

Women Productive Resource Ownership and their Contribution to the Changing Family Patterns in Ankole Sub-Region, Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how changes in family dynamics, particularly marriage and gender roles, in the Ankole Sub-region are influenced by women's economic empowerment, specifically through their access and control over productive resources/assets. By examining these dimensions, the study aims to understand how women's roles as co-providers affect family structures. Conducted in Mbarara, Bushenyi, and Kiruhura districts through interviews and focus group discussions with various stakeholders, including women's rights activists and community leaders, the research reveals that women's access and control over productive assets/resources leads to shifts in marital dynamics and traditional gender roles within families. However, it also highlights a need for further investigation into why women are more readily assuming traditionally male roles while men are hesitant to take on tasks traditionally assigned to women.

Keywords: Women productive resources, family Changing patterns.

INTRODUCTION

Families serve as the cornerstone of sustainable development worldwide, with evolving patterns influenced by factors like industrialization (Xu & Xue, 2016). Notably, the transformation in family dynamics, particularly regarding income generation by women, has been extensively studied (Magezi, 2018; Zimmermann & Konietzka, 2018; Zaitseva et al., 2019). As women gain ownership of productive resources, their roles shift from mere dependents to co-providers within families (Irungu & Sassa, 2017). The debate surrounding women's ownership of productive assets globally, including Africa, reflects diverse perspectives on its impact on marriage and gender roles (Slegh et al., 2013). Such perspectives stem from differing views on marriage and traditional gender roles (Bott & Spillius, 2014; Lindsey, 2015; Taghizadeh et al., 2017). A key objective of promoting women's property ownership, including in Africa, is to uphold women's rights and foster equitable societies (Assembly, 2010; Bird, 2018; Irungu & Sassa, 2017).

While data from Uganda indicates a rising number of female-headed households, there is concern in the Ankole sub-region that women's ownership of productive assets may contribute to family instability (Kagugube, 2017; UNHS, 2018; UBOS, 2018; Hughes et al., 2015; Irungu & Sassa, 2017). However, there is no conclusive evidence linking women's ownership of productive assets to family breakdown. Thus, this study aims to explore the implications of women's ownership of productive assets on changing family

dynamics in the Ankole sub-region. The following sections provide the background, problem statement, purpose, objectives, research questions, conceptual framework, and justification/significance of the study.

Theoretical Review

The study draws on the liberal feminist theory of equality, as articulated by Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, and Harriet Taylor Mill, to analyze the dynamics of women's ownership of property and the changing family pattern (Wollstonecraft, 2014; Mill, 2016; Stanton & Ladd, 2001). This theory advocates for equal opportunities and rights for men and women, emphasizing the elimination of patriarchal related policies and the inclusion of women in public life through legislative reforms (Enyew&Mihrete, 2018). It asserts that women should have access to education, economic participation, and property ownership on par with men.

According to the liberal feminist perspective, women's economic empowerment enables them to challenge gender norms and achieve autonomy (Duman, 2012). This study uses the theory to examine how women's access and ownership of productive assets affect their roles within the family and society (Tong, 1989). It highlights the importance of property rights for women, in line with Uganda's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 and 5 (UBOS, 2019). Furthermore, the theory underscores the significance of women's ownership of property, as it provides them with financial independence and the ability to participate fully in economic activities (Wollstonecraft, 2014). However, it also acknowledges the potential tension between women's professional aspirations and traditional gender roles, particularly in terms of maternal obligations (Block, 2017; Fraser, 2018).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Women's ownership and Control over Productive Resources and Changing Family Patterns

In terms of women's control over productive resources, the study by Holden, Deininger, and Ghebru (2011) in Ethiopia, found that women's property ownership rights remained limited in the traditional families. It was generally accepted that only the head of the household typically the husband would be a landowner and hence the decision maker. Women who separated from their husbands were likely to lose their houses and property, and when a husband died, other family members often claimed the land from his widow (Branisa, Klasen, & Ziegler, 2009a, 2009b; Branisa, Klasen, Ziegler, Drechsler, & Jütting, 2014). The flexibility within cultural traditions due to gender equality sensitization has increased opportunities for women to use or control resources like land which gives women future financial prospects, something that women always longed for (Box, 2012). These findings could be one of the reasons why some women may not tolerate abusive marriage because they are able to secure their lives.

