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**Returning home: Gender and Choice among internally displaced Persons in Gulu district, Northern Uganda**

**(Abstract)**

The study interrogates the widely held assumption that return to original homes is a durable solution for individuals displaced by armed conflict. Taking a case example of the 22 year old conflict in northern Uganda currently in an early phase of a post conflict situation, the study explores the question what influences women and men's decision to return home. Through an eclectic usage of feminist, choice and Koontz theory of migration the study explores why women and men make somewhat different decision in return processes. Field work was carried out among displaced persons and returnees in Gulu district northern Uganda. The return process was characterised by three stages of movement, that is, persons who remained in the IDP camps and did not want to return, those in transit sites on 'their way' home and those resettled in original homes. The decision to return is influenced by an interaction of gendered and non gendered processes which dispels the widely held assumption that displaced persons always want to return home and that return is a problem free process. The study goes beyond academic inquiry of return processes which place an emphasis on the political and legal processes of return to examine how women and men respond to armed conflict and Internal Displacement. In addition the study explores the political, economic, social and cultural processes that influence the decision to return or not to original homes. In as much as women and men would like to return, prevailing gender relations, gender roles and responsibilities and the differential claims to resources such as land influence women and men's decision to return or not to original homes. Policies and programmes which aim at return of displaced populations therefore need to take into account the social transformations among displaced populations and to appreciate the fact that for some displaced populations return may not be a durable solution.

The findings reveal that the decision to return is influenced an interaction of gendered and non gendered processes in return movements, women and men have different motivations and gender relations influence the decision to either return or not to original homes.

Koontz theory of migration attempts to analyse human motivations of displacement without a critical analysis of the other determinants of displacement. Rational choice conceptualisation that agents are rational denies the primacy of gender in decision making. Feminist theory obscures the primacy of non gendered processes in return processes. In addition, individual level analyses do not reveal much about the influence of social structures on individual choices to return nor how individual women and men interface with social structures and their agency in the return processes. Theoretical triangulation therefore provides a lens in which to appreciate and understand the dynamism in displacement and return movements and explore the linkage between gendered and non gendered processes that influence the decision to return or not to original communities or villages.