



Harnessing Evidence and Rights for Women's Voices
(HER VOICE)

Malkia Africa Network

Wakiso District, Entebbe

Kamuli District, Bunangwe Ward

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ABOUT MALKIA AFRICA NETWORK

Malkia Africa Network is a women-centered think tank dedicated to advancing the rights, opportunities, and voices of African women. The organization believes that when women are empowered with knowledge, resources, and freedom, they have the power to transform their lives, their communities, and the continent at large. Through research, advocacy, and capacity-building programs, Malkia Africa works to equip women with the tools and confidence needed to participate meaningfully in economic, political, and social life.

Rooted in the principles of individual liberty, equality, and justice, Malkia Africa seeks to bridge the knowledge gap in women's rights and dismantle systemic barriers that limit women's potential. By promoting property rights, economic participation, and personal freedoms, the organization is helping to cultivate a generation of women who can shape policies, influence institutions, and drive sustainable development across Africa.

Vision

An empowered generation of African women influencing policies, economies, and cultures for a free, fair, and prosperous Africa.

Mission

To bridge the knowledge gap in women's rights and empower women to influence laws, economies, and societies through research, capacity building, and advocacy.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This baseline survey was conducted by Malkia Africa Network with funding from Atlas Network. Its purpose was to deepen understanding of women's experiences, awareness, and perceptions of property and economic rights, including land ownership, control over income, livelihoods, and participation in household and community decision-making. The findings are intended to generate evidence that can guide targeted advocacy and practical interventions to strengthen rights protection, expand women's access to resources, and increase their decision-making power in Uganda (World Bank, 2026).

The study used a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were collected through a structured, closed-ended questionnaire, while qualitative insights were gathered through key informant interviews and secondary data analysis. All data were carefully cleaned, sorted, and analyzed to ensure reliability.

The study findings show the following:

1. **Limited Practical Legal Knowledge**

Although many women are generally aware that they have land rights, their understanding of legal procedures remains weak. In both Entebbe and Bunangwe, many respondents could not identify specific laws or explain the formal processes for land registration and inheritance. This gap between general awareness and practical legal knowledge limits women's ability to claim and defend their rights effectively.

2. **Land-Related Disputes and Insecurity**

Land-related conflict remains a major barrier. In Entebbe, about one-third of respondents reported experiencing land disputes, while in Bunangwe the proportion was even higher. Common disputes included inheritance conflicts, boundary disputes, and denial of ownership rights by male relatives. These conflicts create fear and uncertainty, discouraging women from asserting their rights.

3. Weak Economic and Decision-Making Autonomy

Limited financial independence also restricts women's access to their rights. In Bunangwe, only a small proportion of women reported making independent decisions, and many concealed financial transactions out of fear of household conflict. In Entebbe, although more women had some degree of autonomy, many still depended on joint or male-controlled decision-making. This weakens women's bargaining power in both land and financial matters.

4. Low Levels of Formal Land Ownership

A major structural barrier is the very low rate of land registration in women's names. In Entebbe, formal ownership remains extremely limited, while in Bunangwe, most women access land through customary arrangements without legal documentation. The absence of formal titles weakens tenure security and increases vulnerability to dispossession.

5. Cultural and Gender Norms

Deeply rooted cultural beliefs continue to limit women's access to land and economic rights. In Entebbe, social perceptions of women as subordinates discourage them from challenging unequal land ownership structures. In Bunangwe, male dominance in inheritance and household decision-making further reinforces inequality. These norms remain powerful barriers even where legal rights formally exist.

6. Dependence on Informal Tenure Systems

In Bunangwe, most women access land through customary or family-based arrangements rather than formal registration. This informality creates insecurity because rights are not legally protected and can easily be challenged or withdrawn, especially during family disputes or changes in marital status.

7. Gap Between Awareness and Empowerment Outcomes

Even where awareness of land rights is relatively high, particularly in Bunangwe, this does not automatically translate into ownership, documentation, or decision-making power. This disconnect shows that knowledge alone is not enough without legal, economic, and institutional support.

Recommendations

The findings point to important policy implications. By highlighting the gap between legal protections and women's everyday experiences, the study provides practical evidence for policymakers on where reforms and targeted interventions are most urgently needed. The research suggests several priority policy actions:

a) Streamlining land registration procedures to make them more affordable and accessible for women, including the use of mobile registration services in rural areas.

Limited access to education and information remains a major barrier to women understanding and claiming their rights. Many women do not know what rights they have or how to assert them. There is a need for civic education and legal literacy campaigns that are inclusive of local languages and designed to help women better understand and interpret their rights.

b) Allocating dedicated public funding for free legal aid clinics to support women in land and property disputes

Many women struggle to access legal aid because of the high costs, technical procedures, and delays within the legal system. Establishing free legal clinics and support programs would make it easier for women to pursue and defend their rights.

c) Economic empowerment

Financially disadvantaged women often cannot afford legal services or buy land in their own names, forcing them to rely on insecure secondary access arrangements. Creating financial pools and skill-building programs can help women focus on long-term security and strengthen their bargaining power. These financial pools could take the form of women-led savings and loan groups, where members contribute regularly and access rotating credit for land acquisition or legal costs. Skill-building programs could include modular training in agribusiness, financial literacy, and rights awareness, delivered through local workshops. Implementation should involve partnerships between district women's departments, NGOs such as FIDA Uganda or the Women's Microfinance Initiative, and community development offices to ensure sustainability, accountability, and effective outreach.

d) Mandating a minimum gender quota of at least one-third women on all district and sub-county land boards.

