ABSTRACT

Although Uganda has a progressive and non-discriminatory legal system, women face barriers to accessing, owning, or exercising control over land due to restrictive social and customary practices that continue to override statutory laws. Many Ugandans, especially women, have insecure land tenure, which increases their vulnerability, poverty, hunger, and food insecurity. Secure land rights strengthen livelihoods by providing land for housing and farming for food and nutrition security.
COMPETENCIES

AREAS

PEOPLE-CENTRED LAND GOVERNANCE FOR EQUITABLE AND JUST SOCIETIES

SKILLS

ADVOCACY AND CAMPAIGNING
PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT
RESEARCH AND TRAINING
KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

BACKGROUND

Land is both a productive and cultural resource with socio-historical importance to the community, reinforcing status and identity. However, East African women's land and property rights are often insecure because of conflicting statutory and customary laws, non-enforcement of laws, and discriminatory beliefs and practices within households and communities. When wives and daughters are excluded from land ownership upon divorce or demise of men in the families, relatives or neighbours often grab land and property, leaving the women landless. Resultantly, women often depend on men for their care and livelihoods.

In addressing the knowledge gaps about women’s land rights among men and women, UCOBAC initiated a course titled Securing Your Family’s Future (SYFF) - Transforming peer norms around Women’s Land Rights. The course programme supports communities in interrogating deeply embedded social norms and gender stereotypes that discriminate against women in land and property rights. The course further supports individuals, families, and communities to establish new social norms by increasing women’s access, use, ownership, control, and decision-making power regarding land. Finally, the course addresses five actions essential for securing land rights. These actions include joint decision-making on land, the formalisation of marriages, co-registration and registration of land, writing wills and women’s participation in land administrative structures.

THE CHALLENGE

In communities where patriarchal norms are firmly entrenched, men dominate the land-related decision-making processes in households and communities. Rural women seeking remedies for land rights violations often do not get solutions from male-dominated land governance and customary institutions.

Most women seek assistance from traditional institutions either because they are the appropriate platforms or because of the social and financial costs of the formal legal system. Yet customary law is often interpreted in a gender-discriminatory manner.

Future (SYFF) - Transforming peer norms around Women’s Land Rights. The course programme supports communities in interrogating deeply embedded social norms and gender stereotypes that discriminate against women in land and property rights. The course further supports individuals, families, and communities to establish new social norms by increasing women’s access, use, ownership, control, and decision-making power regarding land. Finally, the course addresses five actions essential for securing land rights. These actions include joint decision-making on land, the formalisation of marriages, co-registration and registration of land, writing wills and women’s participation in land administrative structures.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGE

Engaging men as direct beneficiaries of women’s land rights strengthened women’s land tenure rights. It minimised resistance to the registration and protection of women’s land tenure by immediate relatives, including husbands, brothers, and other relatives.

Further, working with women empowers them to assert themselves, challenge patriarchal norms, break gender stereotypes and protect their land rights.

MOVING TOWARDS PEOPLE-CENTRED LAND GOVERNANCE

Through the SYFF intervention, UCOBAC documented several success stories illustrating social changes, including changes in land utilisation, allocation practices, and gender roles of course beneficiaries. For example, one beneficiary of the pilot project decided to register his wife as a joint owner of their land. He took the initiative to request the local council chairperson to register his wife as a joint owner of their land. He also allocated a plot of land for farming vegetables and legumes to her.

Another beneficiary of the rollout programme co-registered his newly acquired land in his and his wife’s names. Joint land registration strengthens the rights of married women jointly registered as owners, especially because women can be excluded from legal land ownership by their spouses if unregistered. Another beneficiary under the rollout programme, a polygamous man married to three wives with eleven children, wrote a will to protect the land rights of his family upon his demise.
CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT
In developing a theory of change, UCOBAC first identified norms that impacted women's land rights negatively and reframed them as equitable norms. The social norms transformation team developed three curricula - SYFF Men, SYFF Women and SYFF Couples. They also used behavioural and educational theories such as the ecological theory and social norms change processes to inform the curriculum and design interventions. The curricula were then pre-tested in the SYFF Men and SYFF Women pilot programmes. The SYFF curricula are interactive and group-friendly sessions lasting about two and a half hours.

SELECTING AND TRAINING COURSE FACILITATORS
UCOBAC engaged community members to participate voluntarily in the social norms transformation programme as community leaders. First, UCOBAC conducted a training of trainers that brought together staff to train the facilitators on leading the SYFF sessions. Specifically, community facilitators (grassroots men and women of the community) were trained on the curriculum content and on navigating gender sensitivities. UCOBAC trained 42 male facilitators and 42 female facilitators. Male facilitators lead men's courses, while females lead women's courses.

IDENTIFYING AND BRIEFING COURSE PARTICIPANTS
UCOBAC identified course participants of up to 15 people at the village level with the help of community leaders and course facilitators. The participants committed to attending the course sessions regularly to learn from the programme. Soon after, UCOBAC organised a briefing meeting for each group to discuss the project goals, objectives, and participant expectations.

PROGRAMME EVALUATION THROUGH BASELINE, MIDLINE AND ENDLINE SURVEYS
Collecting baseline, midline and endline data assists in setting programme targets, evaluating the performance of the key areas in the programme and quantifying the programme results. First, UCOBAC identified practices and topics of interest in the study, including land allocation and ownership, writing wills, registering marriages and joint decision-making on land in families.

UCOBAC then conducted a baseline survey establishing the status of land rights before the programme intervention. The baseline findings showed that although most men theoretically support women's land ownership upon their demise, most men do not support co-ownership of customary land as they view women as ill-suited to make land-related decisions. Instead, they preferred joint ownership of land purchased together. However, most men who own land jointly with their wives do not have formal documentation. Additionally, few men wrote wills because of superstitious beliefs equating it to the end of their lives. Instead, they prefer waiting for their children to grow to determine an heir.

UCOBAC also conducted a midline evaluation six months later to determine the intermediate changes in accepted norms, including documenting positive stories from course beneficiaries. Finally, UCOBAC engaged the respondents in an endline evaluation to ascertain changes after one year. The endline evaluation of the SYFF course for men reported that the intervention changed norms and demystified myths on joint land ownership, will writing and land-related decision-making. UCOBAC documented the most impactful change stories from the pilot programme with the support of the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW).

COMMUNITY DIALOGUE SESSIONS FOR MEN AND WOMEN
Male participants attended six sessions under the SYFF Men course, while women attended eight sessions under the SYFF Women course. Trained community facilitators led the dialogue sessions under the supervision and support of project staff. UCOBAC has worked with 998 male and 1085 female participants under the programme.
LESSONS LEARNED

4 During the COVID-19 lockdowns, programme delivery modalities changed to meet health and safety regulations and cater for unforeseen events such as bereavement. As a result, UCOBAC learned the importance of flexibility in times of uncertainty.

5 It is challenging to retain men for behavioural change projects. It is essential to include economic empowerment activities to capture their interest.

FIND OUT MORE


KEY FACTORS
OF SUCCESS FOR REPLICABILITY AND ADAPTABILITY PURPOSES

1 Focusing on households as the basic units of change.
UCOBAC engaged both husbands and wives to ensure complete household engagement on the importance of women’s land rights.

2 Working in small groups.
UCOBAC found smaller groups more manageable and straightforward to monitor and follow up. Small groups also build consistency and the necessary rapport for mindset change.

3 Developing a curriculum.
Working with a set curriculum ensures uniform engagements with the programme participants. Additionally, a curriculum sets measurable outcomes for tracking progress throughout the year.