



Collective Voices.

– For Women's Land Rights in Northern Uganda

**The
Hunger
Project.**

SWEDEN

About

Between 2025 and 2026 The Hunger Project carried out the project Mobilizing Collective Voices and Action to Secure Women's Land Rights in Northern Uganda (Collective Voices), with funding from the Swedish Institute (Si). This report presents insights and learnings from the project, with a focus on its contribution to strengthening women's land rights in Northern Uganda. It also highlights the voices and experiences of project participants, illustrating how the project has contributed to change in their lives and communities.

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” Women's land rights are central to the fight against hunger because women are at the heart of nurturing, care, and household food security. When a woman has secure access to land, she has a stronger foundation to feed her family, build resilience, and contribute to the wellbeing of her community.

The Collective Voices project has shown us that when women understand their rights, access support, and are surrounded by institutions willing to listen, they begin to see themselves not as helpless victims but as rights holders with voice, dignity, and agency.

– Irene Naikaali, country lead The Hunger Project Uganda

Mobilizing Collective Voices and Action to Secure Women's Land Rights in Northern Uganda

The Hunger Project Sweden, 2026

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The report can be downloaded at thehungerproject.se



Introduction.

Background

Nwoya district in Acholi sub region, Northern Uganda, is a predominantly Acholi customary land tenure area still recovering from two decades of conflict and internal displacement. Geographically, it covers eight sub counties and three town councils.

The Collective Voices project engaged women groups, customary leaders, Area Land Committees, Court Committees, local government structures, and other land governance actors. Though some activities were scaled to all sub counties and the three town councils, major focus was put on the two land conflict hotspot sub counties of Lungulu and Paminyai.

Prior to the project, a situational analysis was conducted to assess and understand the underlying problems or barriers faced by women in relation to land, the legal and policy gaps, what could be done, and the potential role of key stakeholders.

The findings provided insight into a persistent gap between rights recognized by law and rights experienced in practice. The findings also offered strategies to enable more women to claim, exercise, and protect their land rights, leading to fairer access to land, greater gender equality, and improved household food security.

The situational analysis also showed strengthening women's land rights requires more than legal awareness. It requires stronger institutions, trusted local leadership and communities willing to reconsider established norms without undermining social cohesion. This understanding formed the foundation of the Collective Voices project.

This report presents the key outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations from these combined efforts, showcasing the impact of the work and pathways for future action.

Women's Land Rights in Uganda – Between Law and Tradition.

Uganda's land tenure system reflects a long history of tradition, colonial rule, and legal reform. Before colonialism, most land was held under customary systems, with communities acquiring access through clans and traditional leaders. Nwoya district in Northern Uganda was governed through the Acholi clan system. During British colonial rule the land management system was altered with public, lease and freehold.

After the end of the British colonial era, subsequent state governments made significant contributions to land management systems in Nwoya district. In the 1970s, the Amin government passed the Land Decree of 1975 where all land was nationalized. In order to acquire land ownership, one had to apply for leasehold through Uganda Land Commission. Over the years, the same land was abandoned due to wars. From 1987 to 2006, Northern Uganda was ravaged by armed conflict between rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) led by Joseph Kony and the Government of Uganda. During this period, over 1.5 million civilians were pushed into internally displaced camps which were later disbanded after the war ended.

When the younger population returned, many could not trace where their families had lived before the war. This is one of the root causes of land conflicts.

Women's access to land

Land is essential to livelihoods in Northern Uganda, particularly in rural communities

where agriculture is a primary source of food and income. For women, secure access to land can strengthen food security, economic independence and their ability to provide for their families. Women contribute significantly to agricultural production, yet often have less influence than men over decisions about the land they cultivate.

Women have legal rights to own, use and inherit land. Yet in practice, many still struggle to exercise control over the land they depend on. The gap between legal rights and everyday reality remains a significant barrier to gender equality.

The 1995 Constitution establishes equal rights for women and men and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. But it does not address the systemic barriers that women face in acquiring ownership rights to customary land. It lacks specificity on how to protect women under customary land tenure. The Land Act 1998 (Cap 236) recognizes women's rights to own and use land and provides protection against customary practices that discriminate against women. In certain circumstances, the law requires the consent of spouses before family land can be sold or otherwise transferred.