Kate Bird (2018) while studying practical measures to enable the economic empowerment of chronically poor women in developed countries, found that women's access and ownership of productive resources especially land play a direct role in boosting their economic empowerment (Bird, 2018). It increases access to investment capital (through the provision of collateral for formal lenders) and generates income streams through agricultural/forestry produce or rental income. Land ownership and control also increase women's status within the household and community, boosting their inclusion in community-level decision-making fora and their political voice (Guloba et al., 2018). Land ownership and control shift women's 'backstop position' in the conjugal contract (Mishra & Sam, 2016). This increases women's decision-making power and autonomy and their space to act as independent economic actors which is likely to cause changes in marriage and gender roles.

Elias, Nohmi, Yasunobu, and Ishida (2013) and Emmanuel, Owusu-Sekyere, Owusu, and Jordan (2016) suggest that increasing women's access to and use of productive resources lead to economic benefits from

increased agricultural productivity. Davis et al (2012) found that women's productivity in Ethiopia was higher than men's following an intervention to increase input use. However, Karamba and Winters (2015) and Wossen et al (2017) found no difference in productivity gains between women and men. Agarwal (2018) concludes that higher female agricultural productivity is contingent on a variety of factors such as technical training and support, credit availability, and commercial crop choice. Therefore, it is very pertinent that most women to get advanced training in agricultural so as to improve on their skills and increase productivity.

Yusuff (2013) studied the challenges of women entrepreneurs in rural informal economic activities and implications for sustainable rural development in Ogun state, Nigeria. The researcher points that acquiring farmland was not easy for the women. It was also discovered that although the farmland belonged to the father, it did not assume women's legal rights to the farmland. Yusuff also finds that when women want to buy land from indigenous owners, they are asked to bring their husband or brothers. On the other hand, the land owners advise the women to plant only food crops. This position made the widow and divorced rural women to be more insecure as this vital means of production becomes more difficult.

Eneasoba, (2012) studied *Land Ownership among the Yoruba of South West Nigeria: A case for Women's Land Inheritance*. The researcher focuses on the position of women's land inheritance and ownership rights in the South Western States of Nigeria and relates them to what is obtained in some selected societies in Nigeria and other countries. Eneasoba then makes proposals on how to come out of the quagmire of the inability of women to own land, and concludes that for law and policy to positively influence gender relations in the land tenure realm in these states, there is need to deconstruct, reconstruct, and re-conceptualize customary law notions as they pertain to issues of land inheritance by women. This could be why some women choose to live single lives in order to have liberty for property ownership.

The study by Galiè, et al., (2015) found out that unlike in the past in Tanzania some women today may be allowed to own livestock and even dispose and sell it, except that in most cases it happens if the numbers of the livestock are limited. When the herds increase, however, the men want to have a say in the disposal and sale of the livestock and its products. This implies that women's ownership is only valid as long as the stock is minimal. Women's control over agricultural products has traditionally declined when productivity increases and products end up being marketed through organized groups such as cooperatives, whose membership is predominantly men (Kergna et al., 2010; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2011). Perhaps that is why some women may choose to own property without their husbands knowing.

Among most African countries, violence against women was a widespread societal problem substantiated and perpetuated through general inequities as well as property ownership and control that operate(d) within numerous levels of society (Bolis & Hughes, 2015). Grabe, Grose, and Dutt (2015) in the same sense studied *Women's Land Ownership and Relationship Power in Two Different Countries in The Global South*. One in Nicaragua and another in Tanzania, they used data from 492 women. Results from structural equation models and qualitative thematic analyses demonstrated significant links among women's ownership of land, relationship power, and receipt of physical and psychological violence in both the countries. Findings showed that land ownership in regions is a marker of dominance. Collectively, the findings reveal that when women own land, sometimes they gain power within their relationships and are less likely to experience violence while others experience domestic violence from their spouses. An indicator of changing family pattern particularly in respect to marriage.

The study conducted in the Middle East and North Africa region shows that the region has the lowest level of women's land ownership in the world, yet little research has explored the barriers and opportunities women face in land ownership in the region (Issawi, 2013). Najjar, Baruah, and El Garhi (2020) studied patterns, opportunities, and constraints of ownership of land and other assets (houses, livestock, poultry, and gold) by women and men in the Old and New Lands of Egypt. Using a survey complemented with

qualitative interviews, the study found that both women and men viewed land and houses as the most economically and socially important assets, but they differed in what assets they considered to be valuable for women. The findings highlight the importance of implementing policies that optimize women's property ownership, even if they own non-land assets. The researcher concludes that while legal and economic interventions aid in accomplishing gender-equity goals, consciousness-raising initiatives are as crucial as pro-women policy reforms. The importance of optimizing women property ownership policies could be one of the reasons that makes marriage becoming secondary to property ownership according to some women.

