameworks that balance statutory law with indigenous approaches to land tenure and dispute resolution.

Additionally, the study supports ongoing peacebuilding initiatives by tracing how unresolved land disputes, if not addressed, may contribute to renewed violence. It promotes the inclusion of culturally grounded mechanisms such as clan mediation in post-conflict land governance. These insights are crucial for both governmental and non-governmental actors seeking to foster social cohesion and equitable land access in previously conflict-ridden areas.

From a social perspective, the study amplifies the voices of marginalized groups including women, youth, and the landless who often suffer disproportionately in post-conflict land dynamics. Their experiences and perspectives are essential in crafting inclusive policies and strengthening resilience against future conflict.

Lastly, the study documents and preserves the historical and cultural dimensions of land management in Teso. By capturing oral histories, traditional norms, and indigenous governance structures, it contributes to safeguarding local knowledge that is increasingly at risk of erasure in modern development narratives.

1.7 Justification of the Study

The Teso region presents a unique and underexplored context for investigating how prolonged conflict intersects with land governance. While Uganda has received extensive research attention in regions like Acholi and Karamoja, Teso remains academically neglected despite enduring almost two decades of civil unrest, mass displacement, and contested land claims. This study seeks to address that gap by offering an in-depth examination of post-conflict land dynamics in the region between 1996 and 2014.

Land is central to social identity, economic survival, and political power in Uganda. The prolonged conflict in Teso disrupted clan-based governance, led to the displacement of community elders, and created a vacuum in land management that has persisted into the present. By analyzing these transformations, the study sheds light on how conflict erodes traditional institutions and complicates recovery efforts, particularly in regions where customary and statutory systems coexist in tension.

The justification for this research also stems from the urgency of addressing ongoing land tenure insecurity. Teso continues to face widespread land conflicts that threaten both local stability and broader national development goals. This study offers a foundation for understanding the historical roots of these disputes, helping policymakers and development practitioners design interventions that are historically informed and socially appropriate.

Furthermore, the research bridges theoretical and practical domains. It integrates perspectives from transitional justice, conflict resolution, and land policy, showing how

unresolved wartime legacies can hinder peacebuilding and undermine efforts to rebuild trust in governance. The focus on Teso's specific experience contributes to the broader academic conversation on post-conflict reconstruction in sub-Saharan Africa.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

Civil war: It is a sustained armed conflict between organised factions within the same nation, often featuring clashes between state forces and insurgent groups. In this study, the term pertains to the prolonged internal unrest in Uganda, particularly the armed struggles involving the Uganda People's Army (UPA) and other uprisings that destabilized the Teso region between 1980 and 2014.

Land Disputes: These refer to disagreements or conflicts regarding claims to land ownership, boundaries, usage rights, or access. In Teso, such conflicts have frequently stemmed from displacements, overlapping claims, and the erosion of traditional land tenure structures due to civil unrest.

Customary land tenure: A form of landholding governed by traditional customs and communal norms, typically overseen by elders or clan leaders. It is informal in nature and lacks legal documentation but is deeply respected within local cultural contexts. This study considers the ways in which war disrupted these indigenous systems in Teso.

Statutory land tenure: This denotes land ownership and usage rights established and regulated through national legal frameworks, such as Uganda's Land Act of 1998. In post-conflict environments like Teso, such systems often clash with traditional practices and are hindered by poor enforcement mechanisms.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs): These are individuals or groups who are compelled to leave their homes due to armed conflict or natural disasters but remain within their country's borders. In this context, IDPs in Teso refer to those who were displaced by warfare and later attempted to reclaim their ancestral lands.

Post-conflict recovery: It is the transitional period following the cessation of violence, marked by efforts to reconstruct governance, legal institutions, and social and economic

infrastructure. In Teso, this involves reinstating land rights, resolving property disputes, and rebuilding local leadership structures.

Militarization of land: It is a situation where geographic areas are subjected to military control, including use for strategic operations such as bombardment or occupation. This concept is used in the study to describe how conflict transformed land ownership and accessibility in Teso.

Traditional authorities: These are customary leaders, such as clan heads and elders, who historically played a central role in managing communal land, arbitrating disputes, and upholding customary law. Their displacement during civil unrest severely undermined local land governance.

Land grabbing: The process through which large portions of land are taken, often through illegitimate or coercive methods, by private actors, corporations, or the state. Following the conflict in Teso, weakened governance and legal systems contributed to a rise in such practices.

Peacebuilding: It encompasses a range of actions aimed at creating conditions for sustainable peace by addressing root causes of conflict, promoting justice, and rebuilding community trust. In this study, peacebuilding efforts include reestablishing legitimate land governance and resolving historical grievances over land.

1.9 Organisation of the dissertation:

The study is organised into seven chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction to the study with a focus on the research problem, it outlines the purpose and objectives of the study, and presents the guiding research questions. It also highlights the scope, significance as well as justification of the study. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature and theoretical frameworks. Chapter Three outlines the methodology adopted for data collection and analysis. Chapter Four presents the findings of the study. Chapter Five offers a discussion of the findings. Chapter Six presents conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews existing literature related to civil wars, land disputes, and post-conflict recovery, with particular emphasis on the Ugandan context and the Teso region. It also outlines the theoretical lenses used to frame the study, highlighting the relevance of conflict theory, human security, and legal pluralism in analyzing land disputes in post-conflict settings.

2.2 Conceptualizing Civil Wars and Land Disputes

Civil wars and land disputes are deeply interconnected phenomena, especially in post-colonial African contexts where land is central to identity, survival, and power. Conceptualizing these two elements requires understanding both their distinct characteristics and their interaction over time. Civil wars are typically internal armed conflicts involving sustained violence between government forces and organised rebel groups or factions. Scholars such as Fearon and Laitin (2003) define civil war as a conflict with at least 1,000 combat-related deaths per year, fought primarily within a country's borders. Civil wars often arise from grievances related to political exclusion, resource competition, marginalization, or historical injustices. In Uganda, a series of civil wars—from the post-Amin era to the National Resistance Army's ascent to power—shaped socio-political landscapes across different regions. The Teso sub-region was particularly affected by the insurgency of the UPA and later violent interactions with the, leading to widespread displacement, insecurity, and social fragmentation.

Land disputes refer to conflicts arising from contested claims over land ownership, boundaries, usage rights, or inheritance. In many African societies, land is not just a productive resource but also a symbol of lineage, identity, and social belonging. As Boone (2014) argues, the governance of land often reflects broader patterns of state formation and conflict. In Uganda, two competing tenure systems—customary and statutory—complicate

land rights, especially in post-conflict scenarios where formal institutions are weak and traditional authorities have been disempowered.

The intersection between civil wars and land disputes becomes evident when war leads to displacement, breakdown of local governance, and the erosion of traditional dispute resolution systems. During civil wars, families are often forced to abandon their ancestral lands. Upon return, they may find others occupying the land, or face disputes over unclear boundaries and ownership. Additionally, the militarization of territory and political interference in land allocation exacerbate tensions. In regions like Teso, the disappearance or death of elders with customary knowledge of land allocation has led to increased uncertainty and contestation over land.

Furthermore, the post-conflict period often witnesses a surge in land-related conflicts due to competing claims, unregulated resettlement, and poorly implemented land reforms. The 1998 Land Act in Uganda, though progressive in theory, has had limited success in resolving such disputes in practice, particularly in rural areas like Teso. The gap between statutory provisions and customary realities continues to fuel legal pluralism and overlapping claims, which contribute to protracted land disputes.

Thus, this study conceptualizes civil wars not only as violent events but also as catalysts that alter land governance structures, weaken traditional authority, and intensify competition over scarce resources. Land disputes are understood not as isolated property disagreements but as embedded in broader historical, social, and political dynamics, exacerbated by the legacy of conflict. Analyzing the Teso region through this lens allows for a more holistic understanding of how violence transforms rural societies and the implications for sustainable peace and development.

2.3 Historical Background of the Teso region

The historical and geographical context of the Teso region in eastern Uganda has been the subject of increasing scholarly interest, particularly in relation to its patterns of settlement, resource distribution, and land-related conflict. Teso borders Karamoja to the north, Kenya to the south, and districts such as Lira, Soroti, and Mbale. With a population of approximately 498,874 and a density of 115 people per square kilometer, the region spans

around 2,708 square kilometers and is administratively centred in Soroti (Habib et al., 2023). Akurut et al. (2025) highlight the region's diverse districts—Kumi, Soroti, Ngora, Kaberamaido, Bukedea, Katakwi, and Amuria—and its natural endowments, including rivers, minerals, and fertile soils. Despite these assets, Teso remains among Uganda's most economically marginalized and crime-prone areas (Oucho, 2021), an issue often linked to its history of conflict and displacement.

