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WASHINGTON DC, MARCH 25-29, 2019



CREATING DETERRENCE AND PATHWAYS TO JUSTICE FOR PROPERTY GRABBING IN UGANDA:

A REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF LEARNINGS

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**Paper prepared for presentation at the
“2019 WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY”
The World Bank - Washington DC, March 25-29, 2019**

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Abstract

This paper discusses the research results and evaluation findings of a program aimed at combatting property (land) grabbing from widows in Mukono County, Uganda. Unlike many other ongoing efforts, this program focused on capacity building of local government actors, particularly within the criminal justice system, as the primary approach to ending this overlooked form of violence against women. In 2012, baseline prevalence and justice system performance data were collected. Endline data collected in 2017 provided impact and outcome-level data for a summative evaluation of the program conducted in late 2017/early 2018. The program contributed to approximately a 50% reduction in the prevalence of property grabbing. While challenges remain in the formal justice system's response and sustainability of program gains, government actors substantially improved in their performance addressing property grabbing. Learning outcomes for attendees include applications for local, national, and international actors implementing similar programs affected by culturally-embedded gender norms.

Key Words: gender-based violence, justice system performance, prevalence, property grabbing, Uganda



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to Property Grabbing and the Ugandan Justice System's Response

“Property grabbing” is when individuals and/or families are removed from or lose access to their rightful land or homestead. Property grabbing usually involves the use of physical force, forgery, fraud, threats, intimidation, destruction, acts of violence, and/or pressure from the local community.

In Uganda, widows are highly vulnerable to property grabbing due to prevailing gender norms favoring adult men and relative impunity for those who commit this crime. Following the death of a male head of household, it is common for relatives, neighbors, and persons of authority to seize the property that belonged to the deceased, even if the widow co-owned the property with her husband and holds a legal right to possession. Not only are acts of property grabbing illegal and in direct violation of prevailing inheritance and land ownership laws included in the Ugandan Penal Code (International Justice Mission [IJM], 2014), but they are also commonly accompanied by escalating threats or acts of physical violence against widows in order to forcibly evict them from the property. International Justice Mission's (IJM's) 2012-2013 research in Mukono County, Uganda revealed that more than half of property grabbing cases involved physical violence, and 18% of property grabbing victims experienced attempts on their lives (IJM, 2014).

Land ownership is central to the survival and identity of many Ugandans. According to a 2014 study of land rights in Uganda, 87% of Uganda's population lives in rural areas, 85% of whom depend on subsistence agriculture for survival (Hannay, 2014). The significance of land ownership in Uganda results in frequent land disputes, even within families. For example, a 2016 report of justice issues in Uganda revealed that 36% of those surveyed had experienced a land dispute of some kind, making it the most prevalent justice issue in the country. 25% of identified land disputes are related to questions of ownership, while another 22% are specifically due to property grabbing (HiiL, 2016).

Women remain particularly vulnerable to land insecurity in Uganda due to deeply seated gender norms, cultural bias against women's ownership of land, and challenges accessing the protection of government duty bearers. Even though 90% of women living in rural areas depend on agriculture and hold responsibility for approximately 80% of Uganda's food production (Hannay, 2014), women only own 16% of agricultural land (Gender, Institutions & Development Database, 2014). Further, households headed by women,



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particularly widows and divorcees, are much more vulnerable to land conflict than male-headed households because clan structures and traditional marriage arrangements weaken women's claims to land ownership (Adelman & Peterman, 2014).

Land conflict also tends to result in less favorable outcomes for women than for men (Adelman & Peterman, 2014). For example, a 2013 Oxfam study found that approximately 30% of widows in northern Uganda had experienced property grabbing. They also found that women were more likely than men to experience it, as 68% of cohabiting women had experienced property grabbing as opposed to 25% of cohabiting men (Burck & Kobusingye, 2013). IJM's 2012-2013 research revealed that nearly one in three widows were the victims of property grabbing in their lifetimes (IJM, 2014). Since the release of that research, little additional scholarship has been published on the Ugandan public justice system's response to property grabbing related crimes. One related report emerged in 2016, highlighting that the vast majority (82%) of those in land disputes primarily seek advice from Local Council leaders, while only 32% seek advice or information from the police. Further, 78% rely on Local Council leaders for the resolution of their land disputes, while only 21% rely on the courts for such resolution (HiiL, 2016).

Taken together, the deeply seated norms surrounding women's property ownership and the high level of violence accompanying acts of property grabbing clearly establish property grabbing as a form of violence against women (VAW). Unfortunately, the judicial system and other government entities vital to the protection of the vulnerable from property grabbing crimes suffer from inadequate resourcing and corruption, further preventing survivors of property grabbing from accessing the formal justice system. Among respondents to the 2017 East Africa Bribery Index, 54% reported that paying a bribe was the only way to access the services provided by the police, judiciary and land services (Transparency International Kenya, 2017). The inadequacy of the government's ability to properly respond to acts of property grabbing has left widows vulnerable to this common and little-discussed form of VAW.

1.2 Background on the Program Implemented to Combat Property Grabbing in Mukono County, Uganda

IJM's theory of change focuses on improving the performance of the formal justice system in order to deter current and potential offenders, which over time leads to a reduction in the prevalence of the targeted violence or crime. Weak criminal justice systems unable to effectively enforce the law or protect vulnerable populations beget impunity, leading ultimately to increased rates of crime. Targeted interventions to bolster



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the capacity of the government and other relevant criminal justice actors to appropriately respond to instances of violence and enforce the law empowers the criminal justice system to act against impunity. Ultimately, this intentional capacity building of the formal system leads to measurable improvements in its performance and decreases in the prevalence of the targeted crime through the reduction of impunity.