These measures can strengthen the implementation of existing laws, inform policy amendments that address practical barriers, and ensure that women's voices are better reflected in policy discussions.

To move these actions forward, the following ministries and agencies are best placed to take the lead:

- The Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development should oversee the implementation of gender quotas on land boards and the streamlining of land registration processes, including piloting mobile registration services.
- The Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs should lead on the allocation of public funding for free legal aid clinics, with initial establishment targeted.
- The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development should coordinate legal literacy campaigns in partnership with civil society organizations and community structures, with language-inclusive programs rolled out.

By clearly assigning responsibilities and outlining a practical timeline, policymakers and stakeholders can better visualize how progress can be achieved. Ultimately, this evidence can help government, civil society, and development partners strengthen women's property and economic rights at both local and national levels.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND.

2.1 Background of the Study

Land Rights

In Uganda, women's property and economic rights are supported by a progressive legal framework that, in principle, overrides discriminatory traditions. The 1998 Uganda Land Act explicitly gives women the right to own, occupy, and use land. Key protections include Section 38A, which guarantees a spouse's security of occupancy on family land, and Sections 39 and 40, which require prior written spousal consent before any sale, mortgage, or transfer of family property can take place. Although women make up roughly 70% of the agricultural workforce, their ownership of registered land remains significantly lower, estimated at only 20%, largely because patriarchal systems continue to favor male lineage in succession (Byaruhanga, 2025).

The law also provides for women's representation in land governance. Section 47(4) requires female membership on the Uganda Land Commission, while Sections 57(3) and 65(2) require that at least one-third of District Land Boards and at least one member of Land Committees be women.

Despite these protections, women still face a serious implementation gap. While Section 27 of the Land Act nullifies discriminatory customary decisions, the reality on the ground often reflects an informal system in which land is still treated as an exclusively male inheritance. Women are frequently reduced to insecure user rights that can disappear upon the death of a husband or father, leaving widows and daughters especially vulnerable to land grabbing and forced eviction by male relatives. This dispossession is worsened by legal illiteracy, as many women are unaware that their consent is legally required under Section 39. At the same time, the

high cost of justice, including legal fees and distance to administrative centers, continues to limit access to legal aid and silence women's claims. Social pressures, including the fear of domestic violence or public shame, also force many women to remain silent even when their rights are clearly violated. The result is a cycle of dependency, insecurity, and invisibility.

Bridging this gap requires a multi-sectoral response. Organizations such as FIDA Uganda and the Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) provide legal aid and coordinate collective action against systemic inequalities. Initiatives such as the Stand for Her Land (S4HL) Campaign and the Land and Equity Movement in Uganda (LEMU) engage directly with traditional leaders to reconcile customary practices with statutory law. Other groups, including LACWADO and ARUWE, focus on rural empowerment by helping women secure Certificates of Customary Ownership and resist land grabbing. These organizations play a critical role in turning legal protections into lived realities.

2.2 Economic Rights

Economic rights in Uganda are a fundamental part of human dignity and national development. Yet the data continues to show a persistent implementation gap. As of 2026, Ugandan laws provide women with only 64% of the legal rights afforded to men, and only 56% of the systems needed to support equal opportunity laws are actually in place (World Bank, 2026). Women and girls also carry three times as much unpaid care work as men (UBOS/Ministry of Finance, 2026). This limits women's entry into formal employment and often pushes girls out of school, reinforcing a cycle of intergenerational poverty.

Addressing these inequalities requires a shift in perspective: women must be recognized not as passive beneficiaries, but as key drivers of the economy. Advocacy by UWONET emphasizes the importance of helping women move from subsistence farming into agribusiness as a path to meaningful economic empowerment in Uganda's largely agricultural economy (UWONET, 2023). This aligns with Articles 21 and 33 of the Constitution, which guarantee equality and require the state to promote women's welfare and empowerment. It is also supported by Objective 16 of the National Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy, which calls for equitable development and access to resources. Still, major gaps remain in implementation and public awareness, limiting the extent to which these guarantees translate into real economic opportunity.

At the same time, the demolition of shops and small businesses in several urban centers has raised concerns about the protection of economic rights, especially for informal traders, many of whom are widows, single mothers, and unemployed youth. Efforts to restore trade order have in some cases resulted in widespread destruction of livelihoods, leaving traders with heavy financial losses and damaged assets. Many affected traders reported inadequate notice, limited consultation, and no viable relocation alternatives, highlighting the marginalization of informal workers within policy frameworks and the tension between urban planning objectives and constitutional obligations to protect livelihoods (AllAfrica, 2026).

As a women-centered think tank, Malkia Africa Network, through the HER VOICE project, seeks to complement these existing efforts by addressing gaps in evidence-based storytelling and grassroots capacity. This research is important because it provides data-driven advocacy that can influence policy and strengthen the accountability of land management bodies. By combining research with storytelling and community engagement, the project helps amplify women's voices and turn individual struggles into a shared call for reform.

Government participation will be essential for scaling up and sustaining such efforts. The Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development should lead on land registration, administrative reform, and gender-responsive land governance. The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development should coordinate legal literacy programs and community partnerships. The Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs should strengthen access to legal aid and oversee enforcement of women's land and property rights, including dispute resolution and protection against forced eviction. The evidence generated by HER VOICE can help these institutions prioritize and accelerate meaningful reforms.

