

# LAND ACCESS AND USE IN UGANDA'S REFUGEE-HOSTING DISTRICTS



## What the evidence shows about the inclusion of women, youth, and persons with disabilities

### CONTEXT

Uganda's settlement model allocates land to refugee households as the foundation of self-reliance. Evidence consistently shows that within this system, specific population groups — women, youth, and persons with disabilities — face barriers shaped by the allocation system and by prevailing social norms.

### BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE LAND ACCESS AND USE



#### Women

##### Gender norms and customary tenure

In customary tenure areas, women's access to land is often contingent on the approval of a male figure. Female-headed households secure less gazetted and community land than male-headed households, despite contributing 70–80% of agricultural labour.



#### Youth

##### Household level land allocation system

Land is allocated at the household level to adult heads of household. Young adults who have not yet established their own households hold no individual entitlement. The system provides no defined pathway for youth to access land independently as they transition into adulthood.



#### Persons with Disabilities

##### Assumptions about productive capacity

Research in northern Uganda found that family members often allocate smaller or lower-quality plots to relatives with disabilities, based on assumptions of reduced capacity — assumptions reinforced when adaptive tools and accessible farming methods are lacking.

**13%**

more community land accessed by male-headed vs female-headed households in assessed settlements

**9%**

increase in probability of communal land access per additional year of age for young refugees

**35%**

of people with disabilities excluded from all food aid under the 2025 revised prioritisation system

## COMPOUNDING VULNERABILITIES



### Women

Women are regularly absent from land allocation forums and natural resource governance decisions. Concerns about eviction are among the most commonly cited reasons female refugees sought legal aid in West Nile settlements.



### Youth

Field evidence from settlements notes lower participation in on-farm agriculture among youth, but whether this reflects preference or response to limited land availability is not established.



### Persons with Disabilities

Exclusion of 35% persons with disabilities from all food aid under the revised prioritisation system — compounded dependence on land that is already insufficient.

## EMERGING APPROACHES TO IMPROVING INCLUSION IN LAND ACCESS AND USE



### Legal empowerment for women

Legal assistance programmes in Bidibidi, Rhino Camp, and Imvepi assisted over 37,000 refugees on Housing, Land and Property issues between 2021–2024. Eviction of female-headed households was among the most commonly addressed concerns. Standardised land-sharing templates have reduced mid-season disputes and boundary claims.



### Government commitments

At the 2025 Global Disability Summit, Uganda pledged to strengthen the inclusion of persons with disabilities in planning, improve disability-disaggregated data, build OPD capacity, and localise IASC guidelines. These commitments provide a basis for greater disability visibility in governance and refugee-response systems.



### Digital land rights verification

A pilot programme in West Nile tested a community-based digital platform for land rights verification, with particular focus on marginalised groups including women. 55 VSLA groups participated as entry points, combining the platform with digital literacy support and device access.

## RECOMMENDATIONS



### Embed inclusion in planning and budgets

Generalised allocation does not address the distinct barriers faced by women, youth, or persons with disabilities. Durable solutions require targeted processes, adapted tools, and their inclusion in settlement planning and policy frameworks.



### Strengthen rights awareness

Low awareness of land rights, tenancy, and dispute mechanisms weakens governance investments. Accessible communication in multiple languages and formats is essential, especially for women and persons with disabilities.



### Collect disaggregated data

Most available land access data reflects refugee population. Disaggregated data on women, youth, and persons with disabilities is essential for informed programming and policy.



### Combine support pathways

Inclusive land access programming produces stronger outcomes when support is bundled with financial inclusion, social protection, and empowerment not delivered as standalone interventions.

