

# GENDER JUSTICE

## **Project: Strengthening Women and Youth Land Rights in Koch Goma Sub-County, Nwoya District, Acholi Sub-region.**

Northlight Green Services (NGS Uganda), with funding support from Bruder und Schwester in Not-Diocese Innsbruck (BSIN) and Dreikönigsaktion Hilfswerk der Katholischen Jungschar (DKA Austria) is implementing a one-year pilot project titled “*strengthening women and youth land rights* in Koch Goma Sub-County, Nwoya District, Acholi Sub-region“in Ama and Agonga Parishes of Koch Goma Sub-county, Nwoya District. The project will be implemented from 01<sup>st</sup> July 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2025. A Pre-project phase was funded by BSIN to conduct a baseline study and finalize the project logframe and proposal among others.

### **Background**

The Acholi sub region has some of the largest arable and underutilized land in the country and, paradoxically, is one of the poorest and most marginalized sub-regions in the country, with average poverty rate at 68% (*UBOS, UNHS-2019-20*). The region experiences protracted and severe poverty, mass youth unemployment and social dislocations defying numerous programs and projects, including the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), the Plan for Modernization of Agriculture (PMA), Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF), Peace Recovery, Development Plan (PRDP), and Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) among others. The pace, intensity and persistence of these crises are attributed in large measure to the more than 20 years of armed conflict between the rebel Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan government that displaced more than 1.7 million people and stalled development in Acholiland and greater Northern Uganda. Over the past several years, peace has returned to the region, and more than 90% of internally displaced people (IDPs) have returned to their villages of origin or locations close to home. The peaceful reintegration of returnees as well as the development of the region is undermined, however, by ongoing conflict over land.

In primarily agricultural Acholi land, access rights are a major flashpoint for conflict. Limited economic opportunity and the need to survive drive many land disputes, while others are driven by the failure of investors to engage with communities in a manner that is transparent and respectful of local values. These disputes arise in an environment where mechanisms for delineating boundaries, determining tenure, resolving disputes, and negotiating access are hindered by weaknesses in customary and formal law and by misunderstandings between stakeholders. Ongoing land disputes in turn inhibit the productivity of small-scale farmers due to reduced cultivation, decreased investment, and loss of economic assets. Moreover, while many Acholi’s welcome private investment, the engagement of private sector actors in the region has been compromised by limited transparency in the negotiation of land use, mistrust of outsiders among Acholi’s, and fear of instability and limited awareness of investment opportunities on the part of private sector actors.

The economic consequences of land conflict limit growth and constrain economic opportunity, perpetuating the conditions that drive many of these disputes.

### **Project Description**

The proposed project will be implemented in Ama and Agonga Parishes of Koch Goma Sub-County, in Nwoya District, Acholi sub-region of Northern Uganda. Family land wrangles are very common and on the rise. Close family relatives are living in fear of each other due to land disputes. There have been registered incidences of violence during land mediation among the communities. There is a breakdown of the traditional/cultural governance system partly due to the 2-decades war that destroyed the existing structures and systems, the influence of modernization, greed, and corruption.

Gender disparity in access and control of land remains one of the key constraints to the economic empowerment of women in Ama and Agonga Parishes of Koch Goma Sub-County. Women's ownership of land rights stands at 23.8% compared to 40.2% of men. Of 300 persons issued with certificates of customary land ownership, only 03 (0.1%) are women. Women continue to be victims of land rights abuses due to the increased interest in land, the commercialization, and the patriarchal system of land inheritance. Furthermore, we established that women hardly have a say over the proceeds from the garden which is largely controlled by the male figure, despite women's contribution to the family's well-being. Socio-cultural practices, power imbalances, and negative perceptions continue to play a major role in undermining women's and youth's access to and ownership of land rights. Women and youth need to secure access to and ownership of land because they are highly dependent on the resource for their welfare, productivity, and empowerment as well as fulfilling their productive and reproductive responsibilities.

The project is designed on the premise that women and youth are struggling to have their land rights fully realized, and have limited decision-making over land and property in the household and there is a need *to promote an inclusive society that promotes and guarantees land rights for women, youth and other vulnerable persons, if sustainable peace and socio-economic development is to be achieved.*

Based on the above background, the project is designed to fulfill NGS' Vision of ***a peaceful, informed, and economically empowered society in Northern Uganda able to effectively participate and contribute to National Development.***

The project is in line with NGS Mission "***To Conduct and Promote Research, Innovations, Advocacy and Community Capacity Building for Socio-economic Recovery and Transformation of Northern Uganda especially in Acholi and West Nile sub-regions***".

The project will strive to meet the needs of women and youth on their quest for sustainable access and use of land to transform livelihoods. The project will offer services that will complement the government of Uganda and other development actors' efforts on the related concern. Through networking, NGS will participate in efforts to harmonize existing land laws, policies, and programs, ensuring women and youth's right to the legal security of land tenure, protecting women against forced evictions, and advocating for inclusiveness in land administration.

- **Project goal:** To promote an inclusive society for improved livelihood and sustainable development.

- **General objective:** Promote an inclusive society with a specific focus on enhancing awareness and respect for land rights for women, youth, and other vulnerable members of the community in Koch Goma Sub-County, Nwoya District by 2025.

The project will contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) indicators 5.A.1: Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources, in accordance with national laws, and 5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.

### **Specific objectives**

- (i) To increase community awareness and knowledge of their land rights and mechanisms established to protect them
- (ii) Strengthen existing community systems to promote and protect the land rights of women, youth and other vulnerable members of the community

Land ownership is critical for women in Uganda. It is their right but also because they need it more than anyone else based on their role in agriculture and as actual breadwinners, as the livelihood of the family is skewed towards women meeting those needs. This situation is even tougher for widows and child mothers who have challenges with access, use, and ownership of land. Women and girls are systematically excluded from participating in decision-making and shaping policies and laws that affect them. This project will focus on creating awareness in communities of Koch Goma particularly among women and youth of their land rights and mechanisms for redress in case of violation. NGS seeks to use mediation as an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanism to resolve land disputes and lead to sustainable peaceful co-existence.

To improve the capacity of the Local Authorities to better handle gender-related issues affecting Women and youth land rights. The training will be on land legislation (The 1995 Constitution of Uganda and the Acholi Constitution), human rights, gender and development, etc. These leaders will also receive technical backstopping to enable them to mediate land disputes affecting the most vulnerable women and youth in the communities.

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