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## Gender, land and responses to health and environmental shocks in rural South Western Uganda

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### Abstract

We examine the gendered responses to shocks – including HIV-related illness and death, and environmental factors such as drought or too much rain – and how women in south western Uganda navigate structural barriers such as the gender constraints in land ownership, to cope with the impact of shocks. The study is based on data drawn from households selected from a General Population Cohort of 20,000 people in Kalungu District. As part of a larger study investigating the impact of HIV on agricultural livelihoods, 22 households were purposively sampled for a qualitative study. These households were stratified by sex of household head and by a death having occurred/not occurred of an HIV-positive individual in the household. Our findings show the gendered dimensions in household responses to crises are shaped by women and men's position in the social structure in general and within their families and households. Women can make effective use of their social relations to obtain material support and information to improve their family's livelihood.

### Keywords

Agriculture, livelihoods, land, shocks, HIV, patriarchy, intersectionality, Uganda, Africa

### Introduction

A large body of literature exists on the impact of HIV and environmental shocks on agricultural livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa (Webb and Reardon, 1992, Mutangadura *et al.*, 1999, Rugalema, 1999, Baylies, 2002, Thomas *et al.*, 2007, Parker *et al.*, 2009, Seeley *et al.*, 2010) and the management strategies that communities and households have adopted in response to these shocks (Bond and Wallman, 1993, Seeley, 2014, Rugalema, 2000, Booyesen *et al.*, 2004, O'Farrell *et al.*, 2009, Below *et al.*, 2010).

However, the literature has been largely silent on the potential gender-based variations in this coping (Hodge and Roby, 2010). While there is a growing body of work which focuses on gender and climate change (see, for example, Mnimbo *et al.*, 2016, Shackleton *et al.*, 2014, Van Aelst and Holvoet, 2016, Ravera *et al.*, 2016, Flatø *et al.*, 2017, Mehar *et al.*, 2016, Jost *et al.*, 2016, Thompson-Hall *et al.*, 2016), there is limited research that investigates the ways in which different men and women act within existing gender norms to mitigate livelihood-related risks (Bandali, 2014) and manage shocks (Van Aelst and Holvoet, 2016).

In this paper, we examine the ways in which men and women in rural Uganda manage the shocks, caused by illness, death or environmental factors (lack of rain or too much rain, for example) on the livelihoods of their families and households. A focus of our work is how

women navigate structural barriers such as the gender constraints in land ownership, to cope with the impact of shocks. Our study was sited in an area considered to be part of the epicentre of the HIV epidemic in the late 1980s. Over the past three decades many families have been touched by HIV-related deaths, particularly in the years before antiretroviral therapy became available (Seeley, 2014).

### *Conceptual framing*

The concept of 'gender', the socially constructed characteristics of women and men is central to our work. However, we do not assume that homogeneity exists among 'male' or 'female' headed households or indeed in the broader categories of 'men' and 'women' (Chant, 1997, Klasen *et al.*, 2015). *These broad categories consist of men and women with differential access to assets*, including land, and other resources. In order to explore these differences, we make use of the concept of 'intersectionality' (McCall, 2005) to look at the ways roles and responsibilities are associated with particular social identities. These identities shape 'who does what, how they do it, when they do it, with what resources and to what ends' (Thompson-Hall *et al.*, 2016). We draw on the work of Aelst and Holvoet (2016) in recognising that gender and other social categories such as marital status and age, shape men and women's behaviour towards and experience of coping with shocks. Marital status changes across the life course, as individuals move both into and out of unions (because of separation, divorce and death), structuring social relations, not only to the marital partner but also to the families and wider communities of the couple. Roles and responsibilities change as individuals age. Rights and duties, including access to assets, are influenced by marriage and the birth of children.

While the intersection between gender and other categories of difference change across the life course, there are factors in the broader social structure which influence the agency individuals can use, their vulnerability to the impact of shocks and the roles that they can play in mitigating crises (Klasen *et al.*, 2015). In the context of our study area, as in many other parts of sub-Saharan Africa (Ouzgane and Morrell, 2005), structures based on patriarchal norms are important in shaping social identities and societal roles. Patriarchy may be defined as 'a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women' (Walby, 1989). While the use of the term to refer to 'monolithic accounts of gender oppression' has been increasingly criticised (Patil, 2013), the concept of 'patriarchy' does reflect the (unequal) social relations of power between men and women. A significant body of literature exists that examines patriarchy in the sub-Saharan African context (see, for example, Oduyoye, 1995, Nyanzi *et al.*, 2009, Wyrod, 2008, Silberschmidt, 2001).

In the context of our study, patriarchal values are exhibited in the customary practices that disadvantage women with regards to access to and ownership of land, and may therefore serve to restrict women's options in their management of shocks and may indeed make some women and their households more vulnerable to insecurity. Kandiyoti (1988) deployed the term 'patriarchal bargain' to describe the way in which women strategize within 'a set of concrete constraints' created by the patriarchal systems within which they live in order to maintain their security and 'optimize life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression' (1988). Gray and Kevane (1999) have also documented several strategies used by sub-Saharan African women to respond to their alienation from land, including creating alliances with male kin, such as brothers, sons, husbands, to access land. In this paper, we make use of Deniz Kandiyoti's concept of the patriarchal bargain to

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examine how, despite the gender-based restrictions, some women could access and use land in their effort to mitigate harm and deal with shocks.