While IJM began operations in Uganda in 2004, the program pivoted in 2008 to focus its efforts on assisting widows whose land had been stolen through direct mentorship and capacity building of duty bearers in cases of property grabbing. These duty bearers included Local Council leaders, community leaders, police, social service providers, prosecutors, and judicial officers. Over the course of its project in Mukono County (a rural county outside of Kampala), IJM helped restore 1,200 widows and their dependents to their land; trained 10,000 police officers, judges, church leaders, and other community members on property grabbing; and contributed to the arrest of 96 perpetrators of land theft-related offenses.

Alongside its criminal justice sector partners, IJM developed and implemented a comprehensive five-year project, delivered from 2012 to 2017, to combat violent property grabbing from widows in Mukono County. The program focused on collaborative (mentorship-based) casework with public justice system actors (police, prosecutors and judiciary); classroom and other training; technical assistance; and leveraging the results of casework to address the impunity and cultural norms that support property grabbing in Ugandan communities. More specifically, IJM collaborated with police, public prosecutors, community development officers, Local Council leaders, and other duty bearers to directly support individual victims and cases of property grabbing as they progressed through the criminal justice system – known as IJM’s accompaniment model. By working hand-in-hand to deliver justice to individual survivors of violence, IJM and its partners diagnosed the specific challenges to the successful adjudication of property grabbing cases throughout their lifetime. Through this unique diagnostic approach, IJM and its partners could determine where the precise challenges are within the criminal justice system and then work with officials across multiple institutions to develop solutions for those cases. For example, police and prosecutors may rarely share why cases are not successful, and thus the same mistakes may be repeated in multiple cases leading to the same potentially negative outcomes. The accompaniment model facilitates the sharing of learnings across institutions, for example between police and judges or between social workers and prosecutors, serving as a model of multi-disciplinary functioning and collaboration.



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Learnings generated through the accompaniment model were then captured and incorporated into targeted strategies by government officials and IJM to increase the capacity of the public justice system to proactively prevent, deter, and respond to instances of property grabbing, increasing the protection of widows vulnerable to these crimes. Strategies included intensive and extended classroom and field trainings, using actual cases as learning tools; national curriculum development; peer review of cases; coaching and mentoring on live cases; media campaigns; and community engagement. The overall program objectives were to: 1) deter property grabbing by ensuring that the justice system would reliably hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes, and 2) reduce the overall vulnerability of widows to property grabbing.

IJM completed its program in Mukono County in September 2017. To better understand changes over the life of its program, IJM conducted research studies to measure the prevalence of the crimes of property grabbing and the functioning of the public justice system: one set of studies were completed in 2012 and one set in 2017. This research data, in addition to monitoring data collected over the life of implementation, and interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders, contributed to a summative, externally-led evaluation conducted in late 2017/early 2018. This paper will highlight the main research and evaluation findings, as well as discuss the larger learnings for programs combatting VAW in contexts with culturally embedded norms against women and the various views on pathways to survivor justice and deterrence.

2. RESEARCH AND EVALUATION FINDINGS

2.1 Comparable Research Findings

The baseline (2012-2013) and endline (2017) research studies involved three data collection methods:

- 1) A county-wide household prevalence survey with widows in all villages in half of the randomly selected parishes in all sub-counties of Mukono County. At baseline, the sample was 1,806 widows and at endline, 2,018 widows.
- 2) A Case File Review (CFR) conducted with cases closed between the years 2010-2012 for the baseline and 2010-2017 for the endline study. In total, 68 criminal case files of property grabbing-related offenses were reviewed at baseline; at endline, this was 156 cases. At baseline, 119 administration cause case files were reviewed, and 96 were reviewed at endline.
- 3) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KII) conducted with women and men in the targeted communities, as well as local leaders and justice system officials. At baseline,



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13 FGDs were conducted with 118 respondents, in addition to 13 KIIs; at endline, 41 FGDs were held with 387 respondents, in addition to 7 KIIs.

Between the baseline study in 2012-2013 and the endline study in 2017, there was a statistically significant ($p \leq 0.001$) decrease in property grabbing among widows in Mukono County: 3.5% to 1.8%. Unsuccessful attempts of property grabbing also significantly reduced from 4.8% to 2.3% ($p \leq 0.001$). Both reductions were approximately 50%. Furthermore, there was also a 37% decrease in the prevalence of violence accompanying property grabbing cases, evidenced by a reduction in charges indicative of criminal violence (e.g., threatening violence, malicious damage, arson, injury to animals, murder, etc.), with more recent cases predicated on documentation fraud and intermeddling of an estate.

In the endline study, community members and widows in Mukono County articulated good knowledge on property grabbing, recognizing the existence of laws on inheritance and women's right to land ownership, preventive measures, and how and where to seek help. Bias in favor of males permeates the cultural and gender norms and remained prevalent in women's understanding and experiences of inheritance practices. These norms negatively impacted the potential for change in behavior and the long-term sustainability of IJM's interventions.

Confidence in the ability of the formal justice system to provide justice equitably and fairly increased, with more notable improvements in relation to those police officers trained in property grabbing crimes and accompanied during field investigations of property grabbing. Even greater results from police were limited by the force's lack of sufficient resources for proper investigations, leading to requests for "facilitation" from victims to continue their case in the justice system. In this context, facilitation usually refers to the resources required for investigations, such as to permit basic travel to view the crime scene, take statements from witnesses, and gather evidence. Community members and justice officials had low confidence in the abilities of Local Council leaders¹ to carry out their duties related to inheritance and property disputes. However, all stakeholders acknowledged Local Council leaders' important role at the community level.

The prosecution of criminal cases showed improvements and yet exposed remaining challenges. At the endline, there were more property grabbing cases overall in the system, and they were more easily located.

¹ Local Council leaders are normally embedded in the community and are the first responders to conflicts. They are elected officials and have formal (legal) authority to manage disputes in the community.



