

"A Mad Scramble". The Politics of Access to Land in Post-war Acholi Region

Anders Sjögren¹

¹Stockholm University/Nordic Africa Institute, Department of Political Science,
Stockholm/Uppsala, Sweden

anders.sjogren@statsvet.su.se

In the wake of the return to relative peace in Acholi region in 2006, land matters have taken centre stage. After having lived in camps for many years, families and individuals have begun to return home. Their return is complicated by many factors, however, including fears of renewed war, poverty and land disputes. While Uganda's constitution and land laws protect customary tenure, the social and economic institutions that are necessary for upholding this tenure regime have been severely weakened as a result of war and displacement. Institutional uncertainty and poverty have made survival and coping from agriculture more complicated for most people – and at the same time opened up the scope for rapid accumulation for the better off, both of which features contribute to the intense scramble for land.

Drawing on recent fieldwork, this paper analyses the topic of its title through two cases. One interrogates a bid by the Madhvani business group to access land in oil-rich Amuru district, Western Acholi, for the stated purposes of growing sugar cane, and the heated debate this has generated. The other examines how a boundary dispute between two clans, is linked to local, regional and national politics. The two cases illustrate, at different levels, the intense struggles over access to land, and the politics of identity, territoriality and institutional control this has set off. The paper concludes by situating the findings in the wider context of similar tendencies throughout Uganda.