

# VULNERABLE WOMEN'S RECOVERY PATHS: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY OF COMMUNITY GARDENS IN POST-CONFLICT NORTHERN UGANDA

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## Abstract

In the Northern Ugandan post-conflict scenario, marked by the consequences of the civil war, women still find themselves in a vulnerable condition. In this setting, community gardens - open to the whole community or specific groups to cultivate them - seem to play a significant role in women's empowerment and post-conflict reintegration. Through the analysis of the life stories of two Ugandan women, it has been possible to investigate the social role of community gardens, their effectiveness, and their benefits for the women who take part in them.

Nel contesto post-conflitto nord ugandese, segnato dalle conseguenze della guerra civile, le donne si trovano ancora oggi in una condizione di vulnerabilità. In questo scenario gli orti comunitari - aperti alla comunità o specifici gruppi perché chiunque voglia possa coltivarli - paiono svolgere un ruolo significativo per l'empowerment femminile e il reinserimento sociale post-conflitto. Attraverso l'analisi delle storie di vita di due donne nord ugandesi è stato possibile indagare il ruolo degli orti comunitari, la loro efficacia e i benefici per chi vi partecipa.

## Keywords

Community gardens, Northern Uganda, post-conflict reintegration, structural violence, vulnerability.

## Introduction

This paper is based on a research I conducted in 2020 as part of the excellence program in "Government and Human Sciences" at the Scuola di Studi Superiori Ferdinando Rossi (Turin, Italy). It is a qualitative study that can be theoretically inscribed within the strand of development anthropology. Through the analysis of the life stories of two research participants, it centers on post-conflict Northern Uganda and the role of Slow-Food sponsored community gardens in supporting women who are vulnerable due to conflict.

In fact, acknowledging that the Ugandan Northern war has left a strong footprint on women's physical and psychological wellbeing (Kinyanda *et al.* 2010), the purpose of my research has been to inquire how and in which measure community gardens help vulnerable women in the context of post-conflict fragility and complexity, and which are the aspects (psychological, economic, health) in which the gardens are most beneficial for their participants. In this regard, although there are studies on community gardens in various areas of the world and their effectiveness at the social level (*see* Gruber 2015), I could not find any academic studies specifically on their effectiveness in post-conflict settings on vulnerable groups.

The article is structured in eight sections. The first section provides a historical background of the Northern Ugandan civil war; the second section is dedicated to the theoretical framework of the analysis. The third section is devoted to the methodology, while the fourth section delves into community gardens in Northern Uganda. The fifth and sixth sections are dedicated to recounting and analyzing the life stories of the two research participants; the seventh section provides an analysis and reflection on the findings. Finally, I present my conclusions.

### **The Ugandan Northern Conflict**

According to the World Health Organization, "complex emergencies" can be defined as follows:

Situations of disrupted livelihoods and threats to life produced by warfare, civil disturbance and large-scale movements of people, in which any emergency response has to be conducted in a difficult political and security environment (2002: 4).

Between 1986 and 2006, due to the so-called Northern War, Northern Uganda has been deeply affected by a long-lasting complex emergency. The region was torn apart by a civil conflict fought by Lord's Resistance Army (Lra) rebels and government troops (Finnström 2008). During the conflict, the population was severely affected, particularly women (Baines 2017). The majority were forced to live in the so-called Internally Displaced People (Idp) camps in "atrocious conditions" (Allen *et al.* 2021: 3). In fact, in the Idp camps the ordinary rules of social life were subverted, alcoholism, violence, and sexual promiscuity were rampant. Additionally, women were constantly threatened by the rebels: they were habitually kidnapped either to be made soldiers or, more often, to be given as "forced wives" to the Lra combatants and thus undergo sexual violence (Carlson and Mazurana 2008). From 2006 onwards, they started returning from the Idp camps or the bush. Women who came back to their families and communities oftentimes faced several difficulties: those who were former abductees were blamed and stigmatized, and many were rejected and refused land to cultivate (Nokrac 2012). Most of them had not attended school in over two decades, and they had hardly gained any skills or education. Several endured persevering health problems due to bullet wounds, rape, or Hiv infections (Woldetsadik 2018).

