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STRENGTHENING URBAN LAND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND TENURE SECURITY IN POST-COVID LAND GOVERNANCE:

**EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS FROM LUSANJA AND
LUSANJA INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN KAMPALA CITY
REGION, UGANDA**

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Acronyms

ALC	Area Land Committee
BLB	Buganda Land Board
CAPI	Computer Based Personal Interviews
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
FFP LAS	Fit-for-Purpose Land Administration
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GDN	Global Development Network
GKMA	Greater Kampala Metropolitan Area
KCCA	Kampala Capital City Authority
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
LC1	Local Council 1
LEMU	Land and Equity Movement in Uganda
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoLHUD	Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development
NSDFU	National Slum Dwellers Federation of Uganda
ODK	Open Data Kit
SDI	Slum Dweller International
SSA	Sub Saharan Africa
TSA	Technical Scientific Advisor
WDLG	Wakiso District Local Government
WHO	World Health Organisation

Executive summary

This technical report delves into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on urban land conflict management and tenure security within the Lusanja and Ssekanyoni informal settlements in the Kampala City Region, Uganda. The pandemic highlighted and exacerbated longstanding urban land inequalities, particularly in these informal areas, where insecure tenure, overcrowding, and inadequate services heightened vulnerability to both health risks and eviction effects.

The research involved 211 respondents, revealing a predominantly female population, comprising 66% of participants, while 34% identified as male. Age-wise, the majority of respondents fell into the 36 to 60 years category, making up 54% of those surveyed. A striking 98% of residents in these settlements are migrants, primarily originating from other districts (86%), and a significant portion reported moving to Lusanja with the intention to buy land and build homes (60%).

Key findings demonstrated that 81% of respondents own land, yet the majority of plots are small, with 92% measuring less than 50 by 100 feet, indicative of the high population density and limited space available. While 78% of respondents reportedly possess formal documentation verifying their land ownership, gaps remain in the enforcement of tenure rights, leaving residents vulnerable to disputes and dispossession.

The prevalence of land conflict is alarming, as 87% of respondents reported involvement in disputes primarily tied to issues of ownership (81%) and fraudulent evictions (30%). Most conflicts occur between different communities (79%), showcasing the systemic nature of these challenges. The landscape of these conflicts involves various actors, including residents, local leaders, and landlords, indicating a community-centric dynamic.

The impacts of COVID-19 on these informal settlements were profound. Food security suffered greatly, with 89% of respondents unable to purchase adequate food during the crisis, leading to significant reliance on reduced meal sizes (66%) and fewer meals per day (79%). Economic repercussions of both the land conflict and the pandemic included cash losses reported by 77% of respondents and destruction of shelters for 69%, revealing the devastating effects of the pandemic and conflict on livelihoods. The overlay of health crises with ongoing land issues led to delays in legal proceedings, with 42% of court processes suspended, further complicating residents' efforts to assert their land rights.

Despite these challenges, community engagement has remained a vital aspect of addressing land governance. Approximately 63% of respondents indicated awareness of land tenure laws, although only 38% felt these laws were effectively enforced. Corruption emerged as a prominent barrier to securing land rights, affecting 57% of those surveyed. Engagement in land governance processes was notably proactive, with 68% of respondents participating in community meetings regarding land issues.

Finally, the study emphasizes the complexity of land conflicts in Lusanja and Ssekanyoni, asserting that addressing these issues requires more than legal or administrative fixes. The intertwining of the COVID-19 pandemic with existing vulnerabilities has made it clear that integrated, participatory, and responsive land governance frameworks are essential to prioritize the rights of marginalized groups. The findings highlight an urgent need for policy reforms and the development of practical mechanisms that not only enhance tenure security but also support vulnerable populations and build resilient urban environments in informal settlements.

1. Contextual Background and Introduction

COVID-19 exposed and deepened existing inequalities on how land is accessed, used and governed. In many cities, especially in informal settlements, people faced a double risk i.e., higher exposure to infection due to overcrowding and poor services, and heightened threats of eviction because of insecure land rights (Choudhury et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2021). Emergency measures and lockdowns increased competition for urban and peri-urban land, often sidelining local voices and weakening rights-based planning. Simultaneously, rapid urbanization continues to push city boundaries outwards, driving land conversion and compulsory acquisitions that produce frequent disputes. Land conflicts are rarely about ownership alone but involve questions on who is recognized, who participates in decisions and who benefits from urban growth. Conventional responses focused mainly on issuing land titles have struggled to resolve these deeper issues and sometimes created confusion over which institutions have the authority to act. There is a growing recognition that post-pandemic land governance must combine legal reform, institutional clarity and accessible mechanisms in resolving disputes.

Newer approaches such as Fit-for-purpose land administration (FFP LAS) and responsible land management offer a more adaptable way forward. FFP approaches emphasize flexible rules, recognition of the continuum of land rights, and participatory mapping to document how land is used especially in informal settlements. When build into recovery policies, these approaches can convert short-term regularization measures into lasting protection against eviction and speculative land grabbing. An effective response also requires linking tenure security to broader ideas of fairness in urban space appropriation and allocation. Secure land and housing depend not just on documents, but on transparent procedures, recognition of marginalized groups and fair sharing of the costs and benefits of redevelopment (Uwayezu & De Vries, 2018). Heavy-handed or opaque planning can fuel unrest and mistrust, while open, participatory and people-centered planning can strengthen resilience. Thus, the post-COVID period presents an opportunity to redesign urban land governance so as it manages conflict proactively, protects the vulnerable residents and supports more inclusive, climate-resilient cities.

During the pandemic, emergency measures sped up the use of digital tools and remote systems in land governance. While digitalization of land management is taking shape in Africa, there are threats that vulnerable groups are already or might be left further behind (Cotula, 2021; McGuirk et al., 2021). Crises like COVID-19 can either reinforce top-down control or open room for more inclusive decision-making. Progressive reforms are dependent on embedding community participation in land use decisions and making sure new technologies strengthen, rather than weaken, tenure security for women, tenants and informal residents. The land governance challenge was particularly stark in Sub-Saharan African (SSA) cities where COVID-19 collided with weak land systems and widespread informality. Many households resorted to distress land sales under economic pressure, intensifying competition and disputes where livelihoods were already fragile (Bélair et al., 2023). In settings with low land registration, corruption and heavy reliance on customary arrangements without clear legal backing, people had little protection. The coexistence of state law and customary rules, without effective coordination, created grey zones that fuel conflict and in times of crisis, can be exploited for elite land grabs. Post-COVID land governance must therefore go beyond institutional redesign on paper and focus on clear mandates, inclusive processes and safeguards that work in practice for those most at risk.

The Kampala city region (also known as the Greater Kampala Metropolitan Area, GKMA) lies at the intersection of rapid urbanization, a historically layered land tenure regime, and rising climate and public-health risks (Twinomuhangi et al., 2021). Uganda recognizes four main tenure systems including mailo, customary, freehold and leasehold but it is the traditional mailo regime that most strongly shapes patterns of informal housing, investment and land use across metropolitan Kampala (Bidandi & Williams, 2020; Bird & Venables, 2020). Quantitative spatial modelling shows that mailo tenure is associated with more informal residential development and lower levels of business and commercial activity, constraining efficient land use and limiting inclusive growth (Bird & Venables, 2020). Moreover, authority over land is fragmented between central government, the Buganda Kingdom, Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), municipalities and private owners, producing overlapping claims and persistent disputes around housing, infrastructure corridors and green space.

Colonial and post-colonial reforms, including land nationalization in the 1970s, subsequent re-establishment of multiple tenure forms, and the political return of Buganda land, have produced a deeply politicized urban land question. Land is routinely deployed as a tool of political survival, with recurrent tensions among lineages, clans, investors and families over inheritance, encroachment, commercial corridors development and land “grabbing” in wetlands and on hillsides. Planning decisions frequently emerge from opaque, informal processes and contested relations between technical officials and politicians, undermining coherent land-use planning and effective conflict management (Bidandi & Williams, 2020; Kisémbó, 2021; Marx et al., 2020; Mulatu et al., 2025). COVID-19 struck within this context of structural insecurity and informality, amplifying livelihood stress and consistent with regional patterns, enshrined in heightening risks of distress sales, land disputes and migration-driven pressure on peri-urban areas.

The pandemic also overlapped with growing awareness of flood and landslide risks in informal settlements located along wetlands and steep slopes. In Kampala, disaster risk reduction efforts have relied on individualized voluntary relocation and resettlement, and more lately eviction to move residents away from hazard-prone areas (Kisémbó, 2018; Marx et al., 2020; Sseviiri et al., 2023). Experiences from recent interventions shows that that when authorities explicitly recognize multiple interests in land (i.e., formal titles, occupancy rights, customary claims and social attachments), resettlement shifts from unilateral eviction towards negotiated solutions, including options for in-situ upgrading (Marx et al., 2020; Sseviiri et al., 2023). In a post-COVID governance trajectory, acknowledging layered rights is therefore central to making climate- and health-motivated interventions more equitable and less conflict-prone.

Studies on Kampala’s green spaces further illustrates how land governance and tenure arrangements shape urban commons. Public green areas fall under state, private and communal regimes. While such diversity can at times aid protection, weak legal frameworks, limited planning capacity and unequal power relations have instead driven gradual loss and encroachment (Mulatu et al., 2025). In post-COVID era where access to open space has added public health significance, strengthening tenure security for public land through clearer records, consistent enforcement and community stewardship becomes an integral component of urban resilience. Uganda-wide evidence shows that decentralized and plural land governance have not yet delivered secure tenure for low income groups (Van Leeuwen, 2017). In the GKMA, this translates into overlapping mandates across the city region, city, district and traditional authorities through loose coordination, fragmented documentation and record keeping especially in informal settlements. Existing land data and monitoring systems provide weak insight into tenure security and gender equity in low-income neighborhoods. Addressing these structural weaknesses is essential if post-COVID land governance in Kampala is to support inclusive, climate-resilient and conflict-sensitive urban development.

In the context of Kampala’s complex land tenure and fragmented land governance, this study examined how the COVID-19 pandemic interacted with longstanding land conflicts and tenure insecurity in low-income urban settings. Focusing on the Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi settlements as critical cases, the research interrogates how pre-existing disputes over ownership, eviction histories and structural informality shaped residents’ exposure to pre-existing to pandemic related shocks, and how these dynamics in turn reconfigured urban land conflict, vulnerability and claims to tenure security among the urban poor. Grounded in debates on urban land governance, political settlements and normative pluralism in land tenure, the study draws on qualitative, quantitative and geospatial methods to build a spatio-temporal, event-based account of the Lusanja land conflict before, during and after the pandemic. Household surveys, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis and spatial mapping are combined to trace changes in land use, displacement patterns, local power relations and institutional responses.

Substantively, the research investigated how forced evictions and unresolved disputes over land ownership intersected with COVID-19 era livelihood disruptions such as job loss, mobility restrictions and heightened health risks to shape trajectories of conflict, socio-economic loss and tenure anxiety in Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi settlements. It examines the magnitude and distribution of livelihood losses and damages arising from the Lusanja eviction, including destruction of housing, erosion of informal rental markets and degradation of social and economic networks, and analyses how the pandemic intensified, reshaped or in limited instances mitigated these impacts over time. The study further unpacked the complex, multi-layered strategies that evicted households, local leaders, civil society actors and political brokers deployed to manage conflict, rebuild livelihoods and assert tenure claims ranging

from everyday negotiation and community organization to legal action, political lobbying and appeals to customary authority. Specific focus was on ways in which women, tenants and other vulnerable groups navigated these strategies within unequal power structures.

Institutionally, the research analysed how local governance structures and multi-level institutions including local councils, traditional authorities, municipal and central government agencies, security organs and multi-stakeholder coalitions shaped land conflict management and property rights protection in Lusanja during and after COVID-19. It also explored the formal and informal pathways through which various actors intervened in disputes, enforced or undermined court decisions, facilitated or blocked access to redress, and engaged (or failed to engage) community voices in decision-making processes, situating such practices within wider political settlement dynamics and militarized pandemic control measures. In general, the study integrates and links conflict events, governance practices, spatial change in order to draw actionable lessons for strengthening tenure protection in informal settlements, designing more resilient and fit-for-purpose post-COVID land governance, and informing policy debates on urban land conflict management in comparable low-income city-regions across SSA. Specifically, the study set out to:

- a) To construct a detailed spatio-temporal (pre-, during- and post-pandemic) biography of events, actors and institutional interventions surrounding the Lusanja land conflict, using triangulated qualitative, quantitative and geospatial evidence.
- b) To assess the extent, distribution and drivers of livelihood losses, damages and welfare impacts associated with the Lusanja settlement eviction, and to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic intensified, reconfigured or partially mitigated these impacts for different social groups.
- c) To analyze the strategies and practices through which evicted households and allied actors have sought to secure land-tenure rights and livelihood recovery in Lusanja, including informal negotiation, legal claims, political engagement, collective action and community-based mechanisms.
- d) To examine the roles, interactions and pathways through which local governance structures and multi-level institutions have influenced land-conflict management, enforcement of property rights and access to justice in Lusanja during and after COVID-19.
- e) To identify context-appropriate opportunities and propose pathways for strengthening informal-settlement tenure-rights protection and urban land-conflict management within broader post-COVID land-governance systems in Kampala and comparable low-income urban settings.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Area Context

The study was conducted in Kampala city region, covering villages of Lusanja (Mpererwe parish) and Ssekanyonyi (Kiteezi parish) in Wakiso district and Kampala city respectively (See Figure 1). Latest census data shows that Mpererwe has a total population of 9,092 persons and yet Kiteezi constitutes 41, 485 persons. The study villages are situated in the Northern edge of Kampala city and largely inhabited by migrants from the Western part of Uganda, who originally relocated from Kampala slums within the city where tenure insecurity is a serious challenge that is compounded by appropriation of land for commercial buildings and infrastructure. Land ownership in the study settlements is a contested issue, involving a cultural institution, a local private developer, a long-term lease holding family, administrative governance institutions and community members. The settlement is characterised with small plot holdings with housing units of approximately 1600 persons. While multiple claims exist on the land which in most cases define residents as illegal settlers, an isolated and unique case happened in late 2018 where a local investor, through a court order evicted populations with the intention of taking full ownership of the land. The eviction event and its aftermath coincided with the COVID-19 crisis, complicating the welfare of populations affected in the study area. Currently, community members are attempting to gradually rebuild their housing units, but they face ongoing uncertainty regarding the potential for a lasting resolution to the land conflict, given the competing interests of multiple claimants.

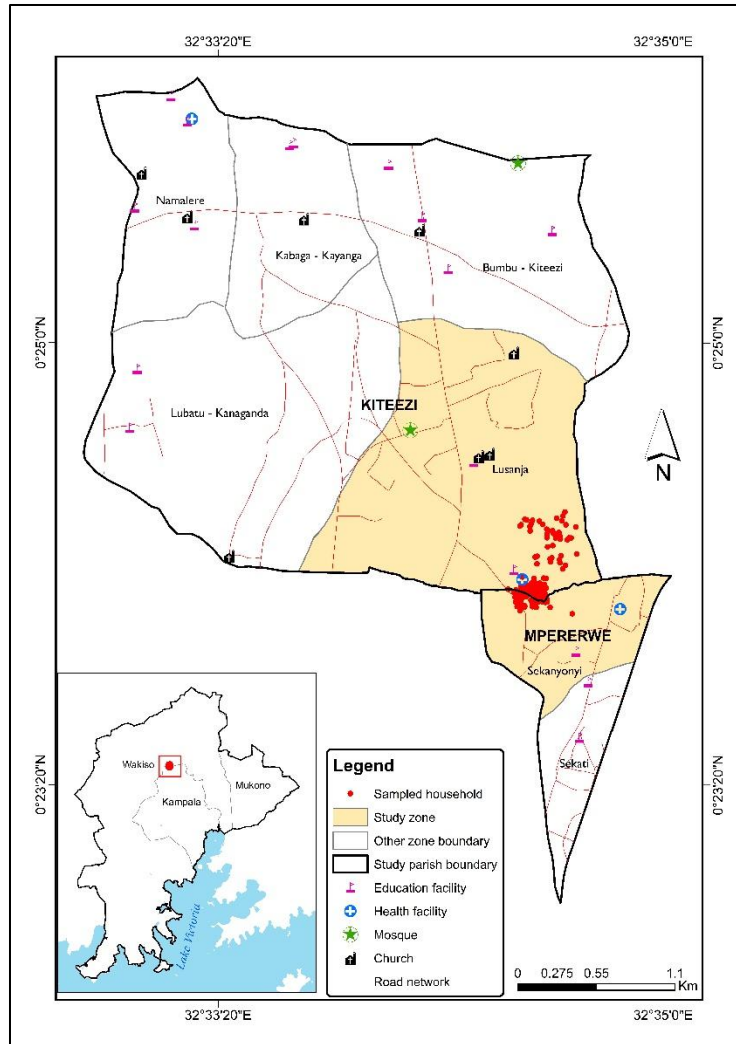


Figure 1: Study area in Kampala city region

2.2 Data collection methods

2.2.1 Surveys

The study used a household survey to capture information on the experiences of land conflict and public health crises in Kampala city region. A total of 212 surveys were administered to household heads or any other older person in the household, capturing information on socio-demographic and economic characteristics, migration and duration of stay in the settlements, state of land tenure, land acquisition modalities, experience of conflict, nature and character of land conflict experienced, temporal aspects of land conflict event and COVID-19, the multi-dimensional and effects of COVID-19 crisis on the welfare of evicted populations. The survey also captured information on livelihood losses and damages following the eviction, recovery support and initiatives, as well as existing engagement processes to secure tenure security.

