

Orphans reclaim land after mediation ends family dispute

BY BILL OKETCH

LIRA. A protracted land dispute in Okwalodyang Village, Lira District, has ended in favour of two orphans, restoring their inheritance after months of tension and legal wrangling.

The conflict arose in 2025 when Mr William Okello attempted to reclaim about three acres of land he had previously gifted to his late son, Peter Omara, who died in 2019. The land is now home to Omara's children, Nathan Okuja and Ivan Okello.

The disagreement escalated after Mr Okello accused Mr Okuja, 18, of criminal trespass in April 2025. In response, Mr Okuja reported to the police the alleged removal of land boundary marks on May 13, 2025, exposing the bereaved

family to possible eviction.

The matter was later taken up by Redeem International, a non-profit organisation that partners with law enforcement agencies to protect land and property rights of widows and orphans. Ms Grace Aneno, an advocate working with the organisation, said they received the case last May and found an existing police file charging Mr Okuja and his 20-year-old brother Okello, with criminal trespass.

"When we supported police investigations, it emerged that the *jago* (clan chief) of Oumolao had reportedly removed the boundary marks that the orphans recognised as defining their land," she said on Tuesday.

The clan chief works under a clan head. Meanwhile, the organisation sup-

ported further investigations into the alleged removal of boundary marks, resulting in two parallel case files — one accusing the orphans of trespass and the other questioning the legality of altering land boundaries.

Upon reviewing the files, the Resident State Attorney advised that the matter be resolved through mediation rather than prosecution.

The mediation process was led by the

Awitong (clan head) of Oumolao, Mr Joe Otim, in collaboration with the police and legal representatives. Last December, parties agreed to a settlement, and on February 17, the land was formally restored to the orphans with clear boundary demarcations to prevent future encroachment.

Mr Okuja said since the resolution, he and his sibling have been able to utilise the land without interference, although

tensions within the extended family have not entirely subsided.

His grandfather, Mr Okello, said he realised the allocation of land he gifted his deceased son was bigger than the one he gave his youngest surviving son. As a result, he removed the boundary marks, to claim a portion of the land for his youngest son. "I didn't know it was an offence," he said, lauding the clan elders, who facilitated a mediation process.

CURRENT SITUATION

A 2025 baseline survey conducted by Redeem International, in Lira, Kole and Oyam districts shows that 11.8 percent of women widowed in 2023 in these districts were victims of land grabbing within the first year of their widowhood. About one third of victimisation occurs in the first year of widowhood. Thirty five percent of these victi-

mised widows lost some or all of their land.

The data also revealed no meaningful difference between rural and urban areas of these districts; land grabbing affects all communities. In a bid to mitigate the escalating cases of land disputes, the registration process for land titles within Lira City began in 2021-2022 with the partner "Act Together", which helped generate approxi-

mately 1,200 applications. However, the process faced delays due to challenges in forming Area Land Committees. VNG International has since stepped in as the primary development partner, committing Shs29.6 million to facilitate the conclusion of these registrations. But when the Lira City Physical Planning Committee recently reviewed all the 1,200 applications, only 251 had reached approval.