El Garhi (2020) uses individual-level survey data from women and men in Uganda and South Africa to examine married women's joint ownership of land and housing. It compares women's control over and benefits from jointly held land and housing with those of married women not owning land or housing at all and married women owning them solely. He asserts that the lack of a clear and consistent advantage of joint ownership potentially arises from frequent disagreement within couples about whether the land or house is jointly owned. The study serves as a reminder of the complexities of joint ownership in practice, particularly within families, that need to be considered in order for married women to benefit from joint asset ownership. El Garhi advises that efforts promoting joint ownership, for example, joint titling and marital property laws supporting joint ownership, should not only consider these complexities but also establish and communicate clear and enforceable rules for joint ownership. Challenges associated with joint property ownership may be a justification for some women to live as single mothers which portrays changing family patterns particularly in marriage.

Jacobs and Kes (2015) used individual-level survey data from women and men in Uganda and South Africa to examine coupled women's joint ownership of land and housing. They compared women's control over and benefits from jointly held land and housing with those of coupled women not owning land or housing at all and coupled women owning them solely. They show that the lack of a clear and consistent advantage of joint ownership potentially arises from frequent disagreement within couples about whether the land or house is jointly owned. They emphasise that the study serves as a reminder of the complexities of joint ownership in practice, particularly within families, that need to be considered in order for coupled women to benefit from joint asset ownership. They further show that efforts promoting joint ownership, for example, joint titling and marital property laws supporting joint ownership, should not only consider these complexities but also establish and communicate clear and enforceable rules for joint ownership. Perhaps the failure of efforts to promote joint property ownership is the reason why some women choose to own property secretly culminating into poor marital relationships causing changes in family patterns specifically marriage.

In Uganda women provide 70-80 percent of all agricultural labour and 90 percent of all labour involving food production in Uganda, yet they own only a fraction of the land (Sell & Minot, 2018). Women are generally responsible for providing for the household, therefore their access to land for food production is critical to the welfare of the entire household. Even women who want to get into business need land as collateral to obtain bank loans. Since women are almost completely dependent on men to access land, women who are childless, single, widowed, disabled, separated/divorced, or with only female children often have little or no recourse because they may have no access to land through a male relative (Gebreslassie, 2005; Tripp, 2004).

In 1989 president Museveni suggested those women ought to withdraw from the usual traditional crafts by hand and involve themselves in more creative informal businesses (Tripp, 2004). In trying to improve women's situation, the land bill was passed on 25 June 1998 (Tripp, 2004). The clause was to ensure both spouses consent in transacting family property (Asiimwe, 2001; Tripp, 2004). However, when the bill was published, there was no sign of spousal co-ownership amendment (Tripp, 2004). The president eventually admitted he had intervened to delete the amendment (Asiimwe, 2001; Deininger & Jin, 2006; Tripp, 2004).

The reason was that it belonged to the pending domestic relations bill. As of now this bill is still pending and no positive progress in making it a law. This situation has since staged a challenge to coupled women's access to and control over land.

The parliamentarians and legislators in Uganda in most cases rely on the customary practices for legal solutions (Fester, 2007; Tripp, 2004). Women are always side lined by the 'real' word representatives which is the usual vagueness and constrictions at parliament and National levels (Ahikire, 2018; Rubogonya, 2006). In the same sense Tamale (1999) highlights that women representatives do not always promote women's issues.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a historical research design within the framework of phenomenological qualitative research. Historical research seeks to gather, verify, and synthesize evidence from the past to uncover insights into research questions (Kothari, 2004). In this study, narratives were utilized to delve into perceptions and beliefs about family dynamics, exploring how past experiences shape contemporary family structures amidst changing patterns. The phenomenological approach was deemed crucial due to its emphasis on historical and relative meanings (Standing, 2009; Weaver & Olson, 2006). Through narratives, participants shared their lived experiences and perceptions regarding family structures, marriage, gender roles, and the evolving landscape of property ownership by women in the Ankole sub-region.

The phenomenological approach facilitated the exploration of individuals' experiences within the cultural context, enabling a deeper understanding and interpretation of cultural patterns surrounding families in the Ankole sub-region. This approach was applied to all participants, aiming to capture and interpret their perceptions and lived experiences concerning women's ownership of productive assets and the shifting dynamics of family structures in the Ankole sub-region.