## Methods

The study is based on data drawn from households selected from a General Population Cohort (GPC) established in 1989 by the Medical Research Council/Uganda Virus Research Institute Research Unit (MRC/UVRI) (Asiki *et al.*, 2013). The GPC covered 15 rural villages in Masaka District in 1989 but was expanded to 25 villages in 2000.<sup>1</sup> The GPC is an open cohort, allowing in-migrants and children born into the cohort to join. The total population covered, with no age limit, is about 20,000 people.

In 2009 a stratified random sample of 200 households was selected from the GPC. The sample was stratified by a death having occurred/not occurred of an HIV-positive individual in the household. An 'HIV-affected household' was defined as one where at least one HIV-positive adult had died since 1989/90 (when the cohort started), this definition was used because people living with HIV can be healthy for some considerable amount of time and an asymptomatic HIV-positive person who was not suffering from HIV-related illness would be expected to carry on with his or her livelihood activities with no discernible effect of their HIV-status on their household. The purpose of the household stratification was to help tease out the long term impact of HIV related deaths on households' agricultural practices.

A sub-sample of 11 percent of the larger quantitative sample of households was selected for collection of in-depth qualitative data upon which this paper is based. These households were purposively sampled to represent HIV-affected households, where an HIV-related death had occurred and those that have not had anyone living with HIV in the household over the 20-year period. In total, 22 case study households were selected, 11 of which were female headed while the rest were male headed; three female headed and five male headed households were HIV-affected. In-depth interviews on agricultural activities and livelihood histories from the past 20 years were conducted with the household heads and when these were not available, another senior household member, usually a spouse or an elder child, was interviewed. For purposes of data triangulation, we also carried out non-participant observation of households' agricultural practices and related livelihood activities. Both the interviews and the observations were conducted monthly over a 12-month period to gain detailed information on current agricultural practices, including the varieties grown and the inputs used and changes in other livelihood related activities. Two experienced interviewers, both local people, conducted these monthly interviews and observation visits. The interviewers had a checklist to aid observations and these centred on changes in household composition and agricultural activities since the previous visit. They took notes during their visits and wrote up those notes immediately afterwards, combining both their observations and narratives of interviews.<sup>2</sup>

The data were coded using a framework developed from the themes emerging from the findings, guided by the overarching research question which looked at the impact of HIV on agriculture over the past 20 years. During the analysis, it became apparent that there were differences in the ways male and female headed households responded to shocks – which we explore in this paper. In the next section, we describe the land tenure systems in the study area to provide the context for this exploration.

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### ***Land tenure systems and women's access to land in south western Uganda***

Women and men have access to land in sub-Saharan Africa, but they rarely, if ever, have the same type of access. Differences in men and women's positions in kinship systems provide the organisational structure for land access, and influence the extent of that access (Whitehead and Tsikata, 2003). Most customary tenure systems favour men, with women being granted access through their father, husband, brothers and sons. While women tend to have less control over land than men, there are differences among women (Joireman, 2008). These are related to intersectionality: age, marital status, residence, household composition and social status. Doss *et al.*, (2014) note that these differences are important determinants of women's interests in land, which are not static and vary across their life course. There is a large body of literature which investigates the impact on women of land titling, debating whether customary or statutory systems are more gender equitable (Jackson, 2003, Whitehead and Tsikata, 2003, Ikdahl *et al.*, 2005, Evans, 2016, Bhaumik *et al.*, 2016), with consistent evidence that women tend to lose out when land tenure systems are formalised. The assumption is often made that 'the right of the male household head is superordinate to other rights' (Yngstrom, 2002) leaving women's rights in land tenure systems as secondary, whether they be wives, sisters, daughters or mothers, and therefore dependent on a man.

Uganda's constitution of 1995 and the Land Act of 1998 recognise four land-holding and tenure systems: freehold, *mailo*<sup>3</sup>, leasehold and customary. Most land in Uganda is under customary land tenure systems. The customary systems of tenure are governed by rules upheld by the tribal/clan authorities. In the patrilineal system of the Baganda, the main tribe in the study area, a woman leaves her natal family to marry but does not give up her clan. Her children belong to their father's clan and are likely to inherit land from their father, whereas their mother may be granted usufruct rights of access to the land by her husband, or her husband's family for the sake of her children, in the wake of the husband's death (Bennett *et al.*, 2006, Doss *et al.*, 2012). Meanwhile, she may inherit land from her own natal family/clan; land which may not be inherited by her children because they are from a different clan.