Scholars have traced the complex historical settlement of Teso to both colonial and precolonial periods. Following the 1900 Uganda Agreement, colonial land policies facilitated the resettlement of groups such as the Basamia Bakireka, a Bantu-speaking ethnic group, whose presence added to the ethnic heterogeneity of the region. Twinomuhangi et al. (2023) note that Teso attracted numerous migrants, including culturally affiliated groups like the Kumam, Iteso, and Okinyi, originally from western Kenya. Environmental pressures similarly encouraged groups such as the Bakonjo to migrate to the region in search of arable land and water resources (Kateiya et al., 2021). These diverse settlement histories have become a central theme in literature addressing land tenure insecurity and ethnic competition over territory.

Several studies emphasize the link between historical migration, land access, and persistent conflict. Chronic land disputes, especially in areas such as Kaberamaido, Amuria, and Kitayunjwa, are frequently traced to overlapping claims of ancestral ownership between the Basamia Bakireka and the Bakonjo. Kandel (2022) documents how these tensions have been exacerbated by the destruction of land records during the insurgencies of the 1980s, as well as by contemporary patterns of forced evictions, often legitimized through manipulated legal processes. The involvement of corrupt political, business, and customary leaders further compounds the disputes, a point echoed by several analysts concerned with post-conflict governance in the region.

In addition, the spatial distribution of conflict during the insurgencies has drawn scholarly attention. Stevens (2013) highlights that while districts like Ngora remained relatively peaceful, others—particularly Soroti, Katakwi, and Kumi—experienced severe violence due to their proximity to Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) activity and the limited capacity of the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF), notably the under-resourced Muami Division.

These conflict histories have had enduring effects on social cohesion, local governance, and land-related stability.

2.4 Factors contributing to land disputes

Scholarly literature highlights that land disputes are often rooted in complex and interrelated legal, political, cultural, and socio-economic factors. Land ownership, broadly defined as the legal and recognized right to possess, use, and manage a specific parcel of land, is frequently a source of contention, especially in contexts where acquisition processes are opaque or disputed (Hillo, 2017). Conflicts can emerge not only between individuals but also between citizens and state institutions, reflecting broader tensions in land governance.

Several studies categorize land-related disputes into man-made (socio-political), physical, resource-based, and legal-administrative conflicts. Socio-political or man-made disputes, as Erman and Furendal (2024) explain, typically result from governance failures and historical injustices, including exclusionary policies or inequitable access to land, which can escalate into civil unrest. Physical disputes, on the other hand, often stem from contested boundaries or physical barriers that limit access to land or resources. These are particularly common in areas with weak land demarcation or shifting territorial claims.

A recurring theme in the literature is the role of contradictory legal frameworks and institutional fragmentation. Wahanisa et al. (2021) argue that the presence of overlapping statutory and customary laws, coupled with poor coordination among government bodies, fosters confusion and undermines effective land administration. In such contexts, weak enforcement mechanisms and the inability or reluctance of security forces to manage inter-group tensions allow disputes to persist and escalate.

Conceptually, the term "land conflict" is context-dependent and carries different meanings across stakeholder groups. Ramadhani (2021) notes that while legal and policy frameworks often define land conflict in formal terms, local land users—especially subsistence farmers—may interpret disputes through the lens of kinship, custom, or historical use. This disconnect in interpretation complicates efforts to mediate or resolve disputes, as parties may operate from fundamentally different understandings of legitimacy and ownership.

Empirical studies from Ethiopia and Nigeria offer comparative insights into these dynamics. In Ethiopia, where all land is formally state-owned, conflicts commonly arise at the interface of formal state control and local livelihood needs. As Nguyen (2023) observes, for many rural communities, land remains a vital economic and cultural resource, and changes in land use often provoke contestation. Although sustainable land use is central to poverty reduction and environmental stewardship, insufficient attention to land use governance has made dispute resolution more reactive than preventive.

Cultural norms also play a significant role in shaping land tenure systems and conflicts. Hirschon (2023) highlights the enduring influence of ancestral land practices, where land is held in trust for future generations. Such customary arrangements, while preserving lineage-based continuity, can generate intra-family or intra-tribal disputes, particularly when land is subdivided or sold contrary to tradition.

In the Nigerian context, Mbazor and Ojo (2019) explore customary practices that restrict land ownership rights among certain social groups. For instance, commoners often lack formal ownership rights, and land is frequently accessed through borrowing arrangements. These borrowings, classified as either simple or serious, are governed by socio-cultural norms that define the obligations of lenders and borrowers. Elias (2024) emphasizes that while such customary practices provide mechanisms for land access and security, they also carry the risk of conflict, particularly when informal agreements are breached or misunderstood. Nonetheless, indigenous dispute resolution mechanisms remain important in mitigating conflict and maintaining social cohesion.

Literature on customary land tenure systems across Africa emphasizes that land is not only a physical resource but also a symbol of identity, ancestry, and power. In many traditional societies, land was historically managed communally, with lineage heads, clan elders, or chiefs acting as custodians (Turay et al., 2025). This custodianship did not equate to individual ownership; instead, it represented the collective rights of a group, wherein members of a clan or lineage could access and use land according to established norms. In Ghana, for instance, communal land use rights were upheld as long as individuals adhered to customary usage rules (Liu et al., 2021). However, population growth and the

commercialization of land have significantly altered this dynamic, making land increasingly scarce and contested.

Studies also highlight how the right to inherit land under customary systems often remained within lineages, though inter-lineage land acquisition was possible through negotiation or exchange. Nonetheless, the growing value of land has led to instances where elders and custodians exploited their position to dispossess others and accumulate land for personal benefit, undermining traditional systems of accountability (Ablavsky, 2021). This erosion of trust within customary institutions has been identified as a key contributor to contemporary land disputes.

The imposition of colonial legal systems further complicated land governance. In Ghana, the Native Authority Land Bills of 1927–1930 favored landlords by formally recognizing surface rights while ignoring subsurface claims, thus facilitating exploitation through mining and plantation agriculture (Yelsang, 2013). Post-independence legislation did little to reverse these inequities, and in some cases reinforced them, especially as land pressures increased due to migration, population growth, and rising land values.

Culturally, land continues to hold profound meaning. Harrison (2021) describes land as the foundation of human relationships, values, and social status, while Ng'ombe and Mushingi (2014) assert that land remains central to subsistence livelihoods in rural communities. Under customary law, land is viewed not as private property but as a collective inheritance held in trust for both ancestors and future generations. This perception underpins the spiritual and social significance of land, which, as Gyapong (2021) explains, links the past, present, and future in a symbolic continuum.

The ancestral ties to land are so strong that, in some communities, burial grounds serve as *de facto* claims of ownership. Mgaya (2023) notes that land legitimacy may be derived from ancestral presence rather than formal documentation. Morphy (2024) extends this argument by suggesting that land, in its natural form, carries symbolic and spiritual weight, and becomes a source of material value only when cultivated. This philosophy underpins the *trusterty theory*, wherein land is collectively owned but individually used, ensuring both stewardship and access within tribal societies.

Scholars such as Mbazon and Ojo (2019) and Elias (2024) further discuss the complexity of land access arrangements in places like Nigeria, where borrowing land is a customary practice governed by nuanced cultural rules. These arrangements may be temporary (simple borrowing) or conditional (serious borrowing), often influenced by social or economic obligations. While such systems provide flexibility, they are also prone to disputes, especially in the absence of written agreements or when expectations are breached.

Beyond cultural and historical factors, economic and political dimensions have significantly reshaped land relations. Morgan et al. (2023) and Zhang et al. (2022) argue that land disputes are often driven by competition over limited land resources and competing claims over land use, including agriculture, construction, and extractive activities. Disputes can also emerge over the rights to develop specific structures—ranging from religious sites to industrial plants—and often reflect deeper power dynamics within and between communities.

Market-based approaches to land valuation have introduced new layers of contestation. Hino and Burke (2021) describe how shifting land use patterns and speculative investments influence land prices, which can result in disputes over fair compensation or taxation. This is particularly evident in countries like the United States, where agricultural land values have fluctuated sharply over time, leading to tensions between landowners and regulatory institutions (Hansen et al., 2006).

In recent decades, shrinking arable land and increased competition have intensified land disputes across many developing countries. Walia (2021) highlights the global surge in land investment and the risks posed by deregulated access, particularly when investor interests collide with local livelihoods. Secure land rights have therefore become a critical policy concern, especially in rural areas where land determines social status, economic opportunity, and political influence (Mekonen & Berlie, 2021). However, land access is often shaped by political favoritism and elite capture. Bhanye (2023) notes that delays in implementing new land tenure systems have enabled informal land grabs, particularly by politically connected actors. These dynamics complicate the pursuit of equitable and transparent land governance and exacerbate land-related tensions in already fragile contexts.