To the present day, Northern Uganda has been affected by a long-lasting, deep-rooted structural violence (Finnström 2008), namely, violence that "is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances" (Galtung 1969: 170; *see* Farmer 2004). Structural violence takes the form of unequally distributed resources, inaccessible medical services, and lacking education. In Northern Uganda, structural violence has bent the population economically, socially, physically, and psychologically. Therefore, it is a context in which the violence of the conflict is compounded by a whole range of other strains that constitute what I have named a condition of

"vulnerability," which we shall analyze in the following paragraph, that still pervades part of the population.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### *Development Anthropology: Reintegration Programs and Grassroots Initiatives*

The present work fits within the development anthropology strand (*see* Crewe and Axelby 2013), focusing on post-conflict women-dedicated reintegration programs. So far, the criticisms leveled at international humanitarian interventions and development programs have been numerous: they are disparaged for their usual ineffective long-term dependency approach, for failing to acknowledge local customs and individualities, and for overlooking the needs of marginalized groups (Calhoun 2010; Crewe and Axelby 2013). Scholars have also critiqued the prevalent top-down approach by stating that it generally neglects the local population's needs and habits (Chambers 1983). Alternatively to "conventional [top-down] development" (Crewe and Axelby 2013: 15), many scholars started voicing the importance of "putting people first" (Cernea 1985), thus recognizing local populations as development protagonists, especially in reintegration programs (Popoola 2020). Consequently, emphasis has been placed on grassroots initiatives made by local civil societies (Lederach 1997). Indeed, despite their shortcomings (*see* Ramsbotham *et al.* 2011), grassroots civil society organizations have been praised as effective in post-conflict settings due to their attention to local necessities and practices (Pearson 2001). Moreover, amid the debate over post-conflict interventions and reintegration, a strong emphasis has been placed on gender sensitivity and women's inclusion.

### *Post-Conflict, Gender, and Reintegration*

In warfare, indeed, women usually face severe and regular violations of their rights, including rape and sexual violence, psychological and gynecological problems, economic restraints, stigma, and rejection (Ochen 2017). In post-conflict settings, they tend to be left aside and excluded during peacebuilding and community-building processes. Recently, scholars have criticized how international post-conflict peacebuilding and reintegration programs often do not "effectively involve and embrace women, or their views" (Ochen 2017: 17). Therefore, many scholars advocate for the consistent use of a gender perspective in post-conflict reintegration initiatives to engage women and address their needs (True 2013). Furthermore, they underscore the need to investigate and examine women-dedicated post-conflict programs (Greenberg and Zuckerman 2009) and the importance of bolstering grassroots, women-focused initiatives at the local level (The Huairou Commission 2010).

Thus, the present work fits this investigation strand and contributes to the scholarship on grassroots women-dedicated reintegration programs.

### *Post-Conflict, Gender, and Vulnerability*

It is not infrequent for women in post-conflict settings to be named "vulnerable" (Sjoberg 2010); in this study as well, I have chosen to employ the etic category of "vulnerability" to define the two research participants. As Cunniff Gilson (2016) states, the concept of vulnerability is complex and has been extensively critiqued. In fact, as vulnerability is deeply gendered, particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings, it is frequently associated with victimhood (Aolain 2011). This narrow pair of vulnerability and victimhood has disgraceful consequences: on women's self-representation and self-narratives; the creation of external dependency relations; the media portrayal and public opinion on women's role in conflict (*see* Sjoberg 2010). Additionally, vulnerability is often simplistically conceived as "relatively immutable" (Cunniff Gilson 2016: 74), while, as Baines states, "meaning one's vulnerability [...] does not define the person as *ever* vulnerable" (2017: 14, *my emphasis*).

Given this, within this article, the definition I employ of vulnerability is as follows: "The probability of a "system" undergoing a negative change due to a perturbation" (Naudé *et al.* 2009: 184; *see* Gallopin 2006). The system can be, for instance, a household or a person (Naudé *et al.* 2009; Óskarsdóttir *et al.* 2016). This definition figures the women I interviewed as systems that have moved from an initial stability state and whose condition has worsened due to external "disturbances." Thus, it does not envisage vulnerability as immutable, nor does it deny the complexity of women's life histories, agency, and responsiveness to events (*see* Baines 2017). Instead, it depicts their unstable condition in a precise moment due to a "disturbance": the war in the North, its aftermath, and the structural violence associated with it.

### **Methodology**

To undertake this inquiry, I conducted qualitative research with a sample of two Northern Ugandan women who fall into the "vulnerable" category and work in a community garden, whom I contacted via snowball sampling.

