

# THE MOUTHPIECE

UCOBAC's bi-annual Newsletter: 1st Edition, 2023

## EDITORIAL TEAM



**Frances Birungi-Odong**  
Executive Director  
UCOBAC



**Gloria Kalinaki**  
Advocacy and  
Communications Officer  
UCOBAC



**Ritah Kemigisa**  
Advocacy and  
Communications Associate  
Stand for Her Land  
Campaign Uganda

## EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

Welcome to our Bi annual Newsletter – *The Mouthpiece*. This issue brings you different articles and opinion pieces on different topical issues related to the work we are doing under the different program areas at UCOBAC in 2023.

UCOBAC works to promote human rights and improve welfare of women and children in Uganda using community-based initiatives. We envision communities where people live free from poverty and are able to fully enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms. We are thus committed to Empowering and Transforming Communities through our different programs including; (i) Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC), (ii) Women's Land and Property Rights (WLPR), (iii) Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and (iv) Climate Change and Resilient Livelihoods (CCRL)

In this Newsletter, UCOBAC staff provide insights on the different issues or problems communities in Uganda are grappling with and how through our work, supported by partners, communities are organizing themselves, mobilizing resources, developing effective and sustainable community own practices and transforming existing practices, norms and public policies to be responsive to their priority needs. As a result, communities are getting empowered and transformed.

We thank you for your unrelenting support and partnership on this journey towards Gender justice and sustainable development,

Enjoy the Read – We appreciate your feedback.

## Ongoing projects in 2023 at a glance

Project	District of Coverage
Child Development Project (CDP)	Bugiri
Improving food and income security, climate resilience and women empowerment for refugees and host communities in Palabek settlement	Lamwo
Fair4All – Power of Voices Partnership Project for inclusive and suitable value chains	Bugiri
Addressing discriminatory norm/practices on HIV and GBV against Women and girls	Pader
Stand for Her Land Campaign Uganda – A Global campaign on call to Action to close the implementation gap on Women's Land Rights	National
Scaling up Community based land registration and land use planning project	Butaleja
Strengthening Women's access and decision making on communal lands and natural resources	Napak
Strengthening Women's land rights for resilient livelihoods and food security in Karamoja sub region	Napak

# An insight into the journey of land law reform in Uganda



**Caroline Kayanja**  
Senior Program Officer, Women's Land and Property Rights

undergone subsequent reviews in 2004 and 2010 to streamline the landlord-tenant relationship, strengthen the protection of the rights of tenants on land and enhance land administration in a decentralized system of governance.

Over the years, Uganda has witnessed major transformations such as the rapid growing population now estimated at 43 million, land pressure, effects of domestic migration, the growing demand for land for investment, technological advancement and the diminishing authority of traditional institutions in land governance. All these have intensified the demand for land reforms.

The Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development earlier this year embarked on a journey of reviewing the land Act. At the heart of the proposed amendments is; strengthening the rights and obligations of lawful and bonafide occupants on registered land, streamlining the functionality of land management institutions, establishment of a customary land register, providing for land use planning in Land Administration and streamlining the role of traditional leaders in land dispute resolution.

A number of proposals have been made by various stakeholders and this prompted the Stand for Her Land Campaign partners together with the Women's Land Rights Movement in Uganda to carry out a gender analysis to ensure that the reforms equally include and benefit women. Our proposals focused on enhancing equitable participation and representation of women; equal access to and utilization of services; a fair economic consideration in regard to women and men accessing land services; enhancing the scale and sustainability of a system to benefit more women and men and ensuring that social and cultural issues in regard to women's and men's access to services and ownership of land are considered.

Only time will tell if these reforms offer a lasting solution to the historical injustices. ■

**1** 23 years ago, Uganda was introduced to a new land governance system following the enactment of the 1900 Buganda Agreement. The agreement divided Buganda into Mailo and crown land. Mailo land belonged to Buganda government and its officials, while crown land belonged to the protectorate government. This left other parts of the country under customary arrangement.

In 1928, the protectorate government introduced the Busuulu and Envujjo law to address the plight of tenants, landlords and insecurities of Mailo owners and peasants.

