

EMPOWERING LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO MANAGE LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES

1. PREAMBLE

Uganda has one of the richest and most diverse natural resource base in Africa. According to the 2018 World Bank report, close to one-third of wealth in low-income countries such as Uganda comes from natural resources. Indeed, key sectors such as Agriculture, tourism, energy, trade and industry to the largest extent depend on the country's natural resources making it a vital component of the country's economy. Despite such importance however, Uganda loses about 2.6% of its forest cover annually, (one of the highest in the world). Communities have continued to deplete the country's natural resources, especially wetlands and forests, and this has exacerbated climate change, threatened livelihoods and compromised the country's economic development trajectory.



Above: UDN's Jude Odaro (Programme Manager) discusses the Succession Act and women land rights during a community sensitization meeting on Sustainably managing Natural resources in Bukedea District, September 2020.

2. THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN UGANDA

Some of the Laws, policies and key institutions that Uganda has put in place geared towards conserving the environment and natural resources include:

1) National Environment Act Cap 153	2) Budget Act, 2001
3) Land Acquisition Act	4) Constitution of the Republic of Uganda 1995
5) National Forestry and Tree Planting Act, 2003	6) 1995, Local Government Act
7) National Land Use Policy, 2008	8) Cap 243 and the Plant Protection Act Cap 31
9) National Policy for the Conservation and Management of Wetland Resources	

Despite the existence of these laws, their enforcement is still weak especially at sub-national levels mainly due to increased pressure for urbanization and industrialization. This has escalated the problem of destruction of natural resources.

3. UDN EMPOWERS COMMUNITIES TO MANAGE ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES

There are various CSOs that advocate and / or implement resource conservation related programmes. As part of her core values and mandate, UDN in partnership with Trocaire Uganda is implementing a Women's Resource Rights Governance Project in Bukedea, and significant results are showing. UDN held six community sensitization meetings at lower local Government level in Bukedea district to empower communities in managing Natural resources (Land, water and forests) sustainably in September 2020. The meetings focused on environmental protection (wetland conservation, tree planting), women land rights and good governance while reflecting on the dominant circumstances culturally, politically and socio- economically. Innovations like community drama skits were to raise awareness, entertain and influence attitude change in the multi stakeholder audience that included duty bearers, Area land committees, religious and clan leaders, NR advocacy members and community members at large.

UDN appreciates support by: UDN Membership; [DCA](#); [Save the Children in Uganda](#); [OSIEA](#), [Inspectorate of Government](#); [IBP](#), [Trocaire](#) and [DGF](#).

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The intervention brought out touchy issues: there was wetland encroachment through removing boundaries from the demarcated wetlands like Abibit in Malera and Okumu in Aminit Sub County; some politicians encouraged community members to cultivate on wetlands contrary to the presidential directive of evacuation from wetlands. Wetland management is still a contentious issue considering that government has allocated wetlands to investors to build industries yet community men and women are not provided with an alternative means of deriving their livelihood.



community drama skit on encroaching on wetlands.

Oswapai wetland (located near Bukedea district headquarters, measuring between 14-16 acres) has been greatly encroached upon by urban dwellers who rent from the politicians and prison authorities. They are engaged in the degradation to cultivate crops like rice. Even other wetlands in the periphery of the district have continued to be rented out to private individuals for other economic activities.

Even at individual level, a number of men, women and children have directly benefitted from the advocacy platforms. Ms. Akellot Berida Loy, a widow aged 67 years, staying in Kabarwa Sub County. Ms. Akellot with 6 children was chased off her land in 1990 when her husband died. Her late husband's relatives and neighbors forced her off the family land since she had given birth to 5 girls and 1 boy. As a result of the disseminated information and knowledge shared, she was glad to hear about her land rights as widow and girl children to be entitled to equal land share as the boy child. The people are happy that UDN has supported successful mediation in some of the land related cases and referred others to Institutions mandated to resolve land conflicts.



Standing On the left, Ms Akellot testifies how family land was grabbed after the death of her husband

4. IMMEDIATE TAKE - AWAYS FROM THE UDN INTERVENTIONS

- 1) Sensitization meetings were an eye opener for men and women regarding their land rights .
- 2) Community recognised that girl and boy children must not be excluded when it comes to Land entitlement.
- 3) Communities realized the cardinal importance of drafting wills in minimizing frequent family conflicts.
- 4) Tree Planting practices were reignited and widely adopted by Bukedea communities to conserve the environment.
- 5) Wetland management committees were constituted to play an oversight role of protecting wetlands from encroachers to the benefit of every community man and woman.

If current and future generations are to benefit, key provisions in the environmental management related legislations and institutions must be seen to strongly bite to prevent manmade destruction of natural resources, regardless of the position culprits hold socially, culturally, economically politically or otherwise.

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