

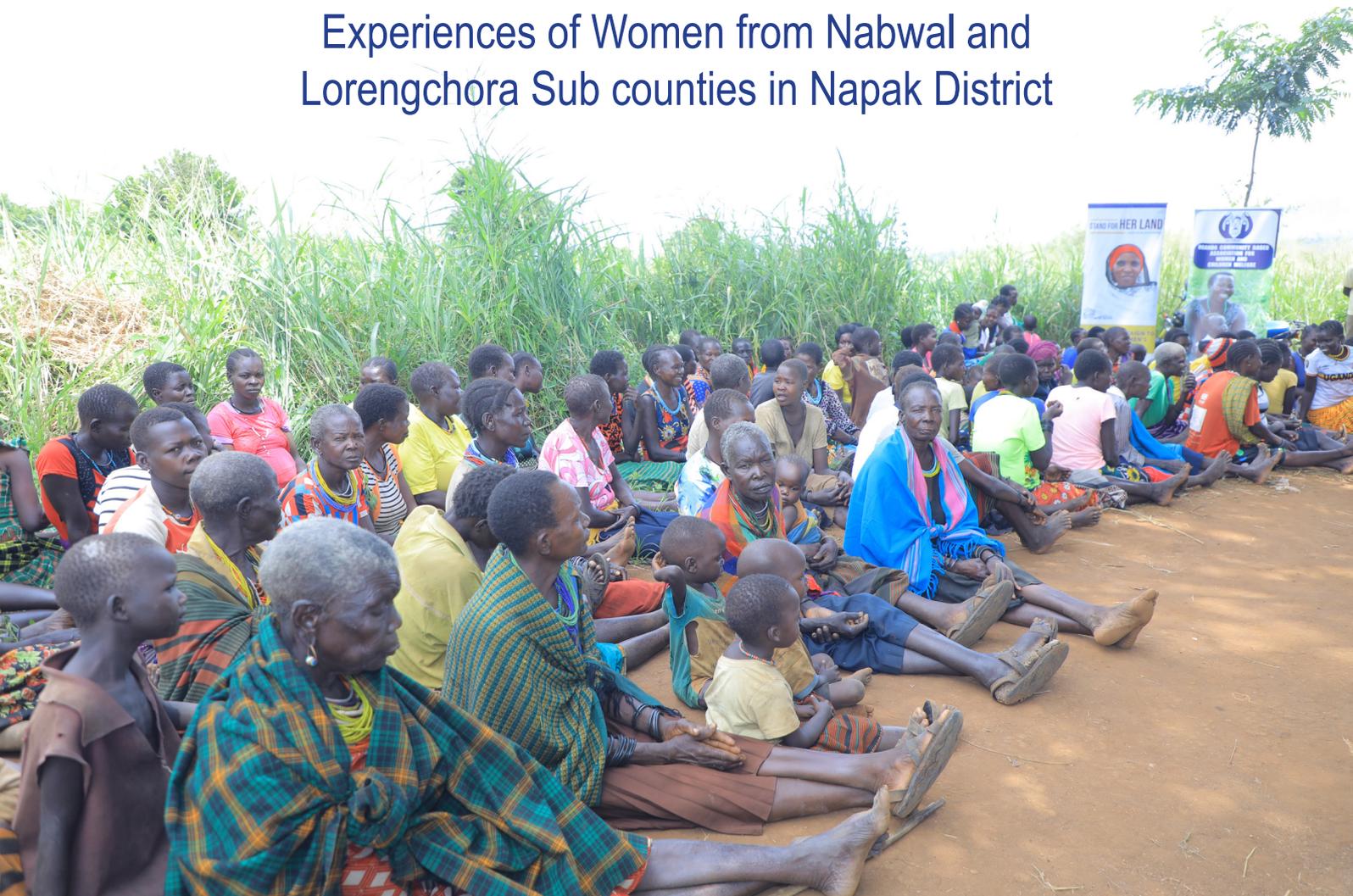
# STAND FOR HER LAND

HER RIGHTS. HER LAND. A BETTER FUTURE FOR ALL.