However, in 1975, a Land Reform Decree was issued which declared all land in Uganda to be public land to be administered by the Land Commission. This decree limited the rights of

customary land owners and converted Mailo and Crown land into 99-year government leases. The Busuulu and Envujjo law was also abolished converting all customary tenancies to customary tenures on public land with little security of tenure. The decree did not completely abolish land titles.

The 1995 constitution also introduced a new Constitutional order regarding ownership of land and protection of property rights for Ugandans. Whereas it declared that land in Uganda belongs to citizens, it stated that Land would be held under four tenure systems including; Mailo land, freehold, leasehold and customary.

These tenure systems were elaborately described in the Land Act of 1998 which is termed as the first comprehensive law on land in Uganda. The Act has since



Land Actors pose for a group photo during the Review of the Land Act CAP 227

# What form should the customary land registry take

Only about 20% of the land in Uganda is registered. The remaining approximately 80% is not registered and is mainly under the customary tenure system.

Customary land has been criticized for its inability to provide security of tenure for land owners, hindrance of the advancement of land markets, and discrimination against women. The Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD) has for the last 12 years embarked on an ambitious plan to have customary land in the country registered.

This effort, which is greatly supported by the fact that the legal framework for the registration of customary land already exists in the form of the Land Act has so far seen the issuance certificates of customary ownership to land owners in more than 13 districts of the country including Butaleja and Pader where UCOBAC in partnership with UN-HABITAT/GLTN has supported the issuance of over 4000 CCOs.

Successes registered by this exercise have created inevitable calls for a customary land registry and also for the integration of cadastral data collected by several implementing partners across the country into the National Land Information System which already contains data from the other tenure systems. Efforts to implement this are already underway.

Much as all these efforts are commendable and are a step in the right direction towards having a credible database, there is need to clearly define what the land registry for customary land should possess and how it should be governed.



**Mark Katusiime**  
Project Officer, Women's Land and Property Rights

Should it be governed like the other tenure systems that adopt Torren's system? Or can the Torrens system be modified to fit the context of our country, Uganda? Torrens is a land registration system in which the state creates and maintains a register of land which serves as conclusive evidence of title of the person or people recorded there as owners.

I however think three factors ought to be put into consideration; the background/basis/purpose of customary land whose governance varies with different communities around the country; the current state of the customary land registry in whatever form, and the interests of the several partners and stakeholders.

This is because Uganda is mainly an agrarian society, with majority of Ugandans utilizing customary land in their various villages for food production. In addition, customary land has been said to belong to the past, present and future generations. It is also seen as the heritage and backup plan

for every citizen upon retirement. Many people say when things fail in the city, you return ancestral home to practice agriculture. With this in context, there is a need to protect people's rights to land to ensure that they do not lose it due to conversion to other tenure systems.

Despite being paper-based, the customary land registry includes all family members. Digital platforms such as GLTN's Social Tenure Domain Model (STDM) have allowed for this to be replicated digitally. In addition, families, clans, and other traditional establishments have knowledge of family hierarchy, land rights, privileges, criteria for allocation, etc. The customary land registry should therefore contain a mechanism to update (add or remove family members at birth or death) and means of verification before an update is made. It should allow for the allocation of roles for institutional heads (family, clan, or tribe depending on the culture of an area) in verifying information used to make changes to the registry. Research on existing traditional mechanisms and integration of these (directly or indirectly) is also key.

There is fear that allowing for the conversion of customary land to freehold (by whatever name, Certificate of Title, or Customary Certificate of Title) is risky. Imagine a situation in which clan land is converted to freehold, how would newborn clan members benefit from their birthright? And if that land is sold, who benefits from this transaction? In the case of Acholi, if a person from a "foreign" tribe buys the land let's say a Musoga, where would the rest of the clan members settle? We could risk having the majority of the rural poor Ugandans becoming landless.

