

From Encampment to ‘Emplotment’: Land Matters in Former IDP Camps

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Introduction

The small rural trading centres that hosted thousands of people in camps for Internally Displaced Persons are being transformed once again in the period since the closure of the camps. Some are pursuing futures as Town Boards or even Town Councils envisioned in fine technical drawings by professional urban planners. In planners’ views, development seems to require the exodus of displaced people and also the removal of the dead who were interred in the camp during the conflict. They must be exhumed and reburied on their own land in rural homes. Both sub-county land and the property of landowners within these small urban centres are being divided into plots to be leased, sold and developed. The commodification of land in the former IDP camps is proceeding apace. Traditional Leaders warn against the sale of rural ‘ancestral land,’ noting that it is better to buy and sell plots in trading centres.

This paper is primarily based on fieldwork in Awach, a former IDP camp now pursuing the status of Town Board. In analysing material from interviews with landowners, ‘remainders’ who stayed behind after the camp closed, local leaders and officials, we emphasize the tensions and conflicts that are emerging around plots and their development.

1. Background

Since the closure of the camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in northern Uganda, and the return of people to their rural homes, there has been concern about claims to ‘ancestral land’ (*ngom kwaro*) and the explosion of land conflicts in rural areas. Yet the former IDP camps, many of which are developing into small urban centres, are also sites of land problems that reflect the far-reaching changes that occurred during the time of displacement. In this paper we explore the processes by which land is taking on new significance in the centres that hosted IDP camps. We argue that the displacement and replacement of thousands of people prepared the way for the commodification, privatization, and judicialization of land in small urban centres.

Problems surrounding rights in rural land are connected to land issues in small urban centres. On the one hand, some people remained in the former IDP camps because of unresolved land wrangles in their rural homes, or denial of access on the grounds of weak patrilineal or marital connections. On the other hand, efforts to maintain customary tenure of rural land were accompanied by encouragements to invest in urban plots. On the radio, and in local meetings, traditional leaders advised people not to buy and sell ancestral land, but only plots in urban areas. These are seen as locations where individual freehold is the dominant form of tenure and land transactions are less problematic, an assumption that is not entirely accurate in the case of the former IDP camps, as we shall see. Urbanization is not just about the growth of major municipalities and cities; trading centres that hosted IDP camps are also seeking recognition as small urban centres by applying for the status of Town Board. This involves technical planning, administrative autonomy, and a vote (budget allocation) for development from central government. Such small urban centres contain family as well as institutional land; agriculture may even be pursued within the limits of a projected Town Board. The contrast between urban plots and rural ‘ancestral land’ is not so sharp.

Our material on land issues derives from a study of the development of IDP camp localities after the camps were closed. We focused on efforts to urbanize and dreams of development (to be presented in another publication entitled ‘Urbanization by Subtraction’) and on the situations of the displaced people who remained behind (Whyte *et al.* 2012). We made a case study of Awach Sub-county headquarters, once a trading centre, then an IDP camp, now in the process of becoming a Town Board. We first visited Awach in early 2009, when it was still home to thousands of displaced people, and have continued to visit as it struggles to develop as a small urban centre. Over the period from September 2010 to January 2012 we interviewed about one hundred residents and former residents of Awach, as well as 28 local leaders, government officials, and NGO officers. In addition we made study visits to two other former camps, where we interviewed ten residents and officials: Opit, likewise slated to become a Town Board, and Pabbo, which has applied for elevation from Town Board to Town Council status. We also had interviews with four District officials in Gulu Town.¹

2. Displacement Changes Land Practices

Displacement in Acholiland started unevenly. After 1986 people fled as insecurity increased and affected their area; some sought safety elsewhere and then returned home for a while. But as the war with the Lord’s Resistance Army intensified, the national army began a strategy of forcibly constraining the population in IDP camps. By the year 2001, 90% of people in Acholiland were crowded into IDP settlements,² allegedly under the protection of the Uganda People’s Defence Force. They ranged in size from 10,000 to 65,000 inhabitants living in round mud-brick houses so close together that their thatched roofs almost touched. In the camps people lived under difficult conditions, dependent on humanitarian aid, which helped just enough to allow the camp regime to continue (Dolan 2009, Finnström 2008, Muyinda 2009, Nibbe 2010). Displacement abrogated previous assumptions about land rights and tenure. Landowners within the camp perimeter had to

¹ The study took place under the auspices of the Gulu ENRECA project entitled ‘Changing Human Security: Recovery from Armed Conflict in Northern Uganda’ for which permission was obtained from the Gulu University Institutional Review Committee and the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology.