Literature consistently identifies political dynamics as a significant driver of land disputes, particularly in contexts where institutional weaknesses and elite interests dominate land governance frameworks. Yakovlev (2021) outlines three key manifestations of political influence in land-related conflicts. First, internal conflicts among the ruling elite often result in fragmented or contradictory land policies. Second, once policies are implemented, attempts to defend them especially when aligned with elite interests can spark contentious reactions from marginalized groups. Third, inadequate law enforcement combined with ideological biases that prioritize narrow political or economic agendas over collective well-being contributes to the rapid escalation of disputes. Such dynamics, when sustained across multiple sectors, undermine long-term development goals and weaken state legitimacy.

Case studies from Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, illustrate the entrenchment of colonial-era landholding patterns in contemporary capitalist development models. Prasetyawan (2006) observes that the concentration of land ownership and capital among elite groups, a legacy of colonialism, has resulted in persistent land inequality and undemocratic access to land resources. These patterns have contributed to a systemic exclusion of vulnerable populations from land governance processes and fueled ongoing contestation over land use, ownership, and redistribution.

Corruption and governance deficits are widely recognized as additional contributors to land conflict. Kaufmann (2004) highlights how semi-official and corrupt actors often manipulate legal outcomes to serve elite interests, thereby eroding public trust in dispute resolution mechanisms. In transitional states, where democratic institutions remain weak or underdeveloped, land conflicts are frequently symptomatic of deeper struggles for political and economic dominance. Oligarchic and industrial interests frequently influence public decisions, particularly where land is tied to large-scale investment or infrastructure projects.

The intersection of land disputes with gender inequality has also received increasing scholarly attention, though it remains underexplored. Hong et al. (2021) and Davis and Pargendler (2021) note that while policy discourses often promote women's participation in land dispute resolution, systemic gender biases in land rights and access continue to limit their effectiveness. In many contexts, women are legally or customarily excluded from land ownership, and even when included in mediation processes, their voices are often

marginalized. De et al. (2021) argue that unless structural inequalities are addressed, particularly those related to inheritance, representation, and decision-making power, efforts to integrate women into dispute resolution frameworks may unintentionally reinforce existing injustices. Therefore, land disputes are not only a product of tenure insecurity or resource scarcity but are deeply embedded in political economy structures. Elite capture, weak legal institutions, and socio-political exclusion create fertile ground for conflict. Sustainable and equitable land governance thus requires not only legal reform but also political accountability, inclusive decision-making, and attention to intersecting inequalities, particularly those based on gender and class.

2.5 Conflict-Induced Changes in Land Ownership and the Role of Land Disputes in Post-War Peacebuilding

The literature consistently identifies war-induced displacement as one of the most disruptive forces in shaping land ownership and tenure systems. Scholars note that civil and international conflicts frequently result in massive population displacements, severing people from their land and undermining pre-existing property rights frameworks (George & Adelaja, 2022; Regasa & Lietaert, 2022). These displacements generate prolonged humanitarian crises and fundamentally alter the landscape of ownership. Yet, as Ferris and Kerwin (2023) and Joireman and Meitzner (2016) observe, relatively limited academic attention has been given to the post-conflict handling of property claims, despite their central role in fostering or obstructing peacebuilding. Unresolved land disputes are not only a legacy of war but also a potential catalyst for renewed instability.

A growing body of work examines how civil wars reshape land governance by dismantling or reconfiguring existing power structures and property regimes. Balcells and Stanton (2021) argue that civil conflicts often emerge from contests over autonomy and power, but they also have far-reaching consequences for infrastructure, property, and land access. Khorram-Manesh et al. (2021) further stress the profound social and psychological consequences of such wars, particularly when violence is driven by ethnic or identity-based divisions. Parver and Wolf (2008) highlight that wars, while devastating, can also open space for political and legal transformation, including shifts in land ownership paradigms.

Empirical studies reinforce that conflict often disrupts long-standing customary tenure systems, introducing new actors into land governance or eroding the authority of traditional institutions. In Mozambique, for example, Joireman and Meitzner (2016) document how the civil war in Beira transformed land into a highly contested commodity, with newly imposed land laws clashing with community perceptions of ownership grounded in social memory and grievance. The transformation of land from a communal resource into a politicized asset reflects the symbolic and material significance of land in post-conflict recovery.

Gokmenoglu (2022) and Affek et al. (2022) note that before the eruption of conflict, land ownership is often shaped by stable cultural, ecological, and social relationships. These relationships, however, are profoundly disrupted by war. Displacement and institutional collapse weaken traditional authority, fragment claims, and often erase evidence of long-standing land use. As these disruptions are often overlooked in state-led recovery efforts, they undermine attempts at durable peace.

The return process for displaced populations is especially fraught. Many find their land occupied, appropriated, or physically inaccessible due to infrastructure damage. Augustinus and Tempra (2021) argue that customary tenure systems are critical to re-establishing land legitimacy, but these systems require functioning community trust and insider knowledge. The absence of such conditions weakens post-conflict restitution and undermines social reintegration.

Land grabbing is another common outcome of civil conflict. Zambakari (2017) illustrates how state and rebel actors frequently exploit wartime conditions to seize land, often under the pretext of military necessity. These acts are typically illegal but leave a lasting imprint on land ownership patterns. Post-war, they manifest in changes such as mechanized agriculture or commercial land use, entrenching new inequalities and reshaping political power.

Scholars also point to the limitations of formal legal systems in addressing land disputes. Rainey et al. (2021) and Alexander (2001) document the reliance on customary and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms in contexts where judicial institutions are weak or corrupt. However, such systems are often vulnerable to manipulation by powerful actors who exploit ideological narratives or social hierarchies to advance their claims.

Vapnek et al. (2017) argue that peacebuilding must shift toward understanding the practical dispute-resolution needs of local communities rather than imposing top-down solutions.

Joireman and Meitzner (2016) caution that overlapping claims, unclear boundaries, and divergent customary norms frequently intensify land disputes when displaced persons return. Restitution frameworks, though essential, are difficult to implement in plural legal contexts where the norms of land ownership are contested or lack formal documentation. The disconnection between international legal standards and local tenure realities presents a recurring challenge in post-conflict settings.

The political dimension of land disputes is also emphasized in the literature. Reina (2022) and Lund (2021) highlight how land dispossession during civil wars strips vulnerable groups, especially women and the rural poor, of economic security and political voice. Such grievances can only be addressed through restitution paired with mechanisms of accountability and community-driven reconciliation. Stevens (2013) reinforces this view, noting that in many post-conflict environments, formal legal structures are absent or ineffective, leaving displaced groups at the mercy of emerging elites.

The literature increasingly calls for community-based resolution mechanisms as viable alternatives in the absence of effective state institutions. Vapnek et al. (2017) stress the importance of locally driven, participatory frameworks grounded in consensus and cultural legitimacy. When successful, these models not only address immediate grievances but also inspire broader legal reforms, promoting long-term peace and inclusive land governance.

Overall, literature reveals that civil war profoundly alters land tenure systems, often producing unstable property regimes that complicate post-conflict recovery. Land becomes a focal point for justice, restitution, and political restructuring, making it central to peacebuilding efforts. Yet, literature also exposes gaps—particularly regarding how customary and formal systems interact during recovery, and how restitution can equitably address the layered and contested meanings of land shaped by conflict.

2.6 Traditional and Formal Approaches to Land Dispute Resolution in Post-Conflict

Contexts

The literature highlights the complementary yet often conflicting roles that traditional and formal institutions play in resolving land disputes in post-conflict environments. Both mechanisms serve as critical tools for rebuilding social order, but their effectiveness varies based on historical, cultural, and institutional contexts (Hurwitz et al., 2022). Traditional leaders, once marginalized during periods of conflict, frequently re-emerge as key mediators through adapted customary laws. These systems are typically more accessible and culturally resonant, allowing for flexible and socially embedded forms of justice. However, displacement and societal transformation caused by conflict often weaken the coherence of customary norms, challenging the legitimacy and relevance of traditional authority (Wanjiru, 2021).

Traditional mechanisms are particularly effective for resolving minor, localized disputes, as they draw on shared memory, communal legitimacy, and culturally embedded norms (Joireman, 2014). Nevertheless, their capacity to manage complex, high-stakes claims has come under increasing scrutiny. Ibrahim et al. (2022) warn that traditional dispute resolution, though often framed as restorative, may prioritize social harmony over justice thereby facilitating land grabs or reinforcing local power imbalances. Furthermore, as land becomes increasingly commodified and politicized, customary institutions can be co-opted by elites, reducing their neutrality and accountability.

In parallel, formal legal systems offer structured and legally binding frameworks for dispute resolution. Their institutional grounding provides a perception of authority, especially in disputes involving external actors or structural injustices (Lasuba, 2016; Joireman, 2014). However, their practical application is often limited by bureaucracy, language barriers, poor infrastructure, and prohibitive costs. These barriers make formal mechanisms less accessible, particularly in rural or marginalized communities. Additionally, state-led formalization efforts may displace or dilute customary practices, failing to account for their cultural relevance or adaptability (Brosché, 2023; Hadlos et al., 2022).