The survey was collected using computer based personal interviews (CAPI) that were programmed on tablets - using the Kobotoolbox and Open Data Kit (ODK) applications. The choice for a CAPI data collection exercise was justified by its cost effectiveness per questionnaire answered, reduced survey and data processing time, elimination of data entry errors, incorporation of completeness and consistency checks as well as its ability to capture photos and geo-locations. A study online server was created to necessitate data storage and management for all surveys administered.

2.2.2 Focus group discussions and stakeholder consultations

Four focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with diverse stakeholders, including landlords, female residents, male residents, and members of the area land committees, to explore the dynamics of land conflict, its effects and land governance issues within the Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi settlements. The FGDs brought together 8-10 participants from various demographics, including youth, people with disabilities, the elderly, local leaders, business community and members of the area land committees from both villages. These discussions aimed to engage participants on experiences of land conflict, its effects and how the COVID-19 crises worsened their welfare after eviction

In addition, two interactive dialogues were implemented at national, and city region levels, involving up to 20 stakeholders in each dialogue. These dialogues aimed to foster a deeper understanding of the land tenure arrangements and informality, the effects of COVID-19 on tenure security, governance and urban development planning across the city region and country at large. The collective insights from these dialogues and FGDs provided contextual realities of the land conflict, ultimately informing lessons for pursuing tenure rights and enhancing inclusive urban planning and governance frameworks for vulnerable communities amid health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2.3 Key informant interviews

A total of twenty (f=22) key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with a diverse array of stakeholders, including land governance experts (f=2), government officials from both national and city levels (f=8) including the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MoLHUD), Ministry of Health (MoH), Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), Kasangati Town Council, and politicians such as mayors of Kawempe Division and Kasangati Town Council. Further, representatives from civil society (f=3) like Slum Dweller International (SDI), Land and Equity Movement in Uganda (LEMU) and Action Aid Uganda were also engaged in interviews, coupled with the private sector that included a broker and a local investor (f=2), Buganda Kingdom (f=3) and academics (f=2). The interviews aimed to delve deep into the complexities of the land conflict at Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi settlements in Kampala and sought to capture a wide range of perceptions and experiences related to the conflict amid other crises especially those that affect the health of populations. In addition, the KIIs identified practices that promote inclusive and sustainable land governance and property rights administration in informal neighbourhoods in contexts where there exist policy and legal pluralism on land issues.

2.3 Data analysis

Data analysis for the study involved both quantitative and qualitative methods to comprehensively understand the land conflict, and its effects on Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi settlement populations. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the socio-demographics and economic characteristics of respondents as well as key aspects of the land conflict and post-COVID governance issues. In addition to the quantitative analysis, thematic content analysis was employed for qualitative data gathered from interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and dialogues. This involved coding the data to identify recurrent themes and patterns related to participants' experiences and perceptions the land conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.4 Ethics

All participants provided informed consent. Ethical approval was obtained from the Makerere University College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Research Ethics Committee (CAES-REC Ref. No. 2024-55) and Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNSCT- Ref. No. SS2816ES). Data from KIIs and FGDs were audio-recorded (with consent), transcribed, and analyzed thematically.

3. Findings.

3.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the study respondents. Among the 211 respondents, majority were female, comprising 66% (139), while males accounted for 34% (72). Age-wise, the findings indicated that most respondents were concentrated in the mid-adult years, with 54% (113) aged between 36 to 60 years. The younger demographic, aged 18 to 35 years, represented 43% (91) of the respondents, while only 3% (7) are over 60, suggesting a relatively youthful population (See Table 1).

In terms of education, the findings revealed varying levels of formal education. While 35% (74) of respondents have attended primary school, 41% (87) have completed secondary education at the Ordinary Level. However, 9% (20) have never attended formal education, and only 2% (4) have achieved a university education, highlighting potential barriers to higher education.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (n=212)

Variable	Frequency (%)
Gender of respondent	
Female	139 (66)
Male	72 (34)
Age of respondent (years)	
18-35	91 (43)
36-60	113 (54)
Greater than 60	7 (3)
Marital status	
Divorced/Separated	22 (10)
Married	159 (75)
Single	20 (9)
Widowed	10 (5)
Highest level of education attended	
Never attended formal education	20 (9)
Apprenticeship	2 (1)
Primary	74 (35)
Secondary (A Level)	15 (7)
Secondary (O Level)	87 (41)
Tertiary (Certificate/Diploma)	10 (5)
Tertiary (University)	4 (2)

In regards to household dynamics (Table 2), 71% (150) of households are headed by males, whereas females head 29% (62) of households. Marital status underscores the stability of the community, with 75% (159) of respondents being married. In contrast, a smaller proportion is divorced or separated (10%), single (9%), or widowed (5%). A family-oriented culture is indicated by approximately 69% (145) of households have between 1 to 5 children, while 22% (45) have between 5 to 10 children. Only 8% (16) of households have no children, and a mere 1% (3) have more than 10 children, reflecting a tendency towards medium-sized families. Household sizes vary, with 56% (119) of households comprising 5 to 10 members. Meanwhile, 41% (86) have fewer than 5 members, and only 3% (7) exceed 10 members, indicating a predominance of smaller to medium-sized households.

Economic activity in the community is diverse, with casual labour being the primary source of income for 49% (97) of households. Businesses account for 34% (66), while formal employment contributes to 12% (23) of household incomes, and remittances constitute 6% (11). This distribution suggests a reliance on informal economic activities.

The household monthly income reflected the economic challenges faced by many families. A significant portion, 25% (51), reported an income between 150,001 and 300,000 UGX, while 20% (41) earn less than 150,000 UGX. Only a small fraction of households (0.5%) reported earning more than 5,000,000 UGX, indicating that a majority of households live within lower income categories (See Table 2).

Table 2: Household characteristics of respondents (n=212)

Variable	Frequency (%)
Gender of household head	
Female	62 (29)
Male	150 (71)
Number of children in household	
No child	16 (8)
1-5	145 (69)
5-10	45 (22)
More than 10	3 (1)
Total household size	
Less than 5	86 (41)
5-10	119 (56)
More than 10	7 (3)
Main source of household income	
Business	66 (34)
Casual labor	97 (49)
Formal employment	23 (12)
Remittances	11 (6)
Household monthly income (in UGX)	
Less than 150,000	41 (20)
150,001 - 300,000	51 (25)
300,001 - 450,000	30 (15)
450,001 - 600,000	37 (18)
600,001 - 750,000	12 (6)
750,001 - 900,000	13 (6)
900,001 - 2,000,000	15 (7)
2,000,000 - 5,000,000	6 (3)
More than 5,000,000	1 (1)

3.2 Migration and duration of stay

The Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi informal settlements primarily consist of a migrant population. The results showed that 98% of residents are migrants, with majority, 86% relocating/born from other districts of Uganda while a smaller portion, 12% moved from within Kampala city and yet only 2% of residents are non-migrants (See Table 3). Most migrants were born in Masaka district, which accounts for the largest share while the rest moved from Wakiso, Kayunga, Tororo, Mbale, Mityana, Fort Portal, Jinja, Bushenyi, Mpigi, Mbarara, Kabarole, Luwero, Butambala, Kanungu, Ibanda and Kisoro districts.

More than half of the respondents, 60% reported moving because they bought land and built homes in Lusanja, reflecting a long-term commitment to settling in the area. Employment opportunities were also a significant factor, influencing 14% of migrants, while marriage contributed to 22% of relocations, emphasizing the importance of social and familial ties. Other motivations for mobility were less common. Education attracted a modest 3% of respondents, and a small segment, 4% cited cheaper housing quality and costs as a reason for migrating (See Table 3). Moreover, only 0.48% of residents moved due to forced displacement from conflict or exposure to climate hazards, indicating that these push factors play a minimal role in migration dynamics.

Table 3: Migration status and reasons for moving into the settlement

Migration into settlement	Frequency (%)
Migration status	
Migrated from other districts	182 (86)
Migrated from within Kampala	25 (12)
Non-migrant	5 (2)
Reasons for moving into Lusanja informal settlement	
Bought land and built here	124 (60)
Employment	30 (14)
Marriage	45 (22)
Personal connection to place	5 (2)
Education	6 (3)
Cheap housing quality/cost	8 (4)
Business	9 (4)
Exposure to climate hazard	1 (0.48)
Forced displacement (conflict)	1 (0.48)

Note: Respondents could report multiple reasons for migration; therefore, percentages may exceed 100%.

The duration of stay in the Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi settlement revealed significant trends in migration over the years, reflecting changing patterns of population growth. The findings indicated that although appropriation of land started in pre-colonial period, arrivals of people into the settlement started from 1996 to 2022 with limited migration before 2010, characterized by sporadic influxes with single-digit counts annually. However, starting in 2010, a notable shift occurred with a steady increase in new arrivals. The year 2014 marked a peak year for migration, with 18% of total respondents moving to Lusanja, suggesting a substantial influx that year. The trend continued with significant numbers residing in the area during 2016 and 2017, with each year contributing nearly 12% of new arrivals. This highlights a period of accelerated growth, which FGDs and KIIs associate with economic opportunities and proximity to Kampala city centre. After 2018, the rate of new arrivals began to decline, indicating a slowdown in settlement growth. It was established in FGDs that by 2014, over half of respondents had established their homes in Lusanja, with approximately one-third of migrants arriving between 2015 and 2018. In contrast, only a small fraction of newcomers has settled in the area in recent years, reflecting a cooling trend in migration. Such pattern of mobility and duration of stay illustrated that Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi settlements rapidly grew from 2008 to 2014, followed by noticeable deceleration between 2014 and 2019, a period when land disputes and conflicts started to significantly emerge. This evolution underscores the interplay of local opportunities and broader economic conditions influencing residency in informal settlements and yet uncertainties of tenure security limits mobility into vulnerable spaces.

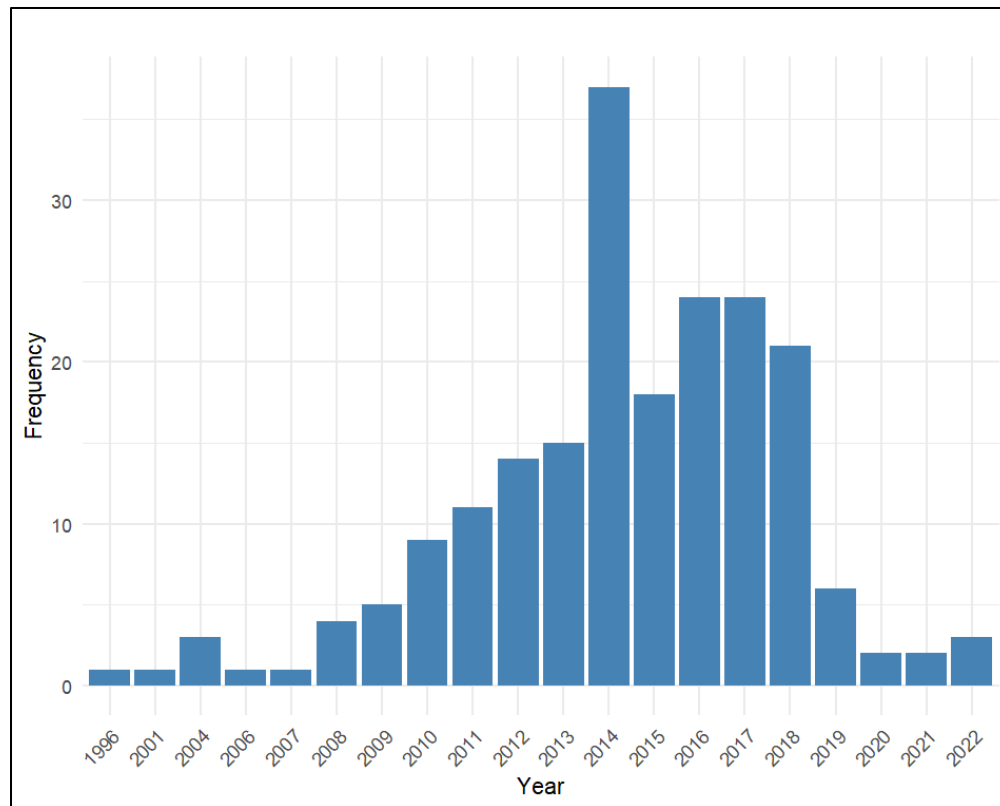


Figure 2: Numbers of people influx into Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi settlements over time.

3.3 Land tenure, modalities of acquisition and land conflict in Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi informal settlements

A large proportion of respondents (81%) reported owning land in the Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi settlements, suggesting a high level of perceived land ownership within the community. However, most of these ownership claims are based on kibanja rights or informal purchase agreements rather than formally registered land titles. Most land plots are relatively small, with a striking 92% of owners having plots measuring less than 50 by 100 feet or approximately 465.7 square meters, indicative of the area's high population density and prevalence of plots below the formally recognized standards within land regulatory and urban planning regimes. The acquisition of land was established to be predominantly through purchase, with 98% of respondents indicating this as their means of obtaining land, while only a minimal 2% inherited their plots.

In terms of land tenure arrangements, the predominant categories include Kibanja (36%), Kabaka's land (Mailo) (34%) and Private Mailo (29%). This distribution reflects a mix of customary and formal landholding systems prevalent in the central region of Uganda, while customary tenure, leasehold, and public land represent a much smaller fraction. Kibanja land tenure is a customary form of landholding that originated in pre-colonial Buganda. Under this system, the Kabaka held ultimate authority over kingdom land and allocated it to his subjects through appointed agents. Occupants (bibanja holders) enjoyed secure use and occupancy rights but were required to pay tribute to the landlord. Transfer of kibanja rights could only be done in consultation with, and with the consent of, the landlord. This arrangement was later formalized under the 1900 Agreement and subsequently recognized in Uganda's post-independence land laws, including those enacted after the 1995 Constitution, as well as later land legislation.

Mailo land is a distinctive tenure system found only in Buganda, where land was allocated in square miles to individuals under the 1900 Agreement. Mailo owners were granted perpetual, quasi-freehold rights. However, the system is characterised by dual ownership: registered Mailo owners hold the title, while occupants (bibanja holders) have legally protected rights of occupancy, use and access. Within Kabaka's Mailo, the Kabaka holds registered title and administers the land through Buganda Kingdom structures, including its land management institutions. Private

Mailo refers to land where individuals or entities hold registered Mailo titles in their own names. These owners enjoy legally recognized ownership rights, subject to the occupancy and use rights of any sitting bibanja holders.

The results on acquisition timelines revealed that the majority of land transactions occurred between 2005 and 2014 (67%), indicating a surge in land acquisition during that period. A smaller portion of transactions occurred before 2004 (5%), and 28% of acquisitions were made in the years following 2015, suggesting ongoing interest in land despite a slower pace compared to the earlier surge.