Despite legal rights, men continue to have greater influence than women over land ownership and decision-making. Women may gain access to land through their husbands or male relatives without having secure ownership themselves. This can leave

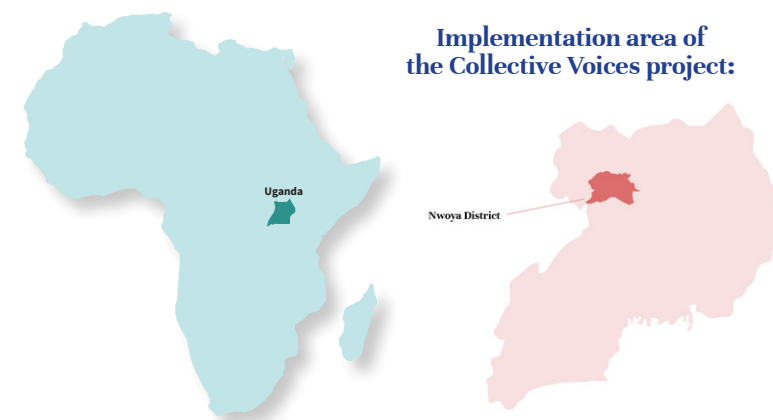


Irene Naikaali, country lead,
The Hunger Project Uganda

Photo: Wayne Taylor

them particularly vulnerable in situations such as divorce, widowhood or family disputes.

The Collective Voices project was formed to enable more women to claim, exercise, and protect their land rights, by developing stronger institutions, trusted local leadership and more gender equal communities in Northern Uganda.



Implementation area of
the Collective Voices project:

” The most memorable experience from the Collective Voices project was seeing legal aid services reach rural women in remote and underserved communities of Nwoya District. What once felt like a distant dream became a real and accessible service through partnership, shared vision, and the willingness of institutions to walk alongside communities.

– Irene Naikaali, country lead,
The Hunger Project Uganda

Collective Voices Working for Women's Land Rights.

The Collective Voices project worked together with existing governance structures and local organizations to help communities navigate the often-complex relationship between customary practice and statutory law. It created spaces where dialogue could replace confrontation and where knowledge could become a tool for empowerment rather than exclusion.

The project recognized that women rarely lack the motivation to defend their rights. More often, they lack access to information, trusted support networks and institutions willing to hear their concerns. The Hunger Project bridged these gaps by making legal knowledge accessible through community meetings, local training sessions, radio broadcasts and continuous engagement with village leaders. These activities transformed legal rights from abstract concepts into practical tools that communities could understand and apply.

For women in Nwoya district The Hunger Project methodology of Vision, Commitment and Action* (VCA) produced changes that went beyond knowledge transfer. The central question — what would change if women had rights and access to land? — invited women to articulate a shared vision and take collective ownership of achieving it.

"The Collective Voices project has shown us that when women understand their rights, access support, and are surrounded by institutions willing to listen, they begin to see themselves not as helpless victims but as rights holders with voice, dignity, and agency."

When women's land rights are protected, the economic benefits extend to their households and their communities," says Irene Naikaali, country lead, The Hunger Project Uganda.

An important contribution was The Hunger Project's ability to convene actors who had traditionally worked in isolation. Clan leaders, Area Land Committees, local councils, district officials and community representatives were encouraged to see themselves not as separate authorities but as partners with a shared responsibility for fair and peaceful land governance.

Relationships that had previously been characterized by uncertainty gradually evolved into more constructive cooperation. Local authorities became more familiar with customary processes, while customary

***Vision, Commitment, Action**

VCA is a methodology developed and used by The Hunger Project to support shifts in mindset, from helplessness and dependency toward a "yes we can" attitude of self-reliance and agency. It helps people recognize their own capacity to shape their future and drive change in their communities.

The three elements of VCA:

Vision – an inspiring picture of a desired future, defined by the people themselves rather than imposed by others.

Commitment – the resolve to stay focused and take responsibility for reaching that vision.

Action – concrete, practical steps that turn the vision into reality.



leaders gained a clearer understanding of statutory protections for women. This mutual learning reduced tensions and created stronger referral pathways for resolving disputes before they escalated.

Area Land and Court Committee members improved their legal knowledge while recognizing that women's participation in land decisions contributes directly to household food security and resilience. This shift helped reframe women's land rights from a social issue to a practical development priority, increasing support among duty bearers.

Following various trainings, Area Land Committee and Court Committee members assumed more proactive roles. They began educating community members, encouraging joint household decision-making and promoting women's inclusion in land governance. Female committee members also reported increased confidence to advocate for women's land rights within their official roles.

Perhaps most importantly, The Hunger Project acted as a trusted intermediary.

” The VCA workshops equipped us with sufficient knowledge about women's land rights. The project also linked us with legal aid providers, which made our work easier when handling land-related disputes.

