



Strengthening Women's Potentials and Capabilities: A Perceived Strategy to Narrow the Gender-Gap in Land Rights in South-Western Uganda

Prudence Kemigisha

1. Department of Environment and Livelihood Support Systems, Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, P.O. Box 1410 Mbarara, Uganda

Abstract:

The gender gap in land rights operates within the broader context of the bigger gender gap in society which is rooted deeply in informal/normative and formal/statutory structures. Security of tenure is a major determinant of the ability of women to improve the productivity of the land they use, to rebalance decision making power within the household, and to raise their status in the household, the community, and as citizens. There is thus the need of succinct strategies to narrow the gender gap in access to and control of the land because unequal access to land is one of the most important forms of economic inequality between men and women and has consequences for women's capabilities as food producers and key contributors to human welfare. This study aimed at exploring the untapped potentials and capabilities of rural women that may be exploited to narrow the gender gap in land rights in Uganda. The study was conducted among the farmer groups and key informants in South Western Uganda. To narrow the gender gap in land rights, the study identified strategies for strengthening women's potentials and capabilities that included formation of women's groups, changing traditions and practices that discriminate against women in terms of land acquisition and land tenure security, increasing awareness and advocacy for women land rights, empowering them to obtain and defend their land rights and also to enhance their potential to utilize the existing legal legislations, legal aid and legal services.

Keywords: Women potentials, Women capabilities, Gender gap, Land rights

BACKGROUND

Land is an important productive asset for households that depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Access to and control of land is synonymous with wealth, status and power of individuals at the household and national levels (FAO, 2011). Strengthening women's access to, and control over land is seen as an important means of raising their status and influence within households and communities. It has direct impacts on farm productivity, and can also have far-reaching implications for minimizing land related conflicts that are usually fueled by discontentment brought by unfair ownership, access and control of land between men and women.

Rights are defined as claims that are legally and socially recognized and enforceable by an external legitimized authority, be it a village level constitution, some higher-level judicial or executive body of the state (Bromley, 1991). Agarwal (1994) conceives land rights to encompass access, control and ownership of land in that access can be through rights of ownership and use whereas control over land means the ability to decide how land is used, how its produce is disposed of, whether it can be leased out, mortgaged, mortgaged, bequeathed or sold. Mamdan (2004) believes that rights to land is associated with social identity and thus empowers, gives

status and this makes it critical to examine not only household level land rights but also the distribution of land rights within the household. This explains why rights over land are synonymous with most conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Literature on women land rights shows that considerable gender gaps in access to and control over land do exist in Uganda as does in other countries around the globe (Agarwal, 1994; Adoko et al., 2011; Ahikire, 2011; Asiimwe, 2014; Kemigisha, 2021). Women as key contributors to agricultural productivity are less likely than men to own or have access to land. The land they do have access to, is often of poorer quality and in smaller plots (Sheahan & Barrett, 2014). Fewer than 15% of agricultural landholders around the world are women and 85% are men (Twyman et al., 2015). The percentage of women land owners ranges from less than 20% in several countries such as Nigeria, Peru to slightly over 50% in Ecuador and Malawi. Even in Malawi where women own land, they own less land than men (Slavchevska et al., 2016). In Uganda, the situation is comparatively similar. From a survey that was conducted in Kapchorwa District in 2009 by Women Land Link Africa (WLLA, 2010), findings revealed that only 8% of married women owned land in their own right. The majority of women did not have land in their own right because in most cases, even when they saved money to purchase land, land agreements were written in their husband's names and the women had to sign only as witnesses (WLLA, 2010; Hanny, 2014;). Therefore, the endeavor to have equitable access, use, and control of land is particularly important given the fact that land is the key production resource (Ahikire, 2011; Kemigisha 2021). Unequal land tenure affects women's ability to access, use, control, and benefit from land, thereby limiting their economic empowerment and financial security. In many cases, women may be unaware of their rights to land, lack the documentation necessary to exercise those rights, or live in societies where social norms inhibit women's access to land. Studies have shown that a woman who holds land may be perceived as a threat to the existing gender norms and power structures within the community. Men who feel that their power is being threatened often target women to keep them in a place of fear and dependence. As a result, women experience gender-based violence (GBV) to dissuade them from exercising their land rights or threaten their existing property rights. As a consequence, the lack of land tenure security results in lower access to credit and inputs leading to inefficient land use, culminating into low agricultural productivity, food insecurity and land related conflicts as people resort to acquiring the land using forceful means. Closing the gender gap in assets—allowing women to own and control productive assets—increases their productivity and self-esteem (Kumar *et al.*, 2015). This study thus sought to explore the untapped potentials and capabilities of rural women that may be exploited to narrow the gender gap in land rights in Uganda.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In general, men own more and higher value assets than women (Deere and Doss, 2006, Deere *et al.*, 2013; Quisumbing, 2003). In particular, women tend to own less land, whether solely or jointly, than men (Agarwal, 1994; Adoko *et al.*, 2011; Ahikire, 2011; Asiimwe, 2014; Deininger *et al.*, 2010; Doss *et al.*, 2013). A growing body of research demonstrates the importance of women's ownership of and control over assets for a range of development outcomes (Agarwal, 1994; Haddad *et al.*, 1997; Quisumbing, 2003; Tucker & Ludi, 2012; Kemigisha, 2021).

