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Climate and Inclusion: Gender and Disability in Post-Conflict Natural Resource Mediation in Northern Uganda

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Abstract: This qualitative study investigates how climate variability interacts with social inequalities to shape natural resource conflicts, exploring the dynamics of conflict resolution in the Nwoya and Kitgum districts of Northern Uganda. This study aims to develop inclusive models for natural resource mediation in post-conflict communities. Utilising a framework that integrates gender analysis, disability inclusion, and climate justice, the research examines the gender-specific roles of men and women, as well as the contributions and exclusions faced by persons with disabilities (PWDs). Data were collected through key informant interviews with 60 participants, comprising 30 from each district, alongside two focus groups in each area to enrich the findings. This qualitative approach was chosen for its strengths in capturing nuanced perspectives and lived

experiences, which are essential for understanding complex social dynamics. Results indicate that men predominantly engage in formal mediation, while women and PWDs lead informal conflict resolution, leveraging their unique perspectives to address disputes effectively. Notably, individuals with physical disabilities are more readily accepted by society, whereas those who are blind or have albinism face greater discrimination. When conflict resolution fails, communities often turn to Mato Oput, a traditional mechanism, and if this also fails, migration becomes a survival strategy, introducing new challenges. This study is among the first to integrate climate variability, gender, and disability in the context of peacebuilding, underscoring its novelty. The practical significance of the findings lies in their potential to inform inclusive policy design in resource governance, promoting equitable participation for marginalised groups, particularly women, youth, and PWDs, and fostering resilience amid environmental and social pressures.

Keywords: Gender, Climate change, Conflict mediation, Disability, Uganda.

Introduction

In the wake of conflict, where natural resources become both a source of livelihood and contention, the voices of women and persons with disabilities remain alarmingly muted. This article explores how inclusive practices in natural resource mediation can pave the way for a more equitable post-conflict recovery in Northern Uganda amid a changing climate. The central research question guiding this inquiry is: How can inclusive practices in natural resource mediation address the needs of marginalised groups, thereby facilitating a more equitable post-conflict recovery in Northern Uganda?

Northern Uganda's trajectory has been profoundly shaped by the armed conflict from 1986 to 2006, which displaced millions into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and disrupted traditional livelihoods (Mabikke, 2011). The subsequent resettlement period intensified competition over scarce natural resources, such as land and water, already strained by climate change, including unpredictable rainfall and prolonged droughts (Abrahams, 2021; Saferworld, 2023; Watum, 2024). This situation is further complicated by land grabbing, which threatens the return and reintegration of displaced populations (Byensi, 2023; Sjögren, 2011). Understanding these dynamics is crucial, particularly as Uganda's Vision 2040 serves as a strategic framework to foster a modern and prosperous nation through sustainable development and equitable resource management. This vision underscores the importance of inclusivity in addressing the challenges posed by climate change and resource conflicts. Uganda ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2008 and has committed to various frameworks such as the Persons with Disability Act (2020) and the Revised National Policy on Persons with Disability (2023).

Additionally, the Government of Uganda has comprehensive gender frameworks, including the Uganda National Gender Policy (Government of Uganda, 2007), currently under review. Commitments to these frameworks aim to promote equity (Uganda Women's Network (UWONET), 2023; The United Nations, 2013). Despite these commitments, women and persons with disabilities

continue to face significant barriers in accessing land and participating in formal dispute resolution (Byaruhanga, 2022; International Alert, 2014).

Traditional reconciliation processes, such as Mato Oput, play a vital role in restoring community harmony but may inadvertently perpetuate existing inequalities if not implemented inclusively (Kiyala, 2024). Mato Oput, a traditional Acholi approach to justice, emphasises restorative justice and community healing. Yet, it may not adequately address the needs and rights of marginalised groups, including persons with disabilities. Despite the increasing recognition of the importance of inclusion, research remains limited on how these groups engage in natural resource conflict resolution in post-war Northern Uganda under changing climate conditions. This study aims to bridge these gaps by examining how gender, disability, and social status influence conflict resolution strategies.

Employing a framework that integrates gender analysis, disability studies, and climate justice, this research aims to illuminate the complexities of resource management and conflict mediation in Northern Uganda. By examining the contributions of diverse community members, including those with physical disabilities, albinism, and visual impairments, it seeks to explore strategies for institutionalising inclusive conflict mediation practices that reflect the community's varied needs.