– Olam Dickens, ALC Chairperson, Paminyai Sub-County

"Communities often viewed us as neutral facilitators capable of listening to different perspectives while maintaining credibility with both traditional authorities and government institutions. This role proved essential in encouraging participation from women who might otherwise have remained silent", says Irene Naikaali, country lead, The Hunger Project Uganda.

The project therefore illustrates an important lesson for development practitioners. Sustainable improvements in land governance

WHAT DID WE DO?

- Conducted familiarization meetings with key district leaders (Resident District Commissioner, sub-county secretaries, district lands officer, and local councils of sub-county tiers of local government) to introduce the project and assess local implementation needs.
- Ran 14 legal aid clinics and 1 follow-up session with the Uganda Law Society, reaching 1,074 community members (57% women); 199 received legal counselling and 154 cases were referred for further support.
- Broadcast 16 radio talk shows and 3 radio spot messages to raise awareness on women's land rights and gender-equitable land governance.
- Held project introductory meetings at district (21 stakeholders) and sub-county level (62 stakeholders across Paminyai and Lungulu) to launch the initiative and secure stakeholder buy-in.
- Distributed 500+ copies of key legal reference materials and land documentation guides to formal and informal duty bearers and community actors.
- Facilitated 21 Vision, Commitment and Action (VCA) workshops, engaging 76 duty bearers and 421 community partners (369 women), resulting in 14 community-led Vision Road Journeys.
- Conducted 30 multi-stakeholder dialogues (21 village, 8 parish, 1 district level) to strengthen collaboration on customary land practices.
- Trained 93 formal land administration duty bearers (area land committees, court committees, district land board, land officers, recorders) on their statutory roles.
- Completed an internal project endline evaluation, with findings disseminated to stakeholders.
- Trained 186 informal duty bearers (parish chiefs, women councillors, female cultural leaders, and clan Leaders) in land governance and mediation.

are not achieved solely through stronger institutions or better legislation. They also depend upon organizations capable of building relationships, facilitating dialogue and strengthening the social fabric that allows institutions to function effectively.

Additionally, the project has contributed to gradual shifts in social norms. Women's participation in land governance has increased, female leadership within customary justice structures has expanded and discussions around women's rights have become more visible within communities. The trainings also created space to address culturally sensitive concerns. For example, committee members discussed fears that widows' land rights could result in land leaving the family through remarriage.

Participants developed locally accepted solutions that balanced customary practice with legal protections, demonstrating the value of facilitated community dialogue.

"More champions for women's rights among male cultural leaders would make a significant difference. Cultural leaders are highly respected and influential within their communities, and when they advocate for women's land rights, they can help shift perceptions and encourage greater acceptance of women's equal rights to land. By combining strong legal frameworks with cultural change and local leadership, lasting progress can be achieved," says Hope Akiror, project manager at The Hunger Project Uganda.



Hope Akiror, project manager
The Hunger Project Uganda

Photo: The Hunger Project

Structural challenges

Despite many achievements, the project also highlights several structural challenges that continue to limit the full realization of women's land rights. Deeply rooted gender norms remain one of the most significant barriers. Although knowledge and confidence have increased considerably, women asserting their land rights continue to face resistance within families and communities. 36.9% of endline respondents (50% in Lungulu sub counties, and higher among female-headed households) reported observing negative consequences, including backlash and intra-family conflict, when women assert land rights.

Social pressure, intimidation and fear of conflict still discourage many women from pursuing legal claims, particularly in inheritance cases or disputes involving customary ownership. These findings illustrate that changing attitudes requires considerably more time than increasing awareness or improving institutional knowledge.

Institutional capacity also remains uneven across the district. While many local land governance structures have become more capable of handling disputes, there are

” In my opinion, working with duty bearers had the greatest impact on the project. Often, projects are designed with a strong focus on the final beneficiaries, but they sometimes overlook the importance of building the capacity of those responsible for delivering services and support. If duty bearers do not have the necessary knowledge and skills, they may not be able to effectively assist the people they serve.

– Hope Akiror, project manager
The Hunger Project Uganda

variations in case resolution rates and organizational performance between different sub-counties. Some committees continue to face delays in resolving complex disputes, particularly boundary conflicts that require technical land demarcation or referral to higher administrative structures. Limited transport, inadequate office equipment and insufficient documentation systems constrain their effectiveness despite improved technical competence.

