



**LERWA-Land and Environmental
Rights Watch Africa Ltd.**

**Empowering Communities for
Environmental Justice:
A YEAR OF IMPACT AND GROWTH**



Annual Report 2023



Introduction:

The Annual Report 2023 for LERWA-Land and Environmental Rights Watch Africa Ltd captures a year of diverse projects and impactful initiatives aimed at promoting environmental justice and sustainable development. From the successful implementation of the Forest Garden Fund 2023 project to the advocacy efforts in the Promoting Women's Land Rights project, alongside the establishment of the Aturukuku LERWA Farmers' Cooperative Society, our organization has been actively engaged in fostering positive change across communities in Tororo district, Uganda. This report provides a comprehensive overview of the various projects, partnerships, and administrative activities undertaken throughout the year, highlighting our commitment to empowering vulnerable populations and advocating for a more just and sustainable greener future.

A) Forest Gardening for Environmental Justice

In February 2023, LERWA-Land and Environmental Rights Watch Africa embarked on a journey towards environmental justice with the support of a USD\$5000 grant from the Global Greengrants Fund. This funding enabled us to implement a six-month Forest Gardening for Environmental Justice project in three parishes across Tororo district, Uganda. The project's aim was to build resilient and self-sustaining communities through the Forest Garden Approach, mitigating food insecurity, improving household livelihoods, and enhancing family nutrition.

Project Implementation and Impact

Through the support of Global Greengrants Fund, we were able to support 97 smallholder farmers, predominantly women and youth, in establishing Forest Gardens consisting of fruit trees and vegetables. These gardens not only provided additional income through the sale of surplus produce but also improved food and nutrition security within the communities. We planted 1213 fruit trees (mangoes and hass avocados) across the project location areas of Osia, Aturukuku and Achilet.

The project activities included beneficiary mapping, awareness sessions, horticulture training, and follow-ups to monitor progress and offer technical support. Additionally, we established the Aturukuku LERWA Farmers' Cooperative Society, which now has 101 members and provides access to financial services, market linkages, and agroprocessing

facilities. This cooperative has furthered our impact, enabling us to reach more vulnerable populations and promote economic empowerment.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

The implementation of the project was not without challenges. Land injustices against women and insufficient funding posed significant obstacles. However, these challenges have served as valuable lessons, prompting us to advocate for gender equality in land rights, secure long-term funding, and prioritize community engagement and scalability in our future initiatives.

Looking Ahead

As we reflect on the achievements and challenges of the Forest Gardening for Environmental Justice project, we are inspired to continue our efforts towards environmental justice and community development. We remain committed to empowering vulnerable populations, promoting sustainable land use practices, and fostering collaboration with stakeholders to create lasting change.

Conclusion

The Forest Gardening for Environmental Justice project has been a testament to the power of community-driven initiatives in addressing environmental challenges. Through this project, we have not only improved the lives of smallholder farmers but also established a foundation for sustainable development and environmental conservation in Tororo district. We look forward to building on these achievements in the years to come, as we continue our journey towards a more just and sustainable future.

B) LERWA-Land and Environmental Rights Watch Africa Launch Event

With support from the Forest Gardening for Environmental Justice project, LERWA-Land and Environmental Rights Watch Africa was formally launched to increase visibility at local, national, and global levels. The organization's focus on addressing land and environmental challenges in Tororo district necessitated the engagement of various stakeholders to foster collaboration and achieve its vision.

Key Objectives:

Establish Rapport: Forge relationships with diverse stakeholders within the district to strengthen collaboration and partnership opportunities.

Raise Awareness: Create awareness about the importance of agroforestry for food and nutrition security, climate change adaptation, and soil revitalization among stakeholders and the community.



Event Participants:

The launch event was attended by over 125 individuals, including:

1. Beneficiary farmers
2. District local government officials:
 - Assistant Chief Accounting Officer
 - District Local Council V Chairperson
 - District NGO Monitoring Committee Chairperson
 - District Natural Resource Officer
 - Community Development Officer
3. Local leaders:
 - Local Council III Chairperson
 - Rubongi Subcounty Chief
 - Parish Chiefs
 - Community Development Officer
 - Production Officer

Event Highlights:

- **Community Engagement:** Beneficiary farmers had a platform to share their experiences and insights on the impact of agroforestry practices on their livelihoods.
- **Awareness Campaign:** Presentations and discussions highlighted the benefits of agroforestry in addressing food security, climate change adaptation, and soil health, emphasizing the importance of sustainable agricultural practices.
- **Government Engagement:** Interaction with district officials and local leaders provided an avenue for dialogue on environmental issues, policy advocacy, and community development initiatives.

