

Trust, Identity and Beer

Institutional Arrangements for Agricultural Labour in
Isunga village in Kiryandongo District, Midwestern
Uganda

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Trust, Identity and Beer: Institutional Arrangements for Agricultural Labour in Isunga village in Kiryandongo District, Midwestern Uganda

Abstract

This thesis explores the role and influence of institutions on agricultural labour transactions in Isunga village in Kiryandongo District, Midwestern Uganda. It primarily focuses on how farmers structure, maintain and enforce their labour relationships during crop farming. The study is based on semi-structured interviews of twenty households and unstructured interviews with representatives of farmers associations. These interviews show that other than household labour, the other common labour arrangements in the village include farm work sharing, labour exchanges and casual wage labour. Farm work sharing and labour exchanges involve farmers temporarily pooling their labour into work groups to complete tasks such as planting, weeding or harvesting crops on members' farms in succession. This is done under strict rules and rewarded with 'good' beer and food. Against this background, the study asks what institutions really are, why they matter and what we can learn about them. Literature suggests that institutions influence labour transactions by their effects on transaction costs and the protection of contractual rights. However, literature does not suggest which institutions are best for agricultural labour transactions. Taking institutions to be the 'rules of the game', with farmers as 'players' who strategically use these rules to their advantage, the study focused on the interaction between institutions and farmers. The major findings of the study are: (a) farmers' choices of institutions are influenced by the characteristics of transactions, the costs of using institutions for handling labour dealings, the fairness and predictability of the outcome of contract enforcement mechanisms, and socio-cultural factors such as kin/ethnic status, morality and affection, (b) formal institutions in Isunga are either weak, ineffective or absent. So, farmers rely heavily on institutions embedded in social norms and networks to structure their transactional relationships, to ensure the performance of the respective parties, and to settle disputes if they arise. The study concludes that agricultural labour transactions in Isunga involve judgements of personal characteristics and social roles expressed as reputation and trustworthiness.

Keywords: Uganda, institutions, labour transactions, contracts, embeddedness, identity, reputation, trust, beer

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Dedication

*To the memory of my sisters: Ms Betty Akwero Otto and Ms Grace Aciro Otto.
May their gentle and loving souls rest in eternal peace!*

*Women of Africa
Sweeper
Smearing floors and walls
With cow dung and black soil
Cook, ayah, the baby on your back*

*Washer of dishes,
Planting, weeding, harvesting
Store-keeper, builder,
Runner of errands,
Cart, lorry, donkey...*

*Women of Africa,
What are you not?*

Okot p'Bitek

Acknowledgments

At one point, writing this thesis was like a ‘journey in circles’ with no beginning and end. It was therefore a great relief to finally feel ‘hope’ and see light at the end of the tunnel. But even with the light visible, it all took longer than expected. Once I had reached my goal I began questioning my efforts and wondering whether this painful journey had been worthwhile. I can only hope that my doctoral ‘safari’ has born some fruit, even if the results will probably not do full justice to all the people who offered me a hand along the way, given me confidence, and waited for me while I was away drinking beer in the ‘People’s Republic’ of Isunga.

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I have been fortunate to be scholarly guided by Professor Adam Pain (my principal advisor) and Professor Emeritus Tekeste Negash (my secondary supervisor). They have

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Rönninge, November 2013
Opira Otto

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Glossary

In this thesis, I have tried to use English words for local terms as far as possible. However, sometimes local words have slipped through and I hope that this glossary will help to guide you (...and dampen your frustrations).

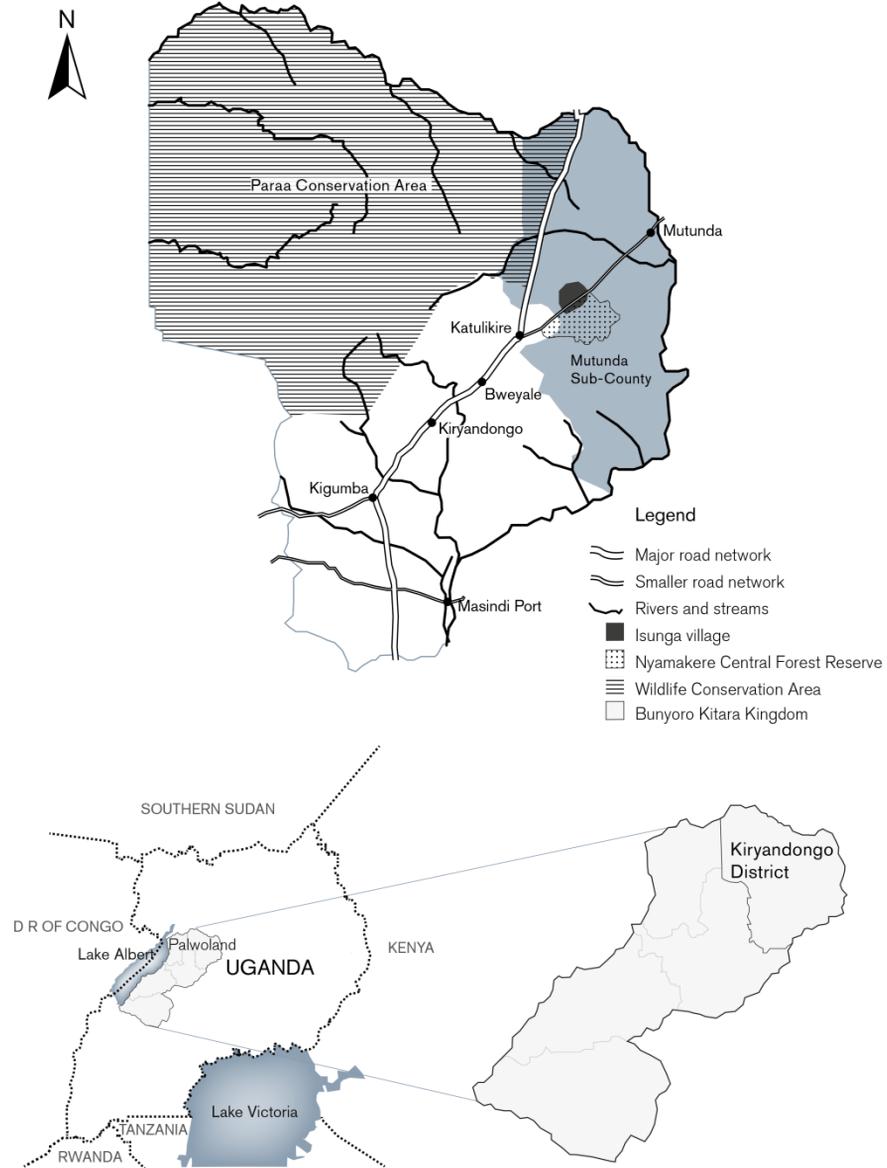
<i>Awak</i>	(Lwo) Communal work/work party
<i>Aleya</i>	(Lwo) rotational labour
<i>Askari</i>	(Swahili) a guard; soldier
<i>Boda-Boda</i>	Motorbike or bicycle taxi
<i>Bonna Bagaggawale</i>	(Luganda) Prosperity for all
<i>Diira</i>	(Lwo) Work party on credit
<i>Dog-bur</i>	(Lwo) Advance payment
<i>Gurub</i>	(Corrupted from the English word group) Farmer Group
<i>Jo-Palwo</i>	(Lwo) The people of Palwo
<i>Kalulu</i>	Lottery
<i>Katala</i>	Work stint/task
<i>Kuku-kuku</i>	(Lwo) Labour dispute
<i>Kwete</i>	(Lwo) Local brew made millet, maize or sorghum
<i>Kwere-kwere</i>	(Lwo) Shoddy work
<i>Kwon</i>	(Lwo) Mingled maize, millet or sorghum bread
<i>Ladit</i>	(Lwo) Address of respect given to elderly men, or men who are senior to you.
<i>Lakan Lim</i>	(Lwo) Treasurer
<i>Leja-leja</i>	Casual work labour, usually in form of task for cash
<i>Malaya</i>	(Swahili) Prostitute
<i>Malwa</i>	Local brew made from millet or sorghum drunk with long straw.
<i>Nywere-nywere</i>	Misunderstanding
<i>Patana</i>	(Swahili) Negotiation or striking a <i>leja-leja</i> deal
<i>Posho</i>	(Swahili) Maize flour
<i>Pur kongo</i>	Farmer groups/associations for <i>Kwete</i> beer
<i>Pur Cente</i>	Farmer groups/associations working for cash

<i>Rudi</i>	<i>(Lwo)</i> twins
<i>Rwot Keri</i>	<i>(Lwo)</i> Chief of Hoe
<i>Shamba</i>	<i>(Swahili)</i> Garden/plot/farm
<i>Tal</i>	<i>(Lwo)</i> A 2 meters long measuring stick
<i>Uhuru</i>	<i>(Swahili)</i> Freedom, and refers to independence in Uganda
<i>Ugali</i>	<i>(Lwo)</i> Mingled maize bread
<i>Winye</i>	<i>(Lwo)</i> Work sharing or labour transactions agreement
<i>Wonkom</i>	<i>(Lwo)</i> Chairperson

Abbreviations

CBO	Civil Society Organisation
CBR	Centre for Basic Research
CMB	Coffee Marketing Board
DAO	District Agricultural Officer
DLO	District Labour Officer
DSIP	Agricultural Sector Development Strategy & Investment Plan
GOU	Government of Uganda
LC	Local Council
LMB	Lint Marketing Board
LRM/A	Lords Resistance Movement/Army
MAAIF	Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries
MFPEd	Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
MLG	Ministry of Local Government
MURDA	Mutunda United Rural Development Association
NARO	National Agriculture Research Organisation
NDP	National Development Plan
NRM/A	National Resistance Movement/Army
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan
PFA	Prosperity for All
PMA	Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendant
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UGX	Uganda shillings (1USD=2350 UGX)
	Dollar values in the thesis are based on the conversion rate of Uganda shillings (January 2009).
UPC	Uganda People's Congress
UPE	Universal Primary Education

Map 1: Location of Kiryandongo District and Bunyoro Kingdom in Uganda.



Source: Drawn by Anni Hoffrén, Department of Urban and Rural Development, SLU

1 Setting the research agenda

This study has its roots in Masindi District in Midwestern Uganda. From 1999 to 2003, I facilitated a summer course there and was struck by the ways farmers shared resources in everyday life and during farming activities. I saw how farmers temporarily pooled their labour into work groups to complete specific tasks on members' fields in succession and sometimes rewarded with beer and food. This behaviour conflicts with the view of Uganda's market-driven agriculture based on neoclassical economics, in which individuals are perceived as disembodied asocial beings, and economic exchanges are rational, utility-maximising processes performed by atomised individuals (cf GOU, 2010a; Bahiigwa *et al.*, 2005; Collier & Reinikka, 2001). The fact that work sharing and labour exchanges exist means they are important to users. This kept me wondering why such labour behaviour has not received any attention from those concerned with agricultural development in Uganda. Caught between theory and practice, many questions went through my mind: *why do labour exchanges or work sharing arise, how are they organised and what rules govern their operations? Are work parties just social events or meaningful economic activities, or a combination of both? Would the roles and character of the work groups change with increased commercialisation?* These observations and questions motivated me to learn more about how farmers structure and enforce their labour relationships. I later found that institutions that are embedded in social structures and networks, such as personal ties, trust, reputation and ethnic identity are instrumental.

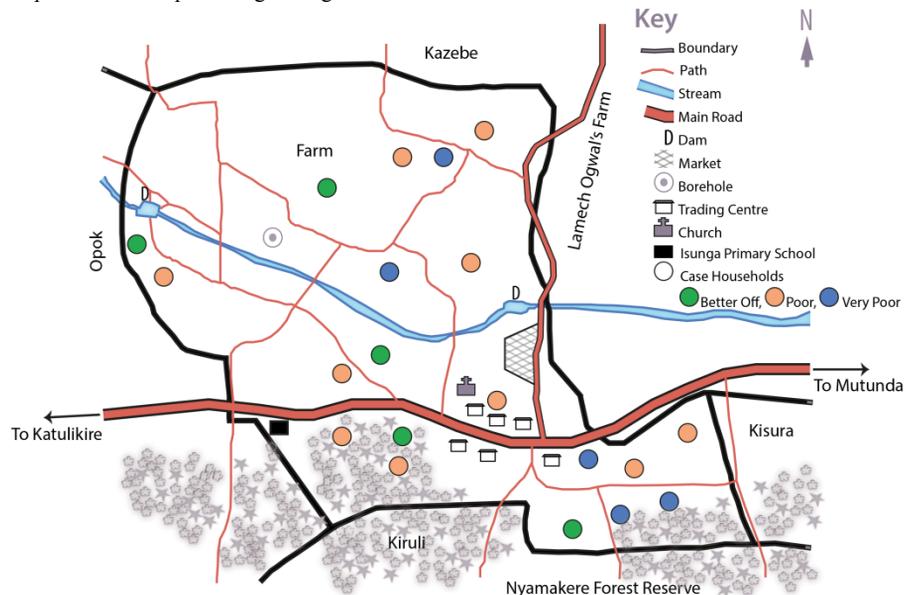
1.1 Background to the research issues

Before discussing the research, it seems important to provide a brief presentation of Isunga, where the fieldwork for this thesis was conducted.

1.1.1 Introducing Isunga

The village of Isunga is located in Kakwokwo Parish in Mutunda Sub-county, Kiryandongo District. The village covers about 21 sq. km and it is traversed by the Katulikire-Mutunda feeder road (see map 2 below).

Map 2: Sketch Map of Isunga village.



Source: Fieldwork, 2008.

Geography and economy

The vegetation cover of Isunga village and surrounding areas consists of savannah grassland, woodlands, swamps and tropical forests (MDLG, 2006). The soils are predominantly deep and loamy, with varying proportions of sand and clay. The rainfall pattern is bimodal, from March to May and August to October. There is an average rainfall of about 1200 mm per year, and the heaviest rain is normally seen during the first period (March to May). Daily temperature varies between 17 and 27 degrees Celsius. The combination of clay loam soils, moderate and ample bimodal rainfall, makes Isunga and surrounding areas favourable for agriculture. Nearly 90 per cent of farming is done by smallholder farmers on limited land holdings of about three acres on average. Women's involvement in crop production is substantial (MDLG, 2006).

Maize growing is the most popular farming activity. Almost all farming households are actively engaged in maize cultivation. They grow it for food and money, although the prices are not always good. Most farmers use simple

farming implements such as hoes (*jembes*), machetes (*pangas*) and harrowing sticks. This kind of farming gives poor yields, as it is dependent on weather conditions, which are not easy to guarantee. Apart from maize, farmers also grow crops like cassava, potatoes, beans, sorghum, millet and groundnuts, peas, Irish potatoes, bananas, tomatoes and cabbages, mainly for subsistence purposes. Specific cash crops include tobacco, sunflower and cotton. People also keep livestock such as sheep, cattle, pigs and goats, and engage in diverse and multiple income-generating activities. Besides, trade in agricultural produce and livestock, sale of used clothing, consumables, pottery and informal trading practices are common.

Crop farming in Isunga relies primarily on human work efforts and the social mobilisation and management of labour. Thus, labour is extremely important in Isunga's rain fed farming system, and it is a social factor used to increase crop production. Apart from household labour, the other common labour arrangements in the village are rotational labour exchange, work parties, and casual and seasonal wage labour.¹ Under a typical form of labour exchange, farmers temporarily pool their labour into work groups to complete tasks such as planting, weeding or harvesting on member's farms. Labour is shared or exchanged under strict rules and rewarded with things other than cash; most often 'good' beer and food.

Population and settlement

According to *Palwo* elders, Isunga was formerly a small temporary shelter for people displaced when the Government of Uganda created state-run ranches in Kiruli, Kazebe and on the southern frontier of Nyamakere central forest reserve in the 1960s and 1970s. Since the soils are good for agriculture, many people chose to settle permanently. The village also had the advantage of being on the way to the Atura ferry-crossing site on the River Nile, linking the then Lango and Bunyoro Districts. Some of the road construction workers also settled permanently in the village. When the government ranches were restructured and privatised in the early 1990s, a number of people returned to their original homes or acquired land in the area. Isunga's trading centre also started taking shape at this time. With the arrival of IDPs from Northern Uganda, many trees were cut down in Nyamakere forest reserve to be used for charcoal and firewood. They subsequently needed somewhere to collect and sell the charcoal and firewood. This resulted in the development of Isunga trading centre, which later became a trading hub with *dukas* (kiosks), maize mills, churches, clinic and beer drinking joints.

¹ These are presented and discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

In 2006, the population of the village was estimated at 1,950 people, with 235 adult men, 330 adult women (including 40 widows), 190 so-called “youths” and the rest were children (MDLG, 2006). Isunga is multi-ethnic, and the predominant ethnic group is the *Acholi*. Other groups include the Lango, Palwo, Alur, Lugbara, Kuku, Barulli, Banyoro and Lendu in that order.² The *Palwo*, however, are the indigenous inhabitants of the area and they own most of the land used for cultivation.³ The other ethnic groups buy, rent or borrow land from them.

However, in the last 30 years, there has been considerable migration to and from Isunga for various reasons. In the early 1980s, many people left the area, because it was considered unsafe due to the bush war being fought by the National Resistance Army (which later became the National Resistance Movement, the current ruling party in Uganda) in the neighbouring Nakasongola District. The reverse was the case in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, when the village and the surrounding areas saw an influx of people fleeing the insurgencies in the Acholi, Lango, West Nile and Teso sub regions. Following a period of relative stability in the West Nile and Teso regions in the early 2000s, many of those who had moved to Isunga and the surrounding areas returned to their homes. In 2007 and 2008, a significant number of IDPs from the Acholi and Lango sub regions also returned to their home villages once relative peace had been restored there.

Common services and the institutional landscape of the village

The residents of Isunga share the limited public services found in the village with residents of neighbouring villages. Education is the most important service being shared. Isunga Primary School (a UPE school) has about 684 pupils, but there are not enough classrooms and most classes are overcrowded. There is no secondary school in the village. In the struggle to reduce illiteracy among adults in the village, there is one functional adult literacy class run by the *Kamdini* Study Circle. There is no government-aided health facility in the village either. So, traditional healers and traditional birth attendants provide services to the villagers. However, some private individuals have opened ‘poor quality’ drug stores. There are about three such stores and one of them provides maternity services to expectant mothers.

A market is held twice a week on Wednesdays and Saturdays at the trading centre. It attracts farmers from nearby areas and buyers from towns as far away

² The Acholi and Lango ethnic groups are former Internally Displaced Persons who fled the 25 year-long armed conflict between the Government of Uganda and the Lord’s Resistance Movement that ended in 2008.

³ The notion of ethnicity and its role in labour transactions is discussed briefly in Chapter 3.

as Gulu and Masindi. There are also retail shops at the trading centre where locals can buy consumer goods. The sale of local brews (e.g. *Waragi*, *Kwete*, *Malwa* and *Kipanga*) is a thriving business in the area. Men come together early in the morning, during the day or after work to sit, talk and drink (an activity termed '*sitting*' in the village). The village has only one borehole, two unprotected dams and a stream (see Map 2).⁴ Locals use the water sources to get water for drinking, bathing, washing clothes and to water their livestock. The villagers themselves are responsible for protecting and maintaining the water points. There are also four privately owned milling machines in the village, which are very important to households, as the mills grind their maize, millet and sorghum seeds and dried cassava into flour. Small 'restaurants' selling tea and food can also be found, especially on market days.

The other important institution in the village is the local council (LC1). The Isunga LC1 (or village government) consists of eight committee members. It is a formally established government institution. Villagers consider it to be useless, but they still use because it provides a link to other levels of government. The LC1 is legally responsible for development activities in the village. Yet in practice, villagers dislike it for a number of reasons (see Chapter 7). The LC1 helps in resolving conflicts in the village, and it has been instrumental in ensuring maintenance of the community roads and the only water dam. It also mobilises the community if there are any meetings or developmental activities in the area.⁵

Culture and religion

The majority of the people in Isunga are religious. According to the Isunga LC1 office, there is a blend of religions in the village, with the Anglican Church of Uganda being the predominant religion. This is closely followed by Catholicism, Islam, as well as several 'Born Again Christians' (in that order). Traditional religion and cultural sites at Panyadoli hills are used by the Jo-Palwo people to get 'blessings' from their gods and ancestors. In fact, occasional consultation with traditional religious is not uncommon, even by those who adhere to formal religions. Since religion is known to have played some role in political factionalism in Uganda, and continues to do so today, this study did not explore farmers' political and religious allegiances.⁶ Nonetheless, there were no indications during the fieldwork that religion is a divisive force in Isunga.

⁴ Queuing at the borehole for a 20 litre jerry-can of water can take up to four hours.

⁵ Major incomes of the Isunga LC1 include market dues, fines, land fees, livestock movement permits, and beer permits.

⁶ See Kasozi (1994) and Karugire (1980)

Why Isunga?

At the start of the study in 2006, the plan was to conduct fieldwork in five villages, representing the main agricultural activities in the old Masindi District: a village on the northern frontier of Budongo Forest, chosen because of its mixed farming system (community forestry, crop farming and livestock keeping); a fishing village on the eastern shore of Lake Albert to cover fishery; a village in Bujenje County to cover pastoral livelihood, a unique way of life, which is seriously threatened by population growth and conflict over land and water resources; a village in the middle of Budongo central forest reserve that exhibits a unique relationship between a conservation area and community forestry as a way of life; and the village of Kawiti in Kakwokwo Parish, Mutunda Sub-county, Kibanda County (now Kiryandongo District) to capture the importance of reciprocal behaviour among vulnerable communities, the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from Northern Uganda. Barely a year later, I realised how ill-conceived the idea was, as it would involve huge resources, especially time, human and finance, which were not available to me. I then narrowed the scope of the study to Kawiti in Mutunda sub-county. This too, did not work in my favour, and I had to abandon it for security reasons. When I arrived in Kawiti in 2006, I learned of a bitter and violent conflict over land between the *Banyarwanda* cattle keepers and crop farmers (mainly the IDPs and *Palwo*). Three persons were killed the week I arrived. This prompted me to look for an alternative location, Isunga village, which was far away from the conflict area. Thus Isunga became the location of my research, because of the sad circumstances in Kawiti and some unexpected logistical challenges (primarily money and time). An added advantage of Isunga was that did not need an interpreter, since I was able to speak and understand most of the languages spoken by the various farmers.⁷ Moreover, the ethnic mix of the village offers a rich environment for studying the social dynamics of labour relationships in a changing society, with mixed cultures and increased commercialisation of the economy.⁸

Isunga village and the trading centre exhibit the characteristics of a rural growth centre, attracting ‘modern’ behaviour. It is quite common to find

⁷ This fitted into Marshall & Rossman’s (1995) recommendations that an ideal study site for qualitative research should be one where entry is possible, with a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people and structures of interest are present. Also, the site should provide space for the researcher to be able to build trusting relations with the participants of the study, and where data quality and credibility are reasonably assured. The village of Isunga meets these recommendations.

⁸ See Vincent’s (1971) work on the dynamics of a polyethnic community in Teso where she found that different ethnic groups in Gondo township use land and labour as facilities in their power struggles.

young people at the trading centre drinking bottled malt beer (Nile Special, Bell, Club etc.) and playing pool as seen at outskirts of Kampala city.⁹ The trading centre is vibrant – in high season it is like a beehive, full of activity. People move between buildings throughout the day. See below some snippets of conversations and accounts from my field trip in 2007, which provide a feel of what life is like in Isunga.

A day at the trading centre

As I approached the trading centre, a little distance away, laughter drifts from a hut, out of which a man staggered followed by a woman yelling, “...*why did you pretend that you had money when you had nothing? No one drinks my beer for free*”. She holds his bicycle, takes it inside the house and returns to the next hut where a ‘*murmuring*’ like conversation could be heard. A woman passing through the trading centre on her way home, with a 5 litre jerry-can (plastic) container filled with *Kipanga* balanced on her head, met the LC1 Chairperson, who asked, “...*are you still at it?*” The woman smiled and did not answer. He followed her to her home on the southern end of the trading centre. After a while, when he had left, I passed by and overheard the woman tell her neighbours, “...*that pig took my income for two days as licence and now he wants more. I refused and he threatened to punish me. He even called me a prostitute*”. One lady shouted in response, “...*get a knife and castrate him next time when he comes back...I will help you if I am around*”. Laughter ensued.

Two women entered the traditional healer’s house (*Dr Mulunglungu*). He is said to be able to cure sterility and impotence, and to help with luck in love and punish bad people. Out of curiosity, I also entered the house and saw some of his medicines spread out on a huge table. One of the women bought a piece of moulded clay for stomach pain. But when I wanted to buy the same, Dr Mulunglungu refused to sell it to me. “...*it does not work on people with big stomachs like yours*”, he said. A young *Murulli* man arrived as I was leaving...rolled up his shirt to have some incisions made and medicines rolled into his right arm. “*This will induce the woman he has been chasing to love him for months*”, Dr Mulunglungu whispered to me. On my way home from the trading centre, a mother stood in her compound shouting instructions to a girl of about six, “...*come back quickly...no playing on the way with the sugar and if you drop it, don’t come back. I will break your neck!*”, she said with a smile on her face. The young girl ran off without looking back.

Two *Boda-Boda* cyclists returning from Mutunda stopped at the bicycle repair ‘workshop’ under a mango tree. They admired a new motorcycle parked nearby, and went into a hut to drink *Kwete* beer, probably to quench their thirst

⁹ Football (soccer), especially the English Premier League, is very popular in Isunga and surrounding areas (particularly among men). Parents have named their kids Beckham, Wenger, Rooney, van Persie, and even Ibra (I assume that this is short for Zlatan Ibrahimovic, the Swedish Footballer). At weekends, discussions at the trading centre are often about football, with lengthy debates about who should play what position in which team.

and quell their hunger. A man, visibly under the influence of alcohol, sang and recited commentaries on life to mixed approval of the people around. From a nearby house, a middle-aged woman appeared with a long stick chasing a rat, which disappeared among the pumpkins at the edge of the homestead. Children cheered, laughed and generally looked amused at this. A few meters away, rude remarks were hurled at a young woman wearing a short, tight skirt. One elderly man remarked “...it is sad and disgraceful that women do not respect themselves these days. If it were in Amin’s days, the soldiers would have taught her a good lesson. We had a law banning such silly clothes and that was probably the best thing that damn man did for the country”, the Mzee told an amused audience of drunkards, as they peered at the woman’s ‘behind’ disappear from view.

Beer and beer drinking Isunga-style



Picture 1: Child drinking Malwa beer.
Courtesy: Ochan, 2012.

The people of Isunga love their *Kwete* and *Malwa* beer, as well as their local gin, *Kipanga*. They make, drink, talk, and think about beer so much that it plays a vital role in their social relationships, including accessing farm labour. Friends share a glass of *Kipanga* and drink *Malwa* from the same pot or *Kwete* from the same calabash. ‘Big day’ celebrations such as *Uhuru*, Christmas and Easter are difficult to imagine without a large supply of beer. Even offering sacrifices to the gods of Palwo at Panyadoli hills would be incomplete without *Kipanga* and *Kwete*. Moreover, there is no age limit on alcohol consumption in the village and children develop beer drinking habits quite early

(see picture 1). Political functions are also familiar with the free flow of beer. In a conversation with the Isunga LC1 Chairperson in 2009, he remarked, “*my campaign was expensive because I had to buy voters Kwete, Kipanga and Malwa every time I held a rally. It costed me a lot of money and this is why I charge them for everything that needs my signature and stamp*” and smiled.

It should, however, be underlined that people are not only rewarded with beer in Isunga; it is also extracted from those who break social rules. For instance, among the Acholi community, the ‘fine’ for domestic violence, or disrespect of elders, abuse or theft, includes large quantities of beer. In a conversation with my ‘beer pot’ friends, I was also told that the most severe

punishment given to a friend is to be excluded from their *Malwa* beer drinking sessions. It is therefore clear that beer defines both the socially valued and the socially censured roles associated with it (See also McAllister, 2004; Carlson, 1990; Stone *et al.*, 1990; Saul, 1983; Netting, 1964; Sangree, 1962). With respect to crop farming, certain farm works are repaid in beer. For example, farm clearing (digging and ploughing), weeding and harvesting are activities on which beer parties can mobilise large work groups. Such parties facilitate cooperation among villagers, and the fact that no cash is required is a definite advantage for many farmers (cf McAllister, 2004; Geschiere, 1995; Netting, 1964). But perhaps the most striking thing is the unique position that beer occupies in Isunga. Walking through the village, you are immediately struck by the smell of beer. Reputation, selfishness and generosity are sometimes phrased in terms of withholding or giving beer on credit, and those who do not give beer on credit are often denied labour when they asked for it.

Well, this is Isunga village where I did my field research. So diverse is what goes on in it that I found it at first, difficult to distinguish between social and economic activities, yet most social and economic relationships seem focused on personal character and social behaviours expressed in terms of trustworthiness and reputation. Hence, my empirical research points to the importance of personal ties, trust and reputation in labour transactions in Isunga.

1.1.2 Commercialisation of agriculture

The agricultural sector remains the major source of livelihood for the majority of rural Ugandans. In recognition of this, the government has made modernising agriculture (understood as market-driven agriculture) one of the key themes for development in the country (GOU, 2011; 2010a).¹⁰ With the agricultural modernisation efforts, the government expects the rural economy to move from subsistence agricultural production towards an integrated production and exchange system based on greater specialisation and market transactions (commercialisation). Since 1986, various efforts have been made to transform subsistence agriculture into a commercially viable, profitable, sustainable and dynamic sector that would improve the wellbeing of rural Ugandans by increasing household incomes, employment and food security (GOU, 2010b; 2010a; 2000). The government notes that,

¹⁰ The importance of agriculture in Uganda, and the various reforms are discussed in Chapter 2.

“...improving the welfare of poor subsistence farmers will require that they re-orient their production towards the market. More of their production must be marketed to enable them to earn higher incomes” (ibid, 2000:4)

The significance of agriculture labour in the transformation process and for rural employment cannot be overestimated, given that agriculture employs about 90 per cent of rural Ugandans (GOU, 2011; 2010b).¹¹ Moreover, apart from being a critical factor of agricultural production, in some households, labour is the only productive asset they have and ‘selling’ labour power is an important source of income (GOU, 2007; UBOS, 2007). Thus, given its importance in relative and absolute terms, it is surprising that when reading Uganda’s policy and programme documents on agriculture, the space given to the nature and role of labour in the country’s agricultural development is negligible (GOU, 2011; 2010b; 2010a; 2000). Instead, the impetus and nature of agricultural development has been framed with an emphasis on technological change to increase yield and productivity through market-driven practices (ibid, 2010a). This is problematic considering that markets are abstracts, and how they operate in practice usually contradicts what economic models want.

While markets for agricultural produce and inputs are underscored in Uganda’s agricultural modernisation drive, those who talk warmly of it think of the ‘market’ as an abstract ideal (what should be). They rarely make references to how commodity or input markets work in practice. This way of understanding markets has been criticised by Harriss-White (2003) for not taking into consideration the influence of history, institutions and socio-cultural factors. Apthorpe & Gasper (1996) also criticise mainstream economists for using the term ‘market’ as a ‘metaphor’ for mechanism, with emphasis on how the forces of supply and demand fix prices, even though there are other aspects of markets worth considering (cf Wiegratz, 2010; Klijn & Pain, 2007).

1.1.3 Agricultural labour in rain fed farming¹²

Labour is a key asset for farming households in rural Uganda. The quality and quantity of labour available to the households, in terms of numbers, skills, health and education level, constitute the basis for constructing their farming activities. In Isunga, where farm mechanisation is virtually non-existent and most farm work is done manually, having access to necessary labour for crop production

¹¹ As the country’s largest employer, the majority of women (83 per cent) are engaged in agriculture as primary producers (GOU, 2011).

¹² The term ‘agricultural labour’ refers to men and women who sell their labour for cash or ‘in kind’, and engage in reciprocal labour exchanges and work parties under a variety of contractual arrangements, including seasonal, casual and piece contract.

directly affects the outcome and household incomes (UBOS, 2007). Besides, household labour supplies may change suddenly for various reasons. Sickness, death and wars, for example, can have a very detrimental impact on the availability of farm labour and crop yields (GOU, 2007). Because returns on crop production are so unpredictable, farming for the market does not necessarily provide farmers with the means to hire labour on a regular basis (ibid, 2007). This begs the question: *what do farmers do when faced with labour shortages?* The CS15-OJM (*Rwakmot*) story below offers some answers to the question and identifies some of the issues this thesis seeks to address.¹³

Rwakmot is an Internally Displaced Person (IDP) in Isunga. He is 43 years old and married to *Leah*, who is about 40 years old. They have two unmarried sons *Daniel* and *Jacob* who are 20 and 18 years old respectively, and they also take care of *Peter* (*Leah's* brother) aged 12. *Peter* is a former child soldier with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group that was active in northern Uganda, which prompted them to leave their home village in *Acholi*.¹⁴ The *Rwakmots* claimed ownership over three acres of land in Nyamakere forest reserve, which is now used to grow food crops. The family also borrows two acres of land from a neighbour to grow sunflowers for cash. They pay for it in a 50/50 arrangement, which entitles the land owner to roughly 50 per cent of the income. Their farming calendar is similar to those of the other farmers in Isunga, i.e. largely controlled by the arrival and availability of rain. Certain farming periods demand a large amount of labour (planting, weeding and harvesting). During such periods, they organise *aleya* (rotational labour) or *awak* (work parties) labour exchanges, "...which calls for good relationship with people around you", according to *Rwakmot*. The boys sometime 'sell' their labour (*leja-leja*) when they need money. *Rwakmot* also said that having good relations with neighbours and their few friends was crucial. *Rwakmot* expanded on this by saying, "...they give us some help...especially food and labour whenever we need extra assistance. We also help those who help us; otherwise they stop helping us, you know". *Rwakmot* is also a member of the *Bed-Mot* Group (...a beer drinking group), which is big source of conflict in the family, but represents an important source of farm labour to the household.¹⁵ The group meets every Saturday afternoon around a beer pot to 'sit' and chat. Members also support each other with farming tasks when called upon.

¹³ Each household case study has been given a code referring which includes the household number, the name of head of the household and his/her sex. Thus, CS15-OJM is case study number 15; OJ is the name of the head of household and he is a male (M). It should be noted that respondents' names (e.g. *Rwakmot*) are aliases, in order to protect their privacy.

¹⁴ For an up-to-date scholarly work on the LRA and the Acholi people, see Finnström's (2008) publication entitled *Living with Bad Surroundings*.

¹⁵ *Leah* remarked that *Rwakmot* spends a lot of money on drinks, and they have quarrelled about it many times.

The story tells us that apart from household labour, casual wage labour (*leja-leja*), work parties (*awak, diira and gurub*) and reciprocal labour (*aleya*) are other labour arrangements farmers turn to during crop production.¹⁶ The CS15-OJM narrative also suggests that Isunga farmers are socialised actors and their labour behaviour, decisions and actions are shaped and constrained by the social context of the village, where trust, reputation, norms and social connections are important for accessing productive resources and livelihood opportunities. This calls into question the government's assumption that rural dwellers are self-interested individuals who can easily turn to the market for their farming needs (GOU, 2010a), and the denial of the 'market' as a social construction.¹⁷ As mentioned earlier, markets are not simply forces of supply and demand. There are also social forces at play that maximise other gains.

Rwakmot's labour behaviour is by no means atypical or particular to just Isunga. Scholarly works from other parts of the world show the importance of 'interpersonal ties' as a key social and economic means necessary for directing the flow of critical resources, information and power in society.¹⁸ Shipton (2007), Donham (1999) and Seppälä (1998) have shown the socially embedded nature of rural labour relations in East Africa where access to labour, and rewards for work done, are determined by social and cultural factors (norms, custom, ethnicity, religion, age and gender). This is also true of Isunga and most of rural Uganda.¹⁹ Yet, apart from Wiegratz's (2010) moral economy approach to the restructuring of produce trade in the Bugisu (*Elgonia*) region in eastern Uganda, there is little documentation on how socially embedded relationships are influenced by increased commercialisation and marketisation of the economy, or how commercialisation is affected by socially embedded relationships in polyethnic communities like Isunga.

¹⁶ These are described and discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

¹⁷ Bryceson (2008), Wiegratz (2010), Harris-White (2004), Havnevik & Hårsmar (1999), Seppälä (1998) and Apthorpe & Gasper (1996) have all alluded to markets as social institutions.

¹⁸ See Portes (2010), Harris-White (2004), Donham (1999), Landa (1994), Hydén (2001; 1983), Granovetter (1992; 1985), Seppälä (1998), Klijn & Pain (2007), Shipton (2007) among others.

¹⁹ See Jones (2008) for an interesting contribution from Uganda's *Teso* region.



Picture 2: Finding farm labour in 'gurub'.
Photo: Opira Otto, SLU.

Considering the efforts of the Ugandan government on market-driven agricultural practices since the mid-1980s, you would expect more labour 'selling and buying' and less work-sharing. Yet as *Rwakmot's* story suggests, labour dealings (including casual wage labour) are nested in social interactions and decision-making processes characterised by affection, moral and other socio-cultural factors (cf Harris-White, 2004:159). This, however, has received little attention in Uganda's agricultural and rural development discourses, and the 'oversight' cannot be due to the infrequency of labour exchanges or a lack of knowledge of their existence. It should also be noted that, although the role of personal ties and social connections is important for accessing agriculture labour in the case study village, these social resources are not distributed equally. Those who do not belong to a particular 'network' of unique personal ties are denied the benefits of such relationships. But how are such 'networks' of personal ties organised, and how are they affected by increased 'monetisation' of the economy? An exploration of how these various labour practices operate should provide insight into the dynamics of agricultural labour relationships in the study area.

1.2 Issues of study

This study examines the role and influence of institutions on agriculture labour transactions in Isunga village, where the fieldwork for this study was performed. The objective is to understand how farmers structure, regulate and enforce their labour dealings in crop farming. The main issues of the study are presented below.

1.2.1 The institutional concern

Uganda's agricultural modernisation agenda mentioned above is essentially a narrative of *commercialisation* and *institutional change*. The narrative includes creating the necessary conditions for increasing rural households' incomes, employment and the fulfilment of secured food security through market-driven agriculture (GOU, 2011; 2010b; 2010a). Undeniably, such a process does not take place in a vacuum. It requires an institutional framework that supports commercialisation, and carried out in an institutional setting, subject to certain rules, regulations and procedures, as well as patterns of behaviour and attitudes (cf North, 2006; 1995; 1990). Therefore, one of the requirements for the agricultural modernisation effort has been the development of an institutional framework that supports market-driven agricultural practices in the country. However, the main emphasis has been on the development of a legal and regulatory framework (formal institution) for transactions of farm inputs and outputs to function according to market mechanism (GOU, 2011; GOU, 2010b; 2010a).²⁰ As a result, many laws and rules have been passed with the aim of easing market-driven agriculture in the country.²¹ Yet with respect to making the reform more practical, many questions remain to be answered, including what influence institutions really have on labour transactions, how institutions work in reality, which institutions function well and which institutions matter to farmers. This is because of evidence indicating that 'other' institutions are more important to the users than the 'legal and regulatory framework' for promoting agricultural modernisation. Therefore, there is need for a deeper understanding of the character of the 'other' institutions and the roles they play in the agricultural modernisation efforts.

Many scholars have discussed the importance of institutions in economic transactions, social change or/and agrarian change in various settings (see Portes, 2010; Schmidt, 2008; Hodgson, 2007; Searle, 2005; Williamson, 2000; Hall & Taylor, 1996; North, 1990). Although some of these scholarly works are

²⁰ By institutional reforms, the government means "...a favourable legal, policy and institutional framework that facilitate private sector expansion and increased profitability along the entire value chain developed" (GOU, 2010a:35).

²¹ See GOU (2010b; 2010a; 2006c; 2006b; 2006a; 1998; 1997; 1995)

discussed in Chapter 3, I will raise some of the issues here to set the agenda. Firstly, studying institutions is not the distinctive domain of any one discipline. Economists, sociologists, lawyers and anthropologists all lay claim to an interest in understanding and studying the role and influence of institutions in society, though with quite different starting points and focal areas.²² Inevitably, the definitions and descriptions of institutions that emerge from these disciplines vary in scope and substance, and tend to open for criticism from other disciplines.²³ Moreover, the methods and actors involved in studying the role and influence of institutions vary from one discipline to the other.

A useful starting point for defining institutions in this thesis is provided by North (1990) ‘...*humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction*’ and are ‘...*devised by human beings to create order and reduce uncertainty in exchange*’ (ibid, 1990:3). These encompass formal rules and informal constraints that determine what activities individuals are allowed to undertake and how.²⁴ Along with scarcity and technology, institutions determine the opportunity set for individuals and the incentives they face (North, 2006; Roland, 2004). This thesis therefore defines institutions as,

“...the socially established norms and rules that govern social interactions, with both enabling and constraining implications for individual freedom of action”²⁵

I also recognise that while scholarly progress has been made in understanding institutions, it remains ambiguous and undecided as to what institutions are and why and how they matter. Therefore, this thesis goes beyond stating that institutions matter, to detailing which institutions matter in labour transactions,

²² C.f. Kasozi (2004)

²³ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss why and how the notion of institutions has developed to become widespread in use, even though it lacks a unified definition. Nonetheless, I acknowledge the existence of diverse and differing scholarship relating to the idea of institutions outside and within economics. In Chapter 3, there is a section on the synopsis of the different perspectives on institutions. However, this thesis uses the rational choice approach to explore agriculture labour transactions at a local (village) level, and the reasons for adapting it are described in Chapter 3.

²⁴ North’s (2006; 1995; 1991; 1990) description emphasizes institutions as: rules, constraining and enabling, shaping human interaction. However, Portes (2010) and other sociologists are not comfortable with this description (see Chapter 3).

²⁵ How I arrived at this definition is discussed in Chapter 3. However, the definitional ideas consist of three elements: (a) human relations and interactions, (b) the effects of rules on human activities and behaviour (*rules of the game*) and (c) constraining and enabling elements of institutions.

and how and why they matter in a real-life context (i.e. the role, influence and outcomes).²⁶

1.2.2 Interrelations of transaction, costs and institutions

A labour transaction is an agreement between the provider and the recipient. It, be it work sharing, rotational labour and/or wage labour, requires cooperation between the persons involved, and the activities between them are not costless. Recipients and providers of labour must communicate to establish contact and enter into agreements, carry out the agreements, reward the labour provider(s) and resolve disputes when it arises. The costs involved in communicating and enforcing labour relations and the relational property rights that they are based on are known as ‘transaction costs’ (Furubotn & Richter, 2005; Williamson, 1998; 1985)²⁷. They are incurred in order to reduce the risks of loss from transactions failure. If transaction costs or the risks of loss from transaction failure are too high, they will cancel out the benefits of such relationships, and labour transactions do not take place, with a subsequent loss of benefits to the parties involved. As rational beings, when structuring their labour relationships, farmers consider both the benefits and costs involved. This is probably what Coase (1992:716) meant when he wrote, “...if the costs of making an exchange are greater than the gains which that exchange would bring, that exchange would not take place”.

So, what are the specific sources of such transaction costs? In short, these lie in defining and securing property rights, identifying and establishing the terms of transactions, keeping track of those transactions, and ensuring that each agent involved in the transaction is in fact discharging his or her assigned role as agreed (Williamson, 1998; 1985). On the other hand, Shipton (2007) contends that whenever individuals borrow and lend resources, there are kin groups or other groups behind them with strong interests in their transactions, since individual interests are always hidden behind group interests. Nonetheless, the creation and protection of the right to enter into a transaction, or the right to decline to do so, is fundamental. Thus, for a labour transaction to occur at all, it must be clear what types of activity a provider or recipient may effectively enter into. To ease the process, societies develop general rules to govern such transactions (North, 2006; Williamson, 1998; North, 1995; 1990).

²⁶ This indicates that my research strategy has two aspects: (a) an extensive review of the theoretical literature on institutions; and (b) an empirical study of institutions within a chosen case study setting.

²⁷ A theoretical consensus on what transaction costs are is still out of sight. Therefore, to reduce the risk of misunderstanding this study, it is important to note that in empirical studies, direct measurement of transaction costs means many things. Refer to Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion.

These rules are either voluntarily accepted or enforced by social sanctions and by law. The significance of institutions is that they not only mediate in labour relations that would otherwise be costly to arrange, but they also make possible undertakings that would not occur if they did not exist.

Notwithstanding the above, literature on the topic reveals that when information is costly and property rights are poorly protected, agreements become hard to reach and enforce, and transaction costs become high (Furubotn & Richter, 2005; North, 1991; Williamson, 1985; Coase, 1960). This results in fewer transactions, as high transaction costs may prevent many agreements from being reached. But if institutions increase the certainty that agreements will be honoured and property rights will be protected, then the parties concerned will be more willing to undertake transactions, including those that are impersonal and complex (Benham & Benham, 2001; Williamson, 2000). Although consensus exists among economists that institutions can influence people's behaviour and relationships by their effects on transaction costs and the protection of contractual rights, it does not in any way suggest which institutions are best, or which type of institution is more advantageous to agricultural labour transactions.²⁸

In the context of Isunga's rain fed farming system too, the seasonality of crop production creates uncertainty and makes farming a risky business.²⁹ Farmers therefore weigh up the different options available to them, and turn to the institutions that raise certainty and minimise transaction costs. If the cost of sharing or exchanging labour is greater than the gains it would bring, then the transaction might not take place (see Chapters 5 and 6).

1.2.3 Focus on social embeddedness

The concept of a transaction cost is useful for providing insight into the determinants of labour relationships through time (the process of how farmers identify and choose their labour partners, enter into agreements, implement and enforce agreements, including dispute settlement). North (2005; 1994; 1990), Furubotn & Richter (2005), Williamson (2000; 1998; 1985) and others have shown that many institutions are involved in resource transfers and economic exchanges, each with its own task, but their shared function is to reduce transaction costs, to protect property rights and thereby create incentives for transactions. This assertion, however, is disputed by scholars such as Portes (2010) and Granovetter (2005; 1992; 1985), who maintain that all economic actions are socially embedded and people's actions are facilitated and

²⁸ C.f. North (2006; 1995; 1991; 1990), Coase (2008; 1992; 1960) and Williamson (2000; 1998; 1985; 1981)

²⁹ Refer to Chapter 2 to further discussions.

constrained by the structure and resources available in the networks in which they are embedded. They are supported by Swedberg (1991), Uzzi (1997) and Landa (1994), who argue that markets are socially structured institutions, infused with cultural norms and meanings. These scholarly positions are relevant for exploring labour behaviour and decisions in the ethnically rich and culturally mixed context of Isunga.

To the architects of the Uganda's agricultural modernisation plan, 'modern' stands for progress, the use of science, the application of impersonal instrumental rationality and its embodiment in institutions like the state and the law of contract (GOU, 2010a; 2000). This does not take into consideration farmer's labour behaviour and decisions that are embedded in social and cultural relations, which are important to farmers like *Rwakmot* (CS15-OJM) since they allow them to share their labour power (and other resources), thereby diffusing farm labour 'headache' and ensuring collective welfare (security). The labour behaviours of farmers in Isunga are embedded in and mediated by a complex web of social relations. This is made possible by available institutions that guide such behaviour. Thus exploring their forms and consequences could highlight some of the issues (e.g. trust, reputation, norms, moral, affections) often overlooked by the transaction cost analysis; and raise some questions about the impact of 'commercialisation' on the institutions that guide and support it.

Although Portes (2010) and Portes & Sensenbrenner (1993) have explained how embeddedness corresponds to trust and 'social capital', a critical reading of their contributions implicate them for portraying the notion of social embeddedness as a simple and convenient shorthand for social ties assumed simply to modify and enhance human economic interactions. Still, 'embeddedness' (in terms of social connections, reciprocity and trust) is an important attribute of agriculture labour relationships in Isunga, and forms an important part of the framework to analyse the interplay of the economic and the social aspects of labour transactions in the village.³⁰ It may therefore be possible to find trappings of 'market' activities (in an economic sense) within social ties and covered in social institutions here. The embeddedness concept is therefore not used as an antithesis of the transaction costs analysis, but for its strength in a study that seeks to explain how the content and roles of certain institutions change over time. The likely tension between transaction costs and embeddedness brings to light how 'the social' and 'the economic' are entwined in Isunga farmer's labour relationships. This helps explain whether and how the role and character of social institutions become more economic.

³⁰ Refer to Chapters 3, 6 and 7 for theoretical arguments and empirical discussions.

1.3 Research objectives and questions

Although the Ugandan government recognises the role of institutions in its agricultural modernisation drive, it perceives them as ‘formal institutions’ with an emphasis on the policy, legal and regulatory framework within which to ‘transform subsistence farming to commercial farming’ and modernise the agricultural sector (GOU, 2010b; GOU, 2010a). This thesis focuses on the ‘other’ institutions (e.g. kinship/ethnic identity, trust and reputation, morality, affection) that the Ugandan government ignores. These are the institutions that farmers like *Rwakmot* (CS15-OJM) use in their farming activities and in their search for livelihood security. The fact that they exist means that they are important to users. Therefore, knowing why they exist in the first place and how they operate in specific contexts would shed light on the consequences of commercialisation on agricultural labour relationships, and what role they (the ‘other’ institutions) play in the commercialisation process. The study is limited to agricultural labour, because it remains on the periphery of Uganda’s agricultural development efforts.

Scholars from various disciplines acknowledge that institutions matter and play a significant role in governing and guiding human interactions and behaviours. Yet acknowledging their existence is not the same as understanding them. Therefore, by exploring the role and influence of institutions on agriculture labour relationships in Isunga, it is possible to establish, in some detail, which institutions really matter to farmers, as well as how they matter. My ambition is to investigate how the content and roles of the ‘other’ institutions ignored by the Ugandan government change with the increased monetisation of the economy. This involves an exploration of the rules that govern and regulate farmers’ labour behaviour and decisions in crop farming. In so doing, the study identifies the institutions that actually regulate and govern labour relationships in Isunga, and explains the effects of increased *commercialisation* on such institutions. The general aim of the study is to contribute to the body of knowledge about the role and influence of institutions on labour transactions in rural Uganda. The specific objectives are:

1. To examine how institutions matter in a real-life context.
2. To investigate the institutions that structure, regulate and enforce farmers’ labour relationships, and identify which institutions actually regulate farmers’ labour behaviour and why they are used.
3. To explore how increased monetisation of the economy affects the role and character of social institutions in the village.

Based on these objectives, it is clear that the study brings together theoretical and empirical considerations to answer the main research question: *what role and influence do institutions have on agricultural labour transactions in rural Uganda?* The following questions guide the thesis:³¹

1. How do institutions influence agricultural labour transactions?
2. What institutions actually regulate agricultural labour transactions in Isunga, and why are they preferred over others?
3. How do social institutions affect the commercialisation of agriculture in rural Uganda (and/or vice versa)?

The open-ended nature of the research questions is appropriate for studying what institutions are, what their roles are, as well as why and how they matter. This called for an understanding of the history of labour, institutions and the nature of crop farming in the study area. It involved direct interaction with farmers during the fieldwork, and formulating and reformulating conversations to elicit the required information. Answering the research questions involved investigating how farmers identify and locate their labour partners, reach agreements, maintain their labour relations, handle risks of disputes and how the latter are resolved when they arise.

In short, the theoretical goal is to place farmers' strategic decision-making about labour into the conceptual discussions of institutions, transaction costs and social embeddedness outlined above. The review of literature addresses questions relating to the theoretical definition: what institutions are, and how they can be identified and described. The empirical goal, on the other hand, is to understand the role and influence of institutions on labour relationships: which institutions are important, and why and how do they influence farmer's labour behaviour and decisions? This called for a need to find and describe the different labour arrangements that farmers in Isunga turn to during crop farming, as well as the different strategies they use to structure, regulate and enforce their labour relations. Therefore, the study does not aim to quantify the adaptation of the different strategies, but to understand why and how they are used. I used the case study approach because it is best suited for describing and addressing the exploratory and explanatory questions outlined above (Yin, 2008). It also allowed exploration of the socio-cultural-historical context, and could accommodate the ambiguous boundaries between the institutions in question and their contexts.

³¹ A number of important subsidiary questions are discussed in subsequent chapters.

1.4 Outline of the thesis

This thesis contains eight chapters. The next chapter presents the study area and its context in relation to agriculture in general, and crop farming in particular. The purpose is to prepare readers for the empirical study. Apart from providing background information on its physical, economic and social dimensions and describing rain fed crop production systems, there is an emphasis on Uganda's agricultural development from an institutional perspective due to its strong bearings on this thesis. All these are intended to provide a broad understanding of the multiple factors that impact crop production and life in general in the study area. This understanding is an essential prerequisite for exploring the complex set of constraints, opportunities and dilemmas that farmers face in their everyday struggles to survive, as well as the institutional arrangements that make them survive.

Chapter 3 introduces and discusses the theoretical concepts used to guide this thesis. The key purpose of the chapter is to explain the theories that this study relies on and anchor it in relation to relevant literature. It begins by looking at what institutions are (how they are identified and described), and then discusses the role of institutions through transaction costs and relational property rights theories. Insights generated from these theories help to understand the significance of institutions in labour transactions. The discussion then focuses on institutions that are important to farmers as social actors and economic agents. In the second part of the chapter, insights from the theoretical review in the previous section are used to develop and propose a framework for investigating agricultural labour relationships in Isunga.

Chapter 4 discusses the research methodology (approach, design and process) of the study, based on the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. It sets the scene with a discussion of the qualitative dimension of the case study research approach. This includes the relevant epistemological and ontological issues, followed by an account of how the study was conducted. The chapter also explains how the case households were selected, the methods used in data collection and how data was processed and analysed. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the problems encountered during the field study and how these were overcome.

Through an exploration of the household case studies, farmers groups and fieldwork experience, Chapter 5 investigates the various forms of labour exchange in the village. It concentrates on their existence, characteristics and functions. The chapter focuses on the major sources of labour: family labour (including child borrowing and lending), cooperative labour (*aleya*, *awak*, *diira* and *pur kongo*) and hired labour (*leja-leja* casual wage labour, seasonal wage

labour and *gurub's pur cente*). It also discusses how farmers find farm labour through *gurubs* (farmers groups).

Chapter 6 examines the rules regulating labour exchange relations, the extent to which households make use of these and how they operate in practice. It begins with an investigation of how farmers locate their labour partners, how they enter into labour relationships, how they maintain them, and how they manage any disputes that may arise.

Chapter 7 examines the durability of informality in the village of Isunga. It argues that the prevalence of this informality is due to the absence and weakness of state structures in Isunga. This is clarified by looking into how labour disputes are settled by the Isunga LC court and other bodies. Other factors that affect farmers' choices of labour exchange institutions are also mentioned, as they facilitate an understanding of the persistence of certain labour practices. The findings are discussed along the following themes: (a) the costs of using institutions for handling labour dealings, (b) outcomes of enforcement mechanisms, (c) the ineffectiveness of the village council, and (d) the socially embedded character of labour transactions and how supporting institutions become more economics in contents and roles.

In the concluding Chapter 8, I discuss my main arguments and reflect upon the theoretical and methodological aspects of the study as well as implications of the study.

2 The Research Context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study area and its context in relation to agriculture in general, and crop farming in particular. According to North et al. (2007:47), context is, “...*the existing social order, as determined by the organisation of society and the ways in which economic, political systems contribute to that organisation*”. Hence, this chapter provides information about the current situation in the study area not mentioned in Chapter 1. Isunga is what North et al., (2007) would refer to as a lower level social order, which also takes into consideration geography, place and people as important components. Indeed most Ugandans live and work at this level. The purpose is to prepare readers for the empirical study. Section 2.2 discusses labour transformation in rural Uganda during the last 100 years with a focus on Bunyoro. Section 2.3 expands on the introduction of Isunga provided in Chapter 1 by exploring livelihoods in the village, with focus on crop farming, before making some concluding remarks in section 2.4. All the above explorations are intended to provide a broad understanding of the multiple factors that impact farming and life in the study area. This understanding is an essential prerequisite for exploring the complex set of constraints, opportunities and dilemmas that farmers face in their everyday struggle for survival, as well as the institutional arrangements that make them survive (cf Pain & Kantor, 2010).

2.2 Institutional and historical perspectives

This section presents Uganda’s agricultural modernisation efforts from historical and institutional angles. The purpose is to identify the institutions involved in Uganda’s agricultural development process, and then to explore the different roles they have played in the transformation of labour in northern Bunyoro,

where the case study village (Isunga) is located. In this way, I hope to show that the completeness of Uganda's agricultural modernisation story depends on a good understanding of the different types of institutions involved, the roles they have played or the influence they have had in transforming labour in the area in question. Thus, the transformation of rural labour and resulting development outcomes are described below. The discussion is structured according to three well-defined periods in which the agricultural sector transformed into its current form: (a) colonialism and the introduction of the cash economy and cash cropping which saw a dramatic transformation of labour in the country; (b) the post-colonial state intervention era (1962 to 1981) during which the state established and institutionalised its dominant role in agriculture; and (c) the reform and liberalisation epoch (1981 to now) in which the Ugandan state rolled back its own intervention and redefined the basis of participation for activities in the country's agricultural sector. These phases are described and analysed to determine the key events, influences and agricultural development implications for the whole period (i.e. from the colonial era to the present day); but first, a note on the Palwo special relationship with the Banyoro.

A note on Palwo-Banyoro relationship

The Palwo of northern Bunyoro are a cluster group of Lwo ethnicity. They settled in the area (present day Mutunda sub-county) around 1856 when their ancestors conquered the Chwezi (Karugire, 1980; Adefuye, 1971b). Although the Banyoro and the Palwo are culturally different – the former are Bantu and the latter Nilotic – they share a lot of history. The close interaction, which began long ago with the establishment of the Lwo-Babito dynasty, remains solid (p'Bitek, 1978). Adefuye (1971b) adds that the Palwo-Banyoro relationship is a special one, and has affected Palwo history, population density, customs and culture in many ways. For instance, through the practice of every *Omukama* marrying at least one Palwo woman, the Palwo saw themselves as the proud builders of the Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom (ibid, 1971b; 1971a). And, each time the status quo is tampered with, the Palwo would take to arm and fight Kitara rulers, not because they did not want to be part of the Kingdom, but because they want the special relationship unchanged. For an *Omukama* to be legitimate by Palwo standards, he has to be a full-blooded Lwo born of a Palwo woman, and a Mubito man (Adefuye, 1971b). According to Adefuye (1971b; 1971a), the Palwo has never expressed the desire to break off from Bunyoro Kitara, a Kingdom which they founded and proud to be part of. To do justice to the Palwo, this thesis looks at the colonial history of Bunyoro and Palwo through the same lens. Thus, in my presentation and discussion of labour transformation and institutional changes in Bunyoro from the colonial era onwards, no attempt is

made to treat the Palwo differently. This is because the drivers of change were externally initiated and never treated the Palwo favourably. However, where necessary, references are specifically made to the Palwo.

2.2.1 Colonialism, cash economy and rural labour transformations

The most defining event for agricultural development in Uganda was the formation of the state of Uganda. This historical event set in motion other changes in the institutional landscape that can today be seen as the defining characteristics of the country's agricultural development efforts. British colonialism created a new institutional reality that enabled the creation and establishment of a cash economy and the introduction of tobacco, coffee and cotton as traded commodities in Bunyoro (Doyle, 2006; Bazaara, 1997; Opio-Odongo, 1992). These developments included the deliberate creation of codified institutional arrangements at all levels of the new Ugandan society. Existing institutions such as the kingdoms, chieftaincies and households evolved, and new ones such as the Uganda modern state and its organs emerged (ibid, 2006; Kanyeihamba, 2002; Mamdani, 1996).³²

The 1902 Order in Council established British sovereignty and political, legislative, economic, administrative dominance over the indigenous rulers and people (Batungi, 2008; Kanyeihamba, 2002; Karugire, 1980). This created a new national authoritative identity around which other interests and identities had to adjust. The Governor, with his rule-making and rule-enforcing powers became the new reality of a dominant colonial administration. The interests of the Imperial British Crown rather than those of the traditional rulers now reigned supreme. Kings and chiefs were marginalised and lost a great deal of power and authority. In *Bunyoro* for example, even the chiefs that were previously under the sole patronage of the *Omukama* were forcefully made agents of the colonial administration or dismissed. These changes restricted the power of the *Omukama* and introduced new state powers and national interests of the colonial executive (Doyle, 2006).

New forms of land tenure

One major act of institutional legislation of the colonial authority was the introduction of a new form of land tenure in the country (Batungi, 2008; Bazaara, 1997). Bunyoro is a rather unique case in this regard, because when Uganda became a British protectorate in 1894, the *Banyoro* took up arms to resist British domination. However, when the British joined forces with the Kingdom of Buganda to fight Bunyoro, *Nyoro* military resistance was crushed and the Kingdom of Bunyoro-Kitara ended up as conquered territory belonging

³² See also Kasozi (1994)

to the Imperial British Crown (Onek, 2009; Doyle, 2006). One dire consequence of this move was that, more than half the land became the property of the Imperial British Crown property and designated as wildlife and central forest reserves.³³ A considerable portion of *Nyoro* land was taken from the kingdom and forcefully made part of Buganda (the so-called ‘lost counties’). Land was also distributed in plots to *Baganda*-appointed chiefs who held this property in private ownership (ibid, 2006). This new form of property rights introduced the potential for alienation, land sales and opportunities for personal agricultural husbandry. Land ownership and wealth creation from that time on, slipped out of the hands and direct patronage of the *Omukama* and his chiefs (Batungi, 2008; Doyle, 2006; Bazaara, 1992).

Colonial legislation introduced new rules that changed the social relationships and interactions that hitherto existed. These new rules were explicit in the sense that they were written down, and the rights they conferred to people were specified and codified. The rules were also implicit in that they represented a shift of decision-making authority over land from the traditional hereditary arrangements to the British Crown (Batungi, 2008; Karugire, 1980). These institutional arrangements created new and different enablement and constraints that dramatically changed the relationships and interactions involving the land, the state and the people of *Bunyoro*, and Uganda at large (Onek, 2009; Batungi, 2008; Doyle, 2006).

Emergence of the cash economy

Along with the new political order, there were also new forms of economic activities. The colonialists brought with them merchants and plantation farmers seeking to grow cash crops (cotton, tobacco, coffee and tea) for export. Reading Doyle (2006), Thompson (2003) and Opio-Odongo (1992), it is clear that European farming interests put great pressure on the colonial authorities to establish reserves and land for growing cash crops.³⁴ Hence, an economy that was previously composed of subsistence activities, reciprocal exchanges and commodity bartering, began to be transformed under the institutional guidance of a unified state authority. Overnight, there were new interests and new roles for the new actors (bankers, merchants, agents of the British state, etc.) to engage in new economic activities. Commercial farming and trading emerged,

³³ Including most of Palwoland (*Karuma* Game Reserve, *Nyamakere* Forest Reserve, *Kibeka* Forest Reserve, *Siri-Siri* Forest Reserve and parts of Murchison Falls National Park)

³⁴ In 1921, the Carter Commission observed that Uganda had twice as much high quality land as Kenya and was therefore more attractive as a home for large-scale plantations. It recommended that the natives (Africans) should provide labour and be restricted to subsistence (and not commercial) farming, but the idea was never fully embraced, and was later dropped (Thompson, 2003; Opio-Odongo, 1992).

expanded and became established under the protection and supervision of the colonial administration. However, the prospects of large-scale white settlement in Uganda, which had seemed so bright at first, faded with time into nothing (Opio-Odongo, 1992).³⁵ For the ‘natives’ though, the collapse of plantation agriculture represented a new opportunity for them as landowners. A smallholding class emerged, and Ugandans seized the opportunity and began growing small-scale cash crops, thus establishing a pattern of agriculture that remains institutionally dominant even today.³⁶

Literature on the topic also suggests that the involvement in cash crops in Bunyoro was a marginal activity for inhabitants, which gave them leverage over colonial bureaucracy. This was because the whole political and economic infrastructure depended on their willingness to produce cash crops, yet they did not depend on the cash crops for anything more than paying taxes, buying clothes and other consumer goods.³⁷ It could also be argued that it was the ongoing shift in ways of living associated with the establishment of a cash economy that created the context within which the specific institutional and personal motivations to cultivate cash crops were derived, eventually becoming institutionalised in the form of cash crop smallholdings.