² UNHCR reports that 1.84 million people were displaced into 251 camps across 11 districts (UNHCR 2012).

allow displaced households to settle on their land, whether they knew them or not. The camps had sharp, not always visible, boundaries and no one was allowed outside from early evening until morning. Even during the day, movements were restricted to a perimeter area of three to six kilometres around the camp, where they could plant crops and collect firewood.

The camps were mostly established in small trading centres, where there was a barracks, a health centre, a school, or a mission. The area delineated for settlement comprised government, institutional, and family or clan land. In many cases, the residents of an area were forced to move into the camps at very short notice, sometimes as little as 24 to 48 hours, giving no time for proper planning. Within a brief time, the rural area of a whole sub-county was depopulated and a modest trading centre of a few thousand people multiplied by a factor of ten or more to become a semi-urban concentration. At the time they were forced to move, no one knew how long they would have to stay. In the event many were displaced for ten years, some even longer.

Awach was part of the last wave of 'gazetted', that is officially established, camps. It had been a small trading centre and a sub-county headquarters with a Health Centre IV, a Catholic mission church, a mosque, a Protestant church, two primary schools, and a secondary school. About two thousand people lived there, mostly on family land, and there were shops and small businesses on plots along the road. Situated 45 km northeast of Gulu town, it was not on the main road from Gulu to Kitgum, had no bus or taxi service to Gulu, and no electricity. The surrounding area was heavily infiltrated by the Lord's Resistance Army and people spontaneously began to flee to the trading centre in the early 1990s, hoping for protection from the soldiers (the 'detach') posted there. By 1995, the newly assigned Catholic priest found many displaced people squatting on church land, while others had taken refuge at the health centre or moved in with relatives who had land near the trading centre. With his catechists he registered 9,000 people for food rations from the World Food Programme. Yet it was not until 2001 that Awach IDP camp was officially established and soldiers of the 47th Battalion forced everyone to leave their rural homes and settle within its boundaries. What had once been a modest congeries of little shops and rural institutions grew exponentially to contain 20,000 internally displaced people.

Awach IDP camp consisted of an area corresponding to a few square kilometres at a road junction. Within the boundaries of the camp were the sub-county headquarters, the government health centre, a primary school, and an Anglican church; each of these institutions had land upon which displaced people put up houses. The Catholic mission land was not within the delineated boundaries, and the squatters there, together with the priest, had to build huts within the camp in which to stay after curfew. In addition to this institutional land, family land lay within the gazetted area. Much of this was 'clan land' in the sense that owners did not have individual title, but held it under customary tenure. Rights were transferred from father to sons, but other members of a patrilineage or clan had residual rights and people spoke of clans owning land in and around Awach trading centre. When people first began to flee insecurity in the rural areas, some built shelters on the land of relatives in Awach. But when the displacement became a flood, landowners within the camp area received settlers of all kinds. The authorities urged them to allow those fleeing to put up huts on their land, and they could not refuse. Some evacuees asked the landowners' permission to settle, others just moved in. The landowners seem to have responded generously to the situation. As several told us, it was a terrible time. 'People volunteered to give land because they saw that their fellow Acholi were dying' (Frances Okot LC1). A businessman, Ladit Ocol, had six families staying on his land in the trading centre: 'Those fleeing got permission from the sub-county to build wherever they could

find space. No one could block the refugees. You could come back from the garden and find someone building on your land. But I had sympathy for them.’

In a few cases, people who were displaced before 2000 purchased plots within the perimeter of the camps. In Awach, some plots along the Paicho road, owned by the sub-county, were surveyed and sold in 1998 as displaced people were beginning to move into the trading centre. We visited two brothers from Pawel who bought pieces of land when they had to move to Pabbo camp in 1996-7. One of them, Okumu, explained that the land was expensive, but he did not know when the war would end and did not want to be at the mercy of landowners. As other members of the extended family arrived at the camp they settled on the land these two men had managed to buy and buried their dead—28 in all—on those two pieces of land. However, it was exceptional for displaced people to buy land in the camps. Most settled on land owned by another, whether the sub-county, an institution, or a family.