In the past, women very seldom inherited land, but over the last few decades it has become more common for women to inherit some land from their parents. Women's rights are still limited to the extent that a woman can only inherit a fraction, usually half, of the land that her brothers inherit. The land women inherit from their parents is often viewed as providing some 'insurance' for the woman should her marriage fail. Even then, the woman's brothers retain custodianship of the land, and should the woman's husband or son (who is from a different clan) take it, or even use it, the brothers and other clan members may intervene (Naybor, 2015). Similarly, when a woman is allocated a piece of her late husband's land she can enjoy usufruct rights by only using the land while she lives but does not own it (Loftspring, 2007), and therefore cannot dispose of it unless this is to a brother-in-law or her own children. Such a practice is primarily intended to keep land within the clan. Indeed when a man dies, his widow is only allowed to manage the land until her minor son is old enough to assume ownership (Doss *et al.*, 2012),<sup>4</sup> and if the widow has only daughters she may use the land mainly for the purpose of raising the daughters with the understanding that ownership of the land reverts to a son of the late husband's brother or to the closest male relative. However, sometime widows without children or with daughters are usually evicted from the land in the immediate aftermath of death of a husband/father (Naybor, 2015).

The norms through which women inherit land have evolved over time (Asiimwe, 2002,

Naybor, 2015). A few decades back, women inherited land through their male siblings, particularly the heir to the deceased whose major task was to support his female relatives especially when their marriages failed. Perhaps because the heirs consistently did not live up to this expectation the inheritance practices have changed. Today, some parents allocate land to their children irrespective of their child's sex allowing the possibility that ownership of family land will switch to another clan following the death of a patriarch. However, this has met with some resistance from the more conservative-minded men who have challenged daughters' rights to inherit land and pass it on to their own children. In such cases, daughters have sold their inheritance to male clan members and used the proceeds to buy land elsewhere, to pre-empt land conflicts. In other cases, daughters have settled on their inherited pieces of land with or without conflict with their brothers. Some have passed land on to their children (Tripp, 2004).

### *Intersections of gender, marital status and access to resources*

The women in our study held different positions in the households in which they lived. In some, women took care of the home and garden within a household headed by a man; even in this role women's experiences differed based on whether they are a first, second, or unmarried partner. In others, women were the daughter of the household head. Others were heads of household, these women included widows, others who were divorced or separated, and some who were de-facto heads of household because their male partner had migrated for work. The intersection of these different roles affected women's relationship to and control/access to resources and their abilities to respond to crises and shocks (Ravera et al., 2016).

**Table 1. Female headed-household characteristics and shocks experienced (as of 2010-2011)**

| Household Head Pseudonym | Household Head Age (years) | Land-holding (acre) | Shock(s) experienced   |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Susan (Christian)        | 33 years                   | 0.1                 | No HIV –related illness reported<br>Divorced 1998<br>Grandmothers death and to restricted land access                              |
| Maria (Christian)        | 80                         | 0.5 acre            | In 2005 of her daughter-in-law died in child birth;<br>Son remarried but sick with HIV-related illness<br>Drought in 2008-9        |
| Jovia (Christian)        | 36 years                   | 0.5                 | No HIV-related illness reported<br>No other shocks reported  |
| Hajara (Muslim)          | 50 years                   | 0.5 acre            | Categorised by GPC as HIV affected but household only reported minor illnesses<br>Household head physically disabled & cannot walk |
| Anet (Christian)         | 68 years                   | 0.5 acre            | Mothers death and land division<br>Sick since 2005 with HIV-related illness.   |
| Margaret (Christian)     | 47 years                   | 1 acre              | No HIV-related illness reported<br>Infertile land  |
| Naume (Christian)        | 72 years                   | 2 acres             | HIV-related deaths: death of Naume's daughter in 1995; of Naume's husband in 1998; and of third and fourth born children           |
| Rehema (Muslim)          | 42 years                   | 3 acres             | No HIV -related illness reported<br>No other shocks reported   |

|                  |          |           |   |
|------------------|----------|-----------|---|
| Fatuma (Muslim)  | 68 years | 3.5 acres | HIV -related death in 1995 when son who was the bread winner died<br>In 2000 Fatuma's father died<br>In 2009 banana weevils and poor rains destroyed the banana plantation and other crops. |
| Aida (Christian) | 66 years | 7.5 acres | Categorised by GPC as HIV unaffected, but HIV-related death reported<br>In 1994 brother of Aida died  |
| Amina (Muslim)   | 56 years | 10 acres  | In 2005 Amina's daughter fell seriously sick and died in the same year. HIV not associated with this death.<br>Banana weevils   |

Few households were entirely 'shock free'. Tables 1 and 2 summarise for each of the households by sex the details of the major shock events reported by the household members.

