



Uganda Community Based Association for Women and Children Welfare

## The MouthPiece

### UCOBAC's Bi-annual Newsletter

#### January - June 2020 Edition

### Editorial

By Gertrude Nalubinga, Senior Program Officer - Advocacy and Communication



The outbreak and fast spread of corona virus (COVID-19) since December 2019 has caused panic and havoc all over the world, destroying economies, straining the health sector, disrupting food systems, affecting livelihoods and causing unimaginable fear, suffering, violence and death. On 30 January 2020, World Health Organization declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a Public Health Emergency of international concern. The first case in Uganda was reported in March, 2020 and since then Ministry of Health has reported 1,069 confirmed cases, 188 active cases 1,069 recoveries, 2 deaths, 1,589 foreign truck cases exited, 247,646 samples tested, 1,575 under quarantine, 22 foreign cases admitted and 166 Ugandan cases admitted as of 21st July (MoH, 2020)

To contain spread of the virus, Government undertook a number of measures including; a total lock down, restrictions on travel and movements, closure of all schools, mandatory use of masks, hand washing with soap, social distancing among others.

None the less, COVID-19 and the associated restrictions have had devastating and far reaching impacts on Ugandans in the social and economic spheres of life. Many people could not work to earn an income to sustain themselves and their families or access some basic services.

COVID-19 affected UCOBAC's operations as an organization as it could not continue to run its programs in communities during the period. Funding partners minimized expenditure as one of the coping mechanisms to handle the effects of the pandemic in their own countries. This increased the challenges of communities that are dependent on donor supported non-government organizations like UCOBAC.

Although COVID-19 affected all people, its effects on women and girls are disproportionate and have exacerbated gender inequality by increasing their vulnerability to poverty, violence and exclusion. This calls for gender sensitive responses to impacts of the pandemic.

In this **Mouthpiece**, UCOBAC staff share how the pandemic has affected communities and disrupted programs on ground in areas of land and property rights, sexual and reproductive health rights, education and food/nutrition security among others. They make key recommendations on overcoming some of the challenges posed by COVID-19.

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# IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION?

By Susan Gamwino, Program Officer- Orphans and Vulnerable Children



**W**hat seemed far off from Africa as a continent eventually got here! Globally, it was and is a health crisis killing people, causing human suffering and unimaginable upheaval. But this is much more than a health crisis; it is a human, economic and social crisis which is affecting communities at the very core.

Education in Uganda has been hit hard by the pandemic with 15 million plus learners country-wide out of school since March 19th 2020 due to closure of schools in compliance with measures to stop corona virus spread. Education is a basic human right critical for fighting poverty and vulnerability. It's key to attain Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specifically SDG1 (Zero Poverty) SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender equality). The government of Uganda recognizes education as a basic human right and continues to strive to increase access to education to all children in the country despite all challenges it faces in relation to providing quality education for all. Obtaining quality education is the foundation to improving people's lives.

The interference in education by corona virus outbreak is likely to affect education outcomes for learners at all levels as they will consequently suffer from learning relapses due to continued missing of classes. It is worse for children in rural areas who are unable to access and afford alternative learning services i.e. using online learning mechanisms, television, radio, smart phones, computers and laptops. This will increase the education access and outcomes divide between children in rural and urban areas.

Further still, many teachers in Uganda do not have adequate skills to undertake online teaching affecting the quality of service provided. The teachers are demotivated as some are not earning any salaries while schools are closed.

Though COVID-19 has affected education of all children, girls are disproportionately affected. It is likely that more girls than boys will drop out or discontinue school. In Uganda, girls drop out of school more than boys due to child marriage, teenage pregnancies, child labor and Gender Based Violence. This stems from existing traditional societal practices and norms that discriminate against women and girls (UNICEF and MoES 2016).