This article is structured to guide the reader through a comprehensive examination of climate, gender, and disability in post-conflict natural resource mediation in Northern Uganda. It begins by articulating the research problem and outlining the aims and questions that frame the study. A thorough literature review and theoretical overview provide essential context, followed by a detailed methodology section that describes the research approach. The findings are then presented and discussed, leading to a conclusion that emphasises the research's implications. Additionally, the article includes suggestions for future studies, acknowledgements, funding sources, and a complete reference list. This structure aims to facilitate a thorough understanding of the critical intersections addressed in the research.

Research Problem

In Northern Uganda, the aftermath of the conflict (1986-2006) has led to intensified competition for natural resources, significantly impacting marginalised groups, including women, persons with disabilities (PWDs), individuals with albinism, and those who are visually impaired. Despite Uganda's commitments to international frameworks promoting equity and inclusion, these populations continue to be largely excluded from natural resource conflict resolution processes. Studies indicate that women and PWDs face substantial barriers in accessing land and participating in formal dispute resolution, highlighting a critical gap in inclusive practices.

The central research question guiding this study is: How can inclusive practices in natural resource mediation address the needs of marginalised groups, thereby facilitating a more equitable post-conflict recovery in Northern Uganda? This challenge is further complicated by climate variability, which exacerbates competition over limited resources and underscores existing social inequalities that impede the involvement of marginalised groups in conflict resolution.

Research Aim and Questions

This study initially anticipated that men would predominantly engage in formal mediation processes, while women and persons with disabilities (PWDs) would play essential roles in informal conflict resolution. To delve deeper into these dynamics, the following research questions were formulated:

- 1. What gender-specific roles do men and women play in both formal and informal natural resource conflict resolution?*
- 2. How do persons with disabilities contribute to or experience natural resource mediation processes?*
- 3. In what ways does climate variability interact with existing social inequalities to influence natural resource disputes?*
- 4. What coping strategies do women and persons with disabilities employ when conflict mediation does not yield positive results?*
- 5. What strategies can promote more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable frameworks for natural resource conflict mediation in post-war Nwoya and Kitgum districts?*

Previous studies have highlighted the critical need for inclusive approaches in conflict resolution, revealing that marginalised groups, particularly women and PWDs, often face significant barriers to participation. Research indicates that traditional mediation practices may inadvertently perpetuate inequalities, emphasising the importance of integrating diverse perspectives to enhance community resilience. These findings underline the scientific interest in exploring inclusive practices, as they can lead to more effective and equitable outcomes in post-conflict recovery efforts.

Literature review / Theoretical Overview

This literature review explores the intersection of natural resource management, social dynamics, and conflict resolution in post-conflict settings, emphasising the necessity for inclusive practices to foster equitable recovery.

Climate Variability and Resource Scarcity

Climate change significantly impacts post-conflict regions, where rising temperatures and erratic rainfall disrupt agricultural cycles (Kosanich et al., 2022). Recurrent droughts exacerbate food insecurity, particularly for marginalised groups such as women, persons with disabilities, individuals with albinism, and the visually impaired, who depend on rain-fed agriculture. These communities face intensified competition over scarce resources like land and water (Bennett & Hanna, 2022). The social impacts of climate variability reinforce existing inequalities, as persons with disabilities encounter barriers limiting their access to resources and decision-making. For instance, physical disabilities can restrict mobility, while blindness hampers access to critical information. Additionally, stigma associated with albinism further restricts participation in agrarian livelihoods (Abualghaib et

al., 2019). These dynamics highlight the need for conflict mediation approaches that integrate social justice perspectives.

Post-War Context and Displacement

The armed conflict in Northern Uganda from 1986 to 2006 displaced nearly 1.8 million people into IDP camps, severely restricting access to farmland (Branch, 2013; Mugizi & Tomoya, 2021). The collapse of customary land governance created institutional gaps that continue to influence land disputes. Upon resettlement, overlapping land claims and the absence of reliable records led to widespread conflicts over resource ownership (Murphy, 2017). Scholars like Kobusingye emphasise community dissatisfaction regarding resource access, noting that while the LRA conflict has ended, new tensions over natural resources persist, particularly impacting marginalised communities. Mwesigye and Matsumoto (2016) highlight that inadequate consultations and increasing population pressures exacerbate land disputes. Kobusingye (2020) identifies a troubling trend of youth responding to resource conflicts with anger and violence, reflecting a belief that the government facilitates dispossession for elite interests. Similar sentiments are documented by Eichelberger (2015), illustrating a broader issue of youth disenfranchisement and the urgent need for equitable resource management. Marginalised groups continue to face barriers in reclaiming land and participating in dispute resolution processes, as reconstruction policies often overlook social inclusion (Allen & Vlassenroot, 2019). It is crucial to prioritise community dialogue in resource management to foster sustainable development and peace, as highlighted by Tumusiime (2017).

