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SOLIDARITY THROUGH SISTERHOOD

Learning from the eco-feminist project, Participation and
Opportunities for Women's Economic Rights (POWER)



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Image on cover: Community dialogue in Katatyer village in Amuru District.

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This paper was written by Piyumi Samaraweera with support from Pamella Lakidi Achan, Sostine Namanya, Christine Bwailisa, Precious Naturinda and Jenny Nakitende, and was edited by Sarah Masters. It is based on evidence and learning from Participation and Opportunities for Women's Economic Rights (POWER), a 27-month project to strengthen the eco-feminist movement in Uganda so that 7,000 grassroots women have increased access to justice on land rights in the Hoima, Buliisa, Nwoya and Amuru districts

POWER was delivered through a collaboration between Womankind Worldwide, National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE) and National Association of Women's Action in Development (NAWAD) between October 2019 and December 2021. This paper is based on extensive project documentation and activity reports, supplemented by six focus group discussions and 16 key informant interviews.

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About the National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE).

NAPE was established in 1997 and is a national lobbying and advocacy non-governmental organisation (NGO) committed to sustainable solutions to Uganda's most challenging environmental and economic growth problems. The organisation monitors government actions, conducts research, provides educational materials, mobilises affected communities, connects other civil society organisations (CSOs) and international organisations, and engages government officials at all levels on issues of good governance of natural resources. Through its Sustainability School Programme, NAPE has been training women activists in affected areas to voice their demands through advocacy, lobbying and media work.

About the National Association for Women's Action in Development (NAWAD).

Established in 2009, NAWAD empowers women and girls to achieve social justice, economic stability and sustainable management of their environment by building their skills, carrying out research and advocacy, and offering service provision. NAWAD supports communities, specifically women, to develop local alternatives to climate change through eco-feminism, circular local economies (an economy that maximises the value of resources and reduces the environmental impact of production) and renewable energy. NAWAD also mobilises women to raise awareness of and advocate on climate change and climate change adaptation, as well as land issues and rights.

About Womankind Worldwide.

Womankind Worldwide (Womankind) is a global women's rights organisation (WRO) working with women's movements (WM) to transform the lives of women. Our vision is a world where the rights of all women are respected, valued and realised. We support WMs to strengthen and grow by carrying out diverse joint activities, including advocacy and communications work, women's rights programming, awareness raising, knowledge sharing, research, capacity development and fundraising. Our Theory of Change purposefully focuses on the need for an intersectional approach and our partnerships across our focus countries reflect this.

About this learning paper.

This learning paper is centred on the experiences and voices of grassroots women from across four districts in Uganda. It aims to share insights, analysis and reflection from the POWER project and builds upon Womankind's previous learning papers, Digging Deep, Stronger Together, Powerful Partnerships, Making Visible and Journey from the Margins, to support women's rights and to strengthen WMs. This paper aims to capture and collate knowledge, learning and evidence around supporting and strengthening the eco-feminist movement in Uganda.¹ We also share new knowledge on feminist approaches that support movement strengthening, with a focus on Hoima and Buliisa districts in the West and Nwoya and Amuru districts in the North targeting marginalised women who are displaced or are at risk of displacement due to the expansion of infrastructure development.

The content of the paper was strengthened by focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) with core POWER stakeholders whose voices and input have been fundamental to shaping our collective learning. We hope the content of this paper offers encouragement on the nature and effectiveness of movement strengthening work, and that it provides some transferable learning for others, including learning from what did not work well or as anticipated. The paper is a contribution to learning for WROs and movements in the global south and north, and those who engage and partner with them. It is also a contribution to local actors both at a district and national level in Uganda.

1. See also Sostine Namanya & Christine Bwailisa, "How Uganda's ecofeminists are fighting back against oil-industry land grabs" Open Democracy, published March 8, 2021 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/how-ugandas-ecofeminists-are-fighting-back-against-oil-industry-land-grabs/>

Acronyms.

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CBP	Community Based Paralegal/s
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
COVID 19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion/s
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
KII	Key Informant Interview/s
LAL	Localised Alternative Livelihoods
LWG	Lagaji Women's Group
NAPE	National Association of Professional Environmentalists
NAWAD	National Association for Women's Action in Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NUWODU	National Union of Women with Disabilities of Uganda
POWER	Participation and Opportunities for Women's Economic Rights
RAP	Resettlement Action Plan
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UGX	Uganda Shilling
UNRA	United National Road Authority
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
VSLAs	Village Saving and Loan Associations
WER	Women's Economic Rights
W/HRD	Women Human Rights Defender/s
WM	Women's Movement/s
WRO	Women's Rights Organisation/s
WWD	Women With Disabilities

Key Definitions.

Collective action: This is ‘action taken by a group (either directly or on its behalf through an organisation) in pursuit of members’ perceived shared interests’.² According to Caroline Sweetman, “Social, economic and political change can come from individuals realising their common interest in challenging unequal power relations and asserting their full and equal rights as members of society.”³

Community-based paralegals (CBPs): The POWER project defines CBPs as largely women but also men who are rooted in local communities. They are women and men who have a sense of authority and are trusted at a grassroots level to deliver justice for community stakeholders. They are trained in basic law and mediation and form a dynamic, creative frontline that can engage formal and traditional institutions alike. Instead of treating their clients as victims requiring an expert service, CBPs can focus on legal empowerment. They can take an approach of collectively finding solutions.⁴

Eco-feminism: A movement for women to have a say on the protection of the environment, energy, fossils and climate justice issues in addition to agribusiness and extractive industries. **Intersectionality:** A term devised by law professor, Kimberlé Crenshaw, in the 1980s to describe the way that multiple systems of oppression interact in the lives of those with multiple marginalised identities. Intersectionality looks at the relationships between multiple marginalised identities and allows us to analyse social problems more thoroughly, shape more effective interventions, and promote more inclusive advocacy amongst communities.

Land Queens: Local women who volunteer to be key contacts at sub county level and play a leadership and coordinating role, particularly (but not exclusively) related to the alternative livelihoods aspects of the POWER project.

Women human rights defenders (WHRDs): Women, in all their diversities, including young women, women in rural areas, women living with disabilities, and survivors of violence who advocate for human rights.

Women’s movements: These are broad social movements, led by women and their organisations, that campaign for women’s rights and gender justice at national, regional and international levels. They include WROs and other actors, including activists, academics, journalists, lawyers and trade unionists.

Women’s rights organisations: These are women-led organisations working to advance women’s rights and gender justice.

2. John Scott & Gordon Marshall, “A Dictionary of Sociology” Oxford University Press, 2009 P 96.

3. Caroline Sweetman, “Introduction, Feminist Solidarity and Collective Action.” Gender and Development, vol. 21, no. 2, 2013, pp. 217–229, www.jstor.org/stable/24697244. Accessed 25 June 2021.

4. The POWER project’s definition of CBPs takes inspiration from Namati’s definition of a community paralegal found here <https://namati.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/What-is-a-Community-Paralegal.pdf>. Namati is an organisation which advances social and environmental justice through a movement of people who know, use, and shape the law. They also convene the Legal Empowerment Network, comprised of more than 2,400 groups from 160 countries who are learning from one another and collaborating on common challenges. See here for more information; <https://namati.org/who-we-are/>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this paper, Womankind and our partners NAPE and NAWAD draw on evidence and learning from Participation and Opportunities for Women's Economic Rights (POWER), a 27-month project to strengthen the eco-feminist movement in Uganda so that 7,000 grassroots women have increased access to justice on land rights in the Hoima, Buliisa, Nwoya and Amuru districts.

Womankind's strategic approach seeks to strengthen women's movements (WMs) in our focus countries by working in partnership with diverse women's rights organisations (WROs), the sites from which movements are built and supported. We recognise that progressive change for women happens when diverse and independent WMs have strength, resilience and collective power, as detailed in our strategy and Theory of Change. Womankind's movement strengthening approach is based on our understanding that sustainable and transformative improvements in women's rights are achieved when there is a critical mass of actors acting collectively towards a common goal at local, regional and global levels. This also goes beyond advocacy and policy objectives, often achieved in formal spaces, to seeking change within individuals, and in informal spaces around beliefs, attitudes, values, cultural norms and practices. Movement strengthening also happens when there is solidarity across movements which share common goals and can build on each other's strengths. That has been the case with the POWER project which has supported the growth of the eco-feminist movement, as well as the linkages between it, and the broader women's and environmental movements.

POWER has strengthened the eco-feminist movement across the four districts where it was implemented by providing a diverse group of women, including the most marginalised, with opportunities to realise their rights, as well as by facilitating spaces through which they can exert leadership and influence. The movement has emerged stronger in numbers, better defined, more inclusive and more effective.

As detailed in this paper, by September 2021, through POWER, NAPE and NAWAD have directly supported and mobilised in excess of 1,220 women across the project districts, including 110 with declared disabilities, to influence decision making in local development processes as well as to promote the adoption of Localised Alternative Livelihoods (LAL) in communities affected by land intensive industries. This has enabled often excluded women, many who provide a lion's share of the labour to sustain their families, an opportunity to understand and unleash their power within. Through that process of self-discovery they have realised the power of collective action, sisterhood and solidarity.

Image: NAPE drama group members, Kigaaga, Hoima.

PHOTO CREDIT: SARAH WAISWA





INTRODUCTION



This paper documents the experience of those delivering the POWER project to engage and strengthen women’s understanding of their land rights, and support their access to justice, while enabling greater financial independence through eco-friendly livelihoods. This combination has created strengthened and sustained solidarity among women within and across the four project districts. The livelihoods strategies supported individual women to generate income to cover their basic needs with some degree of autonomy in a context where men hold the majority of political, cultural and economic power. The project also supported individual women to become better connected to one another as part of the eco-feminist movement, unlocking their power for collective action centred on women’s needs and climate justice.

Setting the scene: the Uganda country context

Land – its access, control and ownership – lies at the heart of power relationships within Uganda. The struggle for land is deeply intertwined with the struggle for women’s rights. Women’s access to and control over resources and economic decision making is fundamental to the achievement of their rights. Despite some progress, inequality between women and men in ownership and control of land remains stark. Women are also more dependent on land: three-quarters of Ugandan women earn their living as (predominantly subsistence) farmers compared with two-thirds of men.⁵ Furthermore, gender roles mean that women are overwhelmingly responsible for the food security of their families.