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Case files revealed improvements in key documentation and better utilization of appropriate legal charges. While not statistically significant, overall case progression rates seem to have lengthened. There are several potential causes for this – including that it could be due to longer and more thorough investigative processes, evidenced by an increase in key documentation being present in case files. The endline also revealed ongoing challenges from the baseline with some officials continuing to push victims to pursue civil (monetary) remedies over criminal prosecution, despite the criminal nature of these cases. While knowledge, confidence, and some engagement had all improved, community members still viewed the formal justice system as challenging to access for the common person due to the costs, lengthy timeframes until case adjudication, language barriers, and limited protections for the large percentage of widows who are in relationships outside of formal marriage.

2.2 Summative Evaluation Findings

An externally-led, multi-disciplinary evaluation team used the above research findings, combined with a full programmatic review (including project monitoring data), key informant interviews, and focus group discussions with government actors, community leaders, community members, and widows in order to assess the relevancy, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability the program.

The evaluation team validated the following findings from IJM's internal endline study, affirming the relevancy, effectiveness, and impact of the program:

1. Prevalence of property grabbing crimes had decreased over the last five years, as indicated by the studies and a variety of other sources. Critically, the incidence of violence associated with cases of property grabbing had also declined (while, interestingly, the incidence of fraud increased).
2. The performance and effectiveness of the relevant justice system actors in relation to property grabbing had improved, largely due to logistical and capacity building support by IJM. However, despite these gains and the resulting decrease in impunity for property grabbing, the number of successfully prosecuted property grabbing cases remained low. The working relationship and coordination of the justice system actors within Mukono County also improved, with several of the interviewed key actors considering it an example to be replicated across Uganda.
3. There remain constraints for widows to address property grabbing as a crime through the formal justice system, the most important of which were: distrust of police and local leaders, corruption, lengthy wait times for court case presentation and finalization, high complexity of cases,



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uncertainty of perpetrator accountability, and limited capacity for case absorption by the formal justice system.

4. Widows' understanding of their own rights in relation to property grabbing had improved, but they remained vulnerable after reporting property grabbing. Potential repercussions to widows following reporting could be perceived as an additional constraint to addressing property grabbing, influencing widows' perceptions of their capacity to take action. Potential repercussions could include increased experience of witchcraft, isolation or pushback from the wider community due to influence by the perpetrator's family, and justice authorities and community leaders supporting the perpetrator's interests.

While there were positive findings from the various data sources and concluded links between the results and the program, the evaluators did note a number of concerns around the sustainability of the achieved results including: ongoing capacity constraints among justice system actors in balancing competing priorities; limited sense of ownership by both the government and community; and limitations in building up capacities of local partner organizations to continue supporting the government, the vulnerable and, the victimized.

Taken together, the external evaluation validated IJM's overarching theory of change of deterrence of violent crime through criminal justice system intervention. These findings are consistent with previous evaluations of IJM's programming in other contexts,² but this is the first evaluation of IJM's theory of change in relation to VAW in a context where VAW has high rates of cultural acceptance. The evaluation identified some key learnings that could maximize the impact of IJM's theory of change in culturally embedded crimes. The two main recommendations, which are useful to both IJM and other implementing agencies, are:

1. Programming to address property grabbing should address the cultural, social, and gender norms that influence these crimes, including involvement of the community and vulnerable population in the design and implementation of the program. Such efforts should include sequencing norm change with reforms at the system level in order to maximize the transformational effects and sustainability of the program's impact.

² To access full evaluations of IJM's global programming, please visit www.ijm.org/studies. Evaluations are currently available for programming in Cambodia and the Philippines. Publication is pending for evaluations on programming in Uganda and Guatemala.



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2. Consider implementing a more integrated (hybrid, holistic) justice system approach to property grabbing that addresses various pathways to justice. This would include mapping out informal and formal justice pathways and defining the conditions for when each is most appropriate in order to further deterrence. Stimulating multiple pathways, especially in contexts where barriers exist to both formal and informal justice systems, would enhance access to and speed of justice for many kinds of victims, particularly when the formal system has limited human and material resources.

3. DISCUSSION ON THE EFFECTS OF CULTURAL NORMS ON INTERVENTIONS COMBATting TYPES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

3.1 Learnings During Programmatic Implementation

Over years of implementing legal education programs and media campaigns at the community level, targeting both women and men, IJM realized that, while knowledge and awareness of property grabbing and its harmful effects on women and children increased, community attitudes and responses towards these crimes remained largely unchanged. Further, IJM noticed that reporting of property grabbing to officials, specifically to the police, seemed to decrease or not occur at all in some sub-counties of the project area. It was unclear whether this was due to access barriers to reporting, decreased incidence of property grabbing, or other external factors, such as cultural norms, impeding reporting. In order to better define and understand these barriers to reporting, IJM commissioned a behavior change communication consultancy to assess the effectiveness of past and ongoing public engagement and messaging efforts to meaningfully shift community attitudes regarding property grabbing.

The consultancy made recommendations for new, more targeted media strategies to empower the community to overcome both real and perceived barriers to engagement with the formal criminal justice system on issues of property grabbing. The consultancy also recommended launching a major behavior change campaign in the form of community dialogues to allow men and women to discuss and process the causes and effects of property grabbing, barriers to combatting the crime, and solutions. Both the media campaigns and the community dialogues intentionally engaged men, as well as women, as the consultancy team's research, supported by IJM's own interactions in the community, concluded men to be both the biggest barrier to and the greatest potential conduit of change, as they hold the most social and cultural power in rural communities, such as Mukono County.