A woman who is empowered to make decisions regarding what to plant and what (and how many) inputs to apply on her plot will be more productive in agriculture, she will be better able to assure her children's health and nutrition because she is able to take care of her own physical and mental well-being (Smith *et al.*, 2003). FAO (2015) reported that if women had the same access to

productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20–30 %. This could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4 %, which could, in turn, reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12–17 %.

Despite the fact that policies targeting secure land rights for women exist in Uganda (The 1995 Uganda Constitution, the 2013 Uganda national Land Policy), the land sector in Uganda is still challenged by insecurity of tenure, overlapping and conflicting land rights between men and women. There is information gap on how utilizing the opportunities and untapped potentials embedded in strengthening women’s capabilities can help to minimize the gender gap in land rights. This study was done to situate the problem within the broader topic of wellbeing and capabilities to conceptualize the perceived strategies for narrowing the gender gap in land rights in the context of women’s untapped potentials and capabilities.

STUDY AIM

The main aim of the study was to assess the opportunities and untapped potentials of strengthening women’s capabilities to narrow the gender gap in land rights in South-western Uganda

STUDY JUSTIFICATION

The results of this study will provide potential strategies for narrowing the gender gap in land rights and improve on the outcomes that come with land tenure security for all. They will further demonstrate the merits of strengthening the potentials and capabilities of women in the endeavor to attain societal development. The results of this study will contribute to SDG goal number 5 that targets gender equality, goal number 10 that emphasizes reduced inequalities and number 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. Results from this study will help in identification of future directions for further studies plus replication of findings elsewhere.