While several child caregivers have not been able to work during this crisis, others have lost their jobs. This has consequently affected their income and it will in the long run affect their capacity to afford children's school requirements and needs. With constrained financial resources, guardians are likely to prioritize provision of education to the boy child while the girl child is engaged in labour to contribute to household welfare and take on baby-sitting roles for younger children in the home.

In collaboration with local government COVID-19 task-force, UCOBAC with support from Canadian Feed The Children (CFTC) responded to effects of the pandemic on children's education using innovative approaches. They have supported school children with self-learning study materials, provided relief food and farm inputs to affected children's households to ensure that their families are food secure during this time of crisis.

They held awareness health raising campaigns on community radio to empower girls and communities with appropriate and timely information on sexual and reproductive health and gender based violence.



# IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

By Loretta Owino Okeny, Senior Program Officer - Sexual and Reproductive Health / Gender Based Violence



Access to social and health services particularly supporting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and Gender Based Violence (GBV) has been inhibited by the COVID-19 pandemic preventive measures. Although both men and women have been affected by the crisis, women and girls are especially more vulnerable to risks of exploitation and sexual abuse.

Epidemics such as COVID-19 expose the fragility and loopholes in health service delivery. Reproductive health of women and girls in Uganda has been compromised with the diversion of resources to manage the corona virus outbreak mainly. Despite the fact that restraining of movement was a necessity in view of the situation; it has contributed to an increase in maternal and child death rates due to failure to reach health centers in time for the much needed services. Limited/lack of access to critical reproductive health services and treatment is leading to high spread of sexually transmitted diseases and contributing to unprecedented population growth through the increasing incidences of unplanned pregnancies in women and girls. The situation is worse for people living with HIV/AIDS who are not only suffering with drug stock outs but also lack of adequate food to support their health condition.

Beneficiaries under UCOBAC and Canadian Feed The Children's Prevention, Education, Empowerment and Recovery from SGBV (PEERS) project among other community members in Bugiri have limited or no access to GBV support services. Women are silently experiencing various forms of violence especially; domestic, physical and emotional violence which has fatal outcomes including; unwanted pregnancies, miscarriages, family breakdown, menstrual and mental disorders and in some instances loss of life. Youth have less access to youth health friendly centers, family planning services and some have no access to phones to reach out for help in instances of abuse. Worse still, some men are brutally venting out frustrations of inability to provide

for their families onto their spouses and children causing a rise in domestic and family violence. This however, does not have to be the situation if Uganda's government would;

Consider SRHR/GBV support services as essential and prioritize access by collaborating with communities to provide space for creating temporary easy-to-reach shelters for GBV survivors. These should have competent case management staff and should be equipped to provide services for counselling, support and protection from perpetrators at all times.

Collaborate with civil society organizations and humanitarian actors such as UCOBAC's AWO-BMZ social structures among others with capacity to bridge the gap in service delivery. Experts in SRH issues and management should be among the key members of the COVID-19 district task-force. CSOs can take charge of providing services at grassroots level to reach the poorer and most vulnerable communities. Through this collaboration government/CSOs can strengthen community policing by actively engaging communities in reporting of not only COVID-19 suspected cases but reporting and minding SRH/GBV emergencies.

Continue advocacy on SRHR and GBV now more than ever because these rights are often shadowed by traditional/cultural beliefs leaving women and children vulnerable. This can be achieved through localized radio campaigns and use of mobile public address systems especially in the rural communities.



*A trained UCOBAC mentor helping a young girl to make her own re-usable pads*

## COVID-19 IMPACT ON FIT-FOR-PURPOSE LAND

### ADMINISTRATION AND REGISTRATION OF CUSTOMARY LAND

By Mark Katusiime, Field Project Officer, Surveying and Mapping Specialist



As the world and Uganda in particular strive to recover from the impact of corona virus pandemic, it should be noted that COVID-19 has not only had serious health impacts on the population but also significant impacts in the land sector by disrupting ongoing processes to increase security of tenure for all. Inadequate and insecure tenure rights increase vulnerability, hunger and poverty and can lead to conflict and environmental degradation when competing users fight for control of resources.