Resource limitations represent another persistent challenge. Many local institutions continue to operate with minimal financial and logistical support, limiting their ability to conduct outreach, follow up cases and maintain reliable records. Although some administrative functions have begun adopting digital tools, the broader land justice system remains largely paper-based. This limits efficiency, complicates monitoring of cases

and reduces opportunities for evidence-based decision-making. At the same time, stakeholders expressed interest in expanding digital record-keeping and case management systems, indicating an opportunity for future investment in digital transformation.

Finally, sustainability remains both an achievement and a challenge. Many project outcomes are likely to continue because they have become embedded within community structures and local institutions. However, sustaining these gains will depend on continued political commitment, formal recognition of local land governance structures, adequate public financing and ongoing technical support. Without these enabling conditions, there is a risk that improvements in institutional performance and women's participation may gradually weaken once external project funding concludes.

Key Insights

- Lasting change occurred because the project combined rights awareness with institutional capacity development, community engagement and strengthened collaboration between formal and customary governance structures.
- Investing in strengthening existing community institutions resulted in greater responsibility for dispute resolution and awareness creation.
- The multi-level approach reduced the disconnect between national legislation and local implementation. Women's increased knowledge of their legal rights led to greater acceptance among local leaders, improved institutional competence and stronger collaboration between customary and statutory authorities.
- Women's active participation in local governance processes contributed to more representative decision-making, strengthened institutional legitimacy and increased community confidence in dispute resolution mechanisms.
- Social norm change remains slower than improvements in technical knowledge or institutional capacity. Discriminatory attitudes and unequal power relations continue to influence women's ability to exercise their rights.
- Investments in operational resources are crucial to efficiency. Although committees and local authorities have become more capable of handling cases, many continue to operate under significant logistical constraints.
- Investment in digitalization of land governance processes will improve documentation, reporting and follow-up of land disputes. Digital solutions could strengthen transparency, improve institutional memory and facilitate monitoring of women's access to justice.

From Land Rights to Local Action

– How Women and Community Leaders Are Changing their communities

When women in Paminyai and Lungulu gathered for a training in September 2025, the question at the heart of the training was simple: What would change if women had rights and access to land?

Over three days, nine women's groups across four parishes turned that question into a shared roadmap for change. A total of 131 community members, 108 women and 23 men, took part in Vision, Commitment and Action (VCA) training, while 39 local leaders and duty bearers developed their own Vision Road Journeys focused on land rights, food security and gender equality.

The shift was not only about knowledge. For many women, it was the first time they had openly discussed their land rights as a group. They confronted a persistent misconception that giving women access to land meant giving them the right to sell it. Once challenged, the belief began to lose its power.

Women started connecting land with opportunity: kitchen gardens, better crop

planning, savings and household food security. Some also began reporting land injustices that they had previously remained silent about.

Local leaders also had a change in perspective. Land rights were no longer seen solely as a legal or social issue, but as a practical part of household food security. Men reported consulting their wives before selling family land, while committee members gained confidence to defend women's rights and mediate disputes.

The momentum did not end when the trainers left. Women's groups continued meeting independently, using Vision Road Journeys to guide decisions on farming, savings and household matters.

What started as training activity carried on as a community-led practice, with participants applying the approach independently rather than relying on continued outside facilitation.

Results

Collective Voices Endline Evaluation 2026.

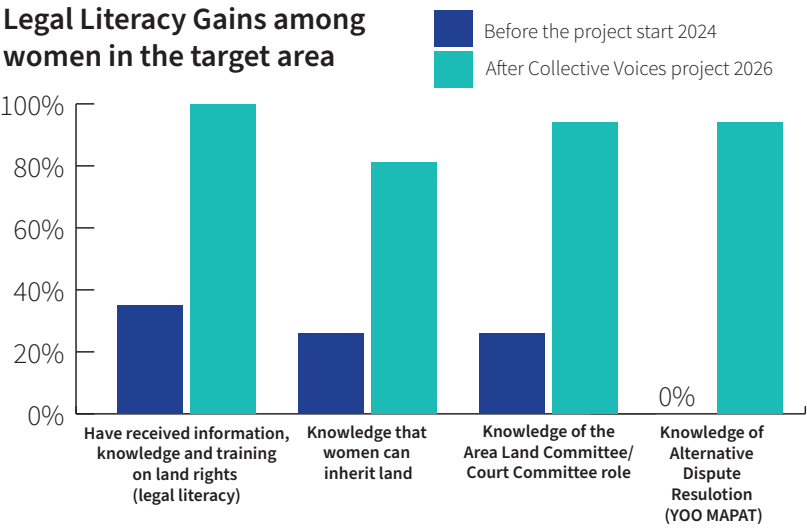
100%
of women surveyed
report improved land-
rights knowledge

Has your access
to land changed since
the project started?
68.7%
greatly improved

35
women's
land cases
handled in
12 months

“ Leaders moved from “women are not allowed to own land” to “land deserves to be given to women to cultivate for food security”.

