

# STAND FOR **HER LAND**

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## **FINANCING FOR WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS IN UGANDA: A REVIEW OF FUNDING TRENDS, GAPS AND FUTURE PRIORITIES**

## Executive Summary

This paper, developed by the Stand for Her Land Campaign Uganda (S4HL), provides an outlook of the funding landscape for Women's Land Rights (WLR) initiatives in Uganda.

It highlights key constraints in public sector financing and outlines priority areas that require sustained investment including; legal literacy, institutional strengthening and evidence generation. While acknowledging progress made in policy and legal reforms, the paper argues that without a deliberate shift towards explicit public financing for WLRs, the government risks undermining national development goals by leaving half of the population more vulnerable.

Finally, the paper offers practical recommendations for diversifying and strengthening funding mechanisms to advance Women's Land Rights in Uganda.

## 1.0. Background

Uganda has made substantial legislative progress in securing WLRs. In the Land Sector, key legal and policy frameworks, including the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, the Land Act Cap 236, the Land Policy 2013 and the Gender Strategy 2018 for the Land Policy, explicitly outlaw discriminatory cultural and customary practices related to land. These instruments enable women to own and transact on land, mandate spousal consent for family land transactions, and establish conditions for affirmative action in land governance.

As a result of these efforts, there's a notable increase in the number of women holding registered land. Data from the Uganda National Land Information shows an increase in women's land ownership rights from 118,303 in June 2019 to 226,811 in June 2023, representing a substantial increase of 27.02%. Furthermore, through the affirmative action strategies, there is an increase in women's representation in the various land management structures.

However, despite these advancements, implementation gaps persist and the work is far from complete. The Uganda Vision 2040 highlights that persistent gender inequality remains a salient constraint on Uganda's economy, with notable gender disparities in access to and control over productive resources like land.

## 2.0. Analysis of Public Sector Funding for WLRs

Despite calls and efforts for gender budgeting, an analysis of budget documents from the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD) reveals a persistent pattern of limited and unclear budget allocation to strategic women's land rights interventions. Information on specific budget allocations for WLRs remains unclear. This lack of specificity and limitations in budget allocation manifest in various ways, including but not limited to;

- ✔ The use of generalized terms like "gender mainstreaming" in fiscal documents complicates efforts to track financial resources specifically dedicated to advancing land rights for women and other marginalized groups.
- ✔ The lack of detailed and specific budget allocation to gender related interventions, despite the National Development Plans (NDP) requirement for integration of gender strategies across all programs.
- ✔ Lack of prioritization: In gender-focused Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), such as the Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development (MGLSD), funding allocated

for women's economic empowerment overlooks the facilitating role of secure land rights. The focus predominantly centers on women entrepreneurs who may not require land, while neglecting women farmers, who constitute a significant portion of the country's agricultural workforce.

- ✔ Limited investments in critical departments, such as the Directorate of Women's Affairs in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, which receives a mere 1% of the Ministry's budget, further highlighting the disparity in resource allocation.
- ✔ Persistent funding shortfalls. There has also been a notable disconnect between the approved budget allocations and actual releases to Ministry of Land, Housing and Urban Development. Between 2020 and 2024, budget shortfalls averaged 19.9% as illustrated in the table below.

**Table 1: Funding/ Financing Shortfalls (Approved Budget Vs. Corresponding Release) to the MLHD**

Year	Approved (Bn)	Released (Bn)	%age Shortfall
FY 2023/24	70.19	51.85	26.2
FY 2022/23	40.11	30.99	22.7
FY 2021/22	42.31	36.62	13.4
FY 2020/21	51.68	42.66	17.4

Source: MLHUD submission to the NPA for NDP IV, 2024

The detrimental impact of this public underfunding has largely been mitigated by out-of-budget financing from civil society and multinational development partners. These non-governmental funds have been channelled into crucial initiatives with WLR components, such as community mobilization, legal education, and land adjudication, leading to a significant increase in the percentage of women with land documents.

**Table 2: Comparing the Numbers of Land documents with Women's Names (2012 Vs. 2023)**

Output Indicators	2012	2023	% Change	Increase Times
1. No. of Titles (Men)	282,319	721,400	60.9	2.6
2. No. of Titles (Women)	95,525	243,818	60.8	2.6
3. No. of Titles (Co-owned)	110,095	281,522	60.9	2.6
6. No. Of LIPs (Women)	—	27,441	—	—

Source: NLP Evaluation Report, 2023

This data confirms that external financing has been essential in realizing gains, such as the 2.6-fold increase in registered land titles held by women between 2012 and 2023, effectively filling the resource gap left by insufficient government allocation.

### 3.0. Key areas requiring sustained funding/ investment

Women comprise over half of Uganda's agricultural workforce (76% of women vs. 62% of men engaged in farming). However, gender disparity persists, as many of these women are primarily involved in on-farm production activities, and yet they have limited or no control over the returns of their labor (UN Women, 2024). This is mainly due to their largely undefined relationship with the land they cultivate. Ultimately, this contributes to the persistent inability of many women to escape poverty. With women representing 51% of the total population (UBOS, 2024), securing their land rights is fundamental to achieving decision-making power and overcoming persistent poverty.