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Over the course of four months in 2017, the community dialogues provided a structure and platform for women and men to come together, both in mixed and gendered groups, to discuss and strategize. The results were powerful. Participants demonstrated knowledge and attitude change, as well as the intention to prevent and respond to property grabbing within their communities. This intensive but short intervention seemed to be more effective than IJM's previous community awareness events which focused solely on legal education. This community-led strategy, which allowed the community to drive the discussion and propose action steps, rather than relying on the expertise of outside parties, revealed important lessons originally missed or underappreciated by the program team.

The dialogues revealed that community members had different perceptions around deterrence and the motivations of perpetrators of property grabbing. The community highlighted barriers to interacting with the justice system, some of which were previously unrecognized, including real challenges specifically for women (financial costs, language of the system – English and Swahili); perceptions of corruption, retaliation, and witchcraft; and cultural opposition to some of the program's prevention strategies (marriage formalization and will writing). Building trust between the community and officials emerged as critical for further engagement and collaboration, revealing that a strengthened justice system does not automatically result in increased trust or utilization. Consequently, a strengthened system is likely unable to deter further VAW crimes without community engagement. Conversely, if a community develops trust of the system and knowledge of the targeted crime, and it attempts to access the formal justice system only to find that the system cannot deliver results, people will cease using it, and women will remain unprotected. Thus, as the program evolved, IJM gained greater appreciation for how to actualize its theory of change when the crime is embedded and promoted by cultural and gender norms.

This learning also inspired another test initiative at the end of the program, focused on sharing the results of property grabbing cases with the community. At "community case meetings," public justice system officials and local leaders gathered to discuss property grabbing case progress and results to ensure members of the community understood the outcome of property grabbing cases in their communities. As perpetrators of property grabbing typically have more power in the community than widows or orphans, their voices often dominate the narrative of how cases are about. Prior to these community case meetings, perpetrators could easily misconstrue the criminal justice process as a result of corruption (identifying themselves as the victim in the scenario) and manipulate communities to intimidate, threaten, and alienate the victim of property grabbing even further. Even when imprisonment was the sentence delivered by the



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courts for property grabbing, communities were often unaware of the result, with perpetrators claiming they were ‘working in town’ or ‘fishing in the islands’. Thus, communities, particularly those in rural areas, did not see the work of the formal justice sector to protect the vulnerable and could view the victim as the wrongdoer. However, once community case meetings were delivered, survivors whose cases were explained in the meeting no longer needed increased security precautions within their communities following the completion of their cases, and communities had a much more real understanding of property grabbing and the work of the justice system to combat it.

This important learning may help to further maximize the effect of IJM’s theory of change in such cases. IJM’s central theory of deterrence is predicated upon the community’s appreciation of and trust in a consistent and reliable law enforcement response. If case results or the actual performance of the formal justice system is never known and understood in the communities that are affected by the target crime, then the deterrent effect is more limited. Initial results from these community case meetings encouragingly demonstrated their ability to bridge this critical communication gap; however, the full impact is not known due to their late-stage implementation in the program.

3.2 Literature Review Summary on Importance of Behavior Change Strategies for VAW Programs

Relevant literature also supports these learnings regarding the importance of behavior change interventions that emerged late in the program. Taken together, the literature points to holistic programming, community awareness raising, and targeting men and boys as key strategies for achieving behavior change amongst potential perpetrators in vulnerable communities.

Holistic Programming

The normality, embeddedness, and ubiquity of VAW is such that collaborative casework and technical support to the criminal justice system should be complemented by ongoing community-based programming that addresses normative attitudes to violence and socializes the rights of victims and the availability of quality criminal justice system resources. Ongoing engagement with women and men in the community is particularly necessary. Other programs operating in a similar context often include a broad approach from the outset, including engaging with a variety of community leaders, such as local leaders, clan chiefs, elders, village council leaders, local mayors, and local religious leaders, as any successful norm change program must address leaders’ views (Overseas Development Institute, 2015; Morrison, Ellsberg, & Bott, 2007).



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However, it should be noted that reviewed programs rarely engage the formal criminal justice system within their otherwise broad approach.

Much of VAW is culturally embedded and therefore knowledge, practices, and responses to these forms of violence are not recognized by individuals, families, leaders, or societies, as problematic but are rather a normative experience. Primary prevention, which aims at preventing violence from ever occurring, requires both a short and long-term investment in challenging deep-seated practices. Activating the dimensions of power in these societies and cultures are key to seeing these investments actually prevent VAW. The evaluations and research that have been done on primary prevention programs all point to the important role of engaging the entire community and a broader sectoral response.

Community Awareness Raising

Program evaluations suggest that in the short term it is easier to increase awareness and modify attitudes than to change violent behavior. Substantial evidence suggests that violence prevention requires community-wide interventions. Community-based educational activities can challenge the underlying beliefs that justify women's subordination and the use of violence for settling conflicts. Preliminary evidence from two community-based projects in South Africa have shown promising results in reducing levels of violence through community mobilization and economic empowerment projects (Jewkes, Flood, & Lang, 2015; Guedes, 2004). Three examples of successful community-wide interventions to prevent



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violence include Plan International's Girl Power Program,³ the Mitanin Program,⁴ and Oxfam's "We Can" campaign to end VAW.⁵

Working with Men and Boys

A large body of rigorous research from the United States has found that decades of violence prevention programs among school girls failed to reduce their individual risk of violence. Researchers concluded that programs cannot focus exclusively on equipping victims to protect themselves. Numerous programs in developing economies are currently working to promote non-violence among men and boys. Several rigorously evaluated programs—such as Program H in Brazil, ReproSalud in Peru, and Men as Partners in South Africa— have shown promising results in changing male attitudes and behaviors (Guedes, 2004; Barker, Nascimento, Segundo, & Pulerwitz, 2004). One policy-relevant finding is that it appears to be easier to change attitudes and behaviors of boys and younger men than of older adult males, highlighting the need to target young people (Morrison et al., 2007).