In Awach as in other camps, the army did not allow people to move back to their rural homes during the day, unless they were very close to the camp. In order to grow crops to supplement the World Food Program rations (which did not cover a household’s food needs), camp residents had to use land within a designated perimeter. In Awach this was first set at 6 km around the camp, but later reduced to 3 km (Nibbe 2010: 167). The restriction created an artificial land shortage and increased the value of land within the peripheral perimeter. Displaced people rented fields for cultivation within the perimeter from local landowners. Thus, even though landowners were not given compensation for settlers, the rental of land for farming provided some income. Perhaps it can be seen as a first step toward the commodification of land.

There was another consequence of the strict control on movement. Settlers were not allowed to bury their dead on their ‘ancestral land’ as is the practice throughout Acholiland and most of Uganda. Common cemeteries are hardly used in northern Uganda except in towns and religious establishments, and no camp burial ground was demarcated. Although a few people buried their relatives in the consecrated ground of the Protestant and Catholic churches,³ most preferred to dig graves near their camp houses, even though the houses were supposed to be only temporary and the space between houses was limited. As years went by, the dead as well as the living multiplied in the camp. The dead were also ‘internally displaced’ in that they were interred ‘out of place’—on other people’s land instead of in their ancestral homes where they should mark the connection between families and land (Meinert & Whyte 2013).

3. Reminders: Squatters and Renters

Re-placement, like displacement, happened in steps and unevenly. After the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement was signed in 2006, satellite or transit camps were established all over Acholiland. The idea was to decongest the IDP camps by moving people to smaller sites closer to their villages, where they could begin to cultivate their own land again. Some moved directly to their rural homes, but many remained in the main camps or in the satellite camps, waiting to see if the peace would hold. Some people said they were ‘still studying the peace’ (Meinert, in press) They hesitated to go back for many reasons: dysfunctional water sources, schools, and health centres; the difficulties of clearing the bush and constructing houses; and the fear of land mines, unexploded ordnance, and

³ In Pabbo, the oldest and largest camp in northern Uganda, an elderly catechist told us that only ‘some 30 bodies’ were buried in the cemetery of the large Catholic church during encampment from 1997-2006.

vengeful spirits (*cen*). As we have discussed elsewhere (Whyte *et al.* 2012), some people were excluded from rural homes on the grounds of missing links through marriage or patriliney. For women, the advice to return to their ‘ancestral home’ did not quite fit, since married women should go to their husband’s ancestral home, and their marital status was not always clear, especially where their partners and partners’ parents had died before leaving IDP camps. In general, women’s rights to land, even user rights, were more fragile than men’s.

Over the three years from 2006 to 2009, the displaced people of Acholiland were encouraged to return to their homes, or as some authorities put it, ‘to where the war found you’ (perhaps in recognition of the fact that not everyone was on ‘ancestral land’ when fighting intensified). Distribution of rations by World Food Program was gradually phased out, at different paces in different areas, as agricultural land was again brought into production. One by one, the IDP camps were formally decommissioned at events sometimes marked by the ceremonial demolition of a hut. The camp at Awach closed officially in August 2008; WFP supplies continued only to the elderly and vulnerable people, until July 2010 when they too were finally halted.

The process of re-placement was not without tension. UNHCR and its NGO partners, which had helped to manage the camps, were bound by the principle of Durable Solutions for IDPs (Brookings Institution 2007). They held that displaced people had the right to return to their places of origin in safety and without duress, to move to another place, or to remain at the site to which they had been displaced. While the Government of Uganda had subscribed to this principle, in practice the authorities wanted the displaced people to return to their rural homes in a bid to restore normality and self-sufficiency. The landowners, both institutions and families, were pressing to remove the settlers in order to resume full use of their land. They even hoped for compensation for having ‘hosted’ displaced people. Arguing against deadlines for eviction and undue pressure, UNHCR and its partners continually urged patience and protection for displaced people.

In Awach the camp phase-out committee repeatedly ‘sensitized’ settlers about why they should leave. The sub-county chief, who chaired the committee, realized that some wanted to stay on for various reasons. But land conflicts were flaring up in the villages, and he urged everyone to go back where they came from, claim their land, and put up a house. Then they could return to Awach later if need be. ‘You go and build where you were to avoid conflict.’ He emphasized that this should apply to all displaced people without exception: ‘We never wanted people to come with excuses like “for me, my cousin has allowed me [to stay on his land in Awach]” or “this is the land of our church.”’ It is noteworthy that this message conformed to others being broadcast on local radio by clan authorities, calling on people to go and claim their clan land before others did. Fears about land-grabbing, which has become a kind of paranoia, were thus reinforced from several sides.