Gender and Natural Resource Mediation

Gender roles significantly influence participation in natural resource management. Women, who depend on these resources for their households, often face entrenched patriarchal norms that limit their participation in formal mediation structures dominated by men (Porter, 2017). Despite these challenges, women often engage in crucial yet often overlooked informal mediation roles. Their exclusion undermines the effectiveness of conflict resolution, as their knowledge and experiences are absent (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2019). Recognising these gendered dynamics is essential for developing inclusive mediation frameworks.

Disability and Social Inclusions

Persons with physical disabilities, the blind, and individuals with albinism face systemic exclusion in natural resource management. Physical disabilities hinder access to land and mediation spaces, while blindness limits access to vital information (Jodoin et al., 2020). Stigma surrounding albinism restricts participation in agrarian livelihoods (Brocco, 2016). Promoting inclusion requires addressing structural barriers, such as providing accessible communication and infrastructure (Abualghaib et al., 2019). Strategies that ensure representation in decision-making processes align with the obligations of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), 2006 and are crucial for fostering equitable resource management (Bennett & Hanna, 2022).

Research gaps

The literature indicates that climate variability, disrupted livelihoods, and weakened institutions shape natural resource conflicts in Northern Uganda. Although studies emphasise the vulnerability of women and persons with disabilities, there is limited empirical research on how these groups engage in mediation processes. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing inclusive conflict resolution frameworks. This study aims to fill these gaps by adopting an intersectional lens to analyse how gender, disability, and social status interact with climate stressors to shape natural resource mediation in Northern Uganda.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in the Inclusive Political Ecology Framework, which emphasises the interplay of gender, disability, and intersectionality in understanding natural resource management and conflict resolution. This framework posits that social and environmental issues are interconnected, enabling a holistic analysis of how various factors influence individuals' experiences with natural resources (Robbins, 2012). It highlights the unique challenges faced by marginalised groups in accessing resources and participating in decision-making processes, particularly through the lens of intersectionality, which examines how overlapping identities shape experiences and engagement in conflict mediation (Crenshaw, 1989).

Interconnectedness of social and environmental issues

The Inclusive Political Ecology Framework asserts that environmental challenges cannot be understood in isolation from the social dynamics that shape them. In post-conflict settings, natural resource management often becomes a source of tension (Blaikie, 2006). Recognising this interplay is essential for a comprehensive understanding of conflict resolution.

Marginalised Groups and Unique Challenges

This framework focuses explicitly on marginalised groups—such as women, persons with physical disabilities, individuals with albinism, and the visually impaired who encounter distinct barriers in accessing resources and participating in governance. Women often face societal norms that limit their involvement in formal structures (Agarwal, 2001), while persons with physical disabilities confront physical barriers to resource access (Mastrorillo et al., 2016). Stigma surrounding albinism restricts participation in resource-dependent communities (Brocco, 2016), and the visually impaired struggle to access critical information necessary for effective engagement (Jodoin et al., 2020).

Intersectionality and Participation in Conflict Mediation

Emphasising intersectionality, this framework explores how overlapping identities compound barriers to effective participation in resource management discussions. This research aims to uncover how these intersecting identities influence experiences and engagement in conflict mediation, and to advocate for strategies that empower marginalised voices and facilitate equitable access to resources.

The Inclusive Political Ecology Framework provides a robust foundation for analysing the interconnectedness of social dynamics and environmental management. By focusing on the unique challenges faced by marginalised groups and emphasising intersectionality, this framework enhances the understanding of natural resource management and conflict resolution, advocating for inclusive practices that promote equitable outcomes.

Research Methodology

General Background

This study adopted a qualitative research design, aligning with the interpretive tradition to explore the multifaceted experiences of marginalised groups in natural resource conflict mediation in post-conflict Northern Uganda (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Qualitative methods are particularly effective in providing in-depth insights into complex social phenomena, making them suitable for understanding the intersectional realities of participants (Tenny et al., 2023).

The research was conducted in Nwoya and Kitgum districts, which are located in the post-war Northern Uganda region characterised by the legacies of prolonged conflict and increasing pressures from climate variability, such as droughts and erratic rainfall. These stressors significantly impact community dynamics and resource availability, complicating existing conflicts over natural resources. Purposive sampling was employed to select three sub-counties in each district, ensuring diverse representation of post-conflict experiences (Patton, 2015).