A 2007 WHO review of interventions with men in the areas of sexual and reproductive health, maternal and child health, gender-based violence, fatherhood and HIV/AIDS documented that such programs, while

³ Plan International's Girl Power Program is implemented in multiple countries across the developing world. It is too soon for any definitive lessons, yet the program is a promising example of a thoughtful comprehensive approach to address risk factors and enhance protective factors at the household, community, and macro levels, and support prevention and response efforts across levels of society. Mid-term outcome evaluations in three South Asian countries of implementation document notable change in the willingness of parents and community members to oppose violence against girls and young women, and an increase in girls' capacity to protect themselves against violence, as well as to seek help and lodge formal cases when exposed to violence (Solotaroff and Pande, 2014).

⁴ In operation since 2002, the Mitanin Program in Chattisgarah, India is considered the precursor to and motivation for the ASHA engagement in GBV-related activities in other parts of the country. Mitanins are local women volunteers who undertake family outreach, community mobilization and social mobilization on health and its determinants, including gender-based violence. When women bring a case of GBV to a mitanin, a meeting is held where the accused is also invited to attend. This meeting serves as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism whereby a solution is arrived at and, if the woman desires it, a police case is filed (Nandi & Schneider, 2014; Nandi, 2012). By 2010, there were 10,000 mitanins spread across almost all blocks of the state. Despite lacking a rigorous evaluation, a qualitative case study in one block of the role of mitanins in resolving domestic violence disputes suggested that their presence and intervention contributed to providing a social support system for women and empowering women to assert themselves in the household, understand the gender-based social underpinnings of violence, and become more active in community discussions (Nandi & Schneider, 2014).

⁵ First launched in 2004, the campaign aimed to reach 50 million individuals in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka through the efforts of a somewhat collective and informal leadership shared among campaign alliance members ("allies"), including universities, civil society groups, corporate bodies, and private enterprises. The campaign has been largely driven by "change makers" who pledged to carry forward the campaign's message by initiating non-acceptance of VAW in their own lives and in the lives of those around them (Solotaroff & Pande). A summary evaluation in September 2011 found that the campaign had been "relevant," "effective," and "efficient" (p. 162) and had contributed to individual and institutional transformation and raising public awareness of issues related to VAW.



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generally of short duration and with limited research, have brought about important changes in men's attitudes and behaviors. Of the 57 studies included in the analysis 24.5% were assessed as effective in leading to attitude or behavior change; 38.5% were assessed as promising; and 36.8% were assessed as unclear. Programs that were 'gender-transformative' – those that sought to transform gender roles and promote more gender-equitable relationships between men and women – were more likely to be effective than programs that were merely 'gender-sensitive' or 'gender-neutral' (Heilman & Barker, 2018). In addition, men (regardless of whether they reported having used violence against a partner) were overwhelmingly against or opposed to current laws that make it illegal for men to use violence against a female partner, at rejection rates from 70% to above 90% (Heilman & Barker, 2018).

4. DISCUSSION ON THE VARIOUS VIEWS OF PATHWAYS TO JUSTICE WITHIN PROPERTY GRABBING

4.1 Learnings During Programmatic Implementation

Throughout the life of IJM's program on property grabbing in Mukono County, various views on pathways to justice and creating deterrence in property grabbing cases arose, both supporting and challenging the program's theory of change. In the initial years of the program, IJM largely pursued mediation and documentation of settlements in property grabbing cases. Engaging the formal criminal justice system through prosecution of perpetrators only occurred when the offender refused a mediated settlement. Although some victims of property grabbing recovered land and documented ownership through mediated settlements, victimization often continued because mediation did not deter potential future offenders. In fact, IJM's own casework revealed that offenders sometimes benefited from the mediation process by securing ownership rights to at least a portion of a property to which they were not entitled. Without a reasonable fear that the formal justice system would respond with criminal accountability to underpin these mediation and settlement agreements, perpetrators frequently failed to respect the terms of these agreements and were not penalized for doing so, even when breach of the agreement was accompanied by violence. Overall, mediation as an approach to securing justice for victimized widows failed to recognize and appropriately address the levels of violence that frequently characterized the property grabbing attempt.

Accordingly, in early 2012, the program pivoted to emphasize criminal prosecution in instances of property grabbing, founded on the belief that this approach would address the impunity that many times resulted from mediation without a foundation of enforcement, and that this would deter others from engaging in



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property grabbing. With this pivot, IJM narrowed its focus to partnering with the government on the most egregious property grabbing cases, most of which involved high levels of violence. This was an intentional shift away from pursuing multiple pathways to justice and deterrence towards focusing on strengthening and enabling the formal criminal justice system to address the rampant impunity for crimes of property grabbing. In doing so, the program re-aligned with IJM's emerging organizational theory of change.

As noted in section 2, the real and perceived barriers to engagement, the community's distrust of government officials and the formal justice system, and the distrust between various levels and types of government officials themselves discouraged both victims of property grabbing from reporting cases into the formal justice system and government officials from following the appropriate legal protocols for such cases. This combination created a situation where cases were simply not entering the system to the degree needed to test IJM's theory of change. The community case meetings, as discussed above, could have helped communicate the truth of legal case outcomes to community members, which might have slowly improved trust in the system, but IJM assessed that the formal justice system needed more cases in order to demonstrate whether capacity building efforts had been successful, and if so, to share this success with affected communities. With the support and advertisement of the Regional District Commissioner, community leaders, and civil society organizations, IJM and its partners hosted legal aid clinics in relevant communities with the goal of increasing reporting of property grabbing. IJM and its government partners received over 100 legitimate case referrals of property grabbing, resulting in more arrests of perpetrators than in any previous year of the program. While it is possible that the increase in arrests and the subsequent community case meetings may have increased public confidence in the formal justice system and contributed in some way to furthering deterrence, these events occurred too close to the end of the program to affect the program results detailed in section 2. As such, there is no documented evidence of the impact of these events.