To sustain progress and strengthen accountability, a monitoring and evaluation framework should be established across responsible ministries. This framework should include annual reporting on key indicators such as the number of women with registered land titles, the number and use of legal aid clinics, participation in legal literacy programs, and women's representation in land governance bodies. It should also include independent audits, regular reviews, public progress dashboards, and mid-term and end-of-cycle evaluations that incorporate feedback from women beneficiaries and grassroots groups. These steps would help ensure transparency, identify challenges early, and demonstrate commitment to tangible change.

Ultimately, by working more closely with established actors such as FIDA and S4HL, HER VOICE seeks to bridge the gap between law and practice and help make secure land tenure a lasting foundation for women's economic empowerment.

3. PURPOSE OF THE BASELINE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to analyze, using evidence-based data, the extent to which women perceive, understand, and exercise their economic and property rights across different areas of their lives.

Through survey data and one-on-one interviews, the study examines women's level of awareness and their practical engagement with these rights. The findings are intended to inform targeted interventions such as capacity-building workshops, storytelling hubs, and community outreach initiatives that address knowledge gaps and strengthen women's ability to claim and exercise their rights.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

- Assess women's access to legal and financial information.
- Evaluate their level of awareness of economic and property rights.
- Identify the main barriers that prevent women from claiming and exercising these rights.

3.2 Research Objectives

To achieve these aims, the study is guided by the following questions:

- Which traditional, cultural, and religious norms influence women's access to land and property?
- To what extent do women enjoy equal economic and property rights regardless of marital or civil status?
- What measures currently exist to protect women against forced evictions?

- How aware are women of their economic and property rights?
- What are the main sources of information women rely on for legal and financial knowledge?
- What barriers prevent women from exercising their economic and property rights?
- What examples exist of government or civil society initiatives that have successfully promoted or protected women's land and economic rights?

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Study Design

The study employed a triangulated mixed-methods research design to build a fuller understanding of the socio-legal environment affecting women in Uganda. By combining numerical data, lived experiences, and legal analysis, the study captures both the scale of rights violations and the social and cultural factors that sustain them.

To strengthen the credibility of the findings, the research was approached through three analytical lenses:

The Quantitative Lens (the “what”)

- Tool: Structured questionnaire surveys administered to about 150 participants.
- Goal: To identify statistical trends and patterns.

The Qualitative Lens (the “why”)

- Tool: Key informant interviews and open-ended feedback.
- Goal: To understand the human realities behind the implementation gap.

The Secondary/Legal Lens (the “should”)

- Tool: Secondary analysis of the 1998 Uganda Land Act and related materials.
- Goal: To compare legal protections with women's lived experiences.

4.2 Study Area

4.2.1 Entebbe Municipality

The study was conducted in Wakiso District, specifically Entebbe Municipality in Central Uganda. This area combines urban and peri-urban settings, making it useful for exploring a range of experiences related to land and economic rights.

District overview

- **Location:** Entebbe is located on a peninsula in Lake Victoria, approximately 37 kilometers southwest of Kampala.
- **Administrative context:** It is part of Wakiso District and hosts Uganda's international airport and major government installations, making it strategically and economically significant.

Reasons for selection

1. The area has a diverse mix of Mailo, freehold, and leasehold land systems, along with residual customary practices.
2. Its proximity to Kampala and the airport creates high commercial pressure, increasing the risks of land grabbing and forced evictions.
3. Its urban and peri-urban population offers insight into the experiences of both wage earners and those who depend on insecure user rights for survival.

4.2.2 BUNANGWE WARD

The second study site was Bunangwe Ward in Kamuli District, Eastern Uganda. This area is predominantly rural, making it suitable for understanding the experiences of women engaged in agriculture and informal trade.

District overview

- **Location:** Kamuli District lies about 140 kilometers northeast of Kampala in the Busoga subregion. Bunangwe Ward is largely agrarian, with dispersed rural settlements.

- **Administrative context:** Kamuli operates under a decentralized local government system in which sub-counties and wards play important roles in service delivery. Agriculture dominates the local economy, while formal employment and industrial activity remain limited.

Reasons for selection

1. The area's dependence on subsistence farming makes it highly relevant for studying women's land and economic rights.
2. Access to formal banking and credit is limited, making it useful for examining financing barriers faced by rural women.
3. The area is characterized mainly by customary land tenure, which often lacks formal documentation and therefore increases insecurity for widows and daughters.
4. As a typical rural setting in Eastern Uganda, Bunangwe reflects the realities of communities dependent on subsistence agriculture and informal trade.

4.3 Target Population

The study focused on a broad group of stakeholders to capture both women's lived experiences and the institutional barriers they face.

Primary participants included vulnerable groups such as:

- Women in peri-urban communities, who often navigate rising land values and insecure customary tenure.
- Widows, whose user rights frequently disappear after the death of a spouse.
- Women in informal settlements, who often face extreme insecurity and limited access to legal aid.

Secondary participants included key informants and local leaders, such as:

- Local and community leaders, who provided insight into how traditional and religious norms shape women's access to land.

- Institutional informants, including community paralegals, who highlighted barriers such as the high cost of justice and the social pressures that silence women's claims.

4.4 Sampling Method

The study used a multi-tiered sampling strategy designed to ensure both statistical relevance and depth of narrative insight.

