

## STRUCTURED SUMMARY

# RECOVERING FROM CIVIL WAR: EVIDENCE FROM A DECADE OF RECOVERY IN NORTHERN UGANDA

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### Motivation

Northern Uganda suffered a civil war between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) from 1986 to 2006. It affected all of Acholi and large parts of Lango sub-regions: more than 100,000 people were killed; almost all the rural population of over 2 million were forcibly displaced; and the local economy was destroyed.

Northern Uganda continues to cope with the aftermath of war, despite millions of dollars in aid and numerous post-war development programmes.

There are few opportunities to follow the lives of households as they emerge from conflict into a phase often thought of as 'recovery'. A previous research project had conducted three rounds of a panel survey from 2013 to 2019 in Northern Uganda, following the lives, livelihoods and attitudes of trust and political legitimacy of over 1,500 households.

SPARC had the chance to extend this unique data set into a fourth wave, to see changes in individual households over an entire decade.

### Purpose

We investigate changes to households in Northern Uganda from 2013 to 2022. We look at how trajectories in livelihoods, state services and perceptions of the state have developed since the 2019 survey.

### Approach and methods

In early 2022, data was collected from 1,497 households in Northern Uganda; following households that had been randomly sampled in 2013 from the populations of Acholi and Lango sub-regions.

Respondents were interviewed on their sources of livelihoods, assets owned and other economic indicators; their experience of basic services — education, water, health care — and social protection; their attitudes to, and perceptions of, government and state institutions; and their trust in society and their social networks.

We summarised the data for the fourth survey round and compared statistics with those seen in the three previous waves.

## Findings

Although the civil war is often seen as something past, recovery over the last decade has been disappointing in most respects. People still feel highly insecure. Throughout the decade, people have progressively come to feel less secure when outside their own ethnic area.

There has been little change in how people gain their livelihoods; for many people, well-being fluctuates around the poverty line; wealth inequality has widened; food security has improved little, if at all.

Almost half the population still cannot access treatment for routine illnesses. The long closure of schools during COVID-19 ended education for around 10% of children.

Trust in government remains low, but people are gaining voice. More are successfully complaining about inadequate services.

## Policy implications

- Recovery of populations from conflict is commonly seen as a steady progression, supported by development agencies. That is not what we see in Northern Uganda. Livelihoods remain precarious, highly dependent on good weather for farming.
- Poverty cannot be reduced without paying attention to widening economic inequality. Assistance has been skewed to the better-off. Almost no economic mobility, to allow people to escape poverty permanently, can be seen.
- People have become more vocal which has led to more responsive service delivery. Support to services often focuses on the supply side; but just providing services is not sufficient. People also value transparency in, and accountability for, service quality and delivery. They value participating in decision-making and community meetings.
- Social tensions, in particular between ethnic groups, should be an explicit area of attention.

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