Table 4: Land tenure context in the study area

Land tenure situation	Frequency (%)
Perceived ownership of land in the area (Yes)	172 (81)
Size of land owned	
Less than 50 by 100	156 (92)
Greater than 50 by 100	14 (8)
Modalities of acquiring land	
Purchased	165 (98)
Inherited it	4 (2)
Tenure arrangement of the land	
Kibanja	71 (36)
Mailo land (Kabaka's land)	67 (34)
Private Mailo	57 (29)
Customary	2 (1)
Leasehold	1 (1)
Public land (govt owned)	1 (1)
Year of acquisition of the land	
2005 to 2014	109 (67)
2015 to now	45 (28)
Before 2004	8 (5)

3.3.1 Land documentation and rights

The study identified possession of land documentation and rights over land among respondents (See Table 4). The results indicated that 78% of respondents possess formal documentation verifying their land ownership, underscoring the importance of legal tenure security within the community. The majority respondents reported that the only formal documents they possessed were written purchase agreements endorsed by the Local Council 1 (LC1) chairperson and stamped with an official seal, signed by the seller, buyer and witnesses. However, these agreements do not, in themselves, confer legally recognized ownership, nor do they provide full tenure security. Rather, they primarily serve as evidence that the current occupant did not illegally trespass on the land, but instead obtained occupancy rights from a previous holder or user of the land, regardless of whether all formal legal procedures were followed. Due to limited awareness of land laws and procedures, many landholders mistakenly regard these purchase agreements as fully fledged legal titles that guarantee ownership. In practice, the agreements provide a record of transaction and some social recognition of claims, but they only substantiate access, use and occupancy rights. This misunderstanding contributes to insecurity of tenure and potential vulnerability to disputes or eviction. The results on the distribution of household ownership rights revealed a predominance of male household heads, who account for 53% of land ownership. Joint ownership between female and male heads represents 22%, while sole ownership by female heads constitutes 19%.

The residents exhibit robust recognition of land use rights. An impressive 88% of respondents reported the right to develop their land, and 75% possess the right to sell it. Further, 59% reportedly have the right to lease their land, demonstrating significant control over their assets and yet substantial portions of the respondents revealed to hold rights to utilize land-based resources (72%), bequeath land (67%), and use land for religious purposes (67%). Generally, the findings illustrate that the populations within the studied settlements enjoy strong and clear land rights, providing perceived both legal protection and practical control over land ownership and usage. It should be

noted that, although respondents perceive themselves as having rights to access and use the land they occupy, they do not hold absolute authority to transfer these land rights to another person without consulting the landlords, who are the registered owners of the legal land title. Uganda's land laws, for example the 1995 Constitution, the 1998 Land Act (Cap. 227) and the Land (Amendment) Act 2010 provide important protections for bona fide occupants and bibanja holders against forced eviction. These legal provisions constrain the powers of landlords to unilaterally access, use or dispose of land that is already occupied by others. Consequently, any decisions regarding access to the land, as well as the transfer or reallocation of associated rights, must be undertaken in consultation with the lawful occupants. This framework seeks to balance the interests of registered landowners with the security of tenure and occupancy rights of bibanja holders.

Table 5: Land documentation and rights over land

Land documentation and rights	Frequency (%)
Document to show ownership rights (Yes)	166 (78)
Rights and freedom applicable to land (Yes)	
Right to develop land	164 (88)
Right to sell land	140 (75)
Right to use land-based resources	135 (72)
Right for religious purposes/use	125 (67)
Right to bequeath land	125 (67)
Right to lease land	110 (59)
Household ownership rights	
Owned by household head (male)	102 (53)
Jointly owned (female and male heads)	42 (22)
Owned by household head (female)	37 (19)
Owned by male child	3 (2)
Others	9 (5)

3.3.2 Land acquisition forms and key institutions in land distribution

In the Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi settlements, purchasing land through informal purchasing agreements with previous occupants and landlords emerged as the sole mode of land acquisition (See Table 5). All respondents (100%) who reported owning the plots they currently occupy indicated that they obtained their occupancy rights by buying from landlords, typically transacted and witnessed through the office of the Local Council One (LC1) chairperson. The LC1 chairperson reportedly played a central role in mediating these transactions, drafting or endorsing the sale agreements and stamping them to provide a basic level of local recognition and social legitimacy for the buyers. This same arrangement applied even to the minority (2%) of respondents who described their plots as "inherited" from parents. FGDs revealed that, in these cases, the parents had themselves originally purchased the land using similar purchasing agreements. As a result, what is framed as inheritance is in fact a secondary transfer of occupancy rights that were first established through purchase, rather than through customary allocation or state-sanctioned allocation processes. This underscores the dominance of market-based land transactions in both settlements and highlights the limited role of other acquisition pathways such as allocation by clan leaders, government resettlement, or informal land occupation. These findings suggest a strong commodification of land in Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi, where access to plots is mediated through cash transactions and locally witnessed agreements, rather than through formal title registration or customary tenure arrangements. The reliance on LC1-endorsed purchasing agreements also depicts the importance of local governance structures in legitimizing land transactions in the absence of formal documentation, and shapes residents' perceptions of tenure security and ownership. However, KIIs and dialogues revealed that LCs have in the recent past contributed to the rise of land conflict across the country due to illegalities around multiple transactions on a single piece of land, inaccurate representation of ownership and fraudulent land deals.

The study findings on influential stakeholders in land distribution revealed that Local Council (LC) leaders are the most significant actors, cited by 82% of respondents for their role in facilitating land transactions. This dominance suggests that the governance of land transactions is largely exercised at the community level, promoting a localized

system of land regulation, distribution, access and occupancy management. Land brokers also emerged as important players, involved in 28% of land distribution processes. They act as intermediaries in the buying process, helping parties navigate the complexities of land transactions in informal settings. By contrast, institutions that are central in formal land governance frameworks were found to play only a limited role in day-to-day land distribution. These include central government (9%), politicians (4%), real estate agencies (5%), community elders (4%) and the Buganda Kingdom (2%).

Table 6: Common form of land acquisition and institutions in land distribution.

Land acquisition and land distribution institutions	Frequency (%)
Influential institutions/figures in land distribution (Yes)	
Local council	173 (82)
Land brokers	59 (28)
Central government	20 (9)
Real estate agencies	10 (5)
Community elders	9 (4)
Politicians	8 (4)
Traditional kingdom	5 (2)
Land tribunals	4 (2)
Religious leaders	2 (1)
Private companies	1 (0)
Police	1 (0)

Note: Influential institutions in land distribution, was multiple choice

3.4 Forms of land conflict, spatial and temporal cross-roads with COVID-19 pandemic crisis

3.4.1 Land conflict and associated impacts

Table 7 reveals the prevalence and nature of land conflicts experienced by residents in the Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi settlements. Under this, respondents were requested to select multiple land related conflicts that they have experienced in the area over the years. A striking 87% of respondents reported having been involved in land conflicts, with an additional 85% indicating awareness of others within the community facing similar issues. This suggests that land conflict is a widespread concern within these communities.

The study established that land conflicts in Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi are predominantly linked to ownership disputes and fraudulent evictions, primarily occurring between communities. Most reported conflicts (79%) occur between the community and individuals from outside the community, suggesting that external actors are a primary contributor to land disputes. In contrast, only 21% of conflicts are reported within the same community, while conflicts involving governance bodies are extremely rare, appearing in just 1% of cases.

The primary causes of these conflicts were indicated to revolve around land ownership disputes, which account for 81% of reported issues. This highlights the intense competition for land and the critical importance of clear title and ownership rights in these settlements. Additionally, 30% of respondents cited experiences of fraudulent eviction, indicating a significant challenge for residents facing unlawful dispossession of their homes or land. Other conflict types include trespass issues (19%), while conflicts related to territorial or administrative rights and resource access are minimal, each representing just 1% of the cases. Notably, concerns over plot boundaries or land enclosures did not emerge as significant issues in the responses, which may reflect effective informal boundary agreements within communities. During the FGDs and KIIs, respondents explained that the absence of land conflicts related to boundaries was largely due to the effectiveness of local leadership during the land purchase process. When migrants buy plots, neighboring landowners are called to witness and consent to the transaction. During this process, plot boundaries are clearly demarcated and agreed upon by all neighbors before the LC1 chairperson formally endorses the agreement with the official stamp.

Table 7: Land conflict experiences in Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi settlements.

Land conflict and associated impacts	Frequency (%)
Ever been involved in land conflict (Yes)	180 (87)
Aware of other persons who experienced land conflict (Yes)	179 (85)
Types of land conflicts experienced (Yes)	
Experience of land conflict between community and person outside the community	155 (79)
Experience of land conflict within community	41 (21)
Conflict between governance bodies	1 (1)
Nature of conflict (Yes)	
Conflict related to land ownership	158 (81)
Conflict related to fraudulent eviction	59 (30)
Conflict related to trespass	38 (19)
Conflict related to territorial/administrative rights	2 (1)
Conflict related to resource use/access	2 (1)

3.4.2 Key actors, interests and roles in the land conflict

Given the widening scope of issues related to land acquisition, ownership, occupancy, access, use, and management, as well as the increasingly complex nature of land conflicts that often require multistakeholder engagement, respondents were asked to identify the different actors involved in these processes. Specifically, they reported; (i) actors involved in managing land acquisition processes; (ii) actors with conflicting interests in land, and (iii) actors involved in managing and resolving land conflicts when they arise.

For analytical purposes, these were grouped into three categories: disputing parties, institutions responsible for handling land matters, and mediating actors.

Disputing parties / conflict actors: Disputing parties refer to individuals and groups with competing or overlapping interests in land, including those whose actions directly fuel conflict. In Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi settlements, the landscape of land conflict involved a wide array of such actors, each playing a distinct role. The findings showed that 92% (f=181) of respondents identified residents as the primary actors in land conflicts, underscoring the highly localized and community-based character of these disputes. Neighbors were cited by 21% (f=41), highlighting the interpersonal and relational dimensions of land conflict within the settlements. Landlords were identified by 46% (f=91) of respondents as key actors in disputes, particularly in relation to ownership claims, evictions, and rental arrangements. Family members or relatives (2%, f=4) and private enterprises (2%, f=3) were reported less frequently, suggesting that intra-family and purely corporate disputes are less prominent than broader community-level conflicts.

Notably, 41% of respondents mentioned the involvement of hired military outfits. These actors were reported to have been recruited by wealthy and politically connected individuals to protect their interests in land, frequently pitting them against poor and vulnerable residents. The use of military outfits was revealed to have been at its peak during the 2018 eviction event that sought to implement the court eviction order. These were directly destructing people's housing units and business structures, damaging service lines especially water, sanitation and energy infrastructure and robbing people's property and cash under the protection of Uganda Police Force (UPC) and Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF). Besides, local investors were cited by 41% (f=81), indicating that external commercial interests and development pressures can further exacerbate existing tensions, particularly over control and use of land. Land brokers were mentioned by 6% (f=12), reflecting their intermediary role in often opaque and contested land transactions.

In general, while residents remain at the center of disputes in the settlements, the active roles of local leaders, landlords, hired security or military groups, investors and brokers demonstrate the multi-layered and politically

charged nature of land conflicts in the two settlements, pointing to the need for comprehensive, inclusive approaches to conflict management.

Institutions in charge of resolving land matters: Institutions responsible for addressing land disputes were found to range from community-based structures to formal state organs. Local leaders were identified as the first point of contact and the main actors in conflict resolution, mentioned by 51% (f=99) of respondents. This reveals their centrality in mediating and settling disputes at the community level. Landlords, cited by 46% (f=91), often feature on both sides of the conflict equation: as parties to disputes and as influential actors in their resolution, especially where ownership and tenancy arrangements are contested.

Hired military outfits and local investors, each mentioned by 41% (f=81), are reported not only as parties to conflict but also as powerful actors whose involvement shape how disputes are resolved, frequently in favour of those with greater economic and political leverage. Formal justice institutions were also present as courts of law were and continue to be engaged in land conflict resolution by 40% (f=79) of respondents, indicating that while the judicial system is an important avenue for redress, it is used less frequently than community-based mechanisms. Politicians were reported in 26% (f=50) of cases, reflecting the close linkage between land, power, and political influence.

Neighbors (21%, f=41) were again noted as participants, either as disputants or as informal witnesses and advisers. Law enforcement agencies, including the police (18%, f=35) and the army (11%, f=21), played a limited but notable role, usually at the enforcement stage of eviction orders, boundary decisions, or security operations. Legal service providers were mentioned by 16% (f=31), suggesting that a portion of residents seek professional legal assistance to navigate complex land laws and procedures. The major legal service providers to the Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi settlements were the area Member of Parliament (Hon. Luyimbazi Nalukoola) and the Lord Mayor of Kampala city. City/municipal authorities were cited by 14% (f=28), indicating a modest, but still relevant, involvement of local government structures in formal land administration and dispute resolution.

Mediating actors: Mediating actors are those perceived as intermediaries, facilitators, or influencers who help manage or resolve land conflicts, even when they are not formal adjudicators. Politicians, reported in 26% (f=50) of cases, illustrate how land disputes intersect with political interests and patronage networks at different levels of government. Law enforcement bodies, particularly the police (18%, f=35) and the army (11%, f=21), were also cited as mediators in some instances, especially when called upon to restore order, enforce agreements, or oversee evictions.

Other stakeholders included city/municipal authorities (14%, f=28), the President's Office (8%, f=15) and religious leaders (8%, f=15), each making a relatively marginal yet symbolically important contribution to the broader conflict resolution environment. Land brokers (6%, f=12) and traditional leaders (4%, f=7) also feature as intermediaries, often using their local knowledge, networks, and perceived authority to facilitate negotiations and transactions.

Family members/relatives (2%, f=4) and private enterprises (2%, f=3) were again reported as having a minor mediating role, which reinforces the finding that land disputes in Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi are not primarily understood as private or intra-family matters, but rather as community-wide issues involving a wide constellation of actors and institutions.

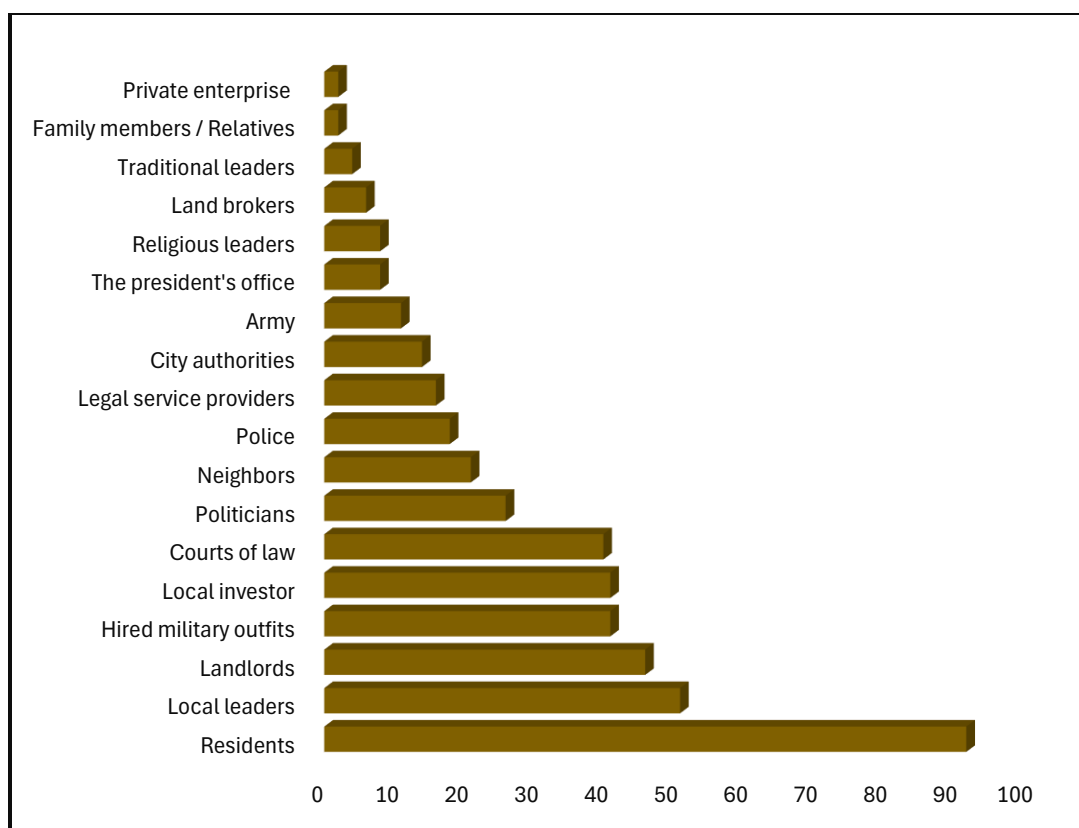


Figure 3: Actors involved in land conflict

3.4.3 Spatial-temporal linkages of land conflict with COVID-19 health crisis

The COVID-19 crisis in Uganda, particularly in Kampala, unfolded alongside and ultimately intersected with an already tense land conflict in Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi, creating a layered and protracted emergency for local residents.