Table 1

Study Area Sub-Counties

District	Sub-Counties
Nwoya District	Purongo, Anaka, Kochi
Kitgum District	Kitgum Municipality, Lamwo, Pajule

Participants / Sample

A total of 60 participants were interviewed, with an equal distribution of male and female across both districts (Nwoya and Kitgum) to capture gender-specific insights. The study population included key local actors involved in natural resource and conflict mediation, particularly leaders from Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs). Participants comprised local leaders, clan leaders, opinion leaders, women leaders, disability leaders, persons with disabilities (physically disabled, blind, and albino), and Local Council court members. Purposive sampling with maximum variation was employed to ensure representation across gender, age, disability type, and mediation role, as recommended by Maxwell (2021). Gatekeepers, including local council leaders and DPO coordinators, facilitated access while ensuring trust and ethical engagement (Maxwell, 2021).

Additionally, two focus groups composed of 4 people were conducted in each district, comprising diverse participants to further enrich the qualitative data. A female community member

from each district acted as a co-researcher, fostering trust and ensuring that the research reflected local realities and priorities. Their involvement enhanced the credibility of the data and facilitated deeper engagement with participants, particularly women and marginalised groups. By leveraging their local knowledge, these co-researchers created a more inclusive research environment, ensuring that diverse voices were represented and contributing to relevant insights into conflict-resolution dynamics in the Nwoya and Kitgum districts.

Instrument and Procedures

This section outlines the instruments and procedures employed in the study to gather and analyse data on natural resource conflict resolution in Northern Uganda. It details the methodologies used to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of marginalised groups in the mediation process.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, allowing participants to share their experiences in their own words and providing rich narrative responses (Elliot & Timulak, 2005). Interviews were conducted in the local language to ensure comprehension and comfort. Notably, two participants with visual impairments in Nwoya preferred to have their companions present during the interviews, which effectively met their needs. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. While focus groups comprised 4-6 participants, fostering interaction among community members (Hennink et al., 2020).

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study employed thematic analysis, a flexible method that facilitates the identification, organisation, and interpretation of patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach enabled a nuanced exploration of the complex dynamics of gender roles, disability, youth involvement, climate variability, and coping strategies in the context of natural resource management.

The analysis process began with familiarisation with the data, which involved transcribing interviews and focus group discussions. This initial step was crucial for immersing myself in the content, allowing for a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences. By engaging closely with the transcripts, I was able to capture the richness of the data and identify preliminary insights.

For the initial coding phase, the focus was on research themes. This involved systematically coding segments of the data that highlighted gender roles, disability, youth involvement, climate variability, and various coping strategies. This initial coding was instrumental in breaking down the data into manageable parts, enabling me to pinpoint significant patterns and insights.

Following the initial coding, the codes were organised into broader themes that reflected the intersectional dynamics present in the data. This thematic organisation was essential for synthesising the findings and illustrating the complexities of the issues at hand. The proposed themes were then reviewed to ensure that they accurately represented the data and effectively addressed the research

questions posed at the outset of the study. This critical evaluation was essential to refine the themes, ensuring they were robust and reflective of the participants' experiences.

To ensure coding reliability, I employed peer debriefing, engaging with colleagues to discuss and challenge the coding process, thereby providing an external perspective that enhanced the analysis. Additionally, triangulation was utilised by comparing findings from different data sources, such as interviews and focus groups, to validate the results' consistency. This multi-faceted approach strengthened the credibility of the themes identified.

Finally, the themes were defined and named, encapsulating the findings and conveying their significance and relevance to the research objectives (Saldaña, 2015). This step was important for presenting the results coherently, enabling a clearer understanding of how the various factors interacted and influenced one another in the context of natural resource management. Through this rigorous thematic analysis process, I was able to uncover rich insights that not only shed light on the challenges faced by various groups but also identified potential pathways for more inclusive and equitable resource management practices.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the National Council of Science and Technology, ensuring adherence to established ethical guidelines (Israel & Hay, 2006). Informed consent was secured from all participants, who were assured of confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any time (Maxwell, 2021). Special attention was given to the well-being of participants with disabilities, ensuring the research process was accessible and respectful of their needs. Given the close interaction with participants, ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study (UK Statistics Authority, 2022).

With this robust methodology in place, the findings illuminate the intricate dynamics of participation in natural resource conflict mediation in Northern Uganda, contributing to a deeper understanding of the intersectional challenges and opportunities within the study communities.

Results

This section presents the findings from the study, addressing the research questions on gender-specific roles, the impact of climate variability, access to natural resources, and the barriers faced by women with physical disabilities, individuals with albinism, and the visually impaired in Nwoya and Kitgum districts. The insights gathered highlight the complex dynamics at play in natural resource conflict resolution.

