

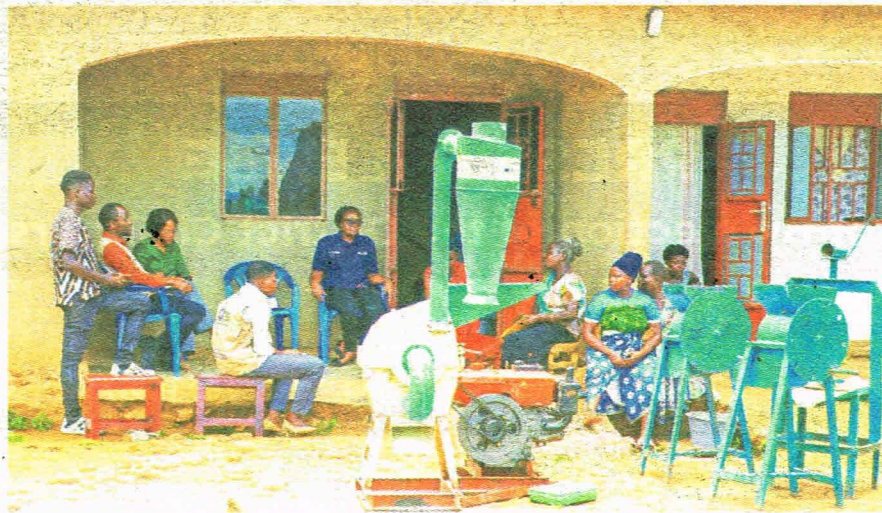
The Unquestionable Link Between Justice and Economic Empowerment

Access to justice without economic empowerment is incomplete. Legal remedies alone cannot sustain safety, this is not just a theoretical claim, but a lived reality for many women across Uganda.

While legal systems can recognize rights, resolve disputes, and deliver judgments, they often fall short of addressing the deeper vulnerabilities that shape people's lives. For women facing land dispossession, domestic violence, or inheritance disputes, justice must go beyond the courtroom. It must enable them to rebuild, to survive independently, and ultimately to thrive. This is the foundation of the Self-Actualisation Model (SAME Model) advanced by FIDA-Uganda, which insists that clients must be supported throughout the justice journey to transform their lives holistically.

The gap between legal justice and lived reality is especially visible in rural communities. A woman may win a case, secure a favourable mediation outcome, or obtain legal protection but without income, land use, or economic opportunity, her safety remains fragile. She may still depend on the same structures or individuals that once harmed her. In such circumstances, legal remedies provide a doorway to justice, but not a guarantee of long-term security. Economic empowerment, therefore, is not an optional add-on; it is central to sustaining justice if we are to achieve the 2030 Agenda's commitment of "Leave No One Behind," an agenda to which the Government of Uganda has made significant commitments and investments. The SAME Model recognizes this intersection. It moves beyond a narrow focus on legal representation to embrace a broader vision of empowerment. Under this model, justice is not complete when a case is closed, it is complete when a client has regained dignity, secured their rights, and acquired the means to live independently. This includes continuous engagement through mediation, community involvement, follow-up, and support for livelihood rebuilding. It is a model rooted in transformation, not just resolution.

Amina's story in Zombo District powerfully illustrates this approach. A mother of five, Amina faced abandonment when her husband married another wife and began unlawfully selling off their matrimonial land. The threat was not only legal, it was existential. Without land, Amina and her children faced displacement, food insecurity, and loss of dignity. When she reported the matter, FIDA-Uganda intervened swiftly, engaging local leadership and halting further sale of the property while mediation was organized. The mediation, conducted in February 2026, resulted in a structured and fair settlement. Amina retained her matrimonial home, received additional residential land, and was allocated four acres of farmland. On paper, this was a legal success: her rights were recognized, and unlawful dispossession was prevented. But the story does not end there.