As COVID-19 spread globally, Uganda quickly moved to strengthen preparedness and response. With cases emerging in neighboring countries, the government closed international entry points, imposed mandatory quarantine for incoming travelers, and intensified testing at major border posts. Under the leadership of the president and the Ministry of Health, authorities regularly issued guidelines and public updates, emphasizing hand hygiene, mask-wearing, and physical distancing. A series of phased lockdowns and restrictions followed: schools, markets, and non-essential services were closed; public gatherings were banned; and public transport was heavily curtailed. Security forces were deployed to enforce these measures, while extensive media campaigns sought to keep citizens informed about evolving COVID-19 protocols.

In March 2021, Uganda launched a mass vaccination campaign targeting priority groups and aiming to vaccinate nearly half of the population. Despite supply challenges, the country secured vaccine donations of different types and administered millions of doses. As coverage gradually expanded, restrictions were progressively eased and the economy began to reopen, although the government continued to stress adherence to standard operating procedures to prevent renewed surges.

These national health measures intersected sharply with the Lusanja land conflict. The Lusanja community had already experienced large-scale evictions and home demolitions in late 2018, with many residents labelled as illegal occupants amid competing claims over land ownership. By the time COVID-19 arrived, a significant portion of the population was already living with tenure insecurity, inadequate shelter, and unstable livelihoods. Lockdown measures and movement restrictions further constrained informal work and small businesses, leading to widespread

income loss among households that relied on daily wages and local trading. For many evicted or threatened residents, the pandemic meant navigating simultaneous crises of health risk, homelessness, and economic precarity.

The central focus of government institutions on disease containment and public safety, while understandable, also had unintended consequences for land governance. During the height of the pandemic, much administrative and judicial activity slowed or shifted priorities, delaying mediation processes, court hearings, and administrative reviews related to land disputes. Security forces tasked with enforcing COVID-19 directives were sometimes present in already volatile areas like Lusanja, contributing to heightened tensions and perceptions of intimidation among residents. As a result, the pursuit of redress for past evictions or protection against new ones was effectively sidelined during key months of the public health emergency.

As vaccination efforts scaled up from March 2021 onwards and the broader economy began to reopen, hopes for recovery grew among affected communities. Yet, the underlying land disputes remained unresolved. Without concerted attention to tenure security, the overlap of COVID-19 restrictions and ongoing land conflict risked entrenching cycles of poverty, displacement, and social marginalization.

A chronological reading of both timelines underscores these spatial-temporal linkages. Globally, the COVID-19 crisis began with reports of a novel pneumonia in Wuhan in December 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern in January 2020 and a pandemic in March 2020. Many countries, including Uganda, responded with lockdowns and border closures from April 2020. Scientific understanding evolved quickly: by June 2020 asymptomatic transmission was widely recognized; by September 2020 vaccine trials were showing encouraging results; and by November 2020 several highly effective vaccines were announced. In early 2021, vaccination campaigns were rolled out worldwide, initially targeting high-risk populations. By mid-2021, the emergence of variants such as Delta prompted renewed concern and, in some places, renewed restrictions. From August 2021, booster doses were authorized for vulnerable groups, while by October 2021 global efforts focused increasingly on scaling up coverage and addressing inequitable access. In 2022, as infections and deaths began to stabilize in many regions, governments started relaxing measures from February onwards, even as new variants continued to appear and vaccine adaptation efforts continued. By December 2022, the international discussion was increasingly about transitioning from an acute pandemic response to longer-term endemic management.

Within this global health context, the Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi land conflict followed its own but intersecting trajectory. Initial reports of land dispossession and ownership disputes surfaced in August 2017. By November 2018, tensions had escalated into protests amid accusations of land grabbing by private developers, culminating in mass evictions and demolitions that left many residents without secure shelter. During 2019, the conflict became more structured and visible: in January, several families reported forced evictions, prompting tentative interventions from local authorities; in February, community forums were convened to build awareness of land rights and organize a collective response; by June, a growing number of residents had received eviction notices, and formal legal disputes intensified; and in September, news of an impending presidential visit raised community expectations for high-level intervention and protection.

The year 2020 marked a pivotal moment when the land conflict and the COVID-19 crisis directly overlapped. In January 2020, the president visited Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi and pledged to review land titles and address the disputes. Within weeks, however, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, and Uganda introduced stringent public health measures that limited mobility and access to state institutions. In March 2020, court rulings deemed some of the prior evictions illegal, representing a key legal milestone even as pandemic-related restrictions complicated enforcement and follow-up. By July 2020, government surveys to clarify ownership were underway, but many residents remained fearful and uncertain about their status. In October 2020, at the height of the pandemic year, a new surge of evictions took place, with families once again forcibly removed, aggravating both social vulnerability and exposure to health risks in crowded temporary accommodations.

In 2021, as vaccination advanced globally and new variants circulated, the land conflict persisted and periodically intensified. In February 2021, community leaders convened a major public meeting to pressure the government to

honour earlier commitments made during the presidential visit. Media coverage in April 2021 brought greater national attention to the plight of evicted families. Nonetheless, July 2021 saw another round of evictions, prompting direct confrontations between residents and authorities. By December 2021, local NGOs were more visibly involved, providing legal aid and advocacy, signaling a growing role for civil society in seeking durable solutions.

By 2022, both domains, health and land, entered a transition phase. As COVID-19 restrictions eased and discourse shifted toward “living with the virus,” the Ugandan government in March 2022 announced a comprehensive review of land tenure policies focusing specifically on Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi. This was followed by broad-based community engagement exercises in May 2022, which offered residents structured spaces to articulate grievances and propose remedies. In September 2022, these processes culminated in a formal agreement that included commitments to compensation and recognition of land rights, establishing a framework for more secure tenure. By November 2022, a monitoring and evaluation phase was in place to oversee implementation and gauge community satisfaction with the emerging settlement.

Viewed together, these intertwined timelines reveal clear spatial-temporal linkages between the Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi land conflict and the COVID-19 health crisis. The period of greatest uncertainty and eviction, from roughly 2018 to 2021, overlapped with the emergence and peak of the pandemic between 2019 and 2021. During this period, residents simultaneously faced the threat or reality of displacement, restricted access to courts and public offices, and the broader health and economic shocks associated with COVID-19. Only as the immediate health emergency began to recede did a more systematic and negotiated approach to resolving the land conflict become politically and institutionally feasible. The post-pandemic recovery moment, therefore, not only created room to address accumulated grievances but also underscored the need to integrate public health considerations with land governance and tenure security, particularly for vulnerable urban communities at risk of eviction. The combined COVID-19 and the land conflict linkages are summarized in the table below and Figure 4, with the spatial outlook, before, during and after the conflict manifested in Figure 5.

Summary of intersection between COVID-19 crisis and the Lusanja/Ssekanyonyi land conflict events

Period	COVID-19 Crisis Milestones	Lusanja & Ssekanyonyi Land Conflict Events	Key Linkage
2017–2018	Pre-COVID; no global pandemic yet	Initial dispossession claims (2017); protests and land grabbing allegations (2018)	Foundations of local land crisis laid before health emergency.
2019	First COVID-19 cases in China (Dec 2019)	Forced evictions, community forums, eviction notices, legal battles, and announced presidential visit.	Local conflict intensifies just as global health risk emerges.
Early 2020	WHO declares emergency (Jan) and pandemic (Mar); first lockdowns identified in Uganda.	Presidential visit (Jan); court rulings on evictions (Mar); Suspension of non-essential services including land related services.	Promises of redress and legal decisions occur as mobility and institutional access compromised.
Mid–Late 2020	Global restrictions, recognition of asymptomatic spread; promising vaccine trials	Government surveys the land (Jul) and a surge in evictions (Oct); Committee put in place to handle land conflict under the Office of the President.	Clarification efforts and intensified evictions unfold under pandemic-related socio-economic stress; Conflicting parties engaged for negotiations.
2022 on-wards	Gradual lifting of restrictions; shift toward endemic framing	Policy review (Mar), community engagements (May), formal agreement and monitoring (Sep–Nov); Some reconstruction processes begin; Continued community outreaches and engagements on land matters.	Post-crisis window enables structured resolution, compensation of proprietor of Lexman industries, and recognition of land rights for local residents.

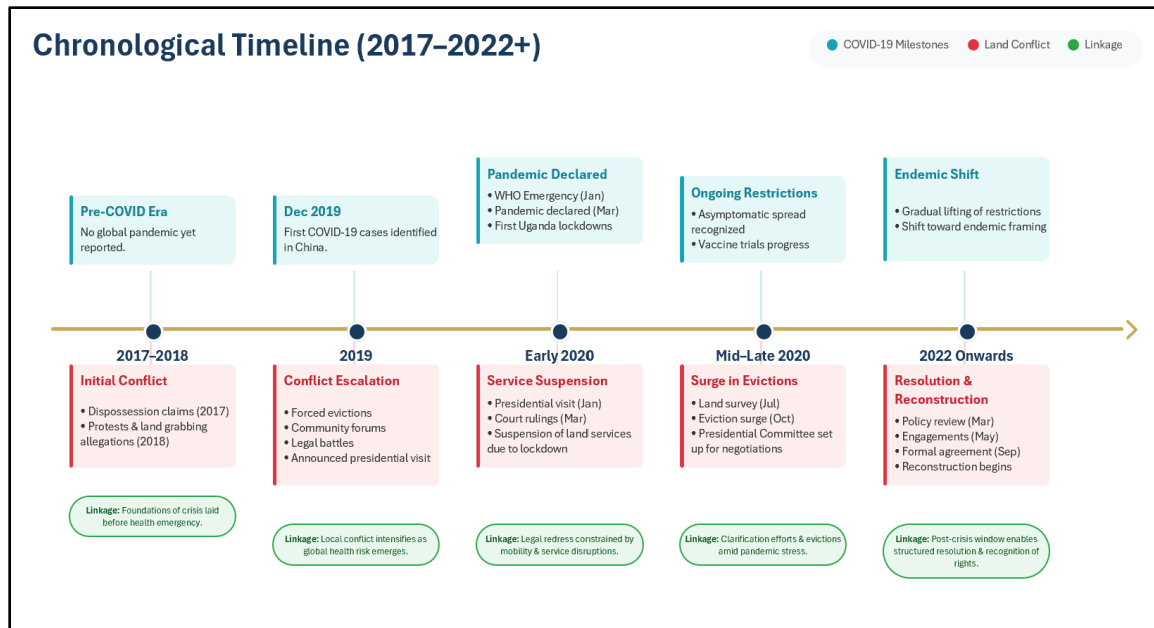


Figure 4: Timeline of COVID-19 events and land conflict 2017 onwards.



Figure 5: Spatial temporal patterns of land conflict before (2015 and 2018), during (after eviction in 2019) and after (post conflict reconstruction in 2025).

3.5 The COVID-19 pandemic and livelihood effects experienced during and after the land conflict

3.5.1 The toll on livelihoods: Socio-economic, health, safety, environmental and food security effects of crises

The study revealed profound socio-economic effects stemming from land conflict (see Figure 6), primarily highlighted by the widespread destruction of property and shelter, which affected 130 respondents (79%). Business losses were a significant concern for 39% (f=64) of the respondents, while 60% of participants reported losing household assets. Further, 44% found themselves homeless as a direct result of the conflict and yet 13% of the respondents experienced employment loss. The repercussions extended to social structures, with 24% noting school dropouts among children, alongside reports of domestic violence (14%) and disintegration of family units (9%). Many also experienced displacements (28%) and a loss of social networks (10%), underscoring the deep-rooted disruptions caused by the land conflict.

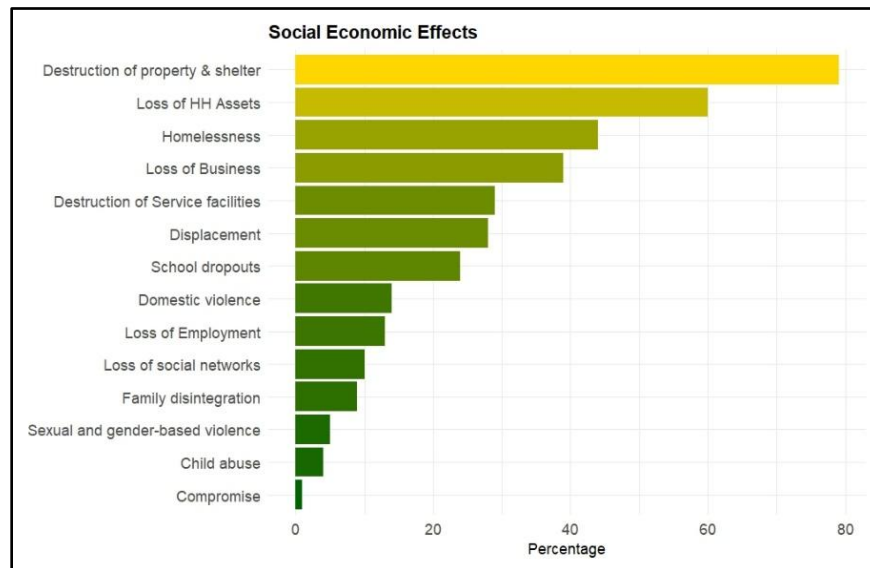


Figure 6: Social economic effects of land conflict during the COVID-19.

Health impacts were found to be equally alarming (see Figure 7), with 77% (f=129) suffering from stress and an average number of participants (50%; f=84) experiencing depression linked to the circumstances which the COVID-19 pandemic and the land conflict exposed them to. Anxiety affected 35% of participants, and 47 individuals (28%) reported physical injuries due to violent encounters. Hunger emerged as a severe issue for 27% of the respondents, while 33% noted a rise in malaria cases, possibly connected to environmental changes caused by the conflict. Trauma was reportedly experienced by 24% of the respondents, and concerns about malnutrition (18%) and chronic illnesses (17%) were also prevalent.

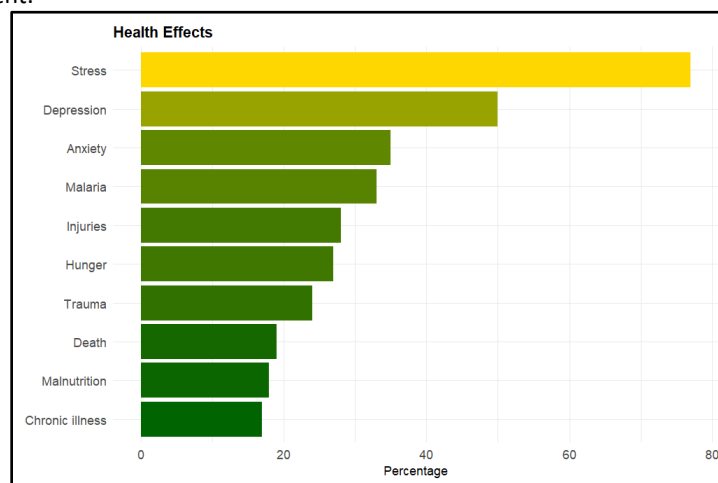


Figure 7: Health effects of land conflict during the COVID-19.

The safety implications of land conflict were revealed to be of a concern too (see Figure 8), with 62% of the respondents (f=82) encountering theft, and 47% (f=62) witnessing or participating in riots. Demonstrations (33%) and armed violence (29%) were reported by nearly a third of participants, while the legal repercussions of conflict manifested in 39 respondents facing imprisonment and 38 experiencing arrests.