However, there was another land issue at play as well. Landowners in the former camp wanted the settlers gone so they could use their land. The Protestant church gave notice that they planned to plough and develop their land for agriculture. The Health Centre wanted everyone gone so they could fence their area as is proper for health facilities. Families mostly planned to cultivate their land in and around the former camp and wanted to avoid any future claims by those who had used it during the conflict. With the re-establishment of security of life and land-tenure, landowners began to assert their rights over the property that had been shared by force of circumstance.

During encampment, landowners could not demand payment from displaced people staying on their land; the only land with commodity value was that used for cultivation just

outside the camp. But once the camp was officially closed, landowners were allowed to charge rent to those who remained living on their land. Displaced people were told that they would have to negotiate conditions with the landowners if they wished to stay. A market for rental of houses and land thus emerged in the shadow of the camp. Some settlers stayed where they were and paid rent; others looked for places to rent in other parts of the former camp. A few were allowed to stay for free by kind-hearted, or related, landowners.

There was a procedure for demolishing huts once they had been vacated. They were numbered and identified for destruction. The former occupants were notified and were allowed to remove any building materials they wanted, such as poles, doors and window shutters. Their ownership of the hut they had built was thus acknowledged. The rights of the landowners were also recognized in that they could ask to keep any structure on their land once the occupants had taken what they wanted. Huts that were in good condition were retained and rented to those who remained, and to others who wished to live in Awach. When the secondary school, which had moved to Gulu town during the war, reopened in Awach, students from distant villages rented former IDP huts from landowners. So did traders who needed to be near the market and people waiting for land wrangles to be settled in their rural homes. Women who could not (or did not want to) go to their patrilateral or marital homes also rented the former IDP huts and tried to eke out a living doing day labour, trading, petty trade, and borrowing or renting agricultural land.

The IDP camp landowners had requested compensation from the government for the use of their land during the time of encampment, and this was discussed, providing more recognition of the commercial value of land. However, in the event, compensation was never paid. UNHCR and its partners had a plan of assisting landowners to re-establish cultivation on the tramped down soil and piles of mouldering mud brick. They were to send a tractor for ploughing and provide planting materials such as pine trees, groundnuts and sesame. But there was only one tractor for two whole districts; no one in Awach benefited from ploughing, and only a few received seeds. Surprisingly, however, the sites where huts had stood proved remarkably fertile. The broken up mud bricks dissolved in the rain and vegetables flourished between the remaining huts.

The barracks, with its detachment of soldiers, was a central feature of the IDP camp. It had been established on clan land, and had existed for years even before the IDP camp was formally gazetted. The number of soldiers fluctuated over time. After the camp closed about 100 soldiers remained with their wives and children, until the barracks was removed in 2011. Their square mud brick and thatch houses went the way of the round ones that had sheltered the internally displaced people they were supposed to have guarded.

Landowners wanted the displaced dead to be removed as well. They said that it was disrespectful to cultivate on a grave, and some feared that the spirits of those buried 'out of place' might disturb them. Mama Alice had six graves remaining on her land in Awach centre, and had gone round to the grave owners in the villages where they had returned to ask them to come back and take the dead home as well. Developing the land was considered incompatible with graves, especially the graves of non-relatives. The new commodity possibilities of land made displaced graves an even greater problem: buyers do not want to purchase land with graves. Whether they plan to cultivate or build, graves are a hindrance. While this would be the case in many parts of the world, the connection between the living, the dead, and family land is particularly strong in Acholiland. As among the Luo of western Kenya (Shipton 2009), graves in Acholiland are markers of

customary tenure (Meinert & Whyte, in press) but they sit uneasily with commoditised land that can be bought, sold, and rented.

In the case of the two brothers from Pawel who bought land in Pabbo IDP camp, the principle of graves as evidence of land ownership came into contradiction with the fact that graves stand in the way of urban land development. One of the brothers who had managed to buy land within the IDP camp had buried his mother there during the war. The extended family organized a mass exhumation of the 28 graves on two pieces of land in the former camp, in order that the two brothers could develop their urban land. Okumu hesitated to rebury his mother alongside the others. His claim to the land in the camp was being challenged and he reckoned that her grave would be evidence that the land belonged to him. In the end her remains were also exhumed, but only after calling local leaders to witness the grave, and taking a photo, which would serve as evidence of his ownership.