The example below is about the tobacco sector in northern Bunyoro. Tobacco is picked for two reasons: firstly, it is widely grown in Isunga and surrounding areas, with a lot of labour challenges and socio-economic related problems due to the ‘contract’ nature of its production;³⁸ secondly, the introduction of tobacco production in Bunyoro heavily transformed labour relationships there.³⁹

Cash crop smallholdings: the case of tobacco growing

The commercial production of tobacco in Bunyoro started in 1927, and since then it has remained an important cash crop and a part of everyday life for many people. This development was made possible by a complex interplay of rules and regulations, practices and customs, which defined roles and allocated specific activities in the tobacco sector to different groups in the *Nyoro* society (Doyle,

³⁵ Bibangambah & Mehari (1993:2) named three factors that determined the ascendancy of peasant agriculture over plantation agriculture in rural Uganda as: (a) the high production costs of plantation agriculture, (b) pressure by Lancashire millers on the British Cotton Growing Association and British Board of Trade to expand cotton production in Uganda, and (c) the collapse in prices in 1920 which dealt plantation agriculture its final blow.

³⁶ With time, *Bunyoro* were both encouraged and coerced by the colonial administration to cultivate food and cash crops.

³⁷ C.f. Batungi (2008), Doyle (2006), Kanyehamba (2002) and Opio-Odongo (1992)

³⁸ See CS19-LOM, CS4-MOJM, CS20-COM, CS15-MOF narratives in chapters 5 and 6.

³⁹ C.f. Muhereza (1995), Bazaara (1997) and Doyle (2006)

2006). The infrastructure and mechanisms needed to produce, process, and market tobacco were established. The ‘natives’ produced tobacco on smallholdings, while foreign private interests carried out the processing and trade.⁴⁰ This established some roles that have persisted to the present day, with smallholdings remaining the preserve of smallholder farmers whilst processing and trade is controlled by the British American Tobacco (U) Ltd, a foreign company. As cultivation of the crop expanded and export quality grew, new tobacco regulations were introduced (Bazaara, 1997; Muhereza, 1995; Opio-Odongo, 1992).

Along with the official colonial measures and restrictions, a mix of mutually reinforcing norms and customary practices also developed. For instance, having been identified as a cash crop, it became the norm for *Bunyoro* farmers to be encouraged and coerced into growing it. The patronage chiefs and village headmen enforced tobacco growing and management practices by the book (Doyle, 2006; Muhereza, 1995; Bazaara, 1991). The enforcements were harsh, and poor husbandry was cruelly punished, sometimes even with whipping (ibid, 2006).⁴¹ These unwritten norms of enforced cash cropping and smallholding were further strengthened by written restrictions such as the establishment of controlled markets requiring colonial permits to participate in processing and trading in tobacco. In a few cases, when farmers and Asian traders managed to organise themselves into associations in attempts to gain greater control of tobacco production or processing, they were frustrated by contracting and licensing arrangements, as well as colonial regulations such as the Native Produce Ordinances, through which the colonial administration was able to control agricultural participation to the benefit of European farmers and their commercial interests (Doyle, 2006; Tosh, 1978).⁴²

Since its introduction as a cash crop, the people of Bunyoro never enjoyed growing tobacco, and even today there are many negative comments about it such as *Gafabusa nka Agalima Simonko* (growing tobacco is wasted effort) or *Okumatara nka Kalima Simonko* (drifting aimlessly as a tobacco grower). Yet farmers still continue to grow tobacco for BAT, whilst their children suffer

⁴⁰ The ‘natives’ were initially restricted from participating in processing and trade, so tobacco exports/trades remained in the hands of a few dominant European and Asian merchants.

⁴¹ On the use of force labour in *Palwoland*, Doyle (2006:129) writes, “...the District Commissioner orders all women were taken to grow sweet potatoes for about three months for a planter. Whoever resisted this forced labour was severely beaten. Consequently, most Palwo escaped from such ill treatment to Acholi District”.

⁴² In the cotton sector for instance, each time an Asian businessman or native proposed installing a hand-gin machine in *Bunyoro*, the colonial government rejected the idea or application, arguing that there was no room for the small businessman in Ugandan cotton (cf Doyle, 2006:132).

from a lack of food and ill health (e.g. *kwashiorkor*) as BAT extension workers strive for quality tobacco leaves for the market, a legacy of colonial practice (Muhereza, 1995).

With tobacco contract farming, farmers keep their land rights, get access to markets and value chains, as well as support with finance, training, seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and so on (ibid, 1995). However, tobacco has an intense cultivation pattern and demands constant attention, leaving minimal time or resources for growing other crops (including food crops).⁴³ Of course, entering into such contracts is a private choice, but how much choice do farmers really have if their only access to markets is via a single dominant buyer? How much benefit can this arrangement bring the farmer if the buyer can dictate the terms of that contract? In essence, farmers end up as disempowered labourers on their own land, and that is probably why tobacco growers are referred to as the ‘poorest of the poor’ (GOU, 2007; Muhereza, 1995).

Taxation and coercion

The motivations behind increased involvement of the ‘natives’ in the cultivation of tobacco and cotton were complex. Documentation and commentaries suggest that it was a mix of institutional and non-institutional encouragement, coercion and hindrance (Onek, 2009; Doyle, 2006; Thompson, 2003; Bazaara, 1997). In Bunyoro, for example, it was customary that women worked on the land, while men took care of the cattle and fought wars. Moreover, it was considered degrading for men to work as labourers for other men (Bazaara, 1992; 1991).⁴⁴ It was not until men needed money and realised that it could be earned by growing cash crops that they did so (ibid, 1991). Together with the official encouragement, use of raw force by the colonial administration, and the population’s increasing willingness to work on farms of wealthy landowners, cash cropping was effectively established in Bunyoro. Reading Thompson (2003) and Doyle (2006) though, it appears that the colonialists were more occupied with how best to create a labour force in their colonial economy without really increasing wages and large-scale forced labour. After all, slavery and forced labour were ‘prohibited’; hence the only possible solution for the new country was work based on the ‘work of men’, who give their labour power because they desire the fruits of their labour. Therefore, it was essential for the terms of successful labour contracts to be

⁴³ See CS19-LOM and CS18-MOF case examples in Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis.

⁴⁴ This was heavily misinterpreted by colonial administrators and their allies in Buganda that the *Banyoro* were lazy, backward and intractable (cf Doyle, 2006). In Mamdani (1976), reference is made to *Nyoro* as a word used in *Buganda* to refer to anything of low quality, dirty and locally produced.

reasonable. There also had to be a consensus between the parties i.e. the true basis of all contracts (Seidman, 1973).

To ensure sufficient supply of labour without resorting to raising wages and without violating the principle that the agreement should be voluntarily entered into, the colonial government found the solution in the poll and hut taxes, levied upon every male adult (Doyle, 2006; Thompson, 2003; Opio-Odongo, 1992). The colonial administration considered taxation the only possible method of compelling ‘natives’ to leave their villages to find work.⁴⁵ In this way, the cost of living for the inhabitants of the Bunyoro Kingdom increased, and it is on this that the supply of labour and the price of labour depended. Raising wages, the colonialists argued, would diminish the supply of labour since fewer external workers would then be able to earn the money required to cover a family’s hut or poll tax. Therefore, the insistence that the ‘natives’ should contribute their fair share to the revenue of the newly created country by paying his tax was all that was necessary on the part of the colonial administrators to ensure the ‘natives’ taking a share in life’s labour which no human being should avoid (Lugard, 1922).

Accordingly, poll tax laws were enacted. Although the amount and form changed over time, the poll tax remained the major instrument for instilling a desire to earn money among the natives, something that the colonial administration so relentlessly pursued, indeed very efficiently throughout Bunyoro. This law greatly affected all adult men’s decisions, yet they had no control of it whatsoever. The introduction of the poll tax was a smart move since it also served as a labour recruitment device in Bunyoro and other parts of the country. In 2008, the Principal Private Secretary to the *Omukama of Bunyoro* in 2008 said,

“...the *Bazungus* (European officials) in *Hoima* (...the district headquarter of *Bunyoro* during colonialism) kept diaries...each time they visit a village, they would ask the village headman to arraign tax defaulters. The district officials would order them sent either to the few European farmers in the south of Bunyoro, or to work off their taxes on road works for the colonial government.” (Interview with Yolamu Nsamba in Hoima on 06/11/2008)

Poll tax and hut tax laws were supplemented by other laws, but with the same effect. For instance, after crushing the *Banyoro* armed resistance of colonialism, numerous *Banyoro* were forced to live in less fertile settlements as the fertile land were turned into game parks and forest reserves. Most of the settlements were too small for the populations imposed upon them, thus

⁴⁵ See Amberntsson (2011) for similar cases in southern Africa.

forcing most *Banyoro* to migrate to other parts of Uganda, especially to Buganda and Busoga, in search of employment (Doyle, 2006).

As mentioned earlier, despite the prevailing official ideology of voluntary labour, forced labour was common. Compulsory labour for community projects was authorised for able-bodied adult males between the ages of 18 and 45. Male *Banyoro* who had been employed for three months of the preceding twelve months, were exempted from compulsory labour. Unless self-employed, they were subject to compulsory labour for sixty days each year. To avoid the effects of the Compulsory Labour Ordinance, many *Banyoro* preferred to work for the colonial administration, thus enabling them to choose when and where to work (Doyle, 2006; Bazaara, 1991).

To ensure that ‘natives’ (employees) continued to work for their employers, ordinary contract remedies were deemed insufficient. Subsequently, Master-Servant Ordinances were introduced and stringently implemented. For example, leaving employment without permission of the employer was a crime punishable by fine or imprisonment (Seidman, 1973; Brown *et al.*, 1945). The Employment of Servants Ordinance of 1937 (paragraph 58) accorded state power to every employer. It was a crime to get drunk during working hours and to neglect to perform any required tasks. It was also a crime to carelessly or improperly perform any work in the contract, to use abusive language towards employers, or refuse to obey employers’ commands (or any other legally authorised person) (Brown *et al.*, 1945). In short, the colonial administration used some innovative ideas to commoditise labour. However, it should be underlined that the laws were not always enforced or observed.⁴⁶

Important institutional changes

With the onset of colonialism, Bunyoro underwent significant institutional changes as earlier values or beliefs had to make way or/and adapt to new influential institutions. This represented a significant change in the rule-making mechanisms of the kingdom. They introduced a new authority with direct power to regulate and enforce particular patterns of economic activity and behaviour. They enabled the new state authority to create constitutional rules in the new Uganda. These allowed changes in subsidiary institutions and associated rules that created and structured the activities, relationships and obligations between individuals and the state (Kanyehamba, 2002; Mamdani, 1996; Karugire, 1980). Traditional leaders’ customary authority no longer had a judicial, administrative or political monopoly. Traditional organs of

⁴⁶ Doyle (2006), Kanyehamba (2002) and Vincent (1971) made references to cases where chiefs were dismissed for failing to follow orders from above, ordinances etc., and the common man imprisoned for laws he never understood.

discussion and customary elaboration that involved the *Omukama* and his chiefs in law-making and adjudication were sidestepped. Indeed the *Omukama* eventually ceased being the prime political figurehead embodying law, traditions and customs of the *Nyoro* people (Doyle, 2006). This meant that within the emergent cash economy and cash crops production in *Bunyoro*, various actors looked increasingly to newly established authorities and institutions as sources of law and law enforcement.

Over time the socio-economic activities of those persons involved in agricultural practices were regulated and enforced by various institutions and organisations. These included the colonial controls and ordinances that created the overall legal and administrative rules that regulated agricultural activities, and led to the creation of commodity boards for cotton, coffee and tea, which acted as the ‘crooked’ arm of the state, charged with overseeing the development and execution of state policy, as well as the observance and sanction of various sector regulations (Doyle, 2006). With changes in authority, there were also changes with respect to guidance and information about the rules. The colonial administration introduced and guaranteed rules that govern the agricultural sector. These new rules were more concerned with promoting the cash economy and less concerned with preserving the traditional subsistence economy (Doyle, 2006; Thompson, 2003; Bazaara, 1991). Thus actors were faced with new rules, which offered them opportunities that led them away from subsistence farming to cash cropping.

Even the existence of a traditional administration that was forcefully modified to include the new responsibility for policing and enforcing new regulations within their traditional role, enabled effective enforcement. Hence, effective enforcement and compliance created new economic choices, such as provision of land and labour for farming, as well as farming activities (planting, harvesting, drying and marketing of crops). Individuals’ choices to participate as smallholders were to become institutionalised within a rather modified traditional setting: *the cash crop smallholding*.

2.2.2 Post-colonial state interventions in agriculture

A short period of relative high economic growth immediately after independence was followed by twenty years of political turbulence, military dictatorship, civil wars and collapse in the country’s economic fortunes (Bazaara, 1997; Kayizzi-Mugerwa, 1996). This era also saw the transformation of the agricultural sector from colonial embodiment into an indigenously controlled post-colonial manifestation. The driving force, however, was the constant search for political and economic progress and stability, and the

relentless cycles of political strife and economic volatility (Bazaara, 1997; Kasozi, 1994; Karugire, 1980).

After gaining independence from the British in 1962, Uganda went in search of political independence, economic development and 'Ugandanisation'.⁴⁷ This involved an ideological departure from the policies that dominated the colonial era. However, the focus was on controlling the economy, and a political drive to create the political and economic conditions designed to rid the new Uganda of the relics of colonial control and continuing dependency on the UK (Kanyehamba, 2002; Bazaara, 1997). However, most strategies reflected the all-embracing role of a dominant state. Over the years, the socio-political and economic developments included a series of governmental changes, including military coups and civil wars;⁴⁸ sweeping constitutional and administrative changes;⁴⁹ as well as a collapse of the economy and the deterioration of social welfare.⁵⁰

This period was dominated by state interventions and regulation of private economic activities. The move towards a predominantly interventionist state with an extended scope of activity was initially reflected in national political pronouncements and policy statements, such as the *Move to the Left* and the *Common Man's Charter* 1969 (Onok, 2009; Kanyehamba, 2002; Mamdani, 1983). It was later to be overtly expressed in presidential written orders, such as the *Nakivubo* pronouncements of 1970, decrees and national legislation establishing greater state control of national assets.⁵¹ It also saw the extension of governmental control over non-state organisations (Banking Act 1969; Cooperative Statutes Act 1970; Trade Unions Act 1970).

⁴⁷ *Ugandanisation* refers to changes that reflected 'African' identity as well as practices or policies of affirmative action intended to increase the number of black Ugandans (natives) in civil service and businesses, which had historically been dominated by British colonialists and Asians.

⁴⁸ The short period of relative economic growth was followed by more politically and economically turbulent years between 1970 and 1987 when economic growth collapsed particularly following the Asian expulsion in 1973. Between 1973 and 1985 military regimes that presided over the country intensified the interventionist and authoritative trend ruling by decrees and extending the state and military control and influence over many aspects of commercial and non-commercial activities.

⁴⁹ These include a new republican constitution in 1967, suspension of constitutional articles by military proclamation in 1971 followed by rule by military decrees and proclamations between 1971 and 1979, and again in 1985 when the military took power for the second time.

⁵⁰ A collapse of key social development indicators, hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives or were persecuted, political intolerance and violence led to a civil war in the southern part of the country from 1981 to 1987, followed by another one in northern Uganda from 1987 to 2008.

⁵¹ The *Nakivubo* Pronouncement was a commitment issued by President Milton Obote, outlining the increased nationalization of major industries as part of the move to towards socialism described by the *Common Man's Charter* of 1969 (the 'Move to the Left').

State interventionism embedded in national institutions emerged, as the Lancaster (independence) constitution was itself being transformed by constitutional and non-constitutional means, first into a unitary republic, then into a one-party state and eventually into a military dictatorship. Rulemaking mechanisms at the national level were transformed. Subsequently, parliamentary rule, an independent judiciary and an elected executive gave way to rule by pronouncements and decrees. The *Omukama* and his fellow traditional rulers and authorities were overshadowed as central government-appointed chiefs, bureaucrats and executive presidents became more powerful and authoritarian. The government became increasingly characterised by bureaucratic control and intervention; and compliance was often achieved through intimidation, patronage or coercion (Onek, 2009; Mamdani, 1996). The state apparatus also expanded with the nationalisation of private foreign enterprises and the appropriation of property, often benefiting favoured ethnic groups, bureaucrats, politicians and military appointees. State laws were propagated to change established notions of property and tenure. As shall be explained below, state control and a regulation of channels to market were the dominant feature of this period, as various crop marketing boards were created (Bazaara, 1997).

Commodity marketing boards as tool of intervention

The post-independence transformation of the agricultural sector began with the creation of various cash crop marketing boards such as the Lint Marketing Board (LMB) and the Coffee Marketing Board (CMB). The marketing boards were more interventionist in character than the various industry boards created by the colonial administration. The boards were created as government monopolies encompassing a wider regulatory, buying, promotional and marketing remit than the cotton, coffee and tea industry boards that were created during colonialism. The boards had additional authority over the marketing of cash crops throughout the country. The state also used the marketing boards to regulate the value and benefits accruing to participants in the specific cash crop sector. Private sector companies and local cooperatives were restricted to primary processing (Bazaara, 1997). Since cotton was more popular than the other crops in northern Bunyoro during this time, it is used here to explain the interventionist characters of the Lint Marketing Board.

The case of the Lint Marketing Board

As mentioned above, the British colonial administration introduced cotton as a cash crop in Uganda quite early (1903). It was to serve the dual purpose of introducing a cash economy in the new country, as well as a raw material for industries in Europe (Doyle, 2006; Opio-Odongo, 1992). Consequently, the

ginning and marketing of cotton was regulated under the Cotton Act, revised in 1964, and the Lint Marketing Board Act of 1959, later amended in 1976. The LMB had a monopoly for cotton lint and seed sales, both domestically and internationally. Thus, acting as a government agency, the LMB was meant to protect cotton farmers, control prices and protect foreign exchange earnings, extract taxes and promote growth and quality.

The 1976 amendment gave the LMB further and more complete monopsonistic powers to encompass all marketing, processing, regulating and exports of cotton. The intent of the government was to promote the health and growth of the sector and to protect it from price fluctuations, manage exchange earnings, ensure quality control and administer tax and customs revenues. Bazaara (1997) claims that whilst the LMB was used to enforce the state institutional intervention, it was distinctively different from the direct coercion of the colonial administration. However, farmers were faced with the mixed motivational effects of a state institutional arrangement (backed by state agents) impinging on farmers' choices and behaviours by offering the incentive of possible personal benefits or the avoidance of personal losses.⁵²

Until 1976, the LMB did a good job acting as the prime regulator, buyer, processor and exporter for the cotton sector. But the next ten years saw Uganda's economic performance decline under the diktat and economic mismanagement of the Amin's military regime. The role and significance of the LMB for cotton production and marketing followed an uneven path. Firstly, it grew and then collapsed when farmers turned their backs on cotton production. Moreover, the continued nationalisation of key industries and commercial organisations, together with the expulsion of the entrepreneurial and productive Asian communities in 1973, led to huge outflow of expatriates and professionals from the country (Bazaara, 1997; Bigsten & Kayizzi Mugerwa, 1995). Moreover, the ensuing mismanagements of the nationalised industries, commercial organisations and other properties or businesses, led to a collapse in tax revenues (Otto, 1997; Ochieng, 1991).⁵³

The LMB, together with many of the other nationalised organisations, suffered enormously from political interference, patronage and poor remuneration. It was in no position to meet its challenge – the LMB and other state bodies were therefore criticised for being inefficient, badly managed, counterproductive regulatory interventions. Moreover, the LMB lacked the sectoral oversight and governance it was created for, and it never took

⁵² The activities of the LMB were similar to state participations in other cash cropping or commercial activities.

⁵³ The more the national revenues fell, the more the country became dependent on its commodity exports, especially coffee.

smallholder interests into consideration (Otto, 1997). In short, the LMB was simply a vehicle for extracting rents and taxes from cotton growers and primary processors, thus providing revenues for an unpopular government that was unable to collect revenues in other ways, yet lining the pockets of politically appointed 'big men' and senior officials. Otto (1997) found that the institutional and administrative activities of the LMB led to a decline in farmers' morale and a dramatic decline in cotton production during this period (ibid, 1997). Smallholders switched their attentions to food crops such as maize, beans, millet and cassava. Moreover, the quality of cotton lint declined as there was no advantage in selling high quality cotton (*safi*), and those few farmers who grew cotton chose to sell it as *kafifi* (poor quality cotton). Cotton exports fell sharply as the amount of quality cotton that the LMB was able to attract from smallholders declined dramatically (ibid, 1997).

Apart from the dominant and restricting role of the LMB in the cotton sector, farmers too faced numerous restrictions and constraints initiated by political and economic developments at the macro level. For instance, in the late 1960s, all crown land in the country was vested in the state. This had huge impact on ownership and tenure security in Bunyoro as it reminded them of the agony of British colonialism, when it was declared that all land in Bunyoro was 'British Crown Land' when Bunyoro was conquered.⁵⁴ Together with the nationalisation agenda and setting up of the land commission by the UPC government of Milton Obote, Idi Amin's confiscation of Asian properties, land reform decree led to reduced confidence in land ownership and title (Batungi, 2008). Dominated by restrictive institutions and difficult socio-political environments, the cotton sector more or less collapsed.

Effects of state intervention on agriculture

The creation of a state republic with a powerful executive president, along with unchallenged interventionist socialist ideologies, created an environment in which new administrative arrangements were set up (Kanyehamba, 2002; Karugire, 1980). As the state used its institutional influence to expand its domain of political and economic control, it reallocated the roles and proceeds of agriculture, as well as enforced specific patterns of farming through regulation, institutionalised coercion, intimidation, patronage and organisational controls (Bazaara, 1997; 1995). The state became an influential reality in every citizen's day-to-day activities. It was not only the control of land, labour and capital that passed to state institutions; the state also

⁵⁴ Refer to earlier discussions on land tenure in the colonial era and the emergence of the cash economy. See (Bazaara, 1997; 1992; 1991)Thompson (2003), Doyle (2006) and Batungi (2008) for further insights.

intervened to control commodities distribution and pricing through state institutions such as Food and Beverages Ltd, Produce Marketing Board (PMB) and others (Bazaara, 1997).

With the extension of state control and influence, new groups of interests emerged. For instance, when the country was faced with the vacuum left by the expelled Asian businesses and with the mixed incentives of economic necessity, political coercion and rewards, new groups of bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, soldiers and politicians used their positions to go into agribusinesses, as well as engage in rent-seeking activities (Bazaara, 1997). Not surprisingly therefore, the new actors did not prioritise programmes for agricultural development, or the redistribution of wealth to aid the poorer, rural population (ibid, 1997). This new gathering of 'big men' overshadowed the appointed leaders that had dominated the latter era of colonialism.

Bazaara (1997) also claims that a culture of rent-seeking and wealth acquisition emerged, and established roots in Bunyoro and beyond. This created a new set of social and economic winners and losers. But with smallholders too many and scattered to control directly and too important to the national economy to be ignored, they were able to continue with their farming activities, remaining well beyond the direct control of the 'heartless' state. Even so, with the state able to manage and control commodity markets and producer prices, smallholders' incomes became even more subject to state policy and regulation (cf Bazaara, 1997; Muhereza, 1995). Subsequently, faced with high prices of purchased goods, shortages of farm inputs and higher taxation, farmers experienced falling incomes and declining returns. They responded to this state of affairs by refusing to participate in the state-controlled market space. Most smallholders simply abandoned cultivating the traditional cash crops (tobacco and cotton) in favour of food crops (Belshaw *et al.*, 1999; Otto, 1997; Bazaara, 1992).

2.2.3 Economic liberalisation and structural reforms

Following the liberation war that toppled Amin's military regime in 1979, increased oil prices during 1973-1974 and 1979-80, deteriorating terms of trade for primary exports and rising interest rates, the country and economy was in deep crisis (Bigsten & Kayizzi Mugerwa, 1995; Ochieng, 1991). The country faced high levels of inflation, macroeconomic imbalances and balance of payment pressures. Much of the infrastructure was in a poor condition, agriculture was severely disrupted and most sectors of the economy were in a poor state (World Bank, 2006; Collier & Reinikka, 2001; Belshaw *et al.*, 1999). Moreover, the country had experienced great losses of the economically active population and skilled personnel as a result of war, disease (especially

HIV/AIDS) and exile. The civil administration had been weakened and political participation was almost abandoned. There had effectively been a complete collapse in all sectors of the economy, with dire effects on crop farming and citizens' wellbeing (Bazaara, 1997; Ochieng, 1991).

The ideological focus was on reform, rehabilitation and liberalisation, as well as the intervening influences of international financial institutions and donor countries (Jones, 2008; Bazaara, 1997; Bigsten & Kayizzi Mugerwa, 1995; Mamdani, 1990b). The period between 1987 and 1990 in particular was dominated by the Economic Recovery Programmes, which had dramatic effects on the economy. The country's economic decline was reversed and there was annual average GDP growth of 7 per cent during this period (Bahiigwa *et al.*, 2005; Collier & Reinikka, 2001; Bazaara, 1997). A broad programme of institutional reforms underpinned the reform policies, which was initiated by a government desperately in need of money (foreign currency), sponsored by the IMF and World Bank and supported by the wider donor community.⁵⁵ The programme involved rolling back the reach and scope of state interventions, and the direct state involvement in regulating and controlling social and economic activities across different sectors of the economy. It also involved constitutional reform to counter the effects of many years of political strife, disruption of administration, and a disregard of property rights (cf Kanyeihamba, 2002; Nsibambi, 1998). The key institutional features representing these changes were the establishment of local administrative councils with local people electing their own representatives, the restoration of an elected parliament, the introduction of 'no-party' democracy, and later multi-party political processes, as well as the introduction of legislation to reform key sectors of the economy such as banking, agriculture, health and education (Mwenda & Tangri, 2005; Collier & Reinikka, 2001; Nsibambi, 1998). The effect of this institutional change on agriculture is discussed below.

Institutional change within the agricultural sector

Within the agricultural sector, the liberalisation era was characterised by widespread institutional reforms aimed at stimulating sectoral production (yield and productivity), processing and trade through liberalisation, and encouraging non-state participation and investments (Wiegratz, 2010). In practice, this

⁵⁵ Ochieng (1991) notes that after the civil war that led to the end of the second Obote regime and its military short-lived successor in 1986, the initial NRM government stance was anti-IMF, anti-devaluation and anti-*laissez faire* (and consequently opposed to the orthodox liberal policies of Obote). He claims that the NRM government was initially reluctant to do business with IMF because it was associated with the Obote regime and for ideological reasons since Museveni himself was a known Marxist. Ochieng also notes that financing the reforms could not be generated locally, thus other foreign financiers increasingly needed the IMF stamp of approval.

involved tax and regulatory changes, as well as organisational reform (Ellis & Bahigwa, 2003; Collier & Reinikka, 2001; GOU, 2000). As part of the reform, taxation on farm produce, exports and sales was abolished. Pre-financing arrangements and joint ventures with foreign companies were permitted. Private participation in all aspects of agricultural production, processing, trade and export were permitted. Moreover, the country's liberalised foreign exchange markets made it possible for foreign companies to enjoy tax holidays for up to two years, as well as to freely repatriate profits to their owners across the globe (Belshaw *et al.*, 1999). As part of the regulatory and institutional reforms, all state-run marketing boards were abolished and their regulatory roles were restricted. Eventually, the market for agricultural inputs and outputs was freed to open up for participation. The role of the state was limited to protect property rights, though some new authorities, including the Uganda Cotton Development Organisation, Uganda Coffee Development Authority and Uganda Tea Development Agency, were established as new statutory regulatory bodies to monitor and regulate production, and to advise the government on policy matters (GOU, 2011; GOU, 2010a; GOU, 2010b; GOU, 2000).

The reforms were meant to create an environment for the development of effective private and competitive markets for agricultural produce and inputs in the country. Supporters of the reforms argued that farmers would gain more freedom in terms of which crops to grow, how to market them and to whom. Put simply, the liberalisation of the agricultural sector would provide conditions for greater competition in agricultural markets among rural farmers, stimulate growth and facilitate a move out of poverty (GOU, 2004; 2000; Collier, 1999; Lateef, 1991; Ochieng, 1991). On the other hand, critics of the reforms raised concerns stating that the presumed impact of liberalisation policies, stimulating increased production due to increased prices and/or incomes, was not tenable because of other constraints on agricultural production.⁵⁶ At worst, the reforms would destabilise prices, widen the income distribution gap in the country and reduce farmers' access to low-cost inputs (Dijkstra & Kees van Donge, 2001; Belshaw *et al.*, 1997; Mamdani, 1991; 1990b). Mamdani (1990b) observed that supporters of liberalisation programmes tended to presume that Uganda's rural areas were undifferentiated, and that the benefits of increased prices would benefit rural dwellers equally. Yet rural Ugandans are differentiated along social, gender and ethnic lines. This differentiation meant that certain social categories had limited access to productive resources (land, capital and agricultural labour), and would therefore not benefit from increased prices (cf Bazaara, 1991).

⁵⁶ For example, lack of access to and control of over land, monopoly in agricultural and commodity markets, transport costs due to the poor state of infrastructure in the country.

Effects of liberalisation on agriculture

The effects of the liberalisation of agriculture were diverse and dramatic. Most notably, there was a rapid influx of re-entrants and new entrants to various agricultural activities. Increases in prices excited many farmers, although they later dropped again (GOU, 2001). Yet farmers were sometimes accused of paying less attention to quality in their rush to get crops to market, whilst middlemen were accused of cheating farmers with poor quality assessment, tampering with measuring scales, and putting undue pressure on farmers to sell their produce even when the crops were not yet ready for harvest (cf Wiegatz, 2010). Some exporters even began to develop closer links with middlemen and farmers, employing commissioned field agents to extend their reach deeper into the villages to find securer and cheaper sources of produce (Bazaara, 1997).

The intervention of international financial institutions and donor agencies with the power to influence state authority and policy played a crucial role in initiating actions to reform Uganda's agricultural sector and reduce state influence and involvement in agricultural production and marketing. The changes meant that farmers could produce more for the market. Subsequently, the availability and significance of inputs (labour, land and capital) for agricultural production, as well as trade in both agricultural inputs and outputs, increased (World Bank, 2006; Collier & Reinikka, 2001; Bazaara, 1997). Increased and open access to various agricultural markets also meant that across the entire production and marketing chain, increases in relative possible returns were associated with increases in relative risks. Farmers could get more for their produce, but were no longer protected by government-guaranteed prices. Renewed incentives to dedicate capital, labour and land to agricultural production increasingly depended on ability, knowledge and information. As such, success increasingly became dependent on business acumen, innovation and the ability to acquire, manage and utilise factors of production (cf World Bank, 2006; Launder, 1998).

Irrespectively, the change from the economic practices of the interventionist epoch represented a remarkable institutional change. The interventionist laws and norms, associated with institutions of earlier post-colonial governments were dismantled. Instead, focus was now on setting constitutional and administrative rules and avoiding getting involved in details of regulatory rules. A new ideology was also emerging at the national level, in addition to a sense of identity that was to shape national and agricultural socio-economic behaviour (Kabwegyere, 2002; Nsibambi, 1998). Farmers were once again free to associate on the basis of shared interests, and to lobby the government to meet these interests. Farmers groups, cooperatives and other local non-governmental associations were formed and they were no longer seen as competing with the authority of the state. Hence,

more decisions and practices were left to farmers to handle. Formal and informal codes of practice thereby emerged. Such wider participation also meant more individual choices and risk of falling prey to unexpected outcomes such as price instability, ‘immorality’, and climate and weather changes.⁵⁷ The country’s agricultural sector became multifaceted and complex, with new roles requiring a wider range of abilities and competence. Nonetheless, there was (and still is) a need for more informal interactions to gather information and share resources for farming. Thus, greater attention is given to identifying shared interests, and developing new ways of cooperating and competing. After all, individual farmers and other actors could no longer limit their concern to just the immediate activities affecting them locally, as agricultural market prices became increasingly subject to international influences (World Bank, 2006; Collier & Reinikka, 2001).

2.2.4 Decentralisation and plans for modernising agriculture

Decentralisation is another important institutional reform that has a bearing on this study. Uganda implemented major decentralisation programmes from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, where a highly centralised state underwent considerable decentralisation following the transfer of powers, functions and services from central government to local councils (Kabwegyere, 2002; Nsibambi, 1998; GOU, 1997; 1995). The decentralisation agenda included the transfer of real power to the districts, bringing political, economic and administrative control over services to where they are delivered, improving financial accountability by closing the gap between tax collection and service provision, as well as achieving democracy involving people at all levels (Jones, 2008; Bahiigwa *et al.*, 2004; Nsibambi, 1998). The above were to contribute to development by empowering the people and institutions at every level of the Ugandan society; improving access to basic services; increasing people’s participation in decision-making; assisting in developing people’s capacities, as well as enhancing governmental responsiveness, transparency and accountability (Ahmad & Brosio, 2009; Onyach-Olaa, 2003; Nsibambi, 1998). Decentralisation therefore provides the framework within which the pillars of the agricultural modernisation agenda are to be implemented.⁵⁸

The transfer of power and responsibility to the local people received praise from a number of international scholars. Francis & James (2003:325) for instance write, “...it is one of the most far reaching local government reform programs in the developing world”; whilst Mitchinson (2003:241) described it as “...one of the most radical devolution initiatives of any country at this

⁵⁷ See Wiegratz (2010)

⁵⁸ Of particular relevance to this study is the delivery of legal services at the village level.

time". Jones (2008:63) noted that, "...the transfer of decision-making powers closer to the point of delivery, was the signature of reform of the 1990s, and links Uganda into a much larger story of political reform across the African continent". Even so, it has to be stressed that the rationale for decentralisation in Uganda was political. It came at a time when there were loud calls for a need to restore democracy and return power to the people. Hence, there was a clear need to implement it speedily and holistically, for the political strategy to install a participatory, grassroots-based and popular democracy to work (Steiner, 2006; Mitchinson, 2003; Khadiagala, 2001).⁵⁹

The decentralisation programmes are run through a pyramid-shaped governance structure called 'Local Councils' (LC). The village-level (LC1) formed the base, followed by the parish level (LCII), sub-county (LCIII), county (LCIV) and the district (LCV) at the top.⁶⁰ Councillors at the LC1, LCIII and LCV levels are directly elected by citizens with geographically defined constituencies. Members of LCII and LCIV are administrative units whose membership is determined by what Bahigwa et al., (2005:490) refer to as "...the council executive of the LCs in the tier below", meaning the LC1 executive members select members for LCII and the LCIII executives for the LCIV.⁶¹ Every local council is obliged to appoint an executive committee, chaired by a chairperson. It is the responsibility of the executive committee to initiate and formulate policy for approval by the council; monitor and oversee the implementation of policies and programmes; and recommend persons to the council to be appointed members of statutory commissions, boards and committees. An administrative unit council is not a corporate body, however. Its functions are to resolve disputes, monitor the delivery of services and assist in the maintenance of law, order and security (Jones, 2008). Administrative unit councils at the county level consist of all members of the sub-county executive committee in the county; at the parish level, all members of the village executive committees in the parish; and at the village level, all persons aged over eighteen residing in the village (GOU, 1997; GOU, 1995).

⁵⁹ See Nsibambi (1998), Kabwegyere (2002), Kanyeihamba (2002) and Mamdani (1990a).

⁶⁰ At LC 1 level, all village residents are *de facto* members of village resistance council, and they elect members who constitute the village local council (LC1). At LC 2, members of LC1 from each village in that parish become members of the parish local council. These members elect 9 of their peers to constitute the parish local council (LC 2). This same process is repeated to form LC3, LC4 and LC5. Each LC is under the organisational leadership of a chairperson. At each LC level, there are posts for a Secretary for Mass Mobilisation and a Secretary for Women Affairs. The government uses extensively the LC system as a channel for communication.

⁶¹ See Ahmad & Brosio (2009), Francis & James (2003), Kabwegyere (2002), Kanyeihamba (2002), Mamdani (1990a), and Nsibambi (1998) for in depth discussions.

Consequences of decentralisation

Although an important aim of decentralisation is to bring political and administrative control over services and to achieve democracy involving people at all levels, evidence shows that the contrary is true (Jones, 2008; Onyach-Olaa, 2003; Khadiagala, 2001). In an interview with the LCV Chairman of Masindi District in 2007, he grouped the problems of the decentralisation process into three broad categories: (a) the difficulties associated with lack of financial and human resources, which have limited the independence of the local governments; (b) the complex centre-local relations, whereby political confrontations at the centre have tended to spill over to the districts thereby altering policy parameters at the local level; and (c) the political and economic dynamics at the local level itself, which is 'bad news' for a poor district like Masindi as it delays decisions on service delivery. Based on the LCV Chairman's comments above, it is therefore very likely that sectors that are out of favour or poorly represented, receive few resources and suffer as a result, especially if the elected councillors do not belong to the ruling NRM party.

2.3 Isunga people and their livelihoods

Many studies have confirmed that livelihood diversification has become an important feature of rural life in Uganda, with off-farm activities accounting for an increasing proportion of rural household incomes, particularly for those whose members are educated and healthy (Ellis & Bahiigwa, 2003; Marter, 2002; Canagarajah *et al.*, 2001; Deininger & Okidi, 2001).⁶² Marter (2002) also notes that female-headed households that engage in a mix of both farm and non/off farm work have risen out of poverty at a faster rate than those only engaged in agriculture; and that "*...women are diversifying their enterprise activities more rapidly than men*" (ibid, 2002:8). However, according to Chambers (1997; 1989), farmers' livelihoods and the conditions that sustain them are usually complex, diverse and risky. Therefore, knowing the factors that determine how, why and when farmers adopt certain strategies when faced with risks associated with rain fed farming, makes it difficult to define livelihoods.

For Ellis (1998), livelihoods encompasses not only income in cash and in kind, but also the social institutions, the gender relations and property rights

⁶² The term '*off-farm*' should not be confused with '*non-farm*'. Off-farm generally refers to activities undertaken away from the household's own farm. Ellis (1998) for instance uses it to refer exclusively to agricultural labouring on someone else's land, so 'off-farm' is used in this sense. Non-farm refers to activities outside the agricultural sector.

required to support and sustain a given standard of living.⁶³ Anderson et al. (1994) on the other hand, describe the concept in terms of strategy.⁶⁴ They look at it as the overall way in which individuals try to structure their activities and actions with a relatively long-term perspective. So, livelihood strategies are long-term plans for survival and construct that form general prescriptions for action (ibid, 1994:20).⁶⁵ These strategies are also choices faced by individuals and households face when the going gets tough,⁶⁶ and how they make their choices, depends on many factors as clearly discussed by Ellis (2000; 1998). He writes,

“...the asset status of households, mediated by social factors and exogenous trends and shocks, results in the adoption and adaptation overtime of livelihood strategies. Livelihood strategies are dynamic, they respond to changing pressures and opportunities and they adopt accordingly.”(ibid, 2000:40)

I have chosen to adopt Ellis’s (2000; 1998) definition in this study to understand the strategies and adaptation made by the people of Isunga when faced with farming challenges. The focus will be on finding out how, when and why they select certain strategies, and how decisions are made in the households. This is also the approach taken by Ellis & Bahiigwa (2003) in one of their scholarly works on livelihoods and rural poverty in Uganda. They stressed the importance of understanding a household’s asset status, the ongoing activities, as well as the enabling and constraining character of the institutional context.

Through wealth-ranking exercises, observations, interviews and discussions, many livelihood-enhancing activities were identified and recorded during the field study (see Table 1 below). However, the relative importance of these activities has changed over the years and varies in importance, either as a source of income or food. For example, at the start of the field study, Isunga villagers made it clear that some sources of income, such as brick-making, which were less important in the 1990s, were becoming increasingly important; others such as selling charcoal were becoming less important due to declining availability of suitable trees. Otherwise, it is common for Isunga households to

⁶³ The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines livelihood as the way one earns money to live on.

⁶⁴ A plan, method or series of manoeuvres for obtaining a specific goal or result.

⁶⁵ They include paid and unpaid work, accumulation and investments, migration, borrowing, food production, income enterprise, social networking, community managing and cooperation and changes in consumption patterns and sharing.

⁶⁶ See discussion on households below.

undertake more than one livelihood activity and diversify to increase their household income.

By diversifying into off-farm or non-farm activities, households have been able to increase their incomes and thus improve their living standards, although not significantly (GOU, 2007; Lawson *et al.*, 2006). Another aspect to consider is that these extra activities sometimes have negative influences on crop farming. One village elder pointed out that some young men no longer participate in crop farming, instead opting to do other non/off-farm activities (*boda-boda*, charcoal/brick-making and selling) because it generates more money than farming. This, according to the old man, has led to risks of hunger and other uncertainties in some households, because the money they get is sometimes not enough to buy food and other essentials, since the prices are much higher these days.⁶⁷

Table 1: Livelihood sources and activities in Isunga village.

Livelihood source	Activities
Crop farming	Production of maize, beans, sunflower, cassava, millet, sorghum, groundnuts, sweet potatoes, tobacco, sunflower, cotton, peas, leafy vegetables, tomatoes, egg plants and rice, for sale and consumption.
Livestock production	Keeping cattle, goats, sheep, pigs, rabbits and chicken, for sale as well as domestic consumption. Hiring out oxen and ox-ploughs.
Nyamakere Forest	Wood and non-wood products that include firewood, charcoal, thatch grass, wild game, fruits, wild leafy vegetables, mushrooms and fibres.
Home industry and wage labour	Casual (<i>leja-leja</i>) wage labour, seasonal wage labour, craft, brick-making, bicycle repairs, selling local brews made from cassava, maize, millet and/or sorghum, preparing and selling cooked food on market days.
Remittances	Money sent from family members living outside the village.
Family support	Preparing meals, housekeeping, attending meetings and leisure.
Others	Salaries (teachers), LC1 councillors sitting allowances and fees

Source: Fieldwork, 2006-2008.

The Nyamakere Forest Reserve also plays a very important role in the economy of the village. Apart from being home to the IDPs, the charcoal and firewood used and/or sold by villagers comes from the Nyamakere forest. This has resulted in considerable deforestation in the reserve. The forest also provides other sources of food such as fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, honey and game. Since my study is focused on agricultural labour relationships, I will

⁶⁷ Even competition for some of the activities (charcoal, bricks selling and *Kipanga* beer selling) is stiff, so other factors (reputation, trustworthiness etc.) weigh in.

focus on the main livelihood activity in the village, crop farming. However, first it seems fitting with a synopsis of the households of Isunga.

2.3.1 The households of Isunga

The ‘household’ is a common form of social organisation in Isunga, and is the unit of analysis of this thesis. It is the primary site for the structuring of agricultural labour transactions. Chant & Campling (1997) note that there is a consensus in defining households in low-income countries as spatial units where members live in the same dwelling and share basic domestic and reproductive activities. But this definition is problematic since it may also be understood as a kinship unit or an economic unit, rather than a residential unit. A household’s reproduction may not depend entirely on those who live in it. This is certainly true in Isunga where the household boundaries are not clearly defined, and some domestic functions are performed outside of the residential unit.⁶⁸ Rudie (1995:228) refers to a household as, “...a co-residential unit, usually family, which takes care of resource management and primary needs of its members”.⁶⁹ In Isunga, there are many IDP households and some have members that live in other villages far away, because of land availability, and are thus not resident in a ‘household’ in Isunga.⁷⁰ Others regard a household as where people ‘eat from one pot’ and live together under one roof. Within the households, members pool resources to meet their various needs (Ellis, 1998; 1993; Lehmann, 1986). Ellis (1993:14) refers to such a household as ‘a social unit defined by the sharing of the same abode or hearth’.

While a household is an important institution, it cannot be reduced to just a unit of strategic economic action with the assumption that members share a common interest. In fact, some feminist scholars have argued for the existence of multiple voices, gendered interests and an unequal distribution of resources within households (Arora-Jonsson, 2005; Tamale, 1999; Adepoju & Oppong, 1994). There is also evidence that dynamics within households bring about gender inequalities with respect to the access to and control of resources in a household (Arora-Jonsson, 2005; Creighton & Omari, 2000; Brydon & Chant, 1993). Creighton & Omari (2000) in particular, stress that although members of a household often share the same residence, it is wrong to assume that this leads to equality or cooperation among the individuals. There are often considerable

⁶⁸ For instance, cash generated in towns and remitted to the family.

⁶⁹ Note the use of ‘family’ here instead of ‘household’ – an indication that many people use the words interchangeably.

⁷⁰ For instance, during my second fieldwork in 2007, I observed in one of the case households that a particular man could eat in her house, and then rides off to spend his night at *Tee-Cwa* village some 13 kilometres away. Further probing revealed that his ‘real’ house was there (a wife and three children), and ‘my’ case household was his ‘other’ house (as my host *Bazilio* put it).

differences in terms of activities and benefits of household members determined by age and gender. In any case, these feminist scholars seem to ignore that belonging to a household also means security, and that a household is also a unit held together by solidarity and affection.⁷¹ Kabeer (1991) also contends that membership in a household is ‘internally differentiated by material constraints’. This may influence access to and control over resources since access and control have implications for the behaviour of household members. Hence, the household as a unit of production is imperative for understanding the power relations in the households and decision-making over labour and other resources. So how do the people of Isunga describe their households?

At the start of the fieldwork, I was engaged in a debate about what constitutes a household in Isunga. One particular argument centred on whether a daughter who is not married but has children, has her own hut and is given some land to farm within her father’s homestead, qualifies as a *keno* (i.e. to be called a household). One elderly woman gave a traditional account among the Palwo as to why she would not qualify as a household. According to this woman, this was because the daughter remained under the ‘*roof of the main household*’, whose family name she still maintained. Further discussions revealed the range of situations that are considered as a household: (a) a father, mother and children living in a house with land; newly married couple or couples without children are also regarded as a household; (b) a polygamous household is considered as one unit even if one of the wives lives far away from the husband,⁷² (c) a household headed by a widow who maintains the name of her late husband (even when she is ‘inherited’ (*lako*) by a clan member); and (d) married sons living in a separate household from the father’s households, with their own house and field provided by the father. The son has autonomy to use the land to provide for his family, but key decisions such as introducing new farming activities have to be done in consultation with the father, and his decision is final. The following do not qualify as a household: (a) unmarried daughter with children (she still belongs to her father’s household), (b) an unmarried son (*labot*) is regarded a child of the household, despite his age and/or social status. It should be noted that these descriptions and expressions do not include those who are physically absent. Chant & Campling (1997) and Guyer & Peters (1987) noted that apart from being a

⁷¹ See arguments on affective ties in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

⁷² CS1-JSBM is a polygamous family and it was quite tricky handling the household as a unit of analysis. After careful consideration, I decided to treat CS2-MDF (*Abwoli*) and CS3-MAF (*Atenyi*) as different households, because during the second field trip I found out that they no longer shared the same granary. Both *Abwoli* and *Atenyi* with their respective children cultivate different plots and eat from separate granaries and pots.

discrete entity, household boundaries are often very porous. Although a household can be identified by a shared residence and economic cooperation, the most important members of some households could be those who are not even living there, but still contribute with cash remittances, goods and services. Since crop farming depends on availability and a tenure security of land, I will now address this briefly in the next section.

2.3.2 Land tenure in Isunga

The 1995 Constitution vests land in the citizens of Uganda (GOU, 1995), and Clause (3) of Article 237 provides for the tenure systems under which land should be owned.⁷³ Those available in Isunga are leasehold and customary tenure systems. Under the leasehold system, land is owned for a particular period of time. The lease can be obtained from an individual or the district local government for a specific period usually 49 or 99 years (or in between) with attached terms and conditions. The leasehold transactions, being essentially contractual, allow parties to define the terms and conditions of access and usage in such a manner that suits their give-and-take land use needs.⁷⁴ The grantee of a lease for an agreed period of time is entitled to a certificate of title. Land under the customary tenure system, however, is communally owned by particular group of people in a particular area. Land use under this tenure is usually controlled by elders, clan heads or a group in its own well-defined administrative structure and authority.⁷⁵ Most land in Isunga and the surroundings areas is held on a customary tenure system, and is characteristic of the indigenous people of the village, because they have always lived on it and been regarded by everyone else as ‘real owners’ of their land.

⁷³ They are *mailo*, *freehold*, *leasehold*, *customary* and *public* land.

⁷⁴ The beneficiaries of freehold tenure in Isunga village are the National Forest Authority (e.g. Nyamakere Forest Reserve) and a few better-off households.

⁷⁵ Land held under *mailo* tenure is mostly confined to the central region of Uganda. The system confers freehold granted by the colonial government in exchange for political co-operation under the 1900 Buganda Agreement. The *mailo* tenure system recognises occupancy by tenants (locally known as *Kibanja* holders), whose relationship with their landlords is governed and guided by the provisions of the 1998 Land Act (amended in 2009). *Mailo* land, like freehold is registered under the Registration of Titles Act. All transactions must therefore be entered in a register guaranteed by the state. Under this tenure, the holder of a *mailo* land title has absolute ownership of that land. Freehold land tenure on the other hand, is a system of owning land in perpetuity and was set up by an agreement between the Kingdoms and the British Government. Grants of land in freehold were made by the Crown and later by the Uganda Land Commission. The grantee of land in freehold is entitled to a certificate of title with the power to abuse, use and dispose. Transactions involving freehold land are governed by the Registration of Titles Act (Cap. 230). With public land, the government owns land and has the right to lease it to any company, organisation or individuals on specific terms and covenants. In most cases, this form of land is not for settlement; it is basically for business and usually located in urban areas.

They have no official papers proving that they own the land or have any rights to it. In this case, people own their land and have rights to it, but they do not have land titles. Some tenants on such land allocate specific areas to themselves with known and defined boundaries usually marked by ridges, trenches and/or trees. In recent years, attempts have been made to translate customary rules into ‘modern’ law, but they have failed due to their complexity (Batungi, 2008; Adoko & Levine, 2004). An important task here is to show the linkages between land and labour in the village.

Linkages between land and labour

The wealth and wellbeing of the people of Isunga is primarily defined by ownership of land. Although land is acquired mainly through inheritance, it is also common to buy land nowadays. Even so, the majority of landowners are men, with women gaining access through marriage, even though women are free to purchase land. Among the *Barulli* too, parents may allocate land to both their sons and daughters (who have returned home after failed marriages). It is apparent that there are local rules governing land and that they are constantly adapting to new circumstances.

A crucial dimension of rural institutions that tends to be glossed over, or is at least not explicitly addressed in the agricultural modernisation effort, is the fact that land and labour are inextricably linked. Crop farming is constrained by both land and labour, and transactions in either of them can be interlocked with other activities such as sharecropping and labour (see Chapter 5). Cases exist where employers act as patrons, providing a range of goods and services, including land in a sharecropping arrangement. Such relationships can be seen as exploitative, as for example in the case of debt bondage (interlocking of land and capital). Nonetheless, in Isunga, many individuals/households access land and other resources through these arrangements, and in turn, employers gain access to inputs brought in by the tenants, and also have to cope with the problems of seasonal availability of labour. Many of those who are relatively well off, do not use all their land as farmland, because they do not have enough labour to open up more farm land. Hence, they rent or lend their land to those who do not have enough.⁷⁶ Thus, by sharing their resources, households increase their crop production beyond the capacity of each separate household. The arrangement might have some negative consequences for the poorer households, but as one farmer said, “...it is better than nothing” (CS20-COM).

⁷⁶ Land is frequently rented out for one production season or more at a cost between 15,000 and 80,000 UGX per acre per season, depending on the social connections and contacts one has. With regards to land borrowing, the borrower normally decides what to give the owner as a token of appreciation after harvesting.

2.3.3 Crop farming and seasonality in Isunga

The Government of Uganda uses three categories for farmers: subsistence, semi-commercial and commercial (GOU, 2010a). However, there are only subsistence and semi-commercial farmers in Isunga. Indeed only 4 of the 139 households are semi-commercial farmers – the rest are smallholder subsistence farmers.⁷⁷ The semi-commercial farmers primarily grow maize, sunflowers, and tobacco and/or keep livestock both for consumption and sale. They also use improved methods of production (e.g. fertilisers, high-yielding seeds, and tractors), hired and household labour, as well as share cropping (see Chapters 5 and 6). The majority of farmers are from poor households, who cultivate about three acres of land on average. They constitute more than 95 per cent of Isunga's farming households, producing mainly for domestic consumption, but also small amounts of tobacco, cotton and sunflower for cash. They also keep small animals and engage in other non/off farm activities. However, the income they generate is not enough to enable them to purchase inputs, hire labour or finance necessities such as health and education. The size and quality of the basket of commodities consumed by these households places them below the poverty line (GOU, 2007; 2003). They depend on household labour, which is only able to cover small areas of new land. These farmers are also highly vulnerable to risks (price, weather, yields).

During the fieldwork, Isunga farmers complained that rainfall has become quite erratic and unpredictable since the mid-1990s, making crop farming a very risky activity. Seasonality is therefore a serious source of risk and vulnerability in Isunga's rain fed farming system. Vulnerability here refers to risks of a sudden, catastrophic decline in a particular variable, usually access to enough food for survival (Ellis & Freeman, 2005; Ellis, 2000). To Ellis (2000), the most vulnerable households are those that are both at great risk of adverse external events and lack assets that could carry them through periods of adversity.⁷⁸

Seasonality as a source of risk and vulnerability

Crop production in Isunga is seasonal, with variations in labour requirements during the farming calendar. The peak of labour needs relates to timely planting,

⁷⁷ Two 'weekend' farmers based in Kampala would qualify to be commercial farmers, but my attempt to interview them was met with negative responses, and comments that they "do not have time". These farmers possess/access critical skills/knowledge; produce for the market for a profit motive; engage in specialised production, marketing and processing; use skilled & non skilled hired labour.

⁷⁸ The vulnerability debate has attracted contributions from many scholars in different disciplines such Chambers (1989), Dercon (2005b; 2005a) Ellis, (2001; 1998), Bankoff *et al* (2004) and many others. This thesis is more interested in its connection to risks and livelihoods and not their in-depth study.

weeding and harvesting. A farming calendar was put together following lengthy discussions with the villagers, indicating when the different activities are generally carried out (see Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2: A seasonal calendar for Isunga village.

Season	Months	Activities
Dry	January	Some households start land preparation (bush clearing and digging) for food crops in mid-January; do off-farm/non-farm income generating activities (hunting, charcoal burning, beer brewing and working as casual labourers outside Isunga village).
	February	Continue with land preparations and off-farm activities; women collect dry grass (<i>raa</i>) and firewood for use during the rainy season. Some very poor households start facing food shortages in their homes, and address this by selling their labour to get cash for food.
	March	Digging/Ploughing; start sowing seeds (mainly cereals) in parts of the <i>shambas</i> , and wait for first rainy season in mid/late March – although for the last four seasons it came either very early or late. Plant maize, beans, millet, sorghum and peas after the arrival of rains.
First Rain	April	Continue planting food crops; start weeding all the fields (labour demand reaches highest level); digging/ploughing for specific cash crops (sunflower, cotton or tobacco).
	May	Continue with weeding. Women harvest fresh vegetables for direct consumption in the households, sale or preservation for future use. Plant more food crops (especially for late comers), and most of the first season crops are getting ready.
	June	First rain season ends. Start of a short period of dry spell, start harvesting maize, millet, groundnuts, beans, sweet potatoes, etc. plus storing/selling some of them.
Dry	July	Peak harvest period for all crops; bush clearing and preparation of gardens for the second rainy period; ploughing/digging for cash crops.
Second Rain	August	Finish harvesting; prepare ground for second rainy season that normally begins in late August; Start planting second maize, beans, cassava, millet, groundnuts, sweet potatoes and sunflowers. Second rainy season starts in late August.
	September	Harvest tobacco; continue planting second maize, beans, millet, groundnuts, sweet potatoes; and weeding second crops
	October	Continue weeding crops; continue harvesting tobacco and start harvesting sunflower.
Dry	November	Peak harvest of second season; harvest sorghum, groundnuts etc.
	December	Continue harvesting, dry season and non/off farm activities and too much drinking (<i>Kipanga</i> , <i>Waragi</i> , <i>Malwa</i> and <i>Kwete</i> local brews), many marriage ceremonies.

Source: Fieldwork 2006 and 2007.

Based on the calendar, it is clear that rain fed farming in Isunga is seasonal. Insufficient labour during critical periods (planting, weeding and harvesting) may have a negative impact on crop production. *Bangkwon* (CS8-BRM) described his story as follows,

We plan our farming activities by following the seasonal variation. I open the first *shamba* towards the end of the long dry period, some weeks before the arrival of the first rain; and the other *shambas* are opened during the short dry spell between late June and mid-August. I clear the bushes from the old *shambas* and cut down trees to open new *shambas* when in need. Then I burn the dry twigs, branches and grass after one or two weeks and spread the ashes. It is our fertiliser. Field burning is easy. I do it alone and then plough the land using the oxen that I keep for my father-in-law. The most difficult and demanding work of the season is weeding, because it is intensive and should be done within a short period or else the weeds take over the *shambas*. With more rain, come more weeds..., which calls for a constant availability of labour. It is also a period, when every farmer in the village wants help with extra labour, yet everyone is busy in his or her *samba*. So, we just plant what is enough, as there is no point planting a lot, when you know you can't get enough labour when you need it the most. When done with weeding beans and maize, I plant some cassava and sweet potatoes...both are good '*banks*' in bad times when food is scarce. We harvest maize, beans and groundnuts together. But millet and sorghum's harvest is done by Betty. Sunflowers are my crop.

Bangkwon's story indicates that the question of labour in crop farming is critical, both in terms of allocation and utilisation, as well as gender inequalities. The table below summarises the division of labour in CS8-BRM's crop production activities.

Table 3: Division of labour in crop in CS8-BRM's crop production activities.

Farming activities	Maize/Beans			Millet/Sorghum			Sunflower		
	Ba	Be	Ot	Ba	Be	Ot	Ba	Be	Ot
Bush cleaning (February-April)	x	x	Al	x		Al	x	x	Al
Ox-Ploughing	x	x		x			x	x	
Sowing/planting	x	x	Al	x	x	Aw	x	x	Al
Weeding	x	x	Al, Aw	x	x	Le, Aw, Al	x	x	Al, Le
Harvesting	x	x	Al	x	x	Le, Al	x	x	
Transporting crops home	x	x		x	x		x	x	
Processing/storage		x		x	x			x	
Transporting to market		x		x			x		

Note: Ba (*Bangkwon*); Be (*Betty*), Ot (*Others*), Le (*Leja-Leja*), Al (*Aleya*), Aw (*Awak*)
Source: Fieldwork 2008.

The above table shows that some tasks are exclusively done by men and women respectively. Male tasks include felling trees, ploughing with oxen, planting and sowing seeds, purchasing and using fertilisers, and the sale of crops. Female tasks include sowing, harvesting, head-loading crops, crop drying, winnowing and storage. However, tasks such as weeding, bagging and storage of popular cash crops like tobacco, sunflower and cotton are performed by both men and women. In the CS8-BRM example, *Bangkwon* is responsible for the cash crops in the family, and this seems the case throughout Isunga. Crops that generate money, such as tobacco, sunflower, maize and beans, are controlled by men. Evidence also exists in other parts of Kiryandongo district that some male labour is usually withdrawn from 'cash' crops if the profitability of the crops decreases, as was the case with cotton (Bazaara, 1997; Muhereza, 1995). Isunga villagers consider leafy vegetables, cassava, sweet potatoes, sorghum and groundnuts to be female crops, and indeed much of their labour is focused on these. In all the 'typical' households⁷⁹, women also contribute a disproportionately high share of their labour to food production and post-harvest processing activities, whereas produce-marketing decisions are mostly made by men. This is an indication that Isunga women still shoulder the responsibility of food security at the household levels, where their production is for household consumption. However, in female-headed households, the above differences are irrelevant since they have to take on activities previously only performed by men.

The Isunga farming system is regulated by rain: the amount, duration and variations vary year to year.⁸⁰ Farmers start clearing their fields quite early (about two months) before the onset of the first rain, mainly to avoid the stress of doing everything within a short period. After the first 'soaking rain', most farmers plant maize and beans, and this is the time when all able-bodied persons (men, women and children) must work long hours. The timing of various farming activities is therefore determined by the ability of households to mobilise labour, not only for farming, but to allocate it to other livelihood activities as well. The peak periods for labour is the period following the rains, and this is when the labour-intensive tasks of digging and weeding have to be done quickly. This period usually coincides with food shortages (hunger season) for most of the households, and many households engage in other income-generating activities, such as working for other people in their *shambas*.

⁷⁹ Wife and husband living together under one roof.

⁸⁰ For instance in 2006, the village received less rain, yet it came late. Then in 2007, it was the opposite as the village received too much rain

2.3.4 Cropping activities

The key crop farming activities during a 12-month farming calendar are outlined below.

Land preparation and planting

Land preparation for various crops involves bush-clearing and digging, or ploughing the soil, cutting and burning crop residues (tobacco, sunflower and maize stocks), which usually starts immediately after harvesting.⁸¹ This is done using machetes (*Pangas*) and hand hoes (*jembes*) between mid-January and early March before the first rain, and in July or early August before the second rain.⁸² In cases where land preparation involves tree-felling and heavy digging, men are more involved, while women usually stick to easier clearing tasks and burning crop residues. When the crop residues are cut or bushy fields are cleared, it is piled together and burnt to provide ash, which serves as fertiliser.

For households with little land, the more frequently cultivated *shambas* get more covering of secondary grass weed. Such *shambas* are weeded at least three times during the growth of a crop, thus requires more labour inputs. Planting begins two to three weeks prior to the expected onset of the rains. This is either done by digging holes and placing seeds into the holes or by broadcasting the seeds. During discussions with a farmers group (the *Kamdini* Reflect Group) in 2006, farmers explained that they do early planting prior to the arrival of the rains so that the labour load is reduced when it is needed most. Planting certain crops before the rain begins is therefore regarded as a way of allocating scarce labour resources during high intensity periods. It is also a way of adapting to erratic rainfall conditions, especially during the second rain period, which is shorter than the first one.

Catching the first rain enables the crops to mature before the rainy season ends in late October or early November. Yet throughout the farming calendar, farmers are faced with labour constraints. Moreover, not all farmers have full control over key decisions such as when to put seeds in the soil or labour (quantity and quality). As a result, timing of planting is associated with the need to manage labour constraints. Planting before the rains therefore seems to be used as a coping strategy by farmers to maximise labour utilisation.