In order to preserve the integrity and purpose of customary land, and ensure that it is transformed into a wealth creation tool for ordinary Ugandans, there is a need to create a register that reflects and preserves culture and UCOBAC looks forward to playing its role in this process. ■

# Enhancing Sustainable Community Wetland Management in Butaleja District

**W**etlands play a crucial role in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in regions with challenging conditions like low rainfall, land scarcity, and poor upland soil quality. Uganda relies greatly on wetlands, covering around 11% of its land, however, this area has significantly reduced. A 2020 Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) report, warns that without restoration efforts, wetland cover could reduce to 1.6% by 2040.

Wetlands maintain ecological balance and provide vital ecosystem services which are essential for water resources and agriculture, supporting approximately 80% of communities living near wetlands who depend on them for food security and livelihoods.

Butaleja district is one of such communities, with 40% of its land is a wetland due to its unique geography, surrounded by Elgon hills and traversed by streams to Lake Kyoga. Local economic activities heavily rely on these water resources, leading to wetland mismanagement and environmental concerns. With the population growth, economic needs, and climate change, wetland degradation persists, demanding sustainable land practices for preservation.

Acknowledging the intricate connections between wetlands, agriculture, and livelihoods, initiatives targeting community engagement, sustainable land use planning, and wetland management are essential in strengthening resilience and the well-being of communities in the district.

To combat these challenges, UCOBAC in partnership with Global Land Tools Network (GLTN), Butaleja Natural Resource Department, and Ministry of



**Jordana Wamboga**  
Project Officer, Climate Change  
and Resilient Livelihoods

Water and Environment (MWE) supported communities in Naweyo and Kachonga sub-counties through community wetland management planning, in line with Ramsar principles. Local communities actively participated in the trainings in order to promote conservation and

sustainable use while leveraging on ancestral knowledge.

This was done through community involvement which amplified resilience against climate-induced challenges. Blending traditional and innovative techniques, community-based monitoring ensures effective wetland management, leading to improved agriculture, fisheries, water resources, and livelihoods while safeguarding traditional knowledge.

Over 2,500 users benefited from the trainings, which led to the formation of wetland association committees and drafting management plans to regulate activities in the wetland. Recognizing the intertwined relationship between wetlands and local livelihoods has empowered the communities to navigate changing circumstances. Through collaborative endeavors, capacity building, and policy support, coexistence can be secured for generations to come. ■



Wetland Management Planning Committee members in Muhula Parish attend a capacity building training

# How to transform social norms on Women's Land Rights

**M**uch as Uganda has a progressive and non-discriminatory legal system, women face barriers to accessing, owning, or exercising control over land.

Many Ugandans, especially women, have insecure land tenure, which increases their vulnerability, poverty, hunger, and food insecurity.

Secure land rights remain a powerful tool to improve livelihoods and self-reliance but unfortunately women who play a critical role in food production are less likely than men to own, inherit, and control land and other natural resources.

This inequality in land ownership, access, use, and control is caused among others restrictive and harmful social and customary norms that continue to override statutory laws.

Social norms are shared beliefs about rules or expectations for people's behaviours within a given group or community. Some of these social norms can be equitable or inequitable.

In Karamoja sub region, land is a male privilege passed on through the male lineage. Women and girls on the other hand have access to land only after giving birth in marriage and prior to marriage respectively. It should however be noted that the rights to access land for women is highly dependent on the kind of relationship she has with a man.

The patriarchal inheritance norms and practices in Karamoja sub region reserve land for sons and men as opposed to surviving spouses. Widows are forced to remarry their brothers in law if they are to acquire land of their deceased husbands.

These harmful norms also affect the way women access and participate in land governance



**Onying Ottober**  
Assistant Project officer, Women's Land and Property Rights

processes. Their opinions on land are always treated as inferior. For example, husbands of women

appointed to local land structures attend Area Land Committees on their behalf.

There is an urgent need to adopt Gender transformative approaches if we are to address these social injustices faced by women. This can be complemented with social norms transformation interventions to uproot the deeply entrenched root causes of such injustices.