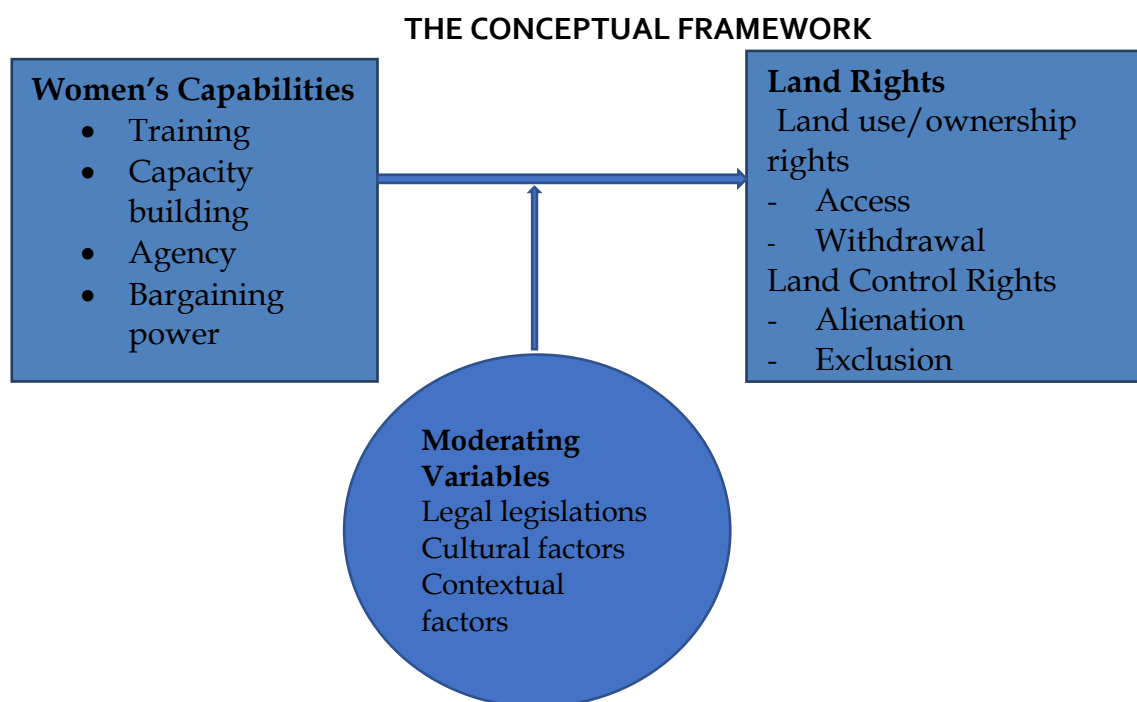


Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework

Adopted from the Global Land Tool Network on securing land and property rights for all –The Continuum of Land Rights Approach (2018) with modifications by the researcher.

The framework above presents the conceptualized link between women's untapped potentials and capabilities and women land rights. Women's untapped potentials and capabilities are the determining variables while women land rights are the outcome variables. In this relationship, it is assumed that strengthening women's capabilities and utilizing the untapped potentials of women can help to narrow the gender gap in land rights. The framework operationalizes women's capabilities in terms of training and capacity building, agency improvement and team/group strengthening while land rights is operationalized in terms of land use/ownership and control rights. The moderating variables include legal legislations, cultural and contextual factors.

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by the capability theory of justice (Nussbaum, 1995) together with the empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 1995) to provide the general framework for analysis/ understanding the opportunities and untapped potentials embedded in strengthening women's capabilities to narrow the gender gap in land rights.

Capability Theory of Justice

The capability theory of justice advanced by Martha Nussbaum, a political philosopher, is seen as a theory seeking to reduce social exclusion and inequalities and to enhance global justice. It was employed as the underpinning theory for this study due to its core and principled account of a set of fundamental human capabilities which are held to be essential to a good human life. Nussbaum (2003) offers an analysis of gender issues in development that follows from the "capabilities" approach to the analysis of quality of life. This theory builds on the work of Amartya Sen (1993), an economist, and philosopher, who pioneered the capability approach in the 1980s. Rawls (1999) and Robeyns (2003) point out that the capability theory of justice highlights on the difference between means and ends, and between substantive freedoms (capabilities) and outcomes (achieved functioning's).

Empowerment Theory

The empowerment theory on the other hand was integrated in this study in that it addresses individual responsibility which is lacking in the capability theory of justice. Empowerment theory is a construct that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviors to social policy and social change (Rappaport, 1984; Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1998; Kabeer, 1999). Based on this understanding of empowerment, land ownership should act as a source of empowerment by increasing women's security and influence and increasing their control over household decisions (Haddad *et al.*, 1997; Agarwal 1997). To this study, the theory helps to conceptualize how empowering women in the ownership, access and control of the household land resource may translate into narrowing the gender gap in land rights.

METHODOLOGY

Selection of Study Sites

The study was done in Bushenyi district, South Western Uganda. Bushenyi District has 9 Sub-counties (Kakanju, Kyabujimbi, Ibaare, Kyeizooba, Ruhumuro, Bitooma, Kyamuhunga, Bumbaare, and Nyabubaare). Three (Nyabubaare, Kyamuhunga and Ibaare) of these were be purposively selected for this study because they have a rich mix of processes, people, programs, interactions and structures of interest that were crucial for this study. The sub counties share relatively similar political, social and cultural history and this made entry possible. From each of the selected Sub-counties, one parish was randomly selected for involvement in the study.