**Table 2. Male headed-household characteristics and shocks experienced (as of 2010-2011)**

| Household Head Pseudonym | Age of Household Head | Land-holding (acre) | Shock(s) experienced  |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---|
| Obadiah (Christian)      | 81 years              | 1.5 acres           | 1996 -1997 sickness and death of his son due to HIV<br>Wife dies of cancer<br>Son drowns in the lake.<br>1990- 1994 Drought   |
| Daudi (Christian)        | 70 years              | 2 acres             | HIV -related illness & death – sick son died in 1997.<br>Wife died 1990   |
| John (Christian)         | 44 years              | 2.5 acres           | HIV -related illness reported<br>Household head sick 2000 - 2002<br>Drought   |
| Jacob (Christian)        | 32 years              | 3 acres             | No HIV/AIDS-related illness reported,<br>Drought in 2010  |
| Lazaro (Christian)       | 67 years              | 3 acres             | 1990 lost a son to AIDS<br>1998 - lost a daughter to AIDS<br>2009 – Household head sick from back ache<br>Drought   |
| Petero (Christian)       | 74 years              | 4 acres             | Four of his children died and are said to have died of HIV related illness<br>Drought   |
| Ibrahim (Muslim)         | 59 years              | 5 acres             | No HIV-related illness reported<br>No shock experienced in this household between 1990 and 2010   |
| Stefano (Christian)      | 86 years              | 7 acres             | Widowed daughter re-joined household after she developed HIV/AIDS-related illnesses; her mother nursed her at the national referral hospital before she died<br>In 1993 son fell sick was admitted at a hospital and later died.<br>Between 1990 & 2005 cassava crop was attacked by pests. |
| James (Christian)        | 45 years              | 10 acres            | In 2010 household head HIV-positive admitted to health centre.  |
| Hussein (Muslim)         | 52 years              | 10 acres            | HIV-related illness of relative who had stayed in the household but this was a distant relative and no costs incurred   |
| Simoni (Christian)       | 72 years              | 10 acres            | HIV- affected (household head)<br>Sickness of the household head<br>Coffee and banana (mbidde) plantation were attacked by disease  |

We also include information on the age of the household head, and their land-holding, which intersect with gender disparities to shape responses to crises.

While many of the shocks are listed as an independent event, for example HIV-related illness or death and drought, there is an interrelationship between them, determined both by cause and effect relations and the timing of each specific event. In the case of a death due to HIV, the loss of household labour could for example determine how a household could respond to a drought. That in turn would depend on how soon a drought, or similar environmental problem, followed on from the death. Equally the effects of a death on land division and land access would depend both on household history, composition as well as on the dynamics of relationships within the household. In this sense treating shocks as single events to which there are specific impacts generating a clear response is an over-simplification (Flatø *et al.*, 2017).

Common to both men and women are the shocks related to more general risks such as drought, crop pests and diseases and deaths due to HIV and other causes. However, whatever the nature of the shocks it is the effects of shocks, individual or combined, that count and these often affect household food security. It is the nature of these responses that is now discussed, and as will become clear, while specific responses are noted, most people deployed a range of responses to address food security and other household needs.

### ***Practices adopted in response to shocks***

Several practices adopted by heads of households for responding to shocks were not gender-specific. One of these was the immediate response in reducing the household's food consumption, a widespread practice that was adopted by 11 of the 22 case study households, with five of the 11 being female headed. This consumption rationing combined both reducing the quality and the quantity of food consumed. It included consumption of foods hitherto considered inferior, for example, posho (maize flour paste), instead of the more popular yet scarce and unaffordable foods like bananas, as well as consumption of sugarless tea and the substitution of *mujaja*, a local herb, for tea leaves. It also involved a reduction in the household members' daily food intake, usually to one meal a day.

Amina, a 56 year old female household head, described a change in eating habits in response to the problem of pests which had affected their food supply:

Many banana plantations in our village were affected by pests and some of my villagers who have money bought some pesticides known as dudu and their banana plantations are now looking well. *Question [from interviewer]: Now your banana plantation fell down, how was the household affected?* My friend it is the problem I am facing now, in the past I never took posho as food in my home but now it is our best dish. I used to sell bananas but now I cannot even get a bunch of banana to sell.

In a similar case for Jacob, a 32 year old male household head, it was noted that:

[Referring to the adverse weather conditions] he [Jacob] revealed that it rained only once and stopped. He said people's crops will be affected by sunshine. He added that their village had been hit by shortage of food. [Jacob observed:] "We are experiencing a food shortage; we are feeding on the cassava we had in our gardens, and if it is over then we shall resort to buying maize flour [posho]."

Another response to shocks, that was not gender-specific, was the tolerating of poor-health in order not to interrupt daily survival activities, a behaviour that saw two female and two male household heads enduring different types of ailments to maintain household food security. This was shown in interviews with Maria (aged 80 years) and Petero (aged 74 years):

I asked her (Maria) to tell me when that problem of stomach pain began and she told me that it had lasted for a long time, like three years ago, and that she often gets drugs from the MRC clinic. I asked her to tell me whether it sometimes hinders her from doing her work and she said no, adding: “*Ngendanalwo ate nakolaki*,” meaning: “I work with the health problem; what else can I do?”

He (Petero) said he was not okay health-wise but he forced himself to ride his bicycle to sell snuff.... It [ailment] never stopped him from working. He could go to the garden to do some work up to when he would feel pain and come back home.