My primary research methods were qualitative interviews held in English: I conducted four interviews with the two research participants between November and December 2020. All interviews were based on in-depth, one-on-one, open-ended questions. I also interviewed another person: Edward Mukiibi, Slow Food Uganda Executive Director, in December 2020 and January 2022. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions at the end of 2020, all the investigation was conducted remotely via computer methods.

I followed stringent ethical guidelines throughout the process, with the utmost consideration for the interviewees' sensibility and privacy. At the start of each interview, the study's purpose, information storage protocols, and personal data protection procedures were explained. Research participants' personal data were anonymized, and all related information was saved in password-encrypted cloud storage before being deleted at the conclusion of the study.

This was the methodological basis for my inquiry, which I shall outline in the following sections.

### **Northern Ugandan Community Gardens: An Overview**

Multiple international organizations, both during and after the Northern Uganda civil war, intervened to support the local population, many focusing on women and their needs (Compton 2014; Muldoon *et al.* 2014). In this regard, there has been no shortage of criticism towards international aid agencies' presence in the field in Uganda (Armstrong 2008; Branch 2009). Along with the external interventions, there have also been numerous grassroots reintegration and women-focused support programs founded by the local population (Omach 2014). Among these, my research focuses on grassroots, Slow Food-sponsored community gardens.

#### *Slow-Food Sponsored Community Garden*

"Community gardens are not new in Uganda as in other African countries,"<sup>1</sup> explains Edward Mukiibi, Executive Director of Slow Food Uganda and Vice President of Slow Food International. These gardens belong to the whole community, where anyone can work and share the harvest. There are many types, with different purposes and various access criteria. In Uganda, Slow Food partners with over 100 community gardens throughout the country. What makes them unique is that they are all born grassroots. Local engagement, networking, and community ownership set them apart: they come from the community, and Slow Food only plays a facilitating role.

Within them, the community acquires manual techniques, carries out income-generating activities, and grows crops. Moreover, gardens can be targeted to a specific category of beneficiaries (for example, Hiv-positive women) and promote the development of networks of mutual support and counseling relationships. Alongside, the gardens mitigate the problematic issue of land access. Indeed, some groups (widows, single mothers) are often precluded from accessing family land (Layolo 2018). Community gardens moderate this problem by giving unrestricted access to land to those who would not customarily have it.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Edward Mukiibi, Slow Food Uganda Executive Director, online, January 28, 2022.

In general, Edward explains:

For a community garden there's this kind of sense of community. People working not only to manage their garden but also to talk about things that affect their community like things that affect nutrition, childbearing, and also building solidarity among women, among youth in the community to learn how to work together, how to live together.<sup>2</sup>

Concluding this overview of community gardens, we may turn to the study's central module: the life stories of two research participants, Susan and Mary<sup>3</sup>.

### **Susan's Lifepath<sup>4</sup>**

Susan is a woman who is nearly forty years old, living in Northern Uganda in the Acholi subregion. Since childhood she has grown up alone with her mother, who her partner had abandoned; there was a solid bond between the two. When she was around ten years old, economic difficulties began, and she had to leave school because her mother could no longer pay her school fees. Then the conflict ensued: the two were forced to live in an Idp camp. About that period, she comments twice: "The war affected us all so much." While still in the Idp camp, with no fixed employment, she met a man with whom she began a relationship, but he "deceived me: I gave myself to him, he impregnated me, and then he left me," "I was traumatized." She even thought about committing suicide. According to her, her life underwent a fundamental change following the unwanted pregnancy and the man's abandonment in a condition of uncertainty and precariousness such as the Idp camp: one could represent this as the perturbative element in Susan's lifepath.

Once the conflict was over, she left the Idp camp and returned to her home village. She kept enduring strains: she had not completed her education and could not find employment. She did not own a piece of land to cultivate. Furthermore, she had to take care of her daughter financially, which she barely could.

Then in 2016, she met a woman, Grace, with whom she shared her condition, and Grace encouraged her greatly:

Grace saw how hard it was for me, she counseled me, she told me her life story too, she encouraged me I could still make it in life. And I was not alone, there were people with my same problems.