- **Purposive sampling:** Used to select widows and women in informal settlements in order to capture the most severe forms of rights violations.
- **Snowball sampling:** Used to reach women who may have been reluctant to speak because of fear or stigma.
- **Random sampling:** Applied within rural communities to gather a broader picture of awareness levels.

4.5 Sample Size

The analysis was based on data from 300 women: 150 from a rural community in Eastern Uganda and 150 from an urban community in Central Uganda. This distinction was important for comparing different socio-economic and geographic realities, especially in relation to access to services, opportunities, and resources. Key informant interviews with community paralegals, leaders, and religious figures added further context.

4.6 Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through in-person surveys using a questionnaire that covered awareness and experiences related to land ownership and broader economic rights. Key informant interviews with community paralegals and local leaders provided additional insight into land governance, legal processes, and protection mechanisms. Focus group discussions also explored community land dispute resolution processes and the ways these conflicts affect livelihoods and economic rights.

4.7 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using charts and graphs to identify patterns and trends. Qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis, which made it possible to identify and interpret recurring themes and insights.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

All participants in the in-person surveys gave informed consent before taking part, and voluntary participation was emphasized throughout. In more sensitive cases, strict confidentiality was maintained, with no names or identifying details recorded. Some interviews were conducted verbally only, and photographs were not taken where participants expressed discomfort. These measures helped protect privacy, ensure ethical compliance, and create a safe environment for honest responses.

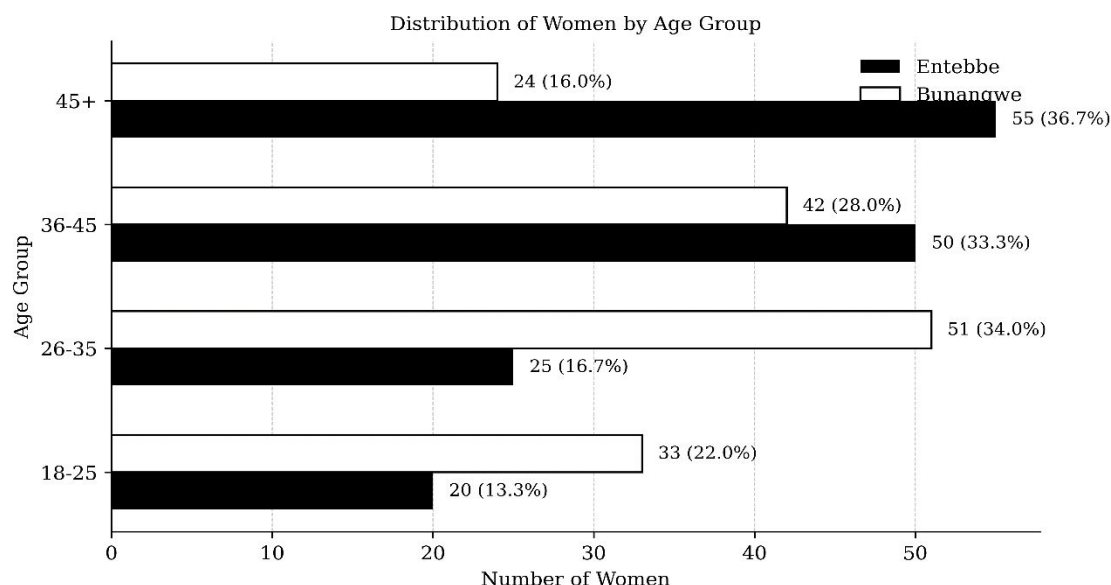
5. FINDINGS / RESULTS

The findings from Bunangwe show that while awareness of land rights is relatively high, practical understanding of the legal steps required to claim and secure those rights remains limited. Land-related conflicts are common, especially among widowed and divorced women, who face greater vulnerability. The results also show a strong relationship between economic empowerment and decision-making autonomy, with women involved in small businesses reporting higher levels of independence. However, formal land registration among women remains low, mainly because of cultural norms, financial limitations, and weak access to legal support.

