Let’s face up to Land grabbing.

1. Why is land grabbing happening?

2. Why is the legal system failing to protect people’s land rights?

3. Why is the social system failing to protect people’s land rights?

4. Why is customary protection failing to prevent land grabbing?

5. Land Rights in Urban Areas

6. Land grabbing – what can we do about it?
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The 1998 Land Act was a huge step towards securing the land rights of Ugandans. Unfortunately the reality on the ground has not lived up to those hopes. Land rights violations are rampant. The misery and poverty which this brings those who lose their land is only a part of the problem. Many children are growing up rejected by their families simply because of greed for the children’s rightful land. Most people in rural areas live in uncertainty about whether or not they will be able to hold on to their own land. Mistrust is growing deep inside communities and between communities and the State. Conflict, violence, fear, witchcraft and abuse are all part of land grabbing which are passing by unnoticed and unaddressed.

The Land and Equity Movement in Uganda (LEMU) was very concerned by what it knew about the problem and wanted to know what could be done about it. We knew that none could achieve alone, but with many voices together we could bring change. Others were also concerned about the problem and together a coalition was formed, with the cultural institutions of Teso and Lango (Iteso Cultural Union (ICU) and Lango Cultural Foundation (LCF), Church organisations - Justice and Peace in Soroti and international NGOs (NRC, Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and TROCAIRE.

We had two main aims. We wanted to know more about how land grabbing actually happens and why it is so rampant. Why were all the mechanisms which are supposed to stop crime and exploitation not working? Only by understanding in detail the strategies of land grabbers and the weaknesses of society’s controls could we know what needed to be done and only by knowing what people were doing to defend their land and when they were successful would we be able to help them. Our second aim was to sound a wake up call and to put land grabbing in the national consciousness as a problem to be tackled, and not as an inevitable fact of life. In order to persuade policy makers and politicians, community leaders and ordinary citizens, that this was a fight that needed fighting, we had to have the facts about land grabbing, so that no-one could use the excuse that we were just reporting a few stories.

We hope one day to have the facts about the full national picture. So far, only organisations in the North and East have come together and so the papers in this pack refer only to about half the country. We are now looking for partners in the West and South of Uganda to join us in extending this work so that land grabbing can be fought as a national problem and not as if it were a problem only in one or two regions.

This pack contains papers analysing different aspects of land grabbing. (The full research report will be made available on www.land-in-uganda.org) They are our contribution to what we hope will become a long national debate and fight against a problem that can truly unite all Ugandans of good-will, because regardless of any ethnic, political or religious differences, we all believe in a Uganda where people can live on their land and in their communities in peace, security and harmony.