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Gendered Gaps: Landslides in Bududa, Uganda

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Gendered Gaps: Landslides in Bududa, Uganda

by
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Global Studies
Honors Thesis

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Abstract

Bududa is a district located in the east of Uganda that frequently suffers from the occurrence of landslides. Based on 22 interviews with community members, I investigated the roles of natural disasters in rural Uganda and the ever-changing social landscape of Bududa. Using the world-systems theory, the theory of ecologically unequal exchange, and ecofeminism, this study examines the changes in gender roles that ensue post-landslides and how this fits the frameworks stated above.

Introduction

As climate change dawns on the horizons of the privileged Western world, natural disasters have been plaguing vulnerable communities ever more frequently than in the recent past (*Climate Change*, 2024). However, despite the implied equity in the world “natural,” these destructive environmental calamities are far from this. Extreme weather events are disproportionately impacting areas and people that are facing other crises and emergencies, especially when considering areas that lack infrastructure or susceptible populations (*Climate Change*, 2024). Poorer countries and populations are unfairly affected by environmental changes and disasters while also losing their natural resources to wealthier countries for the fortification of their advantaged positions (Austin, 2023).

In order to better understand the nature and impacts of inequalities, this study will use world systems theory, ecologically unequal exchange theory, and ecofeminist theory. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the impact of landslides on residents in vulnerable communities while also illuminating the connection between landslides and broader global economic and political dynamics. Focusing on Bududa, Uganda, this study delves into the impact of natural disasters, particularly landslides, on vulnerable communities. It highlights how these disasters exacerbate existing disparities, especially for women. Because of the stresses caused by landslides, domestic violence sees an increase after landslides. In addition, women facing economic pressures may resort to seeking new partners or returning to their extended families' homes in order to cope with the devastating loss. Ultimately, I am attempting to underscore the inequalities that are created by natural disasters, especially in a social sense. As I'll explain further, domestic violence, remarriage, and the return to home are all social phenomena that increase after the occurrence of landslides.

Literature Review

Landslides have posed a threat to Ugandans for years, however, the occurrence of landslides and other natural disasters has been increasing over the past couple of decades (*World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal*, 2018). This increase in natural hazards is not unfounded, on the contrary, when analyzed through the lens of the world-systems theory, it is evident that these so-called natural disasters are exacerbated by the Anthropocene¹ and especially by the neoliberal policies put in place by core countries. In addition, while a lot of literature and theories analyze the causes of landslides and their larger environmental and political effects, there is not enough research on their impacts on social life in Uganda. Through the lens of world-systems theory, ecologically unequal exchange, and ecofeminism, I analyze how Ugandans are losing their lives and having to bounce back from climate disasters at a disproportionate rate. These theories will be further explored in this section while their connection to the findings will be presented in the conclusion.

World-Systems Theory

The world-system theory was born out of the development and later critique of modernization theory and dependency theory. Modernization theory was conceptualized post-World War II after the Bretton Woods conference which led to the dismantling of colonialism and moved the United States to the top of the global hierarchy (So, 1990). Along with the Bretton Woods agreement, the Cold War was extremely relevant to the big push toward development in the “third world” because of the belief that this would spread democracy worldwide. Walt Rostow, an influential scholar on the development of modernization theory, theorized that there are 5 distinct stages of growth: traditional society, pre-conditions of takeoff, take-off, drive to maturity, and high mass consumption (Rostow, 1960). Under his framework, the meaning of “modernization” has been associated with an increase in economic activity, the adoption of Western values, and the destruction of indigenous culture. There was a promise built in as a basic assumption of modernization theory that although there are some struggles along the road to modernization, the end goal is worth the cost (So, 1990). This assumption is a way to explain away the economic and social downturns that are experienced by countries that have begun implementing neoliberal ideas. In addition, it is said that modernization is a slow-moving process insinuating that the positive effects of modernization take a while to

¹ The Anthropocene is “an unofficial unit of geologic time, used to describe the most recent period in Earth’s history when human activity started to have a significant impact on the planet’s climate and ecosystems.” (Anthropocene, 2016).

come to fruition and therefore the process should not be given up on (So, 1990).