In Uganda, land largely remains unregistered with over 70 percent of it being held under customary land tenure. According to the Land Act 1998 (Cap 227), customary land tenure refers to “a system of land tenure regulated by customary rules which are limited in their operation to a particular description or class of persons.” The customary system of land administration is vaguely structured with no clearly established and legally defined functional structures. Customary land in Uganda is associated with a number of problems including (a) its inability to provide security of tenure for landowners; (b) it impedes the advancement of land markets; and (c) it discriminates against women (MLHUD, 2013).

To overcome the challenges associated with customary land tenure, Uganda’s land laws including the Land Policy, Land Act provide for registration of customary land rights through Certificates of Customary Ownership (CCO) and under Communal Land Associations (CLAs). However, in order to ensure that the land rights registration process benefits all persons, its critical to adopt more pragmatic and innovative approaches such as Fit-For-Purpose (FFP) land administration which are purpose-at-hand driven (can be aligned to specific country needs); is flexible (can secure different tenure types

and rights) and can be improved (upgraded) any time depending on the emerging need(s).

Additionally, FFP land administration approaches also have the ability to secure land rights of the poor majority of whom being women, who are unable to afford the formal and conventional land administration systems that are expensive, inaccessible, complicated. The Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Lands together with international and local partners has largely taken up FFP land administration approaches to increase security of tenure at scale. UN Habitat – Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) is partnering with MLHUD and local partners to increase the uptake of FFP land administration approaches in the registration of customary land across different districts in the country. In Pader and Butaleja districts for example, UCOBAC applied the Social Tenure Domain Model tool to map and register customary land rights for over 3,000 households.

Unfortunately, with the outbreak of COVID-19 and associated restrictions, this community work has been disrupted – this is reversing and slowing down momentum and leaving many at risk of violation of their land rights. Government needs to invest in strengthening community capacity in application of FFP land administration to increase uptake and sustain the capacity of local land actors to continue providing land services to their communities even in times of disaster.



*Participatory community land boundary mapping process in Pader district*

# IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN'S LAND AND PROPERTY RIGHTS

By Carol Kayanja, Program Officer- Women's Land and Property Rights



**W**omen's livelihoods and economic empowerment are essential to the well-being of their households, communities and the country at large. In Africa, women are primary users of land, producing more than 80% of the food, but own only 1% of the land thus tilling and toiling on land owned men. Women cannot make decisions on land, and do not benefit from the proceeds of the land they farm (FAO, 2010, UNDP, 2012). Existing restrictions on women to access, use, inherit, control, and own land are largely attributed to the imbalance of power relations between men and women linked to patriarchal systems and social norms that discriminate against women as well as poor legal and political land governance systems.

The pandemic has greatly increased women's economic vulnerability as many women are at higher risk of land rights violation which may lead to loss of their major production and survival asset, condemning them to a life of poverty, hunger and powerlessness. Government and NGOs, including UCOBAC that advance economic rights and justice for women through promoting women's land rights have had to halt or scale down operations in communities, thus creating a vacuum for violation of women's land rights (WLR).

Women need information on their land rights to ably assert their land rights. COVID-19 crisis has interrupted WLRs awareness raising interventions in the communities. Community dialogues and engagements are a powerful tool in creating awareness and building knowledge in communities but these were put on hold as per the restrictions on movement, travel and social gatherings.

Community radio programs are critical channels for communication and information sharing, however,

during this period, radio programs focused on the virus than other socio economic challenges in the community.

During the lockdown, many offices that provide land services to communities including land justice services were closed. Many women could not access justice when their land rights are violated. This created an opportunity for many land rights violators to abuse the rights of vulnerable segments of the society, especially women. A high number of land rights cases occurred during this period including; forceful evictions, fraudulent claims and sale, disinheritance and property grabbing.