## ISSUE BRIEF

# Limitations to Women's land rights in Karamoja sub region

Experiences of Women from Nabwal and  
Lorengchora Sub counties in Napak District



Land ownership is a fundamental right for women in Uganda. Despite being the primary users of land and contributing the bulk of the agricultural labor force, women in Uganda own less than 30% of the land in their own right. While land is central to household livelihoods and well-being, women's access to, control over, and ownership of land remains limited. This is due to a combination of barriers, including socio-cultural norms, limitations in the implementation of legal frameworks, and economic challenges.

Over time, the government has made progress in enacting laws to support women's land rights. Notable among these are the Constitution of Uganda, the National Land Policy of 2013, the Land Act CAP 236 and the Succession Act CAP 268. These legal reforms recognize gender equality in land ownership outlaw discrimination and guarantee equitable access to land for all.

Land in Karamoja is under customary land tenure system, divided into communally owned land and individually owned land. According to the Land Act CAP 236, customary land tenure refers to "a system of land tenure regulated by customary rules and norms of the region where the land is located. Whereas communally owned land is restricted to use and access rights where everyone in the community can access and use the

resource as a collective/shared resource, the individually held customary land on the other hand is vested with families who hold the land in trust of their lineage. In this predominantly patriarchal society, governance and administration of land is vest with the men. The system position land as a privilege for men, accords women weak rights subjecting their access, ownership and control to their relationship with a man.

Traditionally, women in Karamoja are responsible for food production. This significant role has been greatly tested with the current land injustices from within families and external pressures coupled with the escalating conflicts in the region disrupting lives and pastoralism. Secure access to land for women is core at ensuring continuity of food production and wellbeing of families in the region.

In March 2024, the Stand for Her Land Campaign hosted a grassroots academy with 60 women from Nabwal and Lorengchora subcounties in Napak District to explore the experiences of women in accessing, owning and participation in decision making process on land in this region. A number of barriers that prevent them from enjoying their full bundle of rights on land were identified despite land being a prerequisite to the region's food security, improved livelihoods and the country's sustainable development.

27.02% OF  
WOMEN IN UGANDA  
WERE OWNING LAND BY  
JUNE 2023.

Source: Uganda National Land Information System (UgNLIS) data from the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development.

## Acknowledgement

This issue brief is a reflection of the voices and contribution of the women who participated the grassroots academy organised in Karamoja during the local to local dialogues held in Nabwal and Lorengchora subcounties, Napak district. We acknowledge the technical support extended by the UCOBAC staff in developing this issue brief.



Women pose for a group photo during a grassroots academy in Nabwal



Grassroots woman presenting issues affecting women in Nabwal

## Barriers to women's land rights

### 1 Limited voice, representation and participation in communal land management structures

In Karamoja, land allocation, management and resolution of disputes are a preserve for clan elders. This very influential and highly respected structure is male dominated excluding women from decisions pertaining land on which they have a right. This has been sustained by taboos on women's visitation of shrines. This exclusion from communal land management processes has left women in dire situations especially in cases where communal lands have been leased and they cannot access firewood, herbs or greens for their families. *"Traditionally decisions are made from the shrines and women are not allowed to attend, we have also grown up knowing that meetings are attended by only men,"* one woman said during the academy.

### 2 Harmful and Discriminatory Social and gender Norms

In Nabwal and Lorengchora, as in the rest of Karamoja, harmful social and cultural norms undermine women's rights to land and property. These cultural practices prioritize male ownership and inheritance, leaving women with limited access to critical resources. This not only restricts women's economic independence but also increases their vulnerability as they have little control over the assets necessary to support their families. Additionally, cultural norms often push women to remain silent in the face of domestic violence or abuse, as seeking help or speaking out is stigmatized, further perpetuating gender inequality.