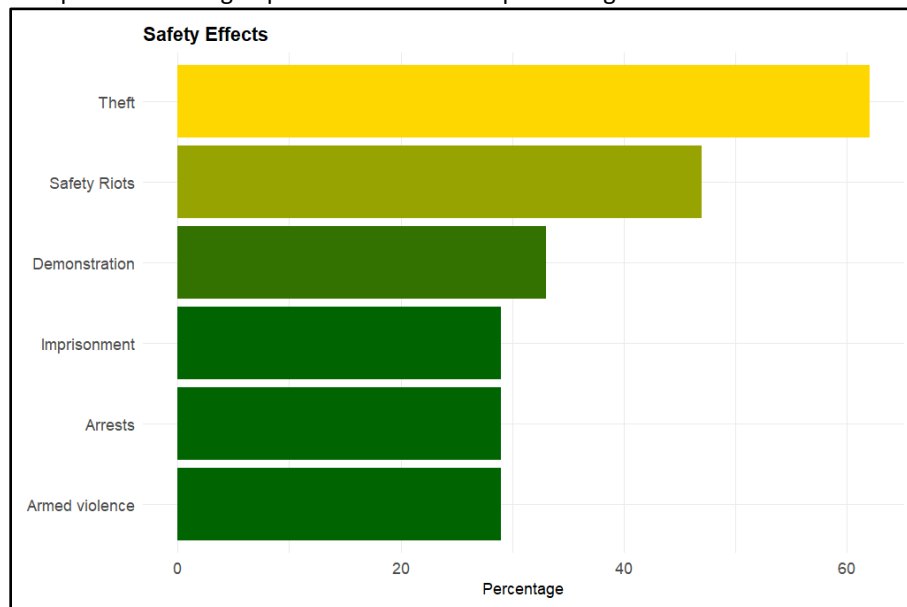


Figure 8: Safety effects of land conflict during the COVID-19.

Environmental concerns were identified to be equally pronounced (See Figure 9), as 88 respondents (69%) indicated an increase in disease vectors due to the conflict as rubbles and wreckages acted as breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Below average number of respondents reported exposure to various environmental hazards (48%) and a notable number experienced animal attacks (33%), yet 28 individuals (22%) observed significant environmental degradation.

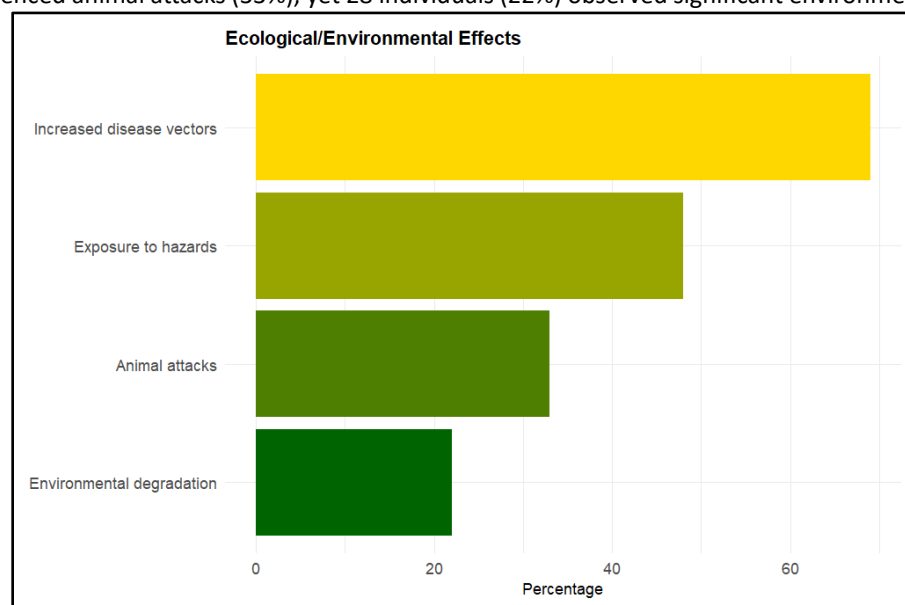


Figure 9: Ecological effects of land conflict during the COVID-19.

In regards to the economic costs and losses during and after the conflict, a substantial 77% of participants reported losses in physical cash, while 69% faced the destruction of their shelters. Half of the respondents (50%) experienced losses in household assets, demonstrating the far-reaching effects on their livelihoods. Health treatment emerged as

a concern for 23% of individuals, while legal costs burdened 14% of participants. Access to temporary shelter affected 19%, with a small proportion reporting the need for relocation transport (14%) and emergency loans (5%). The necessity for constructing temporary shelters was highlighted by 7% of respondents, underscoring the urgent need for support and resources in these crisis situations.

The analysis of losses incurred due to conflicts revealed substantial financial impacts across the respondents. The median loss for physical cash was approximately UGX 525,000 (about \$140), with a confidence interval ranging from UGX 500,000 (approximately \$135) to UGX 800,000 (roughly \$215). The destruction of shelters or housing units was particularly staggering, with median losses reaching UGX 20,000,000 (around \$5,400), falling between UGX 15,000,000 (about \$4,050) and UGX 25,400,000 (approximately \$6,800). Health treatment costs for incidences and chronic illnesses averaged UGX 500,000 (about \$135), with a range from UGX 300,000 (approximately \$80) to UGX 587,087 (roughly \$160). Securing police bonds and legal fees both incurred median costs of around UGX 400,000 (about \$110), with ranges reflecting variability in individual cases. Household assets suffered median losses of UGX 2,000,000 (approximately \$540), while access to temporary shelter averaged UGX 540,000 (around \$145). The construction of temporary shelters had a median cost of UGX 250,000 (about \$68), and relocation transport was estimated at UGX 80,000 (approximately \$22). Also, emergency loans averaged UGX 1,750,000 (around \$470), reflecting significant financial strain, while business capital losses were approximately UGX 2,500,000 (around \$675), emphasizing the extensive economic hardships faced by individuals affected by the pandemic and conflict crises.

The impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods during land conflicts was reportedly significant, with 86% of respondents (f=169) reporting a change in their income source. 94% (f=195 respondents) indicated that COVID-19 had adversely affected their household incomes. The salient issues included job loss, experienced by 34%, and salary reductions affecting 11% of the respondents. Demand for goods decreased for 14% (f=29), while 12% (f=25) faced challenges linked to lack of market access. Transportation limitations especially during the prolonged lockdowns significantly impacted 62% (f=130), alongside movement restrictions affecting 60% (f=126). Other concerns included drained savings 21%, (44 respondents), limited access to financial services 18%, (f=37), and health complications 17%, (f=35). Moreover, 26% (f=54) reported to have closed businesses, and 11% (f=23) noted reduced inflow of remittances, illustrating the extensive economic fallout from the pandemic. Generally, 75% or the respondents revealed that their household incomes were completely affected by COVID-19 pandemic and the aftermath of the land eviction event, with another 18% indicating that their household incomes were very affected, yet a dismal proportion reported little to no effects to of the crises to household incomes (less than 5%) (See Table 8).

Table 8: Overall effect of COVID-19 and land eviction on household incomes.

Overall Effect of COVID-19 and land eviction event on incomes	Frequency (%)
Completely affected (reduction of 76% or more of our income)	147 (75)
Very affected (reduction between 50% and 75% of our income)	35 (18)
Affected (reduction between 25% and 49% of our income)	9 (5)
Little affected (reduction of less than 25% of our income)	3 (2)
It was not affected	2 (1)
Affected because there are more expenses than before crisis	1 (1)

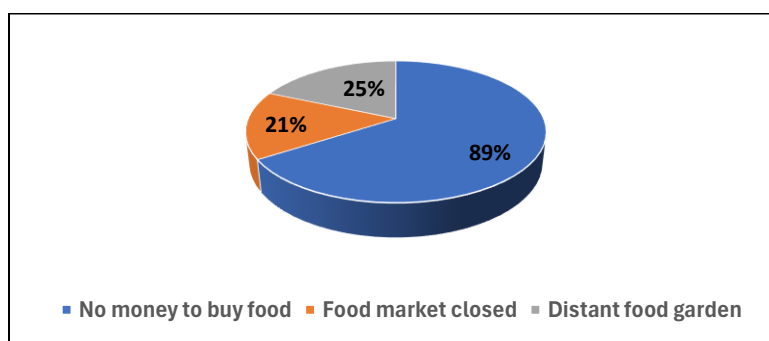


Figure 10: Effect of land conflict and COVID-19 pandemic on food security.

The twin crises of COVID-19 and land conflict have severely hindered food access for many individuals (See Figure 10), with 89% (f=174%) reporting a lack of money to purchase food, underscoring the financial strain experienced by the community. In addition, 21% (f=40) noted that local food markets that failed to adhere to the Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) were closed, further limiting their options for obtaining essential supplies and yet the banning of public transportation hindered mobility to gardens far away from the settlement.

3.5.2 Effect of COVID-19 crisis on land conflict and property rights of evicted households

The COVID-19 crisis with its set restrictions to movement intensified the impact on land conflicts and property rights, revealing significant disruptions in the legal and social frameworks that govern land ownership (Figure 11). With 42% of court proceedings suspended, many individuals were left helpless regarding their claims and disputes. Simultaneously, 30% reported halted land transactions, further complicating the ability to buy or sell property, while 29% faced the distressing reality of losing their land rights altogether. Mobility was affected too, with 22% of residents indicating limited movement, a barrier that restricted access to essential resources and services. The closure of land offices, cited by 21%, added to the confusion and uncertainty, preventing individuals from obtaining important documentation or assistance. Moreover, 17% reported an inability to rehabilitate their properties, emphasizing the ongoing neglect due to lack of resources and support.

Community engagement diminished significantly as well, with only 15% able to hold meetings, and 8% noting their incapacity to advocate for their rights effectively. Even further, 7% felt unable to engage in discourse about their situations, demonstrating how the pandemic has stifled voices that need to be heard. While only a small percentage reported direct threats of violence (4%), damage to property and evictions remain pressing concerns, with 2% facing eviction from land and 1% from their housing units (figure 6).

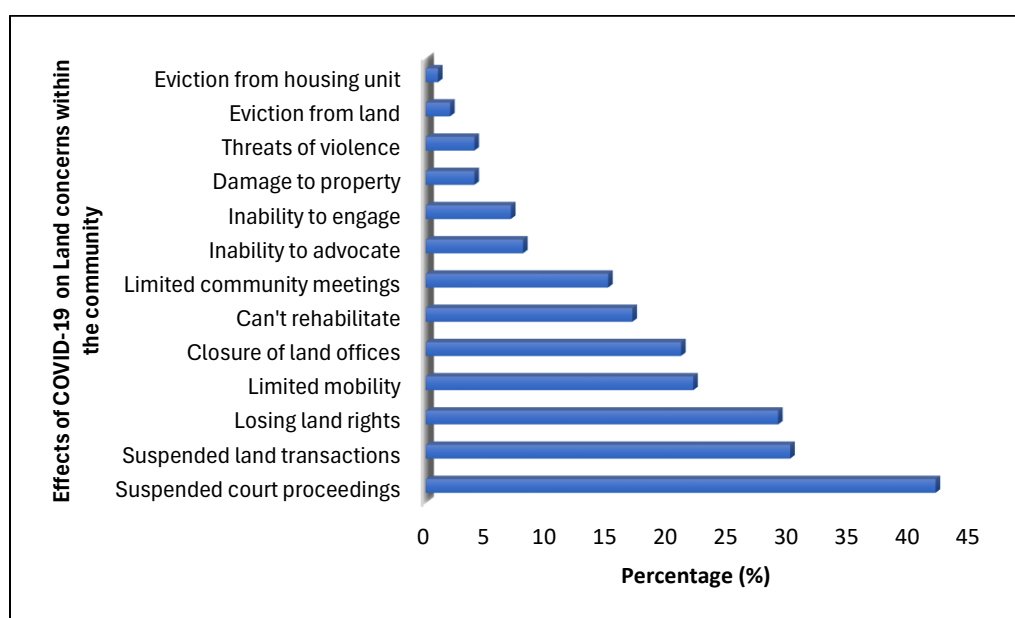


Figure 11: Effects of Covid 19 on land concerns (multiple response).

3.5.3 Level of effect of land conflict and COVID-19 across social groups

The combined effects of land conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic have profoundly disrupted the lives of multiple social groups, pointing to a far-reaching crisis (Table 9). An almost universal 99% of respondents reported that youths and women were significantly affected, highlighting their heightened vulnerability to overlapping shocks in livelihoods, security, and wellbeing. Children were similarly impacted, with 98% reported as affected, underscoring the urgency of addressing the specific risks they face in terms of protection, education, and basic needs. Men also experienced substantial hardship, with 95% of respondents indicating adverse effects, suggesting that no group was spared from the social and economic fallout.

People with disabilities (PWDs) were reported to have been affected in 87% of responses, indicating considerable challenges in accessing services, support, and secure livelihoods amid both crises. From a tenure perspective, both sides of the landlord–tenant relationship suffered acutely: 99% of respondents noted that landlords experienced significant hardships, while 98% reported that tenants were heavily impacted. This reflects the strain on housing security, rent payments, and land-related claims during a period of heightened uncertainty.

These reveal that the intersecting pressures of land conflict and the pandemic cut across age, gender, ability, and tenure status. The near-universal levels of reported impact point to an urgent need for targeted, group-specific support and broader structural interventions to protect livelihoods, strengthen social protection, and reduce vulnerability in future crises.

Table 9: Level of effect of COVID-19 pandemic after the land conflict across social groups.

Social Group (Yes)	Highly affected Frequency (%)	Moderately affected Frequency (%)	Affected Frequency (%)	Slightly affected Frequency (%)	Not affected Frequency (%)
Youths	87 (52)	36 (21)	33 (20)	10 (6)	2 (1)
Women	142 (84)	21 (12)	5 (3)	0 (0)	1 (1)
Children	103 (60)	29 (17)	25 (15)	10 (6)	4 (2)
Elderly	130 (76)	27 (16)	8 (5)	3 (2)	2 (1)
Men	107 (63)	42 (25)	17 (10)	4 (2)	1 (1)
People with Disabilities	90 (63)	14 (10)	12 (8)	8 (6)	18 (13)
Landlords	153 (89)	12 (7)	4 (2)	1 (1)	1 (1)
Tenants	92 (54)	23 (14)	38 (22)	13 (8)	3 (2)

3.6 Food security and livelihood coping strategies during land conflict and COVID-19 pandemic crises

The study asked respondents to multi-select a range of options they adopted to cope up with food security challenges after eviction and during COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Table 10 shows that evicted households relied overwhelmingly on consumption-reducing strategies to cope with food access challenges during COVID-19. The most common responses were reducing the number of meals (79%) and the size of meals (66%), indicating substantial cutbacks in daily food intake. Nearly a third (29%) coped by purchasing low-price products, while around one fifth reported reducing the amount of food bought, borrowing food from shops, or stocking food in bulk (each about 21%). Social networks were also important: 18% sourced food from nearby relatives and friends, and 15% from distant relatives. Intra-household sacrifices were evident, with 22% reducing adults' food so that children could eat more, and, in a small but notable minority, 1% reported reducing women's and girls' food for men and children. The results point to acute food stress, managed primarily by reducing consumption and relying on cheaper foods and social support.

Table 10: Coping with food insecurity among evicted households after eviction and during COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

Coping mechanisms with food access challenges during Covid (Yes)	Frequency (%)
Reduced number of meals	150 (79)
Reduced size of meals	125 (66)
Purchased low price products	56 (29)
Reduced adults' food for children to eat more	41 (22)
Reduced food bought	40 (21)
Stocked food largely	39 (21)
Borrowed food from shops	40 (21)
Sourced food from neighboring relatives and friend	35 (18)
Sourced food from distant relatives	29 (15)
Reduced women's and girl's food for men and children	2 (1)

During the COVID-19 pandemic and in the aftermath of eviction, affected households adopted Livelihood coping strategies. The most commonly reported mechanism was reliance on savings, cited by 39% of respondents, followed by the sale of household assets (32%) and withdrawal of children from school (29%), indicating significant erosion of both financial buffers and human capital. Some households reduced non-food expenses (13%) or had a member migrate in search of opportunities (13%), while 11% resorted to begging. More severe asset depletion was reflected in the sale of land (9%), breeding animals (8%), and other productive assets (4%). Additionally, a small proportion of

households depended on school-going children's work (4%) and, in the most extreme form of distress, child marriage (2%) as a livelihood coping mechanism.