⁸¹ I agree with Hill (1986) that the division between food and cash crops is useless as well as a misleading term since all crops are apt to be sold for cash. But sometimes I use it to portray the gender division of farm labour in the farming households.

⁸² See section on household labour in chapter 5 of this thesis for CS1-JSBM case narratives.

*Crop maintenance*⁸³

Isunga farmers grow different crops in different fields. Maize and beans are often grown on more fertile fields, whereas groundnuts and vegetables are grown in fields near the homesteads. Most crops have to be planted quickly, because after the onset of the rains, the main fields that have already been planted with cereals must be cared for to prevent weeds from destroying the crops. This weeding takes place when the crops (plants) are about 15 – 20 centimetres above the ground, two to three weeks after the first rains. The weeding process involves digging the weeds from the crops using hand hoes or handpicked if weeding millet or sorghum *shambas*.

Farmers regard the process of weeding as the most crucial activity in the farming calendar. It is both labour-intensive and the ability to perform weeding in time is very important, as poor timing leads to poor crop yields. Weeding an acre maize/beans *shamba*, would take a hard-working person (6 man-hours per day) at least a week. In a situation where a household is in need of extra labour, the ability to mobilise external labour for weeding is crucial.

Crop harvesting and storage

Harvesting is usually done in phases. Some households begin by harvesting maize, beans and vegetables in the fields near their homesteads as early as late May for immediate consumption. This is when the hunger season starts affecting the villagers in earnest, and this early harvesting helps to ensure food availability before the start of the main harvesting period (June to mid-July). In 2007, the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) Co-ordinator for Masindi District mentioned that post-harvest losses are one of the many factors contributing to food insecurity in Mutunda sub-county (where Isunga is located). She stated that a considerable amount of the food crops produced is lost after being collected from the fields, and the losses are associated with processing and storing crops. Farmers are aware of such losses, and do their best to minimise these by using local storage techniques (*dero*). The capacity of this traditional storage varies from household to household, but on average, about 200 kilograms of grains can be stored in each. The seeds for the next season are mixed with ash to prevent pest attacks.

According to one elder, villagers in Isunga started trading in crops (with distant traders) in the late 1980s and early 1990s (during trade liberalisation), and the main crops sold and bought were maize, beans and cassava. Traders came from places as far as away as Bweyale, Masindi and Kampala. However, the traders were not popular since farmers felt cheated by them, as they offered

⁸³ Includes weeding, applying other inputs like manure, pesticides and fertilisers.

low prices for the crops. Nevertheless, many villagers now trade produce.⁸⁴ During maize, beans and groundnuts harvesting, traders even come from places as far away as Kampala to buy produce from Isunga. Interestingly, even traditionally low-value crops like lady finger (*okra*), pumpkins, *Boo* (cowpeas leaves) and other leafy vegetables that rural households used to consider as purely for domestic consumption, are now being sold at the weekly markets or on the roadside, indicating the village's involvement in the cash economy.

2.4 Concluding remarks

By focusing on aspects of geography and agro-climatic conditions, the history of labour in Bunyoro, culture and society, readers are better-placed to understand the interplay of factors that shape the complex nature of crop farming and agricultural labour relations in Isunga. Also, the historical and institutional perspectives outlined in the earlier parts of this chapter have important implications for the theoretical discussions in the next chapter.

Whilst identifying institutions indicates the nature of change that occurred in Uganda's agricultural sector, it also shows that in order to describe and explain Uganda's agricultural modernisation efforts, the relationships between various institutions and farmers (as implementers/beneficiaries of the modernisation drive) at the household and village (local) level are another vital aspect. Therefore, the various institutions used to manage labour in Isunga must be identified. The institutional analysis of the agricultural labour relationships has to be able to place existing institutions in relation to other influential institutions, and subsequently implicated in the changes and agricultural developments that occur. This is because institutions at each level of the Ugandan society play a critical role in shaping the socio-economic activities (e.g. farmers' labour behaviours and decisions). Thus, to understand why institutions are influential, it is necessary to flesh out and explain the underlying drivers of change that take place in a relationship. This has to be informed by a theoretically-based premise that can explain why institutions matter. This insight enables a more complete understanding of the influence of institutions on labour transactions that encompasses, which institutions matter most, how they matter and why they matter. The next chapter presents and discusses some theoretical issues linked to labour transactions, and thereafter a framework for analysing agricultural labour relationships in Isunga village will be proposed.

⁸⁴ C.f. Wiegratz (2010)

3 Theoretical considerations and analytical framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the theoretical concepts the study draws on. It begins by conceptualising institutions and then examines the theoretical issues relating to the role of institutions in labour transactions. This provides the basis to explore the empirical evidence of agricultural labour practices in the study area. The chapter addresses the following questions: (a) what are institutions (i.e. how they are identified, described and categorised), (b) why and how do institutions matter in agricultural labour transactions; (c) how do farmers choose institutions for handling labour dealings? Section 3.2 looks at how institutions are understood in different contexts and by different scholars. This is important for defining the scope of the concept of institution used in this study. Section 3.3 explores the role of institutions in labour transactions by reviewing their impact on transaction costs and relational property rights. The insight generated by these theories help to explain the significance of institutions in agricultural labour relationships in the study village. Section 3.4 presents the conceptual framework for analysing agricultural labour relations in Isunga, before ending with some concluding remarks in section 3.5.

3.2 Defining institutions

Although many scholars have written about institutions and their importance in economic development and other contexts, the definition of what institutions are remains contested (North, 2006; Williamson, 2000; North, 1990; Ostrom, 1986). Williamson (2000) noted that institutions mean different things in different contexts. Ostrom (1986) had earlier observed that,

“...the multiple referents for the term ‘institution’ indicate that multiple concepts need to be separately identified and treated as separate terms. We cannot communicate effectively if signs used by one scholar in a field have different referents than the same sign used by another scholar in the same field.” (ibid, 1986:4)

Thus, when adopting an institutional approach to study labour transactions at the village level, it is essential to ensure that the term ‘institution’ is properly understood and clearly defined. Therefore, this section seeks to understand what institutions are, as well as how they are identified and described. According to Williamson (2000), institutions are “diffuse, abstract and very complex” and North (1990:107) states that “we cannot see, feel, touch or even measure institutions...they are constructs of the human mind”. However, since the study of institutions is not the distinctive domain of any one particular discipline, my effort to understand what institutions are, why and how they matter in agricultural labour transactions, is based on rational choice economics, even though I am well aware that there are other perspectives. For example, Hall and Taylor (1996) identify three schools of thought of contemporary institutionalism in political science: the historical, the rational choice and the sociological. Each of these has particular aspects that distinguish them from others.⁸⁵ It is, however, beyond the scope of this study to review all these different perspectives. However, I will refer to them when necessary.

3.2.1 Conceptual challenges

While surveying the various uses of the term ‘institution’ it was evident that within economics and across other disciplines, the term is not consistently used. Different assumptions inform and underpin the different schools of thinking (Portes, 2010; Searle, 2005; Nelson & Sampat, 2001; Williamson, 2000; Hall & Taylor, 1996; North, 1990; Williamson, 1985). It also appears that the conceptual ambiguity has been affected by the way the study of institutions has embraced contributions from other disciplines. Different

⁸⁵ In the law and economics tradition, institutions and institutional analysis are primarily encompassed in the attention given to the economic consequences of laws and considerations of how legal systems affect socio-economic behaviour and the equitable administration of justice (see Bakibinga, 2001; Posner, 1998). Although scholars like Posner (1998) contend that legal acts considered good can be costly and economically adverse, lawyers have evidently acknowledged the economic implications of laws alongside economists growing acknowledgement of the need for and the broad nature of legally based governance. It is no longer simply assumed that the state on its own provides the governance framework essential for a ‘strong’ regime of economic activity. The behavioural and social consequences of laws, legal systems and practices have huge effects on activities in the economic sphere (ibid, 1998). This is particularly the case in relation to contract law and laws of liability (cf Bakibinga, 2001).

disciplines put different emphasis on what institutions comprise, thereby making it a concept that is easily misunderstood.⁸⁶ In any case, a review of relevant literature reveals that there is a wealth of terms to describe the various aspects, effects and types of institutions. Some of the terms include ‘rules of the game’ North (2006; 1990), collective action in control and expansion of individual actions (Ostrom, 2005), patterns of behaviour (Meagher, 2010; Portes, 2010) and conventions (Hodgson, 2006).

Others refer to institutions in terms of cognitive frameworks for interpreting sense data (Hodgson, 2006; Searle, 2005; Williamson, 1985), humanly devised constraints, informal constraints (sanctions, taboos, norms, customs, traditions and codes of conduct) (North, 2006; Pejovich, 2006; 1990; Elster, 1989), formal rules (constitutions, laws property rights) (North, 2006; Williamson, 2000; North, 1990), money, language (Searle, 2005; Williamson, 1985), contracts and agreements (Greif & Laitin, 2004; Greif, 1994; Williamson, 1985), organisations (Schmid, 2004; World Bank, 2002), systems of knowledge belief and moral authority (Scott, 2001), markets (World Bank, 2002), government and law (Dixit, 2009). But what is the reason for all these different views of institutions? The section below explores the character and roles of institutions, and how they are manifested, to provide a robust definition of institutions. Drawing from the literature and nature of data collected from the fieldwork, the discussion is centred on: (a) institutions as rules, and (b) the social and relational nature of institutions.

Institutions as rules

The rule nature of institutions is often represented by North’s description of institutions as “the rules of the game in a society” or more formally, “the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction” encompassing formal rules and informal constraints (North, 1990:3). Thus,

“...institutions consist of a set of constraints on behaviour in the form of rules and regulations; a set of procedures to detect deviations from the rules and regulations...a set of moral, ethical behavioural norms which define the contours that constrain the way in which the rules and regulations are specified and enforcement is carried out.” (North, 1991:204)

North’s definition above not only includes rules and regulations, but also social norms and all other constraints imposed by a society’s arrangement of beliefs and values. In his view, institutions consist of formal rules and informal constraints and the enforcement characteristics of both. These constraints

⁸⁶ See Schmidt (2010), Raitio (2008), Kasozi (2004) and Reich (2000) for similar discussions.

include what individuals are forbidden from doing, or under what conditions certain individuals are permitted to undertake certain activities (North, 2006; 1990). That is, institutions are the frameworks within which human interactions take place. Such an institutional framework does not only set the costs and consequences of certain conduct in society, but also establishes punishments when rules are violated. Based on North's approach, institutions are clearly distinguished as the 'rules of the game', while organisations (including the individuals that make up the organisations) are 'the players of the game'. He writes,

“...what must be clearly differentiated are the rules from the players. The purpose of the rules is to define the way the game is played. But the objective of the team within that set of rules is to win the game by a combination of skills, strategy and coordination; by fair and sometimes by foul means. Modelling the strategies and skills of the team as it develops is a separate process from modelling the creation, evolution, and consequences of the rules.” (ibid,1990:4)

From North's perspective, banks, for example, are organisations, while laws, regulations and other rules relating to the financial system are seen as institutions; churches are organisations, but religions are institutions (North, 2006; 1990). Organisations are made up of groups of individuals held together by some common objectives. These organisations have their particular purposes and through their members, they develop specific strategies to achieve them. Different organisations may have different objectives: political parties strive to win elections, universities want to educate students, firms want to maximise profits and households seek to fulfil basic needs. However, the ultimate objective is survival, because all organisations live in a world of scarcity and hence competition.

North's approach is shared by many scholars, including Williamson & Kerekes (2011), Alexander (2005) and Hall & Soskice (2001) who also distinguish institutions from organisations. Hall & Soskice (2001) describe institutions as,

“... a set of rules, formal or informal, that actors generally follow, whether for normative, cognitive, or material reasons, and organisations as durable entities with formally recognized members, whose rules also contribute to the institutions of the political economy.” (ibid, 2001:8-9)

Still, the difference between institutions and organisations is not clear. While institutions and organisations are discrete, they are also interdependent. The rules and norms form the institutional framework within which organisations exist, operate, and interact with one another to achieve their potential outcomes; and

the existence and development of an organisation is influenced by the institutional framework. So, the incentives inbuilt in the institutional framework affect organisations' decisions and their level of investment in acquiring skills and knowledge in order to achieve their objectives (North, 1990). He wrote, "...organisations influence how the institutional framework evolves" (ibid, 1990:5). That is, organisations can also act as rule-makers or agents of institutional change, meaning that individuals and organisations may design or create their own rules, or follow rules developed or designed by others.

But North's (2006; 1994; 1991; 1990) rule approach is challenged by other scholars (Portes, 2010; Hodgson, 2006). For example, Hodgson (2006) criticises North (1990) for not referring to the existence of informal institutions, nor making a clear distinction between formal and informal rules.⁸⁷ Instead, he sees institutions as social rule systems that include and involve the formal, codified and enforceable rules, as well as the informal norms of behaviours and social conventions (cf Hodgson, 2006:3). As a social rule system, it is apparent that the force to structure and constrain comes as much from the formally specified as well as other implicit aspects that develop and reinforce each other over time and become culturally enforced.⁸⁸ Also, institutions can vary considerably - from the highly codified, often written and specific (a legal system of rules) to orally transmitted and unrecorded forms. While some are unified and purposeful, such as established markets and organisations, others may be diffuse and pervasive, as for example behavioural codes. Yet in all cases, the rule perspective is undeniable.

Elinor Ostrom (2005; 1986) shares North's view. She also identifies institutions with 'rules' that guide and constrain repetitive, interdependent relationships and give people predictable prescriptions for what is required, permitted or prohibited in their interactions (ibid,2005; 1986). She underscores that an institution, as a rule, must consist of the rule component and, the enforcement component. The enforcement component lays the foundations for violations of rules to be punished, thus validating the institution (Ostrom, 1986).⁸⁹ In this sense, therefore, formal laws should not be considered institutions if they are not enforced. She writes, that "enforcement is necessary for a law to become a rule" (ibid,1986:6). Clague (2003; 1997) also takes

⁸⁷ See also Portes (2010:48-50) for bashing of *Northian* new institutionalism. He strongly objects to the lumping of norms, values et cetera into institutions.

⁸⁸ Unlike North (1990), Hodgson (2006) points to the rule-like character of norms (something North sees as informal constraints). In this way, one could argue that Hodgson (2006) establishes a much broader description and scope of institutions and their effect on human beings.

⁸⁹ In Ostrom's (1996) view, institutions or rules may be enforced by "participants, who call rule infraction to one's attention, or by specialists (referees or public officials) who monitor performance".

Ostrom's (1986) line, arguing that for rules to be seen as institutions, there must be some degree of obedience; and if the rules are ignored, then they do not qualify to be referred to as institutions. But what precisely are rules?

Advancing a grammar of institutions, Crawford and Ostrom (in Ostrom, 2005: Chapter 5) suggest the differentiation of rules, norms and shared strategies. They suggest that this differentiation can be made on the basis of: (a) the value/attributes of participants in the situation in question; (b) what is permitted, obliged or forbidden; (c) specific actions or outcomes that are permitted, obliged or forbidden; (d) conditions under which such actions or outcomes are permitted, obliged or forbidden; and (e) the sanctions that apply if the requirement is contravened. Rules therefore define what specific actions and outcomes are permitted, obliged or forbidden, under what conditions, as well as the sanctions that apply if the rule is breached.

Norms on the other hand, define what specific actions and outcomes are permitted or forbidden under what conditions, but the sanction is not specified. However, this does not mean that norms do not carry sanctions, since the shared idea of what is permitted or forbidden creates the shared understanding that breaching the norm is contrary to the expected shared behaviour, and thus unacceptable and subject to punishment. On this basis, I argue that norms are different from rules, but in practice norms can take on a rule-like nature.⁹⁰

Institutions as enabling devices

In contrast with definitions that regard institutions as constraints, Chang & Evans (2000) look at institutions as enabling devices. They write,

“...we need to employ a different rhetoric, namely, seeing institutions as ‘enabling’ devices rather than constraints. This is of course not to say that institutions do not impose constraints. Just about all ‘enabling’ institutions involve constraints on some types of behaviour by some people. In many cases that involve a collective action problem, these constraints are ‘general’ constraints that apply to everyone. In these cases, we are putting constraints on everyone’s behaviour so that we can collectively do more things. However, in other cases, enabling of some people means constraining others” (ibid, 2000: 8)

Even though Chang & Evans (2000) view institutions as devices that enable the realisation of economic goals, it should nonetheless be stressed that shifting the rhetoric to the ‘enabling’ dimension of institutions from their ‘constraining’ dimension does not mean that the constraining nature of institutions is negative and should be ignored. No conflict exists in saying that institutions are both constraining and enabling. These are simply different ways of looking at the

⁹⁰ See norms and conventions below.

same institution and, in a way, this strengthens North's (1990) position that institutions provide patterns that regulate people's or society's behaviours. Their presence reduces uncertainty by providing a structure to everyday life; hence institutional constraints prohibit certain behaviours, whilst enabling others.

The World Bank (2002) too, defines institutions as the rules and organisations that facilitate the coordination of human behaviour. These rules are both formal (regulations, laws, and constitutions) and informal (from norms to traditions).⁹¹ The World Bank (2002) identifies the key function of institutions as: (i) to pick up signals about needs and problems; (ii) to balance interests by negotiating change, forging agreements by avoiding conflicts; and (iii) to execute and implement solutions by following through on agreements. Therefore, in societies with well-functioning institutions, individuals can enter into a number of complex agreements and exchanges with low transaction costs. This creates an environment that enables members of these societies to work together to realise their joint potential (ibid, 2002). In short, the World Bank (2002) definition focuses on the enabling aspects of institutions, and it is viewed as both rules and organisations.

The social and relational nature of institutions

Scholars such as Granovetter (1992; 1985), Landa (1994), Uzzi (1997), Searle (2005) and Portes (2010) understand institutions as a unique social structure with the potential to change people's preferences and purposes in life. Human beings are biological and social beings, who respond to their environment on the basis of their physical and biological needs, as well as their social and relational realities. Therefore, it is possible to see individuals and social structures co-evolving at different levels of society, thus potentially creating new and different social structures. Institutions 'enable', and they are the basis of both socio-economic change and social continuity. According to Landa (1994), to understand the relationship between human beings and their social environment, it is crucial to appreciate that individuals are not independent actors who are completely isolated and uninfluenced in the way they make sense of, and act, in their surroundings (cf Meagher, 2010).

Reflecting on the tendency to over-socialize or under-socialize the individual, Granovetter (1985) suggests that in both situations, the tendency is to assume the atomisation of individuals in their relationship with others, and in their social responses and actions. Granovetter argues for a more fruitful analysis that avoids atomisation and recognises instead that,

⁹¹ To the World Bank, organisations include government agencies, parliament, firms, police and court.

“...actors do not believe or decide as atoms outside a social context, nor do they adhere strictly to a script written by the particular intersection of social categories they happen to occupy. Their attempts at purposive actions are embedded in concrete on going systems of social relationships” (Granovetter, 1985:487)

This notion of embeddedness highlights the importance of personal relations and structures, and how they generate the trust needed for beliefs to influence behaviour and to discourage violation of commitment, customs, rules or norms.⁹² Granovetter (1985) also notes that standard economic analysis ignores past relations of individual interactions, which is critical to understanding the nature of existing socio-economic behaviour. Moreover, people learn from each other and from the environment they live in, and to paraphrase Searle (2005), there are ‘never-ending’ loops of feedback, conscious and unconscious reinforcement, as well as evaluation and action. One outstanding result of this behaviour is that the valuation of outcomes does not remain the same over time, but depends on beliefs and habitual patterns of behaviour.

Even Tuomela’s (2003) conception of norms and rules, and view of collective intentionality highlights the central role and importance of acquired beliefs. By seeing norms as involving attribution of intent to the group, with individuals believing that the intent they hold is held in common with the rest of the group, Tuomela (2003) views beliefs as critical to the establishment of rules and norms.⁹³ A norm results in regularised behaviour that is repeated and habitual, because there are mutually held beliefs that relate to the intentions and expectations of all members of a particular society.⁹⁴ For this reason, institutions rely on the rules that are embedded in shared habits of thoughts and behaviours, and can also be seen as emergent social structures, based on commonly held patterns of social behaviour (Granovetter, 2005). The involvement of beliefs and habits in the development of patterns of behaviour is important, and contributes to understanding the critical interactions between human beings.⁹⁵ Habits are implicated in relation to rules, norms and customs in that they help to constitute and sustain them. It is through habits that individuals carry the marks of their unique history (Shipton, 2007; Donham, 1999).

Thus far, institutions have been shown to have both enabling and constraining dimensions. Although institutions may, at an individual level, appear to impose constraints, at a collective (village) level, the community may be better off as a whole if people are constrained by rules than if they are not

⁹² See discussions about morality and affection below.

⁹³ C.f. Ostrom’s (2005) reasoning above.

⁹⁴ This came out very clearly in Donham’s (1999; 1981) work in Ethiopia.

⁹⁵ Habits are distinct from behaviours and should not be equated to behaviours.

(Clague, 2003; Burki & Perry, 1998). Therefore, institutions facilitate and liberate the community rather than constrain it.⁹⁶ Yet institutions that impose constraints on individuals are not always good for society. Sometimes complicated regulations, procedures and/or weak enforcement mechanisms can impose high transaction costs, which may undermine incentives to invest in a particular activity or participate fully in economic exchanges (Havnevik *et al.*, 2007; Burki & Perry, 1998). Institutions may constrain or enable a society, depending on the quality of institutions.

3.2.2 Definition of institutions used in the study

Whilst there are varied terms and notions of institutions in the social sciences, there are also some key features that have to be included in any robust definition of institutions. Thus, the definition used in this thesis draws on the core ideas which reflect: (a) the structuring of human relationships and interactions, (b) the effects of rules on human activities and behaviour, and (c) constraint and enablement of human behaviour. Hence, the definition of institutions used in this thesis is:

Institutions are the socially established norms and rules that govern social interactions, with both enabling and constraining implications for individual freedom of action.

The definition is broad and includes inter/intra households transacting, the legal and regulatory framework, as well as socio-cultural and cognitive processes, which provide a norm structure to guide people's interactions. The definition is not dissimilar to North's (1990) perspective. Thus by adopting the 'rule approach', the study also differentiates institutions from organisations (game players). In order to take advantage of both formal rules and informal constraints and to "win the game", farmers in Isunga, as the "players of the game of labour transactions or sharing" employs various strategies, acquire skills and adopt certain behaviours.⁹⁷ The discussion now turns to the key concepts applied in this study of labour institutions: (a) transaction costs, (b) relational property rights, and (c) social embeddedness. It is very much guided by the nature of data and information gathered in Isunga.

⁹⁶ Note that this is an empirical issue that is context dependent

⁹⁷ These may include giving bribes, making threats or telling lies.

3.3 Role of institutions in labour transactions

This section addresses the theoretical question of why and how institutions matter in labour transactions, by looking at the notion of transaction costs, which is a key concept underlying property rights and relational contracting. I will then look at the roles of some of the institutions that are embedded in social norms and networks in transactional relationships. They are analysed with reference to well-defined concepts such as ‘bounded rationality’ and ‘opportunism’ (Furubotn & Richter, 2005; Williamson, 1985).

3.3.1 Transaction costs

Farmers in Isunga are both social actors and economic agents. When they sell or share their labour, they carefully identify whom they need to sell it to, negotiate and reach agreements with, and monitor work and settle labour disputes with as necessary. This is a complex process because transactional relationships do not operate in a vacuum. They require institutions and rules to coordinate them, and the process is not frictionless. They are characterised by uncertainty, risks and disparities in how the persons involved perceive each other’s realities. As a result, significant transaction costs can arise in identifying, conducting and enforcing various labour dealings.

However, there are different views on the nature and sources of transaction costs. Coase (1960) views transaction costs as the cost of carrying out a transaction by means of an exchange or in the open market.⁹⁸ North (1990) agrees, but stresses that the,

“...costliness of information is the key to the costs of transacting, which consist of the costs of measuring the valuable attributes of what is being exchanged and the costs of protecting rights and policing and enforcing agreements”.

Transactions costs cover a wide variety of costs, largely associated with the use of time, which are normally disregarded in standard economic analysis. They include search and information costs, bargaining and decision-making costs, and policing and enforcement costs.

Every transaction involves a contract, and the costs of preparing contracts (search and information costs) include the costs that may arise through

⁹⁸ Apart from market transaction costs, there exist non-market transaction costs, which do not arise out of transactions between or among actors in the market. They are costs associated with activities within a household or between households and the government. Furubotn and Richter (2005) also differentiate market transaction costs from managerial transaction costs (costs of exercising the right to give orders within a firm), and political transaction costs (costs of running and adjusting of the institutional framework of a polity) are also included in their analysis.

advertising, visiting prospective customers and so on. They also include the costs of communication among the prospective labour recipients or labour providers, such as mobile telephone expenses and unscheduled visits. Other costs relate to gathering information on wages, and the nature of work. There are also costs of concluding contracts (costs of bargaining and decision-making). Bargaining costs are incurred during negotiations over contractual provisions. In addition to time, there may even be financial costs to cover legal advice, for example. These costs may vary depending on the complexity of such contracts. Decision-making costs include making gathered information usable, reaching decisions within groups and so on. The costs of enforcing contractual obligations are associated with monitoring work, agreed delivery times and wages, for example. The costs involved in protecting rights and enforcing contractual provisions are also included in this category.⁹⁹

It is apparent that not all transaction costs occur at the point of labour transaction or exchange. Some costs occur before the exchange; for example, gathering information about potential labour service suppliers or recipients. Costs may also be incurred after agreements have been reached, and these may include the cost of monitoring performance, inspecting quality, obtaining payments and enforcing contracts (North, 1991; 1990). As argued by numerous scholars, neoclassical economic theory's ideal world of costless information does not exist, since transaction costs arise due to imperfect and costly information (Furubotn & Richter, 2005; Allen, 2000; North, 1990; Williamson, 1985). North (1990:27) writes that "the costliness of information is the key to the costs of transacting". Williamson (1985:44) also claims that imperfect information acknowledges the limitation on the competence of economic actors on the one hand, and "opportunism that substitutes subtle for simple self-interest seeking" on the other.¹⁰⁰

The ideas of bounded rationality and opportunism

In contrast to neoclassical economists who view the decision-maker as a perfectly rational individual who acts on calculated rationality, new institutionalists assume a situation of bounded rationality where decision-makers are not omniscient and have real difficulties in processing information.¹⁰¹ It involves cognitive and perceptive limitations on the one hand and language limitations on the other.¹⁰² Therefore, although an individual is rational, his

⁹⁹ See Furubotn & Richter (2005) for elaborate discussion on the topical issues.

¹⁰⁰ See a note on opportunism below.

¹⁰¹ Rationality means that individuals, when confronted with real choices in exchange, will choose "more" rather than "less" (see Williamson 1985).

¹⁰² North (2006), Hodgson (2006), Searle (2005) and Williamson, (1985)

rationality is limited by his neurophysiologic ability to receive, store, retrieve, and process information, as well as by his linguistic ability to make knowledge or feelings understood by others (Searle, 2005; Williamson, 1985). Furubotn & Richter (2005) share this view:

“...because of their human limitations, their restricted knowledge, and their tendency to make errors, real-world decision makers will always function inefficiently relative to the hypothetical decision makers of neoclassical theory” (ibid, 2005:39).

This limitation of human beings poses a problem in an environment characterised by risk and uncertainty since transaction costs will arise. Moreover, human beings often display opportunistic behaviour, even though not all individuals are continuously opportunistic (Williamson, 1985). Such behaviour contributes to an increase in transaction costs.

Opportunism, according to Williamson (1985:47) means “self-interest seeking with guile”. It is a sort of unconstrained moral consideration and includes lying, stealing and cheating. Opportunism arises due to asymmetric information, which occurs when a person possesses information that is not accessible to the other (Furubotn & Richter, 2005; Williamson, 1985). In other words, opportunism is used, not in a moral sense, but as a way of obtaining advantages, because of the information available to an individual. Williamson (1985) sees parties involved in transactions as ‘contractual men’ who are aware of their conditions of bounded rationality.¹⁰³ Thus, when establishing agreements, they attempt to take advantage of their information and resources to satisfy their own interests. As a ‘contractual man’ therefore, an individual may exhibit opportunistic behaviour by hiding or obstructing access to some information or by being dishonest in order to maximize gains from an agreement. But how are transaction costs measured?

In empirical studies, a direct measurement of transaction costs assesses the economic value of resources and time used in locating trading partners and executing transactions (Wang, 2003; Allen, 2000; Williamson, 1998; Shelanski & Klein, 1995). Another common measurement of transaction costs is the difference between the prices paid by the buyer and received by the seller (Furubotn & Richter, 2005). Some studies focus more on secondary costs than direct costs per se. For example, Williamson (1998) is primarily interested in the secondary cost of negotiation and enforcement (i.e. the cost of participating and reducing the cost of negotiation and enforcement). Yet some studies find

¹⁰³ The term ‘man’ is borrowed directly from Williamson.

that transaction costs can be agent-specific (i.e. the identity of the transactor matters for the cost of conducting transactions).¹⁰⁴

This thesis considers both the agent-specific and Williamsonian transaction cost research perspective, since transaction costs provide the key to understanding types of agricultural labour organisations in Isunga as well as farmers' contractual labour arrangements. What is important though is the cost of conducting transactions in one organisational or contractual form relative to the others. Therefore, what matters are not the absolute transaction costs, but the relative ranking of transaction costs associated with different organisational or contractual choices (Benham & Benham, 2000). Hence, labour transaction costs are thus not directly measured; instead, the proxies discussed below (transaction frequency, level of dependency and degree of uncertainty) are used, since these are seen to critically affect the cost of labour transactions. Understanding the relationship between the chosen proxy and organisational governance makes the point that economising on transaction costs is the unifying logic behind various contractual arrangements of production and exchanges (Williamson, 1998; 1985; 1981). This avoids the problematic exercise of quantifying the actual level of labour transaction costs.

In this thesis, a labour transaction is seen to be an agreement between the provider and the recipient of labour. Therefore, with this definition, a transaction includes the labour agreement itself, the actions of carrying out the agreement and all situations that change the agreements and/or the actions of carrying out the agreement. Two proxies are used to measure labour transaction costs: (a) frequency with which the transaction occurs and level of dependency, and (b) the degree of uncertainty about the future and about other parties' actions. These proxies matter for the preferred institutions' governance (Williamson, 1998).¹⁰⁵

Frequency of transactions and level of dependency

The frequency of transactions refers to the length of the transactional relationship between the parties involved. According to Williamson (1998;

¹⁰⁴ For example, see Portes (2010), Landa (1999; 1994), Granovetter (2005; 1992; 1985), Coleman (1988).

¹⁰⁵ Following Williamson (1998), asset specificity is particularly important and probably the most difficult to measure. Asset-specificity refers to how specific the good or service to be exchanged is, and Williamson (1985) defines it as, "...*durable investments that are undertaken in support of particular transactions, the opportunity cost of which investments is much lower in best alternative uses or by alternative users should the original transaction be prematurely terminated.*" (ibid, 1985:55). However, its relevance in my study of labour dealings in rain fed farming system is not much. I omit it, but recognises the contribution made by Williamson (1998) on the importance of asset specificity in transaction costs economics.

1985), transaction contracts in short-term relationships are obvious and simple. There is little dependency between the parties and they tend to rely on competition as an enforcement mechanism or as a means of settling disagreements, since they can turn to alternative sources if they are dissatisfied. But when the length of contractual relationships increases, the frequency of transactions also increases, and the parties become familiar with each other's norms and backgrounds; to build up trust, the use of informal institutions may be preferable (ibid, 1985; Macaulay, 1963).¹⁰⁶ Private or informal arrangements may be chosen to ensure the completion of transactions rather than judicial systems. Zenger et al., (2002) support the view outlined above. They contend that the use of formal institutions may be preferable in new or non-recurring relationships, since non-repeated interactions provide neither a 'shadow of the future' increasing individuals' perceived benefits from cooperation nor a 'shadow of the past' promoting the gradual development of relational norms and trust (ibid, 2002).

Costs of using institutions for handling labour dealings

Choosing to use an institution to handle labour dealings (i.e. the contracting and enforcement mechanism) also depends on the cost of using it. The parties concerned do not focus only on the costs that are incurred to get an agreement enforced, but also on transaction costs of getting the work done. Thus, in a transaction, actors are confronted with a variety of potential costs.¹⁰⁷ As alluded to earlier, these costs can arise before, during, and even after transactions have taken place. According to transaction cost theory, the institutional environment can affect these costs. In this sense, the function of institutions is to influence actors' decisions on how to use certain institutions in a given context. However, rational behaviour would imply that a more efficient institution (i.e. with lower costs) should be preferable to a less efficient one, all other things being equal (Coase, 1960).

Kähkönen & Meagher (1998), Macaulay (1963) and Telser (1980b) amongst others, maintain that parties to a transaction would not use legal procedures to settle disputes in court if they involve high costs. They can also use a combination of both if such action does not incur high costs (ibid, 1998). It appears that whenever contracts are not costly, individuals are tempted to use

¹⁰⁶ Landa (1994) adds that members of close knit groups also create complex ties that enable them to police their bargains, since members are expected to continue to interact with one another.

¹⁰⁷ The costs of who it is that one wishes to deal with, to inform people that one wishes to deal and on what terms, to conduct negotiations leading up to a bargain, to draw up a contract, to undertake the inspection needed to make sure that terms of contracts are being observed, and so on (see Coase, 1960:15).

these instruments even when informal agreements alone are self-enforcing, as argued by Klein & Shelanski (1996) and Schotter (1981).

High transaction costs associated with formal institutions, for example, may deter parties from using them to carry out transactions. High direct costs of formal institutions (in terms of time and money) are, among other things, the results of ineffective legal systems. Allen (2000) claims that the more efficient the legal system, the lower the costs of enforcement. But with an ineffective legal system, reliance on informal ways to carry out transactions may be more appropriate to minimise transaction costs (cf Khadiagala, 2001). Johnson et al. (2002) and Rodrik (2008) also contend that ambiguity of laws and regulatory procedures, and inadequate legal support in the enforcement of contracts lead economic actors to place more emphasis on private ordering procedures and informal mechanisms to settle disputes. This is an important point, which is similar to Telser's (1980b) earlier assertion that reliance on self-enforcing agreements by the parties to a transaction can be attributed to the fact that it is costly to use the assistance of third parties, such as the courts to enforce contracts and to assess damages when they are breached.¹⁰⁸

Beckmann and Boger (2004) add that using court mechanisms to enforce transactional relationships tends to incur indirect costs. Such costs are associated with the 'termination' of a valuable relationship and the 'damage' of reputations in business or social networks. Williamson (1985) makes the following observations about the first type of indirect costs,

“...one important purposive difference in arbitration and litigation...is that, whereas continuity (at least completion of the contract) is presumed under the arbitration machinery, that presumption is much weaker when litigation is employed” (1985:71).

“...litigation is strictly for settling claims; concentrated efforts to sustain the relation are not made, because the relation is not independently valued” (ibid, 1985:74).

Williamson (1985) thus seems to claim that the relationship between transaction partners is more likely to end from the moment when they begin to use litigation to assist with transactions. Thus, litigation may be used only when the relation does not matter, since the use of litigation as a method of contract enforcement

¹⁰⁸ Consistent with the above views, Fafchamps and Minten (2001) define at least four economic factors which make legal enforcement mechanisms costly and less preferred: (i) the actual cost of legal action, including lawyers' fees, bribes to agents of authority, and the opportunity cost of time, (ii) the expected time delay before compensation is received, (iii) the uncertainty surrounding the level of compensation, and (vi) fear of reprisal from the other party.

may imply the termination of a relationship. If the relationship has no value, then indirect costs associated with the abolition of the relationship do not occur. On the other hand, if the relationship between transacting parties is valuable, then breaking this relationship will incur indirect costs such as the cost of searching for new partners (Beckmann & Boger, 2004). The effect of indirect costs is obvious when actors are embedded in business or social networks since the use of courts damages the reputation of the litigating partner. The principal (or lead claimant) may decide to take a less severe enforcement response with a partner that is embedded in a dense network, and the potential costs of retaliation are likely to mitigate potential benefits of a more severe enforcement response (Beckmann & Boger, 2004). How well institutions solve the problems of coordination and production is determined by the motivations of the actors, the complexity of the environment, and of course the ability of the players to decipher and order the environment, what North (1990) would call ‘measurement and enforcement costs’.

This brings us to another important component of transaction costs, namely the issue of property rights in labour transactions. Property rights are highly robust institutions that support labour transactions. However, the avenues through which property rights in agricultural labour transactions are achieved are not adequately identified. This thesis therefore seeks to investigate the effects of relational contract enforcements on labour transactions.

3.3.2 Relational property rights

According to Furubotn & Richter (2005), property rights are sanctioned ownership rights in material and immaterial things, or claims from contractual or non-contractual obligations. The prevailing system of property rights in a society can be described as the set of economic and social relations defining the position of each individual with respect to the utilisation of scarce resources (including agricultural labour). Furubotn & Richter (2005) divide property rights into two categories: absolute and relational property rights. The former refer not only to property rights in terms of tangible assets (e.g. land or houses), but also intangibles such as copyrights and patents. The latter can result from freely concluded contracts. They comprise, “contractual property rights such as credit-debt or purchase-sale relations and legally imposed obligations” (ibid, 2005:82). The main difference between the two is that absolute property rights are “directed against all others”, while relational property rights “give the owner a power which he can exercise only against one or more determined persons” (ibid, 2005:77). Thus contractual rights are a component of property rights.

Neoclassical economics considers private property rights as the most efficient system of resource allocation (Furubotn & Richter, 2005; Coase, 1960). Coase (1960) claims that only private property rights will further the markets and economic efficiency, thus reducing governmental involvement. However, I find Coase's property rights approach problematic, because it assumes that the main driving force behind institutional change is the search for an efficient use of property rights. It is empirically incorrect to base a theory only on the survival of certain institutional forms and consider them to be the most efficient.

This thesis focuses on relational property rights, because it stresses, amongst other things, the functions and dysfunctions of using contracts to solve transaction problems. The term 'contract' is here used to refer to plans for conducting labour transactions.¹⁰⁹ A contract involves the elements of rational planning of transactions, with careful provision for future unforeseen events and the existence of, or use of actual legal sanctions to encourage performance of labour transactions, or to compensate for non-performance. Thus, the plans for conducting transactions may be used or exist to create various labour relationships, or solve problems that arise during such relationships.¹¹⁰ This is similar to North's (1990) view on institutions as rules that impinge on behaviour by enabling or constraining human beings. The fairness and predictability of contract enforcement mechanisms ties in with the definition above.

Fairness and predictability of enforcement mechanisms

The fairness and the predictability of the outcome of contract enforcement mechanisms affect the choices and use of institutional types (Rodrik, 2008; Johnson *et al.*, 2002; Kähkönen & Meagher, 1998). According to Kähkönen and Meagher (1998), transaction actors may choose courts as an enforcement mechanism when the transaction agreement (contract) is well written. They argue that written and less complex contracts are more easily enforceable than oral, complex and non-standardised ones. They also postulate that, although transaction agreements need not be written down or witnessed by a third party, it is clearly difficult to enforce them if they are not. If this condition is not met or poorly met, those involved may prefer informal mechanisms. Even so, when written agreements are imperfect and incomplete, the actors involved may choose informal enforcement mechanisms. The reason is that a court does not usually enforce unwritten terms or, if it does, then the amount of discretion by the court in relation to ambiguous unwritten contractual terms is limited

¹⁰⁹ I do not use it to refer to a writing recording an agreement.

¹¹⁰ C.f. Furubotn & Richter (2005), Williamson (1985).

(Kähkönen & Meagher, 1998; 1997). Also, actors may not choose litigation through courts as a way of dispute resolution if decisions made by the courts are not based on clear legal criteria and/or judges are incompetent, since this does not ensure a fair and predictable outcome (ibid, 1998). However, when a country's laws, regulations and formal enforcements are weak and ambiguous, citizens may pay more attention to social institutions and informal mechanisms.

In addition to their role in determining transaction costs, institutions also have a role in defining and protecting relational contracts. They determine who gets what and when (Furubotn & Richter, 2005; Johnson *et al.*, 2002). Hence, the extent to which contractual rights are protected affects individuals' incentives to take actions and cooperate, potentially influencing the effective use of labour power during crop farming. According to property rights theory though, incentives are set optimally when the property rights are clearly specified.¹¹¹ Pejovich (2006) notes that people take better care of a house if they own it rather than they rent, and they are more likely to check and add oil to their own car than a rental car. Even so, individuals' incentives are determined by both how the definition of property rights is specified on paper and how property rights are protected in practice. If the state is weak, for example, parties may seek protection elsewhere (Wood, 2004). So the definition, protection and enforcement elements of property rights are vital in discussions about labour transaction.

As noted by Wood (2004), it is not enough to stress the significance of the existence of property rights since problems can arise if they are weak. Ostrom (2005) also argues that property rights must be enforceable to achieve the desired effects.¹¹² So, institutions exist not only to define, but also to protect contractual rights. The World Bank (2002) asserts that one of the main roles of institutions in market transactions is to reduce the potential for disputes and help enforce contracts, arguing that when property rights and contracts are clearly defined and effectively enforced, then transactions costs will be reduced. But how does this work in environments where kinship/ethnic status, trust and reputation and/or social norms influence individuals' behaviours more? The section below attempts to answer to this question.

3.3.3 Social embeddedness

In theory, institutions arise to reduce transaction costs and facilitate interactions and cooperation in an economy. In practice though, institutions can generate labour transaction costs as will be explained shortly. In that respect,

¹¹¹ See Furubotn & Richter (2005) for details.

¹¹² C.f. Ostrom (2005)

institutions can contribute to high or low labour transactions costs, and effectively or ineffectively protect contractual rights. For example, a formal institution (e.g. contract law) made and enforced by government can raise or lower transaction costs through the definition and enforcement of property rights, through regulations, the level of corruption in society and/or time-consuming visits to government offices (Meagher, 2010; Brautigam, 1997). Even institutions that are embedded in social norms and networks (ethnic identity, moral and affection, trust and reputation) can raise or lower labour transaction costs through the enforcement of relational property rights. Rodrik (2008), Granovetter (2005; 1992) and Brautigam (1997) have all shown that institutions embedded in social norms reduce risks and uncertainty in transaction relationships, and also reduce the need for transaction costs linked to monitoring, research and gathering information (hence lower costs).

When transactions are rooted in social networks

In an explanation of the predominance of relational contracting among a group of New York clothing merchants, Uzzi (1997) suggests that apart from risk-sharing, the preference for relational contracting and resulting long-term personal links of trust, loyalty and benevolence among actors have historical, social and cultural roots. Hence, actors feel more comfortable in high-trust and friendly 'give-and-take' relations in which both sides recognise that they also have some stake one another's satisfaction other than in adversarial bargaining relationships. This is the opposite of Williamson's (1985) approach to contracting, where he argues that the high risks associated with idiosyncratic goods and services to be transacted, and the pressure for continuity of the relationship usually lead to reliance on relational contracts.

In fact, Granovetter's (2005; 1992; 1985) embedded argument, described in Section 3.2, is a direct challenge to Williamson's (1985; 1981) approach discussed above. Granovetter's (1985) states that transactions are embedded in social networks, and that the trust generated by personal interactions is helpful in discouraging wrongful acts. He accuses Williamson (1981) for placing undue emphasis on legislative control in markets and the control of authority in hierarchical structures, while also employing an under socialised assumption of 'atomised' actors. Yet within markets and hierarchies alike, actors' interactions in a relationship network exist and serve as an important form of malfeasance control (Granovetter, 1985). With good will or 'good' relational contracts, close supervision and heavy enforcement by the authorities becomes redundant. Moreover, in some cultural contexts (including Isunga), goodwill is vital for economic exchanges, because actors are aware that transactions without a trust relationship may involve extremely high costs (cf Landa, 1994).

As suggested by Williamson (1998; 1985), the search for information is a major component of transaction costs, and quite correctly, a lack of it may lead to opportunistic behaviour. While studying labour markets in the United States, Granovetter (1992) also observed that a “clue in how to do the work” makes a significant part of workers’ performance, and it is generally exchanged in an informal contact network (ibid,1992:251-252). This reasoning is supported by Landa (1994), who argues that whenever economic agents lack adequate information, the search for information represents a significant portion of operational costs, and a trust relationship would be valuable in reducing costs since it is always a primary source of reliable and abundant information.

The function of trust in reducing transaction costs is clear, both in terms of controlling opportunistic behaviour and searching for information, but to view the two terms as substitutes for one another would be incorrect. Trust is necessary to transactions in different ways (see below), and Granovetter (1985:503) warns of taking a “Panglossian view” as done by Williamson (1981). Simply focusing on institutional arrangements in either markets or in hierarchies is not enough to ensure smooth transactions. Some ‘lubricant’ in the interface of human interactions is always needed. However, how different social relations achieve this in rain fed smallholder farming systems is still not fully explored or understood. Thus, by adapting Granovetter’s (1985) embedded argument, this thesis is better placed to examine (and explain) the role of specific socio-cultural factors in labour transactions in Isunga.

Trust and labour transactions

Trust is a key ingredient in the institutional infrastructure of agricultural labour transactions. For example, trust allows for efficient transactions in the face of uncertainty and risks, and constrains opportunistic behaviour. Also, trust in institutions reduces the costs of rule-enforcement and supports collective action (Landa, 1994; North, 1990; Williamson, 1981). I have chosen to focus on trust because of its importance for labour dealings under conditions of uncertainty (due to seasonality and/or contract ambiguity) and risk of opportunism.

Coleman (1988) defines trust as a belief that the other agents would act in a predictable way and fulfil their obligations without special sanctions. This reveals that trusting relationships develop either through the predictable behaviour of the other actors or through mutual obligations to follow accepted conventions, which are voluntarily undertaken. This thesis uses Rose-Ackerman’s approach, which associates trust with social proximity in the sense of sharing the same categories of expected rights and duties, plus shared values and interests (Rose-Ackerman, 2001). People feel confident in other people when they trust that they have the ability, the desire and the good disposition to

perform an exchange, or when they are familiar with other people so that they can make a request. Rose-Ackerman (2001) writes,

“...trust is a relational response, not a result of blind loyalty that permits risks in dealing with each other.” (ibid, 2001:543)

Following Landa (1994) and Tillmar (2005; 2002), when formal institutions are seen to be weak, trust arises to reduce uncertainty and risk of opportunistic behaviour, thereby reducing transaction costs. Trust can also emerge when actors have frequent transactions and become familiar with each other (Lazzarini *et al.*, 2002; Tillmar, 2002). Tillmar (2005; 2002) contends that on-going relationships between people usually develop deep bonds of personal trust, and when transactions between economic actors occur more frequently, the persons involved get to know each other’s behaviours, backgrounds and subsequently develop trust. Moreover, as noted by Coleman (1994), trust can also develop via an intermediary. For example, if **A** is trusted by **B** who is trusted by **C**, it is likely that **C** would trust **A**. Trust can also arise as a result of friendships, ethnic status, family relations or reputations that people develop in social relationships (cf Meagher, 2010; Portes, 2010; Granovetter, 2005; Landa & Lu, 1997; Uzzi, 1997).

According to Tillmar (2002), it seems greater trust between economic actors, facilitates self-enforcing long-term relationships.¹¹³ Trust reduces costs that people incur in managing their relationships. Thus, if labour transactions are carried out on the basis of trust, people will spend less time negotiating and monitoring, thus reducing transaction costs. As Landa (1994) points out, parties who want to reduce the cost of maintaining their relationships have an incentive to develop trust.

Regarding search costs, labour transaction that takes place on the basis of trust resulting from on-going relationships can also help to lower the costs of information. Hence, diligence reduces the costs of searching, and information that is accumulated from past labour exchanges is more likely to lead to correct assessments (Williamson, 1985; 1981). In fact, Williamson (1981) maintains that information collected directly between the parties is cheaper, more detailed and more accurate. He also points out other benefits of doing business on a continual basis: (a) individuals with whom one has a continuing relationship have an economic motivation to be trustworthy, so as not to discourage future transactions;¹¹⁴ (b) continuing economic relations often become overlaid with social content that carries strong expectations of trust and abstention from

¹¹³ C.f. Telser (1980b) and Macaulay (1963)

¹¹⁴ Refer also to the length of transaction and dependency discussion earlier.

opportunism. To my understanding, this supports Granovetter's (1992; 1985) notion of 'embeddedness' stating that economic institutions are 'social constructions'.¹¹⁵

Trust can also come from a 'go-between' who is in a position of trust.¹¹⁶ Such transactions reduce search costs since the intermediary can provide a kind of guarantee (Landa & Lu, 1997; Uzzi, 1997; Coleman, 1988). In this respect, by investing in established relationships, farmers (economic actors) can find new partners and effectively lower the search costs. Hence, trust acts as the bridge of communication and can serve as an informal institution, thereby reducing costs of information (Tillmar, 2005; Landa, 1994; Williamson, 1993a; 1981).

With respect to trust and negotiation costs, a number of scholars agree that parties that have developed strong trust in each other may be more likely to work out their disagreements amicably (Tillmar & Lindkvist, 2007; Uzzi, 1997; Landa, 1994; Williamson, 1993a). However, in cases where people distrust each other, they develop less favourable attitudes, and lower levels of communication and bargaining behaviours. Instead, they tend to be very careful when negotiating labour arrangements. They also spend more time arguing, haggling and debating individual goals. This makes the whole negotiation process costly in terms of time and money. However, if negotiations are carried out in a trusting environment, it is more likely that outcomes will suit both parties and they may not have to take all potential eventualities into consideration. This is because they believe that equitable adjustments will be made as the environment changes. In this sense, the trusted individuals may be willing to engage in high-risk behaviour. In such circumstances, the cost of reaching agreements is similarly low to the negotiation costs, since there is no need to remind each other about what was agreed or not.¹¹⁷

In the presence of trust too, the requirements of enforcement and monitoring are reduced. If the parties involved do not believe that the other side will display opportunistic behaviour, both parties can spend less time and resources on monitoring and controlling each other's behaviour (Williamson, 1993a). Although Williamson (1993a) recognises the role of opportunism in

¹¹⁵ See Granovetter's interview with Swedberg in Swedberg (1990)

¹¹⁶ In this thesis, trust is linked to reputation, which is defined here as a person's belief in another person's capabilities, honesty and reliability based on recommendations from other persons. Reputation can be computed by a trusted third party, or independently by asking other people for recommendations. Although trust and reputation are different in how they are developed, they are closely related. Both are used to evaluate a person's trustworthiness, so they share some common characteristics. See Bailey and Hutson (1971) about the politics of reputation and what it means to 'have a good name'.

¹¹⁷ C.f. Uzzi (1997; 1996)

transactional relationships, he downplays the role of trust, which he simply refers to it as ‘clever ways’.¹¹⁸ He contends that individuals tend to use ‘clever ways’ to gain an upper hand, meaning that there is a possibility of opportunistic behaviour in every relationship. However, dealings based on trust mean that both sides believe they will comply with the agreement.

Much as individual farmers could act opportunistically for short-term gain, such behaviour may incur long-term costs given the high risks and uncertainty (rainfall), as well as mutual dependence. Thus, the continuity of relationships and personal reputations can act as enforcement mechanism in labour transactions.¹¹⁹ Tillmar (2002) observes that short-term gain from opportunistic behaviour may in fact result in long-term losses if others refuse to do business with people who have a bad reputation and who break relationships with their business partners.¹²⁰

Issue of ethnic identity in labour relations

The literature on ethnicity suggests that it is a difficult concept to define. For examples, Hale (2004) notes:

“...nothing close to a consensus has emerged about not only what ethnicity’s effects are but also what it is in the first place. For some, it is an emotion-laden sense of belonging or attachment to a particular kind of group...for others it is embeddedness in a web of significant symbols. Still others see ethnicity as a social construct or a choice to be made...some even call ethnicity a biological survival instinct based on nepotism” (ibid, 2004:458).

From the above quote, ethnicity appears to mean different things to different people, and rarely exists in a pure form. It is situational and fluid with constantly changing boundaries. Thus, it is probably correct to assert that levels of ethnic consciousness and resource mobilisation differ amongst groups for a number of reasons (cf Okuku, 2002; Eriksen, 2001). According to Barth (1969), however, ethnicity denotes the complexity of human existence and behaviour. It signifies perceptions of common origins, historical memories, identity and common ties between people. It has its foundation in memories of past experiences and common aspirations, values, norms and expectations.

This thesis defines ethnicity as a social phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different ethnic groups in Isunga. According to Barth (1969), ethnic groups are social formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries, with the relevant communal factors

¹¹⁸ See Granovetter (1992; 1985)

¹¹⁹ Here reputation is taken as a measurement of trustworthiness.

¹²⁰ See Tillmar (2002) Chapter 4 for detailed arguments in her work in Tanzania.

being language, culture or both. He clarifies the link between people and forms of culture via the concept of ‘ethnic units’:

“...there are aggregates of people who essentially share a common culture, and interconnected differences that distinguish each discrete culture from all others. Since culture is nothing but a way to describe human behaviour, it would follow that there are discrete group of people, i.e. ethnic units, to correspond to each culture” (ibid, 1969:294)

To Barth (1969), the link between the concepts of culture and ethnic groups is so important that he refers to them as ‘cultural bearing unit’, dividing the cultural contents of an ethnic group into two: (a) the overt signal or symbols of identity such as language, religion, rituals, dress style or dietary preferences that members look for and exhibit to show identity, and (b) the underlying values, codes of ethics or standards of morality shared by group members (cf Landa, 1994; Vincent, 1971). Barth’s (1969) other important contribution is the concept of the ethnic boundary. He writes,

“...the ethnic boundary canalizes social life – it entails a frequently quite complex organisation of behaviour and social relations. The identification of another person as a fellow member of an ethnic group implies a sharing of criteria for evaluation and judgement. It thus entails the assumption that the two are fundamentally ‘playing the same game’...on the other hand, a dichotomization of others as strangers, as members of another ethnic group, implies a recognition of limitations on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgement of value and performance, and a restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed common understanding and mutual interest” (Barth, 1969: 300-301)

Based on the above, it is clear that the classification of ‘us’ (the insiders whom we trust) and the discrimination against ‘them’ (the outsiders whom we distrust) is an inherent feature of all ethnic groups.¹²¹ What is relevant here is whether ethnic identity facilitates or obstructs labour transactions in a multi-ethnic village like Isunga. It is also important in the discussion about enforcing relational contracts.

Personal ties as self-enforcing contracts

According to Baker et al., (2002), relational contracts are unwritten understandings of obligations between economic actors, which are sustained by the value of future relationships. In this view, relational contracts occur between parties in a transaction when they rely on on-going transaction

¹²¹ See also Landa (1994)

relationships to regulate their contractual relationships (Williamson, 1993b). Accordingly, relational contracts are concerned with cooperation ('the guiding principle of contract'), aimed at making actors enter a reasoned dialogue. Transactions governed by relational contracts imply strong personal involvement, and personal relations such as friendship, family relations, ethnic status and other social relations. Any difference or difficulties that arise between the parties are tackled by means of cooperation and negotiations. They work on the basis of informal relationships based on trust, a history of reciprocal dealing, reputation and other social norms. Moreover, they are associated with non-legal sanctions such as suffering reputations or relationships (Brautigam, 1997; Landa, 1994; Telser, 1980b).

According to Telser (1980a), it is clear that relational contracts, in which transactions are treated as personal relations, and obligations are sustained by sentiments and values, lower costs of contract enforcement as well as reduces dangers of opportunistic behaviour among actors. This is because relational contracts are based on reputational effects, community punishment or self-enforcement. In advancing his thoughts on the role of 'relational contracts' and informal mechanisms of enforcement in exchange relationships, Telser (1980a) proposed a theory of self-enforcing contracts, which stressed that they could be self-enforced without any intervention by third parties. The main element of the theory is that an agreement would be fulfilled, because it is in the interest of those involved in a relationship to continue with it and to keep exchanging goods and services in the future. He writes,

“...a self-enforcing agreement between two parties remains in force as long as each party believes himself to be better off by continuing the agreement than he would be ending it. It is left to the judgment of the parties concerned to determine whether, or not there has been a violation of the agreement. If one party violates the terms then the only recourse of the other party is to terminate the agreement after he discovers the violation. No third party intervenes to determine whether a violation has taken place or to estimate the damages that result from such a violation” (ibid,1980a:27).

In a self-enforcing agreement, the penalty for failing to comply with terms of agreement is to end the transactional relationship with no future relations. Therefore, one of the strongest incentives to honour contractual terms is a continuing relationship or repetition of transactions.¹²² But in situations where transactions between certain persons are unlikely to be repeated in the future, or there is no benefit from continuing the relationship; a loss of future dealings

¹²² Following Williamson (1985), the *ex post* contract execution consequences are in fact the principal interest in a self-enforcing agreement.

becomes an ineffective penalty.¹²³ In this context, substitutes for self-enforcing agreements will appear without necessarily involving a third party. For example, parties can seek information about the reliability of their potential exchange partners (Telser, 1980a).

In practice, much empirical evidence has also shown that informal rules, trust and social norms can facilitate cooperation, by providing channels through which individuals (as economic agents and social actors) can access information and by offering a means of enforcing contracts without or at low costs. Brautigam's (1997) study of the manufacturing sector in *Nnewi* in Eastern Nigeria mentioned earlier shows that informal institutions, such as networks, successfully compensate for the failure of state institutions in industrial development. In explaining the rise of a new industrial axis in *Nnewi* but not elsewhere, she stressed that policy change was not a reason. More important were entrepreneurs' own rules in organising their trade, concluding that

“...close, ethnic-based networks reduce transaction costs associated with exchange and with expansion, leading to highly successful distribution systems” (ibid,1997:1077)

Considering the above, it is clear that relational contracting (self-enforcing contracts) have many advantages. For instance, the stability of the relationship allows greater investment among transaction actors, since the sense of mutual obligation holds the relationships together; the relationship of trust and mutual dependency allows for a faster flow of information; and it lowers transaction costs and lessens the dangers of opportunistic behaviour among transacting firms (Tillmar, 2005; 2002; Landa & Lu, 1997; Landa, 1994). Landa (1994) strongly argues that relational contracting is associated with lower costs of contract enforcement since it is usually based on reputation, community punishments or on self-enforcement.

Meagher (2010) disagrees with the above. Based on twenty years of research of social networks and the informal economy in south western Nigeria, she has noted that although social networks are thought to offer a solution to market failure and state incapacity to deliver services, the proliferation of socially embedded enterprise networks in Nigeria has generated disorder and economic decline rather than development. She challenged the assumption that the problem of African development lies in bad cultural institutions by arguing that informal economic governance in Nigeria is in fact shaped by the disruptive effects of rapid liberalisation, state decline and political capture, not culture. Meagher (2010) illustrates how ties of

¹²³ See section 6.2 on structuring exchange relationships.

ethnicity, gender and religion are used to restructure enterprise networks in response to contemporary economic challenges in southwest Nigeria.

Morality and affection in labour relations

Social norms, customs, traditions, and religious belief in particular, are institutions that are associated with conventions embedded in culture (Williamson, 2000). Their purpose is to define the way society conducts itself, especially where personal relationships based on kinship, ethnic belonging, religious affiliation and friendship are valued. Quite often, when faced with farming and other livelihood challenges, Isunga's farmers resort to personal networks that offer instant and reliable sources of support; what Hydén (1983) calls the 'economy of affection'. Hydén (1983; 1980) provides a clear exposition of the importance of the 'economy of affection' in African rural societies. The concept blends economic and social rationality, and focuses on a range of survival and self-help strategies that would otherwise remain undetected or misapprehended (Seppälä, 1998; Lemarchand, 1989). Hydén (1983) defines the 'economy of affection' as

“...a network of support, communications and interaction among structurally defined groups connected by blood, kin, community or other activities, for example, religion.” (ibid, 1983:8)

Based on this definition, the economy of affection is a defence mechanism – a way for people living in poverty to cope with the circumstances that are threatening their livelihoods.¹²⁴ It also serves the purpose of maintaining existing social relations since human agency is about more than just pursuing self-interest. It also implies judgements of responsibility and morally guided actions (Hyden, 2002; Lemarchand, 1989; Hydén, 1983).

The above remarks notwithstanding, Elster (1989) reminds us that social norms are purposively generated behavioural rules; e.g. “*Do X*” or “*Don't do X*”, or more complicated rules: “*If you do Y, then do X*” or “*If others do Y, then do X*” or “*Do X if it would be good if everyone did X*”. Therefore, to become an institution, they have to be shared by other people. In this way, social norms can be sustained by people's approval or disapproval, by the feelings of embarrassment, anxiety, guilt and shame of the people who violate them, and by some forms of punishment (e.g. ostracism) from members of a community. In any case, norms should not be confused with habits, because 'violated' habits are not punishable. Habits are not enforced by other people

¹²⁴ Hyden (1983) also takes it as a comment on the weakness of state penetration in rural Tanzania, something he was criticized for.

and their ‘violation’ does not generate self-blame, guilt or anxiety (Raiser, 2001; Olsson, 1999; Elster, 1989). If habits are ‘enforced’, then it becomes a convention; and Olsson (1999) defines a convention as,

“...a habit that is shared by many people which people follow mainly because they do not wish to deviate” (ibid,1999).

Conventions or habits will, according to Olsson (1999), “become norms when the individual feels that he or she ought to take certain actions”.

‘Custom’ is another concept that has a huge bearing on this study and is linked to moral and affection. Schlicht (2001:3) defines it as “...the set of habits, attitudes, convictions prevailing in a society, as inherited from the past”. From this perspective, conventions, habits, moral attitudes and social norms can be seen as units of custom. It is apparent from Schlicht that culture can be divided into non-formalised parts (habits, conventions, and moral attitudes) and formalised parts (formalised law, religious organisations). In this thesis, custom refers to the parts of culture that are not formalised, but emerge and stabilise with time.¹²⁵ Schlicht (2001) notes that much as social and economic structures and processes are thoroughly permeated by customary ways of behaving, thinking and evaluating all kinds of actions and events, custom can also be moulded, bent and shaped by the very social and economic processes that build on it. Thus, morality and affection (informal institutions) are closely related to a society’s culture (Hydén, 1983) and history (North, 1990). They come from socially transmitted information and are part of a society’s cultural heritage. They are maintained from one generation to another through imitation, oral tradition and teaching (North, 1990).

So far, I have presented the different perspectives of institutions, definitions of institutions, important theoretical arguments and some empirical evidence for their roles in transactions. Next is a presentation of the conceptual and analytical framework used to: (a) guide the research, (b) explore the institutions involved in agricultural labour relations, (c) examine the character of institutional regulations that matter in agricultural labour transactions (what institutions matter and how it matter) in Isunga, and (d) reveal some of the factors that influence farmers’ choices of institutions.

¹²⁵ Although the latter is distinguished from customs, it also relies on some elements of customs and is often shaped by the same behavioural tendencies that give rise to customs.

3.4 Analytical framework

In agricultural labour transactions in Isunga, the persons involved identify and choose the individuals they want to deal with, reach agreements (*winye*) and enforce them, which include solving any disputes that may arise. These practices do not take place in a vacuum; institutions are required to coordinate them. Yet as discussed earlier, institutions are diffuse and abstract and cover all aspects of human behaviour. So, the framework adopted for the analysis of agricultural labour transactions in Isunga village is based on the assumption that institutions matter in agricultural labour relations. Institutions that are rooted in state laws and regulations, as well as social institutions such as informal rules, trust, social norms and other informal practices arise to let individual farmers structure their transactional relationships, to ensure performance of the parties involved, and to settle disputes if they arise.¹²⁶ As rightly argued by Meagher (2010), Wood (2004) and Landa (1994), when a country's laws, regulations and formal enforcements are weak and ambiguous, citizens give more attention to social institutions. Even so, it should be stressed that the complexity of individual actors' decision is very much linked to resource availability.