WROs in Uganda have identified changing patterns of land use as a major problem affecting women across the country. While land has long been a locus of conflict and dissent, the most recent wave of dispute is caused by what has been termed the land rush or land grabs – investors purchasing or leasing land for mining or the production of cash crops. The economic ideology espoused by governments throughout Africa and beyond and enabled by international institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund which financially incentivise the ideology, is that increased foreign direct investment and the commodification of agriculture will create a more developed and prosperous economy with jobs and wealth. The reality for many women in rural areas has been very different. In August 2018 the Government proposed a parliamentary

5. Daniel Ayalew Ali, Klaus Deininger, & Marguerite Duponchel, “Levelling the field for women farmers in Uganda,” The World Bank, published June 17, 2015, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/leveling-field-women-farmers-uganda>



PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI

Image above: Hoima Sugar Factory, which caused the eviction of 7,000 people now living in Kigyayo displacement camp, Hoima district.

amendment to Article 26 of the 1995 Land Act to allow the compulsory purchase of land. This amendment would favour big infrastructure so citizens would need to go to a court to demand compensation, rather than challenge government before an acquisition. Following a strong citizen movement in 2019, this article did not pass. Even so, the proposal was a clear indicator of the Government's position on the issue.

Mass internal displacement through compulsory land acquisition is escalating in Uganda as the government facilitates investment for economic growth through supporting local and foreign companies to secure land. As women in Northern and Western Uganda are disproportionately affected by forced displacement due to land grabs and the associated loss of livelihoods, the POWER project focused on Amuru and Nwoya (in the North) and Hoima and Buliisa (in the West).⁶

In 2018, NAPE and NAWAD estimated that over 300,000 marginalised women in these districts were displaced or were at risk of displacement.⁷ In 2021, we estimate this

figure has risen to 400,000 and is projected to rise to over 1 million women by 2023 as the planned expansion of an oil pipeline takes place.⁸

In addition, while at a national level, and on paper, Uganda has progressive gender balance in politics with women occupying nearly 35% seats in parliament, there is a paucity of women in leadership at both community and provincial level, where the POWER project operates.⁹

Women are particularly affected by the loss of their land due to their low human development status, social norms that perpetuate gender inequality and shrinking civil space that restricts WROs from advocating on behalf of affected women.¹⁰ Women who have been displaced or are at risk of displacement suffer increased vulnerability to extreme poverty as a consequence of loss of land and livelihoods and a lack of knowledge on alternative income generation strategies. Gender inequality impacts their ability to participate in decision-making processes around land disputes and prevents

6. Due to road constructions in (Hoima/Kikuube districts), oil industry infrastructure development (in Buliisa), electricity infrastructure development (in Nwoya); and agribusiness investments (in Amuru, Nwoya and Hoima).

7. Estimates are based on populations of the project districts. The population distribution in Nwoya, Amuru, Hoima and Buliisa is estimated at 1,224,200 <http://library.health.go.ug/sites/default/files/resources/UBOS%20Statistical%20Abstract%202020.pdf>

8. Ibid.

9. See <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>

10. "Digging Deep: The Impact of Uganda's Land Rush on Women's Rights" Womankind Worldwide 2018, <https://www.womankind.org.uk/resource/digging-deep-the-impact-of-ugandas-land-rush-on-womens-rights/>

marginalised women seeking and attaining their equal rights to justice, ownership and economic resources. POWER addressed these intersections in its project design; strengthening women's economic rights and thereby their power to make decisions, and vice versa.

Setting the scene: law and policy

The Constitution

The 1995 Constitution provides protection in relation to land rights. Specifically, it states that all land in Uganda is owned by the people of Uganda (article 237), and gives attendant rights in accordance with the four formally recognised land tenure systems (customary, freehold, leasehold, and mailo – see page 7) (article 237(3). The state retains the right to acquire land in the public interest, subject to Constitutional protections.¹¹

The Constitution further provides for “affirmative action in favour of groups marginalised on the basis of gender, age, disability or any other reason created by history, tradition or custom, for the purpose of redressing imbalances which exist against them” (Article 32).

Under Article 26 every person has the right to own property, either individually or in association with others.

Furthermore, no person shall be compulsorily deprived of land except where

- ▶ **Acquisition is necessary for public use or in interest of defense, public order, public morality, public health;**
- ▶ **Provision for prompt payment of fair and adequate compensation is made prior to the taking of the property.**

Despite this, at the time of writing civil society organisations (CSOs) are concerned that this protection is under threat, with ongoing attempts to amend Article 26 to allow the government to appropriate land for development projects without agreeing and providing compensation, as detailed above.¹²

The Land Act

Uganda's principle law on land is the Land Act 1998 (amended in 2004 and 2010), enacted in accordance with Article 237 (9) of the Constitution. The purpose of the Land Act is to provide a system for the tenure, ownership, and management of land, as well as to improve the delivery of land services to the population by decentralising land administration.¹³

The Land Act recognises four systems of land tenure: customary, freehold, leasehold and mailo. Recognition of customary land tenure in official terms is significant and establishes procedures for the registration of customary ownership as well as its conversion into freehold tenure.

Four types of land tenure:

- ▶ Customary tenure is regulated by rules applicable to a specific area of land and group of people, which are generally accepted as binding by the people to whom they apply. The rules will vary for each area and group of people, usually based on geographical location and clan. Management and transactions of the land are in accordance with cultural customs, and sale of land under this system requires the involvement of all those who were entitled to use and access the property in the presence of respected members of the society.
- ▶ Freehold tenure derives its legality from written law and the Constitution, and refers to the holding of land in perpetuity with or without conditions about ownership and or use.

11. “Uganda's Constitution of 1995 with Amendments through 2005,” Constitute Project, last updated 2005, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Uganda_2005.pdf?lang=en.

12. Hamila Abdallah, “Govt asks for more time to rewrite amendment to land acquisition law,” *The East African*, published September 10, 2017, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/Uganda-asks-for-more-time-to-rewrite-amendment-land-law-/2558-4089700-155tev8z/index.html>.

13. “Uganda Land Act 1998” ECOLEX, <https://www.ecolex.org/details/legislation/land-act-cap-227-lex-faoc096350/>; “Uganda Land (Amendment) Act, 2004”, ECOLEX, published 2004, <https://www.ecolex.org/details/legislation/land-amendment-act-2004-lex-faoc140209/>; “Uganda Land (Amendment) Act, 2010”, Land Watch, published 2017, <https://www.landnet.ug/landwatch/the-uganda-land-amendment-act-2010/>

Image: Esther Turyahebwa stood in front of Hoima Sugar Factory, listening group leader from Kigyayo camp



PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI

- ▶ Leasehold tenure is governed by written contract and refers to the holding of land for a given period from a specified date of commencement, on agreed terms and conditions. Rent is usually paid via the creation of a landlord-tenant relationship.
- ▶ Mailo tenure is similar to freehold tenure, except that mailo tenants cannot use their rights to the detriment of the customary and statutory rights of those lawful or bona fide occupants of the land at the time that the tenure was created and their successors in title. Found predominately in Central Uganda, this type of land tenure was established in 1900 by the British colonial government to reward colonial agents and remains a relatively secure system of tenure.

In addition to these national provisions, Uganda has ratified and or adopted key international and regional instruments that promote women's rights and gender equality, including through The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979), the Maputo Protocol (2003), and the East African Gender Equality and Development Act (2017) and engagement through the African Union (AU). Despite specific provisions to address or support women's land rights, the Ugandan state has so far failed to fulfil its stated commitments and obligations.

Setting the scene: shrinking space for civil society

It is important to note that WROs and wider civil society continue to operate and function within a context of shrinking space. A number of restrictive policies, such as The NGO Act (2016) and The Public Order and Management Act (POMA) 2013 restrict

NGO/WRO activity, and control the rights of citizens, limiting their ability to participate in civic space. This continues against the backdrop of recent constitutional change that allowed president Yoweri Museveni, who has ruled for over 30 years, to run and be reelected in 2021 for an unprecedented sixth term in office. As a result, the freedoms of expression, assembly and association continue to be violated in Uganda. Surveillance culture is on the rise with many NGOs and WROs under state surveillance. The CIVICUS Monitor offers a depiction of the state of civic space globally, with the disturbing developments in Uganda earning the country a rating of "repressed" which is one category above "closed," in a five-category rating system. In such a context, the environment for movement strengthening is threatened while the need for it is amplified.¹⁴

Setting the scene: The impact of the pandemic

In addition, COVID 19 has affected the work of all three POWER project partners with particular impact on NAPE and NAWAD, as well as those who participated in the project.

“ We had challenges of transport; with restriction in transporting the sick and pregnant women. And we had a lot to [do to] give permission in writing to whoever wanted to move. I am on the task force as a chairperson Local Council (LC)1,¹⁵ when the lockdown was intense it was stressful to deny anyone a recommendation to travel. We wrote so many letters. ”

**Lucy Awoo,
Chairperson LC1, POWER participant**

14. Freedom House ranks Uganda as a "Not Free" country.

15. A Local Council (LC) is a form of local elected government within the districts of Uganda. There are six levels of Local Councils. The lowest level is the Local Council I (LC I or LC 1) and is responsible for a village or, in the case of towns or cities, a neighbourhood. The area covered by Local Councils II through IV incorporates several of the next lowest levels, while a Local Council V (LC5) is responsible for the entire district. In theory, a problem at a local level is relayed up through the various levels until it reaches an LC with sufficient authority or power to resolve it, while centrally planned directives are relayed downward until they are implemented at the local level. Each Local Council has a certain number of identical positions, such as Chairman, Vice-Chairman, etc. The Local Council does not transfer nationally. Instead, the national government appoints Resident District Commissioners (RDCs) to represent its interests at the district level. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_Council_\(Uganda\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_Council_(Uganda)).



PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI

Image above: Community dialogue in Katatyer village in Amuru District.

Schools remained closed for many months, and the triple burdens of child, elder and domestic care, as well as social/community care and income generation fell disproportionately on women including those working on POWER.

“During the intense lock down there was not a lot of Corona cases; when they eased the lockdown, cases increased. They now say get treatment from home which is going to be more of a burden to us women. As a woman there was no business, no money, a lot of domestic violence, shortage of food and quarrels with husbands.”

**Akello Lilly Kilama,
POWER participant**

Other challenges related to women’s rights violations, especially the rise of violence against women and girls (VAWG) was being reported in the midst of this pandemic, and project partners worked hard to raise awareness and call for accountability including via the community radio platform “Green Radio”.

Partner staff were mindful of the public health risks of exposure to COVID 19 and had limited access to NAPE, NAWAD and Womankind offices during the greater part of April 2021 to August 2021. In addition, the cost of goods and services including personal protective equipment (PPE) increased exponentially in Uganda. POWER partners had to quickly learn and become comfortable with a new normal of using digital platforms including Zoom and WhatsApp for cross organisational working. For three months the POWER project helped pivot some funds towards COVID 19 adaptations including support to purchase routers and data for home working as well as support to communities in accessing hand sanitizer and water points for hand washing. Thereafter these costs were integrated into activity budgets. While staff welcomed the opportunity to redirect funds towards critical pandemic related costs, that process was energy and time consuming, as it involved completing prescriptive templates and seeking specific donor approvals.