While there were similarities between the responses of men and women who headed households to shocks we also found that there were systematic differences in their responses to shocks and it is these that we now explore.

#### *Practices adopted by women*

The findings from this study indicate that when responding specifically to shocks women heads of household often looked inside their village for solutions to access food and other resources, constrained by the responsibilities for children and the home, for example, from travelling far (Flatø *et al.*, 2017).

*Borrowing land.* In using the term ‘borrowing’ this is distinct from a market based transaction. As a response to shocks caused by death in the household, as we explain later in this section, the borrowing of land was reported only by women heads of household. This is consistent with the fact that land shortages disproportionately affected women. Six of the 11 female headed case households owned one acre or less land (Table 1). By contrast, all of the male headed households owned 1.5 acres or more (Table 2), with four of these households owning seven acres or more. Out of the six land-poor female headed households, one household owned a very small piece of land and depended on borrowed land to cultivate; three owned half an acre each; and two owned one acre each. Just two of the 11 female headed case households owned seven acres or more. The evidence on differences in land holding sizes between male and female headed households is consistent with the broader evidence of land inheritance practices which have traditionally favoured men (Kalabamu, 2009, Doss *et al.*, 2012). As one Muslim woman reminded us, Muslim women in the community are entitled to only half of what their brothers inherit from their parents.

The practice of borrowing land was adopted by four of the 11 female headed households (Susan, Naume, Anet and Rehema). Except for Rehema (who borrowed land from her father), land was borrowed in the aftermath of the death of a household head. For Susan, who borrowed from her neighbour the transaction was free of charge. For Naume and Anet they recompensed the lender’s generosity by offering to the latter a small portion of their harvest. This reciprocity was normal practice even when land borrowing was said to be free, as a way of showing appreciation for the support.

Borrowing land became necessary when a woman became a head of household and a landholding to which the household had previously enjoyed exclusive access was divided and distributed among relatives, typically children, of the deceased family head. This division of land has normally resulted in the emergence of multiple households using the land previously used by the single household, not infrequently resulting in conflicts which compounded challenges faced by the female-head of household in the wake of her husband's death. The example of Naume, a 72 year old female household head, illustrates this.

Naume's husband had owned 20 acres of land, but as a second wife and following her husband's death and subsequent division of the land, Naume was left with only two acres. Lamenting the implications of the death of her husband on her wellbeing, she observed:

He was my husband, he was the household head, he was the leader of the home, and he was the one I was relying on. I am now suffering as a result of his death, with the sons of the co-wife [harassing me about land]. We had a big [piece of] land which contained coffee and now the garden was divided among the orphans. I cannot get money which we were getting before his death as the garden is now divided. I can take two weeks without eating sauce (fish or meat) and the day I buy sauce it is only [dried small] silver fish. I was used to eating sauce after three or four days. My husband had several income-generating activities: he was a builder; we also had a very big garden of coffee; and he used to brew [beer]. These activities were stopped as there is no one to run them. Even we used our own *mbidde* [a species of banana used specifically as raw material for local beer] to brew but the garden of *mbidde* was taken by another child who was born by the first wife.

In addition to being a widow, Naume's situation was compounded by her status as a second wife, which put her in conflict with the family of her former co-wife who had already separated from their husband at the time of his death. As Naume reported, a son of the former co-wife – who had been designated as his heir – seemed to be purposely harassing Naume after the latter refused to give the homestead of the late husband to him as would otherwise be required by customary law. The step-son did this by engaging in a series of actions against the step-mother, including harvesting all the coffee belonging to Naume when she was in hospital nursing a grandson. As noted by the interviewer:

I asked her how her grandson's sickness affected her household and she said that there was no one to take him to the hospital, so she left her home and went to nurse him. .... she was picking coffee at the time her grandson fell sick, and [when she returned home] she found her coffee stolen. She said that it was her step-son who stole the coffee; the one who hates her and does not like her staying in that home.

In order to manage her land shortage, to meet the family's needs, Naume was borrowing land:

I asked her [Naume] to tell me whether they used to borrow land at baseline [in 1989/90 when the parent study commenced] and she said that the land she had was enough she could not borrow land. And when asked whether she is now borrowing land, she said that because she was left with a small piece of land [following division of the household's land into a number of units owned by different household members], she is now borrowing land where she grows sweet potato and cassava.

Two other women also linked their borrowing of land directly to a shortage of land for cultivation for their families:

She [Anet, a 68 year old household head] borrowed land and grew seasonal crops like beans, maize, cassava and sweet potato. Asked why she borrowed land, she pointed out that the piece of land she inherited from her late mother was so small and was all covered by coffee trees.

[The household experiences food shortage] because I [Susan, a 33 year old household head] have a very small piece of land where I cultivate crops, and so I borrow land from the neighbours [non-relatives]. At first food was enough for my household and that was because the [grandmother's] land was not yet divided.... When their [father and his siblings'] mother died, the land was divided and I was left with a tiny piece of land from which I cannot get enough food for my household.