Sample size determination

Sample size determination involved conducting 5 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 17 interviews with various stakeholders, including household heads, women in formal and informal employment, activists, religious leaders, and government officials. Saturation was reached when no new information emerged from data collection (Saunders et al., 2018).

Data management and analysis

Thematic data analysis was employed, with transcripts meticulously coded and organized using NVivo software (Creswell, 2014). Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and coding was conducted to identify themes and subthemes. Facilitators aided in data interpretation during focus group discussions, ensuring comprehensive analysis despite the challenges posed by multiple voices. The findings were presented thematically, with each theme serving as a section heading in the report, supported by coded examples and researcher interpretation.

RESULTS

Women's access and control over productive resources and marriage

Marriage and divorce/separation

During interviews, the idea of women's access and control over productive resources was contested by male key informants claiming that sustaining marriage where a woman has her own property is difficult. Women

on the contrary showed that their lives are more secure when they have their own property.

“...ok if my wife must buy and own property alone then I tell her to feel free and leave so that I marry another woman who is able to listen to me and do what I want. You people equality is causing us problems (they all laughed). Who does not see that? Most men no longer say anything within their families..” (FGD E).

According to the findings, male dominance is still a challenge to women’s autonomy in property ownership. Some of the men have not yet accepted that women rights are human rights, that is one of the reason for reduced longevity of marriages. The ideas got from the FGDs were confirmed by the key informants whose ideas were;

“...haaaaa women owning property means a lot....it is not easy to manage a woman who owns a car, goats, land and etc.... women never owned anything in Ankole families. A woman would access property say land through the husband (just to grow crops) but did not have control over that land. Even when the husband died, still the brothers to the husband would take up the land. Today, a girl will even delay to get married purposely to get a man who already has property because she will have inheritance rights in case the husband dies...” (probation officer, case 8).

“...in the first place why should a woman own and control say land? What the man has belongs to her and can be able to use as she wishes. If you see a woman trying to secure property independently then as a man you should be careful. I do not expect that such a woman will keep respect for her husband. For me if my wife does it, I just tell her to go and stay alone..” (local leader, case 13).

From the findings, the researcher analyses that today some of the men are not comfortable marrying women that own property of their own. The discomfort is caused by the suspicion that the man may loose his superiority and power within his family. Contrary to the views of the majority men, the majority women showed that property ownership is a necessity for security reasons;

“...in the traditional families of Ankole, even when a woman was beaten several times she had to persist and stay in her marriage. To me this was the case because women did not have any property secured for themselves. For me today if I have live stock or land and you start beating me I just go and leave that marriage. I cannot stay with a man who wants to beat me as if I am his child no way.....” (women rights activist case, 4).

“...besides, women’s interests within their marriage are better served with property ownership. The right to use and manage the economic resources, for example, microfinance credit, livestock, equipment and land results in increases in women’s income generating strategies. This derived capacity of women is essential for decision making and participation both at a family level and community level. Don’t you see women are somehow better now? do you know how women succumbed to torture from men because they had no economic capacity? Except that some men still have reservations...” (political leader, case 2).

“...for me, what I am sure of is that a woman’s means of securing the basic needs of her life in the traditional Ankole family was only through a man. This man determined activities essential to everyday life the woman. Today with increase in women’s access to and control over a range of productive resources, including land, housing and natural resources, it has improved women’s livelihood strategies through decision making within their families...” (women right activist, case 15).

From the above findings, the researcher interprets that, most men worry losing their male dominance in the face of women’s property ownership. On the contrary the majority women are more comfortable and secure owning their own property in case of marital failure. Mindset change among most men is necessary to allow

recognition of women's rights as human right

Women's property ownership and openness

"...my husband owns a vehicle, he does not like me to drive it. I worked hard and I bought my own but he became annoyed and he keeps throwing negative comments about it. If I am to buy any other property, this time, I will not let him know...." (FGD C).

From the findings got from the FGD with women in formal employment, the researcher interprets that some of the married women choose to made independent decisions in situations where male dominance proves to be a threat to their wellbeing. The above findings got from the FGDs were confirmed by the key informants who had the following to say;

"...it is now common for both men and women to buy land without the knowledge of the other partner. Some even die and their property gets stolen by non family members. It is on the increase and the reason for most women is that their husbands are against it...." (probation officer, case, 8).

"...i have on several occasions signed agreements for women buying houses and land. Sometimes they are single or divorced/seperated mothers and other times they are married women. For the married ones, some times their husbands are not aware. But this is common when the woman finds out that the husband has a nother woman..." (local leader, case, 16).