“ There is a lot of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV); our men move a lot and because of that when they come home we ask them to keep a social distance even for conjugal rights because of fear. This is a recipe for SGBV. There was disunity between task force and village people; police would beat people especially those who would be caught moving beyond curfew time. Leaders extorted money from people. The police got a lot of money. ”

**Jennifer Atenyo,
POWER participant**

A silver lining to the pandemic cloud

POWER was designed to create an enabling environment for women to understand their rights and then act on realising those rights collectively, in a manner that protects and promotes their environment, thus building the eco-feminist movement. The lockdown created a new space and context within which women would step forward to take leadership. In June 2021 during the second national lockdown, grassroots mobilisers and community organisers enabled POWER to deliver sharing and learning sessions between women's groups within project districts at a time when NAPE-NAWAD staff were unable to easily travel out of Kampala. This marked a key shift in roles as grassroots women became active agents of change.

Image below: NAWAD's women's group who have experienced land grabbing, Nwoya



PHOTO CREDIT: SARAH WAISWA



INTRODUCING THE POWER PROJECT



In 2016 NAPE and NAWAD supported the growth of a movement for women in rural areas in Uganda to have a say on energy fuels and climate justice issues, including in relation to agribusiness and extractive industries. As a result, together they developed the POWER project to strengthen the emerging Ugandan eco-feminist movement to promote and protect the economic rights of marginalised women affected by forced land acquisition in the four project target districts. They agreed that to build the movement, POWER would generate and share evidence and learning needed to inform and empower marginalised women displaced or at risk of displacement through forced land acquisition, to input into decision-making affecting their land ownership and livelihoods at local, national and international levels.

Women participants of POWER include a high number of women survivors of violence and those with diverse disabilities. Taking an intersectional approach within project design was a deliberate consideration, to bring women together to understand their common experiences and grievances around access to land, no matter other differences or markers of identity. The project team acknowledged the multiple and numerous additional barriers affecting women in the project districts and considered diverse needs when planning and implementing activities.

This Learning Paper will include focus on each of the three Outputs of the POWER project to provide some information and insight into the learning from selected activities and their significance to individual participants, women in affected communities within project districts, the project partners and other stakeholders in meeting the project's aims.

POWER PROJECT OUTLINE

OUTCOME

More than 1,000 women who have been displaced, or are at risk of, displacement from their land, are supported to protect women's land rights and strengthen women's collective power as part of the eco-feminist movement.

IMPACT

All women enjoy their equal rights to economic resources, including ownership and control of land.

OUTPUT 1.

Knowing our rights

Women are supported to know, claim and protect their rights in a patriarchal society.

ACTIVITIES

- ▶ Women trained on:
 - Land rights
 - Economic rights
 - How to engage with local and national government, and the extractive industry corporations
- ▶ Women hold lobby meetings with local and national government, and the extractive industries to protect their rights
- ▶ Information shared widely through 1,000 leaflets to inform women of their rights
- ▶ Insights from the women captured in learning reports, to share their stories more broadly with national and international women's movements



OUTPUT 2.

Strengthening our economic resilience

Women cannot fight for their rights without money to sustain themselves and their families. POWER supported women to create or strengthen businesses so they can earn a living despite having been, or being at risk of, displacement from their land.

ACTIVITIES

- ▶ Women trained on eco-friendly business options, based on district-level scoping of business opportunities.
- ▶ Women supported to set up or strengthen individual and collective businesses, such as beekeeping and vegetable growing.
- ▶ Women share their experiences on community radio broadcasts, to inspire more women to strengthen their economic resilience.
- ▶ Women connect and learn from each other through solidarity exchanges within and beyond the 4 districts to further build the eco-feminist movement



OUTPUT 3.

Standing up for our rights

Women who are involved in land disputes gain personalised legal advice to stand up for their rights

ACTIVITIES

- ▶ Legal aid clinics provide free legal advice to women in land disputes, resolving some cases and supporting others to continue the next legal steps.
- ▶ Community-based paralegals are trained to provide a sustainable source of knowledge on how women can resolve current and future challenges



Cross-cutting activities and approach

- ▶ Activities centered around women's priorities, in local languages, and actively reaching out to women with disabilities.
- ▶ Amplifying messaging and success stories through national radio, tv spots and billboards.
- ▶ Feedback loops with communities – 1:2:1 calls; contact with Land Queens and Community Based Paralegals;
- ▶ Space for sharing created during solidarity exchanges.

Knowing our rights

Output 1:

Women demonstrate increased knowledge of their economic rights and increased understanding of how to access local, national and international processes to claim and protect those rights

A key aim of the POWER project was to build the capacity of women in rural areas to understand their rights and to know how to access processes through which they can claim and protect those rights. This is a critical foundation to all of Womankind's and its partners' work. Understanding our rights gives us the legitimacy to act to claim and access those same rights. This underpins a one directional process of empowerment that cannot be easily reversed.¹⁶ In this section, we will focus on the advocacy trainings and subsequent lobbying events and opportunities at local and national levels.

The POWER partners undertook various activities and strategies to build capacity including training women on their land rights, creating posters, stickers and community radio programmes based on localised research, ultimately enabling a cadre of local women's rights advocates to participate in local decision-making processes that directly impact upon them. The processes involved convening women in a local, accessible venue, creating a safe space for them to share experiences which are often common to many, leading to discussions on how to tackle such shared issues. Safe spaces often involve creating conditions where women are able to relax and be honest and open; and that means that their child-care needs are considered and addressed; that the spaces are disability inclusive and that crucially,

the spaces are for women only. All of POWER's core activities were rooted in these principles.

Not only did the POWER project create space and scope for collective organising, women developed and agreed advocacy messages and focus, and directly called for much needed changes to land rights in support of women's rights. This is also demonstrated through a tangible change in practice by oil companies involved in oil exploration in the area. For example, oil companies which were only providing land compensation funds to men have started to actively involve women in compensation processes.

“ Before POWER and NAPE we did not know about our rights at the husband's home: the men would sell land without our knowledge: women would just be told to leave land by the buyer saying ‘leave this land because it is has been sold (to me). But now, we no longer accept to be witnesses to land transactions: we insist on being recorded as equal to the men. Before POWER, under Resettlement Action Plan [RAP] 1 of Tilenga project when they would pay compensation for the land, the men would take it all. In March 2021 during the bicycle caravan event conducted to commemorate the International women's day, women did a petition, and I represented the women-of Nguedo Subcounty. On that day women came from Buliisa, Nwoya, Amuru and Hoima. Our voices came out. So when RAP 5 of Tilenga project came, I stood my ground. I no longer had the former fear. Now, we have a joint account. And if he tries to cheat me, I know where to go-LCI, and to the elders of our Alur cultural institution. ”

**Judith Beirwoth,
Nguedo, Buliisa district.**

¹⁶ This is based on Womankind Worldwide's experience working with partners in countries across Asia, Africa and Latin America over 31 years to build the capacity of women to understand, claim and protect their rights.



Image above: Community dialogue in Katatyer village in Amuru District.

To date, 268 women from across the four districts including internally displaced women engaged in advocacy trainings and three key advocacy events that NAPE and NAWAD organised which also reached 27 duty bearers and opinion makers.

A deep dive into the POWER advocacy training

Despite national and regional laws and policies related to women's (land) rights in Uganda, women impacted by infrastructure development in the project districts are far removed from knowing about them, often due to being excluded from awareness raising fora, and sometimes limited by varying degrees of literacy and or disabilities. Training these women in grassroots advocacy was a first and fundamental step to facilitating their collective action, supporting women to come together in keeping with the ethos of the eco-feminist movement that POWER aimed to strengthen.

In each of the project districts, women participated in day long participatory advocacy trainings which reached 144 women. The content was tailored to each district in terms of issues faced connected to food security, water, climate and

biodiversity and included standard items on the key principles of advocacy and compelling communication, national and district laws and policies.

For example, the training in December 2020 in Buliisa involved 40 women and focused on strengthening understanding of government commitments in its Resettlement Action Plan (RAP) and identifying barriers for better land acquisition and resettlement practices in the area. Women participated from Kisasya, Mvule, Kakindo and Avogera who were affected by local oil infrastructure developments including co-owners, squatters and tenants of land. By the end of the session, women identified two core issues for further action by local leaders and relevant institutions such as the local councils and land committees. First, that customary owners must have secure, inclusive land ownership, and rights of access and use of their land. Second, that action was required on the current land transactions that are increasingly being conducted unfairly, inequitably, and unlawfully, where customary owned land was being sold, with inadequate compensation often being given to only the male owners. These two issues were carried through their subsequent discussions, meetings and project activities.

In June 2021, an adapted training under strict lockdown conditions was delivered in Hoima focused on women directly affected by the EACOP and Tilenga feeder oil pipeline.¹⁷ Delivered as two shorter engagement meetings in Buseruka village (with 10 women) and Rugashari village (with 13 women), the sessions explored how best women can understand and seek to address land related issues affecting their community. These included unfair and delayed compensation, lack of information in oil pipeline development progress and poor engagement in related discussions, as well as wider issues with family members who were taking advantage of women's lack of knowledge on land rights.

In Northern Uganda, in Amuru and Nwoya districts which are under the customary land tenure system, the training focus was on the provision of the Constitution of Uganda (1995) and the Land Act (1998:2004). The training in Nwoya was held in September 2020 with participants from Purongo and Got Apwoyo sub counties affected by government projects on infrastructure development and/or agribusiness large scale investments. In Amuru the training in March 2021 was delivered to 50 women drawn from Amuru, Kal, Okum-Goro, Pabbo and Parubanga villages. Following the training, participants formed village groups and selected representatives to advance land issues in their communities, including appointing eight different women as "Land Queens". Land Queens are local leaders and focal points who commit to advance issues of land rights as well as educate other community members on land rights.

Claiming our rights

As of July 2021, evidence is abundant on how women, both individually and collectively have resisted rights violations

and successfully realised their right to land access, ownership and control as a result of engaging with the POWER project. For instance, in Ngeudo Subcounty (Buliisa District) where the government has an extensive RAP implemented by the Tilenga feeder oil pipeline project, one such woman, Judith Beirwoth secured equal compensation with her husband for the family land.