4. Plans and Plots

In November 2009 the sub-county authorities received District approval of their application to upgrade Awach trading centre to the status of Town Board. Becoming a Town Board meant recognition as an urban centre, autonomy from the sub-county and a direct budget vote from central government. By early 2013 final approval had still not come from the relevant national ministry, but many Awachis seemed to consider that they were well on their way to urban status. Part of the process had already started in that plans had been drawn up and plots had been marked.

When we first visited the sub-county offices in October 2010, the walls were hung with colourful and sophisticated drawings of the future Awach Town Board. They showed neat streets lined with plots, and new buildings in several stories, a far cry from the reality outside the door, with its modest mud-walled shops and hundreds of deserted IDP huts. The plans had been drawn up by a team from the Faculty of Technology, Makerere University, apparently financed by the Northern Uganda Transition Initiative, as support to the District plan. The basic thrust of the plan was to bring development by surveying plots that could be sold and developed for commercial and residential use. 'Emplotment' was to start on sub-county land. Two new streets were to be laid out and the land along them divided into plots. These were to be sold as freehold at one million shillings (about 300€) each to buyers who could afford to develop them. Awach was fortunate in that the sub-county had land that could be used for the new streets and divided into plots. The lack of local government land in some places meant the authorities had to find other land to kick-start development in these small urban centres.⁴

The next step was to encourage landowners adjoining the streets, and others in the Town Board, to survey plots on their own land. The message was given to them that they should develop their land by putting up good structures, preferably 'storied' buildings. If they could not afford to do so, they should sell or lease to others who could. This was worrying for some landowners to whom we spoke, who feared they might lose their land because they could not afford to develop it. The chairman of the sub-county council, the LCIII, did not think lack of capital should present a problem. He explained to us that a person with land in the Town Board could survey ten plots and sell eight in order to

⁴ By contrast, the former camp of Opit, also slated for Town Board status, has no public land that can be used to kick-start development. It is not a sub-county headquarters, lying on the boundary of two sub-counties each with administrative centres elsewhere. Land for development would have to be bought, as in fact it was for the construction of the new market and plots to be sold for lockups there.

develop the remaining two. The landowners need not have worried according to the District Lands Officer in Gulu; no one can be forced to sell land, except in special circumstances of compulsory state acquisition.

The streets were duly surveyed and laid out parallel to one another, near the new market funded by USAID. People living on that land, claimed by the sub-county, were warned that houses and graves in the roadway would be destroyed by the road grader. The local authorities claimed that notice had been given in good time when the grader arrived in May 2010, but some residents we spoke to contradicted this. The problem was not so much the houses—they could be vacated—but the bones that had to be exhumed and reburied elsewhere. Exhumation and reburial require a goat for slaughter, and men to open the grave and dig another on the ancestral land where the dead should lie, as well as to transport the bones to the new grave. Many could not exhume their dead quickly enough and marked the burial place with a stick so the grader could pass around it. In all 86 graves (another source put the number at 45) were moved to make way for the new streets with their promise of plots and development. Although money for reburial had been promised, most have yet to receive any because the funds were insufficient.

Nearly two years after the new streets were graded, development was still proceeding slowly. The 25 plots surveyed on sub-county land had all been spoken for, but most of the potential buyers had not completed payment. In April 2012 the LCIII chairman explained that they had been given deadlines to pay and those who did not meet it would be charged a higher price: 1.5 million shillings. The buyers knew their plot numbers, but they would not be shown their actual plots until they paid. He acknowledged that those forced to move graves along the new streets had still received no compensation; there were plans to pay them from the money realized by the sale of the plots. By February, 2013 when we went back, we saw that the streets so dramatically and suddenly graded were now overgrown with grass. The road to the market was reduced to a mere footpath . These ‘Town Board’ plots were by no means the first in the trading centre. People from different clans had gained rights to plots near the old market, proving, as the former sub-county chief said, that it had not been considered clan land for a long time. In the 1960s, the administration gave out an area as plots to be developed by small business people. But the situation was different by 2010 when the 25 Town Board plots were drawn. Money was scarce and land had become a contentious commodity.

5. Land Claims and Conflicts

Displacement facilitated the commercialization of land in that it promoted the paying of rent, both for agricultural land on the camp periphery, and for the empty houses left behind by those returning to their rural land. It strengthened the notion that land was a commodity and served to heighten awareness of the value of land. But there was another pattern that supported this tendency, perhaps even more problematically. This was the growth of claims made against institutions in the trading centre by individuals and families.