As the poster child for neoliberalism, Uganda is the African country that has implemented the most comprehensive neoliberal reforms (Lillehagen Hansen, 2021). Uganda has adopted several structural adjustment policies since 1981: it realigned the value of the Uganda shilling, eliminated price controls, increased foreign investment, privatized previously nationalized companies, and increased interest rates (Lillehagen Hansen, 2021). The implementation of these neoliberal reforms was credited as the reason why Uganda's gross domestic product (GDP) significantly increased (Lillehagen Hansen, 2021). However, when considering the success of structural adjustment policies and neoliberal reforms, there needs to be a more holistic metric by which to do this. GDP is an extremely limited metric for growth; the monetary value of products produced and consumed does not have a bearing on the well-being of people (Huish & Hayden, 2020). Additionally, GDP does not account for environmental degradation on externalities that exist in relationship to GDP. There are also several women-dominated jobs, such as child rearing and other household activities, that are not counted in GDP which systematically undercounts the contribution of women to the economy (Huish & Hayden, 2020). In addition to GDP being an insufficient indicator for the well-being of a country, especially in social and health aspects, Lillehagen Hansen (2021) points out that Uganda's GDP growth was mostly due to the influx of foreign aid. Lillehagen Hansen also notes that Uganda's "Gini coefficient², measuring inequality, increased from 33.0 in 1989/90 to 44.6 in 2012, a substantial rise in the neoliberal era" (2021). This is where the critiques of modernization theory come into play. Modernization theorists are unable to explain the lower rate of growth of third-world countries that have undertaken capitalism (Sheppard, Porter, Faust, & Nagar, 2009). Sheppard concluded that even if all countries enter the free-market economy, there will always be a disparity in the amount each country earns, which will only be exacerbated as time goes on (Sheppard, Porter, Faust, & Nagar, 2009).

Dependency theory is essentially a formalized critique of modernization theory. Dependency theory scholars claim that some of the consequences of implementing modernization policies are simply

² The Gini coefficient is a statistical measure commonly that represents the distribution of income for a population which is used to measure economic inequality. The coefficient ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 represents perfect equality and 1 represents perfect inequality (Hasell & Roser, 2023).

detrimental rather than a stage in the development process. Leninist thinkers critiqued that modernization theory is “one size fits all” and that capitalism does not work well for all developing countries (Sheppard, Porter, Faust, & Nagar, 2009). However, one of the large critiques of dependency theory is that it is an external theory: negative effects are seen as imposed externally by core countries leaving less independence for periphery countries to try and innovate solutions to dependency. This is starkly contrasted with the internal nature of modernization theory which sought to explain the faults of periphery nations as a result of their own making (So, 1990). Because of the flaws in these two theories, the world-systems theory was created. Immanuel Wallerstein, a scholar of world-systems theory, took influence from development theory since he kept the “core-periphery” terminology but thought there should be a third classification, the semi-periphery countries (So, 1990). During this time, “the Vietnam war, Watergate crisis, and the oil embargo in 1975” along with other events were signaling the decline in popularity of a capitalist world system which led to the study of global systems of power and the conception of the world-systems theory (So, 1990). There is a focus within world-systems theory on intersocietal systems that have a more global perspective (Chase-Dunn, 2015). Wallerstein emphasizes the importance of having a trimodal system encompassing the core, semi-periphery, and periphery not only because it fits more countries into accurate categories but also because it moves the conversation away from the inevitable exploitation of the periphery by the core and allows a closer look at the countries who do not fit the development theory model (So, 1990). This is an important shift away from dependency theory which could not accurately explain the differing economic situations of countries in the semi-periphery which weakened the appeal and applicability of the theory. Wallerstein emphasizes the value of history and creates a medium between the “internalized” modernization theory which blames the problems of periphery countries on themselves and the “externalized” dependency theory which blames other countries for the problems of periphery countries. The assumption is that there are many complex factors in play with regard to the underdevelopment of the periphery and semi-periphery, and the world-systems theory can analyze different perspectives and create an explanation that includes both internal and external factors. This theory is directly related to the study of landslides in Uganda because it provides a lens through which we can recognize the exploitation of the region that led to this destruction. Because of the international market and the core’s fixation on economic prosperity and specialization, Uganda relies heavily on

the coffee industry to sustain its economy with it being the country's second-largest export ("Uganda Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners," 2022). As Austin (2017) expertly reflects, the global dynamics of coffee production and consumption inherently reflect wider trends of international inequality. Coffee undergoes processing, packaging, marketing, distribution, and consumption predominantly within core nations, following its cultivation, harvesting, and exportation from peripheral nations (Austin, 2017). To make matters worse, coffee farmers only earn less than 10 cents per every dollar spent in Northern regions on coffee, with coffee farmers in Bududa making only about 2.5 cents per cup of coffee sold in Northern markets (Talbot, 2004; Austin, 2017).