Small scale tenants on mailo land, majority of whom are women are affected by the interruptions of GIZ supported land rights registration processes under the Improved Land Governance in Uganda partnership with Ministry of Lands and UCOBAC. They are at risk of losing their tenure through evictions and land grabbing. As the main labour force employed in small scale agriculture, women have been affected by limited access to agricultural inputs and extension services reducing their productivity on land and increasing food insecurity.

It is therefore critical to innovatively sustain women's land rights programs in the communities using gender sensitive strategies during the COVID-19 era and to have a holistic view of the impacts of COVID-19.



Grassroots women of Mityana at the International Day of Rural Women celebrations in Soroti, 2019 - Standing for Women's Rights

# IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE LIVELIHOODS OF REFUGEES AND HOST COMMUNITIES

By Silvanous Opio, Project Officer - Livelihoods and Food Security



Families of refugees and host community members in Uganda are at a higher risk of hunger and malnutrition due to destruction of their livelihoods by the corona virus pandemic. Lamwo is one of the districts in Northern Uganda bordering South Sudan and is currently hosting approximately 53,000 refugees from South Sudan (The Independent, 2020). The large number of refugees in Lamwo has been attributed to high influx through porous border points between Uganda and South Sudan.

Lamwo is a transit route to South Sudan and therefore a number of long distance truck drivers use it and make stop overs in the district on the way to/from neighboring countries. The largest number of infections in Uganda have been reported to be among truck drivers. Natives of Lamwo are therefore at a high risk of contracting COVID-19 not only because of living in a border district but also due to inadequate shelters and resources leading to congestion in Palabek settlement and surrounding communities. Majority are unable to afford protective equipment such as face masks and hand sanitizers.

In respect to the measure of social distancing, refugees and members of the host communities under UCOBAC-AWO International social structures are no longer engaged in group based activities and this affects efforts to promote social cohesion and harmonious co-existence. The loss of opportunity for constant interaction has potential to cause the rising of previous animosities.

Majority of the families are dependent on subsistence agriculture as a main source of livelihood. They are attached to farmer groups which meet occasionally to learn and share on good agronomic and resilience building practices to ably sustain themselves. Due to limited access to agricultural support services, farmers have been taken advantage of and have been duped

into purchasing costly yet sub-standard and counterfeit agricultural inputs leading to low productivity, loss of income and increased vulnerability to food insecurity and poor nutrition at household level.

Livelihood support avenues such as VSLAs have been obstructed and cannot be operated as effectively and regularly. VSLA is a popular informal arrangement through which refugees and host community members can keep their savings and access affordable credit to support their agricultural activities and small income generating ventures.

Restriction on holding of weekly communal markets has affected women especially those who depend on petty trading and vending of food stuffs such as vegetables grown in their backyard gardens, silver fish, clothes, poultry and goats, etc to earn an income to support their families.

All the above coupled with minimized funding and support from government and development partners leaves the lives and livelihoods of refugees and host community members in jeopardy. Although government has instituted essential precautionary measures ensuring the screening of truck drivers at border entry points; it's important to consistently and continuously implement these and also seek out and guard all the porous points until such a time when the crisis has been dealt with.

There is need to urgently scale-up service delivery to match the identified needs in Palabek and other settlements. The health, housing and agricultural sectors should be targeted to uplift the failing livelihoods. This can be achieved through; creation of shelters, re-locating agricultural extension support staff nearer to the communities, supporting communities to open up land for agriculture and providing them with high yielding and early maturing seeds to meet the food needs of the district.



VSLA agents in a participatory learning session



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Uganda Community Based Association for Women and Children Welfare  
P.O Box 7449, Robert Mugabe Road, Plot 17, Mbuya Zone 1

Tel:- +256-755-949959

Email: [info@ucobac.org](mailto:info@ucobac.org)

facebook: UCOBAC1990

Twitter: [@ucobac\\_](https://twitter.com/ucobac_)

[www.ucobac.org](http://www.ucobac.org)

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