According to the findings, the researcher deduces that in some circumstances, some of the women may decide to secure property without the knowledge of their husbands because they fear to experience domestic violence arise like a member of the FGD below quoted;

"...because women were not expected to own land, they relied on their husbands to make decisions related to such property. Besides, those women did not have money of their own. Even after selling some produce, the woman would present the money to the husband and surprisingly marriage stayed for long. Today, with women's opportunity to buy land, cows and so on, some men do not become comfortable. For example, one time I got money and bought a plot of land. Before I told him about it and he seemed ok with it. When it came to a day for paying, I did not call him to come and sign as a witness. Later, he asked me whether I had secured the land. When he learnt about it, he beat me up that night and I even slept outside the house just because I never called him to sign as a witness on the land agreement. The money was mine and it was up to me to decide....hahaha, they laughed (FGD B).

The views of the woman in the FGD of women from the informal employment indicate that some men are aware that women are also at liberty to acquire individual property, but they are not comfortable to see that it puts them on the same level as women. The backlash therefore, experiences within the families is in most cases caused by man's inferiority complex. The above views from the FGDs were confirmed by the political leader who asserted that;

"....ever since I became a member of parliament, I have been receiving cases of women being beaten by their husbands because of property. One time when I talked to the man, he said that the neighbour told him that his wife had bought a house of two rooms and that it was being rented for commercial business. So the man was finghting his wife so that she can explain how she bought the house...." (political leader, case 6).

From the findings above, the researcher interprets that there are still rigid partriarchal tendencies that hinder women from enjoy their property rights freely. The failure of some of the men to acknowledge women's rights especially those related to property ownership as human rights, stage a challenge to marital harmony. Therefore, most married women decide to attain property without the knowledge of their partners in order to

keep peace within their families.