Ecologically Unequal Exchange

Intimately related to these same problems is the ecologically unequal exchange theory. The core argument of ecologically unequal exchange is that environmental change and degradation do not impact all individuals or groups uniformly (Austin, 2023). More specifically, it tends to be those countries and people that contribute least to the environmental degradation of our planet that feel the impacts of climate change the most. Part of the argument also lies in the fact that core nations are able to export their environmentally harming industries to periphery nations (Austin, 2023). For Uganda specifically, this means that the pressures felt by farmers to buy further into the coffee industry cause native flora and fauna to be replaced by coffee plants which leads to a weakening of the soil. As evident from the previous discussion of world-systems theory, Uganda is not benefitting from a global hierarchical economic structure. Further, the high demand for coffee forces farmers to abandon subsistence farming and instead use most if not all of their land for coffee production (Austin, 2017). This focus on coffee cultivation and production poses a serious threat to the well-being of citizens, especially farmers, in rural, high-elevation areas because it leads to the degradation of the soil, which further exacerbates the frequency and severity of landslides (Austin, 2017). According to interviews performed by Austin (2017), Ugandans do not consume coffee regularly, alluding to the reality that many are unaware of what the coffee they were cultivating was used for. The heavy reliance on coffee as an export leads to more poverty in these areas because of the unpredictable nature of rain seasons due to climate change; sometimes coffee harvests are not lucrative enough to keep families out of poverty (Austin, 2017). Ugandans are experiencing the destruction of landslides as a direct result of the over-cultivation of land for coffee production and environmental degradation primarily caused by the

overconsumption of core countries despite Uganda barely consuming one of their main exports. This inequality in causes and effects is exactly what is targeted by the theory of ecologically unequal exchange.

Ecofeminism

The last theory that will inform the findings and conclusion of this paper is ecofeminism. According to Shiva and Mies (1993), the first assumption of ecofeminism is that there is a mutual relationship that women and nature share in their conquering for “material” resources. Put plainly, both women and nature in a patriarchal society are treated as indispensable sources from which to extract resources, and this is especially true in periphery countries (Shiva & Mies, 1993). In a similar theoretical vein, Berndt and Austin (2020) argue that women’s roles in traditionally patriarchal societies force them to be more intimately reliant on nature and are therefore disproportionately affected by environmental disasters. Women in Uganda are expected to garden and grow food, obtain clean drinking water, and gather natural resources for their homes, clearly tethering them to the environment (Berndt & Austin, 2020). A CNN article covering the September 2022 landslide in the Kasese District indicated that “most of the recovered bodies were women and children” (Feleke, CNN, & Reuters, 2022). Needless to say, women in periphery nations are not all subject to this phenomenon as there are differing factors in not only the gender roles but also the way of life for women across these nations (Berndt & Austin, 2020).

Domestic Violence

As was stated in the introduction, gender roles in Bududa have been changing over time and have been impacted by the occurrence of landslides. One of the ways that community members cited seeing these changes, which will be more deeply discussed in the findings, is an increase in domestic violence. According to the United Nations (“What Is Domestic Abuse?,” n.d.), domestic abuse is defined as “a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person.” When mentioned in interviews, many community members referred to domestic violence either by name or spoke about spouses being “beat” or getting into “fights.” In Uganda, domestic violence has been recognized by the government as a significant threat to human rights, the economy, and overall health which has prompted legislative measures to tackle it (*Uganda*

Demographic and Health Survey, 2016). According to the *Uganda Demographic and Health Survey* (2016), 51% of women and 52% of men aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence since age 15, and 1 in 5 experienced physical violence in the 12 months preceding the survey. When specifically citing spousal abuse, “56% of ever-married women and 44% of ever-married men have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence by their current or most recent spouse/partner” (*Uganda Demographic and Health Survey*, 2016). In terms of data from Bududa specifically, research by Shina, Matovu, Alex, and Sarah (2023) revealed that a majority of their respondents agreed with violence against girls being culturally considered to be normal in Bududa rural areas. Their study concluded that the community's perception of a man having power over his wife would only increase gender violence and that even when reported, Bududa men are “rarely apprehended” (Shina, Matovu, Alex, & Sarah, 2023). These statistics will help inform the data that is presented in the findings.

Gender Roles

More broadly, gender roles in Uganda and specifically Bududa have been changing. Sociologically speaking, gender roles are behavioral norms assumed to accompany one's status as male or female (D. Lindemann, personal communication, September 2021). Gender roles are socially constructed³ and people are socialized⁴ into them sometimes even before birth (D. Lindemann, personal communication, September 2021). Regardless, gender roles have very concrete consequences, especially in societies where gender is ascribed more importance. Specifically in Bududa, there is a conservative culture with traditional gender roles where women are confined to the domestic sphere while men dominate the public sphere (Austin, 2017). Austin, Noble, & Berndt (2020) argue that women are burdened by “social, cultural, and economic inequalities” because in less-developed countries gender disparities tend to be the most pronounced. Holistically, Austin, Noble, & Berndt (2020) state:

³ Social Construction is an entity that exists because people behave as if it exists and whose existence is perpetuated as people and social institutions act in accordance with the widely agreed-on formal rules or informal norms of behavior associated with that entity (D. Lindemann, personal communication, September 2021).