These approaches can be done through promoting male engagement to support gender equitable land governance and ensure household positive behavioural change. On the other hand, women should be empowered with knowledge and deliberate efforts taken to create space for them to participate and strengthen their agency on land governance. ■



Right: Securing Your Family's Future - Men's session

# Why SRHR advancement is needed in Palabek Refugee settlement

Palabek refugee settlement, located in Lamwo district, Northern Uganda, is home to approximately 77,000 South Sudanese refugees. South Sudan has been in a civil war for most of its 12 years of existence, displacing millions of its citizens who are now living as refugees in neighboring countries, Uganda inclusive. However, Palabek refugee settlement which is host to most of the South Sudanese refugees is situated at the heart of a war-torn area which is yet to heal from the brutal scars of the brutal LRA war.

The war brought Lamwo and its environs into an economic and social chokehold and further weakened their health and education sectors.

The unprecedented mass influx of refugees into the settlement has put enormous pressure on the host district and sharing available resources amongst the natives has become a huge challenge with the dwindling resource envelope thus calling for more humanitarian and development interventions. For instance, the weak health system has contributed to the violation of women and young girls' right and access to sexual and reproductive health information and services. There is low uptake of family planning services due to inadequate knowledge about the various methods available, misinformation and misconceptions also abide including; cultural and religious factors, language barrier among others.



**Hedwige Masambagawinyi**  
Project officer, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

With support from AWO International, UCOBAC has since rolled out Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) interventions to fill in the gap. The interventions are targeting both men and women at individual and community levels. Using the door-to-door policy, Community Peer Educators (CPEs) have engaged in SRHR awareness raising, encouraged the youth to utilize the existing safe spaces to discuss their experiences, fears, challenges and seek guidance, and have followed up on health status(es) of households they have visited. Over 360 refugees and members from the host community have been trained on contraception and

other family planning methods. The wider community has also been sensitized via radio talks and community integrated outreaches where health experts are invited to educate communities and provide SRHR services.

Equipping refugees with such information and raising awareness about SRHR among their communities will help them to make informed decisions as individuals, couples and families. This will in turn prevent sexual and reproductive diseases among these groups such as HIV/AIDs and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases/Infections (STDs/STIs), unplanned/unintended and teenage pregnancies which sometimes results into early forced marriages.

However, there is a significant slow change in advancing this SRHR cause due to some cultural and social norms. For example, there are existing gendered structures of violence and inequalities embedded among the Dinka, Khartoum Arabic, Acholi and Neur tribes from South Sudan which hinder the Persons of Concern (PoC) from accessing SRH information and services. The available SRH services are also unreachable due to distant physical locations.

As much as women and young girls are being prioritized, men need support to enable them adapt support behavior towards SRHR.

As UCOBAC, we are involving male champions and community peer educators as our community social structures to help us carry out door to door visits as we promote SRHR and gender equality.

For these interventions to be a success there is urgent need to integrate SRHR into cultures and religions by promoting cultural-religious sensitive and rights based Comprehensive Sexuality Education without being secretive on certain information from the young people. Creating more awareness on SRHR will also help individuals to personally grow, develop and build mutual consensual contacts and relationships. ■



One of the community members in Palabek refugee settlement testing for HIV by a health worker

# Breaking Barriers: Building safe spaces for HIV and GBV survivors in Pader district

For long, women and girls in Ogom sub county, Pader district have been discriminated against due to derogatory norms about HIV while others have been violently abused due to their gender.

Stigmatization, particularly against those living with HIV/AIDS, has pushed many backward and cannot even take part in key decision-making processes because they feel not worthy.

HIV-related stigma remains a global public health problem with far-reaching consequences.

According to a 2022 PLOS ONE journal on HIV-related stigma experiences and coping strategies among pregnant women in rural Uganda, it is estimated that 33% of persons living with HIV In Uganda have ever experienced some form of stigma.

The perpetual HIV-related stigma is partly because of the myths and misconceptions surrounding the transmission and prognosis of HIV/AIDS.

There is however an end in sight with the latest project which is breaking barriers in challenging these norms which is helping to change the plight of these girls and women and consequently empowering them to transform their lives.