The tension between customary and statutory systems is evident across numerous post-conflict settings. In northern Uganda, for instance, formal mechanisms have been

instrumental in protecting the rights of returnees and vulnerable populations. However, they are often perceived as unresponsive, procedurally rigid, or biased, prompting communities to revert to kinship-based systems that emphasize social cohesion over legal precision (Joireman, 2014). In South Sudan, similar dynamics have been observed, where long-standing reliance on traditional mechanisms has eroded in the face of formal state expansion, leaving communities uncertain about which system to trust (Lasuba, 2016).

The literature also stresses the role of cultural norms and social identities in shaping dispute resolution preferences. Traditional forums—such as councils of elders—draw legitimacy from communal values and collective history, and are often seen as more responsive to local needs (Joireman, 2014; Dilek, 2021). These forums have helped de-escalate tensions through locally grounded practices such as surveying claims and issuing verbal agreements or warnings. However, questions about impartiality and the persistence of structural inequality remain (Loyle et al., 2023).

In many cases, hybrid approaches have been adopted to bridge the gap between formal and informal mechanisms. These hybrid systems aim to combine the accessibility and cultural legitimacy of customary law with the procedural authority and rights-based framework of statutory law. Yet, as Rocca and Zielinski (2022) and Ugwueze et al. (2022) observe, the integration of these systems is often uneven and contested, with overlapping jurisdictions and inconsistent outcomes. The legal knowledge, authority, and reputational capital of individual leaders, whether traditional or state-affiliated, frequently shape the resolution process and its legitimacy (Loyle et al., 2023).

Despite growing efforts to reform land governance, formal institutions continue to struggle with elite capture, regulatory uncertainty, and inadequate enforcement (Joireman, 2014). These shortcomings can exacerbate land insecurity and deepen post-conflict grievances. In practice, both formal and informal systems face limitations, especially when addressing large-scale claims, inter-communal disputes, or politically sensitive land acquisitions. While traditional systems may not always guarantee justice, and formal systems often fail to ensure access, both are necessary for building inclusive, sustainable land governance in fragile post-war contexts.

2.7 Gaps in the Literature

A number of existing studies on post-conflict land disputes tend to generalize the causes and characteristics of conflict across diverse regions, without attending closely to local histories or socio-political specificities. For instance, Ugwueze et al. (2022) and Rocca & Zielinski (2022) examine land disputes in sub-Saharan Africa through a broad regional lens, but their work does not sufficiently engage with micro-level dynamics. In attempting to identify continental patterns, they overlook how localized grievances, ethnic identities, and colonial legacies—such as those present in the Teso region—shape land conflict in unique ways. This lack of contextual specificity limits the applicability of their findings to Teso's post-war realities.

Similarly, while Hurwitz et al. (2022) and Ibrahim et al. (2022) document the socio-economic and political consequences of land disputes, their analyses often treat these outcomes in isolation. Their research tends to disaggregate the impact of land disputes into separate domains, without examining how these effects interact with broader peacebuilding or state-building processes. This omission is particularly problematic in fragile post-conflict regions, where land insecurity may not just reflect instability, but actively undermine efforts toward long-term reconciliation, a link more clearly drawn by Joireman (2014) and Loyle et al. (2023), but not fully developed in practice.

In relation to dispute resolution, authors like Lasuba (2016) and Brosché (2023) provide useful overviews of customary and formal mechanisms in African post-conflict settings. However, their findings rely on cases from contexts such as South Sudan or the Great Lakes region and do not include empirical evidence from Teso. As a result, questions remain about how these hybrid systems operate locally—especially in terms of inclusion, accessibility, and legitimacy. Although Ibrahim et al. (2022) and Wanjiru (2021) acknowledge the marginalization of women, youth, and displaced persons in land governance, their research does not focus on how these dynamics play out in Teso specifically.

The challenges faced by returnees are a recurring theme in studies by Joireman (2014) and Lasuba (2016), who address the difficulty of reclaiming land and rebuilding social ties after conflict. Yet even in these works, there is scant attention to the case of Teso, where

returnee populations have altered the demographic and territorial fabric in complex ways. Wanjiru (2021) and Ibrahim et al. (2022) reference reintegration struggles but offer little on how these shape ongoing land disputes or potential flashpoints for renewed violence in the Teso context.

Finally, the role of political and economic actors in shaping post-conflict land governance remains underexplored in the case of Teso. Studies such as Joireman (2014), Brosché (2023), and Dilek (2021) emphasize elite capture, NGO involvement, and patronage in land disputes elsewhere in Africa, yet they stop short of applying these insights to the Teso region. The political economy of land in post-war Teso, including questions of influence, access, and exploitation, thus remains a significant blind spot in the literature.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

2.8.1 Conflict Theory

Rooted in the works of Karl Marx and later scholars like Coser (1956), conflict theory posits that societal tensions arise from unequal access to resources and power. Conflict theory explains how social inequalities, power struggles, and grievances over resources lead to conflict. In the Teso region, civil wars—particularly those involving the UPA and subsequent insurgencies—triggered widespread displacement, social fragmentation, and trauma that continue to shape post-conflict realities. Long-standing grievances, ethnic divisions, and the erosion of traditional structures have left communities vulnerable to renewed tensions over land ownership and use (Joireman, 2014). In Teso, land holds deep cultural, economic, and historical significance. Displacement during the 1980s and 1990s civil conflicts disrupted traditional landholding patterns, weakened clan-based governance, and led to overlapping claims between returnees and those who remained. As communities resettled, questions of "who owns what land" became contentious, with different actors asserting rights based on lineage, occupation, or historical narratives—much like in other post-conflict societies such as Liberia (Vapnek et al., 2017).

Post-conflict land disputes in Teso are fueled by land scarcity, weak tenure systems, and mistrust in formal courts. Customary dispute resolution mechanisms—led by elders or clan heads—remain influential but often lack the authority or capacity to manage complex

disputes, especially when powerful individuals or state actors are involved. Formal systems, on the other hand, are often slow, under-resourced, and poorly understood by the local population. A hybrid approach that combines legal pluralism, reconciliation efforts, and public engagement may offer more sustainable outcomes (Joireman, 2014; Vapnek et al., 2017).

Applying conflict theory to Teso highlights the role of unresolved historical injustices, marginalization, and institutional gaps in sustaining land disputes. The breakdown of customary systems during the war, coupled with limited state capacity in the post-war period, has created a legal vacuum. Integrating conflict theory with frameworks such as human security and legal pluralism can help explain the persistence of land disputes and guide the development of context-sensitive interventions that bridge the divide between formal law and customary practice (Vapnek et al., 2017).

2.8.2 Human Security Framework

This framework broadens the concept of security to include economic, food, health, environmental, and land security. As articulated by the UNDP (1994), human security emphasizes protection and empowerment. Human security is a useful lens for understanding the layered challenges facing post-conflict communities like those in the Teso region. It emphasizes the interconnected nature of social, economic, and political factors in ensuring safety and dignity for individuals and communities. Rather than imposing ready-made solutions, it relies on local knowledge and qualitative insights—such as community narratives and lived experiences—to shape more context-sensitive responses (Ide et al., 2021).

However, critics argue that the framework can be overly idealistic and methodologically complex. In regions like Teso, where informal networks, clan loyalties, and traditional authorities intersect with weak state institutions, applying human security requires close attention to local dynamics and power relations (Stevens, 2013). Teso's post-war recovery has been hindered by poverty, land insecurity, and the re-emergence of conflict drivers—sometimes stirred by local elites or "conflict entrepreneurs" who exploit weak governance to exploit land, manipulate legal systems, or perpetuate divisions for personal benefit. These actors, often embedded within wider political and administrative systems, frustrate

peacebuilding efforts and fuel new grievances. In response, human security approaches in Teso must be adaptive and grounded in trust-building, while remaining vigilant against co-optation by powerful interests. Interventions should be flexible, context-aware, and rooted in everyday community realities to be effective in preventing the resurgence of violence and supporting long-term peace.

2.8.3 Legal Pluralism

Legal pluralism refers to the coexistence of multiple legal systems—such as customary, statutory, religious, and informal laws—within a single society. In Uganda, and particularly in the Teso region, customary land tenure continues to play a central role, even in the face of state-driven legal reforms. This framework is especially relevant in post-conflict contexts, where efforts to re-establish governance, justice, and property rights are complicated by institutional breakdowns and population displacement. Legal pluralism offers a valuable lens for analyzing the tensions and overlaps between competing land governance systems in such fragile environments (Vapnek et al., 2017; Joireman, 2014). In Liberia, for example, land disputes escalated after conflict due to the return of displaced populations, historical grievances, and overlapping tenure claims. Traditional leaders struggled to resolve such disputes without formal legal backing, and both state and customary systems often operated with unclear authority (Joireman, 2014). Likewise, in Teso, Uganda, land conflict has escalated as a result of resettlement, land commodification, and increasing population growth (Czuba, 2024; D'Agoût, 2025).

