

# Widow recovers land after 21-year legal battle

PHOTO BY DELUX EMMY ALOMU

## KALAKI

By Delux Emmy Alomu

After enduring more than two decades of pain, uncertainty and an exhausting legal fight, 80-year-old Modesta Akot, a widow from Omirimir village in Obur parish, Bululu sub-county, Kalaki district, has finally regained ownership of her land, bringing to an end a bitter dispute that began shortly after the death of her husband in 2005.

For Akot, the victory marks not only the restoration of her property, but also a triumph of resilience, patience and justice after years of intimidation and financial hardship.

The conflict began following the death of her husband, Raphael Ocen, when a close neighbour, Joseph Ediau, laid claim to the land where Akot and her family had lived for decades.

During the hearing, 73-year-old Pimento Obwora, who represented his ailing younger brother Ediau, told authorities that their late father, Vincent Engoru Ojwokit, had allegedly allowed Ocen to settle on the land around 1948 because of their friendship.

Obwora argued that the land originally belonged to their family and that Ocen had only been granted permission to occupy it.

However, legal provisions state that a person who has occupied and developed land continuously for more than 12 years may acquire ownership rights under certain circumstances.

Obwora also admitted that external influence had fueled attempts to take over the widow's land because his family lived adjacent to the disputed property.

He recalled that when their father Engoru died, Ediau initially opposed his burial on the same land. It took intervention from clan leaders and police before the burial was allowed.

John Loke Esanu, the LC1 chairperson of Omirimir village, said local leaders had made numerous efforts over the years to mediate the dispute, but the matter remained unresolved.

Esanu revealed that tensions escalated when Ediau's son allegedly assaulted Akot, leading to his arrest at Kalaki Central Police Station.

He said Akot's inability to meet legal costs had nearly forced her to abandon the fight, but assistance from Redeem International gave her renewed hope and enabled her to pursue justice.



80-year-old Modesta Akot (centre) being congratulated after regaining ownership of her land, bringing to an end a dispute that began after the death of her husband in 2005

## WHAT OTHERS SAY

During a land restoration meeting held at a widow's home on April 13, 2026, Juliet Anango educated widows and orphans about inheritance and land rights.

She explained that under the law, a widow has the primary right to occupy, manage and benefit from her deceased husband's estate and no individual has authority to interfere without due process.

Anango also warned customary heirs against forcing widows into unwanted relationships or attempting to assume control over estates without lawful authority.

She clarified that although tradition often appoints the eldest son as a customary heir to assume family responsibilities, that cultural role does not automatically grant legal control over a deceased person's estate.

Francis Bwanika urged residents to report land disputes to local councils and police before matters escalate to court.

He also encouraged communities to embrace land surveys and boundary demarcation to minimise conflicts and prevent violence.

Rose Atim Arimo condemned the practice of dispossessing widows, describing it as both unjust and morally wrong.

She also called on residents to reduce excessive alcohol consumption, which she said contributes to rising crime in communities.

Kalaki deputy resident district commissioner Patrick Bosco Opio lauded Redeem International for supporting widows and orphans through legal interventions that enhance community security.

He warned against greed, witchcraft and prolonged family conflicts over land, urging residents to embrace peaceful conflict resolution.

Esanu appealed for further support to help her construct a permanent house for Akot, noting that many widows in the area continue to face similar threats of land grabbing.

He commended Redeem International for standing with vulnerable women and helping them defend their rights.

David Elelu, the principal parish chief and secretary of the LC3 Court, said land disputes involving widows remain common in the district.

Elelu disclosed that since

January 2025, the sub-county has handled at least two major cases involving widows whose land had been targeted by grabbers.

One of those cases was successfully resolved on April 15, 2025, through the intervention of Redeem International, resulting in proper land demarcation.

Elelu emphasised that clear boundary marking remains critical in reducing family and neighbourhood land conflicts.

For Akot, the resolution brought overwhelming relief.

Speaking shortly after

reclaiming her land, the elderly widow struggled to contain her emotions as she thanked Redeem International and everyone who stood with her throughout the painful journey.

She encouraged fellow widows facing similar challenges to speak out and seek help instead of suffering in silence.

Before her victory, Akot was among many widows in Kalaki and across Uganda living under constant threat of losing land to relatives, neighbours and opportunists following the death of their husbands.

Joseph Atikoro, the district community development officer overseeing community-based services in Kalaki, described grabbing land from widows as a growing crisis.

He said the district now registers approximately five such cases every month, particularly since Redeem International began sensitising communities and offering legal support.

Atikoro said greed often drives brothers and close relatives to target widows and orphans after the death of a family head.

"They see the widow as vulnerable and easy to exploit in order to reclaim land and property. It has become a serious challenge in Kalaki," he said.

Atikoro added that some widows are further exploited by clan leaders who demand hefty payments before intervening, while others are forced to travel long distances to district offices in pursuit of justice.

He praised Redeem International for stepping in where district resources remain limited, especially in financing court processes and investigations.