⁴ Socialization is the process by which individuals internalize the values, beliefs, and norms of a given society and learn to function as members of that society (D. Lindemann, personal communication, September 2021).

Patriarchal structures and hierarchies uphold the idea that men are more valuable than women and should have more authority in society, and can put women's health at risk in a variety of ways, including violence against women, deprioritizing women's health, access to medical care, and education, and restricting participation in activities outside of the home (p. 316).

These approaches to gender roles and norms will inform later discussion in this study.

About Bududa

Uganda is a landlocked country located in East Africa surrounded by South Sudan in the north; Kenya in the east; Tanzania in the south; Rwanda in the southwest; and the Democratic Republic of Congo in the west (*National Population and Housing Census 2014 Area Specific Profiles Bududa District*, 2017). The Bududa District, located alongside the eastern border of Uganda at the foot of the extinct Mount Elgon volcano, is surrounded by the Sironko District in the north, the Republic of Kenya in the east, the Manafwa District in the south, and the Mbale District in the west (Austin, 2017). The district comprises 7 counties, 15 sub-counties, and one town council, with 90 parishes and 899 villages (Austin & Mejia, 2019).

The Bududa district has been particularly vulnerable to landslides because of the hilly terrain of Mount Elgon, the eighth-highest mountain in Africa (Neema et al., 2018; "Mt. Elgon, Africa, Shaded Relief and Colored Height," 2004). The altitude in Bududa ranges from 1250 m to 4300 m with generally steep sloped terrain (Makabayi, Musinguzi, & Otukey, 2021). Exacerbating Bududa's susceptibility to landslides, the district annually receives an average of more than 1,500 millimeters of rain "meaning it basically rains every day" ("Mt. Elgon, Africa, Shaded Relief and Colored Height," 2004).

The population of Bududa was 211,683 in 2014 with projections estimating the 2024 population as 307,729 (*National Population and Housing Census 2014 Area Specific Profiles Bududa District*, 2017; "Revised Subcounty Population Projections 2015 to 2030," 2018). With a growth rate of about 3.8 percent, Bududa has a higher growth rate compared to the national growth rate of 3.2 percent (Austin, 2017). In addition, the population density of the district is 906.7 persons per square kilometer, four times more than the national average, which makes Bududa the "most densely populated region in Uganda" (Neema et al., 2018). Exhibiting a youth bulge, Bududa is extremely young; 52.8% of the population in 2014

was aged 2-17 years (*National Population and Housing Census 2014 Area Specific Profiles Bududa District*, 2017). According to “Eastern Region - Parish Level Profiles” (2018) using 2014 Census data, there are 105,820 men and 104,353 women in Bududa District making the men-to-women ratio 1.01:1. More specifically, in Bubiita where this study’s research is based, there are 3,465 men and 3,518 women with a .98:1 men-to-women ratio (“Eastern Region - Parish Level Profiles,” 2018).

Economically, the average household in Bududa earns approximately \$100 USD annually, while the average GDP per capita of Uganda is around \$1,700 USD (Austin, 2017). According to Austin (2017), 93 percent of Bududa households are subsistence farmers. Some of the crops popularly grown in the region include bananas, cassava, sweet potato, beans, and cabbage (Austin, 2017). Most of the farmers in the district are also involved in coffee cultivation to some degree which is a trend that is reflected nationally as coffee is Uganda’s second largest export (Austin, 2017; “Uganda Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners,” 2022). Other types of economic activity include “livestock rearing, small- to medium-scale business enterprises such as retail trading, mining, timber decking, local beer sales, food stands, and transportation services, and limited tourism in the Mount Elgon forest reserve” (Austin, 2017). Bududa’s economic reliance on the environment as well as its physical topography leaves the residents of Bududa at a higher risk of being impacted by landslides.

Research Methods

Based on the literature outlined above along with relevant theories and research on landslides in Bududa, Uganda, this study aims to analyze and present the link between natural disasters and social constructs such as gender roles. Exploratory and qualitative in nature, this study is focused on investigating the causes of landslides in the region, perceived gender roles by community members, and the interaction between these two factors, if any. This paper is based on 22 semi-structured interviews (10 women and 12 men) with community members who reside in the Bubiita area. Some respondents include farmers, teachers, cooks, nurses, and prominent community leaders who have experienced the consequences of landslides either directly or indirectly. The interviews were conducted by peer researchers over a period of 4 weeks from July 6 to August 4, 2022, in the Bubiita community. All interviews were audio-recorded and generally lasted around 30 to 45 minutes each.