Susan, as reported by the interviewer, described the challenges she faced after the death of her grandmother:

Her grandmother fell sick and her father decided that she had to go and look after her. The grandfather had already died and she [grandmother] was staying alone in the house.... In 1999, her grandmother died and left her in the home. The children (Susan's father and uncles) of the deceased decided that she should stay in the home and look after the land. ... She cultivated that land but they could not allow her to sell any crops from it. She said that there was a season when they harvested 10 sacks of coffee but they did not give her even a sack.

Susan described her disappointment that after cultivating her late grandmother's piece of land for an extended period she was disallowed by her uncles from harvesting the produce. Susan was divorced and had been grateful for the home she had been given as she performed a service for her family by caring for her grandmother. However, disparities in terms of marital status and generation, compounded the disadvantage she faced because she was a woman, in accessing land and produce.

Other women faced similar challenges with their natal male relatives, whereby some men attempted to grab their sister or niece's land inherited from their late father or uncle. This was shown in an interview with Hajara, a 50 year old female household head:

I asked her how she came to live on that land and she said that she bought it in 1995.... When asked where she got the money with which she bought the land, she said that she had land which she inherited peacefully from her late father in xxx [name of village]. She sold it to one of her brothers and bought this piece of land. I asked her the reason why she sold it and she said that some brothers wanted to capture the girls' plots of land and that she was not the only one who sold, but that many of the girls sold their plots.

When considered in terms of Deniz Kandiyoti's 'patriarchal bargain', the actions by Naume and Hajara may be viewed as an expression of resistance to the constraints imposed on women by the patriarchal social order, in which women's rights to land are subordinate to those of men. Naume understood the risks she was taking in refusing to give the late husband's homestead to the designated heir – she knew she was challenging customary law. But to secure her ownership and use of the land, she offered to negotiate with the family of

her former co-wife and conceded a big piece of her late husband's land in exchange for maintaining ownership of the homestead. For her part, Hajara too, understood the risks of holding on to her inherited land, which included dispossession in land wrangles with her brothers. Hajara's sale of her inherited land to her brother was therefore a way of resolving the problem. As observed in both these instances, the women were not necessarily seeking to upset the social order but rather their actions which were counter to specific patriarchal norms were necessary to optimise their life options, especially in the wake of crises.

The three male headed households with the lowest land holdings (Obadiah with 1.5 acres, Daudi with two acres and John with 2.5 acres) who could also be considered as relatively land poor were affected by shortages of food and other resources. These shortages were not due to loss of land through inheritance practices but were due to illness and deaths which did not trigger land divisions. In response to problems they did not borrow but resorted to a range of other practices in response to gain income. These included making sisal ropes and bark-cloth, and selling alcohol.

On the other hand, male heads of households borrowed land to boost agricultural production and income. This assertion was clearly articulated by Hussein with 10 acres, one of the two men who borrowed land, to boost household income given a household size of nine. Jacob, the other man who borrowed land, was a 32 year old who headed a household and owned three acres, but this household was a much smaller one, comprising of two adults and two children by the end of the study.

On closer examination, the gendered nature of borrowing land as a strategic response to shocks reveals certain competencies and social norms that appear to be peculiar to women and not apparent in men. As illustrated above, women sought help from other women in dealing with the shocks. We also note that in engaging in such land transactions the women were governed by norms of reciprocity in which the borrower shared the produce from the land with the lender. These transactions occurred in a relationship of trust as there were reportedly no formal contracts. On the other hand, men's practices – selling alcohol and sisal ropes, and, as we report later in this paper, cycling to neighbouring villages to sell snuff – indicated men's inclination to rely on themselves in responding to shocks.

*Cost-sharing.* This practice is related to livestock rearing. It is a practice whereby the owner of livestock – usually pigs, goats, and chicken – temporarily cedes custodianship of the livestock to someone else. Like the practice of sharecropping, whereby a landlord allows a tenant to use the land in return for a share of the harvest from the land, cost-sharing gives certain use and product rights to the livestock recipient. In this case the livestock owner and the recipient shared the profits accruing from sharing the livestock during the cost-sharing period, although the recipient's costs were restricted to labour. The primary beneficiary in the cost-sharing arrangement was the livestock recipient, and the main return that the recipient got was an entitlement to a share of the offspring that were born when the livestock was in the carer's custody.

Our data indicate that cost-sharing was one of the practices that only particular women heads of household reported. Of the four female study participants who reported having used this practice (Susan, Margaret, Naume and Hajara), all had very small pieces of land, but only one – 50 year old Hajara, with only half an acre – was the provider in the cost-sharing arrangement. The other three women were livestock recipients.

A key purpose of cost-sharing was to respond to the effects of environmental shocks, usually drought. However, the findings also suggest that sometimes the practice was a means of dealing with the combined impact of environmental shock and the burden of death in a household.

From the livestock recipient's standpoint, cost-sharing served a wider purpose. Given the drought conditions that all the livestock recipients blamed for reducing their crop production, cost-sharing not only afforded the recipient the chance to access livestock and build their own livestock holdings, but through the income it generated it also helped the recipient to meet major household needs, such as food, clothing, and children's schooling materials and tuition fees.