Outcomes and Impact:

- Increased visibility and recognition of LERWA-Land and Environmental Rights Watch Africa within the district and among key stakeholders.
- Strengthened partnerships and collaboration opportunities with government agencies, community leaders, and grassroots farmers.
- Raised awareness about the importance of agroforestry practices for sustainable agriculture and environmental conservation.
- Enhanced community engagement and participation in environmental initiatives, promoting a sense of ownership and responsibility towards environmental sustainability.

Building on the success of the launch event, LERWA-Land and Environmental Rights Watch Africa continues fostering partnerships, engaging stakeholders, and implementing impactful projects that promote environmental justice, sustainable land management, and community empowerment in Tororo district and beyond.



C) Forest Garden Fund Project 2023

The Forest Garden Fund Project 2023, a collaborative effort between Trees for the Future and LERWA-Land and Environmental Rights Watch Africa, aimed to empower smallholder farmers in Rubongi Sub County through the establishment of forest gardens. This initiative sought to enhance livelihoods, improve food security, revitalize degraded soils, and build resilience against the impacts of climate change.

Key Achievements:

Throughout the year, the project made significant strides towards its objectives. A total of 538,579 agroforestry, timber, and fruit trees were successfully planted by 174 dedicated farmers on 170.25 acres of land. Training and support were provided to equip beneficiary farmers with the skills needed to set up tree nurseries and propagate various tree species. The implementation of permagardens, green walls, windbreaks, and earthworks contributed to improved family nutrition and income while mitigating environmental challenges such as erosion.

Challenges Faced:

Despite the project's successes, several challenges were encountered along the way. Factors such as unpredictable weather patterns impacting tree survival, high dropout rates among farmers due to various reasons including gender disparities in land ownership, and unrealistic expectations from some participants posed obstacles to the project's full realization of its targets.

Lessons Learned:

The Forest Garden Fund Project 2023 provided valuable insights that can guide future initiatives. Key learnings include the importance of establishing central nurseries for tree species, maintaining open communication with funders for sustained support, engaging closely with government stakeholders for project alignment, raising awareness on the benefits of agroforestry practices, and involving proactive lead farmers and entire families in project activities to ensure sustainability.



D) Promotion of Women's Land Rights in Tororo: Annual Report

With support from Urgent Action Fund-Africa, LERWA implemented a rapid-response advocacy project from September to December 2023, focused on improving the land rights of women in Tororo district, Uganda, specifically in Rubongi subcounty. The project's overarching goal was to empower women to claim their rights to land and address systemic barriers preventing them from doing so. Through a range of activities, including community mobilization, advocacy, documentation, and legal support, the project aimed to effect meaningful change in women's land rights.

Key Objectives:

- Needs Assessment: Conduct a rapid needs assessment to identify pressing land rights issues facing women in Rubongi subcounty, informing evidence-based interventions.
- Community Mobilization: Mobilize communities to support women's land rights, engaging traditional leaders, men, and youth.
- Emergency Support: Provide emergency support to women facing immediate land rights violations, mitigating displacement effects.
- Advocacy: Engage in urgent advocacy with district and national policy makers to promote legislative reform and policy change.
- Documentation: Document cases of land rights violations against women in Tororo district.

Key Activities and Achievements:

1. **Rapid Needs Assessment:** A comprehensive needs assessment was conducted in Panyangasi, Kidera, and Rubongi parishes of Rubongi subcounty to identify pressing land rights issues faced by women. The project employed a comprehensive methodology to collect primary data from various stakeholders. Survey questionnaires were administered to 86 community women, 60 community men, and a number of key stakeholders. Community dialogues, focus group discussions, and one-on-one meetings were conducted to gain deeper insights. The data revealed critical challenges and opportunities for promoting women's land rights.

Key Findings:

- Cultural norms favoring male land ownership.
- Women often restricted to temporary land occupancy.
- Lack of awareness among women about their land rights.
- Discriminatory cultural and social practices limit women's control over land.