### 3 Legal illiteracy

Despite the existence of policies and laws in Uganda that recognize women's land rights, these protections are not fully realized due to the limited understanding of legal provisions among women in the region. In Karamoja, where patriarchal norms dominate, women are often excluded from land governance processes, with men typically attending meetings and making decisions on behalf of their wives. This lack of direct participation in legal and land-related discussions leaves women uninformed about their legal entitlements, making it difficult for them to assert their rights or challenge discriminatory practices in land inheritance, ownership, or use.

### 4 Lack of proper land documentation

In Karamoja, land is primarily held under customary arrangements which remain largely undocumented. Meanwhile communal lands are registered under communal land association structures and even family land which is held by families are often not formally documented. The lack of formal land documentation creates significant challenges for women, especially in cases where they are widowed or face marital disputes, as it becomes increasingly difficult for them to assert their land rights.

### 5 Gender Based Violence

Women in Nabwal and Lorengchora subcounties continue to endure gender-based violence, including physical abuse, often stemming from disputes over land and property including livestock. Alcohol consumption among their spouses frequently exacerbates these

tensions, leading to impulsive and violent behavior that disproportionately impacts women. This violence not only causes physical harm but also contributes to emotional and psychological trauma further deepening the cycle of poverty and instability within families. Moreover, the fear of retaliation or further abuse often prevents women from seeking help, leaving them trapped in dangerous and abusive situations.

A fight nearly broke out between a man and his wife when the woman attempted to file a case at the legal aid desk we had set up during one of the local to local dialogues in Lorengchora to address emerging issues. The woman had accused her husband of dispossessing her of property and giving it to a co-wife.

## 6 High levels of poverty

Due to limited financial resources, many women in Nabwal and Lorengchora face significant economic hardships, making it difficult for them to purchase land which is essential for their livelihoods. Poverty also restricts their ability to seek justice because it is expensive, too technical and delays in the systems to provide redress results in high expenses which women do not have. They also face financial challenges navigating the land registration process leaving them vulnerable to land dispossession and exploitation.

## Recommendations

To address the injustices outlined above and empower women, the women of Napak District made the following recommendations to overcome the challenges they face:

1. Support registration of both family and communal land. In this case, attention to protection of all existing rights on these pieces of land should be prioritized and this an avenue to strengthen land tenure for women. This will grant women security and hence rights to inherit, control and make decisions about land use of this vital resource.
2. Increase and roll out education programs to raise awareness about the legal and policy frameworks on land, rights and responsibilities and the available justice structures that can be used by communities.
3. Establish Community Support Systems to Protect Women from Gender-Based Violence and Assist in Navigating Justice Mechanisms. Establishing community based support systems, such as legal assistance, safe spaces, and advocacy champions, will provide women with the resources and guidance needed to escape abusive situations and seek justice.
4. Collaborate with Traditional Leaders to Reform Harmful Cultural Practices and Promote Gender Equality: Traditional leaders, as custodians of culture and tradition play a significant role in whether harmful norms and practices persist or change. Engaging them to identify discriminatory practices that limit women from enjoying full bundle of rights on land is instrumental in encouraging communities to shift away from these harmful norms hence enabling women to fully exercise their land rights..
5. Working with Communities to Transform Harmful and Discriminatory Social and Gender Norms and Practices: This can be achieved through community mobilization and the use of champions for change. For example, UCOBAC runs community dialogues where they educate communities about land rights with a special focus on women's land rights as well as issues such as joint decision making and joint land registration. Additionally, UCOBAC works with community champions who serve as the first line of engagement within the community.
6. Create Opportunities for Women's Economic Empowerment to Alleviate Poverty and Increase Freedom. This includes access to training, credit, markets, and skill development in sectors such as agriculture, trade, and crafts. Strengthening women's economic position will enable them to provide for their families, gain financial independence, and exert more control over their lives. Economic empowerment also enhances women's bargaining power within households and communities, allowing them to challenge discriminatory practices and assert their rights.

## References

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