3.6.1 Support received after the eviction and during the COVID-19 crisis.

Following eviction from the land, the majority of respondents reported receiving food relief, with 138 households (85%) indicating they had been supported in this way. Nearly half, 76 respondents (47%), received temporary shelter, while 45 (28%) obtained support for shelter construction. Financial support was reported by 28 respondents (17%), and in-kind support by 27 (17%). Legal support was accessed by 26 respondents (16%), whereas 14 (9%) received WASH kits. Very few respondents obtained psychological support, reported by only 7 households (4%), and telehealth services were almost nonexistent, with just 1 respondent (1%) indicating they had received this type of assistance.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, respondents indicated various forms of support received to help them cope with the challenges posed by the crisis. A significant majority, comprising 79% of the respondents, received food relief. Financial support was provided to 11% of participants, while 6% received personal protective equipment to safeguard their health. Additionally, 4% of the respondents were given WASH kits, highlighting efforts to maintain hygiene. Temporary shelter and shelter construction materials were each received by 2% of the participants. Psychological support was reported by 1% of those surveyed, and a similar percentage accessed telehealth services. Legal support was also extended to another 1% of respondents, demonstrating a broad range of assistance offered during this challenging time.

Following eviction from their land, respondents found themselves in various relocation situations. The data showed that 21% of households sought refuge in open spaces, while 16% built makeshift shelters on their plots. A portion of the respondents, totaling 11%, noted that they were hosted by friends, while 5% found temporary makeshift accommodations with neighbors or relatives. Some individuals took refuge in churches or mosques, constituting 2% of the cases. This pattern of relocation underscores the resilience and adaptability of households facing displacement during such unprecedented times.

3.7 Land conflict management and tenure rights re-acquisition: Awareness of Policies, Actions and Actors

Table 11, presents the frequency and proportion of respondents reporting awareness of land laws and factors that hinder their enforcement.

Variable (Yes)	Freq (%)
Awareness on laws/policies that govern land	47 (22)
Awareness on whether such laws/policies are enforced	8 (17)
Hinderers on enforcement of land rights laws	
Corruption	74 (57)
Inadequate awareness	56 (43)
Limited information	46 (35)
Weak government policies	45 (35)
Limited engagement	28 (22)
Conflicting interest on land	28 (22)
Poor law enforcement	17 (13)
Local government exclusion	17 (13)
Nepotism	15 (12)
Land brokerage	11 (8)
Conflicting interest in policy	11 (8)

Table 11 illustrates that only 22% of respondents reportedly know of laws or policies that govern land, and just 17% are aware whether those rules are enforced. This indicates a substantial gap in both legal knowledge and perceived enforcement. Respondents identified governance and information problems as the primary obstacles to enforcing land rights. Corruption is the most frequently cited hindrance (57%), followed by inadequate awareness among the public (43%) and limited access to information (35%). Weak government policies are also reported by 35% of

respondents, underscoring institutional shortcomings. Secondary barriers found out included conflicting interests over land and limited stakeholder engagement (each 22%). Less commonly reported constraints are poor law enforcement and local government exclusion (each 13%), nepotism (12%), and issues related to land brokerage and conflicting policy interests (each 8%). The findings show that a combination of corruption, policy weakness and information deficits as the main challenges to effective land-rights enforcement, with stakeholder exclusion and vested interests further complicating reform efforts.

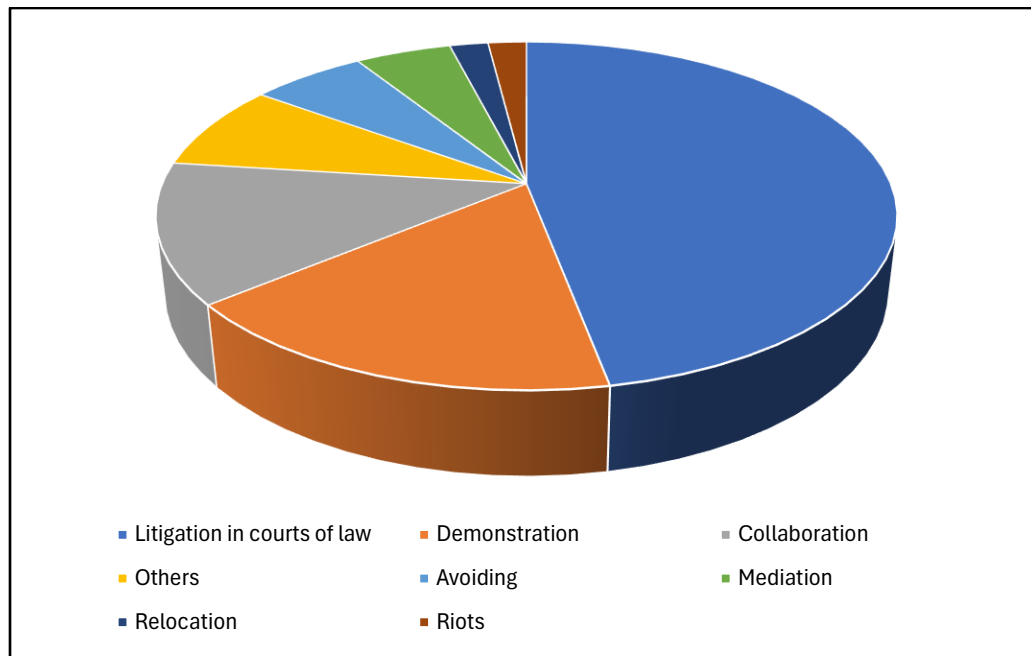


Figure 12: Main strategy depended upon to regain the rights (f=212)

Figure 12 presents the main strategies respondents depend on to regain their rights. The findings show that 47% of respondents relied on litigation in courts of law, making it the most commonly used approach and suggesting a strong reliance on formal legal mechanisms to address disputes. This is followed by demonstrations, reported by 17% of respondents, indicating that collective action and public expression of grievances are also used as a means of demanding the restoration of rights. Collaboration with other stakeholder's accounts for 13%, reflecting the role of cooperative efforts with community members, leaders, or relevant institutions in resolving conflicts. A smaller proportion of respondents reported using other strategies (8%), while 6% indicated that they deal with disputes through avoidance, suggesting that some individuals prefer not to directly engage in confrontation. Mediation was reported by 5%, showing relatively limited reliance on third-party dispute resolution. The least used strategies are relocation (2%) and riots (2%), indicating that only a very small proportion of respondents either move away from disputed areas or resort to violent confrontation as a means of regaining their rights.

The settlements residents actively deployed various strategies to regain land tenure rights after eviction, with 78% of respondents engaging in diversified efforts. Litigation in courts was the most prevalent strategy, utilized by 57% of the respondents, followed closely by demonstrations 56%. Other strategies included riots 30% and collaboration 10%, indicating a range of approaches from legal to more confrontational methods.

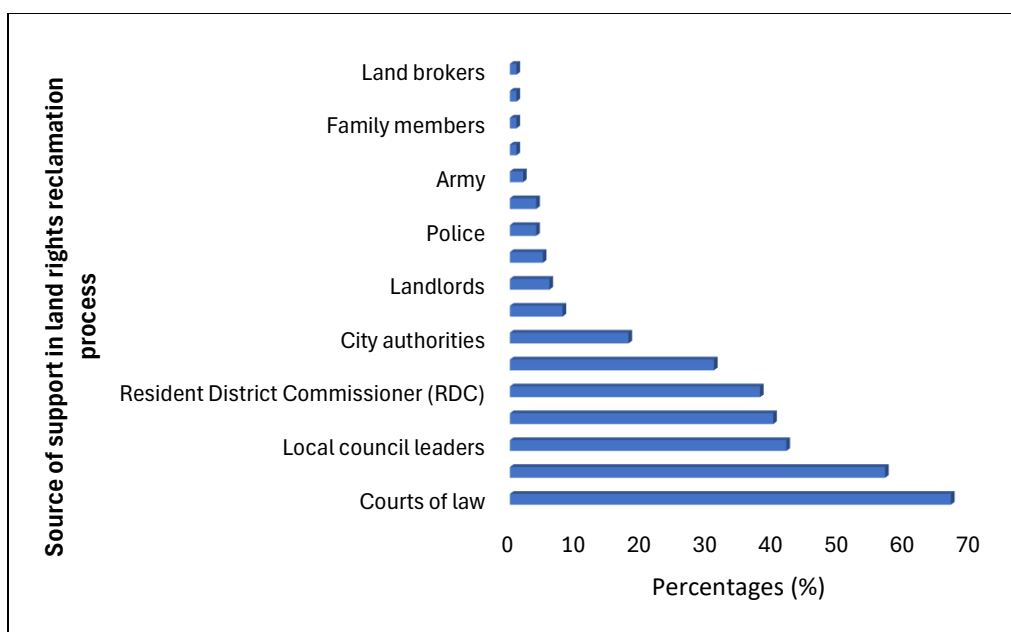


Figure 13: Sources of support in land rights reclamation processes.

Figure 13 shows where respondents sought support during land-rights reclamation and how commonly each institution was used. Courts of law were the most frequently consulted source, cited by 91 respondents (67%). Appeals to the President's office were reported by 106 respondents (57%)*, and local council leaders by 67 respondents (42%). Politicians (64; 40%), the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) (60; 38%), and legal service providers (50; 31%) were also important sources of assistance. Less commonly used institutions include city authorities (28; 18%), land tribunals (13; 8%), landlords (10; 6%), and traditional leaders (8; 5%). Police and the Land Commission of Inquiry were each cited by 6 respondents (4%), while the army was mentioned by 3 respondents (2%). Neighbors, family members, religious leaders and land brokers were rarely consulted (each cited by 1 respondent; 1%). Generally, courts, executive appeals to the president and local councils dominated support seeking behavior for land reclamation, with legal professionals playing a significant but smaller role. Despite the predominance of informal land brokerage, the informal and community actors were seldomly relied upon. FGDs, revealed that the president and institutions under the official of the presidency became relevant following his visit to the settlements in October 2018. KIIs also reported that accompanied by the then Minister of Lands, Housing and Urban Development and the former member of Parliament, the president visited the settlements to inspect damage from a court-ordered eviction of occupants deemed to be on private land. It was indicated that the president directed the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) to provide food, shelter and emergency aid to displaced families, condemned the violence as "uncalled for," and pledged to defend bibanja holders' rights. He further ordered arrests of those implicated in fraudulent land dealings and called for a re-evaluation of the land ownership dispute, while warning against retaliatory destruction of the developer's property.

Table 12 shows the level of satisfaction with the level of support provided by different institutions or persons. Respondents overwhelmingly rated the President's office, local council leaders, courts and legal service providers as the most effective sources of support for land-rights claims: the President's office (98% combined highly effective/effective), legal service providers (98%), local council leaders (89%) and courts (81%). Politicians were also viewed to have favorably (92%) provided effective support. Land tribunals showed strong effectiveness among users but were less frequently used. By contrast, city authorities and the police produced mixed results, while traditional and religious leaders, land brokers and other informal actors received largely low or negative effectiveness ratings.

Table 12: Perceived effectiveness of support from institutions/persons while reclaiming land rights (f=212).

Institution (Yes)	Highly Effective Freq (%)	Effective Freq (%)	Ineffective Freq (%)	Highly Ineffective Freq (%)
City authorities	6 (22)	14 (52)	5 (19)	2 (7)
Landlords	6 (60)	0(0)	3 (30)	1 (10)
Religious leaders	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	1 (100)
Traditional leaders	1 (14)	1 (14)	3 (43)	2 (29)
Land brokers	0(0)	0(0)	1 (100)	0(0)
Police	0(0)	3 (50)	2 (33)	1 (17)
Army	1 (33)	1 (33)	1 (33)	0(0)
Courts of law	38 (37)	46 (44)	12 (12)	8 (8)
Legal service providers	32 (64)	17 (34)	1 (2)	0(0)
Politicians	34 (53)	25 (39)	3 (5)	2 (3)
Land tribunals	9 (75)	0(0)	1 (8)	2 (17)
President / His office	77 (85)	11 (12)	2 (2)	1 (1)
Commission of inquiry	1 (17)	2 (33)	3 (50)	0(0)
Local Council Leaders	43 (66)	15 (23)	3 (5)	4 (6)

Government responses to land conflict were varied and largely oriented toward compensation, participation and formal dispute resolution (Figure 14). Over half of respondents (57%) reported that authorities provided resident compensation, while 49% said the government encouraged community member involvement and 37% noted compensation by other parties. Supporting legal recourse was also used: 25% cited facilitation of court processes, and 9% reported establishment of inquiry committees. Community-focused measures included routine meetings (30%), surveying (18%), nomination of government officials to intervene (15%), processing of community land titles (15%) and opening land boundaries (14%). Security actions were less common: removal of armed forces from occupied land was reported by 18%, whereas deployment of armed forces and imposition of curfews were rare (10% and 1% respectively). Arrests of conflict instigators occurred in 5% of cases. The findings illustrate a multifaceted government strategy combining compensation, participatory measures and formal legal mechanisms to mitigate land disputes and support affected communities.

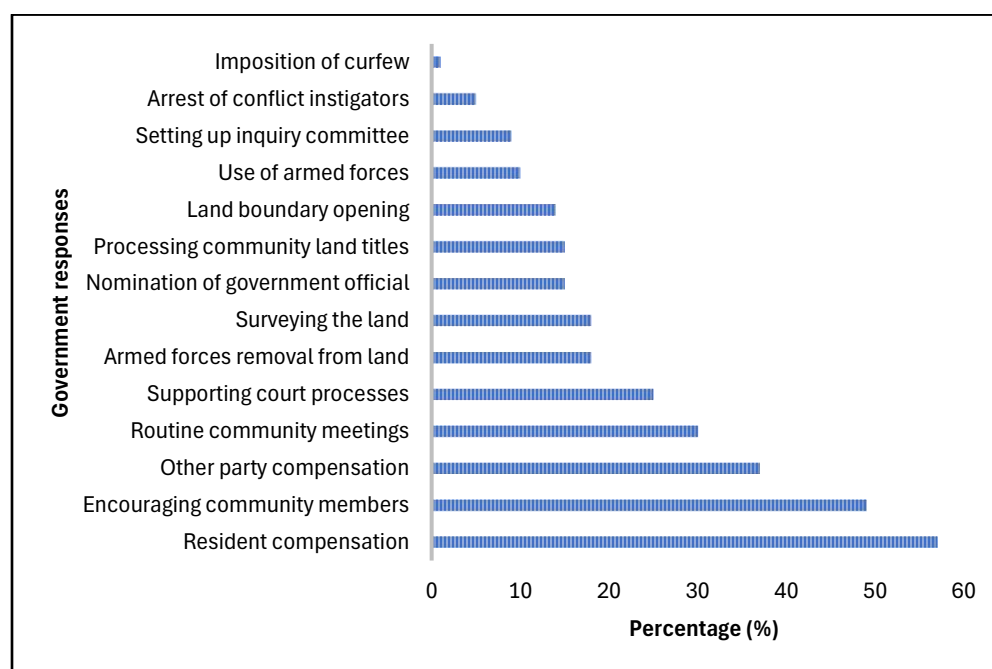


Figure 14: Government measures in response to the land conflict since its emergence.

Overall satisfaction with institutions' actions to secure tenure rights was highest for the President's office, with 79% of respondents expressing satisfaction (See Table 13). Local councils also scored strongly, with 75% combined satisfaction. Politicians and legal service providers recorded similarly high satisfaction levels at 71% and 71% respectively. Courts of law had a lower combined satisfaction rate of 50% (53 satisfied, 20 very satisfied). In contrast, actions by the conflicting parties were rated poorly: only 32% expressed satisfaction while a majority (51%) were very dissatisfied. FGDs attributed the high ratings for the President's office to visible interventions, including reconstruction of damaged water points, power lines and hygiene facilities. These results indicate strong public confidence in executive and local governance bodies and legal actors to secure tenure, whereas measures taken by opposing parties are widely rejected.

Table 13: Level of satisfaction regarding undertakings/actions to secure tenure rights.