‘In those days our parents gave land for development,’ said the former LC III chairman of Awach wistfully. He was referring to the gifts of land by clans and families to churches, for the building of schools and health centres, and to the local administration for offices and community halls. Now descendants of the original donors are demanding that the land, or portions of it, be returned. In rural areas, the descendants of ‘previously welcomed people’ of other clans, who were given land generations back, are being pushed out. In the small urban centres, the equivalent is the pressure being put on institutions and the local administration. This happens all over the country, but the circumstances in

northern Uganda make it especially pronounced. Land has new value as people return from displacement and this includes people who are returning to the small urban centres where their families once gave land to institutions. During encampment that institutional land was overrun by displaced people and is still seeded with their graves. Perhaps this use by other people served to make people rethink the old gift. Perhaps it is simply that people are jostling for land everywhere and the property in the former IDP camps has added value, especially where humanitarian relief organizations erected buildings during the time of the camps.

In Awach, NUSAF (Northern Uganda Social Action Fund) erected a building on land belonging to the Church of Uganda where World Vision ran a skills training school during encampment. Now the Church would like to establish a vocational school there, but someone else is claiming the land and has put his padlock on the door. Judgement was passed by the High Court in favour of the church, but as of early May 2012 the padlock remained.

The most troublesome land case of this kind involves land given to the sub-county and has come to hinder the plans and plots of the prospective Town Board. A man of the Paduny clan, who had grown up in another district after his father was killed, returned in 2008. During encampment, two large buildings had been put up on his father's land as nursery schools, which fortunately fell to him. There were still many IDP huts as well, but what bothered him was the development planned in connection with the Town Board. He claimed that the sub-county had gone ahead with the construction of a new market, the grading of a street, and the designation of plots on land that was his – all without consulting him. The sub-county asserted that his father had given the land, including a community hall, to the local administration, and that other members of the family had agreed. The disgruntled man hired a lawyer in Gulu Town and initiated a lawsuit against the sub-county. This included an injunction to stop development of the 25 plots, since sections of three of them were claimed by the plaintiff. As a local leader explained, everything is at a standstill. Those who bought the plots are complaining that they cannot go ahead and develop them and may even sue the sub-county. 'It is delaying development. The contemporary Paduny clan should remember that their parents gave the land for development!'

Members of this section of the Paduny clan had been generous in giving land to the local administration. Another woman of the extended family explained that her father had been a big man with plenty of land, who donated some to the *jago*, the sub-chief. 'People were living freely until the time of the rebels and displacement,' she said. '[in] Those days people did not talk about land.' But the descendants of those who had been generous were seeing the land of their fathers graded for roads and marked out for plots, and were beginning to reinterpret the old transactions as land-grabbing.

In another case, four families who had stayed in the camp during the war, occupied 10 acres of primary school land in 2009, when others were going back to their rural land. The families claimed that it was their grandfather's land, while others said it had been donated to the Church of Uganda in 1952 for starting the school. This case too progressed all the way up to district council level. The school won the case, but the claimants have refused to vacate the land.

Sensitivity about land has given rise to litigation, in what we might call the judicialisation of land. That is, land has become a matter of contention to be settled by bureaucratic and judicial means. This is clear in the example of the barracks that had stood on clan land for at least two decades. But whose clan land? A demand was lodged for compensation, and the army has agreed, but on the condition that the claimants produce

certificates of customary tenure. In January 2013 when we were in Awach, the sub-county land committee had assembled to view the land, preliminary to issuing the certificates. The former LCIII chairman smoothed out the dust and drew for us the conflicting claims of the Bura and Paromo clans. This too was a legacy of the war and encampment; land that had been alienated, and that had new value because it was within the planned Town Board, had become a judicial matter.

6. Land Matters

The 'land phobia', or perhaps more accurately, 'land paranoia' that has gripped Acholiland since 2006 has taken its own form in the former IDP camps. Landowners who had been obliged to allow their land to be settled by displaced people, or used by the army, are concerned about any further infringement. Suspicion met a World Bank plan put forward in 2005-6 to develop large former IDP camps into urban centres. Five million USD were to be allocated for buying land to ensure water supplies and add electricity. Landowners in the former camps rejected the plan as land-grabbing.

Landowners see commercial value in their property because they are now able to collect rents. This contributes to individualizing perceptions of land in that rent is paid to one individual even when people speak of a particular area as 'clan land.' The idea that land should be an object of investment and development has been promoted by the plans for upgrading former IDP camps to Town Boards or Town Councils. The increased importance of land in small urban centres is unmistakable. As the LCIII chairman of Awach put it, 'Development cannot stand on air, it stands on the land.'

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