The baseline justice system performance study in 2012-2013 revealed that some officials believed property grabbing should be addressed through a hybrid of formal and informal approaches to justice. Interestingly, the summative evaluation findings evidenced that this view remained true at the end of the program. Some officials justified their opinions and preferences by citing the limited availability of human resources, the increased workload these cases require, and the absorption capacity of the justice system, given the overall backlog of criminal cases and increased incidence of large-scale (corporate) land grabbing. Due to the complexity of property grabbing cases and the amount of documentation and investigation needed, these



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cases require a substantial administrative lift for government officials. Additionally, victims expressed continued frustration at the end of the program that the case timeframes were still too long. The community dialogues and summative evaluation found that community members felt other pathways outside the formal justice system could be acceptable routes to justice and that other forms of punishment, such as public shaming of the perpetrator, could also create deterrence.

Over the course of the program, the number of cases that reached judgment increased, as did the number of convictions, illustrating that IJM's capacity building interventions did reduce impunity in instances of property grabbing in Mukono County. However, the number of cases successfully prosecuted remained relatively low at the end of the program. Taken together, these data points invite the question: what is the most effective approach to bring justice for victims and offenders, while catalyzing deterrence to ultimately reduce the overall victimization rate? IJM's program, comprised largely of formal justice system-interventions, contributed to a nearly 50% reduction in the prevalence of property grabbing in Mukono County. However, the summative evaluation concluded that this approach to combatting property grabbing would most likely not be sustainable after IJM's logistical and capacity building support ended, unless most of IJM's strategies were formally adopted by the government. While some components have been adopted, others have not. The evaluation recommended building government ownership and sustainability into programming well in advance of the program's end and augmenting IJM's formal justice sector capacity building approach with developing informal justice system pathways in order to increase long term program success.

Combining IJM's programmatic learnings and the recommendations from the external evaluation regarding both community engagement and pathways to justice, it seems that victims of property grabbing would receive faster and more reliable justice if 1) serious criminal cases were reliably referred to the formal justice system, 2) the formal system then reliably delivered justice for victims, 3) the results of those cases were communicated back out to communities, 4) community engagement efforts focused on attitude and behavior change of men, and 5) smaller or less serious civil land disputes were handled at a local, informal level. It seems plausible that this holistic system could have a greater deterrent effect on future instances of property grabbing than any of the individual parts alone. While plausible, further research is needed to validate the impact of combining these program interventions.

4.2 Literature Review Summary on Justice System Approaches to VAW



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The literature provides limited learnings on when and how various justice system approaches combatting forms of VAW affect the occurrence of these offenses. Criminal justice approaches to VAW have inherent limitations. Even within strong legal systems, prosecution is often lengthy, complicated, expensive, traumatic for survivors, and is obviously not guaranteed to result in conviction.

Criminal justice typically focuses on punishing perpetrators rather than restoring the safety and wellbeing of women. Criminal sanctions are not necessarily appropriate for women who want physical or sexual violence to end, but who do not want to break up their family (Larraín, 1999). In some settings, women and children have no means of economic survival if a violent partner or sexually abusive parent receives jail time (Parenzee, 2001). For all these reasons, legal aid programs often find that women express more interest in assistance with divorce, division of marital property, child custody, and child support - the legal tools that make it possible to leave a violent partner - rather than in criminal prosecution (Guedes & Helzner, 2002). Nonetheless, most researchers consider criminal justice reform to be a crucial component of reducing VAW (National Research Council, 2004). If nothing else, they argue, failure to sanction offenders sends a message that society condones violence (Larraín, 1999).

A growing number of low and middle-income countries have tried to improve the law enforcement response to gender-based violence by training professionals, reorganizing police and courts, and trying to provide a more comprehensive response to survivors. Evidence of effectiveness is relatively limited: most well-evaluated initiatives come from high-income countries, and the lessons learned may not be applicable to developing countries. Evaluations of law enforcement reforms in low- and middle-income countries typically limit case study approaches to drawing from police records (which are notorious for under-reporting), qualitative perspectives from key informant interviews, intermediate outcomes such as changes in attitudes and knowledge among police and judges, and interviews with small numbers of women who have sought legal redress. Population-based data collection, control groups, or follow-up among more than a handful of survivors are rare.

Nonetheless, the following justice sector initiatives illustrate the types of efforts that have produced important lessons learned and have demonstrated promising practices:

1. Educating law enforcement and the public about new laws on VAW;
2. Broad investment in strengthening the law enforcement response to VAW;



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3. Reorganizing the police and the judiciary (e.g. special police cells, family courts, etc.);
4. Comprehensive medico-legal system reform (e.g. introduction of forensic nursing);
5. Building networks and alliances between legal, social and health organizations; and
6. Reform of informal justice systems (e.g. traditional courts and councils) (Bott & Ellsberg, 2005).

This section explores three specific elements of the justice system's response to crimes of VAW: the multi-disciplinarian approach, restraining perpetrators of VAW, and including informal justice pathways.

Multi-Disciplinary Response

Evidence suggests several benefits of inter-sectoral collaboration in VAW cases, highlighting key connections between critical agencies – such as law enforcement, prosecutorial agencies, health care organizations, educational and economic development institutions, and social service agencies – to ensure an integrated justice response to survivors of violence (Bott & Ellsberg, 2005). For example, Coordinated Community Responses (CCRs), which often include stakeholders from across these sectors, have demonstrated improved criminal justice and survivor wellbeing outcomes within VAW cases, particularly when implemented with a victim-centered approach (DePrince, Belknap, Labus, Buckingham, & Gover, 2012). These outcomes include higher rates of reporting crimes to law enforcement, increased survivor engagement in criminal justice proceedings, increased access to and engagement with health and social services, and decreased symptomology amongst survivors for PTSD and depression (DePrince et al., 2012; Mallios & Markowitz, 2011). Similarly, research on the efficacy of Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs), which typically include law enforcement officers, forensic examiners, prosecutors, and victim advocates, has demonstrated that cases involving SARTs are reported more quickly, yield more evidence, are the strongest predictor that criminal charges will be filed, and keep survivors better informed and engaged throughout the criminal justice process (Nugent-Borakove et al, 2006).