Although many institutions are involved in structuring and enforcing transactional relations, there is a need to empirically investigate the ways and degrees to which the institutional environments shapes labour transactions. The factors identified to explain farmers' labour behaviours and guide the empirical study are: (a) the characteristics of labour transactions in agriculture, (b) the social and cultural factors (kinship and ethnic identity, issues of moral and affections, trust and reputation), (c) the costs of using institutions for sharing or exchanging agricultural labour, and (d) the fairness and predictability of enforcement mechanisms (court rulings, arbitration, mediation).

3.4.1 Characteristics of labour transactions in agriculture

Agriculture in Isunga is influenced by seasonality, and crop production carries high risks and uncertainty. This has important bearings on labour usage, since certain characteristics of transactions affect farmers' labour behaviour. Because of the risks and uncertainty associated with rain fed crop production, farmers of Isunga plan their activities and labour practices very carefully within a given institutional context. This makes 'dependency' between labour actors an important characteristic of agricultural labour transactions.¹²⁷ Dependency could be due to the frequency of transactions (receiving and giving labour) and

¹²⁶ Focus, however, is on the (social) institutions used for sharing and exchanging farm labour.

¹²⁷ C.f. Shipton (2007)

uncertainty (the disturbances to which the transactions are subject).¹²⁸ In cases where the level of dependency between labour providers and recipients is high, both sides would suffer if their transactional relationships were destroyed. It would therefore be in their interests to continue with the relationships and even make them stronger (Williamson, 1985). In such a situation, the need for increased sharing of information grows. This would make reaching agreements and commitment during the transaction complex and time-consuming, and the risk of opportunistic behaviour in the relationship would increase, thus raising transaction costs (cf Kähkönen & Meagher, 1997).

Based on the circumstances above, actors may use special governance arrangements to structure their labour relationships. It is likely that they would choose a governance mechanism with a high degree of trust so that the possibility of opportunistic behaviour is reduced and the performance of transaction actors secured. Indeed there is much evidence to show that trust is important in any transactional relationships (Tillmar, 2005; Uzzi, 1997; Landa, 1994; Williamson, 1985). Williamson (1985:3) notes,

“...other things being equal, an idiosyncratic exchange relation that features personal trust will survive greater stress and will display greater adaptability”.

Accordingly, farmers would deal with those who are perceived as trustworthy to avoid risk or use of sophisticated governance mechanisms, which can help them minimise risk or opportunism. Furthermore, if the labour relationship is considered important, then those involved may choose informal mechanisms to settle disputes that may arise in order to preserve the relationship.

3.4.2 Costs of using institutions for agricultural labour

The literature discussed above would suggest that farmers should use those institutions that benefit them the most in terms of reducing the costs of their labour transactions and protecting their contractual rights. Such costs may be associated with the processes of locating labour partners, gathering information about their reliability, reaching agreements, as well as enforcing the agreement, including monitoring the work, reducing risks and uncertainty, and settling disputes that might arise from the transactions. These costs could be monetary (e.g. court fees, fines or bribes), non-monetary (time spent, loss of a relationship or loss of reputation) or both.

High costs connected with formal institutions can be attributed to the insecure nature of the regime, poor written laws, cumbersome procedures,

¹²⁸ The disturbances are mostly related to contracts (*winye*) and seasons.

incompetent arbitrators, magistrates or councillors and corruption.¹²⁹The logic is that weak institutions (including frequent and unpredictable changes) can complicate processes of transactions agreements and increase costs. When the state is weak and formal institutions are inefficient, for example, rules are complex and not understood by the people, or weakly enforced. It thus becomes costly for people to use such institutions in their dealings. Thus, relying on informal ways to structure and enforce labour relations, makes sense according to the economic reasoning advanced by both Williamson (2000; 1985) and North (2006; 1991; 1990) above, and seems more appropriate for keeping labour transaction costs down. Farmers may make their own rules and develop strategies to carry out their labour transactions in ways that ensure each other's performance and avoid misunderstandings. If disputes arise, farmers may use informal mechanisms other than the Isunga village (LC1) court procedures to settle their disputes in order to avoid the high costs connected with the LC1 court. In other words, in the absence of adequate formal support in structuring and enforcing labour relationships, the role of informal arrangements can be expected to be more important since the use of formal institutions may incur high costs. Since institutions affect transaction costs, these costs can arise before, during or after transactions.

3.4.3 Fairness and predictability of enforcement mechanisms

Legal centralism underlines the importance of law and formal enforcement mechanisms in social and economic development (Furubotn & Richter, 2005; Bakibinga, 2001; Kähkönen & Meagher, 1997). Kähkönen & Meagher (1997) suggest that the economic transactions and development of any society depends on a system of simple, transparent laws and regulations, consistent interpretation and enforcement, just and quick resolution and a social attitude of respect for legal and regulatory institutions. North (1991; 1990) and Williamson (1998; 1985) add that formal rules and their enforcements are problematic and never free from transaction costs. For these reasons, the fairness and predictability of outcomes of enforcement are important to explain farmers' transactional behaviours and decisions.

Unfair and unpredictable outcomes of formal enforcement mechanisms such as courts and arbitrations may prevent individual farmers or farming households (as economic agents and social actors) from using such mechanisms to enforce transactions or settle disputes (cf Johnson *et al.*, 2002;

¹²⁹ See Khadiagala's (2001) work on popular justice in Uganda, Jones's (2008) study of the absence/weakness of the Ugandan state in rural *Teso* region as well as the GOU's own admittance of problem of high costs in the Agricultural Sector Development Strategy and Investment Plan (GOU, 2010a)

Kähkönen & Meagher, 1997). Put another way, unjust outcomes of the Isunga village (LC1) court rulings, for example, may prevent some farmers from using it to settle labour disputes.¹³⁰ This could be attributed either to the weaknesses of the local council system or the legal system in Uganda in general, and Isunga in particular, due to contradictory law and regulations, incompetent magistrates, arbitrators or local councillors. It could also be due to corruption (Khadiagala, 2001).¹³¹

3.4.4 Social and cultural factors

Under conditions of labour contract uncertainty, as well as risks and uncertainty due to the seasonal nature of crop farming, kinship/ethnic status is a valuable asset in Isunga. Individuals are embedded in social structures with 'rules of the game' that serve to constrain their behaviours. Hence, farmers enter into labour relationships with others whom they know to be trustworthy and reliable in honouring labour contracts (*winye*). In this context, agricultural labour actors may be reluctant to use externally imposed (formal) institutions to regulate their labour dealings. Thus, social and cultural factors are also used in this thesis to explain Isunga farmers' behaviours and decisions with respect to the institutions they use (cf Shipton, 2007; Englund, 1999; Landa, 1994).

The above views notwithstanding, moral and affective factors raised by Hyden (2004; 2000; 1983; 1980) are also considered in this study, since Isunga villagers consider personal relationships such as kinship and friendships to be very important. When faced with farming and other livelihood challenges, the people of Isunga use personal networks that provide reliable support. Hyden (1983) calls such behaviour the 'economy of affection', because of numerous reasons.¹³² For instance, (a) transaction costs could be much lower because it is easier for a poor person to approach a neighbour, relative, or friend to give or receive labour than associate with strangers; (b) free-riding is not a real problem because those who have something extra take pride in sharing with those who do not, whilst others use it as a way of consolidating existing relationships or for insurance purposes, and (c) the moral hazard is low because even if the risks tend to increase with the break-up of old relationships, seeking out others informally for solutions is less risky than going through corrupt formal institutions, for example.

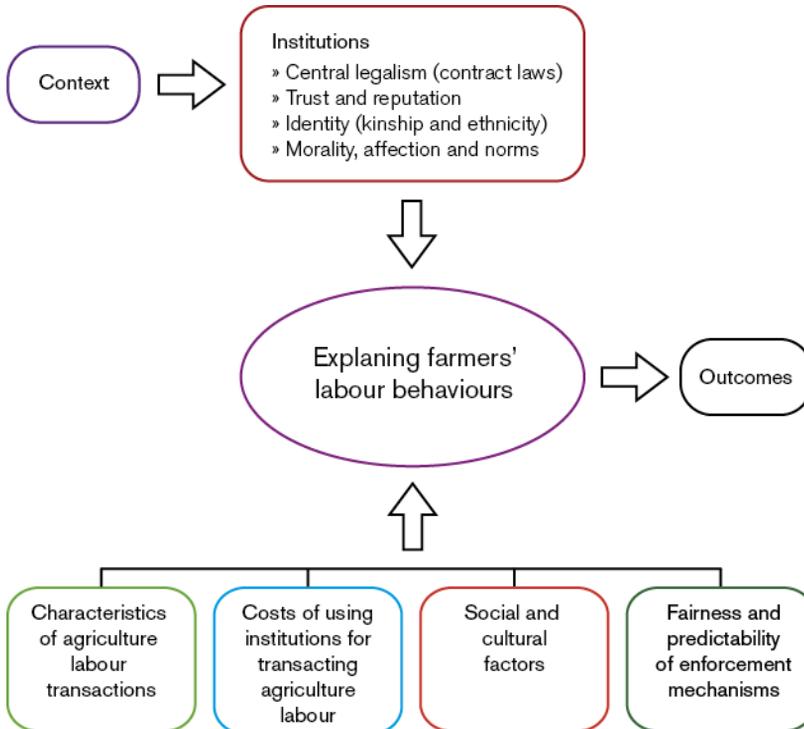
¹³⁰ Referring to a case study of popular justice in South Western Uganda, Khadiagala (2001) concludes that popular justice (LC Court) has failed to protect the land customary rights of women; and the main reason for this failure is the elites' ability to use informal institutions for purpose of social control.

¹³¹ C.f. Jones (2008) and Brautigam (1997)

¹³² The economy of affection refers to situations in which cultivating personal relations is an important part of how individual behave and make their choices (Hyden, 2002).

Figure 1 below summarises the theoretical and analytical framework that guides this research. The framework helps to investigate, analyse and understand labour transactions in crop production in a farming calendar.¹³³

Figure 1: Theoretical and analytical framework



Source: Opira Otto (2013)

In the framework for the analysis of agricultural labour relations, the case study approach is used to link the theoretical issues discussed to the context, i.e. the behaviour of farmers and existing institutional arrangements, since farmers may act as agents of institutional change or persistence. Thus, in my case study of the role and influence of institutions on labour transactions in Isunga, I look

¹³³ In my study of agricultural labour institutions, the following variables are taken into account: (a) institutions as rules that govern and regulate farmers' labour behaviour, (b) the role of context (local setting) such as agro-climatic condition, people, history, institutional context etc., (c) the characteristics of agricultural labour transactions (d) fairness and predictability of enforcement mechanisms, (e) social and cultural issues (economy of affection, *embeddedness*, trust).

at the behaviour of individual farmers, and listen to their arguments in an attempt to clarify a rather heterogeneous reality.

3.5 Summary and key issues

This chapter was concerned with the conceptualisation of institutions. It explored the different ways of viewing institutions and how they are manifested. Whereas some scholars see institutions as ‘constraints’, others see them as ‘enabling devices’; and much as there is no definition of institutions that is universally accepted, some characteristics of institutions, shared by various authors do exist. The chapter also provided key conceptual issues for understanding the significance of institutions in agricultural labour transactions. It explored the theories of transaction costs, relational property rights and social embeddedness. The insights generated from these theories suggest that the ideal role of institutions is to coordinate transactions by reducing transaction costs and protecting contractual rights. Even so, the level of transaction costs and protecting contractual rights depends on the quality of institutions as understood by the users themselves. Effective institutions will reduce transaction costs and effectively protect contractual rights, thereby facilitating impersonal agricultural labour transactions. On the contrary, ineffective institutions will generate high costs and poorly protect contractual rights.

Key issues that arose from the discussions were: which institutions are used in agricultural labour transactions, and why are they important? A review of the literature showed that many institutions are involved in labour transactions. Those relevant for this thesis are: codified laws and government regulations; trust and reputation; ethnicity and identity; social norms (morality and affection). However, theory failed to show which particular institution is most suitable for reducing labour transaction costs and/or enforcing contractual rights. Instead, it showed that various institutions can lower/increase transaction cost; and thus effectively/poorly protect contractual rights. Two aspects of institutions emerged: new institutional economics (NIE) and legal centralism. Whilst legal centralism favours law and formal enforcement mechanisms in transactions, NIE recognises that institutions such as trust, reputation, morality, affection and social norms can not only help to reduce transaction costs, but also effectively protect contractual rights. Suggesting that, formal contracts and formal enforcement mechanisms can and often are imperfect and costly. Therefore, relational contracts and informal enforcement mechanisms emerge to govern transaction relationships. Moreover, it was shown that no single institution exists in isolation in an economy. A mix of institutions or their interactions may be more beneficial to its users.

The theoretical discussions also set the ground for understanding the influence of institutions in agricultural labour transactions. By means of a review of literature on institutions, I explained that actors engaged in such transactions are affected by numerous institutions through transactions costs and the protection of relational property rights. Actors act rationally and choose the 'right' institutions to minimise transaction costs and effectively protect their contractual rights. Apart from the costs of using such institutions, the unfairness or unpredictability of enforcement mechanisms, certain socio-cultural factors (e.g. moral, ethnic status or identity, reputation etc.) also influence actors' decisions. Based on these factors, a framework for analysing and understanding the role and influence of institutions in agricultural labour relationships in Isunga village is proposed.

The next chapter presents the methodological considerations of the research, detailing how the data was collected during the fieldwork, as well as how it has been analysed and presented in this thesis. This has been achieved by means of a review on the literature on the topic, the research objectives and guiding questions, and the practical experiences of the field study in Isunga, in the Kiryandongo District of Midwestern Uganda.

4 Research methodology, design and process

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research approach employed by the study and the methods used in the collection of data. In the next section, the epistemological and ontological issues adopted for the study are discussed, followed by a section on the research design. Section 4.4 presents the various instruments used for collecting data, and then explains the research process in section 4.5. It describes the different phases of the fieldwork undertaken, identifies the households used in the study and the techniques used to select them. It also includes a subsection on problems encountered during the research. Section 4.6 explains how the data and information collected were managed and analysed. It also discusses some ethical issues for the research. Section 4.7 provides some concluding remarks.

4.2 Epistemological and ontological issues

This study seeks to add knowledge about the role and influence of institutions in agricultural labour transactions by investigating farmer's labour behaviour and decisions in Isunga village. Following Lincoln & Guba (2000; 1994), knowledge is seen to be a very complicated concept, and to understand its nature and activities one needs a systematic set of assumptions or beliefs (a paradigm) about the nature of reality: *what the world is* and *how it is viewed*. They write,

“...a paradigm may be viewed as a set of basic beliefs...that deals with ultimate or first principles. It represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the world the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts...” (Lincoln & Guba, 1994:109).

They identify three questions as criteria for comparing research paradigms: (a) the ontological question: *what is the form and nature of reality and what is there that can be known about it?* (b) The epistemological question: *what is the nature of the relationship between the 'knower' and 'would-be knower' and what can be known?* (c) the methodological question: *how can the inquirer (would be knower) go about finding out whether s/he believes can be known?*"(Lincoln & Guba, 2000). In the remainder of this subsection, I discuss the ways and nature of knowing about reality in order to explain the underlying epistemology for this study.

4.2.1 A constructivist perspective for the study

This study does not subscribe to the positivist way of thinking, which assumes the existence of *'a reality out there'* that exists independently of anyone observing it, and that the objective knowledge about that reality can be acquired as a scientific and value neutral truth. Instead, it adopts a constructivist perspective based on the assumption that there exist multiple realities depending on the sense making processes. That is, the meaning given to it by different people. Hence, knowledge about people's behaviour is socially constructed and reconstructed (Berger & Luckmann, 2002; Searle, 1995). Accordingly, a constructivist approach questions research activities regarding their contextual or situational nature (Knorr-Cetina & Cicourel, 1981). However, this does not mean that our constructivist thinking is problem free. Röling (1996) for instance, warns about the danger of constructivism by arguing that it is probably too easy to think that every construction can be undone, yet it cannot be.

Following Lincoln & Guba (2000; 1994) therefore, the researcher and the object of investigation are interactively linked so that the findings are 'accurately' created as much as possible as the investigation proceeds. But, how do the researchers and the objects of investigation (e.g. farmers) know what they know?¹³⁴ This question has been crucial to positioning the constructivist paradigm used here, which aims to understand the dynamics of agricultural labour relationships in a Ugandan village. As pointed out in Chapter 2, households in the village of Isunga are heterogeneous. Thus different households perceive their labour needs and problems differently, and they have different views on how to handle their needs and problems. They also have different reasons, motivations and knowledge bases for perceiving such problems. Thus, by adopting a constructivist approach in the study, the capacity of science to develop new insights into problems concerning agricultural labour relationships in rural Uganda is increased.

¹³⁴ See Table 4.1 on assumptions underlying qualitative methodology

4.2.2 My role in the study

In this study, I assume the existence of a social reality in Isunga that is open to different interpretations. This assumption of a socially constructed reality demands a particular stance, partly because constructivism assumes that all research is value laden and cannot be objective (Searle, 1997; Knorr-Cetina & Cicourel, 1981). It is for this reason that I consider it necessary to clarify some of my assumptions. Firstly, my upbringing in Acholi in northern Uganda played an important role in choosing this research topic. Throughout my adult and academic life, the interplay between interpersonal and impersonal ties, and the rules and behaviours of people engaged in various activities, have fascinated me. Yet to focus on relationships, one has to face up to the challenges of drawing boundaries between people's knowledge, academic disciplines and prejudices. This justifies my constructivist stance in studying labour relations with respect to crop farming in a multi-ethnic village in rural Uganda.

It is certainly true that human beings share things and ideas, but as a student of economics, I failed to get convincing answers to why resource-sharing tends to be glossed over, or at least not explicitly addressed in economic literatures. I became rather uncomfortable with economic argumentation that emphasised individualism, rationality and role of the 'market' to allocate resources or solve human problems. Yet as discussed in Chapter 2, livelihoods in rural Uganda blend both economic and social rationality. Farmers are rational in the sense of pursuing strategies that are embedded in their social context. This has to be recognised in agricultural and rural development discourses.

4.1 Qualitative research methodology

Based on the brief considerations above, it should be evident that the nature of the study is descriptive, exploratory and interpretative.¹³⁵ Consequently, the methodology employed was primarily qualitative, using interviews, field observations and documentary analysis.¹³⁶ As Denscombe (2007) points out,

¹³⁵ The interpretive nature of the study comes about because the findings of the household case studies are presented in narrative forms; that is, Isunga farmer's attitudes and labour exchange behaviour is not only described and explored, but interpreted as well.

¹³⁶ Johansson (2004; 2002) uses the terms strategy, methodology and methods with specific meanings. According to him, methods are the techniques used to collect and analyse data (observations, interviews and archival records); a methodology is a recommended set of methods for collecting and analysing data, including the standards for the validation of findings; and a strategy links methodology to theory. On the other hand, authors like Denscombe (2007) do not make a distinction between strategy and methodology. This thesis follows Denscombe.

undertaking a research study requires great consideration as to the appropriateness of any chosen methodology, since they easily influence the research outcomes. A case study approach, using a qualitative mode of inquiry, was deemed best for my need to explore and understand agricultural labour relations in Isunga, since it provides for close interaction and is designed to observe social interaction and understand people's perspectives (Yin, 2008; Gillham, 2000).

Denzin & Lincoln (2000:8) indicate that the term 'qualitative' in qualitative research implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meaning that are not experimentally examined, or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency; and underscore that,

“...qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.” (ibid,2000:8)

Following Denzin & Lincoln (2000), the qualitative mode of inquiry makes room to discover the motivations and needs behind people's attitudes and behaviours, rather than measuring their rationalised opinions.¹³⁷ Unlike quantitative research, which seeks to 'measure and count', qualitative research tries to capture the full complexity of social phenomena through descriptive analysis that focuses on the details and nuances of people's words and actions (ibid, 2000). So, qualitative research is usually informal and semi-structured, thus allowing people to contribute and share their views and feelings in a conversational format, without the 'constraints' of a structured questionnaire (Creswell, 2003; Pope & Mays, 1995).

Lincoln & Guba (2000) identify some important underlying assumptions that distinguish qualitative research from other types of research (see Table 4). The assumptions address five issues: the nature of the reality in question, the role of the researcher, the role of values in the research, the rhetoric of the study and the methodology used (see also Creswell, 2008; 2003).

¹³⁷ See also Yin (2008) and Miles & Huberman (1994)

Table 4: Assumptions underlying qualitative research methodology.

Assumptions about	Qualitative research methodology
Ontological issue (<i>the nature of reality</i>)	Multiple realities exist in any given situation: the researcher's, those of individuals being investigated, and the reader or audience interpreting the results; these multiple perspectives, or voices, of informants are included in the study.
Epistemological question (<i>the relationship of researcher to the researched</i>)	The researcher interacts with those he/she studies and actively works to minimise the distance between the researcher and those being researched
Axiological issue (<i>the role of values</i>)	The researcher explicitly recognises and acknowledges the value laden nature of the research
Rhetoric of the study (<i>language of the study</i>)	The language is personal, informal and based on definitions that evolve during the study
Methodology	Research is based on inductive forms of logic, categories of interest emerge from informants, rather than being identified as a priority by the researcher The goal is to uncover and discover patterns of theories that help explain a phenomenon of interest. Triangulations should be taken to ensure the accuracy or validity of findings

Source: Creswell (2003); Guba and Lincoln, 1994 and 2000.

In support of the above, Denzin & Lincoln (2000) writes,

“...the gendered, multi culturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that he or she then examines in specific ways (methodology, analysis). That is, the researcher collects empirical materials bearing on the question and then analyses and writes about them. Every researcher speaks from within a distinct interpretive community that configures, in its special way, the multicultural, gendered components of the research act.” (ibid,2000:18)

As Miles and Huberman (1994) also observed, the conversational format of qualitative methods directly puts the researcher in touch with participants and provides an avenue of getting ‘beneath the surface’ of attitudes and behaviours, facilitating a depth of understanding of issues at hand. This allowed me to get a feel for a world that cannot be experienced in the numerical data and statistical analysis used in quantitative research for example; and of course, to interact with the people of Isunga in their own language and on their own terms. Miles and Huberman (1994) write,

“...good qualitative data are more likely to lead to serendipitous findings and to new integrations; they help researchers get beyond initial conceptions and to

generate or revise conceptual frameworks... the findings from qualitative studies have a quality of un-deniability. Words, especially organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete vivid, meaningful flavour that often proves far more convincing to a reader - another researcher, a policy maker, a practitioner - than pages of summarized numbers..." (ibid, 1994:1)

Despite Miles and Huberman's (1994) advocacy for qualitative research analysis, there are criticisms relating to its validity and reliability. Pope & Mays (1995) for instance write,

"...the most commonly heard criticisms are, firstly, that qualitative research is merely an assembly of anecdote and personal impressions, strongly subject to researcher bias; secondly, it is argued that qualitative research lacks reproducibility - the research is so personal to the researcher that there is no guarantee that a different researcher would not come to radically different conclusions; and finally, qualitative research is criticized for lacking generalisability since it tends to focus on a small sample size" (ibid,1995:109).

Silverman (2005) too, claims that qualitative research is subjective and associated with an unsystematic selection of information from a massive amount of data, in ways that are irreducible or even incommunicable. For this reason, findings should be questioned, since no one can see how the researcher reduced many hours of field notes into conclusions.

The above criticisms do not hold water and should be challenged because research methodologies themselves are not good or bad, but the quality of research depends very much on how they are applied. In this study, the most crucial issue was to see how the purpose of the study and research questions engaged with the case study approach to achieve the research objectives outlined in Chapter 1.

4.1.1 The case study approach

Following Devine (1995), qualitative research methodology is most appropriate first, when the researcher wants to explore people's experiences and the meanings they attach to those experiences; secondly in studying processes, and thirdly, when the issue needs to be studied in a specific context or social setting. These make the qualitative aspects of a case study approach appropriate for this study since it focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings. Yin (2003) describes the case study approach as,

"...an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not so obvious." (ibid, 2003:13)

Therefore, the approach is suitable for answering the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions about events or phenomenon, because it can provide better circumstances for creating mutual trust between the researcher and the informants. Moreover, the approach allows for a number of visits to the case examples (the households).¹³⁸

Another scholar, Stake (1999), looks at a case study analysis as a process of learning about a case, by researchers and readers alike. The more the object of a study is specific and unique, the greater its usefulness to answer the question “what can be learnt about it?” Miller (2000) also associates the case study approach with more breadth and its non-limitation to only a small number of variables. Moreover, it is much more exploratory, inductive and less constrained by predetermined protocols.

Atkinson’s (1998) viewpoints on life stories also deserves to be mentioned. He argues strongly for life stories as ways of understanding and defining relationships and group interactions. In his opinion, this can help researchers define an individual’s place in the social order of a society and the process used to achieve that fit. It can help explain a persons’ understanding of social events or how individual members of a group see certain events, as well as how they see, experience or interpret those social events that link to their individual development.

The common denominator with the above references is that qualitative descriptions of ‘the cases’ explore meanings, variations and perceptual experiences of phenomena, and seek to discover relationships and patterns based on personal experiences of the phenomena in question.

Some criticisms of the case study approach

In this thesis, the epistemological questions raised are: what can be learnt from a single case (household)? What can be learnt from different cases (households)? However, the case study approach is not without limitations. Most critics focus on the fact that it can allow for unlimited scope to the inquiry, thereby risking an over-accumulation of data (Johansson, 2002). Similarly, Gillham (2000) observes that problems often associated with case studies include a lack of rigour in research methods and analysis, lack of generalisation, long duration and massive documentation. To counteract this, he proposes a carefully thought-out selection of units of analysis and observation. I followed Gillham’s advice and selected my cases (households) with care in my attempt to understand their labour behaviour and how the institutions that guide such behaviour work in the village. This was not in any

¹³⁸ Gillham (2000) too, refers to case study as a method of studying phenomenon through a thorough analysis of an individual case.

way to achieve statistical representativeness or generalisation (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2003).¹³⁹ The approach therefore enabled me to probe further, to revisit the households many times and to observe them as the fieldwork progressed.

4.1.2 Using grounded theory principles to gain further insights

As knowledge is socially constructed, I also had to construct my own knowledge about the cases. This was quite a challenge, since it meant moving in circles in order to understand the many ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions needed to comprehend certain aspects of farmers’ labour behaviours. Hence, the grounded theory approach is mentioned here as a way to build theory (explanation) from the empirical data in the qualitative case studies. Following Strauss and Corbin (1998), grounded theory principles concern a systematic set of analytical induction, interpretation, comparison and coding procedures to develop a theory (explanation) that is grounded in data collected in the real world.¹⁴⁰ In this thesis, some of the concepts and ideas used at the beginning of the study were used to help guide the exploratory research questions and the findings (the explanation) contextualised to Isunga village.¹⁴¹ The grounded theory principles offered me the chance to consider concepts, ideas, metaphors and methods, which were then reiterated into the emerging relevant explanation (theory) of the nature and persistence of various work-sharing and labour exchange practices in Isunga.

4.2 Methods of data collection

From the household case studies, I looked for evidence to help answer the research questions. Hence, no one particular source or piece of evidence was sufficient on its own. Multiple instruments were used to collect the necessary data and information: (a) Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools and techniques, (b) participation and observations, (c) interviews (semi-structured interviews with farmers, unstructured (informal) interviews with district officials and representatives of certain farmers associations and, (d) documentary analysis (secondary data). These methods were chosen based on the objectives of the study, the research questions, and the possibility of successfully using them in the study area, the financial conditions and other difficulties of conducting the study. These methods are discussed below.

¹³⁹ See section on research ethics and writing below.

¹⁴⁰ See also Gillham (2000)

¹⁴¹ See Figure 4.1 on the overview of the research process below.

4.2.1 Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools and techniques

A number of PRA tools and techniques were used at the initial stage of the study in 2006 to collect primary information. They included: (a) village resource mapping, (b) wealth ranking to categorise households in Isunga into wellbeing groups and selection of the case households, (c) focus group discussions on income-generating activities, (d) seasonal calendar.

4.2.2 Participation and observations

Observation was a very important instrument in the data collection exercise as it involved the systematic description of events and behaviours in the social setting chosen for the study. I used both direct and participant observation during my field trips. Direct observation can be valuable for collecting data as it enables the study of an object, practice or process as it exists, is performed or unfolds in its natural setting and the observer notes exactly what is seen with little emotional involvement to what is being observed (Patton, 2002). Participant observation on the other hand, calls for first-hand involvement in the social world chosen for the study (ibid, 2002). This allowed me to see, hear and experience reality as the people of Isunga themselves do. During the course of the study, I made repeated visits to Isunga and stayed in the village between one to four months at a time. Despite the numerous frustrations, this turned out to be extremely valuable. I spent a lot of time with the community, and became someone in whose presence most issues could be discussed. I also took part in many activities like selling and drinking *Kipanga* gin with members of my host family or the community, being part of farm work parties (*awak*), part of the *Akiba Malwa* drinking group and illegal hunting (poaching) from the *Karuma* game reserve. These actions gave me the opportunity to observe what people do ‘on the ground’ to assess how and why they make certain decisions. With time, I developed close relationships with some of the individuals.¹⁴²

I also observed the endless *Kipanga* drinking sprees at the trading centre, repetitive daily food-processing such as grinding *odii* (groundnuts or sesame paste), millet or sorghum flour for making *ugalli/kwon*, borrowing salt, saucepans or grinding stones, as well as endless queues at the only borehole in the village (plus the quarrels and fighting), mothers carrying their babies on their backs working the soil, young girls selling *Kipanga* or *Kwete*, buying produce and many other activities. All these contributed to my understanding of daily life in Isunga.

¹⁴² Examples of relationships established included exchange of gifts, lending money to a sick mother of eight for treatment, as well as lending money to my host for organising *Awak*, a request by an old lady that I buy her some medicine for malaria, to mention just a few.

4.2.3 Interviews

The most commonly used method for qualitative data collection is interviewing. It can be described as an interaction involving the interviewer and interviewee with the purpose of obtaining reliable information (Silverman, 2005; Stake, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Denscombe (2007) classifies interviews into three types: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews. What distinguishes them is the degree of control exercised by the researcher over the nature of the responses, as well as the length of the answers allowed by the respondent” (ibid, 2007:167).

In structured interviews, the researcher asks the same set of questions, in the same order, using the same words, regardless of the situation and with all interviewees (May, 2001). The researcher simply repeats the questions without “prompting, providing a personal view, interpreting meanings, and improvising” (ibid, 2001:12). Structured interviews are often used in questionnaire surveys where researchers collect a large amount of data from a wide range of respondents (Denscombe, 2007; May, 2001).

Unstructured interviews, however, do not have any pre-set questions or interview guides. They are informal conversations between the interviewer and interviewees enabling them to talk freely about the topic (May, 2001). This type of interview enables respondents to challenge the researcher’s preconceptions by enabling them to draw upon ideas and meanings attached to events. The role of the researcher is thus to generate and develop questions according to what the interviewee says. This requires good interpersonal skills of the researcher in order to keep the interviews flowing, without losing focus of the topics in question (ibid, 2001). Nonetheless, talking freely during unstructured interviews can also place the researcher at the risk of going beyond the focus of the study.

The format of semi-structured interviews is somewhere between structured and unstructured interviews. They are not standardised, as in structured interviews with strict control over the questions and answers (Denscombe, 2007), nor do the interviewer and interviewee “talk freely without any pre-set questions”, as in unstructured ones. Unlike structured interviews, semi-structured interviews do not follow a rigid form. Rather, the interviewer prepares an interview guide that includes a list of questions or issues that may or may not be explored, depending on the situation on the ground (Yin, 2008; Denscombe, 2007; Oka & Shaw, 2000).

In this study, both semi-structured and unstructured interviews (to obtain information from households), and unstructured interviews (to obtain

information from Masindi District officials) were used.¹⁴³ In accordance with the underlying principles of the case study research, I prepared interview guides covering a predefined set of issues (Yin, 2008). This helped to structure my interviews and gave me enough room to generate probing questions in my attempt to develop interesting areas of inquiry during the interviews, whilst keeping the interview more focused on the topic.¹⁴⁴ This was particularly helpful since the available time for most interviews was often limited, and I had to make sure that key topics were covered. Semi-structured interviews with the twenty households gave me the opportunity to obtain in-depth information about issues such as agricultural labour arrangements in Isunga, the rules involved in labour practices, household welfare and livelihood (in)security, power relations in the households and gender aspects of labour, which could not have been fully explored using other methods.

At all times and where necessary, the purpose of the interviews was explained and permission was sought from heads of the households after assuring them of confidentiality, which proved difficult in certain instances. For example, CS1-JSBM (*Bazilio*), CS2-MDF (*Abwoli*) and CS3-MAF (*Atenyi*) are socially connected;¹⁴⁵ hence there was no way I could talk to one of them without the other ones talking about it when I left.

4.2.4 Group Discussions

Information from the farmers groups mentioned by households during the interviews also added insight to the study. During the various stages of the field study, I held meetings with the following farmers groups: (a) Mutunda United Rural Development Association, (b) *Kamdini* Reflect Group, (c) *Kabarole* Women Group, (d) *Labongo Lworo* Women Group, (e) *Kony Paco* and (f) *Kica Ber Akiba Malwa* Drinking Group.¹⁴⁶ Issues discussed included the activities of the specific groups, farming activities, labour mobilisation, rules involved, their functions and labour practices for specific activities (what activity, when it is done, why it is done and how it is done). This kind of dialogue is common in qualitative research (c.f. Mikkelsen, 1995). Researchers often collect data and information from groups of particularly knowledgeable people, or people who have an interest in specific topics.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ See Section 4.5.2 on the interview process for information under what circumstances the semi-structured and unstructured interviews were used.

¹⁴⁴ See Appendix 1: Interview Guides

¹⁴⁵ *Abwoli* and *Atenyi* are *Bazilio*'s wives.

¹⁴⁶ Refer to Appendix 4 for a summary of their characteristics. No group discussions were held with *Bed Mot Malwa* Group. I collected information about it from CS15-OJM and two of the group members recommended.

¹⁴⁷ See section about finding labour in *gurubs* in Chapter 5.

4.2.5 Documentary Analysis

Documentary analysis was also used to complement data collected from the sources mentioned above. Sources included reference books, journals, other published materials by various scholars and writers, as well as web-based sources. Most of them were found in libraries in Sweden and Uganda. Other documents such as government reports and meeting minutes were also used.

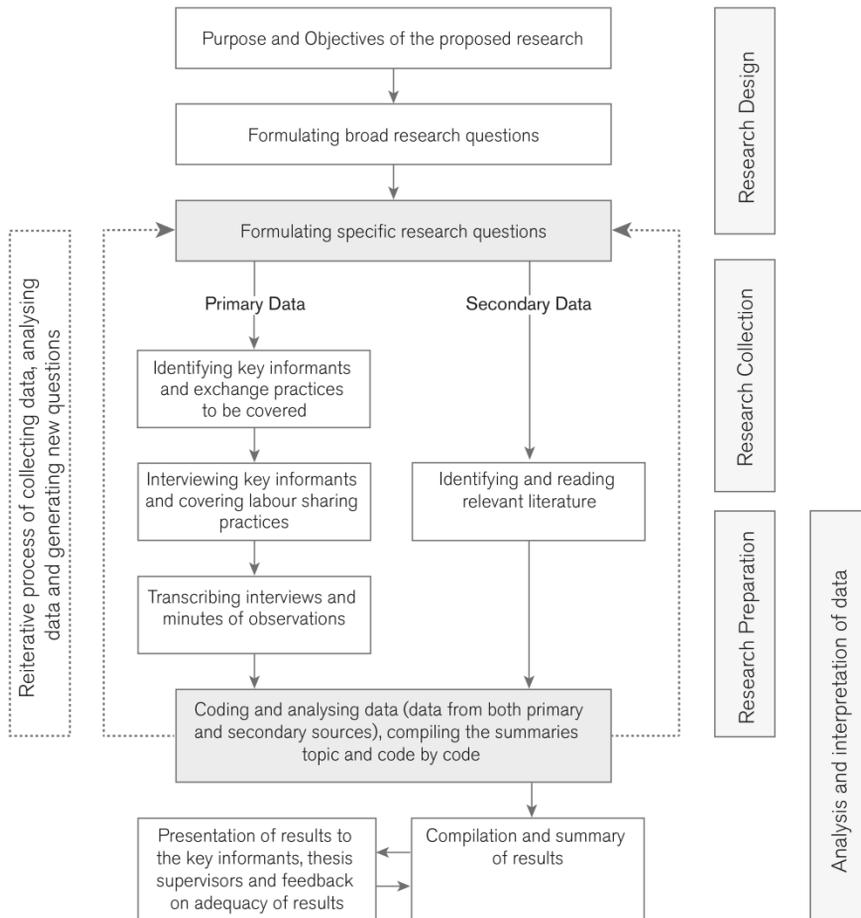
By applying the five research instruments mentioned above, I was able to gain an understanding of the challenges involved in rain fed crop farming in the study area, and to answer the specific research questions listed in Chapter 1. Case household interviews in particular, were effective for gathering information about what labour exchanges are undertaken by farmers; why a particular labour practice is used during a particular period of a farming calendar, how they are organised, how they work in practice, and under what circumstances they are used.¹⁴⁸ Through the above methods too, I gained an understanding of farmers' attitudes towards their village council (Isunga LC1), the only formal institution in the village, and their experience of using it (see Chapters 6 and 7). The research process will be described in the section below.

4.3 The research process

At the start of this doctoral study, I planned to live in Isunga and follow villagers exchange behaviours during an 18-month farming calendar period, and run an econometric analysis of farmers' production behaviours with certain crop outputs as dependent variables. However, this was not possible due to a lack of time and financial resources. Instead, the original research questions were reworked to develop a set of specific issues and questions for an in-depth study. In the process, the data and information gathered were reviewed, leading to an iterative process of data collection, and the formation of new questions. Figure 2 below gives readers an overview of the research process.

¹⁴⁸ The research methods and techniques used are discussed here separately only for analytical purposes. During the fieldwork however, they were used in a rather iterative way and triangulated to tackle the depth and breadth of the research subject.

Figure 2: Overview of the research process.



Source: Opira Otto, 2013

4.3.1 Different phases of the field study

Data and information were collected in three separate phases between August 2006 and May 2009. The first (exploratory) phase was from August 2006 to October 2006. This was a period of orientation, social and physical resource mapping, identifying different crop farming activities using a 12-month farming calendar and wealth ranking exercises, as discussed below. I also held open discussions with various officials and villagers, with the aim of finding out their views on my research and identifying key informants.

Social and physical resource mapping

Participatory social and resource mapping offered a good introduction to Isunga, building an initial understanding of the social structure of the community and the availability and location of key resources. It also gave a good perspective on access to, and control over these resources. A combined social and resource map was an important tool for structuring and conducting subsequent fieldwork. First, it provided useful clues regarding the research topics. Second, it also formed the basis for selecting key informants and farmers groups for focused discussions and further interviews. The social maps were drawn by a small group of well-informed villagers (four men and four women), and it was my role was to facilitate the process.

Seasonal calendar

Seasonal diagrams were also applied to understand the seasonal aspects of livelihood activities in the village focusing on crop production and marketing, livestock production, home industry and wage labour, remittances, crafts, forest product collection (from Nyamakere forest) and marketing.¹⁴⁹ But since it was difficult for the group to draw seasonal maps, I had to facilitate the discussions based on the points listed above, and present these using a chart and coloured stones. Modifications were made according to their suggestions.

Wealth ranking and categorisation of Isunga's households

As discussed in Chapter 2, households in Isunga are not homogenous. Thus a wealth ranking exercise was done to refine and understand my understanding of the socio-economic structures within the village, and to identify clusters of households according to their wealth. The wealth ranking exercises were carried out with the selected key informants from the main ethnic groups in the village noted above. They were also the ones who grouped the households according to their wealth categories. Here too, my role was limited to facilitation. I introduced the process, explained the objectives of the wealth ranking and asked the eight informants to describe how many types of wealth groups there were in Isunga. Once the households were determined and their wealth levels established, a sub-sample were selected for in-depth study.

The following wealth parameters were used: household sizes, money, agricultural labour availability and accessibility, land ownership (size),

¹⁴⁹ See Chapter 2.

livestock (cattle, goats, pigs), education and employment, condition of housing (permanent or temporary), non-farm income sources, self-sufficiency (food, clothes, schooling, etc.), personal security/safety, water, and ox-ploughs. The definitions for each wealth category were discussed and modified accordingly. Following this, the informants placed each of the households under each wealth category. They were adjusted and confirmed through further discussions and clarifications. This resulted in three categories: the ‘better off’, the ‘poor’ and the ‘very poor’ households. I should also stress that these wealth criteria were not strict rules for belonging to groups, and rather distinctive features of households in a certain wealth groups at that time. Therefore, the information presented in Table 5 below, are the most common features of households in each category at the time of the wealth ranking in 2006.¹⁵⁰ Some of the households may well be considered to be in another group today.¹⁵¹

Table 5: Characteristics of households in Isunga village.

Criteria	Better off	Poor	Very Poor
Household size	10 and above	5-10	Less than 5
Land ownership and accessibility	5 acres and above; rents out land; lends land to others	2-5 acres, borrows and rents land from the better off	Less than 2 acres; borrows from others
Agricultural labour availability	Family labour, including child borrowing; work parties and hired labour (<i>leja-leja and seasonal</i>)	Family labour; child borrowing and lending; rotational labour; work parties	Family labour; child lending; rotational labour; work parties
Livestock	Cattle, goats, pigs and chickens	Some goats, pigs and chickens	Few chickens, one or two goats
Housing	Permanent or semi-permanent, with tin roof; good latrine	Better quality huts, good latrines	Poor quality huts, no latrines or very poor quality latrine
Education	Children finish primary school, and go to secondary schools	Children do not finish primary schools	Children don't attend primary school; or drop out early
Off/Non-farm activities	Produce trading, shop keeping, beer brewing, sell charcoal, shop keeping	Sell labour, charcoal, firewood, water; brick making, petty trading, hunting, <i>boda-boda</i> taxi	Sell labour, water, wild fruits, leafy vegetables, grass for thatching huts, firewood; hunting

Source: Fieldwork data.

¹⁵⁰ During the July 2007 field trip, it was found that 28 of 139 households in the village belonged to the Better off group, 72 households were Poor and 39 households were Very Poor.

¹⁵¹ See shifts between wealth groups below.

The better-off households

The better-off households are distinguished by the following: land holdings of more than five acres, five or more cattle, five or more goats, external (non-family) seasonal labour, children attend primary and secondary school, own bicycles and possibly motorbikes, as well as non-farming businesses. They combine farming with other economic activities such as trade in produce, selling charcoal outside the village and brewing *Kipanga* on a large scale. They are mainly of *Palwo* and *Burulli* origin and have plenty of land, some of which they rent out, lend or use for crop sharing.¹⁵² Because they have land, their demand for agricultural labour is always high and they solve it by either organising work parties or hiring labour (*leja-leja* or from the farmers groups) or both.¹⁵³ The better-off households also have permanent or semi-permanent housing made from burnt bricks and *mabati* (tin) roofs. They also keep cattle and use ox-plough. Most of them also employ herdsmen.¹⁵⁴

The poor households

The poor households have fewer of the assets listed above, and they tend to sell rather than buy labour. Their non-farming activities include beer brewing, brick selling, charcoal and firewood selling and running, *boda-boda* (bicycle) taxis. This group is dominated by the IDPs from Northern Uganda, and 72 out of the 139 households in the village belonged to this group, of which ten were used for the case studies in this thesis. Their land holdings are insecure and do not have sufficient labour power.

Although some have worked hard and purchased land (see CS20-COM below), the majority still access farm land by borrowing or renting from others.¹⁵⁵ The land accessed by these households is insufficient to meet their subsistence requirements. Even the slightly better-off households cannot farm more land because they do not have the capacity to hire labour. They even

¹⁵² Sharecropping is defined as a form of land renting in which a land owner allows a poor tenant to use the land in return for a share of the crop produced on the land (e.g. 50 per cent). Hill (1986) on the other hand, defines it as a form of renting such that the tenant retains only a portion of the crop and the landlord provides some inputs additional to the land. Following Hill's definition, only the CS4-MOJM and CS18-MOF households fits in. Most of the better offs like CS1-JSBM provide only land and not 'some inputs'.

¹⁵³ See chapters 5 and 6 for details.

¹⁵⁴ For instance, my host family (CS1-JSBM) employs a herdsman who grazes cattle daily; he is housed, fed two meals a day and a share of the daily milk collection

¹⁵⁵ Of the 20 households, 13 poor and very poor households borrowed or rented land from the better off ones in 2008.

struggle to cultivate the little land they do have with their simple technology including hand hoes, machetes and harrowing sticks, and they cannot afford to hire ox ploughs.¹⁵⁶ In the event of a food shortage, such families sell their labour to supplement their crop production yields.

The very poor households

The very poor households possess little or no land at all, no cattle and minimal livestock (usually a goat or two and a few chickens). They sell their labour to others during the hunger seasons and sometimes buy labour during the labour-intensive farming periods. They do not own bicycles and they have limited non-farming employment options apart from brewing local beer on a small scale and collecting forest products from Nyamakere reserve to sell, including firewood, wild fruits and leafy vegetables, grass for thatching huts, and sometimes collecting and selling water. The group is largely comprised of the older IDPs, sick people, widows and abandoned wives, as well as young households without parents. Even though there is universal primary education, 'very poor' children of school age are not able to attend since they cannot afford to pay for the costs associated with schooling (Parent Teachers Association fee, school uniforms and other 'hidden' costs).

Shifts between wealth groups

Short-term shifts (upward and downward, and vice versa) between the wealth groups are common, as seen during the various field study periods. One particular case (CS13-JKF) moved up and down depending on the season. During the rainy season in 2007, CS13-JKF (*Mama Toto*) was a 'poor' household, but with the arrival of the dry season it became a 'better off' household as many villagers came to buy and drink *Mama Toto's Kipanga* gin. Faced with high demand for the *Kipanga* gin, and thanks to the fact that the ingredients (cassava, maize and millet) were readily available and cheaper compared to other periods of the farming calendar, she increased her production. *Mama Toto* makes much more money during and after the harvesting seasons and climbs up one step on the wealth ladder. Following the onset of the rainy season, the household drops back down to the poor group.

Nevertheless, many factors account for households moving between wealth groups, for example: need for school fees, death and sickness from diseases that forces people to sell their most valuable assets such as land, livestock and

¹⁵⁶ To ox plough a farm of an acre 'costs' 50,000 UGX, and takes two to three days to complete.

bicycles. Other factors which cause crop failure – drought or too much rain or crop diseases can cause a decline in fortunes of households. However, the degree and pace of this decline depends on their asset base (see also Ellis, 2000). Households faced with food shortages seek help from other villagers or have to turn to the market where food items are expensive through selling their livestock, labour or collect wild fruits and leafy vegetables from Nyamakere forest reserve.

Having many children also demands a lot of money for school fees and other school materials. This can create problems for many households, irrespective of their socio-economic stratum, since education is very costly in Uganda. As the people in ‘better off’ households grow older, they are likely to move downwards, as they have to share land and other resources with their older sons, reducing their household asset base. Yet improving fortunes are identified among the younger members of the village. Those who are able to work hard and save some money to purchase land or generate non-farming income can greatly improve their circumstances (e.g. CS20-COM).

Formalisation phase

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with the heads of 20 households in 2007 (July-September) and 2008 (November-December) to obtain information about agricultural labour practices in their households and the village at large, the rules involved and the institutions that hold them together. Unstructured interviews were also used to collect information from then Masindi District officials and representatives of certain farmer’s organisations. Group discussions were also held with farmers groups (*gurubs*) to understand more about them and their roles in agricultural production. Lastly, but equally important, I also made use of documentary analysis throughout the research process.

During this phase too, the study focused on documenting agricultural labour relationships during specific periods of the farming calendar to obtain the necessary details (purpose, how they functioned and organised, rules involved). To allow for comparisons and check for consistency of responses, the case households were interviewed with a similar set of issues in mind (see Appendix 1). Sometimes the interviews too long to complete as respondents required considerable time to recall events and asked other households members for help.

Confirmatory phase

I returned to the study area in 2009 (April to May) to verify certain aspects of the study that were missed or not properly understood. Some of the case households were revisited to learn more about their memberships in the *gurubs*

(farmers groups), as well as power and gender issues. I also interviewed the Masindi District Labour Officer about the problems of rural labour in general and agricultural labour in particular. Lastly, I used this opportunity to share some of the emerging issues with those who had assisted me during the field study and with colleagues at the Centre for Basic Research (CBR) in Kampala.

4.3.2 Selecting the case households

According to Stake (1999), case study methodology is characterised by a purposeful selection of the ‘case’ (household) to be studied. Following the wealth ranking exercise referred to above, the next challenge was to select the cases that would enable me, as Stake (1999) puts it, “...to maximise what we want to learn”. Unlike in probability sampling, where every unit of the population has an equal chance of being included, a different set of criteria is used to select people or events in non-probability sampling (Denscombe, 2007). In this study, two types of non-probability sampling: ‘purposive sampling’ and ‘snowball sampling’ were used to select participants for the interviews, to maximise learning.

With purposive sampling, I purposely selected the households that were likely to produce the most valuable and relevant information for the issues under study. This technique was used mainly for selecting households belonging to the poor and the very poor wealth groups. In snowball sampling, however, the first participants are asked to propose others who satisfy certain criteria or certain conditions relating to the research. I used it in selecting the better off households. My host (CS1-JSBM), a better-off farmer, was able to provide me with a couple of names to aid my research.¹⁵⁷

The poorer households were purposely selected with help from the Chairman of the Isunga Local Council (DO1-LC1) and my host (CS1-JSBM). Initial contact with the households was followed by introductions to other households. However, two households that were recommended by DO1-LC1 declined to be involved in the research. Nonetheless, the choice of households was based on a need of having a set of households with experience of different labour practices during crop farming. The Coordinator of MURDA (DO3-MURDA) also helped me establish contact with members of various farmers groups (*gurubs*), a key source of finding farm labour in the village.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Although Denscombe (2007) advises that the snowballing technique should be used to complement purposive sampling; in this study however, I used it for practical reasons as time for the interviews was limited.

¹⁵⁸ See finding labour in *gurubs* in the next chapter on how the groups are formed, what they do, organisational and leadership structure.

As mentioned above, the process of selecting the households started during the preparatory phase of the fieldwork in 2006 with the identification of households through wealth-ranking exercises and focus groups. These approaches were supplemented by informal chats with other members of the village to learn more about specific households' livelihood activities and their labour practices. Thus, 20 case households were selected and interviewed to develop an understanding of labour exchange rules, processes and management. Their narratives and information from other sources are used: (a) to explore issues related to the organisation and operations of various labour arrangements in Isunga and the reasons farmers use them (see Chapter 5); (b) to illustrate how farmers structure, maintain and enforce their labour relationships (Chapter 6); and (c) to explain the durability of 'informalism' in Isunga and how the role and character of social institutions becomes more economic (Chapter 7). Appendix 2 summarises some of the key features of the case households based on wealth differences.

4.3.3 The interview process

I visited all the selected households to introduce myself and get their confirmation before the actual interviews took place. During such visits, the purpose of the interview was explained to the respondent, except on those occasions when CS1-JSBM introduced it to his wives (CS2-MDF and CS3-MAF) and when DO3-MURDA introduced me to CS1-JSBM. Three households (CS4-MOJM, CS6-BOM and CS17-JOM) were more demanding as they wanted to be informed about the topics of the interviews before the actual interviews took place.

Semi-structured interviews

All the interviews were carried out on the basis of an interview guide (see Appendix 1) prepared in advance. This helped me to remember the points to be covered and suggested ways of approaching topics and questions. It also helped me ensure that as many topics as possible were covered, and enabled participants to talk freely. The interviews varied in length and the degree of informality. In any case, I was flexible regarding the order of issues and questions, depending on the flow of conversation during the interviews. Although I tried to cover all topics that needed to be addressed, the number of questions discussed was not the same in every interview. Some questions were omitted in one interview, whilst other questions were added in other interviews, depending on the mood and circumstances of the interviewees.

The interviews took between 45 and 60 minutes to complete. In two cases, we began in the late morning and spoke for two hours, ending with lunch. In

another case, we started in the late afternoon and ended up *'sitting'* (drinking alcohol together). If a follow-up interview session was deemed necessary, arrangements were made for it to take place another day.¹⁵⁹

Unstructured interviews with Masindi District officials

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, eight informal (unstructured) interviews were conducted with officials of the Masindi District local government and farmers associations. The purpose of these interviews was to collect data on agricultural activities, government policies and other institutional arrangements relevant to labour transactions in the district. Although these unstructured interviews were not the main source of information, they were nonetheless important. They were used to supplement the other sources of information and to triangulate data obtained from the interviews with the households.

The key informants were purposely selected on the basis of their positions and involvement in issues related to agriculture and labour. Again, the snowballing technique was employed to select these participants. The first contact was a person working for the National Forestry Authority (NFA) in *Budongo* Forest Reserve. We had first met in 1999, and with his help, it became easier for me to approach key people in the District. The officials were: Chairperson LCV of the Masindi District Local Council (DO8-LCV), the District Agricultural Officer (DO6-MDAO), the District Labour Officer (DO7-MDLO), the District NAADS Coordinator (DO5-NAADS), the Mutunda Sub-County Chief (DO2-MSCC), the Chairperson LC1 (DO1-LC1), the Coordinator of the Masindi District Farmers Association (DO4-MADFA) and the Chairman of the Mutunda Rural Development Association (DO3-MURDA).

The interviews were informal conversations and there was no set interview guide. We discussed issues relating to the research purpose and objectives, with a focus on what roles their departments or associations play in agriculture and issues concerning agricultural labour relations, such as institutions used for enforcing labour relations in Masindi District, including resolving labour disputes. Most interviews took place in their offices during working hours. In two cases, they were carried out at social places outside working hours. Through these informal interviews, I was able to collect not only qualitative but also basic quantitative data, such as the number of extension officers in the sub-counties, the number of labour related conflicts resolved by the District Labour Office and Local Council Court overtime.

¹⁵⁹ The households were interviewed three times on average, depending on the prevailing situation (mood, time, rain, etc.) and the data requirements.

4.3.4 Fieldwork experiences and challenges

Despite my efforts designing and conducting the research, the fieldwork faced numerous challenges. The first challenge I encountered was how to fit back into the Ugandan social system after years in Sweden. On many occasions I felt offended and discriminated when referred to as a 'black *Muzungu*', instead of the 'proud *Acholi* man' I have always been, simply because I either made some ill-advised comments associated with *Bazungus* in Uganda or failed to see how Uganda has changed in recent years. In Sweden, everything seems organised and orderly, yet I found the opposite to be true of Uganda when I returned.¹⁶⁰

Another frustrating challenge was the unwillingness of some farmers to be interviewed, and the suspicions that they deliberately modified their responses.¹⁶¹ In almost all the households interviewed, respondents were unwilling to answer all my questions. In particular, they were not always able or willing to give details about certain livelihood activities undertaken by other members of the household in their absence. The better-off households also tended to be less forthcoming with financial information.

The unpredictability of rain also affected the study as it had a negative impact on the mood of the respondents. For example, during the exploratory field trip in 2006, the rains were late and Isunga was experiencing a long dry season. It greatly frustrated farmers and they mainly talked about the absence of rain instead of answering my questions. During the second field trip in 2007, it was an excess of rain that was frustrating the farmers. Farmers were distraught as most of their crops were either under water, rotting or germinating in the fields. They were therefore understandably unenthusiastic about talking to me. In cases where we talked, the conversations focused on rain, hunger and uncertainties about future. As a result, working conditions were arduous and I was forced to shorten the fieldwork period by three months.

¹⁶⁰ Isunga villagers too, have their own rules for answering questions (especially if they do not want to answer), conducting conversations or discussions, something I knew but ignored for a while, until when I realised the advantages. For example, whereas in Sweden we learn not to interrupt when somebody else is talking or giving direct answers to direct questions, in Isunga these rules do not apply. They (we) talk to each other physically with frequent interjections; and verbal responses are given to ensure the other person that one is paying attention. It is quite normal for one to stare intently at the floor, in the sky, twist his or her mouth, laugh, murmur words like *ehe*, *hmm*, *eno ba*, *erok*, *eheh* every now and then. Failure to do so leads to abrupt silence. It took me time to become a 'native' again: talking and laughing together at the same time, talking in circles when answering questions (some people call it beating around the bush instead of direct answers).

¹⁶¹ For instance, exaggerating hardship with the hope that some financial support might be forthcoming, or downplaying it because of shame, or failing to discuss wealth or sources of income in the fear that they might be taxed or others might find out.

Qualitative research is very time-consuming, and time becomes an issue when interviews interfere with farmers' daily activities, for example. This was particularly true among women farmers, whose days start early (6am) and end late (11pm). It was therefore more convenient to carry out the interviews during the day when they had some time to spare; or by going to the market, borehole and beer-drinking venues to obtain information. Moreover, the case households were spread all over the village, covering a radius of about seven kilometres, which I had to walk to catch up for the interviews.

4.4 Data management, analysis and presentation

From the start, I was very particular about how the data and information should be recorded and managed, since it would influence the process of data analysis, interpretation and results presentation later on. This section therefore, discusses these issues in some detail.

4.4.1 Recording data during the interviews

As noted by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), data obtained during an interview may be recorded in a variety of ways, but written and audio recordings are the most common. Interview data can be recorded on tape (with the permission of the participants) or summarised in notes. During my field study, I used both tape recordings and notes at first. However, I later decided against recording interviews after realising that interviewees paid too much attention to their voices, and very careful about their choice of words.

Saunders et al. (2009) and Denzin and Lincoln (2005) spell out various factors that may affect the choices of any researcher regarding the pros and cons of data recording methods, the place where interviews take place, the interview topics, the available resources (tapes, records and so on), the skills of the researcher, and even more important, the willingness of interviewees. Saunders et al (2009) list the following disadvantages of tape-recording: (i) the possibility of adversarial relations between the researcher and the participants since it may cause discomfort for interviewees and they may be reluctant to talk when they know that what they say is being recorded, (ii) there may be a technical problem during the interview, (iii) disruption to conversation when changing tapes, and (iv) the time consumed to transcribe the tapes. With these points in mind, note-taking was used as the main method to record data in order to allow participants to express their views more openly and honestly than if they were being recorded and, of course, to avoid the other problems listed above.

4.4.2 Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis is the process by which one reflects upon the data collected and relates it to specific research questions. Both Stake (2005; 1999) and Yin (2003; 2002) assert that through the process of analysis, raw data is located in a particular context in order to further understanding. The data from the interviews, focus group discussions and observations were transcribed from the few tapes that were recorded. Notes taken during fieldwork about key themes, ideas and opinions were also included in the analysis.

Although analysis in case study research is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions, Stake (2005; 1999) recommends that there should be no particular moment when it should begin. For this thesis, however, I followed Yin's (2003; 2002) recommendations, and I analysed the data at the stages proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994:10-11). They describe the major phases of qualitative data analysis as: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

Phase 1: Data reduction

This is an initial process by which material is selected and condensed on the basis of a conceptual framework. According to Miles and Huberman (1994),

"...data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written up field notes or transcriptions" (ibid, 1994:10).

This process involves careful reading of the recorded material, identification of the main themes of the studied process, behaviour and so on, and categorisation of the materials for the purpose of analysis. During the analysis, generalisations and interpretations were made. This process continued until the research was completed. In the case of participant observation, data reduction occurred at the point of interaction with the respondent. Information was collected, processed, analysed and the process continued until the research was completed.

Phase 2: Data display

Data display goes a step beyond data reduction to provide an organised, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing (ibid, 1994). At this stage, data is arranged in ways that make it easier for the researcher to identify, focus on and select potential interpretations of data. This is the process of assembling information around certain themes and points, categorising information in more specific terms and presenting the results in some form.

Phase 3: Conclusion drawing and verification

This phase is the process of drawing interpretations or meaning from displayed data (ibid, 1994). It involves making decisions and drawing conclusions related to the research questions. Identifying patterns and regularities, discovering trends and explanations are aspects of this process. This created room for the development of some firm views to guide the research further, namely more data collection and reduction, organisation and interpretation and so on. In this study, I followed the research process until the data collection yielded nothing new. In other words, a saturation point had been reached, beyond which there would be repetition (Yin, 2002 & 2008; Stake, 1999 & 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Using Miles and Huberman (1994) three phased approach described above, the data from the different sources was analysed separately. Briefly, at the 'data reduction' stage, interview notes were coded, according to the number of interviewees (CS1-JSBM to CS20-COM) for the case household interviews, DO1-MRDC to DO8-MDLO for the unstructured interviews with Masindi District and Masindi District Farmers Association (MADFA) officials, and FG1-KWG to FG5-LA for the farmers groups (*gurubs*) in Isunga.¹⁶² All these interviews were read and re-read in order to identify relevant themes and data for the research. Irrelevant and low quality data were taken out. As the analysis continued, field and interview notes were categorised under topics and questions to identify consistency and differences. Where necessary, tables and matrixes were employed to categorise information in line with the research questions. Finally, the data were interpreted. Apart from exploring the specific content of the farmers' views, I also took notes on the relative frequency with which certain issues of the study were raised, and the intensity with which they were expressed.¹⁶³

4.4.3 Research ethics and writing

Denscombe (2007) stresses that for a study to be accurate, its findings must be reliable and valid. The former means that the findings would be consistently the same, if the study could be conducted over again or the study result is replicable under a similar methodology (see also Creswell, 2008). In case study research, however, this is not to be expected because the case changes over time. That is, if investigated again, new and other results might be revealed, but this does not necessarily mean something was wrong with the first study (Yin, 2008). Yin's advice is to cope with the reliability criteria by documenting

¹⁶² See Appendix 2: List of case households, farmers groups and *Masindi* District officials interviewed.

¹⁶³ This is rather a unique aspect of quantitative application to qualitative data.

procedural and evidential material, and thereby make it possible for another researcher to replicate the study and evaluate its truthfulness (ibid, 2008). For that matter, the procedures and methods for data collection should be carefully clarified and recorded (Yin, 2008; Golafshani, 2003). In this chapter, I provided information about who was interviewed, how these interviews took place, how information was collected from them and analysed, so that the study could be replicated.

The validity of a study relates to the truthfulness of findings. It concerns whether the researcher has used the most appropriate research methods for what she/he is studying (Golafshani, 2003). In other words, it questions if the methods for collecting data and subsequent analysis are appropriate; and therefore, the research objectives and questions are in fact addressed. This study used several methods of data collection and analysis. However, care was taken in conducting them in order to reduce errors and biases associated with these research methods. Where called for, triangulation was used as a strategy for improving the validity of the study (Yin, 2008; Stake, 2005; 1999). Hence, attempts were made to use a combination of different research methods, allowing me to overcome the weaknesses of each and reduce biases, and thereby ensure the validity of the research.