Uganda's plural legal system—comprising freehold, leasehold, mailo, and customary tenure—exacerbates these challenges. In Teso, where customary tenure dominates, clan-based institutions manage land collectively, prioritizing use and inheritance over commercial sale. However, contradictions between formal and customary laws hinder dispute resolution and legitimacy (Stevens, 2013). The persistence of informal claims, lack of clear documentation, and weak state institutions undermine access to justice and fuel conflict. As seen in Liberia and mirrored in Teso, legal pluralism reflects on-the-ground realities, but without harmonization, it can perpetuate uncertainty and conflict (Joireman, 2014). Therefore, legal pluralism is highly relevant to peacebuilding in Teso. Effective land governance must integrate both statutory and customary frameworks through inclusive dialogue, clear legal

reforms, and support for traditional authorities. Recognizing and strengthening hybrid legal institutions can help ensure legitimacy, improve access to justice, and reduce land-related tensions in the region (Vapnek et al., 2017; Czuba, 2024).

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design aimed at exploring the root causes, conflict-related impacts, and resolution mechanisms of land disputes in the Teso region, with particular emphasis on post-conflict peacebuilding and socio-political stability. The qualitative approach is most appropriate given the study's focus on understanding complex social dynamics, lived experiences, and the contextual nature of land disputes, which quantitative methods may inadequately capture. By engaging directly with affected individuals and institutions, the study seeks to generate rich, in-depth insights into both formal and informal mechanisms of land conflict resolution.

3.2 Research Setting and Positionality

The research was conducted in the Teso sub-region of Uganda, a post-conflict area with a long history of land disputes intertwined with war-related displacement and socio-political transformation. My personal connection to the area, being a native speaker of Ateso and familiar with local customs and social structures, provided a significant advantage in gaining trust and eliciting detailed responses from participants. This insider positionality facilitated

access to sensitive information and nuanced perspectives that might otherwise be withheld from external researchers.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

3.3.1 Primary Sources and Interviews

Data collection centred on primary qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews with a diverse set of stakeholders:

- Community members directly affected by land conflicts, including displaced persons and returnees
- Clan and village chiefs, cultural and traditional leaders
- Government officials and law enforcement personnel
- Members of the formal justice system, including local council courts
- Experts knowledgeable in land governance and conflict resolution in Teso.

As Denov and Atim (2017) argue in their research, interviews that are informal and anonymized can enhance confidentiality and encourage openness—particularly when dealing with sensitive topics such as trauma associated with conflict. Informed by this insight, this research adopted a similar approach when interviewing community members. These interviews were largely informal and conducted without recording names, in order to create a safe and trusting environment. In contrast, interviews with government officials and academics were conducted more formally, with explicit consent obtained to disclose identities where appropriate. Flexibility in language was also crucial: interviews were carried out in English when possible, and translators were engaged to support respondents more comfortable communicating in Ateso.

3.3.2 Participant Observation

To supplement interview data, the researcher engaged in participant observation of six community dialogues and mediation sessions focused on land dispute adjudication. These observations allowed the researcher to capture the interaction between formal legal

institutions and customary dispute resolution processes, providing empirical insights into mechanisms of conflict management and community engagement.

3.3.3 Focus Group Discussions

Four focus group discussions were held in communities recently affected by land disputes. These group sessions enabled the exploration of collective perceptions and community dynamics around land conflict and resolution strategies, providing an additional layer of data that complemented individual interviews.

3.3.4 Transect Walks and Site Surveys

Transect walks were conducted around key disputed land sites in the Teso region, often in conjunction with observing mediation sessions. These physical surveys, sometimes aided by motorbike rides over extensive land areas, helped contextualize the spatial and environmental aspects of land conflicts and fostered rapport with community members who provided on-the-ground explanations.

3.3.5 Sampling

Table 1: Sample distribution and Data collection methods

District	In-depth Interviews	FGD Participants	Key Informants	Total Participants	Justification
Soroti	10	12 (2 FGDs x 6)	3	25	A central conflict zone with high displacement, formal land claims, and returnee integration challenges.
Katakwi	8	12 (2 FGDs x 6)	2	22	Severely affected by armed conflict and cattle rustling; returnee pressure on ancestral land.
Amuria	6	12 (2 FGDs x 6)	2	20	LRA insurgency stronghold with persistent land tensions among returnees

					and host communities.
Kaberamaido	5	6 (1 FGD x 6)	2	13	Moderate conflict exposure; resettlement-driven land tensions and clan boundary disputes.
Kumi	5	6 (1 FGD x 6)	2	13	A district with administrative relevance to land governance; moderate conflict impact.
Bukedea	4	6 (1 FGD x 6)	1	11	Fewer direct war impacts, but growing land pressure due to migration and urban expansion.
Ngora	4	6 (1 FGD x 6)	1	11	Stable during conflict period; reflects customary land tenure practices influencing current disputes.
Total	42	60 (10 FGDs)	13	115	Comprehensive regional coverage balancing conflict severity, demographic pressure, and land governance diversity.

The triangulation approach was employed to develop an understanding of land disputes within the historically, socially, and institutionally varied contexts of the Teso sub-region. For example, in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals directly impacted by land disputes and civil war displacement. Additionally, focus group discussions (FGDs) with youth, elders, women, and community leaders helped capture collective memories and contested experiences. Furthermore, key informant interviews (KIIs) with government officials, traditional leaders, legal professionals, and civil society representatives involved in land governance and conflict mediation provided valuable institutional insights.

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3.4 Data Analysis

Data from interviews, observations, and focus groups were transcribed and coded thematically. The coding process involved identifying recurrent patterns, contradictions, and unique case details relating to causes, impacts, and resolution of land disputes. Thematic analysis enabled comparison between formal and traditional mechanisms, highlighting gaps, strengths, and challenges. By incorporating triangulation across different data sources, the researcher was able to strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Given the trauma and sensitivity surrounding land disputes and post-conflict experiences, ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with clear communication on the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Anonymity was preserved especially for vulnerable community members and those sharing sensitive information. I maintained cultural sensitivity and respect, minimizing potential distress by allowing participants to decline to answer or withdraw at any point.

3.6 Limitations

This study faced several limitations typical of post-conflict qualitative research. As Horn (1997) notes in her work on memory and conflict, older participants may struggle with accurately recalling past events, especially when recounting long-term or traumatic experiences. This concern was relevant here, as many interviewees were elderly and reflecting on events that occurred decades ago. Similarly, Denov and Atim (2017) highlight

how trauma and fear of social stigma or retaliation can inhibit full disclosure in interviews conducted in post-conflict settings. This was evident in several interviews, where participants were cautious or reluctant to speak openly about sensitive land-related conflicts. In addition, the informal and purposive sampling strategy used, necessary due to the complex field conditions, limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the Teso region. Fieldwork was further constrained by accessibility issues, particularly in remote or insecure areas, which meant data collection was concentrated in more reachable communities. Nevertheless, drawing on insider positionality and employing triangulation of data sources helped reduce potential biases and provided a richer, more nuanced understanding of land disputes in the region.

Chapter 4: Data Presentation and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the data collected through interviews, participant observations, focus group discussions, and transect walks in the Teso region. The analysis aims to uncover the root causes, impacts, and resolution mechanisms of land disputes within the post-conflict context, with particular attention to how these factors influence peacebuilding and socio-political stability. Themes emerging from the data are organised around key issues such as historical land ownership patterns, displacement effects, the interplay between formal and traditional justice systems, and community perceptions of legitimacy.

4.2 Root Causes of Land Disputes

Participants consistently identified war-related displacement as a central cause of land conflicts. The protracted civil conflict in Teso disrupted traditional land tenure systems, leading to widespread loss of documentation, land grabbing, and contestation upon return. Many interviewees described how shifting boundaries and population movements altered customary claims, exacerbating tensions between clans and individuals.

As Mr. Oigot Habib explained, “When we came back after the war, people had moved. Some found their land already cultivated by others. The old landmarks were destroyed, and no

one remembered who owned what anymore” (April 2024). This testimony illustrates how war-induced displacement destabilized both physical markers and oral memory, critical elements of customary land ownership. It also highlights the fragility of land tenure systems reliant on informal boundary recognition.

Traditional leaders reinforced this concern, particularly regarding the erosion of their authority. Mzee Paul Owula lamented, “Before the war, clans knew their land. But now, even young people question elders' words. They say, ‘Where is the document?’” (March 2024). His statement reflects the growing tension between oral traditions and modern legal expectations, revealing how generational shifts and increased legal formalism challenge customary legitimacy.