Study Population

The study population comprised of farmers groups and key informants. Farmers groups were targeted because group discussions facilitate thinking of group members and bring in a variety of responses on any issue raised. Key informants included LC 11 Chairpersons, Sub-county Chiefs, Lands Officer, Area Land Committee representatives, and NGOs representatives. LC 11 Chairpersons were the key gatekeepers for community entry and in selection of targeted respondents. Sub County chiefs were important in this study because they are government representatives at the parish level and deal with family and land related issues in their areas of jurisdiction. The Lands Officer and Area land committee representatives were considered for their technical experiences and knowledge on land issues in the district. The NGOs involved were selected basing on their orientation. For this study, representatives of Uganda Women Network (UWONET) and Action Aid International Uganda (AAIU) were involved because they are organizations that foresee other NGOs that deal with women’s rights and advocacy in the country.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

Snowball sampling procedure (Browne, 2005) was used to select the three farmers groups (1 from each parish) to engage in FGDs. The local leaders (LC 11 Chairpersons) from each selected parish helped the investigator in identifying one member of the farmers 'group in their respective parishes who in turn helped to identify other group members and also helped in scheduling convenient dates and locations for the meetings.

The key informants were purposively selected and the sample size determined accordingly (Palys, 2008). The key informants selected for this study were 12 as shown in the table below;

Table 1: Sample size for key informants

Category of Key Informants	Number
LC 11 Chairpersons (1 for each of the three parishes)	3
Sub-county Chiefs (1 for each of the selected Sub-counties)	3
Lands Officer	1
Area Land Committee representatives (1 for each Sub- County)	3
NGOs (UWONET and AAIU)	2
Total	12

Research Methods and Tools

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources; primary data was collected through interviews using an interview guide and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) using a FGD guide. Secondary data was collected through document review.

Data Analysis

Thematic content analysis was used to analyze the transcribed anonymized data from the FGDs and key interviews. Themes and subthemes were chronologically developed and discussed following the study aim. The analysis of data was progressively done and coding done after every data collection day.

Ethical Considerations

Voluntary informed consent was obtained from each respondent after explaining the purpose of study. Participants and their responses during the FGDs and interviews were anonymized using

codes rather than names to ensure confidentiality. Administrative clearance was sought from the Local Council Chairpersons of the area of study. Respondents were not induced, bribed, coerced or even forced to participate in the study. A modest compensation amounting to 20,000/- shillings was paid out to the participants for their time transport refund.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Table 2: Strategies for strengthening women's capabilities and empowering them to obtain and defend their land rights

Perceived strategies	Observations
Formation of Women Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women can explore the avenue of purchasing land as a group at a reduced cost per member. • Venture the possibility of leasing public land as a group.
Women's agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women themselves should be proactive in advancing their rights. • Encouraging women participation in decision making • Encouraging women to bequeath their land to both sons and daughters
Awareness and advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men should be given the duty of educating their fellow men to be supportive of women's land rights • Support girl child education and functional adult literacy in order to up lift the literacy levels among women. • Extension workers should ensure that they involve both husband and wife when they initiate government programs. • Training women as conflict mediators in land related conflicts. • Bring men and women on board in the implementation of development projects on land
Land ownership/ inheritance documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Husbands and Fathers should have wills spelling out how they would wish their land to be allocated when they die. • Women should be encouraged to have land that they purchase or inherit registered in their own names. • Women should maintain frequent visits to the inherited land (natal) to avoid encroachers
The role of Government and Civil Society Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSOs need to refocus their agenda and redirect their priorities to intra-household gender dimensions in land ownership. • Government should facilitate women with an enabling environment to claim for their rights to land

Discussion of Results

According to the key informant from The Uganda Women Network (UWONET), the gender gap in land rights can be narrowed if new means through which women can gain greater ownership of and control over land are explored. Given the restrictions imposed by informal (normative), formal (statutory) and contextual factors, women can explore the avenue of forming women's groups and purchasing land as a group at a reduced cost per member. Women can also venture the possibility of leasing public land as a group for a longer period of time. These groups could also provide advice and assistance to women who wish to secure their land rights. However, this strategy was not supported by some women who said that holding land as a group presents management challenges due to group dynamics (such as lack of trust, death of a member, change of address etc.). This implies that what seems to work in one context may not work in another. Owning land as a group may have worked somewhere according to this key informant, but it was not greatly supported by most female respondents in Bushenyi district.