5.1 Demographic Information

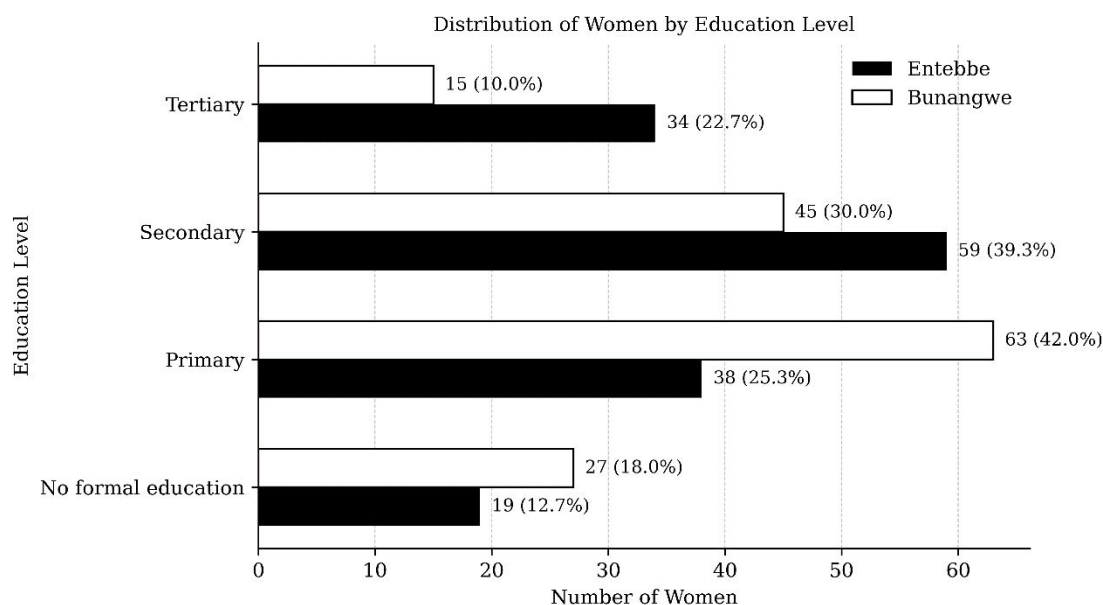
5.1.1 Age Group

Entebbe has an older population profile, with the largest age group being 45 and above (36.7%), followed by 36–45 (33.3%). Bunangwe has a younger demographic, with the largest share in the 26–35 age group (34.0%), followed by 36–45 (28.0%) and 18–25 (22.0%). The older population in Entebbe may suggest greater stability and possibly more accumulated assets, while Bunangwe’s younger population may indicate emerging economic activity but also greater vulnerability.



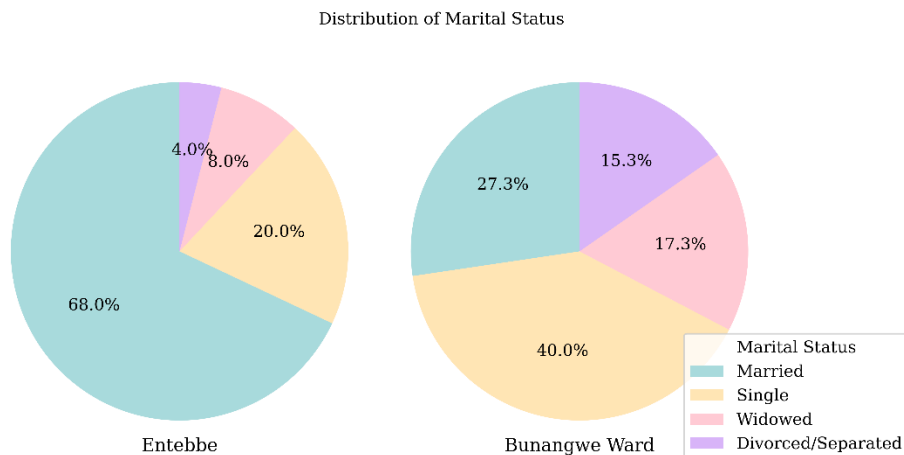
5.1.2 Education Level

Entebbe shows higher levels of educational attainment, with more women having secondary (39.3%) and tertiary (22.7%) education compared to Bunangwe. In Bunangwe, most women had primary education (42.0%) or secondary education (30.0%), and only a small proportion had reached the tertiary level (10.0%). Bunangwe also had a higher proportion of women with no formal education (18.0%) compared to Entebbe (12.7%), indicating a significant educational gap between the two areas.



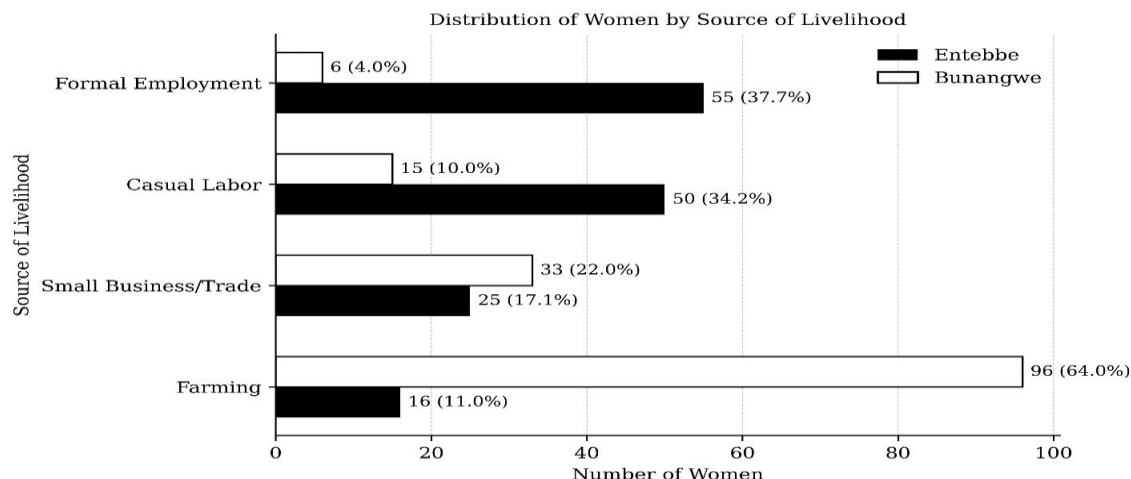
5.1.3 Marital Status

Entebbe's population was predominantly married, at about 68%, while Bunangwe showed a more varied marital profile, including a large proportion of single women and higher numbers of widowed and separated women. This suggests greater vulnerability and a wider diversity of household structures in Bunangwe.