Interviews with community members are critical to my understanding of landslides and their impact as natural disasters on gender dynamics and

social life in the Bududa District. The interviews allowed me to perceive how gender roles are typically seen and represented in Bubiita while also understanding community members' perspectives and experiences with landslides and their perception of their physical and social impacts on their general community. Despite not personally conducting the interviews, I was fully integrated into the community at the time of the interviews and frequently spoke with peers who did conduct interviews. Throughout the analytical process, I have consulted with the lead researcher to ensure that my findings and understanding of the community are well represented.

The interview structure was created to foster open, unrestrained dialogues that allowed participants to express their thoughts on gender dynamics and the role of landslides in the district. Additionally, the research team utilized a Lugisu-speaking translator to facilitate discussions with the aim of enhancing participants' comfort in sharing their experiences and insights in their local tongue. Further, Lehigh's longstanding 10-year connection with the Bududa community hopefully encouraged interviewees to more openly discuss their perceptions of community life and their experiences with landslides in the area. More specifically, interviewees who were closely involved with Lehigh and the Pathways Development Initiative, a local organization dedicated to working with youth and women, seemed to share their thoughts more candidly with the researchers.

The interviews were centered around three main themes. The first part of the interviews asked about the participant's experiences with landslides and any insights they may have on their causes and effects. The second topic addressed gender roles and how community members viewed men's and women's positions as impacted by phenomena such as landslides, relocation, or stress. Finally, questions were asked regarding the participants' perception of coping mechanisms and community trends that have been observed. This line of questioning created the opportunity for a broad understanding of each participant's perspective on the community's issues and the adaptations that ensue.

The interviews were transcribed by hand and proofread by the lead researcher. Using these transcription processes to analyze and quantify my findings, I performed an initial readthrough of all interviews during which I created codes that highlighted recurring themes and wrote short memos on notable information. After getting a feel for the data and possible findings, I reviewed the interviews multiple times, refining my codes and pulling relevant power quotes. The coding followed a similar 3 theme format as the interviews, with subcodes specifying different responses received. Because

of the nature of my study, letting the interviews inform my research question was crucial to the integrity of the following analysis.

Findings

Before diving into an analysis of the intricacies surrounding gender roles in Bududa, it is imperative to first delve deeper into the community's perspectives on the impact of landslides. It was evident from a majority of interviews that landslides have a major detrimental impact on the quality of life of citizens. When asked about their experience with landslides, community members underscored death as the foremost concern followed by displacement and loss of property. One interviewee even went as far as to say landslides are "the biggest problem" facing the community. Describing his concerns about landslides, one community member said:

[Landslides have] taken away our land, and land is now scarce and expensive. If the land is not there you cannot survive because we are entirely agriculturalist and so landslides have taken away most of our land. We have no money, so the house goes with the land, you have to move from place to place, find out where to settle down. It inconveniences even the movement, you can't cross the road, the roads can go away, that's even a problem. It comes uncertainly, it can take even our animals. It is a very big problem. Even it affects the government plan, it is a problem. The government can divert funds from other things like agriculture, maybe social like hospitals, funds are then transferred to help the people, people from the areas. So, it can affect everybody. So, it is a problem.

Another community member said,

It has brought poverty in such a manner that it has washed away crops of the farmers which we use as our source of food, income, and employment because we need the income to buy food.

The interviews conducted in the community reveal important insight into the gender roles present in the district and how they have shifted not only after landslides but also their evolution in recent years. Interviewees of both genders expressed the "ideal" role of a man to be the breadwinner of the family. They have the responsibility of being a figure of support and strength for the family and community.

Of course, men in the community they are in charge of homestay, they look for food, they are heads of the household. They are responsible for all activities in the home, men...like buying food, responding for every property in the home, they make decisions. Women sometimes don't make decisions. Whether bad or good, because they are men.

Women's roles are more domestic, as is the norm in many places, with their main responsibilities being child rearing and support of the home. Now asked about gender roles for women, the same community member as above stated:

Women are there to cook for me, to look after their children, and cultivate, making agricultural activities like growing crops, farming, looking for cattle. By the way a man, can even decide to sit while women are working.

Despite these norms being commonly agreed upon, many interviewees have expressed how in recent years gender roles have not been acted out in these ways. For one, the burden of providing financially for children has been shifting increasingly on women; they have been taking a larger role in farming and trading while still being the main child rearer. One male respondent summarized their sentiments by saying:

In the household, men have abandoned their role as men... Men wake up today, what do you see, anyone that is a man will go very early, instead of going to the field, they are out in the trading center, doing this casual work in the trading center. Maybe gambling, playing cards, and stories just there while they are there the whole day, until very late in the evening when they get back home... They have abandoned farm work and garden to women. But above all, there are no more plots to work in. They just have small plots around the home, so they are actually unemployed.