Institution (Yes)	Very Dissatisfied Freq (%)	Dissatisfied Freq (%)	Satisfied Freq (%)	Very Satisfied Freq (%)
President's office	7 (4)	26 (16)	56 (35)	71 (44)
Local councils	17 (11)	22 (14)	67 (43)	49 (32)
Courts of law	28 (19)	47 (32)	53 (36)	20 (14)
Politicians	17 (12)	25 (17)	63 (43)	41 (28)
Legal service providers	14 (11)	23 (18)	66 (50)	28 (21)
Actions by other Conflicting party	77 (51)	26 (17)	40 (27)	7 (5)

3.7.1 Trust and legitimacy of actors in settling land disputes

The study showed a clear preference for the President's office as the primary trusted and fair authority in land dispute resolution (See Table 14): 50% of respondents named it the most trusted actor and 49% regarded it as fair. This dominance suggests that many people expect decisive, high-level intervention in land matters and view executive action as both effective and impartial compared with other institutions. Findings also showed that other formal institutions lag considerably behind. Courts were the second most trusted actor at 23% but were seen as fair by only 14%, indicating doubts about judicial impartiality or effectiveness in land cases. The Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (18% trust; 13% fairness), local council leaders (11% trust; 8% fairness) and lawyers (9% trust; 5% fairness) received modest confidence. Traditional institutions and community-based actors were trusted by very few respondents (7% or less), and bodies such as land tribunals, police, NGOs and city authorities registered minimal support. Overall, the findings point to strong public reliance on executive authority and a pronounced lack of confidence in judicial, local and customary mechanisms—underscoring the need to strengthen transparency, capacity and legitimacy across lower-level institutions to improve trust and perceptions of fairness in land dispute resolution.

Table 14: Perceived trust and fair authority of actors in resolving land disputes (f=212)

Entity / Actor (Yes)	Trusted actor to settle disputes (Freq.; %)	Fair authority of actors (Freq; %)
President's office	94 (50)	103 (49)
Courts	43 (23)	29 (14)
Ministry of lands, Housing and Urban Development (MoLHUD)	34 (18)	28 (13)
Local council leaders	20 (11)	18 (8)
Lawyers	17 (9)	11 (5)
Traditional institutions	13 (7)	15 (7)
Land tribunal	7 (4)	2 (1)
Politicians	6 (3)	5 (2)
Community members	3 (2)	4 (2)
Police	4 (2)	1 (0)
Family	1 (1)	0 (0)
City authority	1 (1)	1 (0)
NGOs	1 (1)	0 (0)

3.7.2 Barriers to land tenure security

The establishment of strong land rights for residents in Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi settlements is hindered by a range of interrelated factors (See Figure 15). Institutional barriers are prominent, with corruption cited by 77% of respondents as a primary obstacle, highlighting widespread distrust in mechanisms intended to protect land rights. This suggests that corrupt practices undermine formal systems, leading to unequal treatment and land acquisition through bribery and unethical dealings rather than legal processes. Poor policy enforcement, noted by 19% of respondents, further weakens institutional support for secure land rights.

Informational barriers also limit residents' ability to assert tenure security. A lack of awareness among residents was identified by 39% of respondents, while limited access to information was noted by 35%. These gaps indicate that many individuals do not fully understand their rights or the procedures necessary to claim them, leaving them vulnerable to encroachment and unable to effectively navigate land tenure systems.

Political barriers arise from competing interests among powerful actors. Conflicting claims over land, reported by 32% of respondents, create tensions that hinder the establishment of secure land rights. Weak government policies, identified by 45% of respondents, contribute to this challenge by providing insufficiently structured protections and ambiguous processes for land acquisition and ownership. Additional political factors include the exclusion of local government from decision-making, reported by 14% of respondents, and nepotism cited by 16%.

Governance barriers reflect weaknesses in the implementation and coordination of land management systems. Widespread land brokerage, noted by 15% of respondents, and fragmented engagement with local stakeholders, reported by 19%, illustrate how informal dealings and limited coordination undermine formal governance structures. Collectively, these barriers demonstrate a complex system in which corruption, inadequate awareness, competing interests, and weak governance interact to limit residents' tenure security.

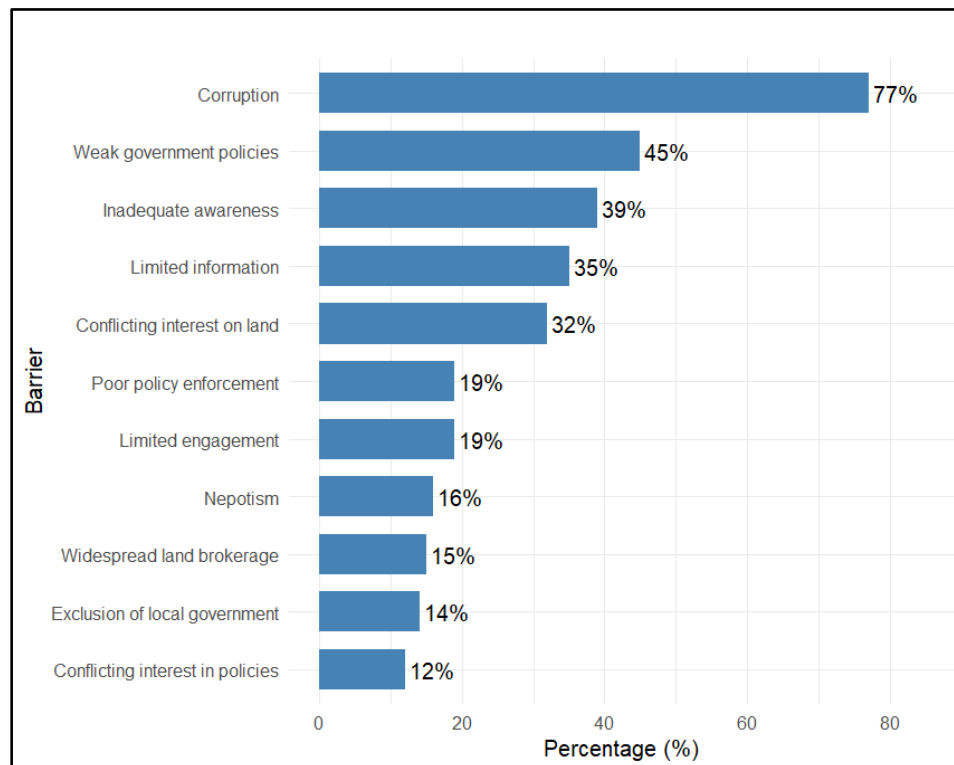


Figure 15: Barriers to the Establishment of Strong Land Rights (multiple response) (f=212).

3.8. Risk of re-eviction, Post-Conflict and Post-COVID-19 Reconstruction and Civic Participation in Land Matters

Perceptions of re-eviction in Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi revealed high and persistent insecurity (See Figure 16): nearly half of respondents (47%) said they were very afraid of being evicted again. A further 25% were uncertain (“maybe”), while 25% believed they would not be evicted, and 3% had no opinion. This distribution, skewed towards fear and uncertainty signals that past evictions continue to shape residents’ sense of tenure security, with many households living under sustained anxiety that undermines confidence in long-term recovery and reconstruction.

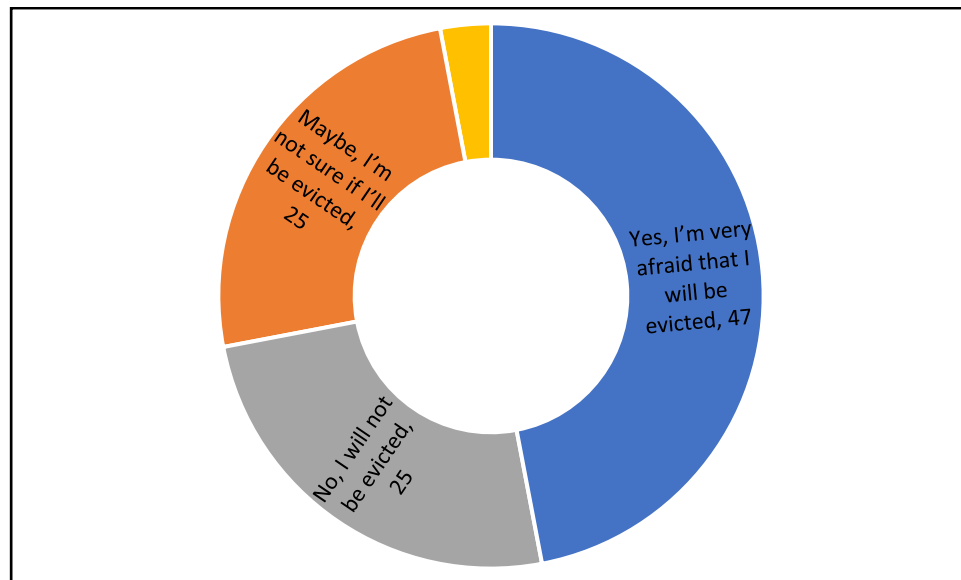


Figure 16: Perceptions on risk of re-eviction from settlement (f=182).

Perceptions of land tenure security are predominantly weak among respondents as 36% reportedly considered their land not secure and only 10% felt secure (See Figure 17). Another 33% describe their tenure as somewhat secure and 15% as very secure, while 6% are unsure. Overall, the data reveal widespread vulnerability and ambivalence about land rights, with a minority experiencing clear tenure confidence.

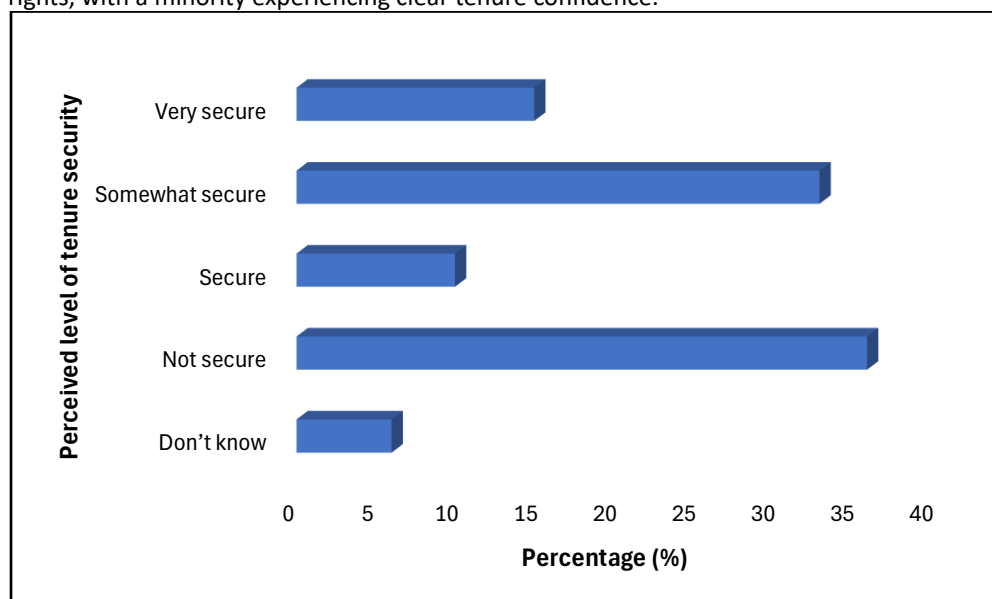


Figure 17: Perceived level of tenure security (f=212).

Following eviction, nearly half of respondents (46%, n=98 of 182) reported they had rebuilt their homes (See Table 15). Reconstruction activity was concentrated between 2019 and 2024, peaking in 2020 (24%) and 2022 (22%), with continued rebuilding into 2023–24. Most reconstructed dwellings are occupied by household owners (89%), while smaller shares rent (6%) or fall into other arrangements (4%). However, formal tenure remains limited: only 9% of reconstructed homes have a land title, 21% have tenancy agreements, and a majority (51%) rely on sales agreements; 12% reported having no formal documentation. These findings indicate substantial post-eviction recovery efforts but persistent insecurity in legal land recognition and long-term tenure protection.

Table 15: Post-conflict housing reconstruction and tenure conditions (f=98 of 182)

Post-conflict conditions	Category	Freq (%)
Reconstructed house after eviction	Yes	98 (46)
Year of reconstruction	2019	14 (15)
	2020	22 (24)
	2021	16 (17)
	2022	20 (22)
	2023	12 (13)
	2024	8 (9)
Tenure/ownership of current dwelling	Occupied without paying	1 (1)
	Own house owned by household member	92 (89)
	Renting	6 (6)
	Others	4 (4)
Tenure status of reconstructed housing	Have land title (private land)	9 (9)
	Have tenancy agreement	22 (21)
	Possess sales agreement	53 (51)
	None	13 (12)
	Other	7 (7)

Figure 18 shows that residents' top post-reconstruction priority at the time of the study was securing legal tenure: 65% reported seeking legal documents to formalize rights. Economic recovery was also reportedly important (33%) with priority on establishing income-generating businesses and 25% on recovering from livelihood shocks. Fewer respondents prioritized housing permanence (16%), relocation (14%), or selling and buying elsewhere (7%), while compensation was rarely cited (1%). In general, these responses indicate a community focused first on legal protection of land rights, then on restoring economic stability, reflecting a pragmatic strategy to reduce future displacement risk and rebuild resilient livelihoods.

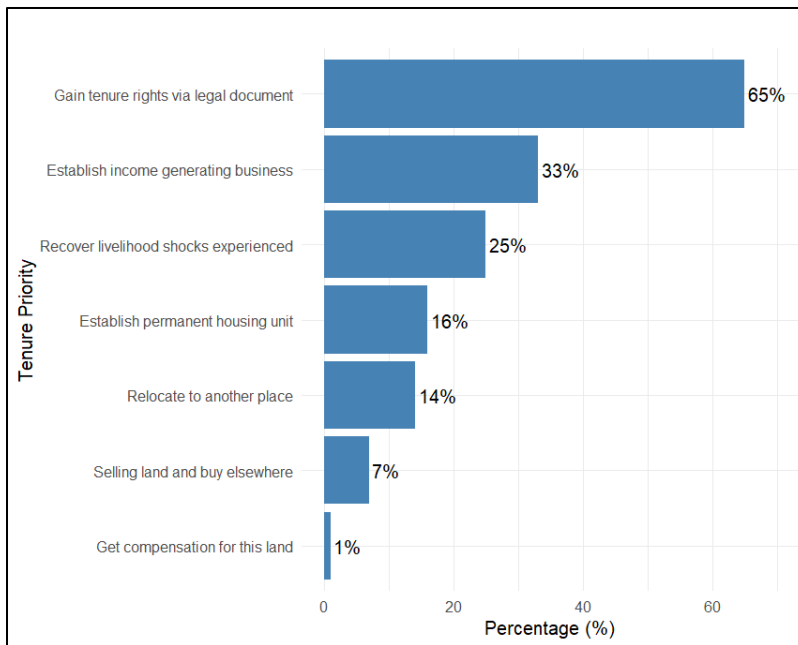


Figure 18: Tenure priorities post reconstruction (multiple response) (f=212).

Despite being exposed to eviction, awareness of land issues was found to have remained limited i.e., only 41% of respondents reported being aware of land matters affecting their community (Figure 19). However, participation in land-related community meetings is relatively high, with 68% attending such meetings (Figure 16). This combination high meeting participation but lower overall awareness on land issues suggests that while many residents engage in local forums, those meetings may not yet be fully effective at raising broad understanding of land rights and risks; strengthening information sharing within these participatory spaces could help translate engagement into greater awareness and more secure tenure outcomes.