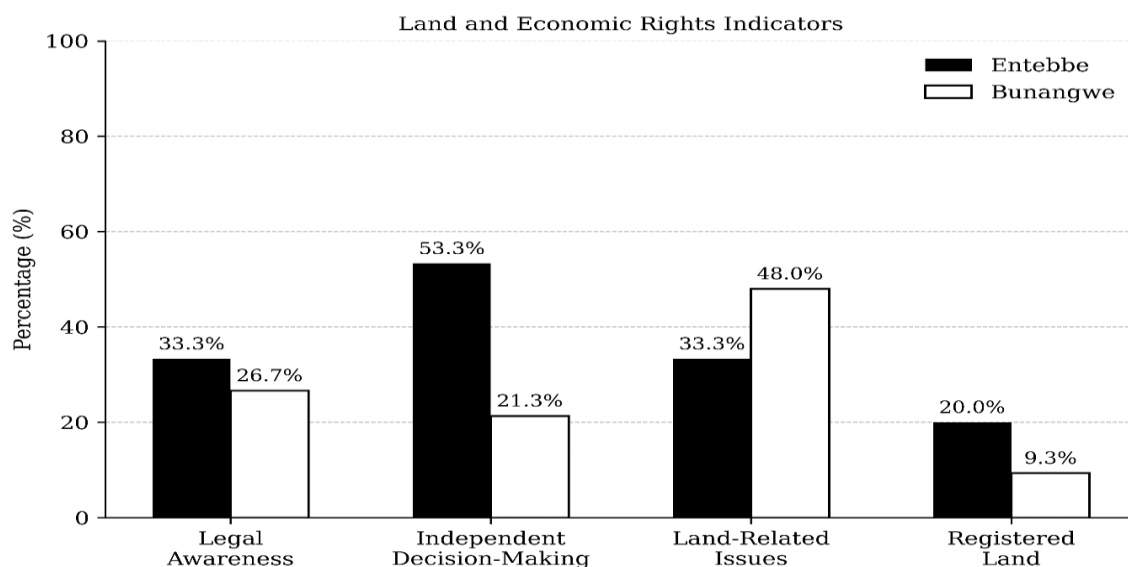


5.1.4 Occupation

In Bunangwe, farming was the main source of livelihood, accounting for 64% of respondents, followed by small business or trade (22%). Casual labor (10%) and formal employment (4%) remained limited, reflecting a largely rural, agriculture-based economy. By contrast, Entebbe had a more diversified livelihood structure, with formal employment (37.7%) and casual labor (34.2%) accounting for the largest shares, followed by small business (17.1%) and farming (11%). This reflects broader access to urban economic opportunities and less dependence on agriculture.



5.2 Awareness of Economic and Property Rights



5.2.1 ENTEBBE

1. Awareness of land rights

Although 50 respondents (33.3%) reported being aware of land rights, many could not cite specific land or economic laws or policies. This suggests that awareness is often general rather than practical, limiting women's ability to protect their rights effectively. The findings point to a need for stronger information dissemination and targeted legal literacy programs, especially around freehold and leasehold systems, which are common in Entebbe.

One respondent explained:

“Women know they have rights, but have no say due to cultural norms, and this has affected them greatly because when they face such cases, they fail to mention laws that concern a particular offense, and sometimes are not listened to by police officers when they report their cases. You say women have rights, but they stay in homes being mistreated by men and have no voice.”

2. Experience of land-related issues

Fifty out of 150 women, or about 33.3%, reported experiencing land-related problems. This points to persistent vulnerability and tenure insecurity, especially within families and communities. Deeply rooted beliefs that women are inferior create fear and prevent many from seeking justice or asserting their rights.

3. Independent decision-making (financial and income rights)

Only 80 respondents (53.3%) reported being able to make independent decisions. Many women said they hid financial decisions, including entering land agreements or seeking loans, because of fear of household conflict. This reflects deeper power imbalances within homes and communities.

4. Women with registered land in their own names

Very few respondents had land registered in their own names (20.0%). Most land was controlled by spouses, relatives, or jointly owned, creating serious barriers to women’s full economic empowerment. The survey also suggested that women’s access to land ownership often depends on marriage and the number of children they have. This underlines why land rights are central to women’s economic security.

5.2.2 Bunangwe

1. Awareness of land rights

About 26.7% of respondents (40 out of 150) had heard about women’s right to own or inherit land, mainly through community meetings, radio, paralegals, and local leaders. However, only a small share could accurately explain the legal procedures for land registration or inheritance.

2. Experience of land-related issues

Nearly half of respondents, 48.0% (72 out of 150), had experienced land-related issues. Common

problems included inheritance disputes (52%), refusal by male relatives to recognize ownership (33%), and boundary conflicts (15%). Women without formal land documentation were especially vulnerable.

3. Independent decision-making (financial and income rights)

Only a limited proportion of women reported being able to decide independently on income use, savings, or small investments. Many said that major financial decisions were made jointly with, or were dominated by, male household members.

4. Women with registered land

Only 9.3% (14 out of 150) had land formally registered in their names. The majority, about 82%, accessed land through customary arrangements or family ownership without documentation. One respondent explained:

“They buy land as a couple, but end up signing as witnesses, and when the man evicts the woman, she has no say and no one to defend her rights.”

5.3 Access to Information

Women mainly received information about land rights and related issues through community-based channels such as local leaders, radio programs, NGOs, paralegals, and legal aid services. Community meetings played a particularly important role in sharing information at the grassroots level, while radio remained a key medium for wider outreach. Only a small number of women reported using newspapers or social media as information sources.