In addition, children are overwhelmingly the responsibility of the women in Bududa which is seen explicitly in instances when divorce occurs; women stay with the children while men are allowed to leave. These changing roles have also had adverse effects on community health; women being forced to take on a larger role in providing for their families has left men with more recreational time which some have regularly used to participate in

“buzzing,” or drinking. An older, well-respected woman in the community said:

Even looking at cows, women in the village to look for the grass in the cows. Some men after digging and giving the cow a little grass, they go for drinking. They eat at the restaurants in the centers, while the wife is suffering alone with the kids.

These changing gender roles are indicative of a larger trend of social change which is intricately connected to economic and environmental factors. Due to their respective gender roles, women are more likely to be in their homes or gardens when landslides hit as opposed to men who are likely to be safer at trading centers. These quotes not only demonstrate a disproportionate physical impact but also an uneven balance in labor and recognition.

Domestic Violence

Most interviewees held a consensus on how women and their roles in society have been impacted in three major ways by landslides. The first effect that was noted by community members as correlated is domestic violence. The majority consensus indicated that domestic violence increases after landslides because of several factors. It is important to note that multiple interviewees stressed the presence of domestic violence regardless of the occurrence of landslides while still indicating that landslides worsened the issue. One female interviewee commented that domestic violence,

...don't only increase because of landslides but because people are poor, some people are unable to look after their families so those ones are ever there, they don't wait for the landslides to happen, maybe landslides worsen the situation.

Many attributed the increase in domestic violence to the increased stress that men may face after a landslide. Being expected to provide and financially support their families, men feel helpless after losing their homes and livelihoods to a natural disaster. This traumatic loss leads to stress and frustration that is oftentimes taken out on women partly because of their subservient standing to men. This type of trigger is especially present when

wives directly confront their husbands for financial support. A community member described this situation and stated:

Because of the effects that come about after the landslide. Loss of property, loss of income, sometimes those things that bring up the domestic violence, the financial hardship, "We don't have food, why don't we have food?" "Are you asking me for food, I don't have the money, what do you expect?" So those arguments bring about domestic violence on the side of both the women and the men.

Being reminded of their current inadequacies as providers by their wives, men might be more likely to react negatively especially when feeling the powerlessness of post-landslide life. The sudden and traumatic loss of structure can bring anomic sense of aimlessness that can impact the actions of the landslide victims. Particularly when considering families with children, the pressures increase, especially for women. More than one community member spoke about the intersectionality of mothers not only as women but as parents as well:

Children come to complain to the ladies, "What food" because of course the man is not home. Because of that they have lost their children to other marriages because of what, because they failed to take care of them. Now the woman is the one who loves the child, the child in Uganda is always with the woman, a man can go anywhere and get another child. So, it is a woman who is much affected, if a child drops out of school, if they go for early marriages, if they do drugs. It affects the women.

Because women are the caretakers who spend the most time with their children, they are disproportionately affected, especially emotionally, after landslides. This double burden as women and as mothers is seen in many different aspects of social life in Uganda, not just after a landslide.

Community members gave other reasons as to why domestic violence might occur that were unrelated to landslides. For example, when asked about the effects of transactional sex in the community, it was mentioned that women whose husbands are not providing for them might resort to transactional sex to take care of themselves and their children and subsequently be subject to domestic abuse if discovered. Other people mentioned that in marriages with a large age gap, specifically between

younger girls and older men, domestic violence can occur because of a lack of understanding and communication.

Finally, men have generally been delegating their roles as head of household to women, making them responsible for taking care of children, the home, and acquiring food. When the breadwinner of the family can no longer "win the bread," men may feel the need to exercise their dominance or remind women of their power in other ways. In an interview with two community women, they expressed that:

[Men] give all the responsibility. He only comes back at night to sleep. And then unfortunately when he comes to sleep and [she] ask for food, and it is not there, they fall into that fight.

Overall, the consensus from community members is that domestic violence is a prevalent issue in Bududa, and while it is prevalent all the time, it worsens after landslides.