Government officials also emphasized the lack of legal documentation as a compounding factor. “Most people in rural areas don't have land titles. So, when disputes arise, they go back to clan history or hearsay, which makes things worse,” noted Miss Atiang Winifred, Sub-County Chief of Asamuk. This comment reveals how the absence of state-recognized land records fuels conflicting narratives and undermines adjudication, especially where multiple legal systems coexist.

4.3 Conflict-Related Impacts on Communities

The disruption of land rights has had profound social and economic impacts in Teso. Returnees frequently encountered occupied land, leading to protracted disputes and, at times, violence. This instability significantly hindered agricultural productivity and deepened poverty.

Women and other vulnerable groups were particularly affected. Auma Stella, a widow, shared: “When my husband died during the war, his brothers took our land. They said I had no right because I was not born in the clan” (April 2024). Her experience highlights the gendered dimensions of land dispossession, where patriarchal norms intensify in post-conflict contexts, especially when formal safeguards are absent or unenforced. Focus group participants also spoke of the breakdown in social trust. “The land fights have turned brothers into enemies. Even churches can't stop them from going to court or cursing each other,” remarked Mr. Orinyo Paul, LC2 Chairman of Ojamai parish. This observation

underscores how land disputes have escalated beyond personal grievances to wider community rifts, undermining social cohesion.

Economically, the fear of eviction discouraged long-term investment in farming. As Naboth Okoboi stated, “You cannot farm in peace when you know someone might evict you tomorrow. People fear to invest in land they may lose.” This quote illustrates how insecurity of tenure translates into reduced productivity, entrenching cycles of poverty in an already fragile post-war economy.

4.4 Resolution Mechanisms: Formal and Traditional Systems

The study revealed a complex landscape of land dispute resolution in Teso, where both formal and traditional institutions operate concurrently. While formal systems—such as Local Council courts and land tribunals—offer legal authority, they are often criticized for being slow, expensive, and inaccessible. On the other hand, traditional mechanisms, though culturally legitimate and widely used, are viewed by some as prone to bias or lacking transparency.

Mzee Paul Owula observed, “We still sit under the tree and talk as clans, but now people ask for court letters. They don’t fear the elders like before.” His reflection points to the waning influence of customary institutions in a context where modern legal expectations are rising, even in rural settings.

Observation during local council sessions confirmed these systemic pressures. One official admitted, “Everyday people bring land cases. Some are genuine, but others are lies. We try to be fair, but the files are too many.” This underscores the burden placed on local courts, which are often under-resourced and overwhelmed, limiting their effectiveness.

Frustration with the formal system was also apparent. “My case has been in court for five years. I have spent all my savings. The other man has more connections,” lamented Okiror Stephen, a land claimant. His experience highlights how economic inequality and political connections influence outcomes, eroding faith in the formal justice system.

As a result, many navigate both systems in parallel. “I first went to the clan elders, but when the other side refused, I took them to court. Now the judge told us to go back and reconcile,” explained Okello George, a returnee. This comment reveals the hybrid approach often taken by individuals, reflecting both the shortcomings and interdependence of formal and traditional avenues.

4.5 Community Perceptions of Legitimacy and Justice

Community trust in land dispute resolution was closely tied to perceptions of fairness, cultural relevance, and transparency. While traditional mechanisms were often seen as accessible and familiar, concerns emerged about their impartiality. As Mr. Opejo Robert, an Iteso cultural leader, put it: “I trust my clan more than the court. Judges don’t know our history.” His remark shows the enduring authority of customary systems where shared heritage and oral memory are valued over written law. However, others questioned the fairness of these mechanisms. “If your clan is not powerful, the elders may not support you. They listen to those with cows and money,” said Asero Sarah from Amuria. Her critique reflects the reality that traditional systems can reinforce existing power hierarchies, disadvantaging already marginalized individuals. Government officials acknowledged these issues. “We need to find a way to integrate customary leaders into the legal system but ensure checks and balances,” noted Miss Atiang Winifred. This reinforces the need for hybrid models that blend legitimacy with procedural safeguards.

4.6 The Role of Post-Conflict Peacebuilding

The data clearly indicate that resolving land disputes is essential for long-term peace in Teso. Secure land tenure supports not only economic recovery but also reconciliation and social stability. As Mr. Orinyo Paul noted, “Even though the war ended, the land fights are like another war. Individuals are living in fear.” This analogy underscores the persistent sense of threat and insecurity, suggesting that land conflicts function as a continuation of wartime grievances in peacetime. The potential for renewed unrest was especially apparent in youth narratives. “If land justice is not seen as fair, youth will rebel again. They feel cheated,” warned Ariokot Joyce an NGO worker in Kumi. This reflects how unresolved land issues can be a flashpoint for political instability, especially among disenfranchised groups.

Nonetheless, the research also revealed hope for reconciliation through community-based dialogue. Observation notes from a mediation session in Soroti recorded that “when both sides talk openly, and elders bless the agreement, there is more peace.” Such practices demonstrate the restorative potential of inclusive dialogue when combined with local cultural legitimacy.

Yet, informal mechanisms alone were not seen as sufficient. As Mr. Okurut Ben, LC3 Chairman of Asamuk, insisted: “Clan courts can guide, but the government must protect people with the law. We need titles, not just words.” His call reflects the broader need for state-backed legal frameworks to complement traditional efforts and reinforce the rule of law.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter critically synthesizes the findings of the study with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, drawing on key theoretical frameworks including Conflict Theory, the Human Security Framework, and Legal Pluralism. The goal is to deepen our understanding of how the root causes, consequences, and mechanisms of land disputes in the Teso region interact with post-conflict peacebuilding and land governance. The analysis highlights the interaction between customary and statutory institutions, historical grievances, elite manipulation, and structural inequalities, showing how these factors either align with or challenge existing scholarship.

5.1 Root Causes of Land Disputes

The study found that displacement due to the LRA insurgency and cattle rustling destabilized traditional landholding systems, producing contested claims and shifting boundaries. According to Conflict Theory, social conflict arises from competition over scarce resources—in this case, land—as a symbol of power, identity, and economic survival. As

interviewees noted, "land was left unattended for years," creating opportunities for opportunistic claims by outsiders and kin alike. This confirms Ugwueze et al. (2022), who observe that conflict-induced displacements typically produce contested property relations. Colonial legacies also emerged as root causes, as post-independence land policies further undermined communal tenure systems. The finding supports Joireman (2014), who argues that unresolved colonial-era land injustices embed deep-rooted grievances that re-emerge in post-conflict transitions.

From a Human Security perspective, displacement and weakened access to land directly compromise individuals' safety, livelihoods, and dignity. As one respondent noted, "The elders knew the boundaries, but after the war, the children returned with new claims and titles." This underlines how threats to land access transcend legal disputes to become existential threats that destabilize communities and fuel cycles of insecurity.

5.2 Conflict-Related Impacts

The social and economic effects of land disputes were found to be severe. Informed by Conflict Theory, these findings illustrate how unresolved structural inequalities—in this case, land tenure insecurity—are not merely historical legacies but ongoing sources of friction. Respondents described "mistrust among brothers" and "churches failing to mediate land fights." These illustrate how land struggles have fractured kinship networks and weakened local social capital. This aligns with Hurwitz et al. (2022), who argue that post-conflict societies remain vulnerable when land rights are uncertain. Contrary to Dilek's (2021) optimistic view of informal forums, Teso's case shows how local mechanisms are not immune to elite manipulation—an insight reinforced by Conflict Theory's emphasis on unequal power dynamics. The Human Security Framework further emphasizes how land disputes compromise personal and community security, undermining recovery from trauma. The continuation of land-related insecurity—despite the cessation of violence—shows that peace remains superficial where daily threats persist.

Additionally, land disputes have plagued the people in the aftermath of the civil wars. This has led to the loss of life and a myriad of other social conflict results (Stevens, 2013). The topography of the Teso region left the people vulnerable and susceptible to vicious attacks

by bush fighters. Children were abducted and were turned to kill their own households, communities and loved ones. Young girls were abducted, forced to commit terrible acts, and made to bear children during the war. Villages were looted with war-brutality using fire, thereby leaving homesteads, homes, economic and social arrangements unattended. For several years, the world only knew of distress in the Teso region. It has not taken the people of Teso long to recover from the ordeal of the brutal civil war; but the piercing scars as a result of the civil wars still remain fresh (Masters, 2023).

5.3 Effectiveness of Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

5.3.1 Traditional Mechanisms

Traditional Traditional mechanisms continue to play a central role in land dispute resolution in Teso due to their deep cultural legitimacy. Respondents acknowledged their accessibility and familiarity, yet many expressed concerns about the effectiveness and fairness of these mechanisms. A recurring critique was that some clan leaders were “too old or compromised,” casting doubt on their ability to mediate disputes impartially. This aligns with broader critiques within Legal Pluralism, which caution that while customary systems offer flexibility, they often perpetuate patriarchal norms, reinforce local hierarchies, and exclude marginalized voices.