Gender-Specific Roles in Natural Resource Conflict Resolution

The study revealed that men and women in Nwoya and Kitgum districts occupy distinct roles in both formal and informal natural resource conflict resolution processes, shaped by traditional gender norms. Men predominantly hold leadership positions in formal mediation settings, such as clan courts and local councils. As one male local council leader stated, *"In our culture, men are the*

heads of households. We make the final decisions in community matters, and we must take a lead in land and resource-related issues." This dominance often sidelines women's voices, particularly those with disabilities.

One male participant noted, "When there is any conflict in the community, we gather the men to discuss. Women's opinions are often secondary, even if they manage the land and have no male relatives in the household." Despite these challenges, women, including those with physical disabilities and visual impairments, play crucial roles in informal mediation and community cohesion. One visually impaired female respondent highlighted, *"I may not sit in the meetings, but I am the one who resolves issues at home. Whenever conflicts arise, I bring my family together to discuss and resolve the issues."* The Acholi saying, as expressed by one female participant, *"When a woman is not heard, the household is not at peace,"* emphasises the necessity of including women's perspectives, particularly those of disabled women, in natural resource management.

Impact of Climate Variability on Resource Conflicts

Climate variability significantly exacerbates existing tensions over natural resources, creating new challenges for both men and women. Erratic rainfall patterns, prolonged droughts, and flooding have led to reduced resource availability, intensifying competition among community members. A young farmer from Kitgum shared, *"The rains are not what they used to be. We struggle to grow enough food, and when there is a drought, water becomes too scarce; we fight over the little water left."*

In response to these conditions, some individuals have begun migrating to neighbouring districts to work for families with sufficient food, reflecting a desperate need to provide for themselves. However, this migration sometimes creates friction between communities, as newcomers compete for limited resources. As one respondent noted, *"Many families have sold parts of their land just to rebuild their homes, leaving little for farming. Youth over 15 want their own grass-thatched houses, but this has led to overcrowding and conflict within the compound."*

The consequences of these conflicts on family dynamics are profound. One respondent pointed out, *"With so many conflicts arising from food scarcity and land issues, when domestic violence occurs, it often takes a long time to resolve it through local councils. This lost time could be spent on productive activities."* The fear of theft has led families to abandon traditional grain storage practices in granaries, further complicating food security. Many are hesitant to store food in granaries, fearing it will be stolen, even though it was once a secure method for ensuring food availability.

Effects on Resource Scarcity

Participants reported that climate change has led to significant shifts in resource availability, particularly concerning water and agricultural land. A female participant with albinism remarked, *"During droughts, we struggle more than others to access water and land, which are far distant. Our needs are forgotten in the rush to resolve conflicts."* This indicates a systemic oversight in addressing the unique challenges faced by marginalised individuals during resource crises.

Women and persons with disabilities (PWDs) are often left to navigate these challenges with fewer resources and support. The findings reveal that climate variability reinforces existing gender disparities within the community. In Kitgum, men are typically more involved in fishing and agricultural production, while women are primarily responsible for household duties. However, the pressures of climate change are prompting women, especially those with disabilities, to take on new roles in resource management. A woman from Nwoya stated, *"I now have to manage our family's land and ensure we have enough to eat. My husband helps more at home because we need each other to survive."*

Barriers to Participation in Conflict Mediation for Women and Persons with Disabilities

The findings reveal that individuals with disabilities, including women, express a strong desire to attend mediation meetings to advocate for their rights. However, significant barriers hinder their ability to participate effectively. Physical accessibility of mediation venues is a significant obstacle, as meetings often occur in communal spaces without wheelchair-accessible paths. One participant noted, *"In our community, a person with any form of disability is usually hidden away; families fear being associated with them, and this keeps us from participating in important discussions."*

Timing also poses problems, as mediation sessions are usually scheduled during the day when the sun is at its peak, creating adverse conditions for individuals with albinism. This exposure increases their risk of sunburn and heat-related illnesses, leading many to avoid participation. For those who are visually impaired, navigating to mediation sites presents its own difficulties due to the absence of clear markers or established pathways.

Societal attitudes significantly contribute to the marginalisation of these individuals. Widespread stigma leads to underestimating their capabilities. Women with albinism often face exclusion from important discussions, and the lack of accessible information restricts their participation. Many experience financial hardships that prevent them from engaging in community initiatives or seeking legal recourse.

These findings highlight the multifaceted challenges faced by women with disabilities in conflict mediation, underscoring the urgent need for inclusive practices that facilitate their meaningful participation.

Access to Natural Resources and Participation

Access to land, water, and firewood is crucial for livelihoods in Nwoya and Kitgum. However, women and PWDs face significant challenges that limit their participation in accessing and managing these resources. Table 2 summarises the challenges faced by women with physical disabilities, individuals with albinism, and the visually impaired regarding access to natural resources, highlighting specific barriers and key actors involved in resource management.

