



## Celebrating 20 years of LEMU: Influence, Impact and Identity

### Introduction

The Land and Equity Movement of Uganda (LEMU) was born on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2003, established by the late Founding Director Judy Adoko. The founding vision was to be a non-governmental organization with a vision to contribute to:

*“a Ugandan society with land tenure security and equitable land rights to make land work for all in poverty eradication and economic development”.*

20 years on, the message has evolved, but the fundamentals remain the same. We are proud of our rich history, excited about this significant milestone, and are reflecting on LEMU's expertise.

Customary tenure is by far the majority tenure in Uganda standing at 80%. It has significant implications for large parts of the rural population. At LEMU, **we promote and defend our customary land, our heritage, our pride, our identity.**

We are proud of our achievements of positively influencing the perception of customary tenure, nationally and internationally; positively impacting communities who hold customary land and promoting the identity of customary land as an important part of our culture. In the 20 years since LEMU was born, it has gone on to become a well-established team of land experts, currently led by Dr. Theresa Auma and Dr. Doreen Kobusingye. The team continues the work that was ably set in train by Judy Adoko in 2003, LEMU is now well-established within Ugandan civil society, and beyond.

LEMU is grateful to have had generous support from a number of partner organizations and entities over the two decades including: Ministry of Lands Housing and Urban Development, District local governments, traditional institutions, Land rights forums and Civil Society Organizations. We are also exceedingly grateful to our funders, including; The Berkley Family Trust UK, Cordaid, IDLO, DCA, IDRC, GIZ, ILC, Trocaire, USAID, NAMATI and other Anonymous funders.

### 20 years of Influence: LEMU's Contribution to the understanding of customary land tenure issues in Uganda and beyond

LEMU has been responsible for over 100 publications on customary tenure to date. These publications have ranged from practical topics on the processes of documenting community land rights under current regulations, to theory and advocacy, on the implications of documenting customary land.

Some of the most influential written work includes LEMU's work on the National Land Policy 2013, where LEMU's influence contributed to the re-statement that customary tenure is at a par with other tenure systems and that it should have its own registration system. LEMU has worked tirelessly in the decade since the publication of the National Land Policy on the implementation of the policy in its application to customary land tenure protection, dispute resolution and boundary demarcation. Importantly, LEMU has also contributed to debates within the women's movement on the question of women's land rights, consistently rebutting the suggestion that women do not hold land rights under customary tenure.

Consequently, LEMU has established herself as a national authority on the theory and practice of customary tenure. LEMU has also taken her work internationally, with regular presentations at the World Bank

Conference on Land and Poverty in Washington DC, United States. Through this international presence, LEMU has gained support from all over the world, and has convened an 'International Advisory Board', which is consulted on matters requiring an international perspective.

To further promote her work, LEMU has formed strategic alliances with partner organisations, including membership of the International Land Coalition, the Northern Uganda Land Platform, hosting the ILC initiative of the National Land Coalition and alliances with academic institutions including Uganda Christian University and the Makerere Institute of Social Research.

## **20 years of Impact: LEMU's contribution towards improving customary land justice**

LEMU has run a number of successful programmes within Lango, Teso, Acholi, Karamoja, Bunyoro and West Nile regions of Uganda, contributing towards improving customary land justice. LEMU has also established innovative tools and practices to improve the definition of customary land 'on the ground'.

Some selected examples include:

- LEMU has contributed to the just resolution of over 1,200 land disputes by assisting with mediation and legal advice, maintaining a database of cases in order to identify key themes and lessons learnt. At the same time, we have encouraged and built the capacity of leaders on alternative dispute resolution, including the design of gender sensitive ADR toolkit.
- LEMU has improved the documentation of customary land through facilitating boundary tree planting and taking a lead role in drafting the Land Documentation and Demarcation Manual.
- LEMU has supported to build the capacity of traditional and local government leaders on customary land management, National laws and policies on land and women land rights.

## **20 years of Identity: LEMU's contribution towards the promotion of customary tenure**

A key milestone has been the PPRR work, in which LEMU worked with 8 communities (Lango, Teso, Acholi, Bunyoro, Aringa, Lugbara, Kumam and Alur) in north and east Uganda to draft their customary land laws into Principles, Practices, Rights and Responsibilities (PPRR) books. The PPRR books have assisted local communities

to protect their long-held customs and traditions, including their customary land tenure systems. The books have been distributed to the judiciary in three regions, magistrates and members of the District Coordination Committee under the Justice Law and Order Sector. The use of the books in courts as guides in customary land cases is in line with the Constitution's commitment to protect customary land rights. As a result of the formal documentation of the existing customary land laws, the communities' traditional and customary land tenure systems have been given recognition and respect.

## **Conclusions and looking ahead**

LEMU continues her important work on land matters in Uganda, which continues to have a significant impact on the lives and livelihoods of many Ugandans. As we pause to celebrate 20 successful years, we look ahead to a bright future. The three major contextual trends that previously defined LEMU's work included; (a) a rapid increase in the demand for land (including in areas where customary land prevailed), (b) a persistent misrepresentation of customary land tenure, especially among policy-influencing institutions, and (c) confusion and weaknesses in customary land management. The previous phase of LEMU's work therefore focused on overcoming these challenges.

These trends have continued and still provide a justification for more work along the same issues. In the new phase of its work after 20 years however, LEMU strives to create new synergies and strategies by considering land from a more holistic perspective than has previously been the case. The new strategy draws on the close links that exist between land and other thematic areas, including the drivers of conflicts around land: these include investments in land and other market forces, the impact of climate change, gender and poverty issues, as well as the opportunities that can arise from secure land tenure (such as increasing productivity through sustainable land use practices). While previous efforts mainly focused on protection of land rights, the new strategy combines land rights protection work with promoting sustainable land use, where applicable.

LEMU continues to seek for partners to support her work to ensure that the expertise gathered over 20 years continues to positively impact communities. To discuss opportunities to work together with LEMU on future programmes, contact us via email on [info@land-in-uganda.org](mailto:info@land-in-uganda.org) or telephone **+256 392 756 212**.