“ Our home was affected by the government infrastructure project under Tilenga RAP. At first my husband was the only signatory to the bank account for the compensation, so he got the money and used it all alone. I was taken as a land user: therefore, I had no say. So when the next compensation round came, and at that time I had now been equipped with knowledge from the POWER trainings of NAPE, ‘how can I be a mere land user?’ I decided to claim my right. So I stood my ground. I resisted and demanded that he include me on the bank signatories to the compensation account. So now we have a joint account. In addition to this, if he gets money and says we are going to buy land, I tell him to hold a family meeting in which even our children are involved. So now I am no longer gripped by fear. It is also because if he tries to oppress me, I know where to go to get help: firstly, we seek the help of the Local Council as the grassroots leader, if he fails then we can go to the Community Development Officer (at the Subcounty). ”

**Judith Beirwoth,
Ngeudo, Buliisa district.**

17. The teams of Total and its partners Tullow and CNOOC are currently working on an oil development project in Uganda, called Tilenga, and an oil pipeline project through Uganda and Tanzania, EACOP, which will transport oil to the port of Tanga. For the two host countries, these projects will have a significant economic and social impact. The Tilenga project comprises oil exploration, a crude oil processing plant, underground pipelines, and infrastructure in the Buliisa and Nwoya districts of Uganda. See https://totalenergies.com/sites/g/files/nytnzq121/files/atoms/files/uganda-projects_introduction.pdf



PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI

Image above: Community dialogue in Katatyer village in Amuru District.

The evidence on customary landowners adopting a more inclusive land ownership is not yet established but a start has been made. What has changed in relation to customary land ownership (particularly in Amuru and Nwoya where this is more common, but also in Hoima and Buliisa), is two-fold; women have gained confidence and are now standing up against the customary norms of 'girls do not inherit (paternal) family land' and 'women have no ownership rights to land (in their marital homes)'.

“ Under POWER we were taught that Article 21 and 26 of the Constitution, 1995 states that ‘everybody -men and women - have equal rights to own land, property and everything’. Now, we Bagungu women learnt from POWER that we have the right to share our father’s property, whether it is land or other property. So when United National Road Authority (UNRA) compensated our family for the road passing through my father’s land, I insisted and saw to it that we (the three girls) shared with our brothers the same and equal amounts ”

**Lucy Awoo,
Chairperson LC1, POWER participant**

In Amuru and Nwoya districts, women advocates are actively sharing their knowledge on women's land rights and VAWG with their local communities. While the advocacy groups' influence remains within a tight radius – frequently supporting women who are their neighbours or family members – their efforts have largely been successful. Adong Betty says *“[before the training], I did not know about women's land rights and gender based violence. We used to just take a peek at our neighbours when they would fight; [but] now we are helping them.”*

Similarly, Lagaji Women's Group (LWG) from Purongo Subcounty in Nwoya district are living and realising the promise of collective strength and solidarity. Through the project and beyond, they have come to better know and hear each other, and building trust in the safe spaces provided by the project, this has created the conditions needed for women to raise their concerns and needs, knowing that others will be ready to stand with you. They say, 'as women you can advocate for yourself and for others' and they are engaged

in sensitising other women in the village on their land rights and VAWG. The group members report that they have established themselves as advocates who people have been calling on to help in resolving issues related to access to land and property as well as domestic violence.

It is clear that women are now acting on their knowledge, taking up cases of both land rights violations and cases of VAWG, as frequently, the two are closely linked, and advocating for the rights of women and girls. For example, the New Owalo group in Amuru intervened and advocated for one of their own group members, a widow supporting eight children, who was contesting her brothers-in-law's claim that she (and her deceased husband's property) should be inherited by one of them. The women's group visited these brothers-in-law and informed them on the provisions of the law in relation to widows, clarifying that widow inheritance was now abolished and explaining how estates of the deceased are divided under Uganda's law. As a result, the harassment stopped, and she lives in her home with access to her land and full control of its outputs.

Image below: Lagaji women's group standing strong against land grabbing, Nwoya.



PHOTO CREDIT: SARAH WAISWA

Lobby events: to support accessing local, national and international processes to claim and protect women's rights

There are key moments on the calendar to publicise and mobilise in support of women's rights and International Women's Day (IWD) on 8th March is one such moment. In 2021, NAPE and NAWAD organised a 'bicycle caravan' event to attract attention and raise awareness on women's land rights. In line with POWER's approach of participatory activity implementation, project staff facilitated women in rural areas affected by infrastructure development from across the four districts to help shape, organise and deliver this event. That experience strengthened existing knowledge and skills of women at the grassroots, supporting them to independently organise together at cross district level. The bringing together of women from each of the four project districts was a significant moment as the cycling caravan of over 55 women included those with disabilities, women displaced by land evictions, those living with HIV/

AIDS, and activists. This was impactful as a group of women on bicycles is a rare sight in Uganda. The significance of the event was underscored through the attendance of Bigirwa Byenkya Nyendwoha, a female Member of Parliament for Buliisa District, who accepted a petition to promote women's land rights in Buliisa.

In another example, women engaged in POWER organised an advocacy event in November 2020 to protest against Hoima Sugar Limited's plans to convert circa 6000 hectares of Bugoma Forest land into a sugar cane plantation. Some women and their families had already been evicted from their land around the forest, and they used the event to share their experience of inequality and exclusion from decisions and practices relating to their ownership and use of land and forest compounded by climate change. The event venue was itself located within Bugoma Forest which provided a powerful backdrop for the speeches and interventions made and brought the women's realities into sharper focus for the 63 participants. These included affected women alongside local government leaders, media, officials from the National Forestry Authority (NFA) and other community based organisations (CBOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) from Hoima and Kikuube districts. In the lead up to the event, women, supported by NAPE, organised joint campaigns to conserve the Bugoma Forest with tour operators, engaged the NFA, the Office of the President, and Hoima and Kikuube districts Land Officers and forest service sectors. The November event was timed in line with the national elections due to take place shortly afterwards in January 2021, demanding for local women's voices to be heard and to leverage their voting power.

The event enabled women to make space for their experiences and voices to a mixed audience including the media and decision makers, and brought together long term campaigners as well as new grassroots advocates.



Image on the left: Bicycle caravan to mark International Women's Day in Buliisa

This mobilised wider stakeholders to understand the realities of the families that have already been evicted and how they wanted redress:

“My life has never been the same since being evicted from our land in 2015 by Hoima Sugar Limited, and the communities around Bugoma forest are heading to similar challenges if you don’t come up to fight. We had land for cultivation and food security before we were evicted. But now we are struggling to get what to eat. You better wake up!”

**Turyaheebwa,
Internally Displaced Persons (IDP)
Camp, Kijayo.**

The timing of the event attracted the attention of President Museveni who said that he wished to meet with the women when travelling to the district as part of his election campaign in December 2020 (though his visit did not materialise).¹⁸ Further, the President made a promise that government would do whatever it takes to protect the threatened Bugoma forest land. Although both commitments remain unfulfilled, this was a powerful indicator to the women involved that their collective action and experiences were heard, were understood, and compelled them to think beyond the immediate moment. As a result, they planned to create a conservation association named “Women for Bugoma forest land” comprising civil society activists, tour operators, journalists and individuals to champion advocacy aimed at keeping Bugoma forest free from



PHOTO CREDIT: NAPE

Image above: Women Protest Bugoma Land Give Away in the albertine Graben of Uganda

development and maintain the momentum of the achievements from the Bugoma advocacy event. However, the association has not yet formed due to challenges around the election period, and then pandemic with lockdowns and restrictions affecting travel and ability to meet.

Nonetheless, the experience of the women who engaged in this activism highlighted the power and reach of the media as the Bugoma Forest protest event and campaign helped to deepen mainstream journalists’ understanding of the issue. It also proved to be an opportunity for cross movement building and campaigning, between POWER stakeholders including the implementing partners NAPE-NAWAD, and local women in affected communities, and various wider

18. “On December 19, 2020, President Museveni is expected at Bunyoro regional headquarters as a presidential candidate on the National Resistance Movement (NRM) ticket to solicit support for him to continue serving as democratically elected president of Uganda for the sixth term. During their dialogue on Bugoma CFR held at Bugoma Jungle Lodge in Kabwoya sub-county, Kikuube district, the women appreciated their role as far as environmental conservation is concerned and how deforestation particularly affects rural women given the traditional setup of their communities. Ms Alice Asimwe of Kaseeta B village in Kabwoya sub-county said women are in great fear for losing their land because men normally abandon them when things turn around as witnessed during the Kigyayo evictions in Kizirafumbi sub-county. According to her, since the local leaders seem not to care or have no capacity to listen to the plight of the local people in relation to the threats against Bugoma forest, they better take advantage of the president’s campaign visit to tell their fears and feelings about the forest.” See <https://kazi-njemanews.com/women-to-welcome-museveni-with-petition-on-bugoma-forest/>

organisations and actors, including those in the environmental and eco-tourist movements. The fact that women from other project districts also attended the Bugoma Forest event showed how women need to stand in solidarity with each other even when an issue may not be directly impacting upon them – and how that act of standing together feeds into building a shared agenda, underscoring their own eco-feminism.

Overcoming and learning from challenge

The reality of adapting and functioning within the context of a global pandemic meant that some aspects of the POWER project needed to change and work within changing restrictions. This was especially the case for large gatherings and impacted the number of participants and duration of such meetings. The team found appropriate venues allowing for social distancing although these were in high demand and so costs rose. Alongside this, the election period also posed challenges with increased security risks for partners and participants due to political violence and risk of arrest. Partners consistently reviewed and updated the project risk register using it as a decision making tool and engaged with project participants throughout.

One unforeseen outcome was that women were more actively taking information back to their districts and communities than was anticipated, as part of a peer learning and sharing approach. As the project evolved, project participants from across the districts began to establish more direct connections, again, realising the vision of POWER in connecting and strengthening women with common purpose through the eco-feminist movement. A good example of this is how Land Queens from each of the four districts began to engage in the same or parallel activities, enabling them to be critical connectors to and between women across the four districts. In May 2021 five Land Queens from across the four districts attended stakeholder consultation in Gulu, Mbarara, and similarly, three of them

attended the National Women's Land Rights Conference in August 2021. Two others fed via Zoom into a gender policy for energy and mineral development in Uganda led by the Ministry of Energy which is a good example of the use of technology as a form of adaptation during COVID 19. The adoption of this role of Land Queens within the project was to enable authentic leadership at community level, and the Land Queens' ability to show up and represent wider grassroots women's voices within national level consultations is again evidence of a strengthened eco-feminist movement. For many women, their engagement, especially via Zoom is a first and it is paving the way for continued follow up and strengthening of their participation skills and advocacy.