Although scholars such as Ibrahim et al. (2022) highlight the reconciliatory potential of traditional justice, this study reveals a more contested picture in Teso. Several participants argued that these mechanisms “hide injustice behind the mask of peace,” pointing to a superficial harmony that conceals underlying structural violence. This supports Loyle et al.’s (2023) warning that informal systems can obscure inequality rather than challenge it. Despite these shortcomings, traditional institutions retain a strong sense of legitimacy, echoing Joireman (2014) and Wanjiru (2021), who note their enduring relevance in post-conflict contexts.

5.3.2 Formal Mechanisms

Formal courts, while theoretically impartial, were widely described as inaccessible, expensive, and easily captured by elites. Conflict Theory helps explain these findings: legal systems reflect and reproduce the interests of dominant groups. Interview data support Rocca & Zielinski (2022), who describe how formal systems in post-conflict environments often serve those with capital and political access. Despite these flaws, formal courts were still pursued in high-stakes disputes, showing the strategic engagement with both systems—a behavior consistent with Legal Pluralism, where individuals "forum shop" based on perceived outcomes.

5.4 Hybrid Legal Systems and Structural Inequalities

The overlapping of customary, statutory, and transitional legal systems in Teso exemplifies the challenges discussed in Legal Pluralism. While pluralism offers flexibility, the lack of coordination creates confusion and deepens inequality. As one official said, "people go to whichever court they think will rule in their favor." This forum-shopping undermines legitimacy and illustrates how power asymmetries are embedded within plural systems (Loyle et al., 2023).

Legal Pluralism theory acknowledges the legitimacy of multiple systems but stresses the need for integration and accountability. In Teso, integration remains weak, and elite capture persists—highlighting that pluralism without oversight can reinforce, rather than reduce, injustice.

5.5 Role of the State and Political Elites

The state's failure to ensure tenure security is a recurring theme. Conflict Theory provides a useful lens here, emphasizing how elites exploit institutions for self-interest during periods of institutional flux. Respondents described the government as "absent" or only engaged when land titles were involved. These findings affirm Joireman's (2014) argument that ambiguous land laws are exploited by political elites in transitional states.

In addition, community mediations were often manipulated by politicians. This undermines the literature's optimistic assessment of state-led peacebuilding (Hurwitz et al., 2022) and instead supports the Conflict Theory critique of elite co-optation of governance mechanisms.

5.6 Implications for Post-Conflict Peacebuilding

The persistence of land disputes despite the end of open conflict underscores the centrality of land to meaningful peace. The Human Security Framework suggests that peace cannot be achieved merely through ceasefires or disarmament—it must include social, legal, and economic security. As one respondent remarked, “Land fights are like another war.”

Sustainable peace in Teso requires a comprehensive approach that addresses land injustice, historical grievances, and institutional legitimacy. This aligns with Ibrahim et al. (2022), who argue that post-conflict justice must engage both local and institutional mechanisms. However, without structural reform and integration of plural legal frameworks, land-related grievances may remain flashpoints for future instability.

This chapter therefore has demonstrated that land disputes in the Teso region are deeply embedded in structural inequalities, historical grievances, and institutional fragmentation. By applying Conflict Theory, Legal Pluralism, and the Human Security Framework, the study reveals that while both traditional and formal systems play crucial roles, neither alone is sufficient to resolve disputes or sustain peace. The findings challenge the literature's sometimes idealistic portrayals of customary systems and highlight the need for harmonized, accountable, and inclusive land governance. Only by addressing land not just as property but as a source of identity, security, and justice can post-conflict peacebuilding in Teso become truly sustainable.

Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the root causes, conflict-related impacts, and resolution mechanisms of land disputes in the Teso region of Uganda, particularly in relation to post-conflict peacebuilding and socio-political stability. Based on qualitative data—including interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and documentary analysis—the findings revealed four interlinked themes: the historical and conflict-related roots of land disputes; the strengths and weaknesses of traditional and formal mechanisms; the role of gender exclusion in land access and justice; and the implications for hybrid legal reform. This conclusion draws these themes together, offering a coherent synthesis and direction for future peacebuilding efforts.

Land disputes in Teso are embedded in layers of historical injustices, including colonial land policies, post-independence land reforms, and displacement during armed conflict. The return of displaced populations has reactivated long-dormant claims, intensifying inter- and intra-community tensions. These land conflicts are not merely economic or legal issues; they are deeply tied to identity, belonging, and the memory of war. As a result, unresolved disputes continue to hinder sustainable peacebuilding and community reintegration.

The study found that communities in Teso rely on both traditional and formal systems to resolve land disputes. Traditional mechanisms, led by clan leaders and elders, are seen as culturally familiar and accessible. However, their legitimacy is increasingly questioned due to internal biases, aging leadership, and exclusionary practices. As one interviewee noted,

“Sometimes our elders are not neutral, they are our uncles or from our rival clan, and they already have a side.” These systems are often ill-equipped to handle disputes involving returnees or large-scale land claims.

In contrast, formal systems offer legal authority and structured procedures but are widely perceived as inaccessible and corrupt. Language barriers, high costs, and elite interference prevent many from seeking justice through the courts. One respondent stated plainly, “You go to court, but the rich man already has the lawyer, the money, and the land title—what chance do we have?”

A critical finding of the study is the persistent marginalization of women—especially widows and orphans—from both traditional and formal land adjudication processes. Despite progressive legal reforms on paper, patriarchal norms continue to dominate land governance in practice. This gender-based exclusion not only perpetuates inequality but also undermines the credibility and inclusiveness of post-conflict recovery efforts.

The overlapping and often conflicting nature of formal, customary, and transitional legal frameworks has created a fragmented and confusing dispute resolution landscape in Teso. This fragmentation enables “forum shopping” by powerful actors and leaves vulnerable populations without clear pathways to justice. While existing literature (Lasuba, 2016; Joireman, 2014) highlights the limitations of informal systems, this study reinforces the idea that communities continue to place more trust in traditional structures than in the state. As Ibrahim et al. (2022) argue, these systems need reform—not abandonment. Reform efforts must focus on increasing accountability, ensuring gender inclusion, and fostering cooperation between formal and informal institutions.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings and testimonies from Teso, it is clear that addressing land disputes and promoting post-conflict recovery requires a comprehensive, inclusive, and context-sensitive approach. The legacy of the LRA war—cited repeatedly in interviews—disrupted social structures, displaced communities, and eroded customary land knowledge through the loss of elders who traditionally safeguarded communal land histories. Therefore, land reform must go beyond technical solutions to engage the legal, social, and cultural dimensions shaped by conflict.

Stronger collaboration between formal and customary land governance systems is essential. Government agencies and NGOs should support hybrid models that integrate traditional dispute resolution within a rights-based framework that ensures fairness, gender equality, and legal consistency. Rather than displacing customary authorities, interventions should focus on building their capacity through training in legal literacy, inclusive mediation, and equitable decision-making. Simultaneously, formal land institutions need to be decentralized, better resourced, and more responsive to the realities of rural communities still grappling with post-conflict vulnerabilities.

Local council courts—established under Uganda’s decentralization policy—emerged in this study as vital to grassroots justice. They are often the first and most trusted point of legal contact for rural populations. The districts in Teso region have Local Council I (village), II (parish), and III (sub-county) courts, which resolve minor civil disputes—especially related to land, debts, and domestic issues. Empowering these courts through operational support, clear jurisdictional mandates, and training in culturally sensitive conflict resolution can significantly improve the efficiency and accessibility of land justice. Enhancing transparency and accountability within these courts can also rebuild public trust and limit elite manipulation.

Gender-based disparities must be urgently addressed. The research found that women, particularly widows, face systemic obstacles in accessing and retaining land under customary tenure. Many cultural norms deny women independent land rights, leaving them vulnerable to eviction and exploitation after the death of a spouse. Respondents—including community leaders—confirmed that widows are often the primary targets in land disputes. Legal reforms should prioritize harmonizing customary and statutory frameworks to secure women’s rights, ensuring their full participation in land governance processes.

A major issue raised during fieldwork was the absence of updated land records in customary tenure areas. The loss of elders has weakened community memory of land boundaries, increasing the risk of disputes. To address this, government should promote participatory and low-cost land documentation initiatives, including community mapping and digitization of records. Certificates of Customary Ownership (CCOs) offer a promising tool if supported by financial assistance and local sensitization campaigns. Current surveying and registration procedures are prohibitively expensive; as a local council chairman noted, “Even we, the

leaders, cannot afford the cost.” There is an urgent need to subsidize and simplify these processes to ensure they are accessible to all—not just the elite.

Many land disputes are worsened by misinformation and limited awareness of legal rights and procedures. Targeted community sensitization—led by government bodies, civil society, and religious institutions—can equip people with the knowledge to make informed decisions. These education campaigns should prioritize inclusivity by targeting women and youth, be conducted in local languages, and use culturally resonant formats.