Women's capabilities can be enhanced through exposing both women and men to income generating projects that are carried out on land. This helps them to attain greater understanding and appreciation of the advantages that come with land tenure security for all. One of the key informants proposed that extension workers should ensure that they involve both husband and wife when they initiate government programs. When one of them is not brought on board, then he/she will be distanced from the whole project, and will not have any sense of ownership even if the project is beneficial to the whole family. He said that government programs that target to benefit individual households have failed to register success because the approach the implementers usually employ is not inclusive. The officers usually target an individual in a household and fail to realize that without participation from all household members, the introduced projects are bound to fail. He gave an example of a case that he handled where the NAADS (National Agriculture Advisory Services) officials gave out piglets to individuals for rearing. One woman beneficially failed to rear the piglet because the husband could not allow it on his land when he was not involved in the whole process of acquiring the piglet. The woman had to take it back to the NAADS officials in order to save her marriage. Similarly, another female respondent complained of a case where her husband sold off the goat, she had received from NAADS suspecting that she could be having extra marital relationship with the NAADS officials.

My husband sold off the goat and when I asked, he threatened to kill me insisting that I was having intimate relationship with the NAADS officers. He was thinking like that because a few women from our village had benefited from the project. In actual fact, I benefited because I was consistent in attending the meetings. My husband commanded me to tell the officers never to step in his compound or else he beats them up. If my husband had been involved in the whole exercise, I would not have faced this challenge (FGD Nyabubare, 2022)

Women tend to favour their sons when it comes to allocation of family land most especially when their husbands die without leaving behind a will on how their property is to be distributed. This widens the gap in land rights (Kemigisha, 2021). A key informant noted that if the gender gap in land rights is to be narrowed, it must start from the women themselves appreciating that they are agents in this cause. He maintained that as they seek for external help from the government and support from the men, they also have to make sure that they start with themselves and bring fellow women on board through supporting them when they come out to advance their cause. It was noted that most women who come out boldly to advocate for women's rights and those who seek leadership positions are often not supported by fellow women. Such women are usually labeled as unruly and 'not womanly'- behaving in a way not considered being inappropriate of a woman. Therefore, the importance of women coming out as agents in narrowing the gender gap in land ownership and control is very paramount.

It was found out that possessing land without a land ownership document threatens women's land tenure security. A member from the District Land Committee mentioned that the gender gap in land rights can be minimized if fathers, husbands and women who own land should ensure that they write wills on how they would wish their property to be managed when they die. Most women usually end up losing everything to their in-laws and some even are chased out of their matrimonial homes when their husbands die. The key informant was of the view that the transfer of land to women should be well documented and should be done in the presence of a witness and most preferably, a lawyer. This would help the women to secure their rights to land. According to him (Land Committee Representative), women should be encouraged to have land that they purchase or inherit registered in their own names.

In order to maintain access to the land given to women in their natal homes, the respondents believed that this can be possible if these women are encouraged to identify means through which they can maintain access to their own lineage land (e.g., by planting cash crops on the land or by renting the land out). They should also maintain frequent visits to the land to ensure that there are no encroachers and it is being put to good use. It was revealed that women who inherit land from their parents sometimes take long before they visit to see their land. That period of absence usually gives the brothers opportunity to start using the land and subsequently take it over. In case where women face pressure from their brothers, then they should be encouraged to sell off the land and buy land which they can have full control over.