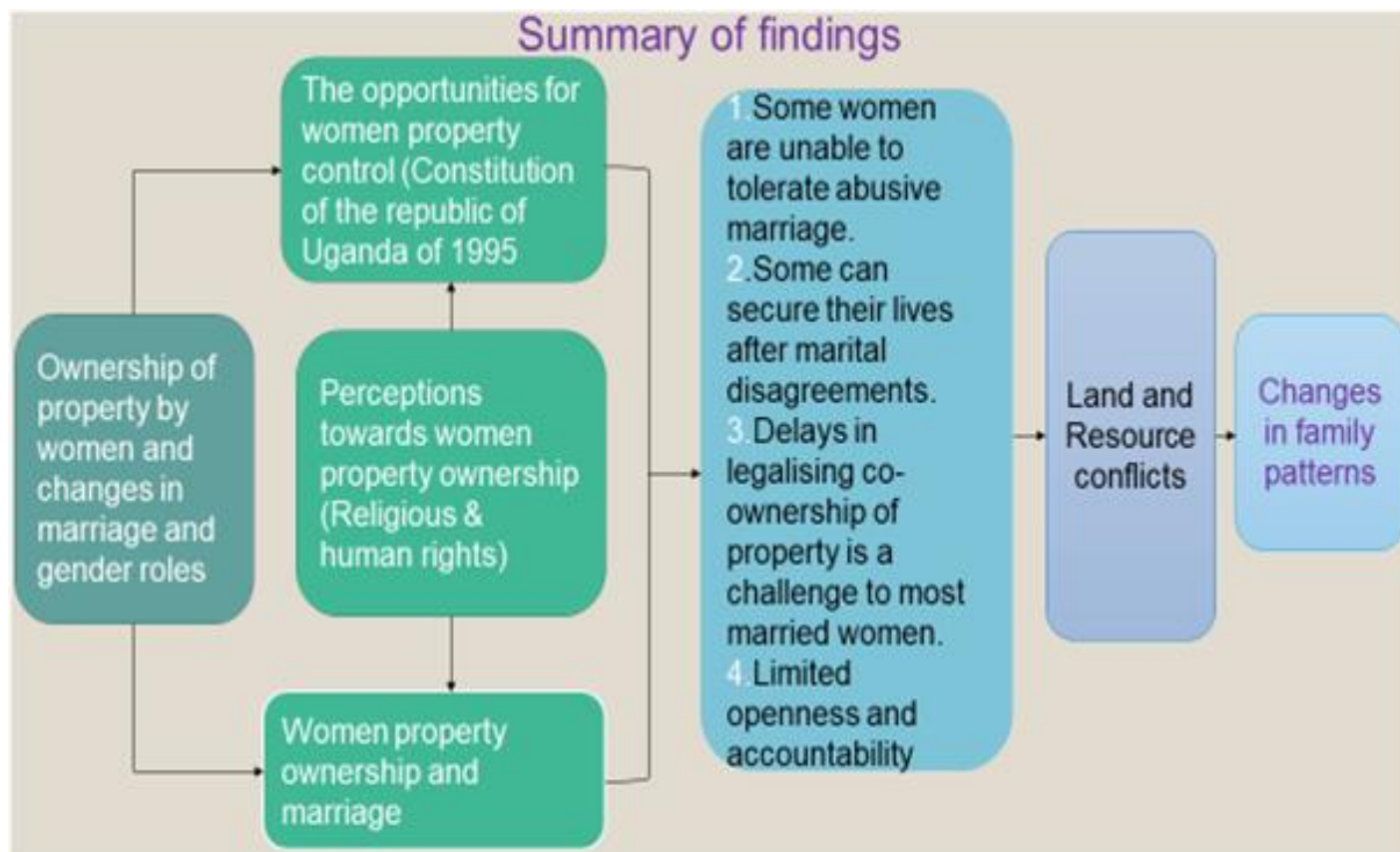


Figure 1: The contemporary families in the Ankole sub-region in the face of women’s control over property.

Figure 1 shows a model summary of the participants views about the ownership of property by women and changes in family patterns.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Women’s access to and control over property in Uganda have been influenced by various legal and societal factors. The Republic of Uganda ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1985 and enshrined women’s property rights in the 1995 constitution, particularly in Article 33 (Kothari, 2004). Additionally, Uganda’s Land Act chapter 227 mandates women’s rights to property ownership, reflecting a significant degree of agency for women (Magezi, 2018). Ownership of assets, especially for married women, plays a crucial role in their bargaining power within and outside the household (Irungu & Sassa, 2017). However, despite legal provisions, challenges persist, as revealed in focus group discussions (FGDs) with women in formal employment. While the law permits women to own land, some married women face obstacles due to their husbands’ reluctance, highlighting persistent cultural norms (Magezi, 2018). Even though local leaders endorse women’s rights and facilitate property agreements, many married women still struggle to obtain property independently (Standing, 2009). Moreover, inheritance practices also affect women’s property rights. While the law allows women to inherit jointly-owned property, the legal framework concerning co-ownership by married couples is still pending approval (Bashaija & Rukundo, 2020). This delay is attributed to policy-making influenced by customary laws (Tripp, 2004). Accelerating the enactment of the co-ownership bill is crucial for advancing gender equality, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 5 (UBOS, 2019).

Women’s preferences for property ownership vary, with some prioritizing livestock over land due to cultural

norms and perceived ease of access (Bolis & Hughes, 2015). However, societal attitudes, particularly among men, often discourage women's individual property ownership, leading to conflicts within marriages (Najjar, Baruah, & El Garhi, 2020). This underscores the importance of implementing policies and raising awareness to support women's property rights and autonomy (UBOS, 2017). In patriarchal societies like Ankole, perceptions towards women's property ownership are diverse, influenced by societal norms and individual agency (Asiimwe, 2001). Religious leaders emphasize joint ownership within marriage, reflecting traditional beliefs about familial roles and responsibilities (Raj et al., 2018). However, advocating for women's property rights is essential for safeguarding their future and reducing vulnerability in case of marital conflicts (Bolis & Hughes, 2015). Women's ownership of property, particularly in agriculture, contributes to food security and poverty reduction, aligning with broader development goals (Emmanuel et al., 2016). Despite historical disparities, efforts to empower women economically and legally are essential for achieving gender equality and sustainable development (Kabeer, 2018).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, promoting women's access to and control over property is vital for fostering gender equality and sustainable development in Uganda. Legal reforms, awareness campaigns, and support for women's autonomy within marriages are necessary steps towards achieving these goals (Galie et al., 2015). Embracing feminist ideologies and addressing societal attitudes towards women's property ownership are crucial for building more equitable societies (Bird, 2018).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the study found out that some men and women choose to secure property without the knowledge of the partner and that some women can easily exit marriage if they have secured property particularly if marriage becomes abusive, the study recommends as follows;

Social justice systems need to intensify the awareness strategy about equal opportunity rights to encourage openness and accountability among married couples.

More so, Committees on local councils need to address the role of property ownership in supporting family sustainability and development.

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