5.4 Barriers to Exercising Rights

The findings from Entebbe and Bunangwe reveal several interconnected barriers that continue to limit women’s access to land rights, economic rights, and decision-making power:

1. Limited practical legal knowledge

Although many women know in general terms that they have rights, their understanding of legal procedures remains weak. In both study sites, respondents often could not identify specific laws or explain the processes for land registration or inheritance. While sensitization efforts have been conducted, the impact of this knowledge is often undermined by cultural norms that portray women as having weaker claims to lineage and property.

2. Land-related disputes and insecurity

Land disputes remain common and create fear, uncertainty, and insecurity. Inheritance conflicts, boundary disputes, and denial of ownership by male relatives continue to discourage women from asserting their rights.

3. Weak economic and decision-making autonomy

Limited financial independence reduces women's ability to make decisions and defend their rights. In Bunangwe, many women reported low autonomy and fear of household conflict. In Entebbe, although autonomy was somewhat stronger, many women still depended on male-controlled or joint decision-making structures.

4. Low levels of formal land ownership

The low rate of land registration in women's names is a major structural barrier. Most women may have access to land for use, but they do not control it or hold formal ownership. This imbalance weakens tenure security and increases vulnerability to dispossession.

5. Cultural and gender norms

Deep-rooted cultural beliefs continue to reinforce unequal access to land and economic rights. In both locations, these beliefs discourage women from challenging existing power structures, even when laws support them.

6. Dependence on informal tenure systems

In Bunangwe, especially, reliance on customary and family-based land arrangements increases insecurity because such rights are not formally documented or legally protected. The rural poor, the majority of whom are women, rely heavily on land and other natural resources for their livelihoods. Eighty per cent of land in Uganda is under customary land tenure systems and is mostly unregistered. The customary tenure system is associated with several problems that include its inability to provide secure and equitable access and control for landowners and its discrimination against women (MLHUD, 2013)

7. Gap between awareness and empowerment outcomes

Even when awareness exists, it does not necessarily lead to ownership, documentation, or decision-making power. Many women said they had not received sufficient support from

community leaders to secure land titles or income rights. Some reported being exploited or misled by local leaders, making the legal process more costly and exhausting.

The experiences of evicted women vendors also illustrate how weak legal awareness and limited empowerment leave women vulnerable to abuse. International human rights frameworks make clear that states have an obligation to prevent forced evictions and protect housing and land rights. These standards reinforce the urgency of strengthening local systems of protection and accountability.

5.5 Women's Experiences and Stories

One woman shared an experience that reflects the situation many women face in trying to secure property and economic stability:

“She became involved with a man who worked as a taxi driver. At one point, the man faced legal issues, and she played a significant role in supporting him through the bail process. As the relationship progressed, the man asked her to move in with him and began cohabiting. Together, they acquired a piece of land and constructed a home. However, despite her financial and non-financial contributions, the land agreement was registered solely in the man's name, with the woman signing as a witness. This excluded her from legal ownership and denied her property rights over a jointly developed asset. Over time, the relationship deteriorated. The man entered another relationship and abandoned the home for over 1.5 years without providing financial support, placing the financial burden on her. When the man occasionally returned, he subjected her to both emotional and physical violence in the presence of her children.”

This story illustrates how economic neglect, denial of property, domestic abuse, and lack of legal awareness intersect to expose women to dispossession and exploitation.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this baseline survey point to several important policy implications for advancing women's property and economic rights in Uganda. Although the legal framework is relatively progressive, there remains a major gap between what the law provides and what women

experience in practice. Cultural norms, weak legal literacy, and limited access to justice continue to undermine women's effective enjoyment of their rights.

The evidence points to two urgent priorities. First, statutory protections need to be translated into real, practical benefits for women through stronger enforcement, increased legal awareness, and improved land administration. Second, the deeper social and economic barriers that limit women's empowerment must be addressed through targeted interventions such as gender quotas on land boards, expanded legal aid, and economic empowerment initiatives.

Policymakers should therefore focus on narrowing the gap between legal frameworks and lived realities by streamlining land administration, ensuring women's representation in decision-making bodies, and extending information and support to marginalized groups, especially widows and women in informal settlements. Without reform in these areas, current policy risks remaining largely symbolic rather than transformative. The survey offers practical evidence that can inform more responsive and effective policy.

8. CONCLUSION

This baseline survey reveals a persistent gap between Uganda's progressive legal framework for women's property and economic rights and the reality of women's lives on the ground. The key findings point to limited practical legal knowledge, frequent land-related disputes and insecurity, low economic autonomy, restrictive cultural norms, and very low rates of formal land ownership in women's names. Together, these findings highlight the urgent need for action.

The policy implications are clear. There are serious gaps in implementation, enforcement, and public awareness of existing laws. The most urgent opportunities for government action include mandating gender quotas in land governance, expanding public funding for women-focused legal aid, decentralizing and simplifying land registration services, and scaling up legal literacy campaigns through trusted and accessible channels. Without concrete reform, legal protections risk remaining only on paper. Prioritizing these actions will help ensure that women's legal rights translate into real benefits and contribute to more just and equitable development

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey shows that women face multiple barriers in exercising their economic and land rights, including limited legal knowledge, cultural restrictions, dependence on informal tenure systems, weak decision-making power, and a persistent gap between awareness and actual empowerment. Addressing these challenges requires a clear and practical strategy.

To support direct government action, the following recommendations are proposed for adoption by relevant ministries and agencies:

1. **Establish mandatory quotas of at least one-third women on all District and Sub-County Land Boards.**

This would help ensure that women's perspectives are consistently represented in land governance and decision-making.