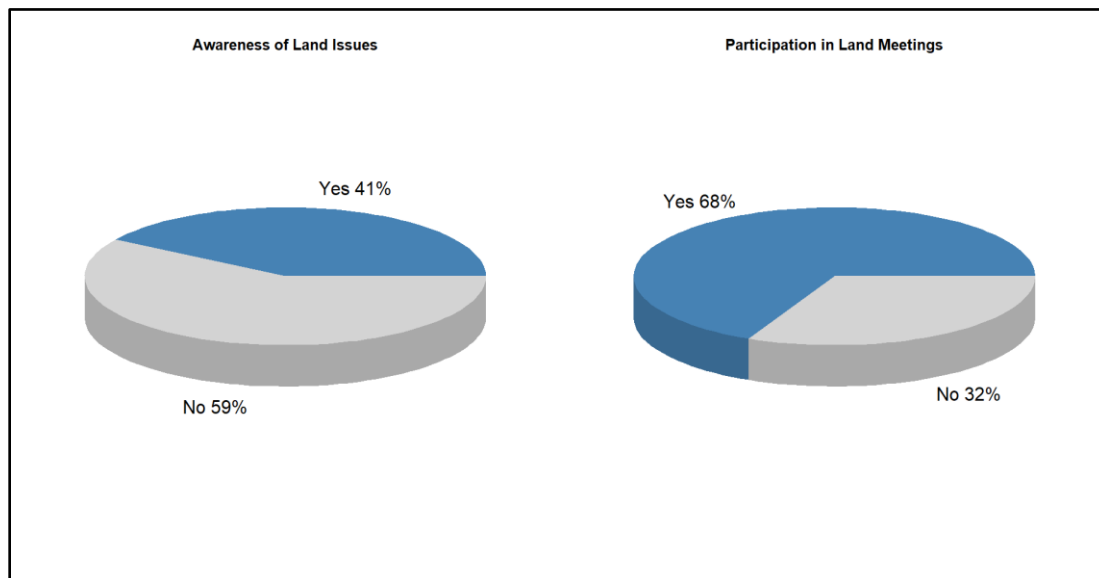


Figure 19: Awareness of land issues and participation of community meetings on land.

The study established communication channels used to provide information about community land matters (Table 16). Community members rely primarily on interpersonal and local leadership channels to receive information about land matters: 52% reported getting information from local leaders and 40% from everyday local conversations. Local

radio also plays an important role (30%), alongside other mass media such as national radio (22%), television (24%) and newspapers (13%). Digital platforms and formal mailings are much less used with WhatsApp groups reach only 6%. These patterns indicate that trusted, face-to-face sources and community-level authorities are the most effective vehicles for communicating land issues, while traditional broadcast media provide useful supplementary coverage; digital and formal written channels currently have limited reach.

Table 16: Communication channels used to provide information about community land matters (n=212)

Communication Channel (Yes)	Freq (%)
Local leaders	101 (52)
Local conversations	78 (40)
Local radio	58 (30)
Television	46 (24)
Radio	42 (22)
Newspapers	26 (13)
WhatsApp groups	11 (6)

Consultation between residents and local authorities on post-reconstruction needs appears sporadic and narrowly focused (See Figure 20). Only one in five respondents (21%) reported being consulted about community facilities, and 17% about youth empowerment, while consultations on road infrastructure (13%), security (12%), livelihood development (12%) and health and wellbeing (12%) were reported by smaller shares. Critical issues received even less attention: just 9% said they had been consulted on land conflicts, 10% on economic development and 6% on domestic violence; environmental protection, development control and city laws were rarely raised (4%, 2% and 2% respectively). Overall, these figures suggest limited and uneven community engagement by local authorities, with important gaps in dialogue on land and other social priorities that could undermine inclusive and needs-responsive reconstruction planning.

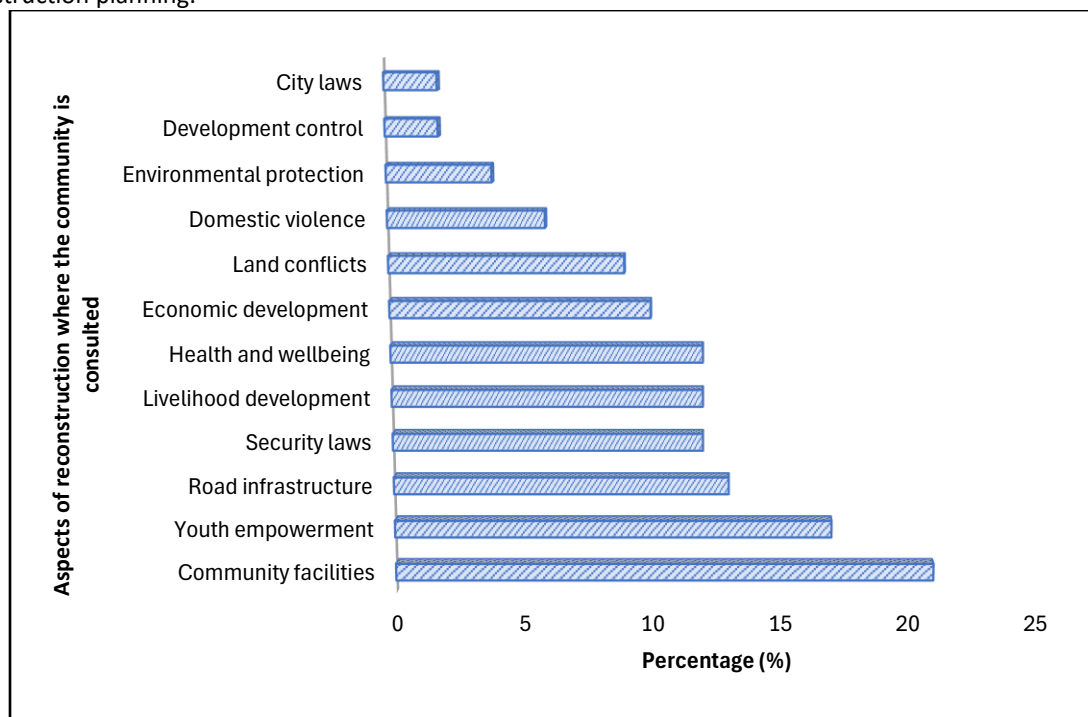


Figure 20: Aspects of post-reconstruction where the community is consulted on (n=212).

Community priorities for engagement on land governance center on rights, conflict resolution and security (See Table 17). The findings showed that 60% of respondents identified land rights as a top issue, 55% prioritized land conflict, and 48% named tenure security. Substantial shares also called for practical capacity building—33% requested training

on land laws while fewer prioritized broader governance or policy work (23% and 12%, respectively) or development-oriented concerns such as housing and land transactions (9% each). Together, these responses underscore an urgent, grassroots demand for measures that clarify and protect individual and communal rights, prevent and resolve disputes, and build local legal literacy as a foundation for more effective land governance.

Table 17: Prioritized community issues for engagement on land governance.

Prioritized community issues for engagement on land governance (Yes)	Freq (%)
Land rights	110 (60)
Land conflict	100 (55)
Tenure security	87 (48)
Land laws training	61 (33)
Land governance	43 (23)
Land policy development	22 (12)
Housing development	17 (9)
Land transactions	17 (9)

4. Conclusions

The evidence from this study shows that urban land conflict in informal settlements is not an isolated legal or administrative issue, but a deeply embedded social, economic, and political process that shapes everyday life and long-term wellbeing. The study has revealed that Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi settlements are built largely by migrants who arrive with hopes of securing livelihoods, accessing social networks, and eventually owning land. Yet, the very strategies that make low-income or informal spaces attractive and accessible such as flexible tenure arrangements, informal transactions, and negotiated access also expose residents to profound insecurity when not recognized and protected in law and policy.

The paradox of “high ownership but low security” runs through the findings of the study. Many households consider themselves landowners, yet lack formal documentation or legally recognized claims. This gap between de facto and de jure rights leaves residents vulnerable to dispossession, particularly when land values rise or powerful actors assert rival claims. The concentration of ownership and decision-making in the hands of male household heads further reinforces unequal power relations, limiting women’s ability to shape land decisions, defend their rights, or benefit fully from land-based opportunities. These gendered patterns revealed that strengthening tenure security must go beyond formal titles to address who is recognized as a rights-holder within households and communities.

The scale and intensity of land conflict documented in the study, affecting the vast majority of respondents and often involving both intra- and inter-community disputes, demonstrates that these are not exceptional events but a routine feature of urban expansion under weak governance. Fraudulent evictions, contested boundaries, and overlapping claims are symptoms of a broader structural problem in land administration, where information is opaque, institutions are fragmented, and enforcement is inconsistent. The COVID-19 pandemic magnified these weaknesses. As public health measures restricted movement and strained state capacity, residents already on the margins faced a double burden: health risks and income loss on one hand, and the constant threat or reality of eviction on the other. Coping strategies such as selling household assets and reducing food consumption are stark indicators of how closely land security is tied to basic survival.

The study also revealed that limited awareness of land laws and procedures is both a cause and consequence of vulnerability. Many residents navigate a complex and often predatory land environment without sufficient knowledge of their rights, available remedies, or the steps required to secure documentation. This knowledge gap is reinforced by corruption, limited outreach by local government, and the perception that formal systems are expensive, distant, or biased against the poor. In this context, land governance is experienced less as a protective framework than as a source of uncertainty and fear.

Simultaneously, the findings highlight that communities are not passive victims. Residents mobilize, seek support from local councils, approach the courts, and appeal to the president's office in attempts to reclaim land and resist dispossession. Yet, their mixed experiences with these institutions point to uneven legitimacy and capacity. Where processes are opaque, slow, or captured by elite interests, trust erodes and conflicts persist. Conversely, when authorities engage transparently, involve communities meaningfully, and follow through on commitments, they can play a critical role in de-escalating tensions and rebuilding confidence.

In general, these insights suggest that improving urban land conflict management in informal settlements requires a shift from piecemeal interventions to a coherent, multi-layered approach. Legal and policy reforms must be matched with practical mechanisms that recognize informal histories of occupation and investment, provide accessible pathways to documentation, and embed safeguards against arbitrary eviction. Strengthening tenure security also demands deliberate efforts to correct gender imbalances, ensuring that women are recognized as landholders and are represented in decision-making spaces at household, community, and institutional levels.

Equally important is the need to view land governance through a resilience lens in a post-COVID context. The pandemic exposed how quickly shocks can destabilize already fragile urban communities. Future strategies must therefore integrate land, health, and livelihood concerns, ensuring that emergency responses do not inadvertently deepen dispossession or exclude those without formal tenure. Community-based structures, civil society organizations, and local authorities should be supported to co-produce solutions, from participatory mapping and local land registers to mediation platforms that can pre-empt or peacefully resolve disputes.

Eventually, the experience of Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi offers more than a localized case; it provides a window into the challenges facing many rapidly urbanizing areas where formal planning lags behind reality on the ground. The study demonstrates that when residents' lived claims to land are ignored, conflict and vulnerability multiply; when those claims are acknowledged, documented, and protected through inclusive, accountable institutions, informal settlements can become more stable, equitable, and resilient. In moving forward, the lessons from these communities call for political commitment and institutional courage to confront vested interests, close the gap between law and practice, and center the rights and voices of those who have long been marginalized in urban land debates.

Solutions to enduring land conflicts especially in informal or low-income settlements require authorities to embrace comprehensive visions rooted in tenure security, social justice, and participatory governance so that policymakers and practitioners transform land from a source of fear and conflict into a foundation for dignified urban living, not only in Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi but across similar settlements navigating the intersecting pressures of urban growth, inequality, and future crises.

5. Recommendations

A suite of recommendations emerging from the Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi case studies calls for strengthening legal recognition and hybrid land governance, institutionalizing inclusive and participatory community decision-making, advancing gender equity and broader social inclusion, integrating land governance with health and social protection, enhancing transparency, anti-corruption measures, and accountability, leveraging appropriate technology and robust land data systems, and securing sustained financing and long-term support to make these reforms durable and effective. Each recommendation is broken down into specific components as illustrated below;

1. Legal Recognition, Documentation, and Hybrid Governance

- Strengthen legal recognition and documentation of existing land rights: The Lusanja and Ssekanyonyi experiences show that land must be treated not only as a legal asset, but as the foundation of welfare, identity and resilience for residents of informal settlements. Authorities should adopt simplified, low-cost procedures to issue certificates of occupancy, temporary titles or block titles that reflect the relationships already present on the ground. These instruments need firm legal safeguards against forced eviction so that formalization closes the gap between perceived and legal ownership instead of opening new avenues for dispossession.
- Adopt hybrid governance models integrating formal, customary and informal systems: Future arrangements should not attempt to replace community and customary norms with statutory law, but

- to integrate them. Customary and community rules that protect vulnerable residents can be recognized, while the state sets non-negotiable standards on non-discrimination, due process and protection from arbitrary eviction. Clear division of roles and coordination between local councils, traditional leaders, land agencies and courts help reduce forum shopping and make the system more predictable and fairer.
- Strengthen local institutions for land conflict management: Local councils, land boards and community leaders need support to mediate disputes fairly. Capacity-building should focus on mediation skills, human rights, gender equality and basic technical aspects of land management, so that conflicts can be resolved close to where they arise and without escalating into violence.

2. Inclusive Participation and Community Governance

- Institutionalize community-driven land governance: Residents of informal settlements should be active co-producers of land governance. Community members can map their neighborhoods, identify long-term occupants, and document social and spatial boundaries. Settlement-level land committees (composed of; women and men, youth, tenants and local leaders) can interface with state institutions to co-produce land-use plans, monitor evictions and negotiate upgrading or relocation when absolutely necessary.
- Embed informal settlements within inclusive urban planning: Urban planning should move away from clearance as the default response. Authorities should prioritize in-situ upgrading through incremental improvements to services, access roads, drainage and public spaces while regularizing tenure as much as possible. Where relocation cannot be avoided, it needs to be nearby, negotiated with residents and designed to preserve or improve access to livelihoods, education and basic services. Planning and building standards should be flexible enough to allow incremental improvements by low-income households rather than criminalizing their efforts.
- Create continuous feedback and learning mechanisms: Monitoring of evictions, disputes, compensation and tenure security indicators should be routine, with data discussed in public hearings, community scorecards and participatory evaluations. These feedback loops help institutions adapt policies to residents' evolving needs and shift from crisis response to prevention.

3. Gender Equity and Social Inclusion

- Make gender-equitable land rights the default: Any reform should directly address entrenched gender inequalities. Joint registration of spouses should become the norm so that women are explicitly recorded as co-owners and rights-holders. Women's representation in land committees, mediation bodies and planning forums should be mandatory, ensuring that their perspectives shape decisions about allocation, upgrading and compensation.
- Protect tenants, youth, migrants and other marginalized groups: Tenants and other less visible residents often face the greatest insecurity. Written occupancy agreements, clear rules on compensation and relocation, and guaranteed access to information and complaints mechanisms can help ensure that tenure security protects everyone, not only formal owners or long-established households.

4. Land Governance, Health, and Social Protection

- Link tenure security with health and social protection systems: The context of the study showed how land insecurity magnifies health crises and economic shocks. Emergency regulations should explicitly prohibit arbitrary evictions during pandemics, disasters or other crises. When relocations are unavoidable, they must be paired with alternative housing, livelihood support and continuity of essential services such as water, sanitation and healthcare.
- Use social protection to buffer displacement risks: Cash transfers, food assistance and public works programs should prioritize households affected by evictions or at high risk of displacement. Treating land policy as part of a broader social protection architecture can transform it from a driver of vulnerability into a tool for resilience.

5. Transparency, Anti-Corruption, and Accountability

- Increase transparency and fight corruption in land administration: Governments should publish procedures, fees and timelines in accessible formats and establish transparent case-tracking systems so residents can follow the progress of applications and disputes. Clear sanctions for bribery, fraud and abuse of power are needed to deter corrupt practices and begin rebuilding trust in land institutions.
- Empower independent oversight and community watchdogs: Independent oversight bodies and community-based monitoring groups can track evictions, allocations and regularization processes. Their findings should feed into administrative and judicial reviews, ensuring that abuses are corrected and not repeated.

6. Technology and Data for Inclusive Land Management

- Use geospatial and digital tools to support, not replace, communities: Digital maps, registries and simple mobile tools can document existing occupation, track land-use changes and provide evidence for dispute resolution. These technologies should be built around community-validated data collection and open access to records, with safeguards against misuse or exclusion of people without digital access.
- Ensure fit-for-purpose, maintainable land data systems: Technology choices should prioritize simplicity, interoperability and long-term maintenance over novelty. Systems must be capable of recording a continuum of rights, from informal and customary to formal, and remain flexible enough to adjust as settlements evolve.

7. Financing and Long-Term Support

- Secure dedicated financing for tenure security and upgrading: Regularization, upgrading, dispute resolution and legal aid require stable, predictable funding at municipal and national levels. Dedicated budget lines signal political commitment and make it possible to plan beyond short project cycles.
- Align innovative financing with accountability and community oversight: Modest, transparent service fees introduced only after tenure is secured, alongside partnerships with development partners and civil society, can help sustain reforms. Any such mechanisms should be subject to strong accountability measures and community oversight to prevent elite capture and ensure that resources directly support improved tenure security and living conditions.

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