Dubbed "Addressing Discriminatory Norms on HIV and GBV against Women and Girls," the project was rolled out by Uganda Community Based Association for Women and Children's Welfare (UCOBAC).

The project is funded and supported by US embassy under its PEPFAR program.

UCOBAC has since established safe spaces in Yitoduny and Telela East, where eighty girls have been



**Joel Okot**  
Field Officer, Sexual and  
Reproductive Health and Rights

provided with vital training on HIV.

Every month, UCOBAC's field officer carries out visits where they use the stepping stone guide (a comprehensive manual for sexual and reproductive health communication and relationship skills) to equip these young individuals with the tools to shatter societal constraints.

Emboldened by their newfound knowledge, the girls and young

women have come together to form advocacy groups which they are using as their mouthpieces to voice their concerns to duty bearers.

By engaging on radio talk shows, their leaders are tirelessly spreading awareness within the community, promoting dialogue on crucial issues such as gender-based violence and sexual harassment.

To foster unity and bolster their collective strength, these groups have formed Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) as they await to tap from the golden opportunity presented by the Parish Development Model (PDM).

The Parish Development Model, is a government wealth creation program that seeks to push majority out of subsistence agriculture into the money economy.

UCOBAC remains resolute in their commitment to nurturing these dreams, working diligently to ensure duty bearers provide the support needed for these girls' collective advancement.

By unlocking the doors to the Parish Development Fund (PDM), UCOBAC aims to bolster their advocacy groups and empower them to make a lasting impact on their community.

As the winds of change blow through Ogom Parish, the stories of these resilient young girls captivate the hearts and minds of many. Their journey is one of triumph over adversity, and their voices echo with the promise of a brighter, more inclusive future. ■



A group of girls and young women attending their monthly safe spaces to share SRH and GBV issues in Yitoduny Village, Ogom Subcounty

# The Power of Voices: Strengthening Grassroots women's participation and benefit from Agri business value chains



**Susan Gamwino**  
Senior Program Officer, Orphans  
and Vulnerable Children

Small holder farmers continue to suffer huge losses arising from low productivity coupled with limited value addition. Value addition in agriculture is the process of transforming agricultural products into higher-value products.

This can be done through a variety of activities, such as processing, packaging, branding, and marketing. Value addition starts from the garden through proper harvesting, transportation, cleaning, proper drying, grinding, packaging and labeling

The Agricultural Sector continues to be the most important sector in Uganda; employing approximately 72% of the population and contributing about 32% to the GDP. For farmers, value-addition has a particular importance in that it offers higher market (NPA –PEC PAPER Scaling up Value Addition 2013.)

Productivity is limited by reliance on natural weather conditions and the still widespread use of traditional methods and equipment. A great number of SMEs lack capacity to process or add value in order to respond to market demand. Most agricultural production in Uganda is seasonal in nature due to total reliance on natural weather and limited application of irrigation technologies. Extension services in agriculture are generally lacking and where they do exist they are inadequate.

Weak value chains have failed to provide incentives to farmers to adapt to improved technologies

and pursue more commercial agriculture.

UCOBAC through the Fair for All project has been training farmers on value addition. The project seeks to enable grassroots women to adapt to new technology to add value to their produce so as to make profits. Women were particularly targeted under this project because they make up more than half of the agricultural labor force.

So far 300 small scale farmers have been trained in the use of appropriate technology to improve production and add value to cassava. They have also learnt how to package and brand their goods. This has in turn helped them reap big from their produce.

Women farmers in the villages of Buluguyi, Buduma, Bulesa, Iwemba and Muterere sub counties have adopted the use of cassava chippers for chopping the cassava into cassava flexes which are later sun dried, this process is quicker. They have learned how to make and package cassava chips, crisps and starch. They are using cassava flour to make pan cakes, doughnuts and baked cakes.

These trainings have witnessed a shift from subsistence to commercial farming. Farmers have also been economically empowered since they are making more profits from the agricultural produce through value addition.

The trainings have also enhanced post-harvest handling practices where women are now drying crops like cassava, coffee and rice on raised surfaces as opposed to the

ground. Using cassava chippers has enabled farmers to dry cassava in a much faster way helping them to keep up with market demand.