Table 2

Challenges faced by women with disabilities in Access to Natural Resources

Resource Type	Challenges faced by women with disabilities	Key actors involved
Land	Exclusion from negotiations and cultural stigma	Clan leaders, local councils
Water	Physical barriers to access, gendered labour	Community water committees
Forest resources	Limited decision-making power, reliance on non-timber products	Community Forest committees
Sand	Exclusion from negotiations, increased extraction demands	Government and community leaders

In Nwoya district, individuals with physical disabilities generally face fewer barriers compared to those with albinism or visual impairments, whose contributions are often undervalued, demonstrating the need for more inclusive approaches.

Informal Mediation in the Context of Climate Change

Informal mediation practices, such as "kangaroo courts," have become essential for resolving conflicts exacerbated by climate stresses. In both Nwoya and Kitgum, women often take the lead in addressing community disputes, utilising their roles within community support groups to mediate conflicts. However, stigma surrounding disabilities significantly hinders the participation of individuals with disabilities in these processes.

Despite these barriers, instances of collaboration between men and women are emerging. Some men are beginning to consult their wives regarding decisions related to land and resource management, recognising that these discussions can help avoid conflicts. One participant noted, *"Men are starting to realise that consulting women helps avoid problems. We need to work together to overcome the challenges posed by climate change."*

Many community members frequently turn to the Mato Oput ceremony when formal conflict resolution fails. This traditional practice serves as a vital mechanism for healing and restoring relationships within the community. Almost all participants expressed that this tradition is an effective way to acknowledge pain and seek forgiveness. One community member stated, *"This is a way for us to acknowledge the pain and seek forgiveness."*

Comparative Insights

To further elucidate these differences, the following table presents a comparative analysis of key aspects observed in both districts.

Table 3

Comparative Insights from Nwoya and Kitgum Districts.

Aspect	Nwoya District	Kitgum districtm
Predominant respondent categories	More women with disabilities involved in informal mediation	Higher numbers of men in formal decision-making roles
Conflict Resolution Practices	Strong reliance on informal mediation (Kangaroo courts)	Greater emphasis on formal mediation through local courts
Impact of climate variability	Increased conflict over land due to drought	More disputes over water access linked to erratic rainfall
Participation of PWDs	Limited participation due to stigma and physical barriers	More inclusive practices observed particularly for individuals with physical disabilities
Women's involvement	Women lead household resource management	Women's roles expanding into community-led level decision-making
Community perception of gender roles	Traditional views prevalent limiting women's voices	Emerging recognition of Women's contributions in resource management
Access to Resources	Land access issues more pronounced for Women	Water access issues dominate the discussions
Cultural Practices	Stronger Adherence to traditional roles	More openness to chaging gender dynamics

The comparative insights table highlights the distinct challenges and opportunities present in Nwoya and Kitgum, emphasising the need for tailored conflict resolution strategies that consider local gender dynamics and resource management practices. This differentiation underscores the importance of inclusive frameworks that address the unique barriers faced by women with disabilities, individuals with albinism, and the visually impaired in each district.

The findings from Nwoya and Kitgum districts reveal both similarities and differences in how women, particularly those with disabilities, navigate conflict over natural resources. In both areas, traditional practices such as the Mato Oput ceremony play a significant role in conflict resolution, providing a framework for healing and reconciliation when formal systems falter. However, the effectiveness of these practices varies by local sociocultural context.

In Nwoya, informal mediation practices, like "kangaroo courts," empower community leaders to facilitate discussions, allowing women with physical disabilities, individuals with albinism, and the visually impaired to voice their concerns. However, the stigma surrounding disabilities often undermines their full participation, as highlighted by Brocco (2016). For instance, a visually impaired man faced challenges asserting his rights due to societal beliefs that questioned his capability to contribute meaningfully to discussions about land grabbing. Conversely, in Kitgum, individuals with albinism encounter discrimination rooted in harmful superstitions, which further sidelines them in negotiations over land access. This observation aligns with Brocco (2016), emphasising that the environment in which people live continues to turn off their participation.

While individuals with physical disabilities generally experience less discrimination in Nwoya, the disparity in acceptance underscores the urgent need for reforms in informal mediation practices. Addressing societal perceptions of disability is essential to ensure that all community members, particularly those with disabilities, can engage in discussions about natural resources (Jodoin et al., 2020).

As we transition to the discussion section, it is essential to analyse these findings in the context of broader societal changes and to develop actionable recommendations to enhance participation and equity in natural resource governance.