However, an ongoing challenge is the dominance of patriarchal social norms regardless of existing laws and policies related to women's rights and awareness of them. We understand that attitude change takes time and requires sustained long term effort, and that trying to track

Image below: Community dialogue in Katatyer village in Amuru District.



PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI

the contributions of the POWER project to such attitude change is almost impossible. Even so, we take heart in the changes experienced by the women participants and partners and how they are now able to involve community and government leaders while conducting their advocacy. Although not all women are engaging in a similar way and may not routinely engage duty bearers to address rights violations, they are standing together and supporting each other as part of the eco-feminist movement to challenge and counter injustice and claim their rights.

In terms of successful delivery of advocacy events, the project was designed with the knowledge that advocating for change is a long-term process and success is dependent on identifying and engaging a cross section of relevant stakeholders including cross-movement actors and public opinion influencers such

as journalists. The project delivery has underscored this, and also confirms that strong risk assessment protocols are useful to ensure that stakeholders stay safe, but also, ultimately, that the activity is more impactful.

Engaging with the trained advocates and the local level authorities during follow up discussions across the four districts made it clear that POWER has unlocked women's agency, grown their confidence and facilitated collective action addressing common injustices as evidenced by the women throughout this paper. It also showed that the women's influence is concentrated within a local radius, and that to widen that impact, we would need to engage more directly with the duty bearers at various levels through activities which targeted them.

Image below: Community dialogue in Katatyer village in Amuru District.

PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI





“ There is change of knowledge amongst women...the work of NAWAD has opened their eyes: now they know their rights and that if those rights are violated, they can and should seek help; and even know where to seek that help from. At least if a man is about to sell land without her participation as an equal buyer the women will raise this issue-not like the past where they would just keep quiet; if they see another woman whose rights are not being upheld, they try to help the woman to enjoy her land rights; if they see another woman or child being violated, they also raise their voice on it. But this is still at a small level: at their household level, at their group level, the cases they have intervened in. So far the women are always working together as a group-even when they report on a matter they have always come to me as a group. ”

**John Ben Okot,
Local Council III Chairperson,
Purongo Town Council, Nwoya
District**

Confident, loved and empowered

Rufunda Joy is a 45 year old woman who is the director of the Hoima Blind Women Association and has been active as a local advocate through POWER. She attended the Localised Alternative Livelihoods (LAL) training (see details under Output 2 below) delivered in Hoima in October 2020, engaged in the Bugoma Forest lobby event in November 2020, and attended the Bulisa advocacy training delivered in December 2020.

“ Before I came across NAPE [in 2017], I had a lot of stigma being a visually impaired woman; I had low self-esteem and could not express myself in public. I could not think that I can start something on my own to get income. Even in my home, I had no peace. My husband was not providing for me, yet he knew I am totally blind. When NAPE came in, they started inviting me [to] women meetings when women had safe space to share their challenges and harness together the solutions. NAPE has supported me ... it has made me confident; I no longer feel stigmatised despite my disability because of the meetings I have been attending. I knew women have rights, but I had not gone deep into which rights are specifically entitled to women. NAPE has trained me on what I am entitled to as a woman and I have been mobilising other women with disabilities and training them on the same.” Following her engagement with the POWER project, Joy says she “felt loved and empowered to start something. ”



PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI

Joy has since mobilised other women with disabilities to start livelihoods projects on poultry and kitchen gardening. In March 2021, Joy was a key member of the 40+ cross-district team of women who participated in the bicycle caravan IWD event.

Image on the left: Community dialogue in Katatyer village in Amuru District. The community members are facing land wrangles and threats of eviction by a prominent cooperative.



PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI

Image above: Nyangoma Christine, Chairperson of Kyakaboga resettlement camp women's group. She group has been trained in beekeeping by NAPE, and also received 30 beehives.

Strengthening women's resilience through economic independence

Output 2:

Women displaced or at risk of displacement by land acquisition have improved knowledge of alternative livelihoods.

Alternative livelihoods for women

To support the movement's agenda of improved economic rights and resilience for women affected by loss of land, POWER conducted a localised alternative livelihoods (LAL) research that helped to identify over 20 income-generating activities based on local knowledge and materials as viable ways for women to improve food and energy security.¹⁹ The research led to the creation of compelling promotional materials such as posters which encouraged women to participate in

the related trainings that would follow; and formed the basis for a LAL training manual. Four accessible and viable alternatives - kitchen gardening, beekeeping, crafts making and millet processing and value addition - were identified, according to the following selection criteria drawn from the research and developed by partners:

- ▶ Availability of quality trainers
- ▶ Independence from middlemen or corporate agents
- ▶ Ease of cascading training
- ▶ Ease of training
- ▶ Eco-friendliness
- ▶ Low maintenance costs
- ▶ Low start-up costs
- ▶ Market demand and ease of access
- ▶ NAPE/NAWAD familiarity with the skill / product
- ▶ Need for existing knowledge / skills as a prerequisite among trainees
- ▶ Profitability
- ▶ Supports subsistence / household food or energy security
- ▶ Sustainability

19. Alternative Livelihood Research for Participation and Opportunities for Women's Economic Rights (POWER) Project, published in 2020, <https://www.nape.or.ug/publications/reports/108-alternative-livelihood-research-alr-2020/file>

Women-centred approach through Localised Alternate Livelihoods (LAL) Trainings

Local women experts contributed to the development of the LAL training manual with some delays to completion due to the pandemic in April 2020. The manual and approach followed a Training of Trainers (ToT) model, and participatory adult training methodology. The resulting LAL manual provided a comprehensive training approach with content that could be adapted to meet the needs of women in each district. Between October 2020 and March 2021, POWER staff delivered six training sessions across the four districts with the support of local technical experts, some of whom supported the LAL manual development. The trainings were delivered over two or three days depending on the number of skills being covered and the number of participants in each session.

The core objective was the transfer of LAL skills in the four viable alternatives. In addition to the core LAL skills, a brief but important introductory session on building women's resilience and leadership, underpinned by principles of women's economic rights was included. This session shared examples of the different forms of organising and resistance for women activists in development, as well as a session on women, land and food security. This differentiated POWER's livelihoods trainings and made them intentionally political. To translate knowledge and skills into practice the women were engaged in a session on making commitments to collective actions, during which they committed to share their knowledge and skills with others either one-on-one or, through smaller groups such as village and savings loan associations (VSLAs) that they were already affiliated with in their communities. For example, following the first LAL training delivered in Hoima in October 2020, 23 out of the 60 participants made such commitments, some of which are described here. Rufunda Joy, a participant from Hoima Blind Women Association supported the training with manure, and pledged to give it out to participants who need it for free; Fatuma, a trainer in Kitchen gardening pledged to give vegetable seeds to the soon-to-be farmers, and also provided free notes to participants; Peninah Ruhindi pledged to share the GBV toll free helpline, (which she had learned about during the session), with other women; Annet Kasolo said she will engage with the sub county officials constructing Hoima International Airport and speak about the land challenges that women are experiencing as a result of the construction; and Anna Basiima promised to mobilise other women to start a beekeeping women's group in her village of Kigaga. These spontaneous commitments that came out of the trainings were bearing out the promise of mutual accountability, solidarity and connectivity of strengthening the eco-feminist movement.

Image on the left: Sabuni Byaruhanga, 62, Hoima district, learnt about the kitchen gardens through trainings from NAPE.



PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI



PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI

Image above: Omuhereza Sanyu, member of Kigyayo camp women's group.

After each training and due to their strengthened understanding, connections with each other, and new skills, the women formed into groups that focused on a livelihood alternative of their choice. There were two core reasons for this. Firstly, they understood that their chances of starting up, sustaining and being successful with a new livelihood were enhanced by doing it with others, and gave them access to more capital and labour. Secondly, they had intentionally been selected from existing grassroots women's groups with some knowing and trusting each other, forming a good foundation from which they felt able to enter into an agreement to work together.

As is the experience of women entrepreneurs worldwide, a great idea or hard work needs start-up capital and the experience within the POWER project was no different. The project was designed to include a seed funding programme to support income generating activities

through materials such as seeds and compost for the kitchen gardens, materials for basket weaving and other crafts making such as floor mats and ornamental items; bee hives for beekeeping; and millet grinding machines for millet processing and value addition. Although the supply of these materials was intended to be immediately after the trainings, the timing was affected by the pandemic and the majority was delivered sometimes as much as six months later. Even so, during this period the women received support through ongoing advice to maintain their skills and prepare for when the materials would arrive.



Women's journeys to greater economic independence

A total 408 women across the four districts received LAL skills training in at least one of the four livelihood areas: beekeeping, crafts making, kitchen gardening, and millet processing and value addition. They then formed 15 small collectives comprising of 5-40 members and an average membership range of 17-18 members. Each collective usually focuses on one or sometimes two specific livelihood areas as follows: 3 beekeeping collectives in Hoima and Kikuube districts ²⁰

- ▶ 3 beekeeping collectives in Amuru, 3 in Nwoya, and 3 in Hoima and Kikuube districts
- ▶ 2 kitchen gardening collectives in Amuru and 1 in Hoima
- ▶ 1 millet processing and value addition collective in Hoima
- ▶ 3 crafts making groups in Amuru, 3 in Nwoya and 1 in Buliisa.

In terms of preference, we note that: beekeeping is the most preferred (nine collectives in both north and west), followed by crafts making (seven collectives in both north and west). Initial evidence points to the higher incomes associated with beekeeping compared to the rest of the LALs. Women have adopted beekeeping despite it being labour intensive and initially considered a 'man's job' in both the north and west regions of Uganda. This underscores the importance of enabling women to choose their preferred form of livelihood support.

Relatedly but very important too is that while COVID 19 delayed POWER in delivering on the start-up support, many women did not wait for the project to resource the start of their livelihood activities. They took initiative and borrowed from a VSLA or mobilised funds through other means to translate their acquired knowledge and skills into income



PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI

Image above: Kamu Kamu women's group in Hoima district runs a millet milling machine which they learnt and got through NAPE.

generating activities. This happened both at the individual and group level. For instance, Fiona Aronda from Kigaaga village reports that she started up her own agro-input shop, while Grace Gipatho from Kyakaboga Resettlement camp started up her own fish mongering business. Kigaaga Twimukye women's group in Kikuube district mobilised funds and bought their own local bee hives; while Purongo women mobilised their own funds (200,000UGX) and sent someone to purchase materials for basket weaving from the capital. This again demonstrates that the underlying premise of the POWER project was alive; women were coming together even when project staff were unable to intervene, and they acted collectively, were resourceful and addressed common challenges.