This crucial role of cost-sharing was also commented on in an interview with Margaret, a 47 year old household head:

In 2005, she got a pig from a friend for livestock cost-sharing. She said that in 2006 the pig produced six piglets from which she owned three. She sold her three piglets and spared that money for buying food. .... In 2008, the pig produced four piglets and she took ownership of two of them. She sold them and bought three blankets for her children.... Soon after selling her two piglets, the owner of the pig sold it at 45,000 shillings and gave 5,000 shillings to Margaret. After some months, Margaret reared a goat and a chicken for cost sharing. The chicken hatched four chicks and they shared them equally. She sold her two chicks at 2,000 shillings each. She said that she was going to use that money for buying books for her children.

The case of Margaret demonstrates the critical role of social capital in the women's management of shocks (Shackleton *et al.*, 2014). As in the case of borrowing land, these cost-sharing arrangements were made possible and sustained through social relations of trust and reciprocity.

*Casual labouring within the village.* Casual labouring was another practice adopted by the female household heads to mitigate shocks arising from death of a former household head. As explained earlier, such a death often led to a land shortage because of division and distribution of the household's land to different household members who went on to create their own households. The reduced landholding size was often insufficient to meet the needs of the household, thereby necessitating the household's resort to other options – casual labour in this case – to supplement household income. The case of 68 year old Anet provides evidence on this point, as noted by an interviewer:

On the piece of land which Anet got, there was only coffee thus making her to go in the village looking for casual labour. She stayed in her late mother's house. She said that she worked as a labourer getting both food and money. She said she was weeding in coffee gardens of other people to get money and food.

Four of the 11 women heads of household (Maria, Anet, Susan and Margaret, all of whom had limited amounts of land) adopted this practice, two of whom (Anet and Susan) had also borrowed land, as noted above.

Casual labouring within the village was a women-only practice. Men who undertook casual labour did it outside their village. It is possible that demands of household duties may be part

of the explanation but age (Maria and Anet are 80 and 68 years respectively) may also be important in restricting mobility. It is also possible that men may not have wished to be seen working for their own neighbours. We return to examples of men earning through labouring below.

Another dimension of casual labouring was of women working as a labour team. A woman was able to make use of village social networks in her response to shocks. Maria, an 80 year old female household head reported her experience of sharing information and repeatedly teaming up with a female friend who was also in search of casual labour opportunities. She talks of one episode where the two were paid in kind (a bunch of bananas) for their joint effort, and another where they were paid in cash, and that in both cases the two shared the proceeds equally.

Women's use of local connections is explained by Goldstein (1999), as being because women are more intra-community focused, while men are more likely to possess the extensive networks stretching beyond the community. It could be argued further that such behaviour may be partly the function of the social structural conditions that dictate the spatial limits of women (Shackleton *et al.*, 2014), particularly those who have responsibilities for the care of children and other relatives (Akampumuza and Matsuda, 2016).

#### *Practices adopted by men*

As shown earlier, although male heads of household adopted some practices like those of female headed households in response to shocks, our data also indicate that they undertook labouring work and trading outside the village, which women heads of households did not do.

*Labouring outside of the village.* This was one of the male-specific practices undertaken by Jacob, Lazaro and Petero, for dealing with shocks.

Lazaro, a 67 year old male household head, related his past experience of labouring in order to overcome the adverse impact of extreme drought that had caused acute food shortage. He reported having laboured outside of the village, in a neighbouring village, where he was paid in the form of bunches of bananas.

*Inter-community petty trade.* Petty trade was another male-specific practice. It involved hawking agricultural merchandise to neighbouring villages or trading centres, usually by means of a bicycle. In fact, Petero's (74 year old household head) household was one that had been doubly impacted by HIV-related death and environmental disaster. The household lost two adult males (Petero's sons) to HIV-related illness. Petero also lost two married daughters who died of HIV-related complications. To make matters worse, Petero's household has been affected by drought conditions leading to acute food shortage. This was noted by an interviewer when he observed that sometimes the household eats posho [maize flour paste] without sauce, and that at other times they mix salt in the posho and take it with tea without sugar.

To address the food insecurity the household faced, Petero resorted to selling snuff made from tobacco he grew in distant villages. He said that this practice helped generate regular income for the household, which in turn enabled them to buy food. Indeed, as recorded in the interviewer's notes:

The money from selling snuff helped him [Petero] to buy household needs including maize flour for home consumption. Petero himself asked [the interviewer] what alternative he had: if I do not sell it [snuff] where would I get the money for salt, maize flour, soap, and others?

Cycling is physically strenuous. The viability of this practice was therefore dependent on the Petero's continuing good health. Unfortunately, towards the end of our study period, the only household head among the 22 case study household heads that appeared to be experiencing exceptional challenges in maintaining the survival of the household was Petero, who could no longer sustain the practice of cycling to sell snuff in neighbouring villages and had failed to meet many of his household's needs.