The women have also been equipped with basic information on manufacturing standards like; wearing hairnets and clean clothes, keeping their finger nails short and washing hands with soap before handling food items. This has improved food hygiene and reduced contamination.

More women are also realizing increased profits thanks to value addition.

"I have been wasting a lot of money to buy packed crisps and giving money to children to buy food items that I have in my garden which I can equally package myself. Thank you for UCOBAC for empowering me. I can also make crisps, make doughnuts and cakes for my children. I will save a lot of money and at the same time make more money," said a grassroots woman.

Whereas the Fair for All project has made significant impact, there is still need to support women to get simple equipment used in value addition.

Business enterprises also need to be registered and certified so as to be competitive and supply products beyond their communities.

There is also need for more awareness and training of Smallholder farmers on local level value addition services which they can exploit to join competitive markets. ■



# The power of Child participation

**W**orldwide, child participation is well thought to be a right in itself like any other human right. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that "every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. Article 13 provides for the right of every child to freely express their thoughts and opinions and to access appropriate information, as long as it is within the law.

As a signatory to the UNCRC, Uganda has put in place a number of legal and regulatory frameworks to advance Child Rights inclusive of meaningful Child Participation and these include, but not limited to; The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995) which recognizes the right to participation by all persons, The Local Government Act (Cap.243), the Children (Amendment) Act(Cap 59), National Child Policy, 2020 and the National Child Participation Strategy 2017.

However, despite the recognition of child participation as a right both locally and globally, it still remains a challenge in Uganda. Children are rarely given a platform to express their views, feelings and make contributions to decisions that affect their wellbeing at family, community and national levels. In addition, the few Child Participation initiatives in place are restricted in scope and their impact is not sufficiently documented.

Part of this problem stems from the unequal power relations between children and adults alongside inadequate knowledge of meaningful child participation, the unfair socio-cultural norms and the usage of English as opposed to local languages. As a consequence, this impedes children from sharing their ideas and feelings, lowers their



**Winnie Babirye**  
Assistant Project Officer, Orphans  
and Vulnerable Children

confidence, limits critical thinking and intrudes development.

It's upon this background that UCOBAC, under its Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) program area is promoting meaningful Child Participation through the "Child Development Project" that is being implemented in Bugiri district. Children are being enabled to represent their concerns through established Children Clubs in schools and the utilization of media spaces. So far, UCOBAC has extended its services to ten government aided schools from Bulesa, Buluguyi and Kapyanga sub-counties.

Under the Child Development Project, UCOBAC coordinates three quarterly, one-hour radio talk-shows on Eastern voice radio, where children hold discussions and engage the community on issues around their rights, challenges, and how they want parents and the community to support them. Under close guidance of a trained mentor, children select a topic of interest for discussion, and lead the program in Lusoga language. This approach has increased community awareness of

children's issues from the children's perspective.

UCOBAC is also supporting the formation and functionality of children's clubs (safe spaces) in all the ten government aided schools that it works with. This platform allows children to share, learn, play and carry out activities that benefit their schools as well as raising social issues that affect their wellbeing most especially around sexual and reproductive health with respect to their age and gender. Every club has a trained mentor that guides the children, provides them with information on matters that concern their lives so that they can make informed decisions, and listens to children's ideas and adopts their concerns for action. Children are also equipped with skills on how to make reusable sanitary towels, and engage in Child Protection and Participation related music, dance and drama.

Children especially adolescent girls are being empowered with life skills including, self-esteem and confidence to speak about their SRHR. The training of girls in Menstrual Health and hygiene has helped to fulfill the unmet demand for menstrual hygiene products, ended misconceptions and menstrual stigma thus stimulating school retention for the girl child.

The quality of learning and interaction among children and between children and mentors has been strengthened. Children are now open to their mentors and can freely seek guidance in case of any challenges at school, home and in the community.

It should therefore be noted that children are social actors with a unique perspective into their own reality. So, in order to make effective decisions on matters that affect children, their voices and experiences need to be captured in addition to those of adults.