2. **Allocate and ring-fence public funding for free legal aid clinics for women involved in land and property disputes.**

This would reduce the financial and structural barriers that prevent women from accessing justice. Many women struggle to access legal aid because of the high costs, technical procedures, and delays within the legal system. Establishing free legal clinics and support programs would make it easier for women to pursue and defend their rights.

3. Develop and implement streamlined mobile land registration services in rural communities.

This would improve access and reduce the cost and complexity of registering land in women's names.

4. Roll out nationwide legal literacy campaigns coordinated by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, and also other stakeholders.

Limited access to education and information remains a major barrier to women understanding and claiming their rights. Many women do not know what rights they have or how to assert them. There is a need for civic education and legal literacy campaigns that are inclusive of local languages and designed to help women better understand and interpret their rights. These campaigns should increase women's practical knowledge of property and economic rights using local languages and trusted community channels.

5. Integrate gender-sensitive monitoring and reporting mechanisms at district and community levels.

This would improve transparency in land allocation processes and support faster response to rights violations.

6. Economic empowerment

Financially disadvantaged women often cannot afford legal services or buy land in their own names, forcing them to rely on insecure secondary access arrangements. Creating financial pools and skill-building programs can help women focus on long-term security and strengthen their bargaining power. These financial pools could take the form of women-led savings and loan groups, where members contribute regularly and access rotating credit for land acquisition or legal costs. Skill-building programs could include modular training in agribusiness, financial literacy, and rights awareness, delivered through local workshops. Implementation should involve partnerships between district women's departments, NGOs such as FIDA Uganda or the Women's Microfinance

Initiative, and community development offices to ensure sustainability, accountability, and effective outreach.

These recommendations are intended to support practical, scalable interventions that close the gap between policy and lived reality for women's property and economic rights.

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FULL BASELINE QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A: RESPONDENT PROFILE

1. Age: ☐ 18–25 ☐ 26–35 ☐ 36–45 ☐ 46–55 ☐ 56+
 2. Marital status: ☐ Single ☐ Married ☐ Widowed ☐ Divorced/Separated
 3. Education level: ☐ None ☐ Primary ☐ Secondary ☐ Tertiary
 4. Main livelihood: ☐ Farming ☐ Small business ☐ Casual labour ☐ Formal employment ☐
- Other

SECTION B: PROPERTY & LAND OWNERSHIP

5. Do you currently own or occupy any land or property? ☐ Yes ☐ No
6. Nature of ownership: ☐ Sole ☐ Joint ☐ Family ☐ Tenant ☐ Customary occupant
7. Type of tenure: ☐ Customary ☐ Mailo ☐ Freehold ☐ Leasehold ☐ Don't know
8. Do you have any documentation? ☐ Sale agreement ☐ LC letter ☐ Title ☐ None

SECTION C: ECONOMIC USE OF PROPERTY

9. Does the land/property contribute to your income or livelihood? ☐ Yes ☐ No
10. How is it used economically? (Multiple responses)
- ☐ Farming ☐ Rental ☐ Business ☐ Security for loans ☐ Household use only
11. Are you able to decide how income from the property is used?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Joint decision

SECTION D: ECONOMIC RIGHTS & DECISION-MAKING

12. Who mainly decides how household income is spent?
- ☐ Respondent ☐ Spouse ☐ Joint ☐ Other family members
13. Can you independently enter economic agreements (sale, rental, loans)?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No
14. Do women in this community generally control income from property they own?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes

SECTION E: AWARENESS OF ECONOMIC & PROPERTY RIGHTS

15. Are you aware that women have a legal right to own property? ☐ Yes ☐ No
16. Are you aware that failure to pay for land/property is a breach of agreement? ☐ Yes ☐ No
17. Do you know where to seek help if your economic or property rights are violated?
☐ Yes ☐ No

SECTION F: DISPUTES & ACCESS TO JUSTICE

18. Have you ever experienced a land or property-related dispute? ☐ Yes ☐ No
19. Did the dispute affect your income or livelihood? ☐ Yes ☐ No
20. Where do people usually seek help first?
☐ Family/elders ☐ LC ☐ Police ☐ Legal aid/paralegals ☐ Courts ☐ Nowhere

SECTION G: VOICE, PARTICIPATION & COLLECTIVE ACTION

21. Are you a member of any women's group or association? ☐ Yes ☐ No
22. Do you feel confident speaking about economic or land issues in community meetings?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes

SECTION H: BARRIERS & RECOMMENDATIONS

23. What limits women's economic and property rights most?
☐ Lack of information ☐ Cultural norms ☐ Poverty ☐ Fear ☐ Weak enforcement

24. What support would strengthen women's economic rights?

☐ Legal awareness ☐ Written contracts ☐ Mediation support ☐ Economic skills ☐ Policy reform

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW (KII) GUIDE FOR HER VOICE PROJECT

Target Informants

- Local Council leaders
- Community elders
- Women leaders
- Legal aid/paralegal actors (where relevant)
- Land administration actors

Guiding Questions

1. What are the most common economic or land-related issues affecting women here?
2. How do property disputes affect women's livelihoods and household welfare?
3. How effective are existing dispute resolution mechanisms?

4. Are women able to independently engage in economic transactions?
5. What institutional gaps limit the protection of women's economic rights?
6. What reforms or interventions are most needed?