Leaving her home due to the conflict, living in the Idp camp, the relationship she had there and then her man's abandonment, having to raise a daughter alone: all of this had greatly impacted her. So it

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Edward Mukiibi, Slow Food Uganda Executive Director, online, January 28, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> The names of the research participants and critical features have been altered to ensure anonymity and privacy protection.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Susan, garden participant, online, November 14, 2020, November 25, 2020.

was that, on Grace's advice, she began attending weekly meetings for people who needed to share their experiences, and she soon realized that "everyone close [to her, *ed.'s note*] was traumatized." By acknowledging that other group participants had suffered as well, she became aware that many other people had faced difficulties similar to her own. In parallel to these group meetings, she also started working in a community garden dedicated to women with difficulties, where her group planted "cabbages, onions, tomatoes, greens."

She discloses her work in the community garden, saying that it helped her to acquire new personal skills:

I was able to know that after doing harvest, you can get your money thanks to selling things, and you can do new things. I also realized that I was also a bit lazy, but then joining the group I understood laziness was bad. Do not beg, do not sleep: work! I overcome laziness.

Along with gaining practical and theoretical skills in farm work, garden participants also receive training on using and investing money. As Susan explains, "They train you so that you get a minimum knowledge on how to properly run a business." Additionally, Susan expresses that working in the garden with other women, each with their background, helps build supportive relationships and friendships:

Working together is good, it helps strengthening relations... The group contained widows, child and single mothers, Hiv positive, former abductees. In the group, we became friends, we shared our stories, we interacted, [...] farming groups kept us occupied and helped to look ahead.

The size of her group, however, was too large in her opinion. She explains that this prevented people from both getting to know each other thoroughly and doing the activities they wanted to:

When people are in a group, there are some who want things done a certain way, some who don't. Working in large groups is not easy. Working together is good but it would be better if groups were smaller. [...] Sometimes we had discussions.

The reason for this, according to Susan, is due to lack of funding:

I feel like they don't have enough resources. Then people haven't done a lot of things because they don't have enough; they're all together in one group.

When she felt too cramped within the group and sensed she had matured enough, she decided to leave. She thought she could employ the experience she had gained in a space where she felt more independent. Overall, however, she states that the garden experience has been very positive for her. Today, she does not own her own land plot, since being both her and her mother separated, they have not been allocated any piece of arable land: "The land has been given to my mum's brothers, land is given to boys, not to a woman." She, however, cultivates a piece of land in her garden: "I am doing farming on my own, thanks to that advice. I have planted beans, corn." Thanks to the greens she

cultivates, she has opened her own small business: a grocery shop where people go back and forth all day long to buy products.

Her life story ends with a mention of the conflict - where it all began. She states that "the trauma of war is still here. People are still traumatized, and they still need help."

According to her, "farming, having animals, having a business, can help overcoming war-related trauma. It will help because when you're lonely then is nothing good."

### *The Role of the Garden in Susan's Lifepath*

Although there was no shortage of friction and discord, the garden was critical in Susan's wellbeing. First, she created new social bonds with her peers: they shared their past experiences and confronted each other about their life paths. Manual labor was also helpful for Susan to keep busy while "looking ahead." Additionally, she gained practical agricultural and business management skills. She emphasizes her economic independence with pride: "You are full of joy, and when you grow vegetables for yourself [...] at the end of the day you are happy and proud."

Susan benefited from the garden in four dimensions: economic empowerment, psychological support, capacity building, and agricultural skills. On the other hand, it negatively impacted from a relational standpoint due to disagreements with other project participants.

### **Mary's Lifepath<sup>5</sup>**

Mary is a woman in her forties, living in the Acholi subregion. She is part of a local community garden, where her group grows traditional food. As soon as we start talking, she sighs deeply and reveals: "My life is a long story, if I have to share with you."

Growing up in a large family, Mary had five siblings and wanted to become a hairdresser from an early age, which eventually she did. The conflict started when she was a child and ended when she was a woman. During the war, she and her family had to move to an Idp camp, where she grew up. She recalls how tense the conflict era was for her and her family, characterized by a shortage of food, work, and personal space.