It is important to note that when doing a case study in rural Uganda, it is reasonable to expect some difficulties in conducting interviews, not only with heads of households, but also with representatives of various organisations including district local government officials, due to cultural or political reasons. They are sometimes unwilling to reveal mistakes and failures to outsiders. Even if they are willing to discuss such problems with an interviewer, cultural background and language barriers may also hinder the effectiveness of the interviews. Fortunately, being Ugandan, I was able to overcome most linguistic and cultural barriers successfully.

With specific reference to the case households, most of them were comfortable answering the questions. This was probably because they were being asked to describe how they dealt about livelihood or farming issues. On several occasions when a question touched on a sensitive issue, the interviewee simply declined to answer (for instance, CS6-BOM, questions relating to bribes to a certain government official to obtain veterinary services). Moreover, during meetings with the interviewees, it was common to start with some irrelevant issues and then move into relevant research topics based on the interview guide. By so doing, the respondents felt relaxed and enjoyed the conversation, rather than feeling 'forced' to answer the questions. On many occasions, after the interview was completed, we had a meal or a drink together along with a lengthy informal discussion. In most cases, the participants

included other people as well. These informal discussions were a rich source of interesting information and added greatly to the information gained through the ‘one on one’ semi-structured interviews and field observations.

4.5 Concluding remarks

This chapter addressed one of the key issues of the study: the methodological perspective of the research. I explained how data was collected during the fieldwork and how it were analysed and presented in this thesis. In particular, the study approach and methods of data collection and analysis have been clearly spelled out. This was done based on a review of literature on the topic, the research objectives, and my experiences from the fieldwork.

Having critically assessed qualitative research methods and their relevance for the research objectives and questions, this study used a combination of data collection instruments. Semi-structured interviews were used in conjunction with observations, informal interviews with the representatives of relevant organisations and local government officials, informal discussions with villagers in Isunga, as well as documentary analysis. The combination of different methods enabled me to minimize problems associated with individual methods, as well as check for the accuracy of information/data collected (Yin, 2008; Stake, 2005).¹⁶⁴ The information collected from the case households was often consistent with data collected from other sources, either from Masindi district officials or documentary reviews or my own observations. This helped to ensure the reliability of the findings discussed in the next three chapters.

¹⁶⁴ Guion and Flowers (2002) refer to this as ‘data triangulation’, which is a way of improving the quality of a study.

5 Finding agricultural labour in Isunga

5.1 Introduction

I showed in Chapter 2 that crop farming in Isunga and the surrounding areas is highly seasonal, with demand for labour peaking during planting, weeding and harvesting. During these periods, all household members are needed on the fields since lack of labour restricts farming. In the face of insufficient household labour, farmers have developed complex labour relations with each other to ease the burden. Before I explore the institutions that guide farmers' labour behaviours in Chapters 6 and 7, this chapter presents the different farm labour arrangements in Isunga. There will be an emphasis on the organisation and operation of the various labour arrangements and farmers' motives for using them. Section 5.2 presents the various labour arrangements used in Isunga during crop farming, before exploring how Isunga's villagers access labour through farmers associations in Section 5.3. In Section 5.4, I highlight the key issues to remember when exploring farmers' labour behaviours and decisions. Section 5.5 concludes the chapter.

5.2 Labour use in crop production

Labour is a major asset for many farming households, and the quality and quantity of labour available to the households (in terms of numbers, health, educational level and skills) form the basis of households' farming strategies (Bryceson *et al.*, 2000). In Isunga, where all farm work is done manually (using hand hoes and machetes) and during the rainy seasons, having access to adequate labour for crop farming directly affects the way farming is practiced. The common sources of farm labour in the village are: (a) household labour, (b) cooperative labour, (c) labour through interlocking relationships and (c) wage labour. Cooperative, hired labour and interlocking relations are used

when a household's labour force is inadequate to perform a particular task. These labour arrangements have many sub-categories and most of them take place through reciprocal relationships involving relatives, friends and neighbours. They differ in the way they are organised, the reasons for using them, the forms of reward for work done and the approaches to dispute resolution. Emphasis, however, is on how farmers access labour through such arrangements; that is, who works for whom, how the work is done and how agreements are negotiated. Table 6 lists the case households' labour sources in a crop farming calendar per household, farm activity and source of labour.

Table 6: Farm activity by labour source and household.

HH Code	Land Preparation	Planting/Sowing	Weeding/fertiliser application	Harvesting and transport
Better-Off Wealth Group				
CS1-JSBM (Bazilio)	Household labour, <i>leja-leja</i> , <i>aleya</i> and <i>gurub</i> labour, sharecroppers	Household labour, wage labour, <i>aleya</i> , sharecroppers	Household labour, wage labour, sharecroppers, <i>gurub</i> labour	Household labour; friends and kin, <i>aleya</i> , <i>gurub</i> labour
CS4-MOJM (Jalon)	Household labour, wage labour, <i>Pur-Kongo</i> sharecroppers	Household labour, wage labour, sharecroppers	Household labour, wage labour, sharecroppers	Household labour, wage labour, sharecroppers
CS6-BOM (Zakayo)	Household labour, <i>awak</i> and <i>leja-leja</i>	Household labour, <i>awak</i> & <i>Pur-kongo</i> , hires <i>leja-leja</i>	Household labour, <i>awak</i> & <i>Pur-kongo</i> , hires <i>leja-leja</i> & <i>pur cente</i>	Household labour, <i>awak</i> & <i>Pur-kongo</i> , hires <i>leja-leja</i>
CS17-JOM (Nelson)	Household labour, <i>awak</i> & <i>Pur-kongo</i> , hires <i>leja-leja</i>	Household labour, <i>Pur-kongo</i> ; <i>leja-leja</i> , seasonal labourers,	Household labour, <i>awak</i> & <i>Pur-kongo</i> , seasonal labourers, <i>leja-leja</i>	Household labour, <i>Pur-kongo</i> , seasonal labourers
CS11-HJM (Hajji)	Household labour, work parties, buys labour (<i>leja-leja</i>), <i>aleya</i> labour	Household labour, <i>pur kongo</i> & <i>awak</i> , hires <i>leja-leja</i> and <i>pur cente</i> , <i>aleya</i>	Household labour, work parties, buys labour (<i>leja-leja</i>), Rukia's <i>aleya</i> group	Household labour, Labour for food crop; <i>aleya</i> , relatives, friends
CS18-MOF (Min Peko)	Household labour, <i>leja-leja</i> & <i>pur cente</i> , sharecroppers	Household labour, <i>leja-leja</i> , <i>pur cente</i> ; sharecroppers	Household labour, <i>leja-leja</i> , <i>pur cente</i> ; labour from sharecroppers	Household labour, <i>leja-leja</i> ; relatives, sharecroppers

Poor Wealth Group				
CS2-MDF (Abwoli)	Household labour, <i>aleya, leja-leja & pur cente</i>	Household labour, <i>aleya, leja-leja</i>	Household labour, <i>awak, aleya, gurub, leja-leja</i>	Household labour, friends & kin, <i>awak, aleya, gurub</i>
CS3-MAF (Atenyi)	Household labour, <i>aleya, leja-leja, gurub</i>	Household labour, <i>aleya, leja-leja</i>	Household labour, <i>awak, aleya, leja-leja, gurub</i> labour	Household labour, <i>awak, aleya,</i> labour for food crops, kin
CS8-BRM (Bangkwon)	Household labour, <i>aleya, gurub's</i> labour, kin & friends	Household labour, <i>aleya, gurub's</i> labour	Household labour, <i>aleya, gurub's</i> labour, relatives	Household labour and <i>aleya,</i> kin and friends
CS10-KPM (Kilama)	Household labour, work parties and <i>aleya</i>	Household labour and <i>aleya</i>	Household labour, <i>aleya,</i> kin	Household labour and <i>aleya,</i> kin
CS12-JAF (Sarah)	Household labour, <i>gurub</i> labour	Household labour, <i>gurub</i> labour & <i>aleya</i>	Household labour, <i>gurub</i> labour & <i>aleya</i>	Household labour & <i>aleya</i>
CS13-JKF (Mama Toto)	<i>Awak, leja-leja,</i> receives labour for beer, <i>gurub</i> labour	Her own labour, <i>leja-leja,</i> labour for beer, <i>gurub</i> labour	Her own labour, <i>leja-leja,</i> labour for beer, <i>gurub</i> labour	Her own labour, labour for beer, friends
CS14-ACM (Tom)	Household labour, <i>pur cente</i>	Household labour, <i>leja-leja</i>	Household labour, <i>leja-leja, pur kongo.</i>	Household labour, friends, <i>leja-leja</i>
CS15-OJM (Rwakmot)	Household labour, <i>aleya & awak</i>	Household labour, <i>aleya & awak</i>	Household labour, <i>aleya & awak</i>	Household labour, <i>aleya & awak</i>
CS19-LOM (Bongomin)	Household labour, <i>pur kongo, leja-leja & aleya</i>	Household labour, <i>pur kongo, leja-leja</i>	Household labour, <i>awak, diira</i> and <i>aleya</i>	Household labour, friends/relatives, <i>diira</i> and <i>aleya</i>
CS20-COM (Anywar)	Household labour, <i>aleya, leja-leja</i>	Household labour, <i>aleya</i> with friends	Household labour, <i>aleya, leja-leja</i>	Household labour, <i>aleya</i> and friends
Very Poor Wealth Group				
CS5-AWM (Kapere)	Labour from kin & friends; <i>aleya</i>	His own labour, labour from kin & friends; <i>aleya</i>	His own labour, labour from kin & friends; <i>aleya</i>	His own labour, labour from kin & friends; <i>aleya</i>
CS7-ABF (Rose)	Household labour, <i>aleya</i> and <i>leja-leja</i>	Household labour, buys <i>leja-leja</i>	Household labour, <i>aleya</i> and <i>diira</i>	Household labour, <i>aleya</i> and <i>diira</i>
CS9-MAM (Musa)	Household labour, <i>awak, aleya</i> labour	Household labour, <i>aleya</i> labour	Household labour, <i>awak, aleya</i> labour	Household labour, <i>awak, aleya</i>
CS16-VLF (Sylvia)	Her own labour, buys <i>leja-leja</i>	Her own labour, buys <i>leja-leja</i>	Her own labour, buys <i>leja-leja</i>	Her own labour

Source: Fieldwork 2007, 2008, 2009.

5.2.1 Household labour

As discussed earlier, households in Isunga village are the basic units of crop production where land, labour and capital are carefully allocated to meet households' crop production goals. Yet labour is the binding constraint on their farming activities, even in households viewed to have surplus of it, because of peak seasonal demands.¹⁶⁵ Household labour is used in all the case households and it accounts for most of the total labour used in crop production.¹⁶⁶ The CS1-JSBM case narrative below provides an indication of the importance of household labour in crop farming.¹⁶⁷

CS1-JSBM (Bazilio): household labour and decision-making

Every year, *Bazilio* cultivates 20 acres of cassava, groundnuts, upland rice and sunflower for cash. But he complains of a lack of labour to work the *shambas*, and uses it as a reason for not opening more land for cultivation. However, he is optimistic that the situation will improve when his boys grow up. *Bazilio's* labour needs are high during weeding and harvest periods when "...every farmer is busy taking care of his or her farm and no one wants to do *leja-leja*. If you go to them, they tell you, we are busy...you either organise 'pur kongo' or turn to your old friends in the 'gurub' for help or those who have worked for you in the past if you still have good relations...or you be nice to those you want their help in future". The 'displaced' people sometimes look for *leja-leja* but "...they are difficult to negotiate with because once they want something or said a word...it is final" *Bazilio* said. In this household, domestic activities like cooking, looking after the children, cleaning, and washing, fetching firewood and water or brewing alcohol are performed by the women and the older girls. However, when it comes to procuring food for the family, all able-bodied members of the household (even children) are involved. No one is engaged in only one activity. With respect to crop farming, *Bazilio's* main tasks include felling trees, ploughing with oxen, digging holes and planting or sowing. *Abwoli*, *Atenyi* and the older children harvest, transport harvested produce, dry and winnow crops, select seeds, and rear pigs and poultry. Weeding and crop storage is done by everybody. *Bazilio* makes all the decisions when it comes to farming: what to plant, when and how to plant it and who should do so.

¹⁶⁵ Netting (1993) also recognises that the quantity of labour available to farming households is a key determinant to wellbeing and food security in rain fed agriculture.

¹⁶⁶ In my discussion of the household as the unit of analysis in Chapter 2, I made it clear that households in Isunga provide the social basis of subsistence production and the organisational framework for the allocation of labour and the division of labour. This subsection is a continuation of the discussion.

¹⁶⁷ Some households even adjust supply to accomplish their farming tasks (see adjusting household sizes below).

Since the household is patriarchal, the roles and status of its members are segregated by gender and age. A number of gendered activities within the family were also noted. Whereas *Abwoli*, *Atenyi* and the older girls spend more time in the fields, distilling *Kipanga* gin for sale, collecting water and firewood, and doing other domestic activities, *Bazilio* and the boys engage more in income-generating tasks such as watering cattle and making bricks and charcoal. *Bazilio* does not participate at all in water collection, but the older boys sometimes do so when *Bazilio*'s bicycle is not being used.¹⁶⁸

Adjusting household sizes

Some people even adjust their household sizes by allowing other people to live with them (CS4-MOJM) or by borrowing children from other households to take care of their younger children (CS2-MDF and CS13-JKF) during cropping seasons (see picture 4). Child borrowing (*piidi*) is particularly common during digging and weeding periods.¹⁶⁹ *Abwoli* remarked,

“...I do not get much help from my relatives because they are very far away, except *Susan*. I borrowed her from my cousin to help me look after *Mark* because sometimes I have a lot to do in the *shambas* and I need someone to keep an eye on him. *Susan* wants to go back to her mother, but I would like her to stay for another year.” (Interview with CS2-MDF, October 2007)

An important aspect of household labour that has emerged from the CS8-BRM (see Chapter 2) and CS1-JSBM case study above, but true of the other households in Isunga, is that, although adult males take care of many of the heavy tasks, they get considerable help from the other household members. In eight of the case households, women work a lot in the *shambas*, but spend less time farming than the adult males, because of other responsibilities in the family such as taking care of children and cooking. Children too, help with some of the labour-intensive activities such as weeding and harvesting crops (see CS19-LOM below). But how much labour may be mobilised for a



Picture 3: Lapiidi at work.
Photo: Opira Otto, SLU.

¹⁶⁸ I also saw in other households that when crops are head loaded to market, women and children do the work, but when bicycles are available for transport, men use them to transport the crops.

¹⁶⁹ The borrowed child is referred to among the *Lwo* speaking households as *Lapiidi*.

particular activity depends on the nature of the work and the age-gender composition of the household. Households such as CS1-JSBM with many young children usually have more limited access to labour to perform agricultural tasks; but as the children grow older, substantial amounts of household labour becomes available.

5.2.2 Farm work parties

In Isunga, farm work parties have different names depending on the form of the reciprocal obligations and nature of rewards. The ones used by the different case households are: (a) work party which is paid for with only food and *Kwete* beer (*awak*), (b) a farm work party on credit (*diira*), and (c) working for *Kwete* beer by farmer groups (*pur-kongo*).¹⁷⁰ This section looks at the existence and nature of *awak* and *diira* work-sharing practices in the village. In both cases, *Kwete* beer is an important form of reward.¹⁷¹ Although work parties vary in size, organisation and the amount of food and *Kwete* beer provided, there are rules involved that do not appear in agriculture economics literature.

Beer work party (awak)

Awak is a non-monetary work-sharing practice in which a household issues an invitation to relatives, friends and neighbours to participate on a specific day to do a specific agricultural task. Such tasks could be land preparation; weeding or crop harvesting when labour demands peak throughout the village and every farmer is in need of extra help. This places extra demands on villagers to maintain good personal ties with potential labour-sharing partners (see Section 6.2.1). For *awak*, it is compulsory for the host to provide 'good' food during work time and entertain participants with 'good' *Kwete* (maize or millet) beer after work.¹⁷² Unlike the rotational labour practice (*aleya*) discussed below, the host has no obligation to attend future *awak* called by his guests. The process of organising *awak*, from the time the idea is hatched to when it takes place, is complex as it involves many actors. This is illustrated by the CS2-MDF case study below and my own experience from one *awak* in 2007.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ *Pur kongo* and *Pur cente* are considered in Section 5.3 because of farmers groups (*gurubs*) unique attributes of offering various services to farmers, including accessing agricultural labour.

¹⁷¹ Scholars like Donham (1999; 1981), Allen (1987), Swindell (1985), Erasmus (1956), Moore (1975), Geschiere (1995), Fafchamps & Gubert (2007), Fafchamps (1993) and many others, have all described agricultural work groups in which a host family provides guest labourers with food and drink.

¹⁷² 'Good food' in terms of quality, rarity and quantity.

¹⁷³ See Miles & Huberman (1994) use of illustrative narratives as evidence presentation in qualitative case studies

CS2-MDF (Abwoli): Getting extra hands through Awak

The rain stopped earlier than expected and the ground was getting hard, thus making harvesting groundnuts difficult as some remained in the ground. *Abwoli* got worried and needed extra help, as further delays would mean using hoes to dig up the groundnuts, which is a very tedious work. She chose to organise *awak*. *Awak* gives quick results, but organising it is taxing and time-consuming. It starts with identifying a person who is trusted, easy to work with and whose social status in the village is good, to act as a *Lakwena* (messenger). The *Lakwena's* work is to identify and invite people with 'strong chests' for the work party. Together with *Atenyi* (CS3-MAF), they discussed who should be the *Lakwena* for the work party. From their conversation, it was clear that *Abwoli* wanted a *Lakwena* who is trusted in the community, someone whose words are taken seriously and able to mobilise hard-working persons for the task. *Tojiira* was chosen as the *Lakwena* for the *Awak*, and the trio (*Tojiira*, *Atenyi* and *Abwoli*) discussed who should or should not be invited, the number of participants, the size of the *shambas*, what food and how much to cook, how much *Kwete* beer to make and the date for the *Awak*. Fifteen women, all with 'strong chests' and known to *Tojiira* and *Abwoli*, were identified for the work party. *Tojiira* visited each of them to invite them to *Abwoli's Awak* and told them that they should report early. *Atenyi*, however, expressed her concerns about the number of participants and costs involved, especially for the food. The next day *Abwoli* visited her friend *Rukia* to ask if she could help with some cooking, and she agreed. On the day of the *Awak*, thirteen women turned up at around 8am, and by 3pm, two *shambas* of groundnuts totalling one acre had been harvested. While working, they joked, laughed and sang songs, either to enjoy themselves or keep in time with each other. Around noon, *Abwoli* served them food - smoked chicken in groundnut sauce (*olel*), goat stew, *kwon* (millet and millet bread) and some vegetables. After work, *Kwete* beer was served to the participants. They continued with their songs and danced deep into the night. The three participants, who did not drink *Kwete* or *Kipanga*, were served Coca-Cola and given some of the harvest to take home.

Since reputation and social relationships seem to have a strong bearing on farmer's labour behaviours and decisions, the next challenge was to understand the rules involved in such labour practices. I did this by directly participating in *Atenyi's* bean harvest work party.

Field Observation: Awak's rules of engagement

Bongomin (CS19-LOM) was the *Lakwena* for *Atenyi's* work party organised for the bean harvest 7 August 2007. The *Awak* started with nine persons (*lumono*), but by midmorning, five other persons (*lunyango*) joined us.¹⁷⁴ We harvested the

¹⁷⁴ *Lumono* are participants invited in advance by the *Lakwena*, whilst *Lunyango* are those not invited at all, but heard of the *Awak* and turned up either to enjoy the *Kwete* beer or show that

beans by uprooting them and bundling them to facilitate the transport home. *Bongomin* and the other participants came straight from their homes to the field. At around 10am, we had our ‘breakfast’ of freshly brewed *Kwete* beer and an hour later food was served.¹⁷⁵ *Bongomin* divided us into two groups and we ate, telling stories, joking, gossiping and giving one another advice, just as we had during work time. When the *Kwete* beer was served to wash the food down, there were only two of us who drank water.¹⁷⁶ We then took some time off to rest under a tree and went back to work for three more hours. Then, two jerry cans of *Kwete* (40 litres) were served and consumed in less than an hour. By 1pm we had finished harvesting the beans, and went straight to *Atenyi*’s home to drink some *Ajalata* (weak *Kwete*). Both *Atenyi* and *Bazilio* thanked us for a job well done and prayed for it to stop raining for at least a week so that they could dry the beans. *Atenyi* then organised five bottles of *Kipanga* gin to accompany the *Ajalata*. Four of the participants who do not drink *Kipanga* were served *Kwete* beer in a big calabash; and one man who did not drink alcohol was served two bottles of Coca-Cola.¹⁷⁷ During the *Ajalata* drinking session, *Bongomin* not only controlled our behaviour while drinking, but also took a complaint to *Atenyi* about the content of one of the bottles of *Kipanga*, stating that it was “water that smelled *Kipanga*” (insinuating that it was not strong enough). Moreover, he also said how nice and strong the *Kwete* beer in the field had been and encouraged her to increase the quantity next time. Three persons who had not participated in the *Awak*, but were just passing by were also invited to share with us the *Ajalata* and “the water that smelled *Kipanga*”. In a conversation with *Bongomin* during the *Ajalata* drinking session, he said that one of the *Lakwena*’s duties is to see that order is maintained and that bad behaviour discouraged. He stressed, “...you misbehave, I throw you out and next time we don’t come for your *Awak* or invite you to participate in others. We also do not deal with sorcerers and selfish people.”

Bongomin divided us into two groups based on age (younger and older).¹⁷⁸ We all sat down, as no one is allowed to drink *Kwete* while standing up, “...it is a sign of poor upbringing”, one participant said. *Bongomin* poured the *Kwete* beer from the jerry-cans into two big calabashes (*Labun*) in stages. A small calabash (*abit*) and a plastic cup were used to take it from the *Labun*. In my group, we used the *abit* and passed it round from one individual to the next. The same happened in the group of younger people. As the drinking continued, the separation of the groups into older and younger people became less visible. By

they care. Such acts of caring gives them ‘good names’ and could make them qualify to be *Lumono* next time around.

¹⁷⁵ Farmers refer to it as *Otur-Pur* (hoe breaker) because when you drink one calabash too much, you might get tipsy, become aggressive while working the soil and in the process break your hoes’ pole.

¹⁷⁶ The first two *Lunyango* who came when we had just finished eating ate the left overs.

¹⁷⁷ This is an indication that farmers do not participate in *awak* just for the sake of drinking *Kwete* beer; there are other motivations too (see Chapter 6)

¹⁷⁸ If the group were mixed, then it would have been subdivided by gender.

the time we had finished drinking *Ajalata*, a cross-generational drinking cluster was formed. *Awak* does not end with the last drop of the *Kwete* beer. The hosts are obliged to take over the roles of their guests on later occasions, and failure to do so is regarded as improper conduct.

Beer work party on credit (diira)

Diira is a work party on credit. It normally consists of ten to fifteen workers spending a day or less in the *shambas*. It arises when a farmer lacks the resources to make *Kwete* beer, but is in dire need of help for a particular task. Food is served in the *shamba* when the work is done, but the *Kwete* beer is consumed on another occasion.¹⁷⁹ *Diira* is more expensive than *awak* because food is served twice: on the day the agricultural task is performed, and on the day the *Kwete* beer is consumed. Because of costs, it is less common in the village, and mainly used by poor women farmers. Four case households (CS19-LOM, CS7-ABF, CS13-JKF and CS3-MAF) mentioned using it during crop weeding periods at least once in the last five years. Its organisation and function is the same as that of *awak* except that the reward is given in the future, as much as three months later. In an interview with CS19-LOM, *Margret* explained why and when she uses *diira*.

*CS19-LOM (Bongomin): When I cry for help, they come*¹⁸⁰

Bongomin's wife (*Margret*) believes that they are poor because they do not have enough labour to farm their land. She said, "...sometimes the need for labour is just overwhelming and we are forced to make difficult decisions. Last week Ronald had to skip school because he had to help his father prune tobacco...I told him to stop growing tobacco, but he does not listen to me. Tobacco makes us poorer and poorer because it takes all our labour and gives nothing back".¹⁸¹ Growing tobacco is labour-intensive and takes longer to grow than the other crops: from preparing the bedding for the seedlings, sowing, digging the *shamba*, planting, transplanting, weeding, pruning, harvesting, curing to sales." According to *Bongomin*, the most labour-intensive period is transplanting tobacco. It requires careful management as detailed by the BAT people, and it has to be completed within a short period. During this period, everyone in the

¹⁷⁹ Here, the quality or rarity of the food does not matter, but the *Kwete* beer has to be good and plentiful.

¹⁸⁰ According to the 2006 wealth ranking exercise, CS19-LOM was placed among the better-off households of Isunga. But when shown the findings, *Bongomin* objected being a better-off and threatened not to participate in the interview if I insisted. My effort to make him understand that it was his fellow villagers who put him among the better-off households of the village did not help; and resolved to categorise the household as a poor one.

¹⁸¹ Apart from being a high labour demanding crop, tobacco growers are also highly taxed (see Chapter 2). Hence comments such as, "*okumatara nka kalima simonko*", translated, "drifting aimlessly as a tobacco grower".

household has to help. Yet *Margret* has to take care of the maize, beans, cassava and other crops to feed the family. Her labour power alone is never enough. She solves this problem by organising work parties with “...*those who when you cry for help, they come*”. During maize weeding periods, when she doesn’t have enough money or grains to organise *Awak*, she calls upon her friends and good neighbours for a *diira*. She tells them about the *diira* by word of mouth, including the date and amount of *Kwete* beer that will be available.¹⁸² About the participants, she said, “...*these are people who trust me and I trust them. People who can leave their work to come and stop me from crying are good. Of course, next time it is my turn to stop them from crying...and if you can’t pay back by working for them then you are a bad person.*” *Margret’s diira* is usually not more than 10 people (*Acholi* and *Lango*) living nearby and only ‘good’ food is served. The *Kwete* beer comes later when sorghum or maize grains are in abundance, and the debt paid accordingly.

Reflections on the beer work parties

The above case examples show that work-sharing is anchored in personal ties, guided by collective rules and expectations that encourage people to share their resources with those in need. It showed that labour-sharing is possible when the social relationship encourages it, but trust must exist between the actors; hence remarks such as, “...*those who when you cry for help, they come*”. The cases also suggest that both *awak* and *diira* are used during labour-intensive periods. The significance of the cases therefore, is the obligations and expectations embedded in the people’s shared identity and social relations. For example, to access *diira*, farmers like *Margret* invest in social relationships to meet their farming targets. Moreover, the labour practice is seasonal in that, during certain periods when demand for farm labour is high, work is done on credit. The labour debt is paid when crops are harvested. *Margret’s* story also highlights the importance of personal trust and reputation in the social relationship of *Isunga’s* villagers, which as we shall see in the next chapter, plays a very important role in structuring, maintaining and implementing their labour exchange relations.

The case stories used in both *awak* and *diira* above showed that work-sharing is motivated by social ties between family, friends and neighbours. Although such practices do not require the actors involved to make explicit agreements between them, there are expectations. It is a debt of honour that may be payable in future. However, some of the literature on work-sharing in Africa (McAllister, 2003; 2001; Rekdal, 1996; Allan, 1965) misinterprets what

¹⁸² With *diira* there are no *lumono* (early comers) and *lunyango* (mid-morning participants); those invited to participate, all come at the given time.

labour arrangements such as *awak* and *diira* actually indicate. For instance, Allan writes,

“...further evidence of the general existence of a grain surplus is to be found in the practice, almost universal throughout Africa, of the working ‘beer party’. Beer-making played an essential part in the economies of most of the traditional systems of food-production, and the changes of recent years have not greatly diminished its importance...” (ibid, 1965:44)

The driving force is not a ‘grain surplus’ but the work to be done. Whilst *Abwoli*, *Atenyi* and *Margaret* provided *Kwete* beer to their *Awak* and *Diira* participants, this was out of thanks for their help, and of course, for them to relax. The *Kwete* beer was not used as a form of payment for labour power used in unit hours. The driving force is a household’s need for a much-needed labour at the most critical period of farming, not the *Kwete* beer itself. Moreover, when the women were working, they joked, laughed and sung songs to enjoy themselves, and probably mostly to keep up with each other. With this in mind, it can be argued that *Kwete* work parties are not just occasions to work, but also moments for enjoyment, gossiping, eating, drinking, singing and dancing. As Geschiere (1995) observed, the inducement derived from the social or joyful nature of the work motivates work-sharing.

5.2.3 Rotational labour exchange

With rotational labour exchanges (*aleya*), farmers form small groups (3-8 persons) to work each other’s farm on a rotational basis. The common number with the case households is five persons, who would move as a group either from day to day or garden to garden, until the required task of all the participants are completed. The amount of work that each member provides for others is reciprocated almost exactly, and the labour exchange is completed in a matter of days. *Aleya* is common in Isunga and 14 of the case households mentioned using it for digging, weeding and/or harvesting crops when their household labour was inadequate (see Appendix 2).

Driven by the lack of working capital to either hire labour or organise *Awak*, those households instead resort to sharing labour power. Most *aleya* groups are formed or renewed before the first rain. In the case of the latter, members meet to reflect on what happened during the previous season and then plan their farming calendar accordingly. At the meeting, they use *kalulu* (lottery) to decide who should receive labour first, second, third and so on. If a member missed a work session, he or she is required to either send a replacement or give a day’s labour to the host later. This is a very important rule for *aleya* to work, and failure to comply with it usually leads to

replacement. Also, no cash payments are made between the members, but food may be served if the *shamba* is far away or the task is performed during an entire day.¹⁸³ The CS5-AWM case study has been selected to show the key features of *aleya* in the village.

CS5-AWM (Kapere): Rotational labour on a day-to-day basis

Kapere's labour and living conditions worsened when his wife passed away in 2005; "...my wife's departure left a deep hole in our farm labour requirements. My effort is now used mainly to get food", he lamented. However, he has a network of people with whom he shares labour with, "...they are poor people like me that I have good relationships with", *Kapere* said.¹⁸⁴ He primarily calls for their services during planting and weeding. The group includes six persons, who are ethnically mixed and active members of the Isunga Church of Uganda (Anglican Church). Their labour-sharing arrangement is based on a simple rota. *Kapere* explained how it works as, "...if we agree to weed our beans, then we may start with mine on the first day. We work together on my *shamba* and weeds as much as possible.¹⁸⁵ On the second day, we go and work on A's garden, then on B's garden on the third day, on C's on the fourth day, on D's on the fifth day and, finally on household E's garden on the sixth day. In this way, all members' *shambas* are worked on from one cycle of labour sharing". They agree the order of the work in advance, and arriving late is not tolerated. If a member refuses to work for some reason, he is replaced and the village will find out about it. *Kapere* said, "...Isunga is bad, you behave like that, then prepare to work your *shamba* alone". Food is not served since members have their farms nearby. According to him, the *aleya* is the only available labour organisation for him considering his poor health and economic situation. Especially during times for planting and weeding, which normally are short, and without help from others, it would be hard for him to cope. Apart from the *aleya* group, *Kapere* also receives help from his close relatives. They provide him with food, labour and other services, but he complains that support from them has been dwindling: "...without my relatives and in laws, I would have grave difficulties meeting my needs and that of my children. But of late, I don't receive as much help as I used to when my wife died...may be they are tired of my problems or they may be facing similar problems".

It appears that the incentive to supply labour does not only include individual reciprocity, but also group monitoring and repeated interactions. For instance, on the first *shamba* or first day, each member has an incentive to work hard in

¹⁸³ Unlike the *awak* where good food in terms of rarity and quantity is served, with *aleya* this is not important.

¹⁸⁴ One of the group members later lamented, "...this kind of work is not for the rich people who can afford to buy labour from us."

¹⁸⁵ For explanatory purpose, I named the households A, B, C, D and E.

order to encourage similar effort from the host in subsequent rounds due to individual reciprocity. On the other hand, group monitoring encourages work discipline as members do not want to be seen as shirking or doing *kwere-kwere* (shoddy) work (c.f. Geschiere, 1995). Thus, by working hard, a member sends a clear signal to the other members about his or her desire to continue sharing work with them. However, such incentives could also decline in later rounds because those individuals who have already hosted have no immediate inducement to supply their labour power to others. But because group members have something in common (ethnicity, kinship, friendship, similar fates or drinking beer together) each member has a high probability of future exchanges with other members of the group, and they continue sharing work and improving their reputation.¹⁸⁶

Just like the examples of *awak* above, *aleya* labour practices are also anchored in personal ties and guided by collective rules and expectations. Thus, labour-sharing is possible when the social relationship encourages it. But it also changes whenever the need for extra labour becomes too heavy to handle. When this happens, existing ties are weakened and relationships become unfavourable. This was made clear in the CS5-AWM case household, when *Kapere* hinted that he receives less help from relatives and in-laws than before. He proposed that this might be because they are tired of his problems or they may be facing similar problems, thus suggesting that labour-sharing and reciprocal exchange practices do not work at all times. It is clear from *Kapere's* story that labour practices anchored in personal ties presuppose a social closeness between actors, and for this to be true, there must be trust. Scholars such as Rose-Ackerman (2001), Landa (1994) and others associate trust with social closeness in the sense of sharing the same categories of expected rights and duties, plus shared values and interests.¹⁸⁷ Accordingly, people feel confident in another person when they trust the other to have the ability, the desire and the good disposition to perform an exchange, or when their own familiarity with the others allow them to make requests. Rose-Ackerman (2001), writes,

¹⁸⁶ Following Furubotn & Richter (2005), in a game-theoretic framework, the above reasoning makes sense as a farmer who has already hosted in a one-time labour exchange has no incentives to supply labour power on the other members' farms.

¹⁸⁷ Closeness could be viewed in many ways. For example as *Musa* remarked: "*they are poor people like me that I have good relationship with....*", or "*this kind of work is not for the rich people who can afford to buy labour from us.*" It is therefore plausible that poorer households consider themselves close to each other, and share work or labour practices with each other more, whereas, the better-off households are probably never bothered by perceived closeness.

“...trust is a relational response, not a result of blind loyalty that permits risks in dealing with each other” (ibid, 2001:543).

Using Rose-Ackerman’s social closeness approach to cooperative labour practices illustrated above, casts doubt on Polanyi’s (2001) reference to reciprocity as the movement of resources between correlative points of symmetrical groupings. For instance, *Bazilio* (CS1-JSBM) belongs to an *Aleya* group including three poorer persons from their *Kamdini* Reflect Group. This raises question of whether the labour relations between two wealth groups are actually done on equal terms as it emerged from the CD5-AWM case story.¹⁸⁸ It could also be that *Bazilio* and the poorer persons do not exchange labour for labour, but something else.

5.2.4 Interlocking dimensions of agricultural labour relations

There are also cases of interlocking exchanges involving labour during cropping seasons in Isunga. The ones mentioned by the case households include: sharecropping (land and labour), borrowing children for labour (*piidi*), *Kipanga* beer exchanged for labour and food crops exchanged for labour during harvest time.¹⁸⁹ Such exchange behaviour is not confined to villagers in Isunga. For example, in her analysis of labour practices in India, Hill (1986) pointed to sharecropping (land and labour) and debt bondage (land and capital).¹⁹⁰ Dual exchanges of resources exist in Isunga and surrounding areas and are important strategies to be able to cope with labour, land and capital shortages in agricultural production. The CS18-MOF and CS13-JKF narratives below bring out some of the key interlocking aspects of agricultural labour in Isunga.¹⁹¹

CS18-MOF: A case of sharecropping (land for labour)

Min Peko has 36 acres of land, which she uses for cultivating maize, beans, sweet potatoes, cassava and green leafy vegetable for domestic consumption. She also grows sunflower (three acres) and tobacco (two acres) crops through sharecropping arrangements with three other persons (*Onen*, *Adyebo* and *Akena*).¹⁹² *Min Peko*’s contribution is the land, securing a contract with the BAT (U) Ltd, the ox-plough and, when needed, buying *leja-leja* to help the men with weeding the tobacco. In return, she gets half of the crops. The men are also responsible for taking care of the six oxen and ploughing her food crops. They

¹⁸⁸ See Donham (1999) for similar reasoning.

¹⁸⁹ See table 5.2 above for households involved in interlocking exchanges.

¹⁹⁰ See Klijn & Pain’s (2007) work on informal credit practices in Afghanistan where debt bondage is also mentioned.

¹⁹¹ See also CS11-HJM (*Hajji*) about groundnuts and beans exchanged for labour in Chapter 7 (Section 7.4).

¹⁹² These are IDPs from *Apac* District in the *Lango* region, Northern Uganda.

are free to use the animals for ploughing their fields and hire the ploughs to others too, but with her permission. She said, "...that is how I maintain my good relation with them. Whatever money they get is theirs. They are good people, except the young one who I have noticed is getting more and more into drinking...I'll get time talk to him. They are like my relatives now you know. They also help me organise 'pur kongo or awak' when I want to open new fields." Min Peko refers to Onen as, "...someone who usually does not go wrong. I trust him and when he says so and so is good, my heart accepts."

Their sharecropping relationships started in 2004, when Onen approached Min Peko that he did not have money to rent land and wanted to 'borrow' two acres of her land for growing tobacco. Min Peko recalled, "...I told him there is nothing for free these days. If you are ready to share the harvest with me then fine, I can give you two or more acres. But I warned him of the many problems involved with tobacco growing, but poverty blocked his ears. The following day he came back...that he has no choice but to get into tobacco farming. I felt sorry for him and went ahead to renew my contract with BAT". With the contract secured, the men could sell their tobacco directly to BAT (U) Ltd; get advice from their extension workers and get fertilisers from them on credit. Their sharecropping relationship is not without problems. However, when there are misunderstandings, they try to solve them amicably. Min Peko said, "...I tell them, whenever there is a problem, it is best we solve it ourselves, since no one can understand the problem better than us, and they agree with me". Most of their quarrels centre around their relationships with BAT (U) Ltd. Min Peko said, "...last year, BAT did not buy many of the leaves and I had to help them pay the fertiliser loans we owe them...after all, the contract is in my name. BAT said our tobacco was of poor quality and refused to buy it...yet we all know the real reason was because they had filled their quota for the year and didn't have money to buy more. The BAT people don't treat farmers well, but we still go to them because they pay if you accept to be their slave and poverty makes us their slaves."

CS13-JKF: Child borrowing (piidi) and exchanging Kipanga for work

Mama Toto's main economic activities are farming and selling Kipanga and Malwa.¹⁹³ Although she owns less than an acre of land on which her homestead stands, she accesses land for farming by borrowing and renting it from those who have excess land. Still, she is constrained by labour for working it, and addresses it by organising *awak*, *diira* or exchange *kipanga beer directly for labour inputs*. Mama Toto is very popular with her Kipanga and Malwa customers because she sometimes gives it to them on credit. This has improved her social standing with them, and they in turn give her their labour whenever

¹⁹³ The CS13-JKF (Mama Toto) household shifts between the Better Off and the Poor wealth groups during certain periods of the farming calendar. For instance, during maize, sorghum and tobacco harvest times, Mama Toto has good money because many villagers come for her Kipanga gin and Malwa beer. But during weeding periods, she struggles to make ends meet has very little money or no money at all on certain days.

she needs it. *Mama Toto* greatly appreciates such exchange relationships, since it gives her access to extra labour when she needs it most. She said, “...some of them like my stuff. They drink it and pay back by digging or weeding my garden. Since I don't have a husband to dig for me, my relationship with them is very important. I trust and respect them...although at times I do not like what they do when they take one bottle too much. I think they also like and trust me, since they keep on coming. Having such relations is very good since we do not have to spend much time discussing what to do, how much to work or the 'strength' of my *Kipanga*. We agree by word of mouth and it stops there...I think we have done well so far without many quarrels because we try hard not to quarrel. Sometimes when I desperately need help with digging or weeding and my business not doing well, I ask my friends (*Alero* and *Wilobotek*) to work my garden on credit, and I give them beer or money later. They have never let me down, although sometimes I do let them down by 'paying' them much later than agreed...the most important thing is to follow through on your agreements. But I worry that if I frequently break my word, then one day they might turn their backs on me...and the relationship breaks down completely. I hope not.”

The above cases suggest that when crop production is restricted by the lack of labour, land or working capital, farmers enter into some interlocking relationships to access the input they lack. This is important as some households use it for building and maintaining social relationships in the village (see Chapter 6). The CS18-MOF sharecropping example showed that by making the oxen and land available to the landless farmers, *Min Peko* also secured a good source of farm labour and some of the crops from the land. Both accessed the inputs they lacked. Moreover, as *Onen* takes care of the oxen, which they use to work each other's *shambas*, the reward he gets is the services the animals render him as well. Even *Mama Toto*'s story of borrowing *Santa* to 'play' with her young son (*Jacob*) is much more than about enabling *Mama Toto* to fulfil her agricultural or other roles. *Mama Toto* gets the much needed extra labour hours through *piidi*, but at a cost. She has to take care of *Santa* (feed, house and clothe her), as well as meet some obligations to *Santa*'s parents. For instance, apart from being nice to them so as not to sour existing relationships, *Mama Toto* is also expected to assist them in times of hardship (send them some money or food). The use of *Kipanga* gin to pay for farm labour when production is restricted by the lack of labour is equally important to explain interlocking exchange relations in crop production. It suggests that trusting and respectful behaviour is the basis for not only structuring an exchange relationship, but maintaining it too.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ This is discussed more in the next chapter.

Uganda's agricultural modernisation efforts only look at one side of farmers' economic behaviours, that is, the rational calculation of self-interest (GOU, 2010; GOU, 2000). Yet, as the *Min Peko* (CS18-MOF) and *Mama Toto* (CS13-JKF) examples have shown, there are alternative perspectives on the mechanisms and motivations of sharing resources that emphasise social interaction. Their labour-sharing arrangements are developed within their personal networks of reciprocity, which functions well in the strength of a rationale of moral, kinship and friendship values.¹⁹⁵ They are socially embedded exchanges that obey a socio-cultural logic that differs from the 'commercialisation' ideas promoted by the government. So, households seek to gain their welfare through informal means rather than the market.

5.2.5 Wage labour

When households (poor or better off) do not have sufficient family labour to complete particular farm, they may also turn to hired labour to access the necessary labour. The three types of hired labour used in crop production in Isunga are: (a) piece work or day-to-day casual wage labour (*leja-leja*); (b) seasonal wage labour, and (c) working for cash (*pur cente*) by farmers groups.¹⁹⁶ Below are three case examples to highlight some of the characteristics of hired labour in the village.

CS6-BOM (Zakayo): a case of leja-leja, pur cente and seasonal labour

This household has enough land which *Zakayo* inherited from his father when he died. He uses it for crop farming and livestock keeping. Every year he puts aside 20 acres of land for growing beans, groundnuts, tobacco and sunflower for money.¹⁹⁷ This requires a lot of labour, but since the household has only two working members, they source extra labour from outside the household. *Zakayo* uses different labour practices depending on the task and periods of the farming calendar. For example, he employs two persons (*Bali-Bali* and *Oturu*) between April to July when the demand for labour in his household is very high, and pays them a monthly wage of 60,000 UGX per person (the wages are paid in advance but on a monthly basis until the contract expires) and 30 kilograms of beans to each of them at the end of their tenure in July. *Zakayo* remarked, "...but sometimes due to too much rain or little rain, the harvest is poor we renegotiate the *winye* (agreement) and give less beans...like last year, they received 20kg instead of 30kg."¹⁹⁸ Both *Bali-Bali* and *Oturu* report to work

¹⁹⁵ See Chapters 6 and 7.

¹⁹⁶ *Pur cente* is purposely pushed to the next sub section on finding agricultural labour in farmers groups.

¹⁹⁷ I asked him many times to disclose how much land he has, but he refused. But other sources said he has more than 300 acres in and around Isunga.

¹⁹⁸ See Chapter 6 for the significance of renegotiation of *winye*.

from their homes and work all day, but *Alice* gives them lunch. *Zakayo* also lends them land if they ask for it “...it is the best way to keep them close to me,” he said. But whenever he is in acute need of extra farm labour for a particular task, he hires *leja-leja* or organises *pur cente* or *pur kongo* through *Kica Ber Akiba* group. Most *leja-leja* labourers want their work paid in cash, as soon as the task is done, but *Zakayo* mentioned four guys who sometimes work on credit and he pays them later. He remarked, “...they are my friends and I have known them for long”. Sometime, he pays their wages in advance before the work is done. “...when they need money in advance, I give it to them after careful consideration, but I don’t normally encourage it. I also give them a small credit when they’re hard up...but I assess the situation first and if my ‘heart tells’ me to give, then I do it. It is good for our relationships,” he said. When they take credit, it means they owe *Zakayo* their labour and work to pay it.

CS9-MAM (Musa): We do leja-leja when we need cash.

This is an IDP family from *Oyam* District. When they arrived in *Isunga* in 2001, they settled on two acres land of *Nyamakere* forest reserve. On this land they grow food crops and sunflower for money. *Musa* complained the harvests never provide for three months, because they don’t have enough land. “...but even if we had enough land, I don’t think we would have managed to cultivate it with just the two of us since our children are still young. Labour is a big headache, especially during weeding periods,” *Anna* added. Their farm labour situation worsens when they have to leave working their *shamba* altogether and go to work for others to get some money for buying basic commodities. Both *Musa* and *Anna* do not like to do *leja-leja*, but resort to it especially during the hunger season when desperately in need of cash to buy food. *Anna* said, “...it is not easy when you need money to take a child to the clinic or buy food and you don’t have the cash. Sometimes we do *leja-leja*, even when weeds are taking over our crops. I don’t like it, but it is the only option we have here.” They have some ‘connections’ and when they hear from them that a *leja-leja* opportunity exists somewhere or announced on the market day that work exists, they go to be recruited. *Anna* added that, “...during the hunger season, many people want to work, yet there is not much work. The rich ones know about it, and take advantage of it by paying little for the work. When you complain, they shout at you ‘*Nga-Olwongi*’ (who called you)...and tobacco farmers are the worst”. A stint of *leja-leja* labour (known as *katala*) is worked for between 1,500 UGX – 2500 UGX, depending on the activity (digging, weeding or harvesting), the period of a farming calendar, how good one is at negotiation (*patana*) and the location of the *shamba*.¹⁹⁹ If the *shamba* is far from home, they demand more. *Musa* takes *patana* very seriously and is very careful with his choice of words

¹⁹⁹ *Katala* is measured with *tal* (a measuring pole) of 2 meters long. In November 2008, one *katala* for digging (opening land) was 2 *tal* by 20 *tal* (i.e. 4x40 meters); and for weeding maize was 3 *tal* by 20 *tal* (i.e. 6x40 meters).

and this has helped him avoid many misunderstandings.²⁰⁰ Agreements for *leja-leja* are made verbally. The seller and buyer agree on what to do, how much should be paid for the work (i.e. wage per day or per *katala*) and the duration of the work. Nonetheless, sometimes conflicts are unavoidable, even if the *winye* were good. *Musa* remarked, “...I once worked for your friend *Bazilio* for three days, it took him months to pay me.”²⁰¹

CS16-VLF (Sylvia): Even the poor hire labour

Sylvia came to Isunga from *Acholi* in 1996 when her husband was killed by the government soldiers who suspected him of being an LRA rebel. She first settled in a village near *Karuma*, just across the River Nile. But when the Mutunda sub-county authority started allocating parts of the Nyamakere Forest Reserve land to the IDPs, she got 2.5 acres.²⁰² She said, “...but being an old woman reduced my chances of acquiring good land. I had to weed a Local Councillor’s garden to get money to pay one of the persons allocating the land. Even then, I was given land in the middle of the forest because other people had refused to take it...and because I needed land, I did not hesitate to accept it”. On the land she grows maize, beans and leafy vegetables for her consumption, “...which I share with monkeys, baboons and wild pigs”, she remarked. *Sylvia* is hard-working and earns much-needed cash from selling firewood to *Kipanga* distillers, grass for thatching huts; packing charcoal in bags for others, doing piece work *leja-leja* for others and selling wild vegetables like *Ocuga* and *Akeyo* on market days. She said, “...although selling firewood gives more money than doing *leja-leja*, it requires a long journey deeper into the forest.” *Sylvia* also works more during the dry season, when she collects enough wood for sale and use during the coming rainy season. *Sylvia*’s other skill as traditional birth attendant earned her two goats, which she is very proud of and she is looking forward to the day they start ‘producing’. She saves some of the money earned and uses it to hire *leja-leja* for opening up land (digging) at the start of the rainy season and “weeding maize and beans garden when it is about to be consumed by weeds”. *Sylvia* does not like working for other people, especially during the hunger season because it means abandoning her *shamba*, but she does it for the money. Sometimes, when she is really hard up, she begs for basic commodities like salt and kerosene from her firewood customers, including *Mama Toto* (CS13-JKF).

²⁰⁰ Reaching *winye* (labour agreement/contract) is discussed extensively in Chapter 6.

²⁰¹ *Musa* referred to *Bazilio* (CS1-JSBM) as my ‘friend’ because he housed me during my field work periods. The dispute between *Musa* and *Bazilio* and other forms of labour disputes as well as how they are resolved are presented and discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

²⁰² The word ‘own’ is used because the ‘encroached’ land officially belongs to the National Forestry Authority (NFA). But since the NFA kept quiet when they moved in, they (encroachers) interpreted it as an acceptance by the government that whatever portion is cleared and farmed is theirs. Moreover, in 2006, President Museveni instructed the NFA not to evict any encroacher from any forest reserve in the entire country.

Hired labour is common in Isunga and is mostly sought by better-off farmers that have enough money to pay for farm labour (CS6-BOM, CS1-JSBM), by labour deficit households such as female-headed households (CS16-VLF), by households headed by elderly persons who cannot complete demanding tasks such as felling trees, digging or sowing (CS16-VLF, CS4-MOJM) and households in need of money for income/consumption-smoothing (CS9-MAM, CS16-VLF). The above cases also brought out some distinct differences between *leja-leja* and seasonal wage labour that should be highlighted.

Casual wage labour (leja-leja)

This is probably the most common form of hired labour in Isunga, and all 20 case households in this study have engaged in hired labour either as labour buyers or sellers in the last five years. *Leja-leja* wages are paid either by day or by task and they vary depending on type of work and persons involved. The daily wage is 2500 UGX, irrespective of the nature of the work. Wage by task is the most popular. As mentioned by *Bazilio* (CS1-JSBM), hiring *leja-leja* during weeding and harvesting periods is very difficult. They are also periods when nearly every farmer tries to enlist the services of others, but fellow farmers are busy with similar agricultural activities. Consequently, those who hire *leja-leja* during such periods succeed in accessing labour based on personal ties and connections rather than pure economics principles of supply and demand signalled by wages. Thus, although cash payment is used, wage contracts are influenced by social factors (c.f Bryceson, 2006; Harris-White, 2004; Whiteside & Malawi, 1999).²⁰³

Compared to seasonal labour, the duration of work in *leja-leja* is much shorter (usually less than a week). However, those who hire *leja-leja* include the better-off and the poorer households, but for different purposes. For instance, as mentioned above, *Sylvia's* advanced age makes it difficult for her to complete some of the more demanding tasks by herself. She earns money through non-farm activities, saves some and uses it for hiring *leja-leja* for opening her gardens and weeding crops. But *leja-leja* labour-selling is more or less confined to poorer households because the households have to supplement their own low farm outputs or incomes.²⁰⁴

As mentioned in Chapter 2, in Isunga's rain fed farming system, the season of high labour demand usually coincides with the time when poorer households exhaust their food stocks. Therefore, casual wage labour provides an important opportunity for households short of food to survive these periods. Yet there are

²⁰³ I will return to this in Chapter 7 when discussing the durability of informality.

²⁰⁴ Although women sell *leja-leja* labour, most *leja-leja* labour is sold by men and mostly for income/consumption smoothing.

times when food crop failure affects most of the households in the village, as was the case in 2007 when heavy rain destroyed most crops. Then demand for casual wage labour decreased since few farmers had the cash to hire labour, thus making casual wage labour an unreliable source of income for the poorer households. Furthermore, as it emerged from the CS16-VLF and CS9-MAM case examples, the involvement of poorer households in *leja-leja* may also result in food shortages in the households. Simply because the need to engage in *leja-leja* to obtain an immediate supply of food means less labour input for their own *shambas* during the most critical periods of farming, which may result in smaller harvests and can create a vicious cycle of food insecurity for some of the poorer households. This is probably what Devereux (2001) had in mind when he suggested that casual labour can be an erosive survival strategy when farmers neglect their own farming.

Some comments on seasonal labour arrangements

Four case households employ seasonal labour for tobacco, sunflower production and for specific tasks (digging, planting and weeding).²⁰⁵ They all belong to the better-off wealth group. The CS6-BOM example above showed how seasonal labour is organised in Isunga, where labourers such as *Bali-Bali* and *Oturu* are employed for several months during a farming calendar. Labourers report to work from their homes and no kin relationships exist between the employers and labourers. Although labour agreements are normally only for one season, it is normally renewed if the relationship between the parties is good. The rewards labourers get for their services depend on the *winye* between the employer and labourer, which could be purely cash or a combination of cash and 'in kind'. In any case, the employers make all decisions on farm management and labourers are monitored to avoid shoddy work.

The CS6-BOM case example also shows that seasonal labour arrangements provided *Zakayo* (the employer) with the means for risk-sharing and *Bali-Bali and Oturu* (the labourers) with the means of income and consumption-smoothing.²⁰⁶ *Bali-Bali and Oturu* received their wages in cash and in kind; and the wages in kind included daily lunch and some beans after the end of their tenure.²⁰⁷ Such payments in kind guarantee the basic survival of the labourers during the 'hunger season' when many households face food deficits. But most interestingly, both *Zakayo* and his two labourers appear to bear the risk of

²⁰⁵ The four households are CS6-BOM, CS4-MOJM, CS17-JOM and CS18-MOF.

²⁰⁶ Smoothing is used here to express the need to meet daily consumption needs when income is erratic and falls short.

²⁰⁷ The quality of the food did not matter like at the *awak*.

production failure. *Zakayo's* statement that, "...sometimes due to too much rain or little rain, the harvest is poor we re-negotiate the *winye* (agreement) and give less beans...like last year, they received 20kgs instead of 30kgs", indicates that labour contracts (*winye*) are amended so as to enable employers to share the risk of crop failure with the labourers. At this point, it is probably correct to suggest that reducing the amount of payment in kind (beans) after a bad harvest is similar to that of Hill's (1986) sharecropping, in the sense that both the employer and the labourer share the risk of production. Therefore, seasonal labour arrangements can be regarded as a form of fixed wage contracts with a risk of sharing characteristics of share contracts (ibid, 1986).²⁰⁸

The labour arrangement above carries with it some advantages to both employers like *Zakayo* and labourers like *Bali-Bali* and *Oturu*. For *Zakayo*, it provides a means of risk-sharing under highly uncertain conditions of crop production. As mentioned several times in this thesis, relying totally on rain fed farming, Isunga farmers occasionally face production failure due to unreliable weather. Moreover, the prices of key crops such as beans, maize, sunflower and tobacco fluctuate widely, thus adding another risk towards a fall in income for farmers who depend on it for cash. In such a situation, the risk-sharing arrangement with labourers in a seasonal labour contract can help improve *Zakayo's* income situation during bad times. On the labourer's side, seasonal labour arrangements can guarantee food security for them during the lean period with payments in kind. For those households that exhaust their food stocks during the rainy season, the guaranteed provision of food crops such as beans is desirable.

5.3 Finding labour in farmer groups

All the case households mentioned belong or have belonged to a farmers group (*gurub*) at some point during the last ten years.²⁰⁹ The *gurubs* are important in the livelihood activities of the villagers as they offer many services to their members, including saving and borrowing money (*Kalulu*)²¹⁰, drinking beer for leisure, solving disputes, moral support during hard times (e.g. when death

²⁰⁸ See CS18-MOF narrative in Section 5.2.3 above.

²⁰⁹ See Appendix 3: Key characteristics of the farmer groups mentioned by the case households.

²¹⁰ The *Kalulu* credit system is practiced by members of a beer drinking group where every week, each member contributes 1,000 UGX to a group savings fund. But if a member had a bad week, he contributes a smaller amount, say 500 UGX or even less - but, may also give more than 1000 UGX in good times. Each Sunday a different member of the group receives all the money collected from the previous week through a draw of names by the Chairperson of the drinking group, hence the name *Kalulu* (lottery). It follows very simple rules based on trust.

'visits' them), and of course, work-sharing. Since the *gurubs* are quite similar in terms of their organisation, functions and the rules that govern their activities, *Kica Ber Akiba Malwa* Drinking Group and *Kony Paco* Group, are picked to explore how Isunga's villagers access much-needed farm labour through farmers groups (*gurubs*).²¹¹ The emphasis is on how such groups emerge, function and are organised, as well as exploring the rules that govern their activities. However, the common denominator with the *gurubs* is that social closeness and knowledge about each other is central to their existence and membership.²¹²

Kica Ber Akiba Group: the beer pot friends of Isunga

Sharing a glass of *Kipanga* gin, a calabash of *Kwete* beer or a pot of *Malwa* beer is a very important social and economic activity in Isunga. It is virtually impossible to get around the village, and not meet someone referring to beer brewing, distilling, selling or drinking. *Kica Ber Akiba* is a *Malwa* Drinking Group, but includes activities other than drinking beer and getting drunk. The *gurub* was started as an *aleya* in 2002 by six farmers who came together to share their labour to prepare their *shambas*, weeding and harvesting, but also to 'enjoy life' by drinking good *Malwa* beer at least once a week. Each member would contribute 1,000 UGX per week. When consuming the beverage, they discuss farming issues, politics, soccer and life in Isunga, in a relaxed environment.

Until May 2007, *Kica Ber Akiba* was purely a male group because many men did not like the idea of women sitting together with them to drink. But, after a long debate, the critical men changed their minds and women joined the *gurub*. Since then, it has grown to include 23 fully paid members (15 men and eight women) all married with children. Five of the women are married to the men who were against women joining it. The other three are married to non-members, but became members because they brew good *Malwa* beer. With such numbers, it became increasingly difficult to meet at members' homes and continue with the same concept. Since then they have been meeting at *Mama Toto's* drinking venue at the trading centre. The Chairman of the group said,

"...during our earlier meetings, we talked a lot about why, every year, we don't have enough food in our homes, get little money when we sell our crops...and we haven't got the answers yet," he said with a *smile*. "We also talked about

²¹¹ These groups are picked because I followed them longer than the rest and the information collected was more detailed. *Kony Paco* in particular has some unique rules and protocols that show how such a social institution has become more economic in nature and roles within the ten or so years of its existence. *Kica Ber Akiba Malwa* Drinking Group on the other hand clearly illustrates the social and economic roles beer plays in Isunga village.

²¹² I suppose this could be the case with all collective labour practices.

how to acquire more farm land, labour during weeding periods or money during hunger seasons. Those were tough days. We then resolved to cooperate more amongst ourselves since it would be easier to get help from each other and to work harder if we are to improve our lives. That is how the group came about.” (Interview with the Chairperson, FG3-KBG, November 2008)

The membership fee is 3,000 UGX per year, plus the weekly 1,000 UGX for buying *Malwa* beer. Members also save 2,500 UGX per month to help each other during cash demanding times like funerals, marriages, sickness or trouble with the authorities.²¹³ The rules for the monthly contributions are not very strict. If, for instance, members have had a bad month, they can pay later; and can even attend ‘beer pot’ meetings without paying the 1,000 UGX. The Chairman remarked,

“...farming is very difficult here without enough hands to work it. If your family can’t provide it, then you try other means like working in groups...one of our strengths is sharing work. We help each other with digging, weeding and other works when called upon. Since we are many, we divide ourselves into smaller groups and work hard to finish our farming tasks accordingly.” (Interview with the Chairperson, FG3-KBA, November 2008)

One member of the *gurub* remarked later on that,

“...the good thing with our group is, if you want to fight one member, prepare to fight all of us. Some people do not like us, so we have to keep together and always have someone trusted to watch your back, and ready to defend you when attacked. We also have a sure source of labour when in need...and through *pur cente*, we earn some money for the *gurub*.” (Comment by a woman member of the FG3-KBA, November 2008)

Non-members can also engage the *gurub* to work their *shambas*, but for money. They charge 80,000 UGX for digging one acre and 60,000 UGX for weeding. Alternatively, they charge per participating member, 1,000 – 2,500 UGX per task (*katala*) depending on the nature of work, location of the *shamba*, the character or reputation of the person hiring the *gurub*, “...if you are not a nice or kind person, we charge more,” the *Wonkom* remarked with a smile. The money earned is saved and used later. But sometimes, not all members turn up for such group work, and whenever this happens and no good reasons are given, members

²¹³ The money is accessed through the *Kalulu* system mentioned earlier. Every last Sunday of the month, two members receive 15,000 UGX each through raffle draw of names by the Chairman (*Wonkom*). Names of those who have already got their rounds are omitted. It runs that way until all members get their shares.

are fined. The common punishment is a person pays twice the amount a participant earned the group. For instance, if members worked for one *katala* each (i.e. 2 *tals* x 20 *tals*) and earned 2,500 UGX, then the fine is 5,000 UGX. This is a lot of money in Isunga, so it is best to attend. Those who refuse to pay or don't comply with the other regulations, are considered 'bad' persons and expelled from the group altogether. *Kica Ber Akiba* Group members know and trust each other well and above all, share the same ethnic background. This has contributed to their success. Thus, as Moore (1975), Allen (1987), Donham (1999) and other earlier scholars observed, groups like *Kica Ber Akiba* function on the basis of kinship and friendship values.

Kony Paco Group: working for Kwete beer or money

The *Kony Paco* Group was founded in 2001 by ten male farmers, and has since expanded to 26 households. The initial aim of the *gurub* was to improve members' maize and beans production; access cash credit through *kalulu* (lottery); celebrate Christmas, Easter and Independence holidays together; as well as stand up for each other during moments of happiness like marriages and bad ones such as deaths in their families. According to the Chairman of the *gurub*, they had to abandon most of their initial ideas in 2006 because members were not disciplined enough, and most of them found it difficult to pay the monthly fee. Instead, they chose to concentrate on helping members during digging and weeding by working for *Kwete* beer. In 2008, they introduced a new service, working for cash for members as well as non-members.

“...every year we dig two *shambas* for each member and also help with weeding the crops. We do it as *aleya*. This year we started working for money. It is open to members and non-members with money who would need our service. For non-members, we select very carefully and just don't just go for money. We do not work for sorcerers or selfish people no matter how much money they have...not even for those unfriendly women who don't sell beer on credit. We know all of them,” the Chairman said with a smile. (Conversation with the *Wonkom*, FG4-KPG, May 2009)

Since the sizes of the *shambas* vary from household to household, they use a measuring stick (*tal*) for measuring the areas to work on. *Kony Paco's tal* is 2 meters long, and the measurements for a digging stint (*Katala*) is 2*tals* x 20*tals* (i.e. 160 square meters); while for weeding it is 3*tals* x 20*tals* (240 square meters). The difference arises because opening up land is more difficult than weeding. It also emerged from the FGD that the *gurub* practices price

discrimination regarding work for cash (*pur cente*).²¹⁴ For instance, the known *Kipanga* dealers in the village like *Mama Toto* pay their *katala* according to the costs of a bottle of *Kipanga* and their social standing in the village. If a *Kipanga* dealer is known for charging more than average per bottle or she is one of those who do not sell beer on credit, then she is considered unfriendly and charged extra. Interestingly, the officials of the *gurub* and elderly members are also given less *katala* out of respect for their age.