The evidence presented from these household case studies points to the gendered dimensions of household-heads responses to shocks. The actions reported by women in terms of borrowing land from neighbours, undertaking casual labour and confining these activities within the village were not actions reported by the men in the case studies. It was suggested earlier that factors which intersected with gender, such as the age of the women respondents and household responsibilities, might have set the spatial limits of their options. However, the women were older and single with few household obligations and older men – Lazaro aged 67 and Petero aged 74 – had no hesitation in going outside the village to find work. This suggests that options may be set by gendered norms of space, shaped by social identities.

In the case of borrowing land from a neighbour in the village this, as we have suggested above may be more culturally acceptable for women than men. Men may build houses within the village or undertake labour outside the village but it appears to be less common for men to undertake casual labour within the village. There are also historical reasons for the low status of casual labour within the village since in the past casual labour was provided by low status economic migrants from the neighbouring districts of Kabale and Mbarara and from Rwanda (Seeley, 2014).

While there are male households that are land constrained, they evidently do not appear to necessarily suffer in the same way as women because of the loss of land. They may be constrained by masculine values that structure what socially acceptable responses are available to them in times of hardship. Such values include male resilience, strength and self-respect (Siu, Wight & Seeley 2014). It is the desire to uphold these values that may be restricting the options available to the men, in which case casual labour outside the village, rather than within the village which might be viewed by men as leading to a loss of respect, and inter community trade appear from the case studies to be the two options available to them. The strict adherence to these masculine values could offer an explanation for why possession of social capital was not evident among men in this study, in spite of the fact that men's privileged social status has generally afforded them more access to this resource (Nelson, 2011).

The women in our case study households had practices through which they managed the constraints they faced as a result of the patriarchal norms in the study area. While the patrilineal descent system, where land is normally inherited through the male line, affected women's access to land, by borrowing land, sharing livestock and labouring for neighbours, the women had socially acceptable ways through which to manage the insecurity their household members faced. When viewed in the terms of Deniz Kandiyoti's 'patriarchal bargain', some strategies such as selling land inherited from their father to male kin and

buying land elsewhere, which was not their family land, gave women a degree of freedom to develop their livelihoods away from the influence of their male family members; an active and positive response to the situation they faced. On the other hand, the women's livelihood strategies of borrowing land, cost-sharing and casual labouring as a team hardly would have been possible had they not been making effective use of their social relations for purposes of obtaining material support and information that was vital for managing the shocks. Thus, consistent with Schellong's (2007) findings from a study conducted in Japan, our study highlights the important role of social capital as a key resource in the management of shocks by women. In the context of our study, indeed social capital may be viewed as an effective counterforce to the patriarchal constraints that would typically undermine women's ability to survive on their own, especially in times of crisis.

## Conclusion

Our findings suggest that the responses of female household heads to shocks are not just 'second best' responses but are equally effective as the responses of their male counterparts in managing crises. Both the female and male household heads acknowledged challenges in their effort to maintain the survival of their households. Yet both also responded to these challenges in ways which enabled them to navigate crises and ensure the survival of the household. The effectiveness of women's responses is contrary to what would have been expected given that women in this context have fewer resources for dealing with crises. This appears to fit with what scholars have observed, that during periods of environmental crisis women in rural contexts have not just been passive but active agents of adaptation (Shackleton *et al.*, 2014, Van Aelst and Holvoet, 2016). They negotiate and strategize, and adapt to shocks despite the structural challenges (Moore, 1993, Gupta and Ferguson, 1997).

In their paper on climate change and gender in Africa Bob and Babugura (2014) conclude that 'research that is gendered, adopts a case study approach and disaggregates data can contribute to unpacking uncritical discourses that women are the most vulnerable and lack the agency to inform and influence [...]'. Yet, it is essential to remember that female headed and male-headed households constitute heterogeneous groups of people with very different capacities to respond to shocks. Gender matters, but so do other intersecting dimensions of social identity too.

## End notes

1. The study area is now located in Kalungu District, a district created out of the sub-division of Masaka District on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2010.
2. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the Uganda Virus Research Institute, and overall clearance by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology. Pseudonyms have been used to mask the identity of respondents.
3. *Mailo* (taken from the word 'mile') tenure was introduced to the Kingdom of Buganda, that covered present day central Uganda, by the British colonial administration under the Uganda Agreement in 1900. Under the agreement the *Kabaka*, the King of the Baganda, and his family and the Baganda Chiefs acquired 8,958 square miles of land as freehold. The remaining land (9000 square miles) was allocated to the British protectorate. This system introduced individual land ownership thereby allowing land to be purchased or sold, as well as inherited by those who had been given *mailo* land (West, 1972, Karuhanga, 2008).

4. The Succession (Amendment) Bill 2006, which would increase and protect women's inheritance rights, is still pending in Parliament in Uganda. See <http://www.ulrc.go.ug/ulrc-workplan-for-fy201314-out-2> (accessed 15th August 2014). Details of the amendment are given in Bennett *et al.*, (2006).

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