Discussion

The findings illustrate the resilience of women, particularly those with physical disabilities, albinism, and visual impairments, in navigating the complexities of conflict. Traditional practices like Mato Oput serve as vital mechanisms for healing and reconciliation, particularly when formal systems fail. This view is affirmed by Kiyala (2024) in his study of the use of traditional approaches in contemporary peacebuilding. The finding on migration reflects both a survival strategy and a source of new challenges, underscoring the need for tailored support. Mwesigye and Matsumoto (2016) affirm the importance of providing support to the vulnerable, given internal migration is expected as a result of population pressure and land conflicts. Community support networks and advocacy efforts empower marginalised voices, emphasising the importance of inclusive participation in decision-making processes. Additionally, active engagement in peacebuilding initiatives signifies a proactive approach to conflict resolution, demonstrating that these groups can play crucial roles in fostering community resilience.

The findings reveal the critical role of informal mediation practices, such as "kangaroo courts," in Nwoya for resolving conflicts over natural resources. These community-based forums empower local leaders to facilitate discussions, providing opportunities for women with physical disabilities, individuals with albinism, and the visually impaired to voice their concerns. However, the stigma surrounding disabilities brought about by traditional beliefs often undermines their full participation, as highlighted by Brocco (2016). For example, a visually impaired man faced difficulties asserting his rights due to societal beliefs that questioned his capability to contribute meaningfully to discussions on land grabbing. This aligns with Stein and Stein (2022) and Byensi (2023), who emphasise that stigma not only silences individual voices but also perpetuates cycles of exclusion, impeding effective conflict resolution.

Conversely, individuals with albinism in Kitgum face discrimination rooted in harmful superstitions, further sidelining them in negotiations over land access. This perspective is supported by Brocco (2016), who contends that the environment in which people live continues to turn off their participation. While individuals with physical disabilities generally experience less discrimination, the disparity in acceptance underscores the urgent need for reforms in informal mediation practices. Addressing societal perceptions of disability is essential to ensure that all community members, particularly those with disabilities, can engage in discussions about natural resources (Jodoin et al., 2020).

Formal mediation structures, such as clan courts and local councils, are designed to address conflicts related to land, water, and forest resources. However, these institutions often reflect existing gender and disability biases, limiting equitable participation in mediation processes, as highlighted by Hopwood et al. (2018). A patriarchal society where men dominate limits the participation of women and marginalised populations. Notably, women and youth frequently find their voices overshadowed by male elders in clan courts, aligning with research by the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation (2022) and Eichelberger (2015) that highlights the dominance of traditional gender roles in mediation settings. In Kitgum, while individuals with physical disabilities face fewer barriers, cultural misconceptions still sideline those with albinism and visual impairments, limiting their engagement in formal processes.

Key barriers to participation for PWDs include social stigma, mobility issues, negative societal attitudes, lack of representation, and limited access to information. This finding aligns with Mugizi and Tamoya (2021) and Abualghaib et al. (2019), who challenge institutional gaps that contribute to the escalation of disputes and the stigma that limits participation in agrarian livelihoods. Despite these challenges, disabled individuals can contribute meaningfully through informal advocacy, leveraging their lived experiences to highlight inequities in access and decision-making. However, systemic exclusion from natural resource mediation processes remains a pressing issue that requires urgent reform. Thus, social justice must be integral to conflict mediation over natural resource access in post-war communities. Disability Equality Training (DET) sessions for stakeholders could raise awareness and promote understanding of disability rights, further enhancing participation in conflict resolution processes.

The findings further indicate that climate variability exacerbates existing social inequalities, influencing natural resource disputes as resources become scarcer due to climate change, competition intensifies, heightening tensions within communities. PWDs, particularly women with physical disabilities, those with albinism, and the visually impaired, are disproportionately affected by these tensions, as earlier noted by scholars such as Rao et.al (2025) in their study on gender, intersectionality and climate-smart agriculture. This same view is affirmed by Nitya et al. (2019) in their discussion of gendered experiences of climate change in Uganda. As one female visually impaired respondent poignantly remarked, "During droughts, we struggle more than others to access water and land. Our needs are forgotten in the rush to resolve conflicts." This reinforces Bennett and Hanna's (2022) observation that social vulnerabilities intersect with environmental challenges, complicating resource management.

This study enhances scholarship on post-conflict inclusion and environmental justice in Africa by examining the intersection of gender, disability, and climate variability in natural resource mediation. Highlighting the resilience of marginalised groups, particularly women with disabilities, it demonstrates how traditional and informal practices can serve as vital mechanisms for conflict resolution and community resilience. The findings call for reforms in both formal and informal mediation structures to ensure equitable participation and challenge societal stigmas, aligning with the theoretical framework used in this study. Ultimately, this research underscores the need to

integrate social justice and inclusive frameworks into resource governance, fostering an environment in which all voices are heard and access to natural resources is equitable.

