

## COMMISSION CONDEMNS DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN ISSUES OF LAND OWNERSHIP

Inequality between men and women has continued to prevail and persist when it comes to access, control and ownership of land and other productive resources within our society, despite the significant progress in strengthening gender equality and women empowerment. This injustice has no doubt contributed to persistent poverty more especially among women which has led to their exclusion from the mainstream of a good portion of socio-economic gains despite the contributions that women make towards strengthening the economies of their countries. The situation has placed poverty profoundly to the face of women rather than that of men as Ahikire Josephine (a gender activist cum academician) notes that *“poverty puts on feminine face rather than masculine face, despite contributions that*

*women make to the country's Economic Growth”*. The obstacles which prevent women from effectively enjoying and accessing these rights are complex and to a large extent context-specific and therefore need to be totally stamped out in our society for total inclusion of all marginalized groups and women in particular. The barriers which prevent women's access to, control over land and other productive resources largely include inadequate information about their rights, legal mechanisms for redress, ineffective, cultural related barriers which undermine women's social, cultural and economic rights among others. The reported incidents in the media about the occurrences in Soroti and Amuru districts, where women went as far as

stripping naked in protests to the infringement of their land rights, is a clear epitome of what other vulnerable women in our country go through.

According to the National Development Plan II, only 27% of registered land is owned by women and yet majority of the women are engaged in agricultural production. This limited access to natural resources is caused by both legal and socio-cultural factors. Legal obstacles relate both to family and succession law and to natural resource law.

Women's access to productive resources in general, and land in particular, cannot be divorced from the broader context of sustainable development and the global economic growth. Inclusive growth requires equal access to opportunities and resources for all segments of society, including for both women and men, boys and girls, husbands and wives. Both the local and international communities have an important role to play in fostering an environment which recognizes and promotes women's land rights.

The Equal Opportunities Commission is a constitutional body established to operationalize the constitutional provision of Equal Opportunities, under Article 32 (3) of the 1995 Constitution of the republic of Uganda (as amended) to eliminate discrimination and inequalities which exist among individuals and groups of persons on the grounds of age, sex, ethnic origin, religion among others. The commission has noted with concern the increasing incidences of discrimination and marginalization of women in access, control and ownership of land and other productive resources within the household and community at large. To this end therefore the EOC wishes to reiterate that our Constitution of 1995 and other laws related to rights of women prohibit this kind of phenomenon. The Equal Opportunities Commission, strongly condemns these unlawful actions of denial of ownership and utilization of land especially among women, and would like to caution the perpetrators to desist from such actions or else face the long arm of the law.

Above all, Uganda is state party to a number of international and regional instruments which lay out a clear foundation for women's rights to land and other productive resources. These among others include the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the recent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to which Uganda has already adopted under its NDP II and Vision 2040.

Through its justice mechanism, the EOC has powers to sanction any form of discrimination or marginalization which infringes on the rights to Equal Opportunities of any person or groups of persons to own land. The EOC therefore, calls upon members of the public who are experiencing unlawful acts of discrimination and marginalization on grounds provided by the EOC Act, 2007 and Article 32 (i) of the 1995 Constitution to bring their complaints to the Commission for legal redress. The Commission will investigate and hear complaints brought before it accordingly.

**For more information on the procedure for lodging a complaint in such matters, contact the EOC on the toll free line 0800100440 or approach them at their offices located in, Plot 7 Luthuli Close Bugolobi Kampala, Uganda.**