– VCA feedback, Lungulu



At the start of the project, only about one in four women knew they had a legal right to inherit land.



By the end, more than four in five had obtained that knowledge.



Area Land Committee and Court Committee members understanding of their roles

	Baseline 2023	Endline 2026
Very Good	4.2%	85.7%
Good	18.3%	14.3%
Average	67.6%	0.0%
Poor	9.9%	0.0%

The Story of Florence Ayot – From Land Insecurity to Community Leadership

In a context where many women depend on clan land or their husbands’ families for access to land, Florence Ayot’s journey represents a powerful example of how knowledge and community support can transform vulnerability into leadership.

Florence, a widow and female household head in Lungulu sub-county, experienced the consequences of insecure land rights first-hand. After her partner died, relatives forced her to leave the land where she had lived and farmed for years, arguing that she had no legal claim because their marriage had not been formally registered and no dowry had been paid. For more than a decade she lived with uncertainty, limited access to productive land and the constant risk of further exclusion.

Her situation began to change after she participated in the Collective Voices project’s Vision, Commitment and Action (VCA) and legal literacy activities. Through community outreach, dialogue forums and training, Florence gained knowledge of Uganda’s land laws, women’s rights, land documentation processes and the role of local institutions in resolving disputes. She learned how to protect her property through formal processes, including writing a will and securing land ownership documents.

Florence did not remain a passive recipient of information. She actively participated in community discussions, developed a Vision Road Journey and turned her plans into action. She saved money, purchased and registered land in her own name, and expanded her farming activities. Today, she cultivates groundnuts, soybeans, beans and maize for both household consumption and income generation.

As Chairperson of the Area Land Committee in Lungulu sub-county, Florence has become a role model for other women. She uses her experience to support women facing similar challenges and advocates for stronger land conflict resolution systems. She is also clear about the obstacles that remain, noting that “men are fighting back on women” as women increasingly claim their land rights.

Despite these challenges, Florence believes that change is possible. Her priority is not further support for herself, but ensuring that more women receive training and that local systems protect women’s ability to access, own and use land.

Recommendations.

Collective Voices provides valuable lessons for future programming within Uganda and other contexts where statutory and customary systems coexist.

For development partners and donors

- Invest in long-term programs that allow time for sustainable social norm change and stronger local institutions.
- Ensure safeguarding measures are integrated in programs for women asserting their land rights.
- Invest in digital land records, documentation systems, transport and infrastructure to strengthen local land governance.

For civil society organizations

- Continue raising awareness of land rights while engaging men, customary leaders and other community actors in promoting gender equality.
- Provide ongoing mentoring and technical support to local land governance institutions after training.
- Strengthen collaboration between women’s groups, customary leaders and local authorities to improve access to justice.
- Document lessons learned and use evidence to inform policy dialogue and advocacy.

For district and national decision-makers

- Ensure formal local mechanisms such as Area Land Committees and Court Committees are fully operational with clear mandates, adequate funding, timely appointments and proper induction before assuming office.
- Prioritize land registration in women’s own names, or ensure co-ownership/ co-registration recognizes women as co-owners of the property, rather than merely as witnesses to the transaction.
- Integrate gender-responsive land governance into district planning and budgeting processes.
- Improve coordination between government institutions, customary authorities and local governments to strengthen implementation of land legislation.
- Digitalize land administration systems while maintaining community-based approaches that build trust and local ownership.

References.

Collective Voices Project Endline Evaluation, 2026.
Situational Analysis On Women’s Equal Access To Land Rights in Nwoya District, Uganda, 2024.
www.landcoalition.org/en/latest/womens-land-rights-in-uganda/

“ Women now feel comfortable reporting land disputes to clan leaders because customary dispute resolution is accessible and affordable. Unlike formal courts, clan-level mediation does not require transport expenses or legal fees. Most women can access our services easily because the mediation takes place within the community and is provided without cost.

– Customary Clan Leader, Lungulu sub-county



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The project has been a good process, not an event. Many of the Area Land Committees and Court Committee members did not know their roles at time of being appointed. The project came at the right time, and supported us to orient them into their respective roles. By virtue of their appointment many had only one member with formal knowledge in land matters. Right now, there is noticeable improvement in reporting and mediation handling.

– Oscar Ongom, Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, Gulu.

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