20. Kikuube district was recently created within the wider Hoima district/area.



PHOTO CREDIT: SARAH WAISWA

Image above: Precious Naturinda, Assistant News Editor & Gender Officer for NAPE's Community Green Radio, Hoima

Cascading the knowledge

The financial benefits emanating from both the group and/or the individual LAL projects have become powerful game changers in the lives of the women. In May-June 2020 and June-September 2021, POWER supported partners to produce and run fourteen radio programmes through Green Radio (which broadcasts eco-feminist content) to over 1,200 regular women and men listeners in the Western region. This series of programmes featured success stories of women entrepreneurs including those trained by POWER sharing their knowledge and achievements in implementing their start-ups. Initial feedback from some of the listeners that call in during the talk shows indicate the programmes have been inspirational to many women.

At this point, POWER has not yet established the extent to which this inspiration has been translated into the adoption of LAL skills and implementation of LAL projects amongst the radio listeners but the hope is to do so at the end line evaluation of the project. Critically, POWER has produced positive stories of change, which can be platformed to inspire and

embolden women in the project districts to turn to alternative sources of income generation as their traditional sources of income disappear, along with their land.

Overcoming and learning from challenges

The first training that was delivered in Hoima in October 2020 was residential, over three nights. The organisers made provisions for child-care for that timeframe and created space for self-care within the agenda by organising activities like watching movies post training hours and enabling a time and space for attending women to trade in any wares. During this first LAL session, the focus on sharing lessons of resistance was longer, and included documentary films highlighting women's and community struggles against extractivism from across the continent, including *Women hold up the Sky*, *Sweet success of beekeepers*, *Congo Blood*, and *Strike A Rock*.

While this first session proved to be incredibly enriching for the participating women and allowed the POWER team to take on a genuinely rounded feminist approach to the training, the overnight stay costs were unsustainable. The team learned



thereafter and ensured to use training venues that local women could commute daily to, thus avoiding overnight stays.

While the POWER team were intentional in mobilising women with disabilities for our activities, in one instance we were unable to support a deaf woman to join a LAL training because we could not locate an interpreter in good time. A second aspect of learning was to ensure that access issues for both women with disabilities and women who had childcare needs would be identified early, to be able to respond to them in time.

While there were many factors contributing to the successful conversion rates of

trainees who became LAL adopters, one key factor is the intentional selection of trainees. During the period when the team were refining the training manual, we were also discussing and refining selection criteria for the trainees and agreed that they had to be women who were unlikely to move within a short period of time, and women who showed the desire to learn a new skill with the intention of putting it to use.²¹

When we delivered our first session on beekeeping in Nwoya we understood that this was potentially not something we should encourage women with physical disabilities to take up, as the barriers to entry for such women were too high. Instead, we agreed to actively engage them

21. As the project focused on women who have been displaced or are at high risk of being displaced, we understood that such women would also potentially be highly transient in nature. Therefore we had to seek some degree of certainty that they would not move within the duration of the project's lifecycle so they could fully benefit from the LAL trainings on offer.

Image below: Sabuni Byaruhanga, 62, Hoima district, learnt about the kitchen gardens through trainings from NAPE.



PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI



PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI

Image above: Members of Ngwedo United Women's Group in Buliisa, Uganda.

in kitchen gardening and or crafts making training. Another challenge in working with WWD was that in mobilising WWD our partners used the approach of identifying and working with grassroots organisations that focused on WWD. While this boosted POWER's access to WWD, it also resulted in less integration between the collectives of women with and without disabilities. This was an undesirable outcome for which we need to find a better solution in future programming. Lastly, we noted that WWD have found it difficult to engage in collective work and instead have found it easier to work as individuals, but with the support of their families. In the context of cross-movement strengthening, while POWER enabled meaningful connections between the eco-feminist and disability rights movements, it is clear that more intentional activity and resourcing, focused on integration, is needed in future programming.

As detailed above, one significant challenge POWER experienced was the delay in getting start up kits and funds across to LAL trained women – partly due to COVID 19 and partly due to needing to

reallocate funds from other project activities as the LAL trainings had cost more than we anticipated. For example, it was in March and June 2021 that we provided start-up support to women who we trained in Hoima and Nwoya in October and November 2020 respectively – by which point we had clear asks from the women for various support including hardware such as millet grinding machines, marketing support and additional guidance on value addition to bee's honey. However, in the interim, the women had proven to be resourceful – using their pooled savings and other sources of funds as start-up funding for either/both their individual and group activities. On the plus side, this time-lag provided the women's collectives with a chance to better identify their critical business needs, and to grow in their sense of solidarity while working through inevitable disagreements – primarily leaning only on each other– and deepening their sense of sisterhood.

Standing together, raising voices

Following the Hoima LAL training delivered by NAPE in October 2020, 58 participants formed three women's groups focused on



PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI

Image above: Kyakaboga resettlement camp women's group consists of 21 members. The group has been trained in beekeeping by NAPE, and also received 30 beehives.

producing bee's honey and valued added products such as skin care and medicinal products using traditional bee hives. All three groups (Kigaga Twimuke Women's Group, Kigaaga Women Beekeeping Group and Kyakaboga Resettlement Women Beekeeping Group) have established an apiary and two of them which are harvesting honey have a stall to sell their products. They also sell them at weekly auction markets. The intentional inclusion of women's capacity building on resilience and leadership also seems to be paying off; the chairperson of Kigaga Twimuke Women's Group, Kwikirize Ann says that there is evidence that the group [of 15] has been able to *"support members to defend their land rights and to show that women are united. We are now registered at the district office, and they know that we are fighting for women's economic rights. You helped raise our voices, at this time a woman can stand in an office and speak, and she is listened to."*

The important difference with the POWER LAL trainings appears to be the underlying rights-based approach that we took, which has helped strengthen the women's sense of self alongside providing them with practical livelihood skills. As Gipatho Grace puts it *"POWER helped me a lot. I used not to know my rights. Today, I know my rights: now I am in charge. I also started a business and I am doing well in my business - I sell fish and other groceries. From the participation in POWER the money I got I used it to buy two acres of land in my name."* Tushabohuriire says; *"POWER opened our eyes. When I started out in the POWER project I had a problem of rejecting myself. I felt that I was useless in the community. But now my self-esteem has returned. I am now a happy woman. I got knowledge on business from POWER so now I have my own business. I am happy."*



PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI

Image above: Peninah Ruhindi, Chairperson Kigaga Women's Beekeeping group in Hoima District, Uganda.

“For instance, when there is an issue in the family, I know I have the right to raise my hand to speak up on what may be oppressing us. Because in the past, we were oppressed: no woman's words were considered in decision making. But now with the power that NAWAD has placed into our hands, we know fully that we have rights because this knowledge has entered.”

**Lakot Beatrice,
Purongo Subcounty, Nwoya district**

Annah, another group member says that she “acquired the skill of speaking up amongst men in a meeting.”

It is also clear that the women are seeing some clear, tangible benefits to their incomes. Many of them attested to being almost entirely dependent on their spouse previously, whereas now, their weekly

incomes range between 10,000 and 50,000 Ugandan Shillings (UGX) a week.²² Alinda Fiona says “Before, I had nothing but depended entirely on the man. Now I get 20,000UGX per week; every 3-4 months I get 360,000UGX.” Nyangoma Christine says, “before I had nothing, I would just beg others. But now I can get 50,000UGX per week. I bought two pigs and I own four bee hives.”

These stories of change bring to life the principles which underpinned the POWER project design – showing the connectivity between the realisation of women's economic rights and advances in their decision making powers. The improvements that the project has brought in participating women's household incomes will not guarantee that their fundamental rights will not continue to be violated. However, those women will be better able to withstand such pressures and respond to them due to the security of a sustainable income that POWER has facilitated, propelled by the increased awareness of their rights and the knowledge that they do not stand alone.

22. Based on data from eight women we surveyed through a focus group discussion held in June 2021.

Standing up for our rights: seeking redress

Output 3:

Women currently involved in land disputes (due to oil, gas, and other industry expansion) access legal advice

Mobile legal aid clinics

The third key aim of the POWER project was to help women seek legal justice when their land rights have been violated, particularly through compulsory land acquisition due to oil, gas and other industry expansion. POWER pioneered mobile legal aid clinics in each of the four project districts, spanning a total of 12 villages with a high concentration of women who have been displaced, or are at risk of being displaced. The clinics comprised of one qualified lawyer and an assistant who spoke the local language and had a good understanding of the local contexts who would situate themselves at a table in a local, accessible public and often free venue. Women complainants would be seen individually, or where relevant for class actions, as a group.²³ The complainants would explain their issue and the lawyer help register their case (where relevant) and recommend follow up action. This entire process was free of charge to the women seeking legal aid.

The largest advantage of these mobile clinics is their proximity and the fact they are within a short walk or short public transport ride away from the communities, as opposed to the publicly funded legal

aid hubs such as the justice centres which are located too far away for most women to easily get to at an affordable cost. Following the first two clinics that POWER delivered, the team recognised the need for the legal aid clinics to span at least four to five days in each district as that allowed delivery persons the time they need to address some mediation cases that could be resolved quickly with the right support in place.

The journey to justice has begun

The clinics resulted in 87 filed legal cases, supporting a total of 142 individuals (121 women and 21 men). The cases were filed either individually, or as class action cases where common grievances and a common perpetrator could be identified. 17 of these 87 (about 20%) cases were resolved within a few weeks of the case being filed, either through legal advice alone or often through mediation, which shows us that investing in training local mediators might help unblock a number of less complex cases which otherwise can remain unresolved for many years. However, most other cases (over 80%) are complex and the women need cost effective support to navigate the complexities of the Ugandan legal structures and the multiple forms of land tenure agreements which govern their rights.

Image below: Twikirize Anna at her home in Kigaga village, Hoima District.



PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI

23. A class action is a procedural device that permits one or more plaintiffs to file and prosecute a lawsuit on behalf of a larger group, or "class".



PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI

Image above: The land from which over 7000 people were evicted to build an oil refinery and airport in Hoima district. The land from which over 7000 people were evicted to build an oil refinery and airport in Hoima district.

Private lawyers are prohibitively expensive for women in rural areas and the local justice centres which are partly funded by the Ugandan state are already resource poor. This means that the status of the current judicial system does not support the quick resolution of land dispute cases and therefore there must be an alternative way to resolve them.