Government and CSOs should strengthen the capacity of duty bearers at all levels on child rights and meaningful child participation.

Child-based institutions should document and share best practices on meaningful Child Participation to aid evidence-based interventions. ■

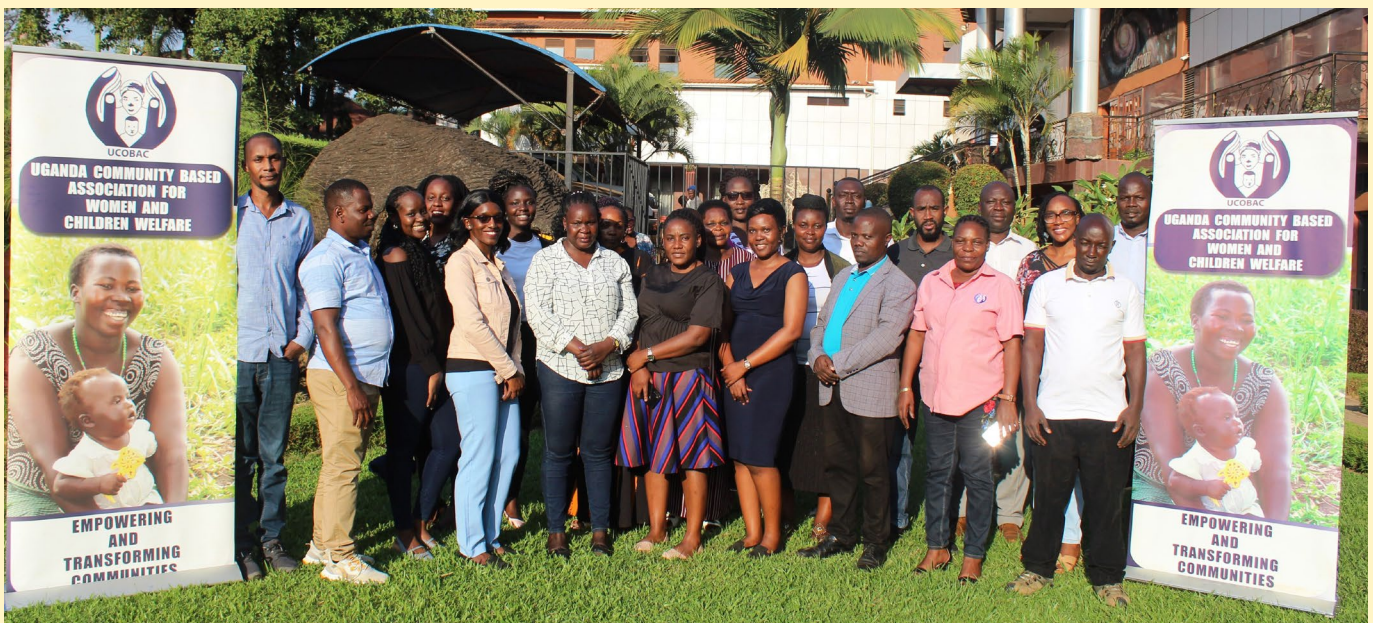
Right: A child expressing her views during the radio talk show on Eastern Voice radio in Bugiri district



Right: A Grassroot woman making her submission during a Grassroots Women Academy held at Pretoria Hotel in Mbale



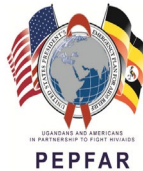
Below: Group photo of UCOBAC staff



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**NLC/UG**  
National Land Coalition Uganda  
"For People Centred Land Governance"

**WLM**  
WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS MOVEMENT



This is a publication of

Uganda Community Based Association for Women and Children Welfare (UCOBAC)

Plot 17 Robert Mugabe Road, Mbuya Zone 1  
P. O Box 75198, Kampala, Uganda

Email: [info@ucobac.org](mailto:info@ucobac.org)  
Facebook: [UcobacUganda](https://www.facebook.com/UcobacUganda)  
Twitter: [@Ucobac\\_](https://twitter.com/Ucobac_)

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