Additionally, many women cannot access the justice system unless they first obtain basic information about their rights, case reporting procedures to the police, and/or legal aid services. In response, non-governmental organizations throughout the world have integrated basic referral services and legal services for survivors of violence into community-based health programs, social services, and economic development programs (Bott & Ellsberg, 2005).

Perpetrator Restraint



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Research on the impact of the incarceration of perpetrators of VAW is not well documented. More repressive interventions to ‘crack down’ on perpetrators, particularly in the United States, have only yielded limited evidence of positive impact. For example, mandatory or pro-arrest laws aiming to boost arrest rates for domestic violence perpetrators in high-income countries have a modest effect on recidivism for some men, especially first-time offenders with no other history of criminal conduct. In addition, studies found that when perpetrators are married, employed, or both, arrest reduced repeat assaults; but, for unemployed and unattached men, arrest increased abuse in some cities. Those with a history of arrest for other crimes were found likely to re-offend (Wollman & Corman, 2013).

In particular, the link between stronger laws and deterrence of would-be perpetrators is not clear (Heise, 2011). There is a common assumption that strict laws serve as deterrents. IMAGES data from nine countries found that more than 90% of men across the countries knew about such laws, but nearly equal percentages of men thought the law made it too easy to bring charges against men. Legislation addressing sexual violence against women and children varies in breadth and emphasis, and its effectiveness is often hard to determine (Wollman & Corman, 2013). Specific mechanisms for perpetrator restraint or programs designed to reduce recidivism explored include protection/restraining orders, judicial monitoring, and batterers programs.

Informal Justice Systems

Hybrid or integrated justice systems exist in many countries. National law may define linkages between the formal and informal justice system and provide for official forms of collaboration. Yet, even where that is not the case, there is often unofficial collaboration. The proper functioning of the criminal justice system as a backstop to an informal system—whether the criminal justice system is a route of appeal or an alternative route—is often what renders it possible for citizens to trust informal justice systems. In turn, with increasing backlogs and workload for criminal justice systems, there is growing global recognition of the importance of informal justice systems to complement and support the criminal justice system (United Nations Women & UNICEF).

Some program interventions building on existing informal pathways to justice for survivors of VAW are showing promise. An increasing number of communities are exploring non-formal ways to sanction perpetrators and to increase rights awareness. Some communities in India, for example, publicly shame abusive men in front of their homes. In Nepal, paralegal committees of trained local women provide



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frontline support for VAW victims, educate them about their rights, and challenge the culture of silence. Restorative or alternative justice approaches have been employed in many countries, with a recent evaluation of a South African victim-offender mediation program finding high levels of satisfaction among female victims (Wollman & Corman, 2013).

In another example, a rural women's group in West Bengal, India, adapted the traditional village dispute resolution system—the shalishi—to address VAW. Facilitators of the shalishis conduct an inquiry, hold a public hearing (depending on the sensitivity of the case), try to negotiate a resolution and call on the community to enforce the decision. Police only intercede if the shalishi fails. Unlike the criminal justice system, which focuses on punishing the perpetrator, the shalishi focuses on restoring the victim's safety, while keeping the family intact. Researchers note many rural women have no means of survival outside the family. Surveys of female participants disclosed the shalishi appeared to be effective in stopping physical violence, and most women were satisfied with the process (Sadasivam, 2000).

5. CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL IDEAS

Like other forms of VAW, property grabbing is a complex issue – one driven by widely held gender norms and enabled by impunity created by justice system inaction. Consequently, initiatives designed to combat these forms of violence must be multi-dimensional and deeply contextual. As the literature reveals, programs targeting VAW pursue a variety of goals, including reduced recidivism, improved access to justice, higher rates of survivor rehabilitation, higher rates of survivor satisfaction with the justice process and outcome, increased cohesion of healthy family units, increased deterrence of would-be offenders, reduced prevalence of violence, improved and coordinated justice system responses (both formal and informal), sustainable intervention against violence, government acknowledgement of VAW and ownership of the response, and increased community-level adoption of reporting and protection. Further, the literature supports a holistic programmatic approach, which could theoretically include elements of each of these. However, there are few, if any, evaluations of holistic programs that measured progress on each of these intermediate and long-term outcomes and demonstrate how they interact and influence each other.

Overall, IJM's intervention with widows in Mukono County, Uganda, was successful: the prevalence of property grabbing in the target area significantly decreased and the performance of the justice system had marked improvements in key areas. These results, coupled with the findings of the summative evaluation,



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proves IJM's theory of change – strengthening the formal justice system reduces the occurrence of targeted crimes –in a sub-Saharan context in a form of violence against women.

Based on the experience of IJM in Mukono County and the available literature, it seems there are three principal areas which require exploration for maximum impact in tackling issues of VAW: 1) sequencing of leveled VAW interventions, 2) balancing of formal and informal justice approaches, and 3) ensuring sustainability of VAW interventions in resource-constrained environments.