To add to conflict-related hardships, which made every day "exhausting," she was also diagnosed with Hiv positivity: "I went for a blood test and I resulted Hiv positive." She couldn't credit it: "I couldn't believe in the machine, I thought the machine is deceiving me, the result was incorrect." There was no medication, no counseling, no Hiv sensitization: "You thought you were going to die

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Mary, garden participant, online, November 16, 2020, December 1, 2020.

straight away." Mary declares a miracle occurred: her health was rapidly declining when it unexpectedly recovered and has stayed steady since: "So, I am still alive and still under treatment." Once the conflict was over and she returned home, she was faced with difficulties that added up to each other: on the one hand, the conflict and its heavy impact on her finances, her mental and physical wellbeing, and her nearly halved family. On the other, Hiv positivity. To cope with this situation, she decided to participate in a group support project and became involved in the community garden's activities. The group she is part of is composed of thirty women and is bound for Hiv-positive women only. She discloses the activities that are practiced in the community garden:

We have a variety of traditional food. We learn how to plant it and to organize the manual work: we do not need big things. So, we plant local varieties. We are all women living with Hiv. We are planting different varieties of greens.

The vegetables she and her group plant ensure them a daily vitamin intake:

We as group grow this kitchen garden so that we have at least a diet and we grow these veggies to improve our nutrition. [...] I changed my diet and improved my nutrition.

Thanks to the skills she acquired working in the community garden, Mary also has her own kitchen garden at home:

Now, in my home, I have a small plot which helps me, I have different varieties. If there is no rain, I water it... and this all helps me. [...] This year, I have grown peanuts, and then sunflowers. I did an acre of sunflowers, it is not ready yet. [...] I also have grown cotton in front of my house. By January, February [2021, *ed.'s note*] I will prepare the land or the garden for another crop.

When her attention focuses on her garden group and the dynamics elapsing within it, she states:

Our group is unique. [...] You know, we share the info among us, mainly about Hiv and Aids: most of our friends, unfortunately, have died. So, we have launched sensitization activities, for example we organize movies and drama. People's lives are transformed, people come out thanks to those sensitization activities. We are also getting counseled so that we take away people from trauma: through counseling we are supported. Not only war has affected us, but also Hiv: we need counseling, and we also try to counsel each other [...]

Since the word "trauma" spontaneously arises in her speech concerning the relief provided by life in the community garden, it occurs to me to ask her what "trauma" means to her. She responds as follows:

Trauma for me is the condition when something has gone wrong with you and it does not give you peace of mind, you get drained completely and you don't want to live anymore, you don't know what to do. [...] The rebels come, you have to go in the camps, you wait for food from the Wfp. That is when you now you have nowhere to go [...]. You talk to people, and while the Lra is no longer there, you are home, you still have lost your father, your mother, your relatives,

you don't have anyone anymore. It is terrible, it confuses your mind, you get traumatized, you get mad. Your mind doesn't work. You need to look for help. People were abducted, [...] you go through a lot of challenges. I have to thank God for being alive.

Mary's definition of trauma is firm and impactful, vibrantly reproducing the post-conflict condition in Northern Uganda and providing a stark picture of the violence-permeated scenario.

Into this trauma-related picture comes the support provided by the community garden itself, according to Mary:

As we work, we talk to one another and this makes you forget about the past. When the crops are doing well, you have again hope that thing will be better. You get hope, you feel strong in what you do. When you're alone, you hardly recover from trauma, because you think that trauma will come again. It takes you time to do things alone, and this also traumatizes you. Because a work you would do in one week working with other people, if you are alone it can take also one month. When you come back home, and again you have nothing to eat, you feel bad. Together you chat, you laugh, and plan what to do.

Mary's support from the garden extends beyond the psychological satisfaction that working and being in a group can provide. Indeed, she emphasizes the importance of cultivating vegetables that ensure her subsistence without going to go the market and obtaining high-quality food that provides her with the vitamins she needs:

The community garden has helped me a lot, actually I have many tools, I grow my own vegetables. I don't go to the market, I have everything home. It provides me to get vitamins. For example... when you have a problem with your eyes, you have to eat those vegetables! [...] The most important thing the garden has given me is that it has provided me a food with vitamins. I changed my diet and I have improved my nutrition.

The garden is also a source of income that allows her to gain economic independence:

And the garden is also a source of income, women come and buy my veggies and that is really an income for me. That is another one from the good things I got from the garden.

Mary ends her story by delving into her companions in the garden: they are at the same time workmates, sometimes buyers from her garden, support figures. This does not mean, however, that relationships are always undisturbed. In fact, Mary points out that it is not infrequent for friction, "misunderstandings in the group." It habitually happens to some of her fellows to start an argument. What she does is counsel them: "In a situation where people lose their dear ones, they feel relieved if I just talk to them."