Membership, leadership and rules of Kony Paco Group

Membership of the *Kony-Paco* is based on households, where each household contributes 2,000 UGX per month, on top of the initial joining fee of 5,000 UGX. The group promotes unity among members, and members try hard to support each other. For instance, if there is a death in one of the households, they come together and support the bereaved family through the difficult period. *Kony-Paco* is headed by the *Wonkom* (Chairman) and his words weigh more than others, especially when arbitrating disputes within the group and making decisions about punishments. On the other hand, he is not allowed to impose his wishes upon members, nor make decisions affecting the *gurub* without consulting members. He is to live by example and failure to do so may lead to heavy fines. One member remarked,

“...in 2006, our *Wonkom* fought with *Okello* (a member of the *gurub*) at my *Pur-Kongo*. We had to punish him hard and denied him our labour until he paid 30,000 UGX and two jerry-cans (40 litres) of *Kwete*.” (Participant at the FGD with FG4-KPG, November 2008)

The other officials of the *gurub* are: *Rwot Kweri* (Chief of Hoe), *Lakan Lim* (Treasurer) and *Askari* (security man). There are no female members in leadership roles, although five of the households are headed by women. In cases where the *Wonkom* is unable to perform his duty, the *Rwot Kweri* takes over. His other duties include keeping the measuring stick (*tal*), measuring the work stint, making sure tasks are properly done, as well as tasting *Kwete* beer.²¹⁵ His other responsibility is to divide the *Kwete* beer among the members in age groups: *ludito* (senior members of the group), *bullu* (youth) and *ludongo*

²¹⁴ Price discrimination here means a wage setting strategy that charges *Kony Paco*'s customers' different wages for the same kind of service.

²¹⁵ He tastes the *Kwete* beer and determines if it is suitable for consumption.

(the age group between *ludito* and *bullu*). Unmarried men (*lubot*) are put together with the youth (*bullu*) irrespective of their ages.²¹⁶

The work of the *Lakan-Lim* is to receive and keep the groups' money safe until members decide what to do with it. They get the money from various sources as detailed above, and use it to celebrate 'big days' such as Christmas, New Year and *Uhuru* (Independence). The money can also be borrowed by members who find themselves in acute need of cash. They ask for it through the *Wonkom* who convenes a meeting and a decision is passed by consensus. The *Askari* on the other hand, is to maintain order during *Kwete* drinking, meetings and to make sure that *Kony Paco's* rules are followed. He also assists the *Rwot-Kweri* measures the *shamba* to be worked on, calculates how much work members should do and the amount of *Kwete* beer to be consumed or money to be paid. Otherwise, members of the *Kony Paco* Group are very particular with the qualities of their leaders. For instance, according to the *Rwot Kweri* of the group, his ideal *Wonkom* is,

“...someone who inspires respect for his behaviour in the village. We want a *Wonkom* who can promote unity and harmony in the group, a person whose words are sweet in our ears and with the ability to listen well, see things some of us can't see...someone with the ability to intervene during bad arguments and always impartial when resolving disputes. We don't want those who change like chameleons and speak with 'double tongue'...those who talk bad of fellow members to others.” (*Rwot Kweri*, FG4-KPG, November 2008)

Although the officials of *Kony Paco* seem to wield a lot of power, their activities and that of members are governed by many unwritten rules. At the start of the first rainy season, members meet to oversee existing rules and/or introduce new ones. They also discuss the leadership of the *gurub*, which quite often leads to the bad ones being replaced. According to the *Wonkom*, the most important rules are those that relate to measurement of how much work should be done during digging and weeding, in return for what quantity of *Kwete* beer or how much money per *katala*.²¹⁷ There are also rules about penalties for improper conduct or failure to carry out duties as agreed. The *Wonkom* narrated what happened to an old member, who unceremoniously left the *gurub* as follows,

²¹⁶ The women who carry the *Kwete* beer are pushed to *ludito*, who can either give them some *Kwete* or nothing because it is assumed they have taken care of themselves or their portions are with the host.

²¹⁷ It is a common practice that rewards are adjusted according to the buying price of a bottle of *Kipanga* gin at the trading centre.

“...*Unyegiu* left the *gurub* and talked really badly of us when we finished weeding his tobacco. These days we don’t even greet him...and when his child died last month, he buried her alone. We never attended...he cried like a baboon. Now he wants to come back, but we won’t allow him back. He is a very bad person.” (Conversation with *Wonkom*, FG4-KPG, May 2009)

In the focus groups, the following rules were mentioned.

“...if the *Kwete* beer tastes bad, smells bad or is watery, the host is fined an equivalent of half of the agreed quantity in cash. If the *Kwete* is sour or too sweet, members discuss how to punish the host...depending on the households’ past records and other factors. For instance, if his wife does not give *den* (i.e. sell beer on credit), then they are harshly punished for being unfriendly.” (*Rwot Kweri*, FG4-KPG, May 2009)

“...but if the *Rwot Kweri* also said that the beer is good and very nice when he tasted it, and it later turn out to be bad...say sour or smelly, then the *Rwot Kweri* is fined to pay himself (*laugh*).” (*Lakan Lim*, FG4-KPG, May 2009)

“...if a member failed to turn up for work without a good reason, he is fined the amount *leja-leja* sellers get per *katala* and the money raised is paid to the owner of the *shamba* that he did not help. He is also fined 2,000 UGX for letting the *gurub* down and the money is passed to *Lakan Lim* to keep.” (*Wonkom*, FG4-KPG, May 2009)

The above remarks tell us that the functions of the rules are to limit the authority of the officials and shape membership into a binding contract. The fact that members meet at the beginning of each cropping season to revise old rules and make new ones, which all members agree to follow throughout the farming calendar, indicates the importance members attach to rules used in their labour relations. Moreover, having rules that punish those who refuse to attend work or meetings, do shoddy work, or try to leave the group altogether when their *shambas* have been worked on, encourage discipline and unity within the group. This supports North’s (2006; 1990) thesis of rules as enabling and constraining institution.

5.3.1 The economic character and roles of the *gurubs*

From the above examples, it is clear farmers share their labour in four ways: first, through working for *Kwete* beer. It works in a similar way to *awak* and involves supplying *Kwete* beer in the *shamba* when the work is on-going, but food is not served. The second way is working for *Kwete* beer on credit (*diira*). This occurs when members want an agricultural task to be done, but do not

have enough resources to make *Kwete*.²¹⁸ Members call upon the group to work on their land and supply the *Kwete* beer later. The third way is working for cash (*pur cente*), where members hire the *gurub* to dig or weed another garden than the one they are officially entitled to work. Working for cash is also open to non-members of the *gurub* who can afford it and meet the other conditions attached to it. Lastly, *gurub* members access each other's labour through rotational labour sharing. They work each other's *shambas* in turn, based on predetermined measurements. Unlike the *awak*, in which an unmeasured *shamba* would be worked by carefully invited persons in return for 'good' food and *Kwete* beer, in the *gurubs*, however, the area to be cultivated and the amount of *Kwete* to be supplied is established in advance under clear rules, making the *gurubs* more economic.

Farmers form *gurubs* because they lack the key resources required for farming, especially labour. In so doing, they access a wider set of crop production resources. Memberships of the *gurubs* also reflect social groupings in the village. Isunga villagers were keen to explain what kind of people are members of a particular group or what kinds of persons belong to a particular organisation. For instance, members of *Kony Paco* are *Acholi* farming households and *Kica Ber Akiba* includes mostly *Alur* people and supporters of the Manchester United Football Club who enjoy drinking *Malwa* beer together. Such classifications show some signs of social segments in Isunga village. In addition, the various rules and protocols used in the functions of the groups make them appear as impressive institutions and more than simple mechanisms for sharing agricultural labour; and the fact that the groups exist at all is because they fill important needs in facilitating farming activities.²¹⁹ Even so, it is reasonable to argue that the many unwritten rules make the *gurubs* inflexible at times, and together with the tight controls placed on the officials, this might take away the freedom to make difficult decisions. This hinders the *gurubs* from growing into something big. Moreover, potential and innovative members can easily be left out if they belong to a 'wrong' social group, since memberships in most *gurubs* are ethnically-based and gender-blind.

5.4 Some emerging issues

In my quest to understand the organisation and operations of the various agricultural labour practices in Isunga, I found that some common features cut across them. This section highlights some of the issues that have emerged so

²¹⁸ This is another form of *diira*, but organised through *gurub* membership and the benefit is in the membership of the *gurub*.

²¹⁹ C.f. Allen (1987)

far, beginning with the role of seasonality and timing in crop farming and labour decision-making.

5.4.1 Seasonality and timing

Most of the farm work in Isunga is done during the rainy seasons, and labour is a key asset for most households.²²⁰ Time therefore is of particular significance, and it is crucial that labour-intensive tasks such as planting, weeding and harvesting are completed quickly. Faced with this reality, farmers share farm work and exchange labour, which rests on reputation, trust and reciprocity.²²¹ Hence remarks such as,

“...farming is a very risky activity indeed and when we have bad harvests say due to drought or too much rain like this year...we turn to our friends and relatives for help...we work hard to keep our names clean with them.”
(Interview with CS10-KP2, July 2008).

The seasonality of farming (and homogeneity of agro-climatic conditions) suggests that agricultural activities and crops grown are likely to be the same for all farmers in the village. This explains why work-sharing or extra labour is needed and common during periods of land-clearing, planting, weeding and harvesting crops. This should not come as a surprise to anyone. Erasmus (1956), Acemoglu et al.(2001) and Collier (2007) have all shown how different geographical and climatic factors can lead to the construction of different social structures and institutions.²²² In Isunga, farmers lend themselves to work-sharing and exchanging labour arrangements that rely on trust and reputation.²²³

5.4.2 Organisation and operations of labour arrangements in Isunga

The agricultural labour arrangements mentioned above: household labour, various types of work parties, rotational labour, hired labour (*leja-leja*), casual wage labour, seasonal labour, farmer groups (*gurubs*) and working for cash (*pur cente*) are organised and operate differently. Their differences are largely based on the rewards involved, membership and the degree of reciprocity. With rotational labour (*aleya*), for example, all group members are obligated to supply as much labour on the *shamba* of the other members, as they receive from them. Although the work is collectively performed in a group, the reciprocity is on an individual level and the labour time shared among the

²²⁰ See Chapter 2, section on farming calendar.

²²¹ See case narratives in Chapters 5 and 6

²²² See also Rodrik et al. (2002) and Sachs (2003) for similar views.

²²³ This is discussed further in the next chapter.

group members represents a one-off labour transaction in a particular round.²²⁴ If a group member fails to meet his/her labour obligation to the other members due to unforeseeable reasons, s/he can send a family member in his/her place or give his/her labour at a later date. Furthermore, no cash payments are made between group members, except that the host member may serve food, if the work is performed over a full day or if the field is some distance away. But this has to be agreed beforehand. Otherwise, most *aleya* groups are formed so that the task on each *shamba* can be completed on one day or half a day. With *aleya*, the order of rotation is determined at random or sympathy among members if there is a compelling reason.

Concerning work parties (*awak* and *pur-kongo*), the host assembles a group of people for a task and serves them 'good' food and sufficient *Kwete* beer when the work is completed on that day or later as is the case with *diira*. During *awak*, *Kwete* beer drinking begins while the work is still on going. In any case, an obligation exists for the host to reciprocate labour in the future to those who participated. All participants know that their contribution will be exactly matched in kind with future returns. It is determined from knowledge about the group's size and what benefits they will incur through participation. The invitation to the work parties is based on character, i.e. you need to have a 'strong chest', be trusted and have a good reputation in the village. It also emerged from the case interviews that due to costs associated with organising such activities, work teams are usually kept small (10-20 people). Group numbers are also affected by farm sizes and the activities in question.

Another important feature of labour arrangements in Isunga concerns those who qualify for membership. The case studies, focus groups discussions and observations above indicate that the key determinants of membership are personal ties and connections. Quite often the composition of work groups such as *aleya* and *gurub* are based in part on family ties, friendship and/or ethnicity.²²⁵ This, however, is not just unique to Isunga. Earlier scholars such as Erasmus (1956), Jay (1969), Stone (1996) and Donham (1999; 1981) have observed (in other parts of the world) that labour exchange groupings exhibit considerable homogeneity in social status and ethnicity, including age and gender compositions. A common argument for this is that it is easier to enforce rules and regulations among group members of identical socioeconomic status or ethnicity, because their shared experiences contribute to common values and

²²⁴ This is the reason I sometime refer to *aleya* (rotational labour) as reciprocal labour exchange.

²²⁵ We shall discuss how this works practice in the next chapter.

norms of behaviour; and because they are more likely to participate together in other transactions that build trust and reinforce these norms.²²⁶

5.4.3 Motivations for labour sharing

What motivates certain people to share work or exchange their labour? Although literature has addressed this question, there are some reasons that are quite particular to Isunga. Firstly, as we saw with seasonality and timing above, to understand Isunga's labour-sharing behaviour, we need to understand the context within which the villagers operate (see Chapter 2). Most households in Isunga do not have the necessary money needed to pay wage labourers. As such, work parties and rotational labour may offer the only means for gathering a labour force larger than the immediate household in this setting (Geschiere, 1995).²²⁷ With the drive to commercialise Uganda's agriculture, the prevalence of labour-sharing (*aleya*, *awak*, *diira* or/and *gurub*, *aleya*) is expected to decline as wage labour becomes more affordable relative to the costs of organising the various work parties.

As Erasmus (1956) and Moore (1975) correctly pointed out, one of the primary motivations for labour or work-sharing stems from the benefits associated with returns to group work (*aleya*, *awak*, *diira*, *gurub*, *aleya*). Thus, the number of workers is important for doing burdensome work such as land-clearing where work-sharing simplifies the task of moving large logs and reduces the need to cut the shrubs and trees that are small enough for one person to move (CS6-BOM, CS4-MOJM). In addition, time is of particular significance and concerns the need for fast completion of time-sensitive tasks.²²⁸ Thus, by reducing the duration of the activity by assembling people for a task, a farmer would stand to gain from this.

Cultural underpinnings of cooperative labour, particularly norms about sharing, mutual help and contributions to social welfare are also worth remembering. If these motivations for participation in *aleya*, *awak*, *diira* or *gurub* practices are significant, then the prevalence of such labour exchanges may persist even where there are active agricultural labour markets.²²⁹ This is consistent with claims by Williamson (1985; 1981; 1979) that non-market

²²⁶ See Chapters 6 and 7 for evidence and further discussions.

²²⁷ Still, the argument that cash constraints may be important contributors to labour sharing, need to be treated with some care; because, much as it may be true during planting and weeding periods when demand for extra labour is high, it does not explain why farmers continue to share their labour inputs during harvesting activities, when labourers could be paid immediately with a share of the output or soon afterward when crops are sold.

²²⁸ Refer to CS19-LOM case story in Section 5.2.2.

²²⁹ This is discussed further in Chapter 7 when exploring the durability of informality in Isunga.

institutions develop to substitute for market transactions until market trades become affordable. In the Ugandan context, although farm work-sharing and labour exchanges seem to play an important role in crop farming, it is not considered part of the agricultural commercialisation process.²³⁰ However, it is reasonable to note that labour-sharing being replaced by increased commercialisation of labour will depend on many factors, including geography and agro-climatic conditions, mutual dependency, benefits and costs associated with returns to teamwork (c.f. Ponte, 2002; 2000).

5.5 Concluding remarks

This chapter has examined the agricultural labour arrangements observed in Isunga. Apart from their households' own labour supply, farmers access extra labour through wage labour, work parties and rotational labour. The most common practices are *leja-leja* wage labour and *aleya* rotational labour. With rotational labour, farmers temporarily pool together their labour to perform an agricultural task on each member's farm in succession. Labour hours are traded reciprocally without pay, with the possible exception of a meal if the farm is far away or members agree to work the whole day. In this way, they complete pressing tasks in a matter of days. Both work parties and rotational labour practices do not involve the use of money in the sense of participants receiving cash for their labour inputs. Instead, villagers offer each other mutual assistance during crop production. Such labour practices are complex and embedded in patterns of social relations.

Isunga's farmers participate in work sharing or exchange their labour for various reasons. The clearest motivations include: (a) greater speed in completing time-sensitive tasks such as planting, weeding and harvesting, (b) returns gained from teamwork due to the number of workers doing burdensome work and/or the need for the fast completion of time-sensitive tasks. Through their farmers groups, Isunga's villagers have formalised the 'business' of crop farming in a practical way by working for *Kwete* beer and working for money (*pur cente*), thus making the *gurubs* more economic in character and function. To ensure their smooth running, they have put in place appropriate structures with officials, rules and accepted behavioural codes in their respective groups.

Although the agricultural sector employs a considerable number of Ugandans, the role that labour occupies in the agricultural modernisation

²³⁰ Elsewhere in Africa, Ponte (2000) claims that in Tanzania, the process of increased mechanisation and commercialisation of agriculture has led to a move away from subsistence toward commercial farming, with more labour and land transactions, the development of a landless labour force and growth on non-farm incomes.

debate is invisible and overlooked (cf GOU, 2011; 2010b; 2010a; 2007; 2000). This study has so far shown that labour is a very important factor of crop production. And those farm households who do not have enough of it, access it through work-sharing without the commitment of money. This is consistent with the principles of transaction cost economics discussed in Chapter 3, in which institutions arise because transaction costs make reliance on the wage labour market very expensive for the time-sensitive tasks. It was clear from the case examples that the defining characteristics of the agricultural labour practices include: (a) the reciprocal swap of labour time, (b) work-sharing, (c) the absence of monetary payments i.e. work parties and rotational labour, (d) the socially embedded nature of wage labour, and (e) the benefits from pooling labour rather than outputs across the households. However, labour relationships between actors with diverse resource endowments raise a number of social and economic issues on how farmers structure, maintain and enforce their labour relationships (i.e. labour relationship formation, duration, regulation and implementation).²³¹ These issues still need to be discussed in the economic literature and require further study. In the next chapter, I explore how Isunga's farmers structure, regulate and implement their labour transaction relationships. Using the guiding concepts and analytical framework proposed in Chapter 3, attempts are made to understand existing rules and institutions that farmers use in their labour relationships.

²³¹ See CS4-MOJM relation with CS20-COM, CS18-MOF's land for labour, CS6-BOM's relation with *Bali-Bali* and *Oturu*

6 The dynamics of labour relationships

6.1 Introduction

The last chapter discussed the existence, nature and functions of various agricultural labour arrangements in Isunga village. Their prevalence is an indication of their significance in crop production. Moreover, there are norms and rules that govern their use. Whilst reviewing literature on institutions in Chapter 3, institutions were defined as socially established rules that organise, enable and constrain the people of Isunga village and their interactions. This portrays institutions as ‘rules of the game’ and farmers as the ‘game players’ who strategically use the rules to their advantage. This chapter explores the ‘rules of the game’ of labour relations in the village. The purpose is to gain insight into the actual institutions that regulate farmers’ labour behaviour. The key question is: *what institutions structure and enforce labour relations in Isunga village (and how)?* Using the analytical framework proposed in Chapter 3, I look into the factors that influence farmers’ labour decisions. The chapter has six sections. The next section investigates the institutions that enable farmers to structure their labour relationships. This is followed by a discussion on how they regulate and enforce their labour exchanges in Section 6.3. Section 6.4 looks at how farmers resolve their labour disputes, before making concluding remarks in Section 6.5.

6.2 Structuring agricultural labour relations

How do farmers find and choose their labour partners? Who are they? How are labour agreements reached? In the subsections below, I address these questions and show the different approaches used by villagers in Isunga to enter into labour relationships. Eight case households are used to explore the key

dimensions of structuring, regulating and enforcing labour transactions in the village as summarised in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Structuring, maintaining and enforcing labour relationships in Isunga.

Labour relations	Key features	Households case studies
Identifying and choosing labour partners	Personal relationship is key when choosing labour partners	CS2-MDF, CS17-JOM and CS6-BOM: identifying and choosing labour partners
	Farmers gather information about potential labour actors	CS13-JKF & CS17-JOM: collecting information about potential labour partner
Beginning and maintaining labour relations	Trust, trustworthiness and reputation matters	CS13-JKF & CS17-JOM: collecting information about potential labour partner
	Most farmers dislike labour disputes; they collect information about potential partners.	CS4-MOJM & CS17-JOM: Dealing with strangers
Enforcing labour agreements (<i>winye</i>)	Work sharing and labour transactions agreements are verbally agreed	CS9-MAM and CS2-MDF: reaching <i>winye</i> and entering a relationships
	Villagers work hard to avoid the risk of labour disputes	CS4-MOJM, CS13-JKF & CS17-JOM: collecting information about potential labour partners
Solving labour disputes (<i>nywere-nywere</i>)	Renegotiation of <i>winye</i> , involving third parties (acquaintances, the Isunga LC)	CS9-MAM, CS1-JSBM & CS19-LOM: solving labour related disputes

Source: Fieldwork 2007, 2008 and 2009.

6.2.1 Identifying and choosing labour partners

Villagers in Isunga use many ways to identify and choose their labour providers and recipients. It emerged from the household interviews that most farmers generally prefer to work with people they know well (e.g. close relatives, in-laws, friends, neighbours) or who have a good reputation in the village. However, this does not mean that they do not use labour from strangers (unfamiliar persons). For example, some better-off farmers hire *leja-leja* labour from strangers too if they cannot use workers who they are well-acquainted with.²³² They do this because they can afford the uncertainties involved or the risk of opportunistic behaviour. Farmers take trust and being trustworthy very seriously and rely, above all, on trust that emerges from personal ties, which

²³² Strangers refer to those they did not know at the start of the labour relationship.

have passed the test of time.²³³ They invest wisely in having good relationships with fellow villagers because they know that “*the longer a good relationship takes, the better it becomes*” (CS4-MOJM). The case studies below show the importance of trust and reputation when identifying and choosing labour providers and recipients.

CS2-MDF (Abwoli): Ears on the ground for people with smelly names

Abwoli's labour behaviour is complex, and involves accessing much-needed farm labour through *aleya*, *awak*, *gurub* and *leja-leja* practices. She turns to these practices mainly for opening new fields (digging), weeding and harvesting crops when the demand for labour is at its highest. However, *Abwoli* complained of the difficulty of getting hardworking people. “...if you want those with ‘strong chests’ then you better put your ears on the ground for a long time”, she said. As well as a small *aleya* group of five women, *Abwoli* is also member of the *Kabarole* Group: “...we are all *Barullis* but I prefer the small *aleya* group to *Kabarole*, because we only share labour and nothing else like contributing money every month”. Weeding is the most important farming activity in this household, but it is also labour-intensive. Therefore, *Abwoli's* ability to complete weeding in time is very important, as poor timing might enable weeds to compete with crops, thus resulting in poor harvests. She informed me that “...it takes a hard working person at least a week to weed an acre of maize. I am a weak woman [laughter], so look around for help”, and added “...our village is mixed with many people I don't know very well. So, when looking for help, I try hard to understand if they are trusted and how their names smell”. *Abwoli* interacts with people in many ways, and in the process she knows how their ‘names smell’ in the village. She also tries to befriend those with ‘strong chests’ or asks *Bazilio* and her friends how they behave in the village²³⁴: “...*Isunga* is very small and there are no secrets...especially after a glass of *Kipanga*, they say anything about anybody. I'll for sure know or hear something about someone I want his or her help,” *Abwoli* added with a smile. She also builds her reputation and makes her name ‘smell good’ by allowing those from whom she would like services in future to drink her *Kipanga* gin on credit; and remarked, “...if you have a good name, attend burials, have a history of making good beer, people will always turn up for you and do a good job [laughter].”

CS17-JOM (Nelson): having a trusting relationship

Nelson and *Dorothy* have relatives and good friends that they turn to when things are bad, including acute labour needs. *Dorothy* noted that “...they are the kind of people you don't want to conflict with and we always try hard to maintain good relations with them.” But not all relatives help at all times or in

²³³ Trust (*gen*) in *Isunga* is defined in terms of dependability; and reputation (*kwiri*) refers to the standing one has in the opinion of others regarding integrity or attainments in the village.

²³⁴ ‘Strong chests’ (*kore tek*) is the *Isunga* way of describing hard-working people.

the way one would expect. *Nelson* said, “...my relatives are very proud and don't do *leja-leja*. They only come to me for help when they are in trouble...not to help me cultivate.” *Nelson* and his labour partners verbally agree on what to do, how to do it, as well as how much to pay. But he is very particular when choosing *leja-leja* labourers. When unsure about a potential labourer, he consults his friends for more information and/or discusses his labour needs with them and they help get good people. He also talks to the Isunga LC1 people if a potential labourer is a Langi or Acholi to confirm if the person is a genuine IDP and not a LRA rebel – before he hires him/her. This generates some confidence.

Both *Dorothy* and *Nelson* consider it important to build a trusting relationship with people they want to work with. According to *Nelson*, trustworthiness on both sides (labour provider and labour recipient) is a very important component of *leja-leja* work, and following through on what you have agreed to do or promised to do is a good indication of this. He said, “...it happened once, that a person I hired to weed my tobacco shamba for three days sent his 9 yrs. old child on the second day to work in his place because he was drunk. Do you trust such a person? I only hire people after checking their characters well”. *Dorothy* added, “...but finding good and hardworking people is never easy in Isunga, especially if you don't know how to relate well with people.” *Nelson* is very particular with his choices of labour partners, “...when I am impressed by a person's work, I become curious to know how he lives and behaves at home. I visit him to his home to thank him for doing a good work. Yes, I do...and this is a good occasion to form an opinion on his behaviour in another environment. By so doing, I gain his respect and a good relationship is built”; and added, “...sometimes I hear from the trading centre that so and so was not happy that I went to his house only to say thank you.” He also gets suspicious when dealing with unknown persons and the person in question wants to do the job differently to how others do it. *Nelson* said, “...I become very careful if a *leja-leja* seller asks for a bigger advance payment (*dog-bur*), because those who disappear are usually those given big advances”.

A similar remark concerning trust and being trustworthiness was also made by *Mzee Jalon* when he said,

“...the Alur people are many here, but I don't deal with them because they are not trusted. They say one thing and do something else.²³⁵ I rather deal with those 'displaced' from Acholi and Lango, because they are more trustworthy and do not abandon work.²³⁶ They are my main source of labour and I have dealt with some of them for about six years now...with no problem of *kwere-kwere* work.” (Interview with CS4-MOJM, September 2007).

²³⁵The Alur people are one of the many ethnic groups in the village. They hail from the eastern side of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda's West Nile region.

²³⁶ It could also be that it is because the 'displaced' persons from Acholi and Lango have no choice but to work and earn whatever amount of money that comes their way.

As mentioned by Nelson (CS17-JOM) above, not all personal ties (kinship or friendships) are good. The case below gives another dimension of the problem.

CS6-BOM (Zakayo): My relatives do not want to work for me

Zakayo has many friends and relatives in Isunga and surrounding villages. However, his experience with his relatives concerning work sharing is negative. He lamented, "...when I ask them to help me open up new land, the majority do not come. Even those who show up are often difficult to deal with because they do shoddy work, and when I complain, they insult me, saying that I am a miser and give them too little Kwete beer to drink. I keep quiet because it is not good to be tough or punish a relative who does shoddy work or something that you really don't like...than people who do not have close relationships with you." He later added that, *"...my uncle's son does not participate in our Awak, no matter how much we tell him. But whenever he has problem, he comes to me first...and I help because I don't want my name to smell bad. We Palwo are terrible people. If you don't help a relative...they'll sing with your name everywhere and soil it badly".* Bali-Bali and Ocora are good people *"...I trust them and they trust me. But we also disagree, and when this happens, we don't even think of the LC people."*²³⁷ Zakayo added, *"...they are bad people. I'll never bring them into my problems. We are old enough to talk about issues and that is what we do whenever we have our many quarrels."*

Isunga villagers consider a person's trust and reputation first and foremost when identifying and choosing labour partners. The above case narratives showed that choices are influenced by personal ties, connections and the level of contact between villagers. The cases stressed a reliance on persons whom they know well, because they want to avoid the risk of opportunistic behaviour. Better off farmers like CS4-MOJM, CS6-BOM and CS17-JOM on the other hand, can afford to care less and easily work with unfamiliar persons. The CS6-BOM story also shows that there is a negative side to kinships and personal ties. But despite *Zakayo's* reservations, most villagers still turn to their relatives, friends and neighbours for farm labour support. In fact, *Zakayo's* remark appears to suggest that the reason for sharing labour with a relative, a friend or a neighbour stems from social pressure, i.e. *"...if you don't help a relative, they'll sing with your name everywhere and soil it badly"*. Thus if one refuses to share labour with someone close, such as a relative, an in-law or a friend, then s/he would be subject to family and community sanctions.²³⁸

²³⁷ When I asked *Zakayo* to explain to me what he meant by *gen* (trust), he said, *"...I mean someone you can rely on at all times...someone you leave in your house will not sleep with your wife; someone you are in trouble, shall stand by you and when you die, cries the loudest (laughter)."* (Interview with CS6-BOM, November 2008)

²³⁸ See Hydén's (1983) economy of affection addressed in Chapter 7

There are also farmers who do not care so much about personal ties. One such farmer is CS4-MOJM (*Jalon*) who does not prefer relatives and friends over strangers. He remarked,

“...it is not my intention to give *leja-leja* work to a person simply because he is my friend or relative. If they want to work for me, they should be prepared to work hard for the money. If he is ready for this, then he is most welcome.” (Interview with CS4-MOJM, August 2007).

As noted in the previous chapter, apart from dealing with relatives and friends, Isunga villagers also turn to persons with whom they have something in common, e.g. being from the same ethnic or wealth group, praying in the same church, belonging to the same *gurub*, sharing the same destiny or fate such as the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) of Isunga. Such networks play important roles in shaping farmers’ labour behaviours and forming labour relationships among them. One farmer remarked,

“...*aleya* is not for rich people who can afford to buy labour from us the *abaseege* (the very poor). It is for us the poor” (Conversation with a member of CS5-AWM *Aleya* group, July 2007).

Personal connections developed over time through trusting relationships are important avenues for sourcing agricultural labour, especially during the most critical periods of farming like planting, weeding and harvesting of crops. These are periods when the values of social proximity are discernible.

Getting labour through recommendations

Farmers in Isunga also make use of recommendations from fellow villagers. All opinions are taken into account, but the most reliable recommendations are felt to come from family members, close relatives, neighbours and people from the same *gurub* or ethnic group. The decisive factor is that, they should be persons whose trustworthiness and reputation are not disputed. *Mama Toto* (CS13-JKF), for example, relies heavily on her trusted *Kipanga* customers for her agricultural labour needs. But whenever her usual labour suppliers are unable to help her, she seeks new contacts through other customers’ recommendations. She said,

“...one of my customers is really good and knows all hard working people in Isunga. Whenever I want help with digging or weeding, I ask him to do it and if he can’t, I ask him to look for someone who can do it and he does...of course not free, I give him a glass of *Kipanga* for the effort. If the recommendation comes from someone who has a good name and trusted in the village...you can

sleep well, because the work will be done well.” (Interview with CS13-JKF, November 2008).

Mama Toto’s remarks indicate that trust and reputation as a basis for giving or receiving labour can also come from a person in a position of trust and not the person who took the assignment.²³⁹ Thus, reputation is the guarantee for proper behaviour of the person being introduced. Even the Isunga village council (LC1), which many villagers consider corrupt and ‘useless’, is used by certain farmers to obtain information about potential labourers.²⁴⁰ *Nelson* (CS17-JOM), for example, seeks recommendations from the Isunga LC1 each time he wants to hire an IDP for the first time.²⁴¹

Although individual farmers are normally eager to share their labour with each other, they are often reluctant to do so with those whose integrity and capacity to honour their word is poor. All the case households hinted that they would rather avoid dealing with people they do not know and trust. But, if unavoidable, they would seek to engage with the person(s) in some other way to establish some trust between them first. For example, *Zakayo* remarked,

“...sitting down with such a person will give me some confidence to think clearly, allow me to understand him...and develop some trust (*gen*) with each other” (Interview with CS6-BOM, May 2009).

Nonetheless, what seems important so far is not only the ability and willingness to maintain existing labour relationships (CS13-JKF), but also the wish to establish and have successful labour relationships (CS17-JOM). The common denominator in both cases is the importance of reputation, trust and being trustworthy in a relationship. Thus, Isunga’s villagers work hard to build a trusting relationship with fellow villagers.

Dealing with unfamiliar persons and relations based on morality and affection

As noted in Chapters 1 and 2, Isunga is ethnically rich, with plenty of inward and outward migration, and not all villagers know each other very well. Therefore, when villagers seek to deal with people whom they do not know, the ‘rules of the game’ for initiating a labour relationship are quite different to the ones presented so far. Even so, labour actors still have to develop a sense of trust between them before using labour. This could happen through informal meetings with the potential exchange actors or through their reputations in the

²³⁹ See CS13-JKF case story in Section 6.3.1 on building reputations.

²⁴⁰ See Chapter 7 on the presence of the Ugandan State in Isunga village and how the village council operates.

²⁴¹ Refer to *CS17-JOM (Nelson)*: *having a trusting relationship* above.

village. Alternatively, they structure their labour relationships in a way that reduces the risk of disputes. Labour relationships could also be established or pushed forward by moral and affective factors.²⁴² Consider *Hajji's* (CS11-HJM) reasoning for giving beans to the poor widow although she came to work late. He said,

“...she is a member of the village, a poor widow whose husband died not long ago and it is just not in my character to let her go empty-handed...*Allah* would never forgive me” (Interview with CS11-HJM, 2007).

Nonetheless, Isunga’s farmers are often reluctant to enter into labour relationships with individuals whose integrity and capacity to deliver is questionable. One farmer said,

“...but I do not want to work for someone I do not trust. To me, a trusting relationship comes first...and if I am working for you for the first time, I keep my ears open and see you with a ‘sharp eye’ so that I see, hear and understand your intention...” (Interview with CS20-COM, May 2009)

To the above farmers, labour agreements (*winye*) are reached, labour is exchanged or work is shared, once a trusting relationship has been established, since this can act as a guarantee for the enforcement of *winye*. Conscious of this, some farmers make efforts to get to know the backgrounds, characters and reputations of those they intend to establish a relationship with (see Section 6.3 on building and maintaining labour relationships).

6.2.2 Reaching labour exchange agreements²⁴³

Farmers in Isunga establish their labour agreements after careful and time-consuming negotiation. The duration and nature of the negotiation depends on the type of labour arrangement. As noted in the previous chapter, each labour arrangement in Isunga has its unique means of reaching agreements. Since much has been said about the organisation and operation of work parties (*awak*, *diira* and *pur cente*) in the last chapter, I will now focus on how agreements are reached in *leja-leja* wage labour.

²⁴² See CS11-HJM (*Hajji*) narrative in Chapter 7 and the ‘economy of affection’ concept used to explain prevalence of informality in the village, despite decades of institutional reforms that favours formality.

²⁴³ Unlike contracts where an arrangement is accepted by all parties to a transaction and is time specific (See Chapter 3), *winye* is not time specific and goes on even after the work (transaction) is done. It can be renegotiated anytime from the moment a labour partner is chosen right after the work is done.

Negotiation for casual wage labour (leja-leja)

Wage labour negotiations (*patana*) and agreements (*winye*) vary from person to person and farming activity. The duration and nature of the negotiations are guided by the desire of the persons involved to reach a good agreement that reduces the risk of disputes (*nywere-nywere*) during and after the work is done. Disputes are a costly component of a labour relationship if they arise. Farmers therefore prefer to avoid them altogether.²⁴⁴ During *patana*, parties verbally agree on the tasks, time-frames and wages (either per day or per task). Interestingly, they avoid discussing punishment for work poorly done (*kwere-kwere*) or a failure to complete the work all together. Instead they wait until a dispute arises, and then solve it. Regardless, farmers are aware that any opportunistic behaviour is bad and costly in the long run.²⁴⁵ Instead, such incidents are discussed when they occur, and there is enough evidence that a particular aspect of the agreement has not been properly handled.²⁴⁶ In May 2009, I observed one such negotiation (*patana*).

*Field Observation: Patana for leja-leja wage labour*²⁴⁷

On 28 May 2009, we followed a *patana* between a *leja-leja* labour buyer (*Lawil*) and a *leja-leja* labour seller (*Lacat*)²⁴⁸ for weeding tobacco. Both *Lawil* and *Lacat* verbally agreed to establish a *leja-leja* labour relationship, and certain aspects of the *winye* that were not clear, were re-negotiated during the *leja-leja* work. *Lawil* and *Lacat* agreed on the amount of the work (*katala*) to be done, without really paying attention to the details of the agreement. After working for a couple of hours without food and water, *Lacat* remembered that food and water were not mentioned during the first *patana* and he needed some clarification from *Lawil* on this. *Lacat* had thought that since weeding tobacco is quite taxing and the *katala* rather heavy, the *leja-leja* included food and drinking water. *Lawil* on the other hand thought it included only drinking water. Because of this misunderstanding, both *Lacat* and *Lawil* had good reasons to revise their earlier agreement. They talked while working and laughed occasionally. They

²⁴⁴ See Section 6.4.2 on avoiding disputes

²⁴⁵ See CS1-JSBM and CS9-MAM conflicts below.

²⁴⁶ Resolving disputes of any kind in Isunga is quite complicated and operates mostly outside the more formal village council (LC). The reasons are presented and discussed in Chapter 7.

²⁴⁷ The author overheard CS1-JSBM discuss with his friend (*Lawil*) that *Lawil* might not finish weeding his tobacco *shamba* on time if he did not seek help from outside. *Lawil* thought of *Awak* but CS1-JSBM advised him against it because it takes time to organise it. *Lawil* then thought of a one day or two days *leja-leja* casual wage labour. When I confirmed that *Lawil* is going to hire *leja-leja*, I sought *Lawil's* permission to attend the *patana* (negotiation) and participate in the actual weeding with him to get to know the nature of the work. I cannot describe everything here, except for the negotiation aspect of *leja-leja* which is important for understanding the significance of *patana* in labour behaviour.

²⁴⁸ Both *Lawil* and *Lacat* are fictitious names.

finally agreed that, the *katala* of 3 *tal* x 20 *tal* (approximately 4 rows of tobacco) should be completed within the day, and that *Lacat* would receive 3,000 UGX (up 500 UGX from the first *patana*) for the work, with 1,000 UGX as advance payment (*dog-bur*). *Lawil* did not want to go by *Lacat's* position on *dog-bur*, but *Lacat* insisted and also threatened not to work without it. They also agreed that *Lacat* would drink water, but get no food.²⁴⁹ In spite of this, the actual time set to finish the work fell outside the time limit agreed during the negotiations. The *katala* was too much for *Lacat* to finish in one day, because the weeds were much. He later asked for permission to finish it early the following day instead, to which *Lawil* agreed. The following day, *Lacat* came with two other persons, all looking for *leja-leja* work and *Lawil* employed them.

Two important aspects of *patana* emerged from the above. The first one is a confirmation that farmers do not want disputes in their relationships and when a particular working situation changes, further discussions are conducted. As observed above, both *Lawil* and *Lacat* never expressed negative opinion about another round of *patana* because they knew very well that if certain issues were not handled early, then it might lead to a conflict. Secondly, the use of *dog-bur* payments as a deterrent of bad behaviour is very interesting, as it adds another dimension of terms of payments in the labour transactions. *Lacat* insisted on his *dog-bur* of 1,000 UGX and even threatened not to work if not paid, yet with a smile. At first I thought *Lacat* was rather mean, considering that *Lawil* also shared two roast cassavas with us. But in a conversation with *Lacat* later on, he explained that he insisted on *dog-bur* payment because *Lawil* has a 'bad name' in the village. He is known for *loko doge* (changing positions) and not paying his workers promptly.

According to my informants, it is quite normal that work conditions agreed prior to the *katala* (including wage rates) are changed if there are new developments. Such new developments could be working on a different *shamba* other than the one agreed, the distance of the *shamba* from the *leja-leja* seller's home, working when it is raining and/or digging instead of weeding. Under these circumstances, the labour seller renegotiates with the buyer or else it may be a source of dispute if the labour buyer decides to walk away from the arrangement.²⁵⁰ However, if the 'personal chemistry' between the labour buyer and seller is good, then the buyer might agree to pay a higher wage. *Winye* could also easily be reached if the labour buyer is desperate to see

²⁴⁹ *Lawil* went home (some 1 km away) and returned with a - jerry can of water and two roast cassava, one for me and one for *Lacat* (in fact, I shared mine with *Lawil*).

²⁵⁰ See section on enforcing labour exchange relations here below.

the work done within a short period of time, such as weeding crops, which if missed, could spell disaster for the farmer.²⁵¹

6.3 Building and maintaining labour relationships

Work-sharing and labour exchanges between individual farmers and households raise a number of issues concerning building and maintaining labour relationships. This section explores how farmers address these.

6.3.1 Building labour relationships

The study found that farmers in Isunga rely on reputation when structuring their labour relations, especially when there are no personal connections. All the case households reported that they share, give or receive labour based on reputation and shun dealing with bad and untrustworthy persons. This begs the question: how do Isunga villagers build their reputations? The following were mentioned during the interviews and group discussions: following through on agreements (*winye*) and promises; making payments on time (CS4-MOJM); not doing shoddy work; not walking away from a person in need (CS13-JKF); not talking behind people's backs (CS1-JSBM); offering *Kipanga* to customers on credit (CS13-JKF) and lending land to others (CS6-BOM). All these have an impact of people's reputations in the village. In the case below, *Mama Toto* (CS13-JKF) explains why and how she chose her helpers.

CS13-JKF (Mama Toto): My name should 'smell good' to others

Mama Toto is a single parent and relies on others for her farming activities. But whenever she needs extra help for farm work, she carefully identifies the persons for the work. One guiding factor is reputation (both her own and other people). She also knows that getting people with 'strong chests' to work for her is difficult, so she tries extra hard to make her name 'smell good' to others. She said, "...if your reputation is good, you'll always have people to stand up for you; and the way you treat others either makes your name smell good or destroys you... good names and reputation are important here". *Mama Toto* builds her reputation by selling *Kipanga* gin on credit to her prominent customers, helping fellow villagers when they are in difficulties and by attending burials. She said, "...credit-giving has made me popular here. Some of them like my stuff, and exchange it with their labour power. This helps me a lot during digging and weeding times. Don't forget, I don't have a husband to dig for me...so my relationship with them is very important. I trust and respect them although at times I do not like what they do when drunk. I think they also like me

¹ In Chapter 2, it was pointed out that with rain fed crop farming, all activities are intensive and have to be completed within a specific period or else it might lead to crop failure.

or my beer since they keep coming back.” Isunga is a small village and it is not all that difficult to know how a person treats others. *Mama Toto* observed, “...so much is against me, and if I turn my back or start quarrelling with those who normally lends me a hand without understanding the reason why this time around they are not able to do so, then I may lose not only one customer but the other ones too. As you know, no one wants to deal with a person who treats their colleagues unfairly or a person who really enjoys seeing people suffer, like that lady (pointing to the direction of CS1-JSBM).”²⁵² *Mama Toto* treats her labourers with respect and care because she does not want to break up relationships with good and hardworking persons. She chooses her labourers carefully based on their character, and said, “...a person can be good or bad, but if I want him to help me...I check his character by assessing how he behaves out there or ask my customers...they tell me if he is good or bad and I make the right decision.” *Mama Toto* is also aware that as she is a single parent and a female IDP, she has to be extra careful and remarked, “...I also have to be very careful...otherwise my name shall be all over the place.”

Based on the CS13-JKF account, having trusting and respectful relations is advantageous since labour actors do not have to spend much time negotiating issues relating to the kind of work, how much to work or the strength of her *Malwa* beer or *Kipanga* gin. The narrative also tells us that a person’s reputation does not only come directly from the relationship between labour actors, but also from their behaviour in the village. This is reiterated by *Mama Toto*’s emphasis about how an individual treats other members of the village could either hinder or help his or her reputation. In fact, one farmer (CS9-MAM) supported this after a late payment conflict with a *leja-leja* buyer (CS1-JSBM) when he forcefully remarked that,²⁵³

“...I don’t think I’ll ever work for them again...they treat poor people like human shit that smells.” (Interview with CS9-MAM, November 2008)

The above point is supported by Landa (1994:8) and Leeson (2003) in discussions of ‘tit-for-tat’ strategies in self-enforcing behaviour. That is, if a labour recipient or provider violates a contract, the aggrieved party informs others and the party who violated the agreement is punished. There is a penalty for cheating, and the labour sharing or exchange does not take place until the party who violated the agreement can demonstrate that s/he will not do it again.

²⁵² *Mama Toto*’s gesture and remark about the CS1-JSBM prompted further probing and found that *Bazilio* and his wives are not popular among the new comers (IDPs), who accuse them of being arrogant and exploitative.

²⁵³ See Section 6.4.2 below

6.3.2 Maintaining existing labour relationships

From the empirical presentation so far, little doubt exists about the fact that Isunga farmers put considerable efforts in building good relationships with those whom they would like to share or exchange their labour power with in future. Even those villagers who already have positive connections with each other work equally hard to maintain and develop these relationships further.²⁵⁴ One farmer discussed how to maintain good and working labour relations:

“...we sit and drink *Kipanga*, *Kwete* or *Malwa* beer, play *Mweso*²⁵⁵ together, and are nice to each other by talking sweetly of them to other people in their absence. I also lend him land and do other things that are good [*smile*]. ” (Conversation with CS6-BOM, November 2008)

It appears that once a sense of trust has been established, they then do their best to transform the relationship into a long-term personal relationship by fostering informal contacts with one another. Both CS6-BOM and CS13-JKF household case studies indicated that good relationships are kept and maintained because investments in such social relations are important for securing future labour opportunities. This was more or less confirmed by another villager who said,

“...you cannot practice farming by simply relying on your sweat (own labour). You have to get help from other people too, otherwise expect trouble. To get help from others requires good names and good relations with people. So we try our best to have good contacts with people, including devils like the LC people...just to be on a safe side.” (IDP farmer during a focus group discussion, November 2008)

From the above case studies and remarks, it is evident that by investing in good personal relations with fellow villagers, non-opportunistic behaviour from them is upheld and the risks of labour disputes are significantly reduced. In other words, dealing with known and trusted persons lowers labour transaction costs.²⁵⁶ This is because once a farmer has enough information about a potential labour partner and a trusting relationship has been established, then there is no need to incur additional exchange costs. From that time onwards, the farmer would spend less time on information, negotiation and

²⁵⁴ Some villagers like CS4-MOJM (Jalon), attempt to personalise the relationships with them after a couple of successful encounters, even when dealing with unfamiliar people such as the newly settled IDPs

²⁵⁵ *Mweso* is a popular board game across much of Uganda. For more information, see Shackell (1934) and Seppälä (1998).

²⁵⁶ Cf. Fafchamps & Gubert (2007) and Landa (1994).

implementation. Hence, costs related to searching for labour, negotiating it, as well as implementing the exchange would therefore be minimised (Eggertsson, 1996; 1994; Williamson, 1981).²⁵⁷

This subsection has shown how Isunga's farmers identify and choose labour exchange actors; how labour agreements are reached, as well as how they build and maintain their labour relationships. It came out clearly that trust arising from long-term relations (family members, relatives, and friends), praying in the same church, sharing the same fate (e.g. the Internally Displaced Persons), belonging to a *gurub* or drinking *Malwa* and *Kipanga* together, are important for structuring labour relations in the village. It also emerged that building personal relationships with fellow villagers is a very important strategy for securing agricultural labour and other resources. Hence, farmers very seriously take the reputation of other people into consideration when entering into labour relationships. I also showed that reaching *winye* is complex, yet it remained a very important step for structuring labour transactions in Isunga village. For *winye* to be properly enforced, the persons involved 'choose and use their words' very carefully to avoid misunderstandings. These reduce the risks of misunderstanding each other, and avoid disputes that might arise due to opportunistic behaviours of the other actors. The next section gives evidence of how farmers implement labour agreements, and show under what circumstances disputes may arise.

6.4 Enforcing labour agreements

Williamson (1998; 1993b; 1985; 1981) and other scholars argue that when contracts work properly in accordance with existing '*contract laws*' then they can prevent opportunistic behaviour by the parties involved in a transaction; and transactions take place without any interventions from outsiders (third parties).²⁵⁸ In this study, the people of Isunga do not work within the law of contract as understood by Williamson (1998; 1993b; 1981) and Bakibinga (2001).²⁵⁹ But even if they were aware of them, the weak nature of the Ugandan state in the village makes the notion of enforcement irrelevant. As

²⁵⁷ Eggertsson (1996; 1994) observes that "when information is costly, various activities related to the exchange of property rights between individuals give rise to transaction costs. These activities include, amongst others, the making of contract, the monitoring of contractual partners to see whether they abide by the forms of contract, the enforcement of contract and the collection of damages when partners fail to observe their contractual obligations" (Eggertsson, 1996:9)

²⁵⁸ Third parties and outsiders are used interchangeably in this thesis.

²⁵⁹ Their logic of labour agreement (*winye*) is different from central legalism discussed in Chapter 3 where enforcement mechanism also entails direct punishment of contract violating party (jail times or fines).

Jones (2008:64) would say, Isunga village is “...a situation where the state bureaucracy and local government system had withdrawn from the life of the village”. To examine how Isunga farmers conduct themselves when *winye* is reached, and under what circumstances labour disputes may arise, calls for clarification of the term dispute or else we run the risk of misunderstanding dispute as a key component of labour relationship.

6.4.1 Labour dispute defined

There are two ways to look at labour disputes: one defined according to the Labour Dispute (Arbitration and Settlement) Act of 2006 (GOU, 2006b), and the other defined by the Isunga villagers themselves. The difference between the two needs clarification. First, according to the Labour Dispute (Arbitration and Settlement) Act of 2006 (ibid, 2006b), the term ‘dispute’ means a ‘labour dispute’,

“...any dispute or difference between an employer and an employee or employees, or a dispute between employees; or between labour unions, connected with employment or non-employment, terms of employment, the conditions of labour of any person or of the economic and social interest of a worker or workers.” (ibid, 2006b:5)

Reading through the 2006 Labour Disputes Act, there is no mention of agricultural labour in rural Uganda, even though more than 80 per cent of the country’s labour force lives in the countryside and derives its livelihood from agriculture (GOU, 2010b; UBOS, 2007).

As we saw with *patana* in Section 6.2.2, disputes arise in labour relations, but partners try their best to resolve them without involving third parties. They are flexible and make changes that fit into their context. Moreover, not all changes in *winye* lead to disputes. For instance, if changes to a *winye* were accepted by the persons involved, then there would be no dispute at all. But *winye* can be violated and disputes arise when a labour provider or recipient, attempts to change it without the other actor agreeing to it. In other words, labour disputes emerge because the persons involved in a labour exchange cannot agree on the changes in the *winye*. Consequently, the term ‘dispute’ is used to mean any disagreement between labour actors.²⁶⁰ It includes reasons for the disputes other than the violation of a specific term of *winye*, which can occur either during or after the task has been completed. Thus, the results presented here cover individual farmers’ reactions to specific disputes arising

²⁶⁰ In Isunga, there are many ‘words’ or expressions for conflicts, disagreements, misunderstandings or disputes. The common ones are *nywere-nywere* and *kuku-kuku*, and sometimes they appear in the text because the author is familiar with them.

from a particular transactional relationship at a particular time. But first, let us see under what circumstances labour disputes may arise.

6.4.2 Nature of labour disputes in Isunga

All the case households reported having had some kind of disagreement with a fellow villager about labour in the last ten years. However, many of the disputes involved *leja-leja* wage labour with only very few cases from cooperative labour practices. Most *leja-leja* sellers spoke of their unhappiness with late or non-payment by some of the better-off households (CS9-MAM, CS12-JKF); the *shamba* is different to the one agreed on during *patana* (CS16-VLF), and use of abusive and derogatory language (CS9-MAM, CS20-COM). *Leja-leja* buyers on the other hand, complained of certain *leja-leja* labourers doing shoddy (*kwere-kwere*) work, working slowly and not finishing their *katala* on time (CS1-JSBM) or disappearing once they have received their advance (*dog-bur*) payment (CS4-MOJM). As for cooperative labour practices, most disputes are usually due to less food or beer, watery and smelly *Kwete* beer, doing *kwere-kwere* work, abstaining from *gurub*'s work without permission, members starting to fight with each other, a member causing disturbances during meetings and/or young *gurub* members talking disrespectfully to senior members.²⁶¹ All of the above disputes cannot be dealt with here.²⁶² Instead, the CS9-MAM case study is intended to show some of the unique aspects of labour disputes in the village.

CS9-MAM: Delayed payment for work done

In August 2007, *Musa* (CS9-MAM) cleared *Bazilio*'s (CS1-JSBM) sunflower garden. He slashed the grass, cut the shrubs, heaped the branches together, burnt them and spread the ashes, precisely as had been agreed during *patana*. It was tough work and it took *Musa* eight days to perform, but when it came to payment, *Bazilio* did not want to pay as agreed. Instead he referred *Musa* to *Atenyi* (*Bazilio*'s second wife), who according to *Musa*, "...is a bad woman who always yells at people. She shouted at me that I did not finish the work in the three days they gave me. Yet they know very well that we did not discuss the duration of the work but just to do the work, which I did well using my own machete and hoe. They even sent their small children to bring me water to drink on those days. After I finished the work on the eighth day, I happily went for the money and they changed their position". When *Musa* saw that *Bazilio* was

²⁶¹ Another interesting aspect of labour disputes mentioned during focus group discussions is when an official of a *gurub* ignores members' opinions the official is punished for it.

²⁶² The study focused more on disputes involving *leja-leja* dealers because it is the most common labour dispute in Isunga, and usually involve farmers of unequal status (labour buyers are mostly 'better off' while sellers are 'poorer'). Indeed, I would have wished to make more of disputes between households or farmers of equal status but failed to get appropriate data.

‘playing around’ with him, he went to the Chairman of the Isunga LC for help.²⁶³ He said, “...that was another problem altogether. He told me he did not have a pen and piece of paper to write down my ‘words’ and asked for 1,000 UGX, which I gave him. When he pocketed it, he called his young son and told him to go to his big hut, open a tin box...he’ll find a black book with a pen inside; and that he should bring it. When I reminded him of what he told me a few minutes ago about the pen, paper and the money I gave him, he smiled and smugly said, “...go back to your home if you don’t want my services.” According to Musa, this kind of behaviour is common in Isunga: “...that is how they treat us here. Each time you want their help, they remind you that you don’t belong here. We even don’t have names, but are collectively called ‘displaced’.”

The LC1 Chairman summoned *Bazilio* to get his version of the story “...but he did not ask for a pen and paper from him”. Musa continued, “...*Bazilio* accepted my version of the story, that he had some difficulties with money and that he will pay when he gets money...that he is trying hard and I should give him one more month. What a lie...all these months? ...one month to a poor man is like ten years. Well, I ‘accepted’ his excuse because of our past relationship...although I knew it was a big lie.” After a month, Musa went to *Bazilio*’s house every week for four weeks, without any luck. He then decided to go to *Bazilio*’s sister-in-law who lives at *Mailo Kumi* not far away from Musa’s home to talk about his problem with *Bazilio* and get her help to solve it: “...instead she rebuked me and did not believe that *Bazilio* and her sister could behave in such a way. She refused to help me.” This experience did not quash Musa’s spirit to fight on. Instead, he took his problem to the elders of the *Kamdini* Group, of which *Bazilio* is a member, and sought their help to make *Bazilio* pay him. He explained that, “...when *Bazilio* heard that I reported him to the elders, none other than his big-mouthed wife contacted me and begged me to withdraw the complaint from the group. She agreed to pay me and we put the whole thing behind us. She talked of how hardworking and good I have been to them all these years...and that the whole thing was a misunderstanding. I accepted. After all, it was not my intention from the beginning to speak of *Bazilio* to the elders or to the LC...I just wanted my money, nothing else,” Musa said. Two days later, Musa got his 10,000 UGX and a bottle of *Kipanga* gin.²⁶⁴

Musa’s story raises a number of interesting aspects of labour disputes in Isunga village. His search for justice involved a number of approaches that are

²⁶³ *Musa*’s experience with the Chairman of Isunga Local Council is revisited in chapter 7 when discussing the prevalence of informality in agricultural labour relationships.

²⁶⁴ When I hinted to *Bazilio* that his name ‘smells bad’ among the IDPs and is ‘not trusted’ because he tricked *Musa* to work for him without pay, his response was very negative and defensive. He literally accused me of being dishonest myself because I live in his house and still talk behind his back. He said, “...so you talked about me with him? That is not good. Yes, it was a small problem...*Musa* is a difficult person. When he wants something, he wants it straight away...there and then. I told him we did not have the money, but when we get it I’ll square him up. He never took it” (Conversation with CS1-JSBM, December 2008).

probably adopted by most villagers adopt when faced with similar situations, notably: (a) talking it over with the person(s) involved, (b) seeking help from relatives, friends, neighbours, and/or farmers groups and (c) turning to the Isunga Local Council (LC1) even if they perceive the councillors as being dishonest.²⁶⁵ *Musa's* story also showed the extent to which farmers make use of the informal mechanisms to solve existing labour disputes.²⁶⁶ Clearly, *Musa* had some payment problems over work he did for *Bazilio*. Instead of seeking help from the Isunga LC1 from the beginning, *Musa* began by renegotiating their *winye* first (i.e. addressing the issues informally), and only after failing with this approach, did he choose to go to the LC1.²⁶⁷ In the process, he had to part with some money for the pen and paper. Although the LC1 Chairman summoned *Bazilio*, talked about the issue and agreed to pay *Musa* his money within a certain period, he never did.

Many villagers stated that they rarely go to the Isunga LC people for help and when they do, they do so as a last resort. They try other methods first, and then go to the LC1 if they fail. The CS9-MAM (*Musa*) and CS1-JSBM (*Bazilio*) labour conflict story above is not an isolated scenario. All my informants have indicated that resolving labour disputes in the village is expensive, unpleasant and time-consuming.²⁶⁸ Apart from soiling one's name and reputation, it may also destroy existing labour relationships. All these add to the cost of labour exchanges, thus having negative effects on crop production. It is therefore, in the interest of all those engaging in work sharing and labour exchanges to avoid disputes.

6.4.3 Reducing the risks of labour disputes

As argued in Chapter 3, not all transactions are enforced through formal institutions or require the involvement of third parties. Theory and empirical studies have pointed to the fact that there are social norms or informal rules to make contracts enforceable. Literature also tells us that when contracts work properly in accordance with existing contract law, they prevent opportunistic behaviour (Ostrom, 2005; Williamson, 1998; Eggertsson, 1994; North, 1991; North, 1990; Williamson, 1981). This implies that Isunga's farmers, in their roles as social actors and as economic agents, can structure their labour exchange relationships in ways that reduce risks of labour disputes, thereby

²⁶⁵ Although *Musa* never used force or threats of it, it came out from one case study that this does occasionally happen. See Section 6.3.2 on the use of force to solve labour disputes.

²⁶⁶ It also showed that even the more formal village council operates informally.

²⁶⁷ It could also be argued that *Musa's* going to the LC shows that the Local Council System is not as bad as farmers portrayed it after all. It does some good work despite its shortcomings.

²⁶⁸ This is consistent with the contract arguments and the principles of transactions cost economics argument discussed in Chapter 3.

making their labour transactions enforceable.²⁶⁹ With this in mind, I investigated some of these institutional arrangements and the extent to which farmers in Isunga use them.

From the household interviews, field observations and discussions with a cross-section of the community, it emerged that the strategies farmers use to identify and choose labour exchange partners, are also the same strategies they use for avoiding labour disputes: (i) dealing with people they have known for a long and have good connections with, such as relatives, friends and neighbours (CS5-AWM, CS13-JKF, CS4-MOJM), (ii) use of *dog-bur* payments in the case of hired labour (CS9-MAM, FG3-KBA, FG4-KPG), (iii) gathering information about potential labour exchange actors' character, reputation or trustworthiness and capabilities before and after the task is completed (CS13-JKF, CS6-BOM, CS17-JOM and CS2-MDF); (iv) reaching good *winye* with clear dos and don'ts, and (v) and turning to the Isunga Local Council (CS9-MAM, CS6-BOM and CS17-JOM). Many villagers felt comfortable with most of these approaches, except for the last one, which they turn to as a last resort. This suggests that they rely more on social (informal) institutions than the formal Isunga Local Council to structure and maintain their labour relationships. Since some of the above approaches have already been discussed in Section 6.2.1, below is a presentation and discussion of other mechanisms not mentioned.²⁷⁰

Gathering information about potential labour partners

The ethnic mix in Isunga sometimes makes finding people to exchange labour or share farm work with a tricky and difficult exercise.²⁷¹ Faced with such uncertainty, farmers attempt to protect themselves from any opportunistic behaviour by carefully assessing their potential labour partners, either by talking to the individuals in question or gathering information about them in other ways. For instance, CS17-JOM (a *leja-leja* buyer) collects information about IDPs *leja-leja* sellers by asking his friends or the LC1 Chairman about their background and character before hiring them. He said,

“...I have land, but labour is my problem and when the boys are in school, a big gap is left and I fill it through *leja-leja*...mainly from the ‘displaced’ *Acholi* and *Langi* because my relatives are very proud and don’t do *leja-leja*. But when someone comes to work for me for the first time, I ask ‘little’ questions like if they

²⁶⁹ An economic agent is an actor and decision-maker (e.g. labour buyer and labour seller) and their behaviour is studied in the theory of the firm and the theory of the consumer.

²⁷⁰ Since, most of the households' stories were already used in previous sections or chapters, only relevant excerpts from the interviews are dealt with here.

²⁷¹ This is particularly the case when dealing with unfamiliar people for the first time.

drink the poison of Isunga²⁷² or I go the LC1 Chairman to check whether the person is a 'displaced' *Lango* or *Acholi* to confirm that he is a genuine IDP and not an LRA rebel, before I hire him." (Interview with CS17-JOM, August 2007)

Bazilio (CS1-JSBM) and his wives too, explained that they usually have 'little talks' with other people at the market on market days, at the borehole when collecting water, during funerals or during their monthly *gurub* meetings. During this process they hear a lot about other people. *Abwoli* (CS2-MDF) and *Atenyi* (CS3-MAF) also get information from their *Kipanga* customers and some friends at the trading centre. *Atenyi* remarked,

"...I sometimes go to my friend *Kilama*, the shopkeeper at the trading centre and ask him if the person is an *Acholi* like him. He knows everybody in this village because he buys their maize and beans for *Fanta*."²⁷³ (Interview with CS3-MAF, November 2008)

Some people go out to drink beer (*Malwa*, *Kwete* or *Kipanga*), play cards or *mwes*, or just sit and talk with fellow villagers. Such informal meetings enable them to get ample information not only about fellow villagers' characters, behaviours and past actions before actually engaging with them, but also opportunities of where to find *leja-leja* or land for rent or sale.²⁷⁴ The process of collecting information does not stop once a labour partner has been found or the work has been completed. It may in fact, continue during or after the work is completed. *Mama Toto* remarked,

"...I visit them in the *shamba* just to ensure that they are doing the right things as agreed during *patana*." (Interview with CS13-JKF, August 2007)

By so doing, the risk of misunderstandings between the persons exchanging labour are reduced and the task (*katala*) is smoothly executed. Although meeting labour partners in different environments is viewed by some farmers as a good opportunity to foster a relationship or to make sure that *winye* is correctly followed, some people do not like it and consider it rather patronising.²⁷⁵ One *leja-leja* seller commented,

"...the *Mzee* came to my house after work and asked many stupid questions, yet I finished my *katala* well and even got paid...who does he think he is? I really

²⁷² Referring to *Kipanga* gin

²⁷³ *Fanta* is a produce dealer based in Kampala who frequents Isunga village during maize and beans harvesting times to buy crops for Kampala market.