Sequencing VAW Interventions

The sequencing of individual, community, and system-level VAW interventions is not well-established in the literature and clearly requires a thoughtfully-developed plan. If a program sensitizes and empowers women to access appropriate formal avenues for justice too early in the program, they could 1) experience increased violence from the perpetrator or in the community due to deeply-seated norms regarding VAW and the inadequacy of the formal system in addressing the crime, and/or 2) be met with an unresponsive and potentially harmful justice system when they report their cases. If a program builds an effective system-level response but does not involve the community in the design and implementation of the program, the community may under-utilize the newly available services and/or continue to discredit and distrust justice actors, undermining and discouraging further positive growth.

The literature recommends starting initiatives at all levels of engagement from the beginning of the program. Learning from IJM's program in Mukono County, Uganda, norm change interventions should have begun years earlier in order to address the cultural and gender norms and public distrust of the formal justice system that enabled impunity for property grabbing crimes to continue. Due to the lateness of this intervention, many of IJM's messages and communications throughout the program were not appropriately designed to achieve attitude and behavior change. Future programming should employ best practice around behavior change communication, where there is ample time for knowledge gain – an acknowledgement that the issue exists, and general attitude change – then adoption and acceptance of the issue as problematic, before moving a community to the intended behavior. Allowing sufficient time for this process enables communities to fully own the issue and design their own responses. If these knowledge and attitude interventions had begun at the beginning of IJM's program, the teams working at the individual, community, and system levels could have coordinated and aligned strategies to optimize progress at each level.



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Determining how to sequence initiatives that are dependent, interdependent, or influenced by each other, is critical in this type of programming. Additionally, more research on these types of programs, including quasi-experimental program designs, would help the international community better understand how the various components work in different contexts.

Balancing Formal and Informal Systems

The balance of utilizing formal and informal justice system approaches to VAW is also not well-elaborated in the literature. In Uganda – or any other context where power imbalances between men and women exist – programs must recognize how various systems of power affect both informal and formal justice pathways for victims of VAW. The external evaluators for IJM’s program recommended designing a hybrid approach, a recommendation supported by some government officials hinting during data collection that more property grabbing cases should stay out of the courts. At its best, the formal justice system is intended to right the power imbalances that exist between all groups of people. At all levels, however, this function can be misunderstood, so programs must consider how victims, communities, local leaders, and other officials perceive the responses and conclusions of the formal and informal justice systems, as these perceptions can unintentionally undermine the true intentions of the system. For example, victims may not agree with a forced separation or custodial sentence of a family member issued by the formal justice system; an official at the local level may mistakenly believe a formal system response has stepped into their role and stripped them of their responsibilities and credibility with the community; and the community may overtly support the offender and reject the victim as they do not have visibility into the often hidden and complex justice process of the courts.

A strong formal justice system must be in place when the informal system fails or when power-actors and vulnerable people are not given equal footing in a case. However, when determining how to balance or implement a hybrid approach to justice in a setting like Uganda, it is best to remember the ultimate goal of the program. For IJM, the ultimate goal was to reduce the occurrence of property grabbing against widows. Further, the organization sought to prove the theory that strengthening the justice system could contribute to this reduction, and, the data collected does support this theory. In future programs addressing VAW, it will be important to consider how combining formal system strengthening with other pathways to justice for victims could result in a broader deterrent effect and whether both systems complement or hinder case or survivor outcomes.



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Sustainability

The issue of sustainability in these types of programs is challenging given competing priorities and limited resourcing amongst key stakeholders, including the formal justice system. Many justice systems in developing countries are overwhelmed with serious case backlogs (frequently caused by the system engaging in minor matters which do not require the full weight of the criminal justice system); therefore, it is essential to consider what type of cases can be handled by alternative or informal justice systems. The backlog in Uganda's criminal justice system and its lack of capacity to take on more cases are real barriers to justice for VAW victims. In such situations, programs could pursue more nuanced approaches to balance these capacity issues, such as promoting 'proof of concept' or 'test' cases⁶ that are heavily socialized amongst justice system actors and community members, coupled with strengthened pathways to informal justice approaches that are fully supported and endorsed by the formal justice system, survivors, and the wider community. Both informal and formal systems must be rigorously monitored, however, to ensure that they do not reinforce or fuel gender biases.

Further, sustainability is heavily affected by the lack of adoption of the criminality of property grabbing and support for a justice response by key stakeholders, which included women, the wider rural community, and justice system actors in IJM's Mukono program. In fact, all three groups voiced barriers to adoption of these views during data collection efforts, as elaborated earlier. In future programs similar to the one described in this paper, more attention could be paid throughout to understanding the meaning and value of justice for VAW crimes to various stakeholders, the motivations of offenders, approaches, and barriers to deterrence, influences of cultural and gender biases on community and system-level structures, and how the informal and formal justice system actors could function complementarily for the betterment of the vulnerable and the system as a whole. This is the best scenario for developing partnerships and informed community-based strategies to protect women and prevent VAW, ultimately leading to optimal positioning for long-term sustainability of program interventions.

⁶ These 'proof of concept' or 'test' cases would allow both the program implementer and justice system actors to learn how the formal system responds to instances of VAW and determine appropriate conditions for engaging the formal system. Once determined, the program implementer and justice system actors should encourage continued appropriate engagement with the formal system and monitor for system integrity (e.g., corruption, abuse of original conditions or intent, blurred boundaries between informal and formal pathways, etc.).



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Greater impact, sustainability, and protection of vulnerable women may be achieved through the addition of these three approaches – sequencing interventions to allow time for needed cultural norm change, balancing of formal and informal justice approaches, and considering constraints to long-term sustainability – to capacity building programs for the criminal justice sector. While not negating the critical role of the formal justice system in combatting crimes of VAW, including property grabbing, such a holistic response acknowledges the complexity of VAW and enables sustainability of program gains. For example, IJM’s Mukono County program proved successful due to the meaningful reduction in prevalence of property and increase in performance of the formal system, such gains might have been augmented and sustained through the addition of these complementary approaches.



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