If you are lucky and your parents give you land, let your presence on that land be felt. Do something on the land! Keep visiting and checking on the boundaries. Practice effective occupation (Land Committee Representative, Ibaare, 2022)

Most of the respondents who participated in this study had limited knowledge of their land entitlements, they were not able to discern between customary law and statutory law and were unaware of the different mechanisms that exist for land dispute resolution and land administration in general. The study revealed that statutory laws were seldom applied to the benefit women in the district. Men and women had little knowledge of existing laws, legal aid and legal services. This knowledge gap creates opportunities for those with more power (who are in most cases men) to unlawfully acquire more land and to exploit those with less power. The key informants from NGOs proposed that this could be achieved through increased legal awareness campaigns, non-formal and formal education programmes, legal literacy programmes, advocacy and lobbying.

The emphasis of titling of customary land in Uganda has done little to protect women's rights to land but has instead made them more vulnerable to dispossession (Asiimwe, 2014). The study reveals that the limited space that women had on family land was waning with increased individualization of family land that turns it into 'men's land' by virtue of being household heads. Giovarelli (2003) notes that as land becomes more valuable, land grabbing increases and women face greater threat of dispossession. In response to this challenge, the female respondents in the FGD conducted in Ibaare Sub- County proposed that both names of husband and wife should be included on the certificate of customary ownership. They believed that this would increase women's land tenure security and help them improve their agricultural productivity.

To most respondents in the FGD conducted from Nyabubare Sub- County, literacy campaigns would help to increase women's capabilities and empower them to take advantage of the opportunities that come with increased literacy. Majority of the female respondents in the group revealed that they had attained low levels of education and thus could not easily interpret nor understand the land related policies.

Most of us have not gone to school and we do not understand the documents we are expected to fill when we take our land disputes to court or when we are following up on land registration processes. Even at the local level, we do not comprehend the procedures and we end up giving up our claims. If we were given some literacy lessons on basic land issues and policies, maybe we would ably stand and fight for our rights. (FGD (Female respondent) Nyabubaare, 2022)

Education plays a major role not only for individual's opportunities in society, but also for the productive capacity and wellbeing of a household (UNDP, 2002). Almost universally, studies that analyze income, agricultural production, and other measures of welfare find that education, - human capital available in the household (usually measured as the education of the head of household, or the average education of working age adults) - is strongly correlated with these (UNESCO, 2002)

The district Lands Officer was of the view that if the roles, functions and mandates of the different institutions involved in administration of land justice were well elaborated, the gender gap in land rights would be narrowed. This is because women need to be informed of their land rights entitlements and need to know when, how and where to claim rights from the rights bearers such as the community leaders, courts of law, and police. He supposed that the land law policy documents and acts need to be interpreted to the language of the local populace in order to be well understood. He said that that can be achieved through developing appropriate and effective means of communication and information dissemination by having sensitization seminars and workshops on land issues moving up-country. The message has to be understandable to both literate and illiterate persons and that the dissemination programme should not be left to the Lands office alone but actively involve other highly respectable members in society such as religious leaders, village leaders, village elders and teachers. The strategy raised here supposes that Functional Adult Literacy campaigns would empower women to utilize the available legal services regarding their rights to land.

The key informants most especially from civil society organizations alleged that the establishment of functional and effective land committees in the villages and parishes to help women access recourse mechanisms to address land issues would go a long way in narrowing the gender gap in land rights. In addition to the land committees, there is also need to re operationalize land tribunals because magistrate courts were reported not to be helpful since they had a backlog of criminal and civil cases. According to them, land tribunals are less formal but legalistic and they are assumed to be more accessible to ordinary people and bring justice closer to the community. This presupposes that if such committees and tribunals were given the technical and financial support they needed, land related injustices would reduce, and women would be in a better position to claim or uphold their rights to land.

Respondents supposed that the land administration department should work to reduce on the bureaucracy and to improve the land registration function. They suggested that vacant positions need to be filled up with technical staff. The study findings revealed that the office of the Land Registrar in the district was still vacant. To acquire a land title, people in the district have to travel to the regional land office in Mbarara which is also not devoid of bureaucracy and other related technical challenges. As if that is not enough, the study findings reveal that the cadastral processes are too long and expensive and therefore not manageable to most people most who would be interested in acquiring land titles. Despite the fact that this affects men and women, the magnitude with which it affects women is more than their male counterparts because of the existing gender gaps in education, income, and other socio-cultural constraints.