Remarrying

The process of relocation after landslides is a stress-inducing, temporary fix for the copious destruction created. Many community members expressed dismay about the government's rebuilding efforts and the lack of security and opportunity to thrive at relocation camps. This pushes people to resort to other forms of labor to be able to take care of themselves. Community members expressed how after landslides, they notice that some women decide to leave their husbands and instead find a man financially capable of supporting her and her children. One community member gave an example of this:

Yes, divorce is common. Like I said earlier when landslide has occur, you are taken to a camp and there in the camp you live in place that is not supportive enough, you have needs, the man with something will come and take away your wife, it is very common, during the time of landslides. And maybe someone will come and convince you that yeah this man is not supporting you but me I can support you with what you want and automatically the woman is diverting

The loss of a spouse takes an emotional toll on top of the other debilitating effects of landslides. Interviewees said men can be quite traumatized psychologically in these examples. In addition, there is an innate change in the fabric of the community when spouses are being replaced:

No even men, cause we can see that the landslide occurred here, me and my wife survived, so when we survived we moved to our friend this one, I have financial problems but this one is financial ok, so he has to take away my wife, so it creates hatred between me and him because of course he has taken my wife.

As discussed in the previous section regarding domestic violence, the double burden of being a mother in Uganda after a landslide means that there is increased pressure to resolve their situation not only for themselves but for their children as well. Because the social system is set up to where women are frequently dependent on the provisions of a man, it is not always possible for women to stay with a man who cannot provide. Feeling as if there is no other recourse, a woman can decide to find another man to provide for her. A female interviewee responded:

That now when they go to those places, of course it's a new place for them, a new community, and the women do not have enough money, so it forces them to begin practicing adultery, going out with other men so that they can get money, so that relocation makes them start doing sexual affairs.

The trend of increasing remarriage rates in Bududa after a landslide is only part of the picture that the community members described. Some interviewees expressed concerns about an increase in the marriage of young girls after a landslide. However, this point was more contested because there was a disagreement regarding the causational effect of landslides on child marriage and the basic definition of bride price. Bride price was brought up in many interviews and while some community members affirmed its existence in Bududa, others were quick to deny that this practice was still prevalent in the district. In addition, interviewees distinguished bride price from child marriage. Whereas bride price was described as a mutual decision between the bride, the husband, and the bride's family, others discussed how marrying off a daughter was often a forced decision made due to financial insecurity without regard to the daughter. In the examples described by community members, either young girls themselves decided to marry for financial security, or families decided to marry off their eldest daughter to provide financially for the rest of their family. When asked about families marrying off their eldest daughters during financial hardship, one interviewee responded saying:

That it mostly depends on landslides, he is saying that landslides make some families to be too broke, so they resort, he is saying take my girl away to get marry to another man so that I can get some money to do what, to continue living because I am negatively affected by the landslide... He is seeing that with bride price, there you agree with the girl, and she be mature enough to get married, but with this one you just force a girl to get married and so the parent can get money for loving, but with bride price you agree and the girl accepts that I am waiting to get married.

Landslides wreak havoc not only on physical land but also on the social landscape in Bududa. It is not clear from the interviews whether bride price and child marriage are affected by landslides. There was, however, a majority consensus that remarriage increased after landslides signaling that landslides cut deep into all aspects of life in Bududa.

Return to Family

The final case that is heavily influenced by the occurrence of landslides is the return of women to their nuclear family. After landslides, many community members said that for families that needed to be relocated, some women decided to simply return home instead of heading to relocation camps or waiting for their husbands to rebuild their homes. When asked about the effect of landslides on women, one female respondent mentioned that for women,

...if they see that their home, the home from before they got marriage, is safer, once a landslide happens, they shift and go back to their home with their children.

This trend underscores the importance of the nuclear and extended family for women in Bududa and the strong reliance and connection that exists. This phenomenon is not frequently seen concerning men in the district because they have the social ability to obtain a new job or relocate more effortlessly. Women do not have many other choices but to return home, especially when children are involved. Rather than gamble on her ability to form a new life in a new district or sub-county where she may not speak the language or have a support system, a woman returns home as a survival strategy. One man in the community stated:

That men because of what has happened, you just stay strong, but women, for them they can go there and it can even make them turn back to their family.

Most community members echoed these feelings and agreed that it is socially acceptable for women to return home after a landslide while men must stay strong and attempt to amend the situation. Once again, analyzing the impact that children have on mothers reflects that perhaps men can “stay strong” because they are not primarily responsible for the well-being of their children. While men are expected to provide for their families, they do not answer directly to a child’s needs as a mother does. Because of that, it might be more manageable for a woman to return home to her family with her kids so that her nuclear family can aid in rearing the children post-landslide.

Another aspect to consider in the return of women to their nuclear families after a landslide is the importance of the land people were forced to leave behind due to the devastation. Many community members expressed how landslides are particularly detrimental not only because of the complete dismantling of their lives as they knew it but also because of their separation from their ancestral land. For this reason, men often decide to keep some of their impacted land and simply travel to and from their relocation camps. This means that men must dedicate a lot of time and physical energy that a mother cannot invest because she is the main caretaker of her children.

