

Kirema Land Action Programme: A model for integrated land reform



Uganda's land tenure system remains central to the country's socio-economic transformation. Despite a strong legal framework under the Land Act, the practical implementation of tenure security, particularly through the Land Fund, continues to suffer from financial, operational and structural inefficiencies.

The Kirema Land Action Programme (KLAP) in Nakaseke district, designed around a nucleus outgrower model and anchored on public-private collaboration, demonstrates an effective and scalable alternative for addressing long-standing gaps in Uganda's land administration landscape.

Uganda's land tenure challenges continue to constrain agricultural productivity, rural transformation and social stability.

The Land Fund, established to secure tenure for bona fide and lawful occupants, was expected to address historical land injustices and promote equitable land access. However, the Fund's performance over the past two decades has been mixed.

While it has facilitated the acquisition of over 126,000 hectares and the issuance of thousands of titles, its impact has been undermined by persistent underfunding, an overwhelming backlog of compensation claims and weak linkages between titling and economic empowerment.

KLAP offers a compelling case study of how Uganda can rethink land tenure reform by integrating private sector participation, structured land sharing and a nucleus-out grower model. KLAP transformed a potentially volatile land tenure situation into a productive, inclusive and economically viable agricultural ecosystem. KLAP is a viable template for modernising the Land Fund, improving governance and embedding proactive dispute prevention mechanisms within the Land Act.

LIMITATIONS OF LAND FUND IN THE EXISTING LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The main aim of the Land Fund is to acquire land for regularising occupancy and safeguarding vulnerable households, which remains justified. Section 42 of the Land Act provides clear procedures for purchasing land, compensating those affected and issuing titles to occupants. However, putting

these rules into practice has faced practical challenges. The biggest hurdle is insufficient funding: Just 29% of the compensation claims assessed have been paid, leaving over a trillion Ugandan shillings still owed. This financial shortfall complicates efforts to settle tenure disputes, pay landlords and facilitate the broader titling process.

The Land Act provides measures like certificates of occupancy and purchase rights, but its dispute resolution is mainly reactive. Mediation and negotiation are optional, with few productivity incentives. As a result, occupants often remain as subsistence farmers because land security alone does not ensure economic progress.

These weaknesses highlight a critical policy gap: Uganda's land tenure reforms have historically emphasised legal rights and compensation mechanisms, but have not adequately connected land security to productivity, investment and rural enterprise development. This disconnect is where KLAP offers invaluable insight.

KLAP: A PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION OF INTEGRATED LAND REFORM

KLAP was conceived in response to a potentially contentious situation involving a privately owned 824-acre estate in Semuto sub-county, Nakaseke district. The estate had long hosted 177 *bibanja*-holding families facing uncertainty and risk of eviction.

Through a co-ordinated partnership led by Namunkekeru Agro-Processing Industries Ltd (NAPIL), Heritage Farm Kirema Ltd and Land Solutions Uganda Ltd, KLAP adopted a collaborative approach that avoided displacement and, instead conceptualised the estate as a nucleus

outgrower ecosystem.

In 2015, the Uganda Land Commission purchased 600 acres, representing 73% of the land, from NAPIL using Land Fund resources. This portion was allocated to occupants, eventually benefiting 301 individuals through the issuance of freehold titles handed over by the President in 2018. The remaining 224 acres were retained as a professionally managed nucleus farm responsible for agricultural training, extension services, and market co-ordination.

KLAP's strength lies in its ability to simultaneously resolve tenure insecurity and stimulate rural productivity. With secure titles, beneficiaries began investing in permanent homes and perennial crops, accessing credit, and adopting modern farming practices. The nucleus farm serves as a practical demonstration centre with over 100 acres of CWD-resistant coffee, extensive banana intercropping, solar-powered irrigation systems, livestock, nurseries, and daily extension services.

The distribution of over 16,000 improved seedlings boosted the adoption of commercial agriculture.

The model also aligned naturally with national initiatives, including Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) for input distribution, the Parish Development Model (PDM) for financing and community mobilisation, and NDP IV's focus on agro-industrialisation.

Furthermore, KLAP established robust governance mechanisms. An eight-member land use committee provided oversight and monitoring, while a re-survey in 2025 ensured boundary integrity and minimised disputes. This governance structure helped maintain community trust and accountability.

KLAP'S OUTCOMES AND ITS DISTINCTIVE VALUE PROPOSITION

By 2025, the impact of KLAP was evident. Beneficiaries had transitioned from subsistence to commercial

farming, with expanded coffee and banana acreage, diversified incomes, and improved household food security.

REFORMING THE LAND FUND: LESSONS FROM THE KIREMA EXPERIENCE

A key lesson from KLAP is that the Land Fund must evolve beyond a compensation-driven mechanism. A modernised Land Fund should operate as a strategic investment tool that enhances tenure security. By using a nucleus outgrower model for future acquisitions, each project could have its own built-in productivity driver rather than simply distributing titles.

Collaborating with private sector partners could ease initial financial pressures and strengthen technical expertise.

Connecting land titles to inputs, training opportunities, and assured markets would help beneficiaries achieve economic stability.

ENHANCING THE LAND ACT THROUGH EMBEDDING STRUCTURED NEGOTIATION AND LAND POOLING ARRANGEMENTS.

The sustainability of land reform ultimately depends on strengthening the legal framework.

The Land Act should be revised. Amend Section 36 to allow flexibility for loans to enable nucleus outgrower structures, while establishing a new provision for voluntary land pooling that supports consolidation of fragmented holdings for collective agricultural or infrastructural development. This would align public expenditure with productivity and conflict prevention goals.

KLAP stands as a compelling illustration of how Uganda can rethink land reform to achieve both social equity and economic transformation.

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The writer is the Commissioner for Registration in the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development.