The District Lands officer was of the view that informal mechanisms of land dispute resolution should be promoted with clear regulatory framework and a clear hierarchy. He said that there was a strong perception that formal justice options were largely punitive and did not promote reconciliation. He suggested that if Local Councils, elders and community leaders are empowered

with appropriate knowledge and skills to handle the land related disputes, it would see many women seeking legal redress in case of violation and this would go a long way in narrowing the gender gap in land ownership and control. The LC courts therefore need to be technically supported and promoted because they are physically and technically accessible by the rural population. Rugadya *et al.*, (2008) notes that LC courts are friendly, faster and people have confidence in them and identify with them compared to the formal courts. The respondents echoed the need for training women as conflict mediators in order to help them build community skills and increase the probability that their concerns relating to land rights would be addressed. This was in line with Rugadya & Busingye (2002) who assert that participation of women in local land management and administration committees including land dispute resolution/management committees is basic for women's empowerment as it enables them to take part in community level decision making processes.

Female farmers who participated in one of the FGDs proposed that the government should always come in to facilitate women farmers with low interest loans without putting emphasis on land as collateral security. They believed that if credit facilities are availed basing on social capital other than land, many women would benefit because they are able to accumulate social capital through forming women's farmers groups and other women's associations. With increased social capital and economic empowerment, women are able to collectively fight for their rights and also gain increased access to resources. A key informant from Action Aid International Uganda (AAIU) suggested that women need to be strong enough to assertively present their cause without being destructive because property rights continue to be a contentious issue in Uganda as evidenced by the hot debates in parliament whenever bills related to property rights are raised. The marriage and divorce bill were shelved for many years though it was finally put on the order paper in the 10th and 11th parliament. The property related clauses that emphasize protection of women during marriage, divorce and separation are not well received by parliamentarians and whenever the bill is tabled, the debate becomes tense and they end up shelving it time and again.

Despite the fact that civil society organizations and movements are instrumental in improving the social and economic conditions of the vulnerable people in communities where they operate, they tend to focus on family issues (health, economic status, health) and on class (the landless, the rural poor, the refugees) while ignoring the power dynamics and gender inequities within the households (UNDP, 2014). There was agreement among most women respondents from the different categories (FGDs NGO representatives and the technical personnel) who participated in this study that these organizations and movements need to refocus their agenda and redirect their priorities and start with intra-household gender dimensions and then move on to the inter household and the wider community. Intra household allocation of productive resources most especially land, needs to be gender sensitive. The respondents maintained that since these organizations usually aim at helping the vulnerable groups in society, their direct involvement with household members would lead to greater improvement towards the achievement of gender equity in land ownership and control. In support of CSO work, the state through donors needs to increase resources in form of financial and technical assistance most especially to the local NGOs that offer legal aid and other services to women.

To most key informants, the gender gap in land rights can be narrowed if there is commitment from the government to guarantee equal participation of men and women in agriculture through an enabling social, legal, economic and political environment. The respondents emphasized that this can be achieved when women are given the opportunity to participate in the policy

formulation and implementation process. They upheld that representation of women on land committees, tribunals, boards or other bodies responsible for distributing or overseeing land rights should be an important step towards helping women gain access to established rights. Most female respondents perceived that women's voices need to be heard and they should not be seen as being placed in positions as the government's way of gaining popular support. Through increased women's involvement in decision-making processes at the household, community, district, regional and national levels, their leadership skills are enhanced and they become more confident to claim their land rights.

CONCLUSION

Security of tenure as evidenced by this study is a major determinant of the ability of women to improve the productivity of the land they use, to rebalance decision making power within the household, and to raise their status in the household, the community, and as citizens. Closing the gender gap in ownership, use and control of land therefore unlocks the productivity potential of women and increases their capacity to make meaningful decisions. Strengthening women's capabilities and empowering them to obtain and defend their land rights through increasing the utilization of existing legal legislations, legal aid and legal services goes a long way to narrow the gender gap in land rights.

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