Conclusions and Implications

This study provides valuable insights into the ongoing challenges of conflict resolution in Nwoya and Kitgum districts following years of armed conflict. Examining the experiences of marginalised groups, particularly women and persons with disabilities, highlights the urgent need for inclusive approaches to foster community resilience and sustainable development. The findings inform various stakeholders, including government entities and donors, about the critical components necessary for effective post-conflict mediation.

Impact of Armed Conflict

The ongoing effects of armed conflict continue to destabilise communities in Nwoya and Kitgum, with unresolved disputes affecting families even two decades after resettlement. Personal experiences shared by respondents, such as one physically disabled woman who stated, "I had to leave my home because the fighting never stopped. But it is not easy here; sometimes, I feel more alone than before," emphasise the urgent need for conflict resolution mechanisms that specifically address the unique challenges faced by marginalised individuals.

Integrating Gender, Disability and Climate Justice

This study contributes to the literature by integrating gender, disability, and climate justice into one analytical framework for post-conflict mediation. This comprehensive approach underscores the necessity of prioritising the participation of women with disabilities, individuals with albinism, and the visually impaired in mediation processes. Community awareness campaigns play a vital role in reducing stigma and transforming harmful cultural beliefs, ensuring that all voices are included in discussions about resource management.

Accessibility and Participation

Improving access to mediation venues and providing information in accessible formats are crucial for empowering individuals with mobility challenges. Leveraging technology—such as mobile applications and social media enhances participation and engagement, allowing marginalised voices to be heard in conflict resolution efforts. Such measures ensure that everyone can contribute to discussions on natural resources.

Youth Engagement and Advocacy

Engaging youth as mediators and advocates fosters dialogue about the unique challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. One young advocate remarked, "We need to stand together so everyone's voice counts," highlighting the importance of inclusivity and intergenerational solidarity in addressing these issues.

Policy Relevance for Uganda

The findings inform the government of Uganda and donor initiatives by emphasising the necessity of inclusive policies in conflict resolution frameworks. By prioritising accessibility, representation, and community engagement, stakeholders can create equitable environments that support sustainable development and peacebuilding efforts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, proactive measures must be implemented to establish inclusive frameworks for conflict resolution in Nwoya and Kitgum districts. Addressing the unique challenges faced by marginalised groups is not just a matter of justice; it is essential for fostering community resilience and social cohesion. By ensuring that every voice is valued, particularly those of women and persons with disabilities, stakeholders can create a more equitable society that facilitates dialogue and understanding among diverse community members.

Moreover, integrating gender, disability, and climate justice into conflict resolution strategies will enhance the effectiveness of these efforts, promoting sustainable solutions that are responsive to the needs of all individuals. Collaborative initiatives that engage community members, local leaders, and policymakers will be critical in developing and implementing these frameworks. Ultimately, a commitment to inclusivity and accessibility will not only contribute to lasting peace in Nwoya and Kitgum but also serve as a model for other post-conflict regions seeking to rebuild and thrive.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could prioritise longitudinal studies on the impacts of climate change on resource management, community resilience, and conflict dynamics in Northern Uganda. Understanding the long-term effects of climate shifts on access to vital resources is essential for insights into social stability and conflict. These studies can identify effective strategies to enhance community resilience against environmental challenges.

Additionally, a comparative analysis of justice systems is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of traditional restorative justice mechanisms, such as Mato Oput, versus formal judicial systems in this unique cultural context. This exploration can reveal how different conflict-resolution approaches affect community cohesion and trust in governance. By assessing the strengths and limitations of both systems, researchers can guide policymakers in fostering reconciliation and justice, especially in post-conflict settings where cultural practices play a significant role.

Future research should adopt a cross-country comparative perspective, focusing on Uganda, DRC, Kenya, and South Sudan. This will enhance understanding of how climate variability and social inequalities affect natural resource conflicts across different contexts, enabling identification of effective, region-specific mediation strategies.

Furthermore, future studies should employ a mixed-methods approach that incorporates a quantitative component. This will provide statistical evidence to complement qualitative insights,

thereby enriching the analysis of the interplay among gender, disability, and climate change in conflict mediation and leading to more informed interventions.

This study was limited to two districts in post-war Northern Uganda. Future research could expand to other districts to compare the magnitude of the issues. Moreover, while this study focused on three categories of disabilities, future work could explore the experiences of people who are deaf or hard of hearing and those with multiple impairments.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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