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Through follow-up support, it was confirmed that Amina had begun cultivating cassava and beans on her land. This step, from ownership to utilization, is where the true impact of justice emerges. Amina's ability to farm her land transformed her situation from vulnerability to stability. The harvest would feed her children, reduce dependency, and create a pathway for income. Her safety was no longer tied solely to a legal agreement; it was sustained by her economic independence.

A similar pattern emerges in Pakwach District, where an 80-year-old woman challenged entrenched norms to reclaim her inheritance. Despite her age and visual impairment, she stood firm against nephews who had encroached on her land. Previous mediation attempts had failed, often escalating into abuse and intimidation. When FIDA-Uganda intervened, the approach shifted. A locus mediation brought together elders, clan leaders, and community members, creating a space where her voice could be heard and validated. The outcome was decisive: her ownership of the disputed land was formally recognized. Yet, as with Amina's case, the significance of this victory extends beyond legal recognition. For this elderly woman, the land represented security, identity, and continuity. It was the foundation upon which her family life had been built for decades. By reclaiming it, she not only secured her rights but also restored her dignity and sense of belonging. For the community, the case set a powerful precedent—that women's inheritance

rights must be respected, regardless of age or social barriers.

Evaline's story, also from Pakwach, further underscores the importance of linking justice with economic empowerment. As a widow and mother of five, she faced immediate exclusion from her father's land after his death. Without formal documentation, her claim was contested, leaving her and her children in a state of uncertainty and hardship. Through community-based mediation facilitated by FIDA-Uganda, a breakthrough was achieved. Evaline was granted half an acre of land, formally recognizing her as an heir. This outcome carried profound implications. With land ownership, Evaline transitioned from vulnerability to possibility. She began clearing the land for cultivation, ensuring food for her children. She started constructing a home, providing stability and security. Perhaps most importantly, she gained the assurance that her children would inherit something tangible, a legacy secured through justice. Her words capture this transformation: she now has a place to build a home and a future to pass on.

All these life-changing interventions, which are made possible through the support of UN Women, with funding from the European Union and the Government of the Netherlands under the HER Access - Integrated SRHR & SGBV Response Project, highlight a truth we must recognize: justice is not a single event but a continuous process. It may begin with legal recognition, but it must extend

into addressing the economic and social realities. Without this continuity, the gains of justice can quickly erode. A woman who wins a land case but cannot utilize the land remains at risk. A survivor who secures protection but lacks income may be forced back into harmful situations.

Moreover, this approach has broader societal implications. When women are economically empowered, the benefits extend beyond the individual. Families become more stable, children have better access to food and education, and communities begin to shift their perceptions of women's roles and rights. Each successful case becomes a reference point, challenging harmful norms and demonstrating that justice can be both fair and transformative.

The integration of community structures in mediation processes also plays a key role. By involving local leaders, elders, and family members, the SAME Model ensures that outcomes are not only legally sound but socially accepted. This reduces the likelihood of future disputes and strengthens the sustainability of agreements. It also fosters a sense of collective responsibility in upholding justice.

At its core, the statement that "access to justice without economic empowerment is incomplete" calls for a rethinking of how justice is delivered across institutions and development programmes. It challenges government bodies such as the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (Uganda) to strengthen the link between justice, livelihoods, and social protection in the implementation of initiatives like the Parish Development Model and the GROW project. It also calls on Members of Parliament to recognize these linkages when shaping policy priorities and allocating national resources.

Beyond government, it underscores the importance of stronger collaboration between state actors and civil society organisations to ensure complementary delivery of services at community level. For example, FIDA-Uganda has, through its legal aid clinic in Luweero for over eight years, worked closely with Community Development Officers, UWEP focal persons, and District Community Development Officers to support women's groups in preparing for government programmes. The organisation has also provided capacity building to beneficiaries of the Parish Development Model to ensure effective utilisation of funds and meaningful transformation of livelihoods, aligning directly with the intended purpose of these national interventions. Institutionalisation of such initiatives would go along way in improving lives of women.

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