Conclusion

Natural disasters continue to pose an existential threat to countries around the world. As was established, these disasters' frequency and damage have impacted vulnerable communities the hardest. Creating disproportionate disparities, landslides tear down people in disadvantaged communities who already face an uphill battle against the economic hierarchy outlined by the world-systems theory. Facing extreme vulnerabilities, the social fabric of regions such as Bududa begins to shift and mold. Especially when considering their positionality within their conservative society, women are greatly affected by landslides. Understanding and considering existing roles and norms within the community help inform the trends that are being seen after catastrophes.

The world-systems theory helps contextualize Uganda’s current position in the global market and the subsequent reverberations felt in social life in Bududa. Dependent on the coffee market to make a living,

farmers and families in Bududa have to tether themselves further to the over-cultivation of their land to survive despite knowing that this can have disastrous consequences. Closely related, ecologically unequal exchange highlights how Ugandans, despite not significantly consuming coffee, are witnessing the results of the capitalistic global market. Particularly evident through the ecofeminist lens, women are bearing the brunt of this already disproportionate impact due to their standing in Ugandan society.

After meticulously analyzing the data, it is evident that there is an increase in three social phenomena after landslides, the first of which is domestic violence. Community members were quick to note that although domestic violence is present without extenuating circumstances, occurrences increase after landslides. The stress that is faced by citizens after landslides manifests itself in frustration and anger and is subsequently directed onto spouses. Men face the rigid gender role as providers not only for their families but their greater communities as well, so when these roles cannot be fulfilled, cognitive dissonance can cloud judgment and lead to a physically violent response. These pressures are not just placed by the gender norms structured by their society but also by the expectations of global modernization to continue to be economically productive. Women once again face the double burden of femininity and motherhood; they face the physical and emotional turmoil of being abused while also being unable to ameliorate the situation for themselves and their children.

In a similar vein, when women realize their husbands are unable to provide after a landslide, they might feel that the only viable option is to find someone who can. Being a mother, the responsibility of keeping her children healthy and safe can force women to marry a man with the capital to sustain a family. Quite obviously, this creates a rift within men in a community. Male interviewees seemed to have a negative perspective on this phenomenon but tended to concede that the post-landslide relocation process is completely lacking in breadth of assistance.

If the previous option was not chosen, another pathway a woman could choose to follow is returning to her extended family's home. Community members expressed that sometimes women decided to return home instead of waiting for their husbands to rebuild their homes or persevering at a relocation camp. Interviewees seemed to insinuate that it was more culturally acceptable for women to return home while men were expected to work on rebuilding their damaged residences. Despite this seemingly superior option, women going back home might not always be returning to favorable circumstances; returning home means coming back under the control of her father. In addition, with more mouths to feed, the

women of the nuclear household will now have to accommodate and provide for additional people especially if the impacted woman is a mother and brings her children.

Due to the nature of this study, multiple factors could limit the viability and reliability of this study. Primarily, because I was unable to conduct these interviews on my own, there might be a loss in context that can be relevant to further understanding the insights given by community members. Steps were taken in order to attempt and curb these limitations by way of frequent consulting with the lead researcher and comparison of data to previous studies centered in the area. Secondly, results could be skewed simply by the nature of having a translator involved. Because some community members felt more comfortable speaking in their native tongue, certain thoughts and emotions could have been lost in translation. Finally, as “mzungus,” or foreigners, there might be confusion regarding our role in the community and the purpose of the research. Despite Lehigh University having a lengthy and successful relationship with leaders in the community, individual interviewees may have skewed their answers in order to convey an answer they believe we would want to hear. These limitations are potentially hindering, however, great care was taken in order to attempt their mitigation.

Given the opportunity to return to the community, I believe future research should focus further on the gendered effects of the three findings. For example, learning about the gendered effects of domestic violence would provide more insight, especially given the statistics pointing out the rates of domestic violence for men. Additionally, having more detailed first-person accounts for each of the three findings would greatly aid the strength and reliability of the results. Digging more deeply into not only the correlation but causation of these three phenomena would also create a good basis for further analysis and studies.

Vulnerability in rural Uganda caused by the dominance of landslides as an environmental disaster has shed light on the current and changing landscape of social norms and trends in Bududa. The world-systems framework, ecologically unequal exchange, and ecofeminist theory helped form a more critical understanding of natural disasters as more than just coincidental freaks of nature. Illuminating disparities for women through studies like this one is important; by unearthing these inequalities we are forced to grapple with the consequences brought to light.

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