

# Gender, Food Security and AIDS in Internally Displaced People's Camps in Uganda

## Implications for HIV Responsive Policy and Programming

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### Introduction

**F**ood and nutritional insecurity coexists with high HIV prevalence rates in war-affected communities in the north and northeastern regions of Uganda. Women and especially female children are disproportionately affected. Gender relations underpin the interaction between AIDS and food insecurity, though there is limited documentation on the influence of conflict and displacement on gender relations and how they may exacerbate household food insecurity and risk of HIV infection. There is also limited understanding of the extent to which Uganda's current policies and programs address the complex issues involved in gender, HIV, and food insecurity in IDP camps.

This study aims to fill these gaps by contributing to the understanding of the interactions between gender relations, HIV and AIDS, and food security in Uganda. First, a systematic review of relevant policies was undertaken. Then, using a various survey methods, the study was carried out in conflict-affected districts of Gulu and Katakwi, the former having been affected by the LRA insurgencies for the last two decades, and the latter by the Karimojong warriors and the LRA since 2005.

### Policy and Legal Context

The policy and legal context in which IDP camps exist can impact gender relations. Policies that address AIDS or food insecurity directly or indirectly impact gender roles and relations.

One of Uganda's key policy documents is the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), which is the national planning framework. The PEAP recognizes that AIDS and gender are cross-cutting issues in the eradication of poverty. The PEAP proposes actions to reduce gender inequality; these include improving access to agriculture extension services for women and addressing discrimination with regard to land rights. The Medium Term Competitive Strategy for the private sector (MTCS) and the Plan for Modernization of Agriculture (PMA) are two major strategies that guide the PEAP implementation. Although the PEAP recognizes IDPs as a vulnerable group in terms of food insecurity, it does not present concrete proposals to boost food security in IDP camps.

The government of Uganda developed the IDP policy to address the situation of individuals and communities displaced by conflict and other emergencies. While the policy provides for establishment and maintenance of adequate grain stores for IDPs and other such emergencies, it has not been implemented. Previous programs to address disaster-

related problems in northern Uganda, such as the Emergency Relief Rehabilitation Programme (ERRP), Recovery and Development Programme for Northern Uganda, the draft National Strategic Plan for Karamoja, and Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF), have been, at most, top-bottom, without substantive participation of the community whose livelihoods they aim at transforming.

The Uganda AIDS Commission has developed several guidelines to direct the AIDS response, including the National Strategic Plan (NSP) which establishes administrative structures for a coordinated response. However, these structures have been less effective even in areas without insecurity, mainly due to limited funding. The IDP populations are recognized by the NSP as a vulnerable group but this recognition has not been translated into policy proposals for addressing the unique needs of displaced populations. There is no mention of food security in the NSP as a prevention intervention. Focus is placed on care and support interventions for households with people living with HIV. In addition, the NSP is silent on the interaction between gender, food security, and AIDS.

The national Food and Nutrition Policy recognizes that access to food is a right. It also provides for mechanisms to ensure access to food by vulnerable groups. However the policy is more focused on nutrition than food security. It does not provide clear guidelines on how to increase access to food to vulnerable groups. Key elements of this policy, such as establishment of national food stores, have not been implemented. There are no adequate funding mechanisms coordinated by government and its partners to effectively alleviate food shortages in times of crises. Gender issues are taken into consideration in the policy but the changing gender dynamics in the IDP situation in terms of food and nutrition provision is not considered.

Uganda's National Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) Policy also recognizes the importance of nutrition support to people living with HIV but does not provide clear guidelines on how to effectively integrate nutrition and food security into ART programs. In addition, the policy does not adequately take into consideration the unique gender-based vulnerabilities of IDPs living with HIV, yet displacement poses special accessibility challenges to food, nutrition, and treatment services.

Overall, while various policies and programs exist in Uganda, none directly address the relationship between gender, food insecurity, and AIDS in conflict areas. Thus the particular dynamic experienced by this particularly vulnerable group is not addressed in national policies.

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This study was largely qualitative but supplemented with quantitative approaches. It employed a participatory and collaborative approach which involved working with relevant government departments as well as local and international agencies involved in activities related to gender, food security and HIV in IDP camps. This was deemed necessary for dialogue on study issues and findings and to motivate policy action. A total of 403 households from 8 camps were included in the sample and interviewed using semi-structured questionnaires. 8 Community Dialogue meetings and 22 key informant interviews were used to obtain qualitative data. Case narratives were used to allow participants an opportunity to talk about their experiences. The study also examined the policy framework in relation to the interaction between AIDS, gender and food security.

## Key Findings

The study unraveled a number of issues that can inform policy and programming. Food insecurity was rampant in IDP communities, with most households having only one meal a day. Households of the elderly, chronically sick, especially those living with HIV, orphans, and the disabled were more food-insecure than others. Armed conflict and displacement also led to the collapse of “buffer” stocks against food insecurity.

Although some direct food aid interventions by aid agencies exist in some camps, they were insufficient in meeting food needs of IDPs. Efforts to improve the adequacy of household food requirements through cultivation were hampered by insecurity and inadequate access to land and farm inputs. Insecurity and displacement socially and economically disoriented the traditional responsibilities of men. The women were playing the key household roles, including those traditionally played by the men. In situations of armed conflict, women and girls are more vulnerable to risks of contracting HIV than their male counterparts. Women and

girls were adopting behaviors and livelihood strategies such as transactional sex for money, food, and other basic necessities. This situation was exacerbated by the collapse of traditional and social institutions that regulate sexual behavior.

Although there were high levels of awareness about HIV and AIDS among IDPs, the motivation to act on this information was low. The conditions and subcultures in IDP camps tended to compromise their resilience to indulging in risky sexual behavior.

## Policy Recommendations

There is need to strengthen the existing policies through

- Development of comprehensive guidelines with clear indicators for addressing linkage between gender issues, food insecurity, and AIDS.
- Improving coordination and integration of services addressing AIDS and food security and gender-based sexual violence in conflict-affected settings.
- Strengthening the capacity of local governments to provide agricultural extension services to IDPs.
- Special targeting of the most vulnerable households, especially those with the elderly, chronically sick (living with HIV), orphans, and the disabled.
- Using gender as a conceptual lens to integrate HIV prevention programs with poverty/livelihood security interventions rather than have them as stand alone.
- Conceptualizing food security as an HIV prevention intervention rather than only a social support intervention.
- Ensuring regular and functional HIV services within IDP camp settings.
- HIV policies and programs that adequately address critical issues linked to access of HIV-infected mothers to alternative feeding of their babies.
- Integrating gender analysis into policy/program development and implementation in IDP settings.



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## About RENEWAL

Facilitated by the International Food Policy Research Institute, RENEWAL is a regional “network-of-networks” in Sub-Saharan Africa. Currently active in five “hub” countries (Malawi, Uganda, Zambia, South Africa, and Kenya), RENEWAL comprises national networks of food and nutrition-relevant organizations (public, private, and nongovernmental) together with partners in AIDS and public health research. RENEWAL aims to enhance understanding of the worsening interactions between HIV, food security, and nutrition, and facilitate a comprehensive response to these interactions. RENEWAL is grateful for support, at present, from Irish Aid, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC, Canada), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

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