In the Northern region where land is customarily held, the traditional institutions have a significant role to play in the resolution of land disputes. However, as such institutions are led by men, transformation of traditional customs and norms that promote discrimination against women are required, before they can deliver justice in an equal manner. *“Me I return thanks to NAWAD firstly, because they gave me, as a widow, the strength to be the owner of the land that my deceased husband left with me. I am filled with happiness because of that. For, oftentimes – we widows – once your husband is*

demised the people of that family chase you so that you may leave the home. So, I started with the Rwot Kweri: they sat but the matter failed to be resolved.²⁴ So, they sent me to go to the LC1: the LC1 sat but they also failed. So, then I went to LC3. When the LC3 failed he advised that ‘you go to Kal Kwaro’. So then it was the Kal Kwaro that resolved the matter. So now, I have the power to speak over the land that my husband left as well all other properties that he left. That is what I thank NAWAD for”. Aluku Esther, Purongo Subcounty, Nwoya district. Therefore, in the Northern region a strengthening of traditional structures in gender responsive delivery of justice on land rights will go a long way in reducing the number of cases to be handled by the formal justice system.

In Western Uganda, the cultural structure is less strong and less used in land dispute resolutions. In the West, the land tenure system is that of Mailo land similar to what is operating in central Uganda (Buganda subregion) where land ownership consists

24. Rwot kweri is a ‘chief of the hoe’ elected by a community in a sub-division of a village to administer and oversee land organisation and collective farming, elected on the basis of their local land knowledge and community trust for an indefinite period and are usually one of the first lines of mediation in local land disputes. See H.E. Porter, ‘Justice and Rape on the Periphery: The Supremacy of Social Harmony in the Space Between Local Solutions and Formal Judicial Systems in Northern Uganda’, 6:1 Journal of Eastern African Studies (2012) pp. 113–115.

of a multiple tier of landlords, co-owners, squatters and tenants of land.²⁵ Therefore, the land issues here are more connected to irregular acquisition of land by government, where the land claimant is pitted against the investor/government. These require the intervention of the formal justice system as they relate to contracts and the implementation of government policy on land acquisition procedures.

Creating community led solutions

Community-Based Paralegals (CBPs)
To address the need for longer term engagement on legal aid follow up, POWER invested in the establishment of a cadre of community based legal aid service providers in the form of community-based paralegals (CBPs). In April 2021, 20 CBPs (five per district) were capacitated through a two-day face to face training. Selection criteria were applied to identify the CBPs to enhance their success in the roles including individuals who commanded respect of women in rural areas; being trusted at a grassroots level to deliver justice for community stakeholders; prior knowledge and/or familiarity with local legal issues and structures.

At the end of the trainings, an accountability framework was agreed with them at the outset of their contributions, which clearly laid out the roles and responsibilities of the project staff and the CBPs. The CBPs were trained on how to handle issues of human rights violations and how to handle mediation cases. To date, of the 60 cases which were unresolved at the end of the clinic-delivery phase, at least 50 cases (83%) have been followed up by the CBPs, and they have supported to close 19 of them, 9 resolved

in favour of the women petitioners. Asaba Harrison a CBP from Buliisa district has supported Kabonesa Sophia to follow up on her legal claim as below: *“A road is being constructed by the Chinese Company 4C who had made agreements that they would be buying the murram from her land.²⁶ But they stopped her from using the land. Finally, they found murram on another person’s land which they considered much better. Without giving her notice they abandoned getting murram from her land.... After attending the legal aid clinic, she was assigned to me for follow up. So, after the CBP training I called her. I wrote to the company. They responded and asked for a meeting. During the discussion they agreed to pay her for the six months that Kabonesa had not used the land. They negotiated with her on the price. I have followed up on this matter and she said the process is moving well”.*

CBPs who are unpaid volunteers are all committed to supporting their communities and many feel energised and valued by the training they have received. It may be too early to say with certainty, but the CBPs feel like a sustainable resource for women’s rights in these districts as they form a critical bridge between the community and the more formal institutions such as LCs and justice centres. Beyond the CBPs, the women who have been engaged through POWER themselves have become strong advocates for legal action, which in of itself is bearing results in the communities.

Tiyo Jonathan, Regional Manager, Justice Centres Uganda who has been involved with POWER from the outset, and supported us with our thinking at the project design stage says *“we see a new trend in the number of women coming to the office seeking justice, linked to issues of property, inheritance*

25. The districts of Hoima and Buliisa are located within the kingdom of Bunyoro, which resisted colonisation by going to war with the British and rival kingdom Buganda in 1899. With the advancement of the British colonial push, large portions of Bunyoro territory were given to Buganda, leaving the Banyoro people impoverished. The annexations of land were formalised in the 1900 Buganda agreement, known as mailo tenure. This is when permanent ownership of a large plot of land belongs to landlords who acquired it through the 1900 Buganda agreement, while simultaneously recognising the rights of tenants on this land to live on and utilise it. Under mailo land tenure, owners have perpetual ownership and are free to sell or pass on their rights to their heirs. However, over time these areas of land have been further sub-divided through people buying or inheriting parcels of land, with indigenous Bunyoro people becoming customary tenants or squatters on their own land. Later, the Bunyoro Agreement of 1933 placed all land under the Governor’s jurisdiction, recognising the right of local people to use land and to have a certificate of occupancy. See Digging Deep <https://www.womankind.org.uk/resource/digging-deep-the-impact-of-ugandas-land-rush-on-womens-rights/>

26. Murram is a form of laterite (clayey material) used for road surfaces in tropical Africa.

and compensation, almost equalling the number of men; before, women came but their concerns were focused on their children's needs like claiming school fees." Jonathan sees the POWER project's work to raise awareness of women's land rights as contributing to this important trend.

Overcoming and learning from challenges

An early impediment to this area of work was an oversight in project design, where we had intentionally budgeted for the delivery of legal aid clinics, but not for the individualised support that community women who filed cases would need to progress those cases. We recognised this gap early in our delivery and adapted our programming and budget accordingly.

Our first legal aid clinic was delivered in Hoima in March 2020, shortly followed by the first pandemic related lockdown in Uganda. Thereafter court systems themselves were under considerable strain and between April and June 2020, and again between 10 June and 31 July 2021, only cases considered to be emergencies were attended to by the courts. This coupled with the delay in identifying funds for legal aid follow up meant that many of the cases which were filed lay dormant with little movement for a number of months.

Given the high and unsustainable cost of maintaining a lawyer that would support continued individualised support to the complainants, POWER recruited and trained community-based paralegals (CBPs) to remove the bottleneck. Although the CBPs have continued to work well as volunteers, deploying them came with some delays, largely related to ensuring they were provided with adequate funds which they need to support women whose cases they have been assigned to. "We have no allowance and yet the work involves use of money. For instance, when I have to follow up on a matter, it necessitates moving from one place to another: either you fuel your motorcycle or pay a Bodaboda (hired motorcycles) to take you. Also, when mobilising conflicting parties for mobilisation you have to make calls and that means use of airtime. At the end of day, you find that you are spending to work but at the end of the month you have no allowance to look forward too. And for the women it is even worse, they leave behind their children and family to go out and do this work and yet they will come back with nothing. Sometimes they have left the home without food. So this is a major disincentive to the paralegals and in our last meeting it was a key issue of concern that we discussed".

Image below: Bulandina Pointing at her new acquired plot of Land



PHOTO CREDIT: NAPE

While this is a valid complaint, and the project staff had always intended to ensure that CBPs would be reimbursed for related expenses, particularly related to transport and communications, the issue was with the implicit expectation that CBPs would front-fund these costs. Particularly under the constraints of COVID 19, the challenges to quickly cascading petty cash to a cross section of 20 individuals across four districts created unnecessary delays in the legal aid follow up work. This is partly because of the high levels of caution project staff need to exercise in disbursing donor funds, ensuring that there are sufficient checks and balances built in to ensure good governance and monitoring that the funds are being used entirely for the community's service.

Following the mobile legal aid clinics that POWER delivered, there was an increased demand for personalised, quality and free legal aid support for women in the four districts. While POWER sign-posted women to national level legal aid providers' hotlines to try to meet the increased demand, the hotlines did not provide consistent service. We found that some women called the hotlines and there was no response. The demand for legal aid particularly linked to VAWG would inevitably have risen sharply during and due to COVID 19 as well, which likely made the service provider response rate lower than usual, as they struggled to meet the increased demand.

In response we see that the trained CBPs are stepping in to provide a bridge between those potential legal claimants and the legal aid providers, but the challenge of resolution of disputes that require more than mediation continues- a problem that can only be solved through a better formal justice service delivery system in the district and the country at large.

In Northern Uganda where family and community ties are still strong in dictating women's rights to land, we noticed that following our clinic in Nwoya, four women

who had filed a legal complaint returned and retracted the same, due to family and community pressure on them to do so. The POWER field staff made physical contact with these women who withdrew their cases to confirm their safety. We found that the women have involved Local Council leaders and traditional elders (Rwot Kweri) to ensure their safety and protection. However, the crucial learning for the POWER team was to proactively share risk mitigation information with women who attend legal aid clinics to forearm them with resources they may need, if they do face intimidation and or violence from close quarters. We also consistently kept on file a contact number for each clinic attendee as well as their address to ensure that field officers could follow up and check on their safety if and where a need arose. Furthermore, POWER printed and distributed related visibility materials on countering VAWG to all the women who attend the clinics. As noted in the country context section of this paper, women in the project districts face high levels of VAWG due to their context and displacement, and POWER has supported such women escaping violence and abuse. Although the latter was not a specific project aim, POWER has reached such women and signposted them to support, and the need to intentionally include this in future programming of a similar project is an important learning aspect (provided funding allows it).

The incident in Nwoya mentioned above is another reminder of the need to continuously address the issues of cultural norms that perpetuate discrimination of women and promote the violation of their rights, including their land rights.

Resistance and resilience

Tumwebaze Bulandina is a 49 year old woman from Kizirafumbi sub county, Hoima, whose land was impacted by the Kiziranfumbi-Buseruka road developed by the United National Road Authority (UNRA) as a part of the oil refinery infrastructure in the region. She and five other women filed a collective complaint on delayed compensation through the POWER funded legal aid clinic. She had already filed an individual complaint a few years prior and had been back and forth to UNRA trying to get a decision. “When I met [the POWER project facilitated] lawyer, I was relieved. I knew I would get my compensation after a long game of hide and seek. The lawyer was accommodative. She listened to us, took us through what the law says on land rights and promised to follow up the case. [I]t didn’t take long before my fellow women and I were compensated. UNRA team came

looking for us, they apologised for poor communication and not paying us in time and processed our compensation. I used the compensation money to build a permanent house and buy an acre of land in the village.”

Many of the women who have engaged with POWER – both directly with the legal aid clinics, but also others who have attended LAL and advocacy training, have been sharing their knowledge and encouraging other women with legal claims to seek justice. Bulandina says, “I have reached out to three other women on a one-on-one basis and taught them about women’s rights to land ownership and informed them that there is a lawyer who can help. One of the women, called Precious was needing help. The lawyer agreed that when she returns here she will help her.”