²⁷⁴ See the Meeting Pot of Isunga village in Chapter 2.

²⁷⁵ See CS17-JOM case story in Section 6.2.1

don't understand why he came to my house.” (Conversation with a *leja-leja* seller, May 2009)

Visiting others in their homes after work is completed is not a common practice, but it appears to serve two purposes: (a) to help identify relevant mechanisms for responding to a person's behaviour so that the existing labour relationship is not lost, or (b) to build up one's reputation for future activities. Under these circumstances, it is important to treat each other well, or else the relationship might turn sour and disintegrate. Some farmers in fact, use it purposely to know how to deal with an individual in a particular situation. For example, *Mama Toto* (CS13-JKF) investigated the reasons why a *leja-leja* seller (*Awiny*) did not show up as was originally agreed, because she is aware that finding good and hardworking people in the village is not easy. She went to *Awiny's* home, because she does not want to end the relationship with this good and hardworking person. Even if she was annoyed with *Awiny*, she made sure she understood the reason why they were at loggerheads this time. She explained this by using an incident that happened a while back,

“...last month (April), I gave your friend *Awiny* a bottle of *Kipanga* on credit, on the promise that he would weed my maize field which was getting dangerously full of weeds. When he did not show up, I was angry, felt let down and went to his home to confront him, only to find that he had been struck down by malaria and had no money for treatment. I lent him 5,000 UGX to go to the clinic. Well, I could not do much but to tell him to come when he gets better. Since I didn't like to lose my maize to the weeds, I had to organise a small *diira* to save it...I still turn to *Awiny* whenever I need help with *shamba* work, because he is a good, hardworking person and usually keeps his word.” (Interview with CS13-JKF, May 2009)²⁷⁶

If a person does not report to work as agreed, works slowly or poorly, some farmers like *Mama Toto* try to find out why so that they make the right decision next time they need help. *Mama Toto's* effort to treat *Awiny* with respect not only revealed the benefit of taking the time to gather information about people whose labour power you want, but can also be seen as a way of building one's reputation in the village. By treating *Awiny* fairly, *Mama Toto* strengthened their on-going relationship. It also enhanced her reputation in the eyes of others. If she had played tough and been hard on *Awiny*, shouting, yelling, and accusing him of drinking her *Kipanga* for free, this would have

²⁷⁶ *Mama Toto* referred to *Awiny* as my friend because she saw us together a couple of times when I joined *Awiny* and his friends for a glass of *Kipanga* as I was struggling to understand the kinds of labour networks around CS13-JKF (*Mama Toto*).

soiled her name and reputation. This is probably what she had in mind when she remarked,²⁷⁷

“...as a widow and displaced person, I cannot afford *nywere-nywere*. It becomes expensive for me to handle as I would have to struggle alone to solve it and may be look for other people to replace him. No, I can’t afford it.” (Interview with CS13-JKF, May 2009)

Since the village is rather small, it can be a big problem if your name ‘smells bad’.²⁷⁸ All my informants said that information relating to disputes generating behaviour such as shirking payments, doing shoddy work and other dishonest behaviour spread very quickly in the village.

Advance payment for hired labour (dog-bur)

This method is used in *leja-leja* wage labour and farmers groups’ work for money (*pur cente*). It is not applicable to cooperative labour practices (*awak, aleya, diira* and *pur-kongo*) that do not take cash as a means of reward. All the poorer households stressed the importance of *dog-bur* payment in *leja-leja* labour practices. Farmers treat it as an act of commitment, and once *dog-bur* has changed hands; there is no going back as it ties actors to the transaction. As the experience of *Lawil* and *Lacat* showed in Section 6.2.2, *dog-bur* payment is a good way for reducing risks associated with *leja-leja* labour transactions. This is because some better-off households have the habit of not paying once the work is completed. However, because of their wealth status in the village, the poorer households or people desperately in need of money or food still go to them for work. And as seen in CS9-MAM’s conflict with CS1-JSBM above, the significance of *dog-bur* (advance payment) in *leja-leja* transactions is clear. One IDP farmer also said that,

“...some of the *Palwos* and *Barullis* are not good to us. When we first came, they would trick us to work for them and refuse to pay or delay to pay. Of course, it would make sense not to work for them altogether, but when you’re desperately looking for *leja-leja* and you get one with a person you have never worked for before...how would you know if he is bad or good? You just think about getting the money nothing else.” (Interview with CS20-COM, May 2009)

Such opportunistic behaviour has made *leja-leja* labour sellers demand *dog-bur* payment at the start of *leja-leja* work. By so doing, the *leja-leja* buyer and

²⁷⁷ See CS13-JKF stories in Sections 6.2.1 and 6.3.1

²⁷⁸ A name ‘smelling bad’ is *Isunga*’s expression of people whose reputations, trustworthiness or characters are in disrepute.

seller are able to implement the agreement reached between them without the intervention of a third party. In other words, the *dog-bur* payment ties those involved to the labour transaction. From the perspective of the *leja-leja* seller, the method ensures that the labour buyer does not change his or her mind and walk away after *winye* has been reached and the work started. In essence, once the *leja-leja* buyer has paid the deposit, both parties have to comply with the transaction right until the end. However, if for other reasons the deal is cancelled or the *leja-leja* seller disappears after receiving *dog-bur*, then the *leja-leja* buyer loses the *dog-bur* money paid to the *leja-leja* seller (and the seller's name begins to 'smell bad' in the village). Furthermore, the fact that the last payment is after the task (*katala*) is completed means that the *leja-leja* buyer withholds part of the payment until the work is done to the buyer's satisfaction. In case the *leja-leja* seller fails to perform well, perhaps by doing shoddy work or failing to finish the work within the specified time, then it is very possible s/he will miss the remaining balance and there may be conflict. Therefore, for the labour relationship to continue on a warm footing and the *leja-leja* seller gets the rest of the money, s/he will have to stick to the *winye* and ensures that the labour buyer is satisfied. If not, then s/he would bear the cost of bad performance or dishonest behaviour.

This section dealt with the nature of disputes that are common in agricultural labour dealings in Isunga. Most labour disputes are due to: shirking payments, late payment, not finishing the work (*katala*) on time, shoddy work or misunderstandings due to poor *patana* and bad *winye*. Furthermore, Isunga villagers do not like opportunistic behaviour that may lead to disputes, and hence try to prevent them by (a) dealing with those persons they have good contacts with, (b) using *dog-bur* payments for 'cementing' *leja-leja* or *pur cente* agreements (*winye*), (c) gathering information about potential labour partners before *patana* and in few cases after the work is done, (d) reaching good *winye* with clear terms of work, and of course (e) using of the Isunga LC1 as a last resort. But what happens when labour disputes do arise?

6.5 Resolving labour disputes

Although Isunga villagers work hard to avoid labour disputes, they do happen and when they do, those involved employ various tactics. As we saw from *Musa's* story (CS9-MAM) above, the tactics are mainly informal such as talking it over (renegotiation) with the other person or persons involved, seeking help from relatives, friends or neighbours, and using 'legal' procedures

through the Isunga LC1 court or using force when despair creeps in.²⁷⁹ This section further explores the ‘rules of the game’ of solving labour disputes and the extent to which farmers use them.

6.5.1 Renegotiating *winye*

Musa’s story revealed that before involving outsiders in their labour relationships, farmers in Isunga prefer to settle their grievances by renegotiating *winye* with each other first. Only after they have failed, do they turn to other methods. Most farmers remarked that it is usually not their intention to turn away from their obligations once they reached *winye*; but sometimes they do because of factors beyond their control, such as a heavy rain, sickness or deaths in a family, which can deter one from reporting to work or completing the agreed work on time. Late payments or non-payments may also be due to similar reasons. For this reason, most farmers consider such delays to be ‘small problems’ rather than violations of agreements, because the actions are not caused by opportunistic behaviour, but rather unforeseen problems. Therefore, when faced with such ‘small problems’, they seek to address them by talking it over and they seem contented with this approach because it is simple and less expensive in terms of time and money. Moreover, as we have seen with CS13-JKF’s (*Mama Toto*) story above, it also helps to foster existing relationships with fellow villagers.

Renegotiating *winye* does not involve third parties and most villagers remarked that it is probably the best method for solving existing *nywere-nywere*. It also gives room to those involved in in dispute to safeguard their reputations. A female farmer explained,

“...to talk to others about your problems is like walking naked before men. They will look at you and comment excitedly, that is why I usually tell people that whenever a problem arises, talk to each other about it and solve it because no one can understand the problem better than you. It is cheaper and helps you find the best solution to your *kuku-kuku*. But if you chose to take it to the LC, for example, they’ll ask all kinds of questions...including *obal tic* (sitting allowance) and you lose even when you win the case.” (Interview with CS18-MOF, May 2009)

Renegotiations of *winye* are carried out informally in the homes of the persons involved, at the trading centre or other social places such as beer drinking venues without involving third parties. Isunga villagers prefer to discuss their differences in a peaceful way to try to find a solution to existing problems

²⁷⁹ Threat of force or use of it is quite isolated. None of the case households mentioned using it or being victim of use of force.

rather than threatening each other. But if it turns out that one party is seen to be unreasonable, then the other could mention the rather 'despised' Isunga Local Council, essentially to speed things up. In such circumstances, it is easy to argue that the Isunga LC1 does have a positive influence on the process of settling labour disputes, but villagers do not value this. I will revisit the role of Isunga LC1 when discussing the durability of informality in Isunga in the next chapter. Here, I look at the role of elders in dispute mediation.

6.5.2 Using wisdom of elders to solve disputes

Apart from renegotiating *winye* and involving the Isunga LC1, labour disputes in the village are also resolved by elders. Although few in number, Isunga's elders are very much respected for their good character, knowledge, and their words weigh heavily in most situations. Many villagers believe that their advanced age puts them in a unique position to mediate on matters concerning their community. Hence, they are called upon to discuss possible causes of conflicts and to find proper responses to it. I was privy to one such mediation effort in November 2008. *Bongomin* (CS19-LOM) told me of a case involving a neighbour who battered his wife so badly that he (*Bongomin*) had to report it to *Ludito Acholi* (*Acholi* elders). According to *Bongomin*, a member of their community (*Odoki*) and his wife (*Ayaa*)²⁸⁰ did some *leja-leja* work (harvesting maize) for *Mzee Ogwal*. Their combined wages were handed to *Odoki*, but when *Ayaa* asked for her share when they got home, *Odoki* responded by slapping and kicking her, even though *Ayaa* was visibly pregnant. *Ayaa* did not report what happened to the LC1 or *Ludito Acholi*. This angered *Bongomin* very much, who then chose to report the matter himself. He said, "...I had to, because it is wrong to do a thing like that to a pregnant woman". The mediation hearing was scheduled for 30 November 2008. Unfortunately, there was a death in the family of one of the elders and the hearing had to be postponed. Even so, I was given the opportunity to understand how the hearing was planned, and below is my account of the discussions.

Field Observation: Dispute mediation among the Acholi IDPs of Isunga

In my discussion with the elders, I was keen to understand what defines the justice system used by the *Acholi* in Isunga. According to the elders, justice in *Acholi* culture is restorative and revolves around: trust, the establishment of truth, the voluntary nature of the process, the payment of compensation, and the restoration of harmony and unity of the household. One elder said, "...it is fear that usually keeps people from accepting their mistakes. Before we start any mediation process, the persons concerned must first accept and trust those of us

²⁸⁰ Both *Odoki* and *Ayaa* are fictitious names.

involved in the mediation. We also help them build their confidence in our mediation effort by giving examples of what happened in the past, and their consequences. We promote harmony and encourage the perpetrator to confess to his or her wrongdoing. The idea is to free those who have erred from fear and shame and to encourage them to take the right steps towards claiming their rightful place in the society.”

When it is clear that individuals have committed wrongdoings, but refuse to admit their guilt, elders also take it upon themselves to encourage revenge from the other side. For instance, if *Odoki* is found to be in the wrong, but he refused to accept it, they would encourage *Ayaa* to go back to her maiden home. So that if *Odoki* really loves her, he'll follow her and meet 'men like him' there who may also beat him up for mistreating their daughter. Alternatively, *Odoki* is threatened that since he has failed to keep *Ayaa* in accordance to what he had agreed when marrying her, she can now go back home. Any man is free to take *Ayaa*, and *Odoki* loses both the wife and the dowry he paid. One elder interjected, “...an Acholi man really gets scared when you talk like that to him, yet this is said just to 'cool off' the anger between *Odoki* and *Ayaa*'s people. Maybe *Ayaa* is still angry at her husband or even in the wrong, so it is better to buy time to cool off the existing tension.” Another elder added, “...we would also ask them to tell us what exactly happened, as we try to establish the facts of the conflict...which is important for resolving their problem. We mediate and we don't pass judgements the way the LC people do. In our effort, the first task would be to establish the facts by talking to *Ayaa* and *Odoki* and their witnesses. We do this in the open and stick to getting the truth no matter how long it takes...even a stranger like you is allowed to say something.” Whether *Odoki* beat his wife intentionally, or under the influence of alcohol, or as continuation of an old problem, the elders would know and then advise them accordingly and determine the amount of compensation.

According to the elders, any fight between a husband and wife that leads to loss of blood is bad and they discourage it by demanding heavy compensation. In their view, *Ayaa* was badly beaten by her husband and lost blood, which might affect the child she is carrying. One elderly lady (*Damali*) said, “...this is a very bad thing to do to a pregnant wife. We have not heard *Odoki*'s version, but I have seen him drink like a fish and behave badly when drunk. I am sure he is in the wrong and must pay *Ayaa*”. *Abuneri* agreed and stressed the importance of understanding the circumstances surrounding the fight first, before talking about compensation. He said, “...we must know whether *Odoki* was drunk or the fight was a continuation of earlier quarrels or if it was intended to harm *Ayaa*. If it is because of the money that *Ayaa* worked for, then *Odoki* is an idiot and shall pay heavily.”²⁸¹ They seek to get the facts by knowing the truth and then determine the right compensation, which can be

²⁸¹ In the two hours we discussed *Odoki* and his wife (*Ayaa*), the wife was referred to in many ways: *Min Akello*, *Min Ode*, *Min Acii* and *Min Jok*. These are positive names for bearing 'twins', which according to *Acholi* culture is abnormal and treated with much care and respect. This partly explains why *Mego Damali* sounded hard on *Odoki*.

something like a goat or money. The presiding elder takes it from *Odoki* and gives it to *Ayaa*. One elder added (with a smile), “...*he also has to pay for our ‘sitting allowance’ ...not money, but nice Kwete beer.*”

It is not only fighting that the elders want to address, but other related things too. For instance, the fight could be caused by *Odoki*'s failure to take care of his wife and children. “...*since they have land, why did they go to do leja-leja in the first place?*” *Abuneri* mumbled. They all agreed that if *Ayaa* had done something wrong, *Odoki* should have been the first to report to them, not *Bongomin*. He failed to resolve his domestic problem and resorted to kicking a person “carrying his blood”, and has become a source of conflict in his house. What the elders want is not to punish *Odoki*, but to stop the flow of the bad blood between them so that they may live ‘well’ again.

Although the gathering was about domestic violence, and not directly a dispute between a labour provider and labour recipient, the root cause was the money from *leja-leja* work that *Odoki* and *Ayaa* had earned. The mediation hearing of what happened between *Odoki* and his wife did not take place during my stay in the village, but the discussions with the elders gave an interesting dimension of how villagers solve their disputes informally despite the option of using the Isunga village council. Regardless, it showed the components, nature and complexity of the ‘other’ justice system that is very different from the more formal local council system, which is there to punish rather than promote harmony between people.²⁸²

6.5.3 Threats and use of force to resolve labour disputes

As mentioned in Chapter 3, another way of resolving disputes between economic actors is by hiring individuals to act as ‘debt collectors’. The debt collectors of Isunga use threats or force to resolve disputes. Although it is illegal in Uganda, some people turn to such methods out of despair. In a conversation with CS3-MAF (*Atenyi*) in 2007, she referred to one person who used it, and thus became the talk of the village for a long time. She said,

“...*Mzee Luka*²⁸³ our neighbour over there (*pointing*) refused to pay a ‘displaced’ labourer without giving the reasons. The man gathered his friends and threatened to kill him. He got his money in no time. Some of the ‘displaced’ do not hesitate to harm you if you delay to pay them as agreed. We hear some of them killed many people in *Acholi* before coming here...I fear them.” (Conversation with CS3-MAF in September 2007)

²⁸² C.f. Jones (2008) work in *Oledei* village, *Kumi* District in the *Teso* sub-region.

²⁸³ *Mzee Luka* is a fictitious name.

In November 2008, I located the man at the centre of CS3-MAF's (*Atenyi*) story to find out his version of the events.²⁸⁴ This is what he told me,

“...nyeri laming mada (he is very stupid), he made me work for him *calo gwici* (like a slave) without water to drink...what did he expect me to do? I narrated my problems to my friends from *Tee-Cwa* village and they agreed to deal with him. I really didn't want to harm him but rather to force him to pay my money. One of the guys from *Tee-Cwa* is one-eyed and we call him *Dayan*. He lost his eye during a fight over a woman two years ago. He is bad news; his look alone can scare you...fierce with scars all over his face. With him in charge, we went to *Mzee Luka* (the debtor), caught him by the neck, and threatened him that if he did not pay within two days, *Dayan* would finish him off. The following day, I got my money, paid my friends three bottles of *Kipanga* for their efforts...I also drank it (*laugh*)”

Ladit, to be honest, I will never do this again. It spoils people's names (*balo nying dano*) and could easily have got me into trouble. But I was badly in need of money, approached him many times, but *Mzee Luka* just did not want to pay me. This made me very angry and I sought help from my friends. I only asked them to threaten him so that I could get my money...but I was also afraid that if *Mzee* was hurt, then I would be in deep trouble with the law.” (Conversation with *Okumu*, November 2008)

Although *Okumu* successfully got his money by threatening to ‘finish off’ *Mzee Luka*, he was not very comfortable with the method, as shown by the last part of the conversation above. He also expressed remorse for what he did to *Mzee Luka* and underlined “...I will never do this again, it spoils people's names”. Other than this, none of the case households used threats or applied force to resolve their labour disputes; and neither did they say they were victims of such threats.

6.6 Summary and key issues

In this chapter we presented and discussed the institutions and institutional arrangements that Isunga villagers use to structure and enforce their labour exchange relationships. In my effort to understand which particular institutions (formal or informal) actually regulate agricultural labour exchanges in the village, the study found that the farmers of Isunga use many different institutions when structuring their labour relationships, ensuring performance and resolving labour conflicts that may arise out of work-sharing or labour exchange relationships. But the role of informal institutions was more apparent than the formal ones.

²⁸⁴ He is not one of the 20 case households, but I had to find out why he did it.

The study demonstrated the importance of personal trust arising from long-term relationships when identifying and choosing labour partners. Family membership, friendship and other informal relations (such as belonging to the same ethnic group, praying in the same church or belonging to the same *gurub*) play key roles in structuring labour relationships in the village. Therefore, building such personal relationships is an important strategy to secure much-needed farm labour, as well as to enforce it. At the core of this is a person's trust and reputation in the eyes of the other villagers. Labour exchange agreements (*winye*) are agreed verbally, which makes them rather fluid, and constantly renegotiated to reduce the risk of conflicts. However, farmers use *winye* in combination with other informal mechanisms to make their labour exchanges as smooth as possible. Such informal mechanisms include: (a) gathering information about potential labour partners, (b) using advance payment (*dog-bur*) in the case of *leja-leja* wage labour and work for cash (*pur cente*) by farmers groups in Isunga. In spite of what contract theory tells us, *winye* is used for smoothing exchanges and making them conflict-free, rather than as a 'legal safeguard' against opportunistic behaviour or use as evidence in courts.²⁸⁵

I also found that the mechanisms used to identify and choose labour partners are the same ones they use to guarantee performance by their labour exchange partners: (a) dealing with individuals that are personally known to them; (b) making use of *dog-bur* payment practices in which a partial amount is paid in advance at the start of the work, and the rest after the work is done. This mechanism applies only to *leja-leja* wage labour transactions and work for cash (*pur cente*) carried out by farmer groups such as the *Kony-Paco* Group mentioned in Chapter 5; (c) gathering information about potential exchange actors' characters, behaviours, personalities and capabilities through informal sources, such as family members, relatives, in-laws, friends, neighbours, beer drinking groups or other informal connections. In other words, they make use of informal institutional arrangements to reduce uncertainty of verbal contracts and to avoid disputes that might arise.

It also emerged that the Isunga local village council (LC1) had very limited role as a formal institution in structuring, regulating and enforcing villagers' labour exchange relationships.²⁸⁶ A few people mentioned it with respect to curious farmers checking the background of newcomers to the village, such as the internally displaced persons to see if they were LRA rebels or genuine IDPs for example, and resolving disputes. Even so, the people of Isunga take their grievances to the village council for guidance only after informal mechanisms

²⁸⁵ See Eggertsson (1996) and Landa (1994) on uncertainty with contract.

²⁸⁶ We shall explore this further in the next chapter.

have failed. None of the case households spoke of taking their grievances directly to the Isunga LC1 court without first attempting to settle them informally. This is because informal means are less expensive in terms of time and money, and more effective than their village council. It also helps to foster on-going labour relationships. The informal mechanisms villagers use to settle their labour disputes include: (a) renegotiation of labour exchange agreements which involve direct bargaining with the persons involved; (b) informal mediation such as using elders committees, who put pressure on the persons involved to change their behaviour; (c) other persons with whom labour partners have informal relationships, such as relatives or friends. It is clear from the household case studies that these informal mechanisms work because Isunga villagers fear embarrassment (*balo nying*), damage to their reputation, and family or community sanctions.

In the next chapter, we investigate possible explanations for the continued use of informal institutions and the minimal use of formal institutions in Isunga.

7 Durability of informality

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I showed how Isunga farmers carefully structure and implement their labour relationships. They work hard to reach good *winye* to avoid disputes or opportunistic behaviour that could lead to *nywere-nywere*. Even so, most labour dealings are carried out on the basis of personal trust. When faced with labour disputes, informal mechanisms are commonly used, and they only turn to the more formal Isunga Local Council for help as a last resort. This is despite years of institutional reforms that include introducing changes in labour dispute laws and processes. Why is this so? Why do farmers use informal institutions and informal mechanisms to access labour and solve disputes instead of the formal ones created by the government of Uganda? How has ‘informalism’ been affected by the development of commercial agriculture in Isunga? This chapter gives some possible explanations to the prevalence of informality in Isunga after three decades of neo-liberal reforms with a focus on the factors that may affect the operations of formal institutions in the village.

In the next section, I discuss the factors relating to the characteristics of agricultural labour transactions in Isunga (the role played by level of dependency and length of labour relations on farmers’ choices of institutional types). Section 7.3 recognises the presence of the Ugandan State in Isunga by looking at how the Isunga Local Council (LC1) works in practice, focusing on the role it plays in resolving disputes. This is followed by a note on the formal arbitration system in the country in Section 7.4. Subsequently, Section 7.5 looks at morality and affection as sources of informality, before some concluding remarks in Section 7.6

7.2 Characteristics of agricultural labour transactions

In Chapter 3, I presented and discussed the frequency of labour transactions and level of dependency, and length of labour relations as the main factors relating to the characteristics of agricultural labour transactions. This section examines how these factors influence farmers' uses of institutional types.

7.2.1 Frequency of transactions and level of dependency

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the farmers of Isunga are aware that when labour is scarce, unique or specialised, such as using oxen for weeding and reasonable levels of dependency exist, then they choose governance arrangements that are based on trust and reputation so as to minimise the possibility of opportunistic behaviour. Opportunism here is defined according to Williamson (1985) as,

“...self-interest seeking with guile. This includes but is scarcely limited to more blatant forms, such as lying, stealing, and cheating. Opportunism often involves subtle forms of deceit ... More generally, opportunism refers to the incomplete or distorted disclosure of information, especially to calculated efforts to mislead, distort, disguise, obfuscate, or otherwise confuse. It is responsible for real or contrived conditions of information asymmetry, which complicate problems of economic organization.” (ibid, 1985:47-48)

This study, however, did not see any significant role played by human asset specificity in labour transactions, apart from one case of using oxen for weeding tobacco. This is because the majority of Isunga villagers practice crop farming using rudimentary tools like hand hoes and machetes, and raw labour power. Moreover, in an environment where timing and planning are very important in decision-making, there are periods when the need for fast completion of time-sensitive tasks is high and every farmer is doing the same kind of work.²⁸⁷ Farmers therefore seek to invest in social ties and in the words of one farmer “rest on each other's shoulders” (CS19-LOM). Thus, the relationships between labour providers and labour recipients involve some degree of mutual dependency, hence the relevance of social structure.

Level of mutual dependency

When a labour relationship is based on mutual dependency (e.g. CS4-MOJM and CS20-COM), both labour providers and recipients would bear some risks with respect to possible opportunistic behaviour. A labour provider would be in trouble if an agreement (*winye*) were not properly interpreted. For instance, a

²⁸⁷ Refer to discussion on the role of geography and risks in rain fed crop farming in Chapter 4.

leja-leja seller may fail to get his or her wage on time (CS9-MAM), a *gurub* member may be expelled from a farmers group (see Section 5.3), an *aleya* member may miss other members' labour contributions; a work party participant may miss future labour opportunities because his or her name is 'soiled' or 'smells bad'. There was consensus among the case households that it was difficult to deal with persons who do not follow their parts of *winye*. On the other hand, a labour recipient may also be negatively affected by the opportunistic behaviour of labour providers by doing shoddy work, working slowly or getting the '*dog-bur*' payment and disappearing. These harm households that receive labour and hamper their crop production activities. It could also cause *nywere-nywere*, which in turn results in the termination of their labour relations, something that most villagers do not feel comfortable doing.

In principle, both labour recipients and labour providers could take their grievances to the Isunga Local Council (LC1) for legal guidance, as recommended by the 2006 Labour Disputes (Arbitration and Settlement) Act (GOU, 2006b) and the 2006 Local Council Courts Act (GOU, 2006c). But as I will explain in the next section, the 'legal' route is always tricky. The Isunga LC1 is not all that popular among the villagers. Many villagers consider the LC1 court procedures to be costly and biased, with unpredictable outcomes. Moreover, turning to the Isunga LC carries with it other social costs associated with reputation and losing sources of farm labour. Thus, when a particular task has to be done fast, and the labour dealing is considered valuable, or may involve some sort of mechanisation such as use of animal traction (see CS18-MOF in chapter 5), it is likely that the persons involved would structure their transactions in a way that reduces risk and uncertainty (c.f North, 2006; Landa, 1994; North, 1994; Williamson, 1985). It is therefore not surprising that farmers structure their labour dealings in ways that are based on trust. This also explains why the case households used in this study stressed dealing with persons they know well or those persons whose names 'smell good' in the village. They put emphasis on core labour partners and work hard to build and maintain long-term relationships with them. Some of the better-off households (CS4-MOJM and CS18-MOF) indicated that when an existing labour relationship is good, then they would feel relaxed when doing *patana* and they know the task would be well done. Mutual dependency is therefore an important factor in explaining why Isunga villagers use informal mechanisms when structuring, regulating and enforcing their labour relationships.

7.2.2 The duration of transactional relations also matters

The study also found that the duration of labour relationships matters when deciding what institutions should govern labour relationships. All my

informants stressed maintaining labour relationships that have passed the test of time, because it eases *patana*, reaching good *winye* and enforcing it without fear of opportunistic behaviour. They have come to know each other well over time (see Section 6.2), and *winye* are reached without the intervention of outsiders (third parties) since both sides have gone through ‘experiential learning’ and know what is expected of them. As hinted at in the last chapter, once a labour relationship has been established and is working well, the parties involved try hard to foster it. All the case households said they take long-term relationship into account when looking for help or extra labour, or when deciding how to settle *nywere-nywere*. So, when the duration of the relationship increases, those involved get more used to each other or familiar with each other’s expectations and build up trust. In this case, the use of informal institutions makes sense.²⁸⁸ Zenger et al.(2002) also support this when they argue that the use of formal institutions may be preferable in non-recurring relationships given that,

“...non-repeated interactions provide neither a shadow of the future increasing perceived benefits from cooperation nor a shadow of the past promoting the gradual development of relational norms and trust” (ibid, 2002:8)

As will be discussed in section 7.5, the above findings are also affected by moral and affective factors. These contribute to the prevalence of informal institutions in the village and the minimal use of the Isunga Local Council (a formal institution) in settling labour disputes. The people of Isunga prefer to work with persons they have come to know well over time, instead of new faces. In the next section, I look at the presence of the Ugandan state in Isunga by examining how the local council system works in practice.

7.3 Isunga village court and disputes settlement

It was made clear in Chapter 3 that formal institutions in general, and legal procedures relating to courts in particular, play important roles in labour transactions if they are cheap and efficient. However, it emerged from the field study that the people of Isunga are cautious about taking their grievances to the Isunga LC1 (the only formal institution in the village).²⁸⁹ Instead, they prefer informal mechanisms when faced with disputes because they are cheaper. In

²⁸⁸ See Williamson (1985; 1979) for theoretical discussions.

²⁸⁹ The authority of the all local council courts is from the Local Council Court Act (GOU, 2006c) and the Labour Disputes (Arbitration and Settlements) Act (GOU, 2006b). These Acts centre on the idea that transfers of power over decision making and implementation to the lower administrative levels would improve efficiency in service delivery.

the eyes of many villagers, the Isunga LC1 court is a source of injustice due to factors including bribery, corruption, incompetence, biased rulings, and the women complain of male domination.²⁹⁰ Most villagers, even those who had no experience of taking disputes to the LC1, said that they do not trust the Isunga LC1 and stressed that dealing with it is a very ‘costly business’. The costs include money, time and effort throughout the entire dispute settlement process; and of course, the social costs associated with the ‘soiling’ of one’s reputation and breakdown of existing relationships. The sub-sections below examine these costs as driving factors of informality in Isunga.²⁹¹

7.3.1 The costs of using the village court

Both North (1991; 1990) and Williamson (1998; 1985; 1981) point out that transactions of any sort involving two actors or more are riddled with many potential problems (costs). These problems can arise before, during, and after the transactions have taken place. Therefore, the type of institutions farmers use affects these costs in many ways. In this way, the function of a particular institution is to influence the game players’ decisions in a given context. And, as argued by Coase (1960), rational behaviour would imply that a more efficient institution (with fewer problems or lower costs) should be preferable over a less efficient one. This study supports Coase’s point since most people of Isunga are not enthusiastic about using ‘legal’ procedures to go about their labour dealings or settle disputes in court if there are high costs involved. This was the case with *Musa’s* (CS9-MAM) behaviour discussed earlier. Because of the high costs associated with the Isunga Local Council, farmers like *Musa* tend to avoid it as much as possible. However, those who turn to it, do so as a last resort and with a great deal of effort.²⁹² Fafchamps & Minten (2001) observed that in an environment where the legal framework is poorly developed, reliance on informal ways to carry out transactions may be more appropriate for minimising transaction costs.²⁹³

As will be explored below, ambiguity of existing labour laws, regulatory procedures and inadequate legal support in the enforcement of contracts

²⁹⁰ C.f. Khadiagala (2001)

²⁹¹ For a study of the weak and disputed character of the Ugandan state in rural Uganda, see Ben Jones’ (2008) work in the *Teso* sub-region.

²⁹² Elsewhere in Uganda, Khadiagala (2001) reached similar conclusion in her work on the failure of popular justice in south western Uganda.

²⁹³ Fafchamps & Minten (2001) define four economic factors which make legal enforcement mechanisms costly and less preferred: (i) the actual cost of legal action, including lawyers’ fees, bribes to agents of authority, and the opportunity cost of time, (ii) the expected time delay before compensation is received, (iii) the uncertainty surrounding the level of compensation, and (vi) fear of reprisal from the other party

(*winye*) lead villagers in Isunga to place their faith and efforts outside the more formal local council to carry out their labour dealings. This behaviour is supported by Telser (1980a) who correctly argued that reliance on self-enforcing agreements by parties to a transaction can be attributed to the fact that it is costly to use the assistance of third parties.²⁹⁴ In the case of the Isunga LC1 court, it has the legal power to enforce agreements and assess damages when they are breached (GOU, 2006c).²⁹⁵ The LC1 court can penalise persons who breach wage labour agreements. On the other hand, if the existing labour relationship between actors is very valuable then breaking it could incur other costs such as the cost of searching for new labour partners. The effect of such costs is obvious when a person is embedded in social networks, since using the Isunga LC1 court is likely to damage one's reputation and future possibilities of finding support (see Section 7.4 below).²⁹⁶

Social costs of going to the Isunga village court

As seen in the last chapter Isunga villagers are very careful with their reputations and going to the local council (LC1) court to solve existing *nywere-nywere* may in the damage one's reputation in the long-term. Isunga is a small village, thus information about those who behave badly, treat fellow villagers unfairly or those who have labour disputes, easily spreads throughout the village. The losing party is thus seen as a person who has displayed bad and/or unacceptable behaviour, which will affect his or her reputation negatively. People who have bad reputations are likely to be subjected to community sanctions. In the dispute between *Musa* (CS9-MAM) and *Bazilio* (CS1-JSBM) discussed earlier, the latter would find it difficult to get people to work for him in the future since many villagers do not like working for people who are dishonest or have behaved badly towards another villager. Interestingly, such community sanctions do not only apply to those who lose a case; even 'winners' can be in trouble. This is because there is an ethnic perspective to almost everything in Isunga. If for instance, the disagreement filters through the village and is portrayed as IDPs versus the *Barullis*, then some of the *Barullis* would be reluctant to deal with IDPs in the future. In this way, the reputation of the winning side is also damaged since the *Barullis* may think

²⁹⁴ See also Landa & Lu (1997) work on ethnic cooperation in Southeast Asia for similar arguments.

²⁹⁵ Note that the LC1 court is based on a principle of punishment rather than that of promoting harmony through mediations discussed in Section 6.5.2.

²⁹⁶ Harrison White (1981) whilst talking to Swedberg (1990:78-93) argued that people also use deliberate action with respect to embedding economic actions, the notion of embedding used in the sense of Karl Polanyi (2001) to mean that an individual's economic transactions are embedded in social and kinship relations.

that he just wanted to punish their fellow *Murulli* man. A farmer came close to confirming this when he remarked,

“... I really do not know what I would do when put in *Musa*'s situation. But taking the case to the LC people would not be an option because it'll 'spoil my name' among the *Palwos* and the *Barullis* who are very powerful here...and we are in their land. They are rich and might not help you next time you need their help or work.” (Interview with CS20-COM, November 2008)

Thus pressing charges against a fellow villager in the LC1 Court, no matter how justifiable it might be, is seen by some villagers as a violation of behavioural norms. Therefore, they may not wish to push their counterparts too hard, simply because they want to keep their reputations intact. Thus, the need to preserve relationships acts as an incentive for villagers to rely on informal mechanisms to enforce their labour dealings. This makes sense, especially when we consider the hazardous way the Isunga LC1 court mechanism operates with rampant complaints of unfair and unpredictable outcomes (see below).

7.3.2 Outcomes of the Isunga village court rulings

Apart from the cost issues outlined above, villagers also remarked that the Isunga LC1 court rulings are usually biased and unfair, and that the whole process of acquiring justice is quite unpredictable. This discourages many of them from using it. The shortcomings of the Isunga local council mentioned in the case studies, conversations with villagers (including some of the local councillors), as well as my own observations include: (a) weaknesses of the laws governing the local council system, (b) decisions not based on legal considerations due to the councillors' corrupt behaviour, (c) most of the village councillors are illiterate and incompetent, and (d) the court rulings being 'tricky' to enforce.²⁹⁷ The illustrations below reflect the biased, unfair and unpredictable nature of the Isunga village court.

CS4-MOJM (Jalon): the LC ruled in our favour, but they refused to leave.

Jalon is a *Palwo* elder, with a junk of land.²⁹⁸ According to *Jalon*, land is no longer owned by the *Palwo* people as it used to be. Most of the land is sold and

²⁹⁷ It was very difficult to obtain data on agricultural labour related disputes from the Isunga Local Council (LC1), because they do not maintain a registry and most farmers use informal mechanisms to address existing conflicts. Still, it is important to show how disputes are solved through the Isunga Local Council Court, one of the products of the institutional reforms of the agricultural modernization agenda.

²⁹⁸ *Jalon* told me the first time we met that he owns 50 acres of land, and the second time we met he increased this to 'only' 130 acres of land, but the Isunga LC1 Chairman said the *Mzee* has more than 1000 acres in and around Isunga village.

the forests have been taken over by the government. This has led to many land conflicts in the village and surrounding areas. At the time of the interview in 2007, *Jalon* was in conflict with a group of villagers. He said, “...*the conflict does not involve me directly, but one of my cousins. My name comes in because I was involved in filing the case to the magistrate’s court in Masindi. I used to attend the court sessions regularly but stopped attending the court case last year because they kept on postponing it...now I am tired following it*”. The source of the conflict is farmland that belonged to his late cousin (*Okwera*). *Okwera* rented the farmland to some *Alur* people from the West Nile when he was still alive. But when he died in 2006, the family of the deceased wanted to get the land back, but the *Alur* (squatters) refused to leave. They argued that they bought it from *Okwera* and see no reason why they should leave. *Jalon* and the family of the deceased disagree, and the squatters don’t have any paper to support their claim. *Jalon* remarked, “...*the Alur people are not trusted, they say this and do something else...I do not want them in my shamba*”. The case was referred to both the Isunga LC1 court and the magistrate’s court in Kiryandongo...and nothing has come of it yet. *Jalon* said, “...*the LC first ruled in our favour, but the squatters refused to leave. Now I ‘hear words’ that the LC Chairman is encouraging them not to leave, and that the law is on their side. If it is true, then I think it is because he is an Alur and wants to protect his people...after all, they voted for him. Some people keep on telling me that if I give some of the councillors ‘something small’ (bribe), then we’ll get our land back. But why should I do it when I know we are in the right?*” *Jalon* is convinced some of the Isunga local councillors are hostile towards him. He said, “...*one of them even witnessed against me before he became councillor...and every day he and the chairman sit and drink beer together*”.

Jalon’s dissatisfaction with the Isunga LC1 court above is supplemented by my experience of a court session in May 2009.

Field experience: Before the ‘hyenas’ of Isunga

On 31 May 31 2009, I accompanied *Bazilio* to hear a case before the Isunga LC1 Court. A fellow villager (*Abiro*) accused *Bazilio* of letting his cattle stray into his maize field, destroying the crop, and he wanted to be compensated.²⁹⁹ *Abiro* came with four witnesses, and *Bazilio* had his herdsman (*Thomas*) as a witness. The judge and prosecutor was the LC1 Chairman, with two of his

²⁹⁹ Of course, I tried to understand why they could not resolve the *nywere-nywere* between them informally instead of going to the LC since everyone seems to be against the LC people, but I got a rather unpleasant response from *Bazilio* saying that *Abiro* is an idiot (*muciro*) and I should go and ask him (*Abiro*) instead. Even my effort to talk to *Abiro* about the *nywere-nywere* did not yield any results. Instead, *Abiro* accused me for trying to get words from him and pass them to *Bazilio* (my host during the fieldwork).

councillors as advisors. We all sat in a circle under a mango tree.³⁰⁰ Although the principal purpose of the court was to administer justice, it was in effect a 'reality theatre', which drew a lot of interest to by passers and some villagers joined in when the court was under way. The exchanges between *Abiro* and *Bazilio* were unfriendly and provided fertile ground for much laughter, murmuring and discussion. One councillor reminded the court that this is not the first time *Bazilio* is brought before them because of 'his arrogance' with his wealth and because of straying into *Ekanya's* home and committing adulterous acts with his wife. To an outsider like me, the councillor's remarks had nothing to do with the conflict between *Abiro* and *Bazilio*. Indeed, there was drama as *Bazilio* walked away accusing the village councillor of 'spoiling his name' and 'witch-hunting' him for things he never did and just 'soiling his reputation' in the village. But *Thomas* stayed, raised his hand and pointed out that on the day and time *Abiro* said their cattle destroyed his maize *shamba*, he was watering the cattle at the dam. And that there are people who saw *Zakayo's* cattle near *Abiro's shamba*, and advised the court to talk to them instead. *Bazilio* left, visibly angry and swearing to report the 'big-mouthed' councillor to the Mutunda sub-county chief for 'spoiling his name'. The Chairman kept quiet, although occasionally smiled. The court ended abruptly, as the accused was not willing to be part of it. Instead, other villagers advised *Abiro* to solve the problem out of court. *Abiro* murmured to himself and was equally disappointed as nothing concrete came from the effort, yet he had to pay for the local councillors' sitting allowance.

The local council court is by law to be an arena where grievances and disputes are addressed, and the main work of the Chairperson is to listen to both sides carefully and settle them without biases and to the satisfaction of the parties involved (GOU, 2006c; Khadiagala, 2001). The law also says that the local council court should consist of all members of the executive committee of the village, which was not followed in the above case and the village court should have adjourned to another time (ibid, 2006c:6). The unfairness in which the case was handled led to the court breaking in disarray. *Bazilio* left in anger, a signal perhaps that he doubted the court's judgement. *Abiro* too, was equally disappointed as his grievance was not properly addressed and nothing was said about compensation for the maize crops that were destroyed. Thus, the unfair and unreasonable way in which the court conducted itself and dealt with the case, is a strong reason villagers spoke badly of their local council and refer to the councillors as 'hyenas'.³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ At the start of the hearing, *Bazilio* introduced me to the gathering and asked if anyone objects to my presence. No one objected and I sat next *Bazilio*.

³⁰¹ In *Palwo* and *Nyoro* folklore, hyenas are viewed with contempt and are associated with bad things/behaviour such as scavenging and stealing goats, sheep and even children.

Although the law demands procedural fairness, this was not observed during the LC1 court sitting (GOU, 2006c). For instance, as a ‘prosecutor’, the Chairperson never advised *Bazilio* (the accused person) of the case against him. He never explained the nature of the allegation to him, as a way of giving *Bazilio* a fair hearing as required by the law, nor the chance to question his accuser (*Abiro*). Instead, the Isunga LC1 Chairman allowed one of his councillors to make allegations more or less in support of *Abiro*, including all sorts of accusations that had nothing to do with the court. If anything, the conduct of the LC Chairperson and his councillors is a stark reminder that no matter how well the Government of Uganda creates the administrative, legal and/or political structures needed for an effective service delivery; much will depend on the attitude and conduct of the individuals in charge of those structures. But since the system relies on untrained ‘judges’, common sense, local norms and social ties easily influence the local council court outcomes (Khadiagala, 2001).

Both the CS4-MOJM story and the field observation above reveal the limitations of the Isunga LC1 as an institution. Not only do they offer examples of how long it takes the Isunga LC1 to settle disputes, but also that ‘simple’ disputes could also become complicated due to the weakness of the local council system itself. This in turn makes the process of dispute settlement cumbersome, unpleasant and costly. Even CS9-MAM’s dispute with CS1-JSBM discussed in Chapter 6 showed that *Musa*’s experience with the Isunga LC was financially and socially costly. With the above catalogue of evidence, I conclude that the cumbersome court procedures and lack of professionalism involved, bribery or corruption and use of ethnicity, all work in concert to deny justice to the people of Isunga.

The Isunga local councillors as rent seekers

In the CS9-MAM household case study, the Isunga LC1 Chairman’s decision to help *Musa* was influenced by informal payments. If we also consider what CS20-COM seems to suggest below, then there is the possibility for anyone with the means (social or strong economic position in the village) to influence the decisions of the Isunga local council. In a village where ethnicity weighs heavily and personal ties are important, there is no guarantee that Isunga local councillors do not make decisions and judgements based on their relations with a particular member of the society. Again, considering *Mzee Jalon*’s (CS4-MOJM) critics of the Isunga Local Council above, it is apparent the Isunga LC1 court process is messy and unpredictable, court judgements are unfair and the outcomes are heavily questionable. Most villagers I talked to, even those

who had no experience with the Isunga LC, talked of it as useless, corrupt and 'tribalistic', and it called the councillors biased. One farmer remarked,

"...here, you can win a case if you go to any of the councillors with some *chai* (meaning money) and he influences the others. Well, you may lose the money, but is much cheaper than going the full cycle of their process...with money for pens, papers, water and *obal tic* (sitting allowance) each time they gather. Where can a poor man like me get that money? *Camusana* (bribe) influences most of their decisions...and if you gave them 'something small' but lost the case, the fine is reduced or punishment less severe compared to when nothing was given." (Interview with CS20-COM, November 2008)

A woman farmer added,

"...our councillors hunt for money and they chase it like chasing a rat. If you don't have money, no one listens to you" (Interview with CS13-JKF, November 2008).

With the possibility of 'greasing the hands' of the councillors open to both the accused and the accuser, those with the right resources can buy justice.³⁰² For instance, when the LC1 Chairman wanted money for 'a pen and paper' from *Musa* (CS9-MAM), the signal was clear i.e. if you want me to attend to your case, just pay.

Weaknesses of the laws and regulations

The fact that the local council courts are allowed to make 'legal' decisions even when councillors lack the knowledge and experience to validate the importance of a case, leaves a lot to be desired. The LC system appears to be an important source of injustice in Isunga and beyond. Uganda's law on labour disputes does not clearly spell out procedures on how the LC1 courts should settle labour disputes. It also does not specify whether 'court' procedures involving labour disputes should be initiated in the LC1 courts, the Magistrate's Courts or through the District Labour Offices. Therefore, given the overlap in the legal documents, labour disputes can in fact be handled by different offices with different outcomes. The evidence suggests that decisions made by the Isunga local council are influenced by a number of non-legal factors such as nepotism, friendship, ethnicity or membership of social organisations, and not based on any legal consideration whatsoever. This is a view shared by Khadiagala (2001) when she wrote,

³⁰² See the New Vision Newspaper, 23 November 2009: Police hold *Kiruhura* LC over bribery.

“...the court’s personal knowledge of the disputants replaces the rules of evidence employed by formal courts of law.” (ibid, 2001:65)

The CS9-MAM case study and my field experience narrated above involving *Bazilio* (CS1-JSBM) provide examples of contradictory and inconsistent ‘legal’ behaviour of the Isunga village court, which in turn contribute to unpredictable results of their actions. These are strong enough reasons for villagers to turn their backs on the more formal local council court. Note that the settlement processes of land disputes, labour disputes, criminal (murder, robbery or theft) and civil cases such as wife battering are similar. Isunga villagers may take their grievances to their LC Chairman as required by the law. But if the process is handled poorly, then it is very likely that their experience from such a process prevents them from taking any grievance to the village council in the future.³⁰³ One farmer noted,

“...I had some problems with a fellow who got his *dog-bur* and disappeared without finishing his task, but I never bothered to report it to those LC *hyenas* because my experience with them concerning the land dispute with those *Alur* people we talked about last year, ‘opened my eyes’ and taught me never to trust the Isunga LC people, especially that useless Chairman who starts his day with a glass of *Kipanga*...he is a bad person.” (Interview with CS4-MOJM, November 2008)

Another woman from a poor household remarked,

“...I took a small complaint to them, and when the chairman demanded a goat before he considered it, I just gave up. My friend *Min Acii* fought with *Akiiki* at the borehole, when the LC took the case up...they asked both *Min Acii* and *Akiiki* for money for lunch, transport and sitting allowance. Hmm, transport within Isunga?” (Interview with CS7-ABF, November 2008)

The above farmers are not alone when it comes to negative feelings about the Isunga LC. During the interviews, group discussions and informal conversations, many villagers referred to several cases in which people they knew had some nasty experience with the Isunga LC. Their dissatisfaction is mainly due to the councillor’s corrupt behaviour, use of bad language and the unpredictable court processes.

³⁰³ See the New Vision Newspaper, 30 May 2007. Article: Why Local Councils overstep their power, in which a village court in *Karamoja* sentenced a man suspected of murder to death by hanging; and the sentence was implemented there and then.

Issues of competence and knowledge

Following the ‘players of the game’ discussion in Chapter 3, it would make sense for Isunga villagers to turn to the village council for guidance and not complain if their local councillors were competent and knowledgeable of the various laws in place. This would increase their confidence in the system, as it would guarantee fairness and predictability of the outcomes of the Isunga LC1 court decisions. No such conditions exist in Isunga, and hence the outcomes of the local council activities are unpredictable. In an interview with the Chairman of Isunga LC (DO1-LC1) in May 2009, he confirmed the negative perceptions in the village about the council he heads. According to him, this is because most of his councillors are illiterate and some hardly read or writes. A number of them too, do not attend meetings regularly because they prefer to spend more time working their *shambas*, so he does most of the work alone.³⁰⁴ He also confessed that his knowledge of the labour law or other laws is quite low. But as the government’s representative in the village, he has to work anyway because that is what he is expected to do. In short, the Isunga village councillors lack the knowledge, competence and experience in the laws they are supposed to apply in their line of duties. This explains why certain villagers complain that the outcomes of their LC1 court rulings are usually unfair and difficult to understand.³⁰⁵

Difficulties in enforcing court rulings

Another point of significance that could explain the prevalence of informality in labour dealings in Isunga is how the LC1 court rulings are enforced. All my informants mentioned that each time a court ruling delivered a favourable outcome; enforcement is left up to the persons involved. This adds to the uncertainty of the whole process since there is no guarantee that the person who won the case can manage to enforce the outcome. In view of this, it is probably correct to argue that the LC1 court rulings enforcement mechanism does not exist. If it does exist, then the local councillors do not make use of it, probably due to their incompetence and lack of knowledge.

Also, the difficulty of enforcing decisions is a good enough reason why the institution of the LC1 court is not used. One woman farmer came close to supporting this statement when she said,

“...our LCs are needy people (*lukec*), they work hard to get our money, take their time to decide on a simple issue and if they decide in your favour, it is upon you

³⁰⁴ Kabwegyere (2002:7) also expressed his disappointment with rural Ugandans who did not want to participate in the political process of the local councils.

³⁰⁵ C.f. Kabwegyere (2002), Khadiagala (2001) and Nsibambi (1998)

to follow it up.” (Woman farmer during a FGD with *Labongo Lworo Women’s* Group, November 2008)

Nowhere in the 2006 Local Council Courts Act, is there any mention of deadlines within which the process of enforcement must be completed. In the *nywere-nywere* between *Musa* (CS9-MAM) and *Bazilio* (CS1-JSBM), the decision taken for *Musa* to get his money dragged on for months. Many of the households interviewed said that most LC rulings and decisions take several months to be enforced. In some cases, judgements were not enforced at all. Faced with such a reality, many villagers doubt their ability to obtain fair enforcement of the Isunga LC1 court rulings. Hence, they prefer informal mechanisms both outside the Isunga LC and within it, which in turn adds more to the unpredictable nature of the outcomes. Weighing up what literature tells us against how the Isunga local council operates in practice; it is safe to state that the continued existence of informality is in fact an intrinsic element of ‘formality’ in so far as it is a response to the inadequacies of formalisation and operations of the Isunga LC. Therefore, the prevalence of informality appears to be an adaptive mechanism that reinforces the shortcomings of the formal local court system.³⁰⁶ Although Jones (2008) suggested that the judicial functions were the most popular aspect of the local council system in the *Teso* region, this study found the people of Isunga less enthusiastic about the ability of their local council to adjudicate fairly. The Isunga LC is simply not popular.

7.4 A note on the formal arbitration and mediation system

Both the Employment Act (GOU, 2006a) and the Labour Disputes (Arbitration and Settlement) Act (GOU, 2006b) meant that arbitration could be used as a tool to resolve disputes arising from labour transactions. In principle, arbitration offers some advantages over the LC1 courts, and one such advantage is the conclusiveness of the rulings.³⁰⁷ While the local council courts are subject to appeal, despite taking long to wind a case up, there are no appeals with arbitration rulings. In addition, the proceedings and rules of arbitration are relatively simple compared to courts. Whilst the local council courts take place in the open and anyone can attend, arbitration proceedings

³⁰⁶ It could also be that farmers simply feel safe, comfortable and confident operating within existing social structures in the village.

³⁰⁷ Arbitration here means settlement of disputes between parties to a contract (verbal or written) by a neutral third party (the arbitrator) without resorting to court actions. It is voluntary, yet required by law. If both parties agree to be bound by the arbitration decision, then it becomes a binding arbitration. In the Ugandan context, the exact procedure to follow is governed by the Labour Disputes (Arbitration and Settlement) Act of 2006.

take place in private, thus ensuring confidentiality. Although the Ugandan government has put extra effort into encouraging arbitration in settling disputes, villagers in Isunga have never heard of it, and hence do not use it. Nonetheless, recognising its existence and function provides insight into the perseverance of informal mediation approaches in the village.

The Labour Disputes (Arbitration and Settlement) Act of 2006 also provides clear provisions for workers to refer labour disputes to the District Labour Officer (another formal way of solving disputes). Ironically, Isunga villagers said they have never heard of such possibilities. Section 3 of the Act spells out why and how labour disputes should be referred to District Labour Officers. Subsection 3 (1) reads,

“...a labour dispute whether existing or apprehended, may be reported, in writing to a labour officer, by a party to the dispute in such form and containing particulars as may be prescribed by regulations made under this Act...and a person making a report of a labour dispute under subsection (1) shall send a copy of the report immediately to the other party to the dispute.” (GOU, 2006b:7)

The Act also calls upon District Labour Officers to react within two weeks after receipt of a complaint. They do so by meeting the parties and endeavouring to conciliate and resolve the labour dispute (GOU, 2006b). However, in an interview with the Masindi District Labour Officer (DO7-MDLO), he admitted that the above sections of the Labour Disputes (Arbitration and Settlement) Act of 2006 probably work well when labour agreements are written. He said,

“...my work would be easy when a labour agreement is clearly written...but in cases where agreements are verbally reached, the Act is as good as useless. I also think that is why I don't receive complaints from farmers. Even the white collar workers, sometimes they just come to obtain information about our role in resolving disputes, but most of them never come back after their first or second visits” (Interview with DO7-MDLO, November 2008).

These comments by the Masindi District Labour Officer show that there is very little reliance on the offices set by the government to resolve labour disputes. Two reasons can be articulated for this, either the long arm of ‘the state’ is very weak that it cannot meet citizens’ expectations, or the low use of state institutions (the Isunga LC1 and the Masindi District Labour office) show the

importance of informal methods in resolving labour disputes in the presence of a rather weak state in the country side.³⁰⁸

Mediation as a mechanism for resolving labour disputes

The Labour Disputes Act also gives space for mediation as a mechanism for resolving labour disputes. Section 24, on power of the Labour Officer states,

“...a Labour Officer shall in exercising his or her powers under this Act, endeavours to secure the settlement of disputes, actual or imminent, by use of voluntary procedures, conciliation and mediation; ...and a Labour Officer may act as conciliator or mediator in a labour disputes or may nominate any other person to act in the capacity.”(GOU, 2006b:15)

Although it reads well on paper, my informants made no mention of going to the Masindi District Labour Office to settle labour disputes. Otherwise, formal mediation involves using an independent, impartial and respected third party to reach a settlement instead of opting for arbitration or litigation. The mediator’s role is to advise the parties and offers suggestions on how to resolve their differences. It is not binding, yet recognised by the Ugandan state as one of the means to solve disputes (GOU, 2006b).³⁰⁹ Although Isunga villagers (including the LC1 Chairperson) were ignorant about its existence, many of them complained that even if they were aware of the possibility of resolving labour related disputes through the District Labour Office, they would still hesitate to do so, because Masindi town is very far away. The LC1 Chairman observed,

“...most of them do not have the money to travel to Masindi...and may be when they go, they come back empty-handed” (Interview with DOI-LC1).

Reading through the Labour Disputes (Arbitration and Settlement) Act of 2006, one is struck by the lack of clear regulations on mediation, which in my understanding makes it a bad mechanism for settling labour disputes. In particular, there is no precise provision indicating how agricultural labourers should go about it.³¹⁰ Moreover, it is based on the assumption that such information is free and farmers can easily access it, yet this is not true.

³⁰⁸ See Jones (2008) for similar remarks.

³⁰⁹ Unlike an arbitrator, a mediator has no power to force acceptance of his or her decision, but relies on persuasion to reach an agreement. Even so, mediations are usually informal in terms of the persons involved, time and place of mediation.

³¹⁰ The *Masindi* District Labour Officer did not even know what inhibits them from doing so.

Breaking the rules, the LC Chairman as a dispute mediator

In my interview with the Mutunda sub-county chief (DO2-MSCC), he revealed that although he was not familiar with the law on mediation and unsure whether he should do it, he has on many occasions mediated in disputes between community members when referred from the local councils. Even the LC1 Chairpersons mediate. According to the Chairman of Isunga LC, the most common labour dispute in the village involves the *leja-leja* people. *Leja-leja* disputes revolve around non-payment or late payment for work done, getting advance payment (*dog-bur*) and disappearing “...especially the IDPs are notorious for this,” the Chairman stressed. Whenever approached by any of the disputing persons, he takes time to listen and mediate.³¹¹ For instance, in the CS1-JSBM and CS9-MAM labour dispute narrated above, the LC Chairman mediated at one point; but did it in an informal way by assisting both *Musa* and *Bazilio* to determine the facts and scale of the dispute. When he heard *Musa*’s story and confronted *Bazilio* with the facts, the latter accepted as accused. He also helped them agree on what to do. However, he did not use his power and authority as the Isunga village boss to compel participation in the process and to make a decision for them to follow. The final decision was made by *Musa* and *Bazilio* and not enforced by some kind of law. The whole process was informal, non-binding and worked ‘well’ in the end.³¹²

Since retaining a ‘good name’ is important in Isunga, if *Bazilio* continues behaving badly, or refuses to pay *Musa* his money, other persons may get involved. For instance, *Musa* could use force or take the matter to the office of the Mutunda Sub-County Chief. This would not be good for *Bazilio* as his name might ‘get spoiled’. The whole village would get to know about his cheating behaviour and the consequences might be greater and more costly than the 10,000 UGX he owed *Musa*. Most likely other villagers would avoid dealing with him for showing bad behaviour, simply to avoid potential problems in future. Given the fact that *Bazilio* relies heavily on *leja-leja* labour for his farming activities, this would have severe consequences.

7.5 Morality and affection as sources of informality

Enough evidence exists from the household case studies in the previous chapters that labour transactions in Isunga are embedded in social relations and

³¹¹ When asked about the dispute between *Musa* (CS9-MAM) and *Bazilio* (CS1-JSBM), he confirmed his involvement and that *Bazilio* was in the wrong. Still, he had to see between his fingers because *Bazilio* is a prominent member of the village and former LCIII councillor under their NRM party.

³¹² If of course we disregard the long time it took for *Musa* to get his money.

cultural conventions. More importantly, farmers' labour behaviours and choices are fully rational. Hydén (1983; 1980) provides a clear exposition of the importance of the 'economy of affection' in African rural societies. The concept blends economic and social rationality and focuses on a range of survival and self-help strategies which otherwise would remain undetected or misapprehended (Seppälä, 1998; Lemarchand, 1989). Hydén (1983) defines the 'economy of affection' as

“...a network of support, communications and interaction among structurally defined groups connected by blood, kin, community or other activities, for example, religion.” (ibid, 1983:8)

Therefore, the economy of affection is a defence mechanism, a way for people living in poverty to cope with the circumstances that are threatening their livelihoods.³¹³ It also serves the purpose of maintaining existing social relations since human agency is more than just pursuing one's self-interest. It also implies judgements of responsibility and morally-guided actions (Hyden, 2002; Lemarchand, 1989; Hydén, 1983). The subsection below explores how the 'economy of affection' affects Isunga farmers' choices of labour institutions and practices.

7.5.1 Affective ties

The collaborative efforts of the people of Isunga brought out several features of their individual, kinship and community dynamics. Their interactions at various levels of the village are consistent with the notion of the 'economy of affection'. Below are three case examples that show how farmers exchange behaviour is influenced by moral and affective factors. They are presented in the form of episodes, sequences of events as observed and complemented by interviews on the actual happenings from CS11-HJM, CS3-MAF and CS1-JSBM households.

CS11-HJM (Hajji): Groundnuts and beans for labour

Hajji's main economic activities are farming and trading in chicken. He mainly cultivates food crops (beans, maize, cassava, sweet potatoes, groundnuts and vegetables) and sunflower for money.³¹⁴ However, his major problem is lack of labour during certain periods when farming activities are seriously restricted by

³¹³ Hydén (1983) also takes it as a comment on the weakness of state penetration in rural Tanzania, something he was criticised for.

³¹⁴ *Hajji* bought the land and the animals from his chicken business. He buys the birds rather cheaply from Isunga and the surrounding villages; transports them to *Masindi* Town and sells them at prices three or four times higher than the buying price.

the lack of family labour. He addresses it by organising pur-kongo, receiving help from relatives and neighbours and/or hires leja-leja. The rewards vary depending on the source of labour, tasks and ages of the labourers.³¹⁵ In August 2007, I observed how *Hajji* mobilised people to help him harvest beans and groundnuts that were getting spoiled due to heavy rain. Eleven people were involved: two persons from Rukia's aleya group, three were *Hajji's* friends, two were IDPs working for reward in kind and four were relatives (two cousins and two sisters-in-law).³¹⁶ They worked for roughly four hours, and after they had finished harvesting the crops, Rukia arranged to reciprocate her work to the other two. The IDPs and *Hajji's* cousins were given some beans and groundnuts to take home.³¹⁷ Rukia's aleya labour companions were not given any of the crops to take home, except a promise to get Rukia's labour in return for their contributions. One of the relatives received some beans, but was also promised labour help by *Hajji* for the following day. Even the IDP lady who came late got some beans to take with her. According to *Hajji*, she is a poor widow whose husband died not long ago; and it is just not in his character to let her go empty-handed. "...Allah would never forgive me for not helping such a person", he said. Not all of *Hajji's* friends who helped with the harvest were treated equally after the harvest. One was given some beans to take home, while the other two were not. *Hajji* explained that it is because they don't have children yet.

*CS3-MAF (Atenyi): So many exchanges?*³¹⁸

During my first visit to Isunga in 2006, I recorded numerous exchange encounters in my host family. The first exchange encounter observed in my new family was when the Chairperson of the *Kamdini* Study Circle visited the family on the second day of my stay. He approached *Atenyi* and enquired if *Bazilio* had returned the saucepan, which he had brought with some groundnuts to their last meeting. "...*Jirani* wants it back because the real owner came for it," he said. *Atenyi* looked around but did not find the saucepan. The man left but promised to come back the following day. In the afternoon of the same day, *Penina* (*Atenyi's* friend) passed by. *Atenyi* paid back 2000 UGX which she borrowed from her some time back, gave her two *paw paws* and a bowl of cassava flour. The cassava flour was from *Atenyi's* mother, who had visited them the previous day. On the fourth day of my stay, *Bazilio* returned from taking his mother-in-

³¹⁵ When asked why he should use alcohol to mobilise labour which is against the teaching of their holy book, the Koran, he stated, "...when it comes to survival the Koran accepts even bad Moslems. After all, it is not me drinking the stuff".