So to conclude, achieving land justice in Teso requires addressing not only the procedural gaps in land governance but also the deeper legacies of war, displacement, and systemic exclusion. Reconciliation, the restoration of institutional trust, and recognition of historical grievances must accompany any legal or policy reform. Aligning customary and formal mechanisms, promoting equity in access and participation, and empowering local actors can transform land reform into a platform for lasting peace and inclusive development in the region.

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Appendix A: Participant Consent Form

Title of Study:

Investigating the Root Causes, Conflict-related Impacts, and Resolution Mechanisms of Land Disputes in the Teso Region.

Researcher:

University

Contact.....

You are invited to participate in a research study aimed at understanding the underlying causes of land disputes in the Teso region, the impacts of conflict on land rights, and how disputes are being addressed in ways that contribute to peace and stability.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw at any point without any negative consequences. You may also refuse to answer any question you do not wish to respond to. If you agree to take part, you will be asked to participate in an interview, focus group discussion, or community dialogue. This may take between 30–60 minutes. You may also be asked to clarify some points at a later time, if necessary. All the information you provide will be treated with strict confidentiality. Your responses will be used only for academic and research purposes. Your name or any identifying information will not be included in the final report unless you give explicit permission. You may choose to remain anonymous.

Please note: There are no known risks to participating in this study. However, if discussing past experiences causes discomfort, you are free to pause or stop the interview. The study aims to contribute to improved land conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts in the Teso region.

Please read and indicate your understanding and agreement below by putting a tick for Yes OR a cross for No:

1. I have read and understood the information provided above. Yes No
2. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. Yes No
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time.
 Yes No
4. I understand that my responses will be kept confidential and used for academic purposes only. Yes No
5. I consent to participate in this research study. Yes No

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature or Thumbprint: _____ **Date:** _____

Interviewer's Name and Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX B: FGD Tool

Introduction

Good day. Thank you all for coming. We are conducting a research study to understand land disputes in the Teso region—what causes them, how they impact communities, and how they are resolved, especially in the context of peace after conflict. We are interested in hearing your views and lived experiences. This is a group discussion, not a test, there are no right or wrong answers. We kindly ask everyone to respect one another's opinions and to speak one at a time. Participation is voluntary, and all responses will be kept confidential. You can choose to remain silent or leave the group at any time.

A. Participant Profile (Recorded by note-taker or moderator)

- Group type (e.g., elders, youth, women, mixed, returnees, leaders):
- Location:
- Number of participants:

- Approximate age range:
- Date and time of FGD:

B. Discussion guiding questions

1. Land Ownership and Use Before and After Conflict

- How was land traditionally owned and used before the conflict?
- How did the war or conflict in Teso change land ownership or use?
- Have returnees or displaced persons faced difficulties reclaiming land?

2. Root Causes of Land Conflicts

- What are the main causes of land conflicts in your community?
- Are there new causes emerging after the war (e.g., increased land value, land scarcity, population growth)?
- Do historical grievances or colonial land arrangements still play a role?

3. Impacts of Land Conflicts on Daily Life and Peacebuilding

- How have land conflicts affected relationships among community members, clans, or families?
- Have there been incidents of violence, intimidation, or displacement?
- In what ways do land disputes affect women, orphans, or vulnerable groups?
- Do you think land disputes are a threat to peace and development in the area?

4. Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

- How are land disputes usually resolved in this community?
- What role do clan leaders, elders, or cultural institutions play?
- What role do local councils or formal courts play?
- Which mechanisms are more trusted and why?
- Are there cases where both traditional and formal systems are used together? How does that work?

5. Role of Institutions in Peacebuilding

- What is the role of the government in resolving land disputes here?
- Have NGOs or religious leaders helped in mediating land issues? Please elaborate.
- Do you feel your community has enough support to manage land conflicts? Please elaborate.

6. Recommendations for Sustainable Land Governance

- What needs to be done to prevent future land conflicts?
- What can be done to make land governance fairer and more peaceful?
- What is the role of youth and women in promoting peace and land justice?

C. Closing

- Is there anything else you would like to share about land and peace in your community?
- Thank you for your participation. Your views will contribute to solutions that respect your experiences and needs.

Appendix C: Interview Tool:

Introduction (read to participant):

Good day. My name is, and I am conducting a research study to understand the root causes and impacts of land conflicts in the Teso region, particularly how these disputes affect peacebuilding and stability after the war. This interview is voluntary and confidential. Your responses will be used for academic purposes only. You may choose not to answer any question and can stop the interview at any time.

Section A: Background Information

1. Gender: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Occupation: _____
4. District/Sub-county/Parish: _____
5. Role in the community (e.g., clan elder, local leader, returnee, farmer, widow, youth, etc.): _____

Section B: Root Causes of Land Disputes

1. In your opinion, what are the main causes of land conflicts in your area?
2. How have these causes changed over time, especially before, during, and after the war?
3. Do you think the civil conflict in Teso contributed to the current land disputes? How?
4. Are there specific groups (e.g., returnees, widows, clans, elites) who are more affected or more involved in these disputes? Why?

Section C: Impacts of Land Conflicts

1. How have land disputes affected community relationships in your area?

2. Have you personally experienced or witnessed any effects of land conflicts (e.g., violence, displacement, poverty)?
3. What are some of the long-term consequences of these conflicts for peacebuilding and development?
4. How have vulnerable groups (e.g., women, orphans, elderly) been affected differently by land disputes?

Section D: Resolution Mechanisms

1. What methods are commonly used to resolve land disputes here?
2. How effective are traditional leaders or clan mechanisms in resolving these disputes?
3. What about formal/legal mechanisms—are they accessible and effective?
4. Do people trust one system more than the other? Why?
5. Have there been efforts to combine or integrate traditional and formal systems? If yes, how successful have they been?

Section E: Peacebuilding and Stability

1. Do you think land conflicts pose a risk to long-term peace and stability in Teso?
2. What role do local leaders or institutions play in promoting peace over land issues?
3. What strategies can be used to ensure fair and lasting resolutions to land disputes?
4. What can the government, NGOs, or cultural institutions do better to support communities affected by land conflicts?

Section F: Closing Questions

1. Is there anything else you would like to share about land disputes or how they can be better resolved?
2. Would you be willing to be contacted again for clarification if needed?

THANK YOU

Appendix D: Key Informant Interview (KII) Tool

Introduction

Good morning/afternoon. My name is and I'm conducting a research study on land disputes in the Teso region, specifically focusing on their causes, impacts, and how they are resolved, especially in relation to peacebuilding after conflict. You have been selected for this interview because of your expertise, experience, or position in relation to these issues. Your participation is voluntary, and your responses will be confidential. You may decline to answer any question or end the interview at any time.

Section A: Informant Profile (*filled by interviewer*)

- Name (or code, if anonymity requested):
- Gender:
- Position/Title:
- Organization/Institution:
- Area of jurisdiction or expertise:
- Date and location of interview:

Section B: Guiding Interview Questions

1. Context and Background

- i. In your view, what were the main historical and conflict-related causes of land disputes in Teso?
- ii. How did the civil conflict or insurgency affect land ownership patterns and traditional land systems?

2. Nature and Dynamics of Land Disputes

- i. What types of land disputes are most common in the region (e.g., boundary, inheritance, returnee claims)?

- ii. Which groups (e.g., youth, returnees, women, and clan leaders) are most affected by land disputes?
- iii. Are there particular districts, clans, or ethnicities where these disputes are more prevalent?

3. Post-conflict Impacts

- i. How have unresolved land disputes affected post-conflict peace and reconciliation efforts?
- ii. Do you think land issues are still a threat to stability in the region?

4. Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

- i. What mechanisms exist for resolving land disputes in Teso (traditional, local council, court, etc.)?
- ii. How effective are these mechanisms in resolving land-related conflicts?
- iii. Have you observed any tensions between traditional and formal justice systems?
- iv. Are some actors more trusted than others to mediate disputes?

5. Institutional Roles

- i. What roles do local government, cultural institutions, and national land bodies play in dispute resolution?
- ii. Has the state (or specific agencies) helped or hindered peaceful land governance?
- iii. What role have NGOs, religious institutions, or donors played?

6. Peacebuilding and Community Stability

- i. How are land disputes linked to broader community stability or development challenges?
- ii. What steps have been taken to promote land rights awareness, especially among vulnerable groups?

7. Challenges and Gaps

- i. What are the biggest obstacles to achieving fair and lasting land dispute resolution in the region?
- ii. Are there legal, institutional, or cultural gaps that complicate this process?

8. Recommendations

- i. What policy or community-level changes would you recommend to reduce land conflict in Teso?
- ii. How can traditional and formal mechanisms be better integrated?
- iii. What is needed to strengthen land governance and support peacebuilding?

Section C: Closing

- Do you have any final thoughts, concerns, or stories you'd like to share that could help us understand the issue better?