Image below: Bulandina pointing at her newly built house, in Hoima



PHOTO CREDIT: NAPE

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

The expected result of POWER is that the eco-feminist movement is strengthened in the four project districts of Uganda to actively promote and protect women's land rights, land ownership and livelihoods, gain access to justice and to advocate for policy change. At a fundamental level, through POWER we also hoped to increase support for women's land rights at community level among leaders, the general population, and men and women. Furthermore, we intended to influence changes primarily in local and district level policies and practice that promote and protect the land rights of Ugandan women, particularly those currently affected by or at risk of displacement.

By September 2021, NAPE and NAWAD have directly supported and mobilised in excess of 1,220 women, including 110 with declared disabilities, to influence decision making in local development processes as well as promote the adoption of Localised Alternative Livelihoods (LAL) in communities affected by land intensive industries. We hope that our project endline evaluation will help us to provide more robust and conclusive data on this.

Below are the key lessons we learned (and re-learned) through the process of delivering POWER.

1. Once women understand their rights, and their value, and once they are facilitated to understand structures and organisations that can help them to realise those rights, there is a fundamental unlocking of power within – which is a process that is difficult to reverse. Women's rights organisations and all stakeholders interested in furthering gender equality need to invest in this process of unlocking.

“ Advocacy training opened my head: I should go out and advocate for myself or another [woman] because I know where to go; I know that I have a right to control land; I have a right, even as a woman with disability, to get married. ”

**Akello Vincentia,
Amuru**

“ For me, what I got from POWER project has made me a happier person. I am a widow. Because of the POWER trainings I know about rights, I know how to speak to people; I know how to sensitise people on how they should relate with each other in their home/family. Further to this, I find that I have authority in my home: if there is any matter in the home/family I am involved/consulted. ”

**Aluku Esther,
Nwoya**

“ These women do not keep quiet. They are trying by themselves to resolve problems. When they fail they go to LC1; if he fails then the CDO; and if it still fails to the Police. ”

**John Ben Okot,
LC3 Chairperson of Purongo Town Council, Amuru**

2. Working with others – collective action – be it with just one other, or many others, has the power to fuel women’s voices and galvanise their strengths to stand up to power structures.

In April 2021, Peninah Ruhindi and Kyaliisiima Grace, two POWER project Land Queens from Hoima attended a district dialogue meeting on compensation and the resettlement of Project Affected Persons (PAPs) under the East African Crude Oil Pipeline Project in Hoima. The meeting was organised by Total and Atacama Consulting with the aim to provide updates on the Resettlement Actions Plans (RAP) disclosure. In the meeting the Land Queens raised issues of continued denial of access to land and delayed compensation, and the companies responded to say that they committed to PAPs being able to continue using their land until they have been fully compensated and issued with a notice to vacate. The companies also committed that the RAP team will make site visits to undertake individual entitlement disclosure and compensation agreement signing ahead of payment processing.

Image below: Land queens and members of the Kigaga Oil Refinery Women’s Development Association



PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI



PHOTO CREDIT: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI

Image above: Community members from Katatyer village present their petition to the leaders in Amuru District. The community members are facing land wrangles and threats of eviction by a prominent cooperative.

3. Grassroots women and women's groups will focus their advocacy work primarily on a local radius – taking action on issues related to their own families, their neighbours and at a village level. This level of localised engagement is powerful, enabling and necessary. In order to lift the impact of that work to effect policy and practice at county/district/national level, programmes need to intentionally build in networking opportunities and spaces which bring local women's groups into more direct and consistent contact with higher level duty bearers.

“ POWER has influenced some local level leaders to better promote and protect land rights of women in Nwoya. The police are key in GBV matters while the LC1 and the Rwot Kweri are important on land related issues. I have seen that now the Rwot Kweri put special emphasis on women empowerment and property rights. They know that when they mediate, they should not make it like a court case (they are not judges); they know the clear referral pathway-if they fail, they should refer to local councils. Also, these days their response to cases reported to them is free of charge compared to those days when they required to be 'facilitated'. I would say that the same changes are evident in the LCs, they offer free mediation; they no longer keep postponing to the level they did before. I see that there is increased willingness to participate in resolving women's rights issues and more active in mobilising for community engagement meetings. ”

**Fred Okecha,
District Community Development Officer for Nwoya**

4. Feminist programming unapologetically focuses on women as key beneficiaries. Even so, there is a need to intentionally build in activities which focus on information sharing with men – both at a family level as well as at an institutional level – to ensure that men can be better enablers.

“ Members of Lagaji Women Group from Nwoya testify that they are now seeing key differences in the community, including a shift in mind-set of those who previously held that ‘women have no value’. ‘Husbands used to sell family land without involving the woman, especially in seeking their consent, but now this is changing ”

A Lagaji women’s group member reports.

5. Grassroots women’s groups grapple with discrimination and hierarchies as all women’s movements do. Collective action through formal and or informal groups means navigating the challenges of group dynamics and group structures which can require responsive interventions (and budgeting) such as leadership and conflict resolution training.

“ there were two ethnic groups in their women’s group: those that are Lunyoro/ Rukiga speakers (of Bantu origins) and the Alur (of Nilotic origins). She said that this has resulted into discrimination amongst the group members and there was need to address this difference. ”

A member of Kyakaboga Resettlement Women’s group.

6. Supporting women with disabilities to understand the value of advocacy will benefit other women with disability within communities.

Yago Pino Women with Disability group from Nwoya district were trained in advocacy in August 2020, following which they were active in their local community. In April 2021, there was a case of defilement in which a mute girl was sexually abused by a young man in her neighbourhood. The group got involved and ensured that the perpetrator was apprehended. This group action created pressure on duty bearers such that the man was arrested. This successful advocacy action has helped women and they said that “this has shown them that as women they have power; and they also know their rights as women with disability.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

for stakeholders; shaped and or validated by women in rural areas

Community stakeholders – women grassroots actors/activists should:

- ▶ Educate yourselves on your rights.
- ▶ Open a bank account in your own name.
- ▶ If you are legally married, ensure your name as a woman is on the purchase or sale agreement as a buyer or seller at equal footing with your husband and not merely as a witness.
- ▶ If you are not legally married, include your name on all formal paperwork.
- ▶ Ensure that both husband and wife (where relevant) are recognised as owners if selling land, so that both can be beneficiaries.
- ▶ Ensure that you benefit if ancestral land is being divided; ensure that if there is an issue of inheritance that you speak up on your rights as a daughter, equaling those of sons.
- ▶ Plan and organise women's community dialogues and community exchange

visits (within districts and counties) on women's rights and land rights to share experiences and knowledge, updates on developments and to learn from each other, strategise together and engage your leaders.

- ▶ Start or become active in CBOs, including to organise and engage in advocacy events.

Local district and national government actors and policy makers should:

- ▶ Create awareness and empower more women on their land rights and compensation issues.
- ▶ Promote food and nutrition security by supporting women to grow enterprise crops; training them in the relevant skills, including organic farming; and link women to organisations that implement climate change adaptation strategies.
- ▶ Enforce land and compensation policies and regulations, including fair and timely valuation and compensation and co-ownership; and ensure strict guidelines on inclusion of women.

- ▶ Continue to support localised justice centres and affordable legal aid providers.
- ▶ Exercise better control over foreign companies to protect local communities and the environment, ensuring respect of the buffer zones (boundaries between government land and community land).
- ▶ Secure women's land and property rights through upholding and or amending legislation to ensure equality and non-discriminatory succession and inheritance practices that do not exacerbate the discrimination of women. For example, ensure joint spousal co-ownership of family land and property as provided for in the Land Policy (2013); popularise the Land (Amendment) Act (2010) to promote ownership and inheritance of land by women and girls.
- ▶ Create joint chain link forums that meet periodically (e.g. quarterly) linking officials such as the District Police Commander, Officer in Charge - Criminal investigation Department, medical superintendent, and Resident District Commissioner, to review performance of the public sectors represented, to identify and address any underperformance and take action to address it. (e.g. Misconduct by health workers or police officers on GBV cases they were supposed to handle.)

Actors within the eco-feminist movement, environmental movement, and women's movements (WM) including Non-

Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) should:

- ▶ Work at the village level (as well as the sub county/ district level), engaging both established women's groups and women who are not part of established groups.
- ▶ Intentionally work with marginalised women, including women with disabilities, survivors of violence and internally displaced persons, as a way to increase inclusivity.
- ▶ Identify and capacitate local women's collectives.
- ▶ Explore existing non land-intensive livelihood strategies like backyard gardening, enterprise crops, organic farming and take advantage of emerging developments to link women to growing employment and livelihood opportunities.
- ▶ Provide start-up kits (capital) and link women to financial institutions to access credit.
- ▶ Link women to organisations that implement climate change adaptation strategies for support.
- ▶ Advocate for and develop mechanisms, focusing on social welfare and insurance schemes that provide social protection for women involved in various livelihood activities against shocks, calamities and negative trends such as crop failure,

business shut down and illness.

- ▶ Strengthen the social networks which women are interested in and have been participating in, such as women's groups, through trainings in relevant identified skills gaps.
- ▶ Provide continued technical and logistical support to women that might need to access justice.
- ▶ Work with referral institutions and community resource persons to support legal aid referral follow up.
- ▶ Engage directly with and support local authority personnel through targeted programming including police and local councilors, supporting to strengthen the relationships between them and grassroots WRs groups.
- ▶ Share project reporting with local authority stakeholders when and where appropriate as a way to stay connected on the progress of localised work.

Global Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) and Donors should:

- ▶ Ensure that women and (formal or informal) WROs and collectives, including diverse and often excluded groups, have a role in design and implementation of related programming work.
- ▶ Account for and adequately resource the meaningful engagement of persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups, including budgeting for the

cost of creating safe spaces for them to access.

- ▶ Provide support for WROs and WMs to develop feminist trainings and related documentation to evidence the impact and value of their work.
- ▶ Fund increased access to legal justice through context specific mechanisms, including the support of mobile legal aid clinics and community paralegals.
- ▶ Advocate for more flexibility in funding for WM strengthening that is designed with the involvement of women from those movements, including movements that focus on climate justice.
- ▶ Share lessons learned with donors about what works to strengthen WMs, which may not always be about funding tangible project results but may focus on the mechanisms and relationships that support stronger movements.
- ▶ Increase devolved funding through women's funds and specialist intermediary organisations that have strong partnerships with Southern WROs and WMs.
- ▶ Increase the accessibility of existing funding streams to WROs and WMs, particularly funds targeted at human rights and CSOs.
- ▶ Place greater emphasis on core and long-term funding, where possible based on WROs' plans and budgets and providing sizable grants.

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