³¹⁶ In fact, three IDPs turned up, except that the third person came when the group was finishing work and was not counted but got some beans anyway.

³¹⁷ Quite a considerable portion of the beans was given away, as bigger shares were given to the two cousins and sisters-in-law.

³¹⁸ This is my recollection on informal exchanges during the first two weeks of my stay with CS1-JSBM (my host family) during the scoping exercise in 2006.

law back to her home village, some 45 kilometres away.³¹⁹ In the evening, *James* visited the family. He is a guy *Bazilio* referred to “*as a neighbour...we often help each other.*” They chatted, and laughed for a while. Before leaving, *James* asked *Bazilio* to lend him 5,000 UGX to enable him take a sick child to the medicine woman. *Bazilio* ‘gave’ him 4000 UGX. This did not amuse *Atenyi* who had earlier asked *Bazilio* for money to buy paraffin, which he declined to give saying that he had no money.

On the sixth day, a girl of about eight came looking for *Atenyi*. She is the daughter of someone *Atenyi* referred to as, “*a member of our group with whom I have friendly relations. She often helps me.*” Her mother sent her to get some salt. In the afternoon, *Atenyi* went to the trading centre to ask *Kilama* (a shopkeeper) if he could change a dress she bought for her daughter (*Sarah*) from the market the other day, but did not fit her. It was small on her. *Atenyi* talked of *Kilama* as “*a few of those ‘displaced’ who often do me favours*”. *Kilama* first declined, but changed his mind later on. In the evening, he sent his son on bicycle with a bigger dress, and an instruction to collect the tighter dress. On his way back, *Atenyi* gave him some passion fruits. The following Saturday, I followed *Atenyi* to the market, where she met their LC1 women councillor (*Lanyero*). *Atenyi* lent her some money to buy a used pair of shoes for her son. In a conversation on our way back home, she talked of *Lanyero* as follows: “*we lend money to each other when we are hard up. She is a kind woman with whom I share things with during good and bad times.*” Three days later *Atenyi* attended the circumcision ceremony and party at *Hajji’s* place. When she returned home, she said “*... we sang, danced and met Maria who I got to know through my friend Penina. Although we meet occasionally, we rarely discuss from the bottom of our hearts when we meet...but she is a generous person who helps me sometimes. This time we talked about a certain herb that she has which is good for skin rashes.*” Three days later, she brought the herb. *Atenyi* gave her a small gourd of sour milk.

Field Observation/CSI-JSBM (Bazilio): Food-sharing in everyday life

On a sunny day in August 2007, *Penina* (*Atenyi’s* friend) came to the homestead. I was sitting under a tree but could hear their conversations loud and clear. Two particular statements caught my attention. *Penina* said, “*...yesterday you gave me very little beans, as if you did not want to give it at all. How could you give just two mugs to a poor friend to feed six ‘mouths’?*” *Atenyi* laughed and replied, “*...I know you want more, but I won’t give it to you because what you got yesterday was more than enough.*” I thought *Penina* was a bit big-headed and wondered whether it was due to the closeness between them or just her way to communicate to get more beans. I asked *Adyeri* later on if her friends also share with her their crops, she replied: “*...some do, but the majority never give us a grain. For instance, last year when you left, Bazilio had some problems*

³¹⁹ According to *Barulli* culture, if your mother-in-law visited you; you accompany her back to her home as a sign that all is well with their daughter.

with the Balalo cattle keepers and was arrested for no reasons by the police. Only Penina showed sympathy and gave us some beans and groundnuts. The rest never even came close to us.” This statement suggests that those who share food or other resources with other people do not necessarily receive pay back in kind, and yet they continue to share anyway. On another day *Atenyi* gave some beans to a sick neighbour. She explained her action by referring to almighty God that “...God gave us this land, and from it we get our food. It would be a terrible thing for us who are healthy and have some food not to share it with those who don't have. I would have lied that I don't have any beans left, but they know we have. I do not want the provider of the land to punish my house. Our culture forbids lying”. *Abwoli* (CS2-MDF) added, “...we all know those with 'strong chests' and grow a lot of maize, beans or groundnuts. They also know that we have land and grow a lot of food. Sometimes they come and compliment you for working hard, or how good your crops look in the field, and then tell you in your face that they'll come to take some during harvests, and they come.” *Abwoli's* remark seems to suggest that those who have good harvests are in fact expected to share it with those who may not. The recipients too, conduct themselves as if sharing is a normal obligation on those who have more. I also observed cases that contradict *Atenyi's* remarks. One day, a man clearly under the influence of *Kipanga*, which he bought from *Atenyi*, asked for some food to eat. He said he was hungry and had no food to cook in his house. *Bazilio* 'shouted' from one end of the homestead, “...do not give him anything.” When asked why he stopped his wife from giving food to a hungry man to eat, he replied, “...if he can have money to drink, then he is not needy. He is just careless, and I cannot share the little I have with such a person.” *Bazilio* was visibly upset.

Although *Atenyi* (CS3-MAF) and *Hajji's* (C11-HJM) exchanges differed a lot in terms of number and the nature of exchanges, the informal exchanges gave them access to other households' resources. Their exchange partners too, accessed their personal resources. For instance, *Kilama* the shopkeeper offers *Atenyi* access to a collection of used children's clothes in his shop that she would not have done without personal connections with *Kilama*. In a similar manner, *Hajji* helps a needy widow get some beans. Both *Atenyi* and *Hajji* reported many informal exchange activities involving their relatives, friends, in-laws, neighbours and persons not very close to them. The nature of CS3-MAF exchange relations can be characterised in terms of mutual help, a key component of the economy of affection. For example, ‘...we often help each other’ (a neighbour), ‘...someone with whom I have friendly relations. She often helps me’ (member of a women's group); ‘...a few of those 'displaced' who often do me favour’ (*Kilama*, the shopkeeper); ‘...we lend money to each other when we are hard up.....a kind woman with whom I share things (LC councillor), ‘...we meet once in a while, and whenever we meet, we rarely discuss from the bottom of our hearts. But she is a generous person who helps once in a while’ (*Maria*). Both *Atenyi* and *Hajji* gained

from their relations by accessing resources that are otherwise difficult to get, and other people gained from them too.

The above examples about food-sharing show the extent to which mutual assistance and sharing of resources are applied in certain households in Isunga village. Isunga's villagers enter into such informal exchange relationships for a number of reasons, but more importantly, it is an investment in social ties for providing and receiving assistance in times of need (consumption smoothing) and maintaining existing relationships. It also confirms Hydén's (2004; 1983) and other scholars' assertions that exchanges of resources are motivated by kinship and friendship, other than pure economic gain (a social reality).³²⁰

These case examples are not unique or isolated to these particular households. Most Isunga people share food crops, exchange their labour, borrow land and other resources among themselves without the direct use of money, but through cultures that favour personal relationships. Yet, these kinds of institutional arrangements are not catered for in Uganda's agricultural modernisation agenda. As we saw with the *leja-leja* wage labour in Chapter 5, markets are much more than just mechanisms of transactions. They are embedded in (social) institutions and are influenced by context: geography, agro-climatic conditions, culture, social relations, ethnicity or gender (Seppälä, 1998; Apthorpe & Gasper, 1996). Seppälä (1998) writes,

“...this fetishist notion of ‘market’ is very common in liberal economic theory. When we bothered to study the *‘realexistierende’* markets we find, however, social relations always impinging on them. The social relationships within this economy tend to have a component of affection but this component is not contrary to the market principle but a local application of it” (ibid, 1998:184)

Following Seppälä (1998) and Apthorpe & Gasper (1996), markets are both institutions and mechanisms, and the difference has to be recognised and understood.³²¹ To that effect, Wood's (2004) contribution is worth mentioning here. In particular, he reminds us that where the state is weak and unable to regulate the market, households tend to seek security and protection in informal institutions. He refers to such situations characterised by acute risks and insecurity as informal security regimes. It features heavy reliance on the community and family to meet welfare needs, and a presence of patron–client

³²⁰ I used food sharing examples other than labour sharing because I consider it the most appropriate data to explain the ‘economy of affection’, ‘embeddedness’ and/or the importance of personal relationships in resource sharing.

³²¹ See also Klijn & Pain's (2007) work on the informal credit practices in Afghanistan as well as Harriss-White's (2004) work on India's socially regulated economy to show that such behaviour exists in other parts of the world too.

relations that are structured by hierarchies and power inequalities (ibid, 2004). In such situations therefore, farmers are risk-averse and trade short-term security for long-term vulnerability and dependence. In the process, it reinforces underlying patron-client relations that nonetheless provide some informal rights (Wood, 2007; 2004). Put together, these affect farmers' decisions when choosing institutional types for labour relations.

But there is also a dark side of sharing

The case examples above and my observations also suggest that resource-sharing is not automatically practiced at all times. Instead, villagers seem to be in constant negotiation with recipients about how much to share, and why. In the process, ethnicity, kinship, fear, respect or sympathy are vital variables that determine the outcomes of sharing. Those who are strategically good at using these variables in their negotiations (such as *Penina*) receive their share of the resource in question, be it extra labour, food, land or money. In both the CS1-JSBM and the CS11-HJM examples, different forces that motivate them to share food with other people came out rather clearly. Yet, it also appears that obligatory exchanges bring power relationship to the provider by placing the recipient in debt. Hence remarks such as “...*only Penina showed sympathy and gave us some beans and groundnuts. The rest never even came close to us*” (CS3-MAF). The remark could also be an indication of a deliberate act or opportunistic behaviour by past receivers to avoid contacts after the exchange. This is because they are aware that if they keep in touch, then they'll be reminded of their indebtedness and need to reciprocate one day. In a way, this places the receiver in a subordinate position to the giver. For this reason, avoiding contacts is probably a way for the receivers to mask uncomfortable 'give-and-take' relationships between the stronger providers and the weaker recipients. As such, it seems that sharing is a constant struggle between obligation and indebtedness brought about by reciprocity, hence the informality involved. Neoliberal economics does not really explain this. Instead it looks at individuals as rational actors who always account for their costs and benefits. This creates a bias for short-term economic interests, while long-term social interests and security are disregarded (see Chapter 3).

7.6 Summary and key issues

This chapter explained why farmers rely on informal institutions in preference to state institutions in Isunga village when structuring and enforcing their labour relationships. The study found the following factors affect farmers' choices of institutional types in labour transactions in Isunga: (a) the characteristics of

agricultural labour transactions, (b) the costs of using the Isunga LC1 court, its biased rulings and the 'absence' or unpredictable enforcement mechanism, (c) the ineffectiveness of Uganda's arbitration system, and (d) social and cultural factors based on morality, affection, norms etc.

Regarding the Isunga LC1 court, villagers associated it with high costs, stating that their rulings are usually unfair, biased and the court process is difficult to predict. Many reasons were given for this, including: (a) the Isunga local councillors being incompetent, corrupt and illiterate; (b) the laws governing labour disputes are unclear and not understood by the councillors; (c) the process of implementing the Isunga LC1 court ruling is unclear, and in most cases left to the person who won the case to follow up thus causing further uncertainty about its outcome, compared to the informal mechanisms which are simple, straightforward and less costly; (d) going to the Isunga LC1 court may also damage existing relationships or soil one's reputation. We also found that although laws regarding arbitrations exists (GOU, 2006b), no villagers had ever heard of these. This has prevented villagers from settling their disputes through arbitration. Thus, the problems relating to labour or contract laws and the inadequacy of arbitrations have all contributed to the prevalence of informality in Isunga.

Moral and affective factors also influenced farmers' decisions when choosing types of institutions for labour exchanges. It was evident that the notions of 'social embeddedness' and 'economy of affection' are alive and well in Isunga, where villagers rely on each other for their survival and agricultural labour exchanges. In particular, personal relationships (family memberships, friendships, or relationships that have developed over time) are important in their relations. This is because the community of Isunga tend to rely more on trust when structuring their labour exchange relations, and use of soft methods to settle their differences, just to avoid breakdowns of existing relationships.

In the next chapter, I end my long research journey by discussing the key findings of the study as well as theoretical and methodological contributions of this thesis.

8 Discussion and Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

This final chapter discusses the findings of the study and reconnects to the research questions and objectives outlined in Chapter 1. The main research question is about the role and influence of institutions in agricultural labour transactions in a village in rural Uganda. From a theoretical perspective, the task was to develop a suitable analytical framework for exploring how institutions matter in agriculture labour transactions. This was followed by an investigation into the roles and influence of relational contracts, morality and affection, trust and reputation as well as kinship/ethnic identity in farmers' labour behaviours and decisions. The chapter starts by discussing the key findings of the study according to the way that farmers structure and maintain their labour relationships, as well as how they enforce their labour agreements, including what they do if conflicts arise. This is followed by conclusions on both theoretical and methodological issues in Section 8.3. Key theoretical inputs of the study are presented in Section 8.4. Implications and issues raised by the study that require further research are presented in Section 8.5.

8.2 Key findings of the study

I began my research journey by acknowledging the growing awareness of institutions in explaining transactional relationships. This entry point provided the backdrop for the focus of the study: (a) to address key theoretical issues relating to institutions, and then (b) examine a real situational experience (labour relationships in Isunga village during crop farming seasons) to draw from it, insights into the role and influence of institutions in agricultural labour transactions in Isunga. The key findings of the study are presented and discussed in the subsections below.

8.2.1 Structuring labour relationships

The study found that crop farming in Isunga is complex, diverse and full of risks. To meet these challenges, farmers adapt many strategies, including sharing farm work. But for labour-sharing or exchange relationships to operate well, there need to be rules and regulations to govern and regulate farmers' transaction behaviour; hence, the need to explore what rules apply to specific agriculture labour practices. And, given that the Government of Uganda has put considerable effort into reforming institutions relating to agricultural development (modernisation), the challenge was to establish which institutions actually regulate farmers' labour behaviours and transaction decisions. I found that institutions embedded in social networks and structures, such as trust and reputation, kinship and ethnic identity, morality and affection, as well as an 'informalised' village council (Isunga LC1), are involved and sometimes work together to: (a) structure farmers' labour relationships,³²² (b) secure the performance of labour actors, and (c) resolve disputes that come out of the relationships.

Personal relationship as a form of institutions

A key finding of the study is the importance of personal relationships, connections, trust, reputation and the informal networks farmers place in the formation and maintenance of labour relationships. Personal trust and connections that are embedded in social networks are tapped and used by farmers to locate both labour providers and recipients. Family members, friends, neighbours, in-laws and other relations based on factors such as ethnic belonging, coming from the same district or region, sharing the same fate, belonging to same *gurub* or drinking *Malwa* beer together, are all important sources of labour in Isunga. Such social relationships act as avenues through which individual farmers or farming households expand their labour-sharing or exchange networks.

The study also found that trust and reputation that have passed the test of time are vital in agricultural labour relationships. Personal relationships and connections, the reputation of labour partners, and relationships developed during previous dealings are normally used as reference points for future labour dealings. Accordingly, Isunga people (farmers) prefer to deal with each other on the basis of good personal relationships rather than strict formal contracts (with set out rights and obligations, backed up by Uganda's legal system or contract law), as required by the agricultural modernisation agenda.

³²² Why should an individual A form a relationship with person B out of the many people in a village? What keeps the relationship intact? Why do some relationships never happen? What are the forces that shape individual relationships?

The people of Isunga believe that building personal relationships with fellow villagers is more important than the use of laws and formal mechanisms to protect their contractual rights. As a result, the majority of farmers structure their labour dealings centred on relationships such as family members, close relatives, in-laws, friends, and neighbours. These may also be based on recommendations by third parties that are in positions of trust in the village. Farmers also secure much-needed labour by developing informal relationships with individuals who want their labour services by focusing more on those they trust or share labour with on a regular basis.

Relational contracting and verbal agreements (winye)

The use of relational contracts and verbal agreements (*winye*) in labour transactions is common.³²³ During the course of the field study, ample evidence showing how *winye* actually controls the behaviour of those involved in labour transactions was uncovered (Chapters 6 and 7). In principle, Uganda's contract law and institutions, such as the Isunga LC court and the Magistrate's court in Kiryandongo town, make it possible for every citizen to use 'legal' means to secure performance by labour actors. In reality though, most people shun it because of high transaction costs due to local councillors' rent-seeking behaviour, incompetence and erratic court outcomes. Interestingly, verbal agreements do not indicate the forms of punishment for someone who fails to accomplish his or her part of the deal in due time. Instead, they deal with such matters as and when they arise.

It should also be underlined that *winye* have no, or if any, very little, legal benefits since farmers use it for purposes other than 'legal' safeguards to allow them to have recourse to the Isunga LC1 court or the Magistrate's court in case of contract violations. Farmers in Isunga use mainly use these *winye* for specifying tasks in a labour transaction, so that each party knows what to do in order to meet the other's expectations. This is important as it helps labour actors to avoid potential problems, such as when to complete the task, how to do so and the nature of the reward. Most farmers believe that carefully negotiated *winye* allow them to ensure that each party to a labour transaction understands its tasks and the other actors' expectations. Hence, labour transactions can be carried out smoothly without a third party intervention, making the transactions more self-enforcing.

Irrelevance of the village council (LC1)

Another finding of the study is that the administrative arrangements set by the Government of Uganda to support commodity and inputs transactions are

³²³ No respondent mentioned the use of written contracts.

rather limited. For example, the Isunga Local Council has a very limited role in providing information concerning agriculture or about potential labour partners, or in negotiating, preparing and securing labour agreements.³²⁴ Even when faced with labour disputes, farmers prefer to solve their *nywere-nywere* outside the more formal LC1 court. Therefore, the ineffectiveness of the LC1 as a ‘legal entity’ is a strong reason why the people of Isunga are less excited about using ‘formal’ mechanisms to secure transactions and protect their contractual rights. To remain relevant, the LC1 operates informally.

Most Isunga people underlined that the LC1 court processes are very costly, with unpredictable and unfair outcomes (Chapter 7); contrary to what central legalism demands. If a dispute occurs, the persons involved would prefer to settle it themselves outside the LC system. They do it this way because they want to maintain harmony, and foster existing labour relationships and their reputations in the village, instead of tearing themselves apart before the LC court, which is accused by many of being corrupt, incompetent and ridden with ethnic division. There were also few cases where the LC1 was used essentially as a deterrent because its name ‘smells so bad’ that people rather avoid them. Such deterrent is common with *leja-leja* dealers, so that the persons selling or buying labour would know what to do in order to meet the other party’s expectations. This indirectly helps *leja-leja* dealers to avoid potential problems like delays in payment, shoddy work and so forth.

8.2.2 Securing labour dealings

To ensure effective enforcement of *winye*, the study found that labour partners use informal institutional arrangements for securing labour relations, and thus avoid potential labour disputes. The arrangements include dealing with people they have known over a long period (kin, friends, and neighbours), gathering relevant information about potential labour givers or labour receivers, and the popular use of *dog-bur* (advance payments) in hired labour. Even during disputes, the perception amongst Isunga people is that dealing with individuals they have known for a long time can favourably help them solve labour-related problems. It is therefore not surprising that most labour relationships mentioned, observed and described in the interviews are based on personal ties and embedded in social relations.

It emerged quite early during the fieldwork, that institutions that have developed over time in different situations allow farmers to acquire much-needed labour and protects them from opportunistic behaviour such as non-payment, delayed payment or shoddy work. These relationships help farmers to reduce their labour transaction costs because persons closely connected in

³²⁴ Regardless, the village council (LC1) has some role in resolving labour disputes.

informal networks may not need to bear the informational costs of conducting background checks of the other party. To reduce uncertainty and probable misunderstandings, many farmers indicated that they would rather gather as much information as possible about character, behaviour, personality, capabilities and the reputation of a potential labour partner, before getting involved in any labour sharing, giving or receiving relations. Some people even went further to collect more information about other labour actors, even after the farm work had taken place. As mentioned several times in this thesis, they do so through informal sources, such as going to people with whom they have personal connections (family members, in laws, relatives, friends and/or neighbours). In some cases, they get the information they need directly from labour givers or receivers themselves, from the *Kipanga/Malwa* beer drinking venues, the '*mango tree*' notice board at the trading centre or various farmers groups. Even the dreaded Isunga LC1 is consulted occasionally, especially by those with the 'right' ethnic status.

The other mechanism the Isunga villagers use to reduce opportunistic behaviours amongst wage labourers are the institutional arrangements relating to payment. In particular, *dog-bur* (advance) payment is required by those who sell their labour efforts before the work starts and the last payment after the work is completed. For their part, labour buyers regard the use of *dog-bur* as a way of hindering the problem of poor performance (shoddy work). For example, *dog-bur* payments motivate labour sellers to do good work. Some buyers actually go to the *shambas* and physically make sure the work is properly done and to their expectations. This kind of quality control mechanism leaves very little room for shoddy work. Moreover, if the *leja-leja* seller is found or seen to be underperforming, s/he is told to style up and stop doing *kwere-kwere* work or the remaining balance will not be paid.

8.2.3 Settling labour disputes

When a labour dispute arises, people in Isunga either turn to their LC1 court (a formal 'legal' mechanism) or solve it informally outside the LC1 court. But as shown and discussed in the last two chapters, even the LC1 court solves disputes informally. Farmers in Isunga are very creative when it comes to handling labour disputes. Disputes can be handled through the LC1 court, mediated through the various elders committees in the village or farmer groups (*gurubs*) or through renegotiation of *winye* between the parties involved. It should, however, be stressed that these avenues are not mutually exclusive since interactions exist between them in the actual process of dispute settlement. As we saw with the CS1-JSBM and CS9-MAM labour dispute settlement process earlier, some grievances may go back and forth between the

Isunga LC1 and other informal institutions or arrangements. In most cases however, farmers settle their *nywere-nywere* without involving the Isunga LC court because the court is not trusted. In some cases, they start with informal arrangements, and then go to the LC1 if attempts to settle their disputes through the former fail. Only one respondent (CS4-MOJM) reported taking a grievance to the LC1 without first making an effort to settle it informally through renegotiation or mediation. But he was keen to explain that it only happened once, and the conflict involved a newly arrived Internally Displaced Person (IDP) from the *Lango* region across the River Nile who got his advance payment (*dog-bur*) and then disappeared.

Farmers underlined that they prefer informal arrangements to the LC1, the LCIII at the sub-county headquarters or the Magistrate's Court in Kiryandongo town, when faced with labour disputes because they consider informal arrangements more effective, less expensive and more importantly, it preserves existing relationships and reputations. The mechanisms used include the ones already mentioned above: negotiation between the persons in conflict, the use of mediation in which the mediator is a person of respect in the village, and the influence of certain individuals who in one way or the other can put pressure on the accused to change their behaviour. Such people include, some members of the Isunga LC1, village elders, officials in farmer groups, known *Kipanga* and *Malwa* sellers or/and persons with whom the affected farmers have personal ties such as relatives, friends, in-laws, and neighbours. The study also found that non-legal sanctions such as loss of face (*balo nying dano*), threats to one's reputation ('smelly names') or community sanctions are taken seriously when it comes to labour relationships.

Other mechanisms such as belonging to farmer groups (*gurubs*) where peer pressure plays a role, and the threat or use of force are sometimes used to settle labour disputes. Concerning the latter, villagers in Isunga rarely use it because the use of violence may get them into trouble with the law, which can be very expensive because of the bribes involved and the corrupt nature of the 'legal' system in the village and beyond. In cases where family members, relatives, and friends display opportunistic behaviour, some farmers said they 'would do nothing' or 'just forget about it'. This is because taking a relative or friend to the LC1 'hyenas' would make their names 'smell bad' in the village, thus tarnishing their reputation (*balo nying dano*). They would instead use other informal arrangements to settle the dispute in question if need be.

In cases where a labour recipient or provider is introduced by another person who has a personal relationship with them, terms of *winye* are often complied with. But should any opportunistic behaviour occur or disagreements arise, then they would prefer to quietly resolve this and keep it within

themselves, as they would not wish the ‘introducer’ to ‘feel embarrassed’ if they violate their part of the labour bargain or are seen as ‘bad’ people. The pressure not to embarrass the introducer acts as a means of enforcing relational contracts and the driving force is trust and being trustworthy in the eyes of others. In the Isunga context, the trust farmers refer to emerges from their own experience with people they have known over long periods of time.

Moreover, apart from understanding how the LC court system works in practice, the study also found that the role of the Isunga LC in resolving labour-related disagreements is rather minimal. In those few situations where it is used, as exemplified by the CS1-JSBM and CS9-MAM case studies, it is done only when informal mechanisms have failed and one of the parties look to the LC1 as the only way to solve the conflict. Although the study found that the role of informal institutions is more evident in dispute resolution, it does not mean that formal institutions like the LC system have no role to play. They do. For example, it can be used to make negotiations work by helping parties in dispute to understand their tasks and expectations. In this way, both parties can avoid potential disputes and make their labour transactions self-enforcing. Quite often, both the Isunga LC and other informal mechanisms are used in combination to settle disputes. Sometimes, the Isunga LC1 is used to check the background or characters of potential labour transaction actors, used to make negotiations work (i.e. by mentioning the LC more or less as a threat to each other) and/or the Chairperson being used as a mediator for settling *nywere-nywere*. Nonetheless, the fact that the LC institution is used informally to help enforce agreements or settle disputes showed that the LC1 plays some role in labour transactions.

8.3 Main conclusions of the study

My study of institutions drew together a huge body of scholarship encompassing different disciplines within the social sciences and a large number of overlapping ideas and themes. In the process, I found that institutionalists’ ideas and their contributions for understanding economic behaviour are not lucidly organised. Therefore, the first conclusion concerns what institutions are and how they are identified.

8.3.1 What institutions are and how they are identified

Understanding the range of ideas and the interconnections that make them valuable in a study of this kind requires engaging with the different disciplines and perspectives that have a claim to institutionalists thinking. This study showed that when the different institutional perspectives are acknowledged, it

is possible to differentiate between them. This is important because without sufficient theoretical differentiation it would be difficult to apply our understanding of the scope of institutional influence to the task of examining real-world experiences and challenges. Early parts of Chapter 3 took up the different perspectives on institutions, as well as the difficulty of defining institutions. This helped me get a workable definition for what an institution is and is not; as well as providing a theoretical framework to inform and guide the empirical analysis required to carry out the household case studies. The thesis used the ‘rule approach’ of institutions as the essential qualifying criteria, and reasserted that institutions are simply ‘rules that structure social interactions’.³²⁵ Subsequently, central legalism (contract laws, regulatory frameworks) and social institutions (trust and reputation, kinship and ethnic identity, moral and affections) were identified to address the issues related to real-life encounters of institutions in labour dealings in Isunga. This progress in definition based on a review of numerous sources, not only allows for a methodical review of existing definitions, but also challenges persisting and ill-informed preconceptions that limit the relevance of institutions because of a poor definition. So, the study suggests that it is possible to identify specific institutions for the purpose of empirical investigation, and use the clarity achieved to deal with issues related to real-life encounters.

The thesis concludes that whilst particular schools of thought and disciplines may pay greater attention to some types of institutions, the overall definition is probably not all that important. Instead, attention should focus more on the other important intricacies and debates relating to the nature of the influence of institutional types on livelihood activities. As regards the study of labour relations in crop farming, it is clear that such analysis enables a better understanding and assessment of how and why the character and roles of certain institutions change (or not change) in the current era of modernisation.

8.3.2 Why and how institutions matter in labour transactions

The focus of this study has been on drawing insights that address the key questions of why and how institutions matter in agriculture labour transactions in a village in rural Uganda. While empirical research showed that institutions are involved in transactions, this study provided qualitative support, informed by theory, necessary to address the research questions of why and how institutions matter in agriculture labour relations. The conclusions drawn from the household case studies are significant as institutions are shown to be central to agriculture labour dealings in Isunga. As explored in Chapter 2, historical experiences indicate how institutions are intricately involved in processes of

³²⁵ C.f. Ostrom (2007; 2005), North (2006; 1990), Hodgson (2006)

development that have shaped Uganda's agricultural sector, and transformed labour in rural Uganda the last 100 years. Therefore, it would be ridiculous to even suggest the possibility of modernising the agricultural sector without admitting the central role of institutions in the allocation and use of inputs (labour, land, capital) in crop production. This study clearly showed that the changes that created the agricultural sector in Uganda were institutional in many ways. Thus, making reference to agricultural modernisation without focusing on the institutional involvement at local levels is simply a misnomer.

The study also confirmed what other studies achieved elsewhere that the institutions that matter are not simply those that are officially codified in writing (formal ones); it underscored that institutions such as statutes and regulatory organisations, only form a small part of the agricultural modernisation story. As empirically fleshed out in Chapters 6 and 7 (especially the section on how the Isunga LC court works in practice) different institutions appear always to matter and work together. Therefore, the study concludes that at all stages of agricultural development it is the mix of formal (state) and social institutions that are at play in shaping the economic roles and activities of farmers. In this case, there is not much point in simply isolating institutional significance on the basis of how 'formal' institutions are.

8.3.3 The changing character and roles of some institutions

The study also presented institutions as social and relational, hence as socially embedded, socially constructed and socially constructing – an indication that character and roles of institutions also change. This research confirmed that the institutions that matter in transactions manifest themselves in different social spheres, either as formal (contract law/central legalism) and/or informal (trust, reputation, moral, affection, kinship/ethnicity) institutions. In Isunga, it is smallholdings and socially-motivated exchange norms and behaviours that matter most. However, the village does not exist in isolation. It is associated with 'markets' and organisations beyond Isunga. This makes room for other institutions to come into play, mix and change the regulatory organisations that hitherto exist. In any case, institutional influences are manifest not only in the farming households, but in commercial and administrative spheres as well. Consequently, the influence that institutions have on the households or Isunga village is related to and influenced by institutional influences, activities and outcomes outside Isunga.

It came out very clearly from the empirical chapters that institutions across different spheres (administrative, economic, cultural or political) interact to influence and shape each other. But some institutions are more 'significant' in their influence, while others are eventually reconfigured or reorganised in

response to the role and influence of these important essential institutions. This certainly explains how institutions such as *pur kongo* and *pur cente* became more economic, both in character and in terms of the role they play in Isunga (Chapters 5 and 6). Through a detailed study of the institutional and societal antecedents, interactions and outcomes over a 12-month farming calendar, the study was able to gain insights into the changing role and character role of social (informal) institutions like *pur cente*, elders mediation committees, *pur kongo* and *gurubs*.

Lastly, the fact that farmers' labour behaviours and decisions are embedded in social and cultural relations, sits rather awkwardly with the Ugandan government's assumption that the 'market' is the ideal vision for smallholder farmers, and the road to prosperity. The visions individualises farming activities, yet farmers get their livelihood security (or safety nets) from taking care of each other, thus securing collective welfare.

8.4 Contributions to knowledge and reflections

This thesis provides a more insightful work that goes beyond mere description of outcomes narrowly based on a lean logic of neoliberal economics in agriculture. It gets deeper into Uganda's agricultural modernisation experience from colonial era to date to seek out relevant contextual information and specific data with which to further examine the nature, role and experience of institutions in agricultural development. In so doing, this thesis opens up new avenues for further studying the role of institutions in factor markets and rural development. As such, this study should be of particular interest to those seeking to draw common insights and possible implications for institutional designs and policy-making for agriculture sector. Three specific contributions tied to theory and methodology are underlined: (a) the need to include 'non-formal' institutions in agricultural development discussions, (b) the conceptual and analytical tools used to studying agricultural labour institutions can be used to study other aspects of agriculture, and (c) qualitative case study methodology answer the difficult, yet important questions about why farmers choose certain institutions for labour transactions, and how this happens.

8.4.1 Theoretical reflections

In the Ugandan context, when reading policy documents and other papers on institutional reform, it is striking to see that institutions are discussed as if there are only formal institutions.³²⁶ The neglect of non-formal institutions in the reforms designed to modernise the country's agriculture during the last thirty

³²⁶ Refer to GOU (2011; 2010b; 2010a; 2007; 2004; 2000), for example.

years could be a reason for the disappointing results of various reforms so far. For that matter, studying either formal or informal institutions separately may be misleading and unrevealing. Or by simply focusing on the role of either formal (state) institutions or social institutions while ignoring the way they interact also fails to fully reveal how agricultural labour transactions work in practice. This study attempted to fill this gap by examining both types of institution and their roles in agricultural labour transactions at what North et al.(2007) would refer to as lower level social order (Isunga village).

Although my findings showed that the role of social institutions (e.g. trust and reputation, moral and affection, kinship and ethnic identity) is important in Isunga peoples' relations, this does not mean that state (formal) institutions have no role to play in Isunga's labour dealings. It was found that when solving disputes, the supposedly formal village council (LC1) and social institutions interact with each other in a number of ways and their interaction allows farmers to structure and enforce their labour dealings at low costs. In situations when *winye* are unclear, they are renegotiated and informal arrangements are used to reduce the risks of disputes. On some occasions though, formal enforcement mechanisms such as the Isunga LC1 can influence negotiations (*patana*). But in clearly specified transaction agreements, in which tasks and expectations are properly understood by the parties involved can make the process of transactions self-enforcing by reducing likely disputes.

Furthermore, in their roles as social actors and economic agents, farmers actively 'informalise' formal institutions, such as when the Isunga LC officials are involved in dispute settlement, but use informal procedures that are not related to legal or administrative procedures (e.g. ethnic status, nepotism, bribes and kickbacks). Therefore, this study underscores the theoretical points made earlier that different institutions can be used in combination and they should not be seen as mere alternative ways to regulate and govern contractual relationships.³²⁷ In their interaction, formal and social institutions do not necessarily conflict with each other. Rather, they complement each other to produce better outcomes that suit the context of the users.

This study also demonstrated that although institutions that are rooted in Uganda's contract law create room for farmers as economic agents to use written contracts as a means to carry out labour transactions, this does not mean anything to the people of Isunga who seem happy with their verbal agreements (*winye*) and relational contracting. Labour agreements are frequently changed during the process of implementation of the '*winye*' if deemed necessary, yet with ease. But when faced with the challenge of

³²⁷ C.f. North (2006), Hodgson (2007; 2006), Klijn & Pain (2007), Klein & Shelanski (1996), Klein (1996) (among others).

opportunistic behaviour that brings into dispute the terms of *winye*, non-legal sanctions such as loss of the future labour sharing or transactions possibilities or reputation are used. Violations of terms of agreements and consequent disputes are rarely settled by 'legal' procedures in the Isunga LC1 Court. The study found *winye* to be a very flexible form of relational contract, and flexibility in farmer's relationships is important for labour dealings to take place as it allows the actors involved to minimise their transaction costs.

The conceptual and analytical framework used to study agriculture labour arrangements in Isunga village could restructure future studies on the role of institutions in the transactions of other agricultural inputs (land, capital and technology) and specific commodity (tobacco, cotton, sunflower, beans, etc.). Since the concept of institutions is understood differently by many scholars, this may generate problems in any empirical study if not well handled. Therefore, by discussing different ways of defining and classifying institutions, the framework has contributed to a good understanding of agricultural labour dealings investigated in this study and has minimised problems associated with its findings. The framework also provides an opportunity for understanding why one type of institution is used more than another. This is very important since it adds to our understanding the role of various institutions in agricultural input transactions. The framework identified possible factors that affect farmers' decisions when choosing institutions for work sharing and labour exchanges during crop production. These included: (a) the characteristics of agriculture labour transactions, (b) the transaction costs of using institutions for handling labour dealings, (c) unfair and unpredictable outcomes of enforcement mechanisms, as well as (d) social and cultural factors like morality, affection, kinship/ethnic status, trust and reputation. Therefore, by covering all these factors, this thesis gives a more complete and comprehensive understanding of why certain institutions are preferred over others.

The empirical evidence from the village of Isunga validates the theoretical assumptions to generate understanding of the factors that affect choices of institutional types in agricultural labour relationships. This study, therefore reinforces earlier points that: (i) the ambiguity of laws and regulatory procedures normally leads economic agents to place more emphasis on social institutions, especially informal mechanisms of dispute settlement, since this can help them to avoid high costs of using formal mechanisms such as courts (Fafchamps & Minten, 2001; Telser, 1980a); (ii) the length or frequency of transactional relationships influence the choice of institutions (Williamson, 1998; 1985); (iii) the reliance on trust and reputation, norms, conventions, long-term relationships and so forth is also supported by moral, affective or cultural factors that have passed the test of time and that determine the

individual's behaviour (Shipton, 2007; Hyden, 2004; 1983), hence (iv) transactions are embedded in social relations and structures (Granovetter, 2005; 1992; 1985).

8.4.2 Methodological reflections

In Uganda, most existing empirical studies on the role of institutions on anything to do with agricultural development have employed statistical and econometric analysis using quantitative data, which to my understanding fails to provide a proper understanding of the role of institutions in transactions (Pender *et al.*, 2004; Appleton & Balihuta, 1996).³²⁸ For example, using quantitative methods in econometric analysis may help to conclude that certain institutions are used more by particular persons in a particular area, yet may fail to explain why this is so and how it happens. The qualitative case study approach applied in this study provided detailed information on how institutional types matter and why they matter in a rural settings where many Ugandans live and practice farming.

By applying case study methodology to examine how farmers influence or get influenced by the various institutional structures used in agricultural labour relations, this study found the case study approach to institutional study useful in seeking to elucidate the resilience of work sharing (*awak, diira, pur-kongo, gurub*) and labour exchanges (*aleya*) in the face of repeated assaults on it in the name of agricultural modernisation or commercialisation. Instead of applying methods and postulates of pure economics to farmers' labour behaviour, the case study approach was useful in that it looked at the diverse roles of institutions in identifying, structuring, securing, maintaining and mediating the relationship between different labour actors. The insight derived from this approach and analysis could help inform Uganda's policy makers and development practitioners target interventions more effectively. Such interventions may involve treating commodity and factor markets as social institutions, rather than as a place to go buy and sell labour, as suggested and promoted by the Ugandan government today. An understanding of the complex nature of agricultural labour practices in Isunga (and similar villages in rural Uganda), which seek to make sense of their existence and nature, is a good precursor for understanding why various market-oriented agricultural reforms in Uganda since 1986 have not produced expected outcomes as anticipated by economists and donor organisations.

Also, individual farmers' stories in the case study approach showed that different social interactions develop and change depending on the context and resource-availability in the households. This approach places emphasis on the

³²⁸ See also Deininger & Okidi (2001) and Lawson *et al.* (2006)

role of the individual farmer and his or her household; hence, it is important in the analysis of how individual actors position themselves in relation to other actors to ensure that their labour needs are achieved. Of course this involves strategizing and manipulating the ‘rules of the game’ of labour transactions to achieve the best outcome. Therefore, the case study approach was useful in unravelling the process of structuring, securing and maintaining labour relationships among Isunga’s farmers. For exploratory purposes too, the case study was useful for understanding how different labour practices are embedded in social relations as well as the rules used to govern and regulate work sharing and exchanges. Hence, by collecting and analysing primary data, using the qualitative case study methodology to answer the research questions, this study has not only provided a more complete picture of the role of institutions in agricultural labour transactions, but also filled a methodological gap in the institutional literature. The use of various sources of data collected by different methods in a single study at a local (village) level did not only reduce bias and increased the accuracy of the data, thereby enhancing the validity of the research, but also allowed this study to capture a more complete and comprehensive picture of the studied phenomena.

8.5 Implications of the study

Given the points raised in Section 8.4, the implications from this study relate mainly to the policy issues and practicalities that farmers are faced with. Following the findings of this study, there is a need to revisit and even challenge some prevailing assumptions about the appropriate role of the Ugandan state in the development (modernisation) of the agricultural sector. This study would support the argument that generalising state intervention (e.g. commercialisation of rain fed smallholder agriculture) as being completely positive is simplistic and misses the point. It would also suggest that the simplistic construction of the modernisation policy dichotomy Uganda has been following since the mid-1980s clearly fails to address important issues that matter to farmers. Therefore, there is a need for agricultural and rural development policy that advocates that the state should only initiate certain official acts of critical institutional design. Hence, far from making it an argument for state intervention, it becomes an argument for effective institutional support for agricultural development in rural Uganda. An important question raised by my results is: what kind of state intervention is really appropriate for agricultural modernisation, for what purpose and in what way?

There is also a need to critically look at the nature of state involvement or intervention in relation to the strength of the agricultural sector in rural development, prevailing institutional weaknesses and the critical events affecting farming, such as climate change, crop price volatility, rural urban migration, political instability etc. Arguably, numerous shocks and events underline the need for state action to support the development of essential institutions needed to overcome the adverse effects that may arise. Of course, this raises the question of political will, state competence in intervention as well as institutional design. Since ample evidence exists to the effect that the local council (LC) system is not doing well, it also calls for administrative and political arrangements that enable the state apparatus to be well connected with the socio-economic realities facing rural Ugandans whose work and livelihoods are dependent on farming. Actually, a more conscious attention to the role of social institutions in agricultural transactions would also require a clearly worded acceptance of the need for mechanisms that can engage with and mediate between different interest groups (actors). This requires the need to understand the interests and implications involved, and to consider the losses and gains involved, including the political implications (e.g. loss of voters).

Another important policy implication relates to how Uganda should take on the challenge of institutional design for agricultural development in the future. This study suggests that a requirement for any institutional design should appreciate the country's economic history and history of agricultural development more, especially rural labour transformation, crop sector development, capital/credit usage, as well as land policy and tenure reforms. For this reason, future institutional design has to involve broader institutionally-aware analysis that establishes an understanding of the broader context and historical legacies, as well as specific institutional analysis that engages with the current realities in rural Uganda, critical events and on-going developments within the agricultural sector. Such analysis needs to take on board not just developments in the country's agricultural sector, but also the unfolding effects of external influences such as new technologies, powerful donors influence, crop market shocks, critical agro-ecological changes and socio-cultural factors. Of course, this study does not suggest that institutional design is the panacea, but rather argue that more attentive design is likely to benefit rural farmers, especially smallholders.

Suggestions for further research

As might be expected, a study of this kind inevitably raises further issues or questions that warrant further research and detailed investigations. A central question raised in this vein is how to develop strong and contextually

appropriate institutions for agricultural development in rural Uganda. While accepting the importance of institutions and recognising the need for more effective institutions in Uganda's agricultural or rural development, it still remains the case that not all institutions are formal, official and directly accessible for design as portrayed in the various documents on agricultural modernisation (GOU, 2011; 2010b; 2010a; 2003; 2000). Social institutions play a significant role and are by definition not available to policy makers to design. Further study to understand in some detail the role and nature of social institutions in a modern economic sector, and the effects of deliberate institutional design on these institutions and their economic effects, would enrich scholarship and learning on rural development.

In my literature review, I found that writing on the unexpected consequences of deliberate policy actions, such as agricultural modernisation in Uganda, is rather thin. The purpose of further research in this area should also aim to gain insights in relation to specific crops (tobacco, sunflower, beans, maize, etc.) and thoroughly scrutinise its cross-sector applicability. Given the continuing challenge of modernising Uganda's agriculture, achieving country-wide insights would also generate useful knowledge beneficial to all those involved or interested in Uganda's agricultural and rural development. Connected to this investigation should be questions of political will, social engagement processes, technical competence and the role and influence of external factors and powerful economic players (e.g. multinational companies, donor countries and international financial institutions).

Finally, more research that seeks to extend this study beyond the village level, sector (crop farming) and one factor study to include other production factors (land, credit, capital and technology) in the light of institutional transformation, would be useful in agricultural and rural development discourses. It would also be useful to continue to monitor the latest developments in the agricultural sector, with 'eyes' on the unfolding effects of agricultural commercialisation taking place against a background of falling smallholding productivity, climate change, land grabbing, rural urban migration of youths looking for better opportunities, and the involvement of more foreign players in distributive and even productive activities (food crops and biofuel production). It would also be valuable to establish the extent to which changes in crop farming have antecedents, parallels or equivalents in other sectors (animal husbandry, forestry and fishery), including how various markets work in practice in these sectors and subsectors. Can lessons be learnt from other sectors and subsectors? Can crop farming offer direct insights to other sectors? The future shall tell.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guides and field questions

1. About the case households
 - a. Size and composition (age, sex, marital status); religion;
 - b. Family type, size and composition, ethnicity, household's history; social relations; gender/age (roles, tasks, responsibilities);
 - c. Education (children, spouses, parents, view on);
 - d. Sources of income (farming, non-farm and off farm): motives, channels, reliability, scale, household member, contributions, and how it is organised;
 - e. Access to land, land rights (ownership, renting, borrowing, squatters, size of land);
 - f. Labour availability/accessibility (seasonal variations, on/off farm, gender variations, individual/family/collective labour practices; intra household division of tasks and responsibilities,
 - g. Education (wife, husband and children; views of education)
 - h. Employment and Livelihood activities: what is your main source of income?
 - i. What problems (if any) have you experienced while undertaking the above mentioned activities? (e.g. land acquisition, marketing, credit facilities, marginalization, heavy work load, mobility, etc.)
2. Nature, scale and functions of agricultural labour arrangements in Isunga
 - a. What is/are your source(s) of farm labour?
 - b. Do other labour arrangements exist in the village? Have you used it? Why did you use it/them?
 - c. Why do you share work?
 - d. How does it work? How is it organised?
 - e. How were you rewarded? How did you reward them?
3. Identifying and choosing labour transaction actors
 - a. Who do you share labour with, receive labour from or give labour to? What is important when choosing your labour exchange partner?
 - b. How long have you known each other? How close are you?
 - c. Describe your labour relationships with him/her/them (family members, relatives, friends, and neighbours); if recommended, by whom?

- d. Have you got some key people you share labour with, give labour to or receive labour from? How do you maintain the relationships? What are the benefits (or costs)?
 - e. How do you reach *winye*? What happens during *nywere-nywere*? What causes it? Do you go to the LC for help?
 - f. Do you think building relations with other people is important? How do you build relationship with others? Any specific benefit(s)?
 - g. To what extent do you consider other peoples' reputation important in the establishment of exchange relationships?
 - h. Do you get help from other people when negotiating *winye*? Why? What? How?
 - i. Do you belong to a *gurub*? Which one(s)? Why did you join it? What does it do? What benefits do you receive from it?
4. Reducing risks of *nywere-nywere*
 - a. Is *winye* violated? Why? How do/did you resolve it?
 - b. How do you avoid *nywere-nywere* or *kuku-kuku*? What methods do you use to keep 'your name good'?
 - c. How do you gather information about potential labour partners? What information do you obtain from these sources?
 - d. What is *dog-bur* payment? How does it work? Any other practices of payment that you have used? Describe
 5. Resolving labour *nywere-nywere*
 - a. What causes *nywere-nywere*? How do you resolve it? What methods are involved? How does it work?
 - b. How is the LC involved? When do you go to them?
 - c. What influences you the most when choosing to settle disputes through the LC1 court or the other ones?
 - d. Have you ever experienced any *nywere-nywere* the last five years? If yes, what were the disputes about?
 - e. What method(s) did you use to settle it? Did you like it? If no, what methods would you use? Why?
 - f. Did you renegotiate the *winye*? How? Where did the renegotiation take place? Did it work out well? How? Do you still deal with him/her/them after the *nywere-nywere*?

For those who had experience in dispute settlement through mediation

- a. Why did you do it? What was the problem? Why is the LC not good? Have you been before them? Where did the settlement take place? Did it work out well?
- b. Did you try other methods of settlement before seeking mediation? If yes, what were they?
- c. Did you pay any fee to that mediator? If yes, how much was it? To what extent do you think that mechanism is effective?

For those who had experience in dispute settlement through the Isunga LC1 court

- a. Have you taken *kuku-kuku* to the LC? Do you know of someone who has done it? Why did you report him/her/them to the LC?
- b. Please explain how you settled the *nywere-nywere*?
- c. Before going to the LC, had you tried other methods? Which ones? Why did it fail?
- d. How long did it take to settle your *nywere-nywere* through the LC?

- e. Do you still share/exchange labour with him/her/them after taking him/her/them to the LC?

For those who had experience in dispute settlement through other methods

- a. Please specify and describe other methods you have used to settle *nywere-nywere*?
- b. Why did you choose this method, and not the other ones?
- c. What problems are associated with the methods used? And...?
- d. Have you ever chosen “take the loss and terminate the relationship” as a way of settling disputes. Why/Why not?
- e. Why did you use this method? Have you ever used a third party in settling disputes? If yes, specify who.
- f. Why did you choose this method? Have you known anyone who used other methods in settling disputes? Who is she/he? How did it work? Was the problem solved? Under what circumstances would you think to use this method?

Appendix 2: Profile of the case households according to wealth differences

HH Code	HH Profile	Key characteristics
Better Off Wealth Group		
CS1-JSBM	Husband (<i>Bazilio</i>) 45 yrs <i>Murulli</i> , Protestant, two wives (<i>Abwoli & Atenyi</i>), 19 children and 6 dependants; Owns house, 180 acres of land, 32 cattle, Ox-plough 27 (8 working members)	Earns income by renting out land, selling charcoal and produce; keeps livestock with the help of a herdsman Engages in crop farming using family labour, wage labour, receives labour for land, <i>Bazilio</i> is a member of the <i>Kamdini</i> , MURDA and Kabarole Groups
CS4-MOJM	<i>Jalon</i> is a 72 yrs old <i>Palwo</i> man, Protestant, married to <i>Min Kapere</i> 52 yrs; 23 children; Owns a house, 3 huts, 12 cattle, ox plough, 70 acres land, 5 (4 working members)	Maize, beans and tobacco farming, rents out land, ox-plough hire Family labour, hires wage labour (<i>leja-leja</i> and <i>pur</i> <i>cente</i>), work parties for opening land, 2 seasonal labourers, member of MURDA, sharecropping with CS20-COM Shares food crops with relatives, lends cash to his labourers,
CS6-BOM	Husband (<i>Zakayo</i>) 42 yrs old, <i>Palwo</i> man, Protestant, wife (<i>Alice</i>), 4 children; owns house, land and livestock, 6 (2 working members)	Crop farming on rented land, runs a kiosk Household labour, <i>awak</i> , <i>aleya</i> and <i>leja-leja</i> labour practices, friends and neighbours
CS17-JOM	Husband (<i>Nelson</i>) 44 yrs old, wife (<i>Dorothy</i>), 5 children, owns house & 3 huts, 10+ acres of land, 11 cattle, 5 goats some chickens 7 (four working members)	Tobacco and sunflower farming; trading in produce Family labour; organises <i>awak</i> and <i>pur kongo</i> for opening land, weeding and harvesting; hires labour (piece work casual labour); 2 seasonal labourers to help with tobacco and sunflower farming.
CS11-HJM	Husband (<i>Hajji</i>) 40 yrs old, wife (<i>Rukia</i>) 35 yrs, 7 children; Owns house, 8 acres of land, 11 cattle, 5 goats some chickens 9 (three working members)	Earns income from crop farming and trading in chicken Cultivates his land using family labour, work parties, buys labour (<i>leja-leja</i>) and gets labour for food. <i>Rukia</i> is a member of <i>aleya</i> group Shares food with others
CS18-MOF	<i>Min Peko</i> is a 54 yrs old <i>Palwo</i> , abandoned wife; Owns a house, 2 huts, 36 acres land, 6 oxen, 8 goat, 5 chickens and motor bike	She cultivates sunflower, tobacco, beans and maize crops. Sources of income include: delivering babies (as Traditional Birth Attendant), remittance from children, land renting, sharecropping; Employs a housekeeper (<i>Nakito</i>); practices crop

9 (2 working members) farming using her own labour, *awak*, labour for land, buys *leja-leja* labour, labour from sharecroppers.

Poor Wealth Group

CS2-MDF	<i>Abwoli</i> is <i>Bazilio</i> 's first wife. <i>Munyoro</i> , Catholic; 2 pigs and some chickens, <i>Bazilio</i> 's first wife, owns kitchen 11 (3 working members)	<i>Abwoli</i> accesses 4 acres of land from her husband, farming, brews and sells <i>Kipanga</i> gin, selling vegetables Family labour, <i>Awak</i> , <i>Aleya</i> , buys <i>leja-leja</i> , borrowed child, receives labour for food crops, labour from their <i>Kabarole</i> group, friends and neighbours
CS3-MAF	<i>Atenyi</i> is CS1-JSBM's second wife, owns 1 hut (kitchen), 1 goat, 2 pigs and 6 chickens, 7 (2 working members) <i>Murulli</i> and Protestant	She accesses 4 acres of land from CS1-JSBM; Farming, brews and sells <i>Kipanga</i> gin and <i>Kwete</i> beer, selling vegetables Family labour, <i>Awak</i> , <i>Aleya</i> , buys <i>leja-leja</i> , child labour (<i>piidi</i>), receives labour for food crops, labour from <i>Kabarole</i> group, friends and neighbours
CS8-BRM	Husband (<i>Bangkwon</i>) 26 yrs old IDP from <i>Lango</i> , Born Again (Pentecostal), wife (<i>Betty</i>) and 3 young children; Owns 2 huts, 2 acres land, 2 oxen, 1 goat and 8 chickens 5 (2 working members)	Borrow 4 acres from friends and neighbours, rents 2 acres from <i>Mzee Ogwal</i> in <i>Kazebe</i> village; Sources of income are crop farming, <i>Bangkwon</i> 's LC1 meeting/sitting allowance Gives and takes small cash credit from relatives, share food crop with CS9-MAM (an in-law) and other relatives. Practices crop farming using household labour, <i>aleya</i> , <i>gurub</i> labour and ox plough sharing with his father-in-law
CS10-KPM	Husband (<i>Kilama</i>) 36 years old, wife (<i>Acii</i>) 31 years old, 5 own children, 2 dependants aged 15 & 17 years old; owns 3 huts, 8 acres land, 6 chicken, a bicycle 9 (4 working members) <i>Acholi</i> IDP, Atheist; wife is Catholic	Earns income from selling crops, selling bricks and <i>Kwete</i> beer; sells poached game meat, sells <i>leja-leja</i> when the going gets tough; <i>Kilama</i> is also produce buyer agent. <i>Kilama</i> is also a member of <i>Konya Paco</i> Group through which he accesses farm labour. Practices farming using family labour, work parties, rotational labour. Borrows small cash from friends and relatives, buy on credit from <i>Akiki</i> (a shopkeeper at the centre).
CS12-JAF	<i>Sarah</i> is a 17 year old <i>Murulli</i> woman; she takes care of her 3 siblings, parents died of AIDS; owns 8 acres of land, 2 huts, 2 goats and 7 chickens. 4 (2 working members)	Practices crop farming, rents out 4 acres of land to IDPs, food crops sharing, do <i>leja-leja</i> when hard up, sells cassava chips to pupils of <i>Isunga P.7</i> School. A member of <i>Kabarole</i> Women Group, access extra labour through <i>aleya</i> ; has weak ties with her relatives.
CS14-ACM	Husband (<i>Tom</i>) 27 years	Both <i>Tom</i> and <i>Ayoo</i> belong to the <i>Lango</i> ethnic

	old, wife (<i>Ayoo</i>) 24 years old, no children of their own but takes care of a 5 years old relative, own 3½ acres land, bicycle, 4 pigs; runs a small kiosk. 3 (2 working members)	group. Rents 3 acres from CS1-JSBM for growing sunflower and sorghum. <i>Tom</i> is a member of <i>Bedmot Akiba</i> (a Malwa beer drinking group). Sources of income are crop farming (sunflower and sorghum) and the kiosk. Labour for farming comes from the two, <i>leja-leja, awak</i> and <i>pur cente</i> from the <i>Kony Paco</i> Group.
CS15-OJM	IDP from <i>Acholi</i> ; husband (<i>Bongomin</i>) and wife, 2 adult children, owns 4 huts, 3 acres of encroached land. 4 (4 working members)	Crop farmer, earns money by selling their labour, Kipanga gin, firewood and bricks. Share sunflower with a land owner in <i>Kazebe</i> village, access farm labour through <i>aleya</i> and <i>awak</i> practices. The boys borrow rent land from a <i>Jirani</i> .
CS13-JKF	IDP from <i>Acholi</i> , widow (<i>Mama Toto</i>), 5 children, owns 2 huts, one acre of land, 4 goats & 4 chickens 6 (2 working members)	Sells <i>Kipanga</i> gin and <i>Malwa</i> millet beer, crop farming Family labour, <i>Awak</i> , buys <i>leja-leja</i> labour, receives labour for beer, child labour (<i>Piidi</i>)
CS19-LOM	Husband (<i>Bongomin</i>) 51 yrs <i>Acholi</i> , wife (<i>Margret</i>) 29 years old, 3 children between 2 and 10 years; Owns a bicycle, 3 huts, 10 acres of land, 4 goats and some chickens, 5 (2 working members)	<i>Bongomin</i> is a member of <i>Ludito Acholi</i> (<i>Acholi</i> Elders Committee) and <i>Kony Paco</i> Group Cultivates food crops as well as tobacco and sunflowers for cash using household labour, <i>awak</i> labour practices, hire <i>Leja-Leja</i> when cash is available <i>Margret</i> also accesses farm labour through <i>Diira</i> (work party on credit) and <i>aleya</i> consisting of 5 <i>Acholi</i> women
CS20-COM	Husband (<i>Anywar</i>) 26 yrs old IDP from <i>Acholi</i> , wife (<i>Jenny</i>) 22 yrs old, their 2yrs son, a dependent (<i>Okiya</i>) 16 yrs old. Owns 2 huts, 3 acres land, some chicken & a bicycle. 4 (3 working members)	Rent 2 acres from CS4-MOJM for growing and maize/beans; land for labour (sharecropping) with CS4-MOJM. Sources of income includes: tobacco and sunflower farming, <i>Jenny</i> sells vegetables and <i>Kipanga</i> gin Labour sources include household labour, <i>awak</i> labour practice and buying <i>leja-leja</i> when in dire need of extra hand.
Very Poor Wealth Group		
CS5-AWM	Widower (<i>Kapere</i>) 37 yrs old, HIV+, <i>Kuku</i> man, Owns 2 huts, 2 acres of land, 2 young daughters, few chickens, 3 (1 working member)	Crop farming Family labour, participates in <i>Aleya</i> labour, receives food, labour and various help from relatives and friends
CS7-ABF	Abandoned wife (<i>Rose</i>) 41 years old, HIV+, 3 sons, 83 yrs old mother-in-law, a brother;	Sells firewood, local brews and second hand clothes on <i>okicon</i> (big market) days; share food with some neighbours, borrow cash from CS11-HJM. Practices crop farming using family labour and

	Owns 2 huts, owns 3 acres of land and 6 chickens. 5 (1 working member)	<i>Aleya</i> with six other persons.
CS9-MAM	IDP from <i>Lango</i> , Husband (<i>Musa</i>) 32 yrs old, wife (<i>Anna</i>) 26 yrs, 4 children: owns 2 huts, 2 acres land encroached from forest reserve, 5 chickens 6 (2 working members)	<i>Musa</i> rents 3 acres from <i>Mzee Ogwai</i> on credit, sources of income are farming, selling their labour efforts when hard up; share food crops with relatives and friends during harvest periods. Practices farming using family labour, <i>awak</i> , <i>aleya</i> labour; also exchange their labour power for maize/beans during hunger season.
CS16-VLF	Widow (<i>Sylvia</i>) in her 60s, IDP from <i>Acholi</i> , lives alone. Owns 2½ acres of land, one poorly built hut, 2 goats, 4 chickens	Crop farming, selling firewood, wild fruits and vegetables, TBA, sells <i>leja-leja</i> at times Own labour, buys <i>leja-leja</i> for opening land and doing some difficult tasks

Source: Fieldwork 2007, 2008, 2009

Appendix 3: Key Informants

DO1-LC1	Chairman of Isunga Local Council (LC1). Interviews in July, August 2006, July 2007, November 2008 and June 2009
DO2-MSCC	Mutunda Sub-County Chief. Interviews in August 2006, July August 2007
DO3-MURDA	Coordinator of Mutunda Rural Development Association. Interviews in July-August 2007, November 2009
DO4-MADFA	Coordinator, Masindi District Farmers Association. Interviewed in August 2007
DO5-NAADS	Coordinator, National Agricultural Advisory Services, Masindi District. Interviewed in August 2007
DO6-MDAO	Masindi District Agricultural Officer. Interviewed in August 2007 & November 2008
DO7-MDLO	Masindi District Labour Officer. Interviewed in November 2008
DO8-LC5	Chairman of Masindi District Local Council (LC5). Interviews in July, August 2006, July 2007 and November 2008

Checklist

Key Informants (local governments and NGOs)

- Nature of problems in Isunga village and surrounding areas
- Agricultural related policy
- Livelihood security
- Specific farming problems
- Gender roles in agriculture
- Sources of income
- Working relationship with civil society (NGOs), farmers and frontline ministries

Appendix 4: Farmer Groups and Guide for Focus Group Discussions

- FG1-KWG Chairlady of *Kabarole* Women's Group. Interviewed in November 2008. Group discussion with some members in June 2009.
- The group provides saving and credit facilities to members and loaning is according to shares (i.e. three times the amount saved)
- FG2-LLWG *Wonkom* of *Labongo Lworo* Women's Group. Interviewed in November 2008
- Improve members economically and enable them to contribute to towards household financial demand; enable women to socialise and improve access to information.
- FG3-KBA *Kica Ber Akiba* Beer Drinking. Chairman interviewed in November 2008, participation in beer drinking in November 2008 and June 2009.
- It is an important source of income to the women brewers and the LC1 (through the fees paid)
- FG4-KPG *Kony Paco* Group. Interviewed members in November 2008 and attending *gurub's* meeting in May 2009.
- Members share and exchange labour among themselves in rotation; if death occurs they contribute to the bereaved family to help them through the difficult period.
- FG5-LAC Group discussion with members of *Ludito Acoli* Elders Committee
- Settles many conflicts among the *Acholi* of *Isunga* without involving the LC1; resolves conflicts through application of *Acholi* customary rules and values; they are rewarded for every conflict/dispute is solved; promotes peace and harmony among the *Acholi* in *Isunga*.
- The *Acholi* elders are also involved in various decision-making and their opinion is respected by the community; the elders are also important source of information because of their experience/vast knowledge.
- FG6-KRG Chairman of *Kamdini* Reflect Group. Interviewed in November 2008 and June 2009. Participation in group's meeting in July 2007
- Runs a credit savings scheme. Loans are given to members on a monthly basis at an interest of 5 per cent of the principle. The group considers itself successful in that loans are paid in time. Members attribute it to discipline, trust among members, good cooperation and hard work.
- Members share and exchange labour among themselves in rotation; if death occurs they contribute to the bereaved family to help them through the difficult period.
- Most decisions are taken during their monthly meetings on the last Sunday of the month. At the meetings, they review and discuss what happened to members in the last month, new/old challenges, but more importantly decide on who should get the monthly loan.

Checklist - Focus Group Discussions

- Agriculture: Land use (crop production - where, when, how, who and why); motives (food/cash crops, quantities, seasonal variations); differences in modes of production; labour (where, when, how, who and why); decision-making (who, how and why); changes (how, why and outcome); land tenure (intra household, division of land, decision making rights, rights of produce, income); Crops and labour marketing (what, how, who, where); support/Information (where, who, how, on what, why, official, individual networks); availability of other resources (cash, inputs, credit), cooperation
- Rules operating in labour practice: Kinship, cooperation and trust within the communities.
- Mechanisms for maintaining labour exchange relationships. What happens when dispute arise? Ways of solving disputes
- Problems faced at household levels and village levels
- Coping mechanisms
- Income and livelihood activities