Recommendations:

- Sensitize stakeholders on women's land rights.
 - Educate communities on existing land laws and policies.
 - Advocate for government support to ensure equal rights for women.
 - Conduct awareness campaigns beyond project locations.
2. **Community Mobilization:** Through community dialogues and focus group discussions, awareness was raised on women's land rights, highlighting cultural norms, legal constraints, and gender biases affecting women's access to land. Women actively participated in discussions and advocated for equal land rights. There were also radio talkshow Initiatives aimed at mobilizing the communities for the community dialogues and meetings, raising awareness of land laws and policies, to challenge cultural norms hindering women's land rights, foster gender equality. The organization focused on advocating for formal land guidelines to be established by the cultural institutions, with emphasis on cultural institutions' role as land custodians, utilizing radio talk shows as part of response strategy.
3. **Legal Support:** Legal awareness meetings were held to educate community members on land rights laws in Uganda such as the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (Amended) 2010, National Land Policy, National Land Act (Amendment 2016), Succession Act (Amendment 2022), etc, emphasizing gender equality in land ownership, procedural diligence in land transactions, and succession laws, fostering open dialogue on inheritance rights. During the awareness sessions, over 185 women were empowered with knowledge on their legal rights. About 20 of these women filed





claims seeking fir justice during the legal aid clinics. Two (2) women whose land rights were violated received emergency support during the project duration with a number of cases referred to Justice Centres Tororo for further legal support.

4. **Advocacy and Policy Engagement:** Urgent advocacy efforts were undertaken with policymakers at the cultural institutions, district and national levels to promote legislative reforms supporting women’s land rights. Recommendations for policy changes were developed based on the needs assessment findings.

Challenges Faced:

- **Cultural Resistance:** Deep-rooted patriarchal norms and cultural practices posed challenges to women’s land ownership rights.
- **Legal Awareness:** Limited knowledge of existing land rights laws among women and community members hindered effective advocacy.
- **Resource Constraints:** Limited resources impacted the scale and reach of project activities, affecting the depth of impact on women’s land rights.

Recommendations for Future Initiatives:

- **Continued Advocacy:** Sustained advocacy efforts are needed to address cultural barriers and promote gender equality in land ownership.
- **Capacity Building:** Enhancing legal awareness among women and community members through regular training sessions and workshops.
- **Partnerships:** Strengthening partnerships with local authorities, civil society organizations, and legal institutions to support women’s land rights initiatives.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Implementing robust monitoring mechanisms to track progress, evaluate impact, and adjust strategies accordingly.

Conclusion:

The promotion of women’s land rights in Tororo remains a critical endeavor towards achieving gender equality and empowering women to

achieve sustainable land and environmental protection and preservation. With concerted efforts and strategic interventions, we can create a more equitable society where women have equal access to and control over land resources.

E) Establishment and Registration of Aturukuku LERWA Farmers' Cooperative Society

Aturukuku LERWA Farmers' Cooperative Society, established in 2023 in Rubongi Sub-county, Tororo District, Uganda, is a multipurpose cooperative organization dedicated to addressing the financial service and market linkage challenges faced by subsistence farmers in the region. The cooperative aims to enhance farmers' livelihoods by providing access to financial services, promoting investment in agriculture, facilitating the adoption of modern farming technologies, and fostering market linkages for improved productivity and income generation.

Key Achievements and Activities:

- **Financial Inclusion:** The cooperative has provided financial services to 101 members, enabling them to save, access credit facilities, and engage in income-generating activities.
- **Agricultural Investment Promotion:** Members are encouraged to invest in agriculture and other income-generating ventures to enhance their economic well-being.
- **Capacity Building:** Trainings and workshops have been conducted for members and leadership on cooperative formation, financial management, and agricultural projects such as mushroom cultivation for business, vegetable permagardening, sorghum cultivation to ensure quality assurance.
- **Market Linkages:** Partnerships with Uganda Breweries Limited for sorghum cultivation and Women Permaganardening project for local vegetable seed banks have been established to create market opportunities for members.
- **Modern Farming Technologies:** Initiatives such as mushroom cultivation training with GreatLakes Industrial Institute have been implemented to introduce new farming practices and income streams.



Cooperative Registration and Governance:

The cooperative is officially registered with the Ministry of Trade Industry and Cooperatives under the Cooperative Societies Act, providing legal recognition and protection. It is governed by an Executive Committee, Loans Committee, Marketing Committee, and Audit/Supervisory Committee elected during the Annual General Meeting held on 18th August 2023.