Sustained investment is urgently required in the following key areas:

#### a) Legal literacy and mindset change

Uganda's population remains substantial, but the heterogeneous nature of women and its general population has changed. The need for access to land and secure land rights is increasingly prevalent among younger persons, which calls for a rethinking of the discourse surrounding land rights. There is a need to broaden land rights conversations from just ownership to strengthen aspects of new innovative ways through which younger persons, including young women, can access and use land to sustain their livelihoods. This new generation of women does not necessarily require perpetual land ownership, but rather secure access to land that aligns with their ongoing production needs.

To facilitate this, they must be equipped with negotiation and literacy skills to navigate the complexities of conditional land access. Further still, there is need for substantial investments in mindset change regarding the perceptions and attitudes around land rights for women to ensure that gender equality efforts are sustained within the young generation.

Empowering women to navigate the land market should be a cornerstone of capacity-building efforts and the broader women's land rights movement. Despite years of universal primary and secondary education, many of these women continue to be vulnerable in terms of literacy, confidence, and communication. Additionally, secure, time-bound land access instruments that would be beneficial for such women are still lacking in Uganda's land policy and law. Furthermore, the desire to ground outcomes of the legal literacy campaigns requires a shift from large scale public campaigns and mass media to more personalized and interpersonal engagement, which will require huge investments.

#### b) Strengthening the functionality of the land administration institutions.

The functionality of specifically local land administration institutions requires both technical and financial strengthening. The establishment of institutions without investments in their functionality breeds corruption and robs communities of efficient and timely service delivery. Women's representation in statutory land management and administration institutions could be significantly improved to address ongoing disenfranchisement. It is equally important to prioritise funding for capacity strengthening of the lower-level land management structures to ensure their full and sustained functionality to guarantee timely land service delivery to communities.

#### c) Harnessing the role of cultural institutions

Achieving lasting changes in cultural norms requires a **long-term, sustained funding approach** that transcends short-term projects. Investment must be directed towards facilitating deep cultural shifts necessary to legitimize women's land rights in traditionally centralized communities like Buganda, Bunyoro, Toro, Acholi, Lango, Lugbara, Alur, Teso, and Karamoja. Customary authorities and institutions in these communities can be used to domesticate the various legal provisions that outlaw discrimination against women and girls. Further still, Investments should be put in documenting progressive cultural practices on ownership and control of land to inform programming and advocacy.

**d) Strengthening Evidence Base for Changes in WLRs:**

A robust evidence base is necessary to monitor and assess changes in women's land rights. Currently there is notable absence of course and impact studies and gender dis-aggregated data which makes it difficult to establish clear. Additionally, a significant data gap also exists regarding the contribution of secure women's land rights to bridging the employment gap, increasing income levels, food security, climate action and poverty eradication in the country.

Descriptive, non-correlational statistics provide a partial understanding and fail to capture the complexities of these dynamics. There is a pressing need to invest in comprehensive research to build a more robust and nuanced understanding of the impact of WLR interventions.

#### **4.0. Strategies for increasing and sustaining funding for women's land rights**

One notable approach to sustain financing gender equality is Gender-responsive budgeting within public finance, which identifies and allocates resources at various stages of the budgeting cycle to support land rights causes. However, it is important to note that in many countries, Gender-responsive budgeting initiatives have often been isolated and have not been fully integrated into broader public finance reforms. Therefore, given the volatility in the global funding landscape, the government and women's land rights advocates must adopt innovative strategies beyond isolated Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) to sustain financing for WLRs.

- a) Multi-sectoral approach:** Land tenure security is integral to development in agriculture, infrastructure, and peace. Promoting multi-agency and ministerial collaborations ensures that all major development programs and projects not just the MLHUD's allocate funds to facilitate land tenure security, especially for women.
- b) Leveraging civil society organizations and private sector partnerships:** Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) offer crucial expertise and funding support. Moreover, private sector collaborations can involve companies dedicating a percentage of sales to women's economic empowerment initiatives that include a land rights component, creating mutual benefits.
- c) Special grants for women's group and Community-Based Organizations-** Private donors and philanthropists should establish simple grants and endowments for local women's groups and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). These groups, often the legacy of phased-out NGO projects, require basic facilitation (e.g., transport costs) to sustain their critical, continuous engagements on land tenure issues.
- d) Community financing mechanisms:** It is strategic to establish and strengthen systems that offer opportunities for community owned financing. For example, land registration processes and systems can generate local revenue which can be channeled back into the system to support land service delivery and finance processes that advance women's land rights. It is therefore important that government puts in place clear, efficient, transparent, affordable and easy to use systems and processes to tap into that opportunity.

## **CONCLUSION**

Addressing land tenure challenges, particularly for women, is a cornerstone for unlocking Uganda's full development potential. While significant progress has been made through non-governmental financing, sustainable progress requires funding prioritization by the government to empower agencies and ensure effective service delivery. Moving forward, the government must adopt innovative funding strategies and leverage strong partnerships to secure the resources necessary to invest in women's land rights initiatives for lasting national impact.

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This publication is by the Stand for Her Land Campaign Uganda

**Technical writers:**

Mr. Herbert Kamusiime and Ms. Kajumba Christine  
Both Researchers at Associates Research Trust - Uganda

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 Standforherland Uganda  
 @Stand4herlandUg