### *The Role of the Garden in Mary's Lifepath*

Mary's life has been heavily impacted by conflict and Hiv. The garden has played a primary role in her recovery. In this regard, Mary often repeats the importance of growing and eating healthy, nutritious food to provide her with a daily vitamin intake. The economic independence provided by

working in the community garden seems to play an equally crucial role. Mary is proud to say that she is now wholly independent of the market and can take care of her needs and nutrition on her own. On the negative side, she points out that internal discord often arises among garden participants.

The garden positively supports Mary in these five dimensions: economic empowerment, psychological support, capacity building, agricultural skills, health, and nutrition. On the other hand, it has had a negative impact from a relational perspective, as arguments often arise in the group.

### **Dealing with Vulnerability**

From these two life stories it is possible not only to draw considerations about community gardens, but also to contextualize vulnerability in a post-conflict society, resulting from a complex emergency. Indeed, in Northern Uganda the emergency can currently be thought of as over, but the complexity has unquestionably remained (*see de Coning 2018*).

In this regard, we can set the Northern Ugandan society within the syndemic social comorbidities framework (Xavier Hall and Evans 2020). This framework takes its cue from the definition of syndemic, which is "the adverse synergistic interaction of two or more diseases or other health conditions promoted or facilitated by social and environmental conditions" (Singer and Rylko-Bauer 2021: 491). A syndemic is an accumulation of at least two biological or health diseases, which interact and worsen their adverse effects. Within this research, we can apply the syndemic framework to the Northern Ugandan scenario, but since there is primarily an overlapping of social conditions, we may talk about "social comorbidities" (Xavier Hall and Evans 2020).

The combination and intertwining of different social comorbidities have reinforced each other and caused one to find fertile ground for its spread into the other. The conflict was compounded by additional hitches, that have emerged from Mary and Susan's narratives: unwanted pregnancies, single parenthood, lack of education, land inheritance issues, and high Hiv incidence<sup>6</sup>. Together with conflict, violence, and displacement, these issues intersected and spread, generating a profound condition of vulnerability and disruption.

The persistence of vulnerability and the need for support from some social groups impacted by conflict also emerge from Allen and colleagues' research (2020; 2021). Post-conflict Northern Uganda today is marked by a peace to which, according to Denov and Lakor (2017), many prefer war. Indeed, the lives of those we can define as "vulnerable" because of conflict are still permeated by "social and moral stress" (Finnström 2008: 220), rejection, stigma, and violence. The consequences of the "dirty war" (Finnström 2008: 13) intensely affect today's society.

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<sup>6</sup> Hiv positivity rates in Northern Uganda are 2.5 times higher than national estimates (Katamba *et al.* 2020).

Within this collapse of society, community gardens have proved to be a liminal space of mediation between life "before" and life "after" the conflict. The gardens have given women a chance to improve in these dimensions: economic empowerment; psychological support; capacity building; health and nutrition; agricultural skills. In a world that is slowly overcoming a complex, long-standing emergency, but still represents a complex scenario, community gardens are a comprehensive tool that curbs and connects vulnerabilities.

## **Conclusions**

By retracing and analyzing the life stories of two so-called "vulnerable" women, Susan and Mary, my research set the primary objective to understand whether community gardens can be a viable support to women dealing with vulnerability and livelihood difficulties in a post-conflict setting. What emerged from their stories is that community gardens have proven to be positively supportive. The core dimensions in which the community gardens supported Mary and Susan were primarily economic and psychological. In fact, both have acquired new business and management skills, developed practical agricultural skills that allow them to earn a living, and have molded personal relationships with whom they have shared their life experiences.

A weakness of the gardens has emerged from both narratives, related on the one hand to a lack of space and resources, and on the other to internal discord. In particular, the relationship between beneficiaries is seen on the one hand as valuable psychological support, on the other as a source of quarrels.

From this investigation, community gardens appear overall as an effective support tool for vulnerable women in a post-conflict scenario. They represent a good blend of local and international actors' cooperation, with a substantial grassroots component, and they appear to be able to make the beneficiaries independent in the long run. Overall, this study represents an investigation of community gardens as a potential tool for post-conflict community reintegration, which should be implemented through an anthropological perspective considering the specific gendered needs and dynamics of post-conflict settings.

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## **Acronyms**

Aids	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
Hiv	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
Idp	Internally Displaced People
Lra	Lord's Resistance Army
Wfp	World Food Program