Financial Status:

As of 15th January 2024, the cooperative has total savings amounting to 3,945,900/= and total share capital of 367,000/=. Loans totaling 4,155,000/= have been disbursed to members to support their agricultural and economic activities.

Partnerships and Initiatives:

The cooperative's collaboration with Absa Bank Uganda and Stanbic Bank has facilitated effective financial management and transparency. Partnerships with Uganda Breweries Limited for sorghum cultivation and Women Permagardening project for food security initiatives have expanded market opportunities for members.

Future Outlook:

The cooperative aims to continue promoting financial inclusion, enhancing agricultural investments, providing modern farming technologies, and fostering market linkages for its members. Efforts will be made to strengthen partnerships, expand training programs, and explore new ventures to further improve the livelihoods of subsistence farmers in the region.

2023 Administrative Annual Report

In 2023, LERWA-Land and Environmental Rights Watch Africa focused on enhancing organizational capacity, building networks, and fostering partnerships to drive visibility and vertical growth. The organization's strategic efforts culminated in joining the National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders Uganda under the Environment and Climate Cluster, opening up opportunities for staff participation in various activities aimed at promoting human rights and environmental advocacy.

Key Activities and Achievements:

1. **Membership in National Coalition:** LERWA's affiliation with the National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders Uganda provided staff with opportunities to engage in critical events such as the Annual General Meeting, International Human Rights Day celebrations, and the writing of a shadow report to the African Commission on People and Human Rights.
2. **Capacity Building:** Staff members, including the Country Director and Programs Officer, benefited from capacity-building initiatives in digital security and advocacy through workshops organized by Defend Defenders. This enhanced their skills in advocacy at both local and national levels.
3. **IT Support and Digital Wellness Check:** LERWA received IT support from Defend Defenders, including a digital wellness check to ensure the organization's digital infrastructure was secure and efficient.
4. **Strategic Planning:** A volunteer expert from Senior Expert Services (SES) supported LERWA in drafting a strategic plan for 2024-2027. The expert conducted consultations with stakeholders, facilitated a strategic planning workshop, and developed essential tools such as a logical framework, operational plan, monitoring and evaluation tool, and SWOT matrix.
5. **Project Proposal Development:** The volunteer expert also assisted the programs team in drafting two project proposals aimed at advancing the organization's mission and impact.



6. Inception Meeting with District Officials: To kickstart the Promoting Women’s Land Rights project, an inception meeting was held with key district officials from Tororo District Local Government. The meeting served as a platform to introduce the project objectives, strategies, and expected outcomes to the district authorities, fostering alignment and cooperation between LERWA and the local government.

Participation in National Events:

- International Wildlife Day: LERWA participated in the National Celebrations of International Wildlife Day on March 3rd, 2023, enhancing the organization’s visibility at the district level.
- Advocacy and Networking: Engagement in activities organized by the National Coalition and other national events provided LERWA with opportunities to advocate for environmental and human rights issues, network with key stakeholders, and contribute to important discussions on civic space, human rights violations, and environmental protection.

Moving forward, LERWA aims to leverage its strengthened partnerships, enhanced staff capacity, and strategic planning tools to drive impactful advocacy, promote environmental rights, and address human rights violations effectively. The organization remains committed to advancing its mission of protecting land and environmental rights while advocating for social justice and sustainable development in the region.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the Annual Report 2023 showcases the collective efforts and achievements of LERWA-Land and Environmental Rights Watch Africa Ltd in advancing environmental justice and community development. Through projects such as the Forest Garden Fund 2023 project, Promoting Women's Land Rights project, and the establishment of the Aturukuku LERWA Farmers Cooperative Society, we have made significant strides towards building resilient communities and promoting sustainable practices. The dedication to empowering marginalized populations, advocating for gender equality in land rights, and fostering collaboration with stakeholders has been instrumental in driving positive change. As we look ahead, we are inspired by the progress made and remain committed to our mission of creating lasting impact and promoting environmental conservation in Tororo district and beyond.



Here is a summary of the report in figures:

Number of funded projects implemented: **3**

Number of beneficiaries: **872** smallholder farmers

Number of trees planted: **539,579** Multiple agroforestry, fruit trees and timber trees in Forest Gardens.

Number of communities engaged: **10**



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