

Women's Spaces Breaks Ground!



Uganda and South Africa. The goal of this ground-breaking initiative is to secure equal rights for women to use and control housing and related resources. This will allow women to better provide for their families and respond to challenges such as gender-based violence, health emergencies, and political upheaval. Women will also be freer to use their homes and the space around them for income-generating activities, including food production.

Members of Akuwa Village Saving Loans Association in Uganda, including Nabirye Annet quoted on page 4, speak with Ameena Ilahi, Rooftops Canada

There is a lot of excitement and renewed energy at Rooftops Canada with the successful start of the *Women's Spaces* project. We have always recognized and promoted the right to housing as a development imperative, and believe it is fundamental to alleviating gender-based poverty.

Women's Spaces is expected to have a profoundly positive impact on women's equal access to land and livelihoods in the African context.

Women's Spaces started early in 2022 in partnership with African organizations in Angola, Kenya,

Women's Spaces is a \$7.2 million project over five years. We deeply appreciate the commitment and generosity that Global Affairs Canada has demonstrated as our major funding partner. However, we still need to raise \$508,000 as our share of this vital work.

Every dollar you contribute is matched 10 times over by the Government of Canada.

We completed our first mission to Africa and are pleased to report that the *Women's Spaces* project is making impressive strides!

These women in Nairobi, Kenya are part of a group of 68 farmers who live in the Kibera slum, and farm on land owned by the railway. To improve household income and nutrition, *Women's Spaces* will work with these industrious women to help secure their use of the land. Through innovative, holistic approaches, the *Women's Spaces* project will address the specific needs of women in four countries by strengthening their demands for their rights through local advocacy, amending legislative loopholes and building the capacity of public institutions to implement policies. Ultimately, this will empower women to gain equitable access to land.



On The Ground

The first in-person meeting of project partners from all four African countries implementing *Women's Spaces* took place in September. Gathering in Nairobi, Kenya a thorough review of project implementation and common themes and synergies that tie the project together were discussed.

Partners in each country completed a comprehensive gender analysis to contextualize and inform key project activities. Partners were also active in obtaining necessary government approvals and engaging with local stakeholders and communities.

Our partner in **Angola**, Development Workshop Angola, has already organized a forum to launch the project that included 150 representatives from provincial, municipal and traditional authorities, civil society and community organizations. Over 500 people also participated in five local sessions to examine Angola's land law from a gender perspective.



Pictured are community members in education sessions on gender equitable land rights delivered by our Angolan partner, Development Workshop.



In **Kenya**, our partner, Mazingira Institute, inaugurated *Women's Spaces* through a forum with representatives of the Nairobi city administration, local urban farmers, academia, civil society, research organizations and the Canadian High Commission.



Our implementing partner in **South Africa**, Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa, held a series of consultative workshops in informal settlements and conducted introductory meetings with national policymakers.

In **Uganda**, our local partner, Shelter and Settlements Alternatives, has secured Memorandums of Understanding in two districts where the project is starting. These agreements recognize government support and facilitate access to communities – a significant first step to implement *Women's Spaces*.



Meeting with residents of Kamuli municipality in Uganda in October 2022

The Ebenezer Lugonjo Bag-Making Group: Wakiso - Entebbe District, Uganda

The Ebenezer Lugonjo Bag-Making Group was formed in 2019 to give women and men a platform for generating revenue through crafting unique and colourful bags. The group holds weekly meetings to discuss member achievements and challenges.

Discussions often focus on the violation of women's rights in purchasing and owning property. Physical and sexual violence and the infringement of children's rights are also debated. The reluctance of local politicians and law enforcement to become engaged in family issues, together with the lack of self-esteem among women, has resulted in many of these critical issues going unresolved. However, there is hope. The chairperson of this community initiative will be part of a training program to become a paralegal helping marginalized young girls and women understand their



rights, particularly related to land and housing. Projects like *Women's Spaces* provide a voice for groups like The Ebenezer Lugonjo Bag-Making Group that try to effect change beyond the community level.

Nanteza Moreen, pictured with ELBMG members, always wants to consider different laws "for instance the Succession Act that explains how properties are to be distributed equally among children, wives, dependents and heirs, human rights, how to write a valid will and the different referral pathways that are already in existence in our community."



Although women's inequality is inherent in our work, *Women's Spaces* is the first explicitly gender-focused project at the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa. It has created the opportunity to tackle some of the deep-rooted challenges faced by poor and marginalized women across a range of tenure and housing. The project navigates complex circumstances, obstacles and the compounding impact of race and class discrimination, which women experience as they attempt to access land and housing rights. These challenges are direct remnants of South Africa's apartheid history. The potential impact of this project is exponential and has already signalled change."



**Lauren Royston, Director of Research and Advocacy,
Socio-Economic Rights Institute**

To learn more about *Women's Spaces* and other projects that build homes and communities, please visit: www.rooftops.ca

New Leadership at Rooftops Canada!

In May 2022, Ameena Ilahi joined Rooftops Canada as the incoming Executive Director, taking over from Barry Pinsky, the outgoing Executive Director and one of the founders of the organization. Ameena and Barry have been working together over the past months to ensure a smooth transition. We are also pleased to announce that a new Operations Manager has recently joined Rooftops Canada.

“Having just returned from my visit with project leaders in Africa, I learned about the immense hardships women endure in securing land. The cultural, legal and economic factors that prevent women from accessing productive resources,

also exacerbate women’s poverty and marginalization. As Nabirye Annet of Kamuli municipality in Uganda says, “women and youth especially girls are the most affected members in terms of not owning property and land, considered as the weakest group thus not included in decision making, those married/cohabiting are left with all the responsibilities of taking care of their families, paying school dues, medical dues, providing food and other basic needs. Girls and women are only considered as house helpers.” I’m excited to see the positive impact *Women’s Spaces* will have in the lives of women.”

Ameena Ilahi, Executive Director



Ameena Ilahi, Executive Director

Stay updated by signing up to our eBulletin at www.rooftops.ca



A young urban farmer from an informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya being interviewed as part of Mazingira Institute’s gender baseline study. Youth in informal settlements are embracing urban agriculture as a form of income generating activity.

Rooftops Canada – Over 35 Years of Service

In 2020, Rooftops Canada celebrated 35 years of service around the world as the international program of cooperative and social housing organizations in Canada. We are grateful to have worked with many innovative and resourceful Canadian and overseas partners, helping to improve housing conditions and develop sustainable communities in 38 countries.

We are proud to be supported by major funders like Global Affairs Canada, but also rely on the generosity of cooperative and social housing organizations, companies and agencies that work with these organizations, and individual donors who share our vision of equitable global development.

Please donate today! www.rooftops.ca



Rooftops Canada – Abri International
720 Spadina Avenue, Suite 313, Toronto, ON M5S 2T9
Telephone: 416-366-1445 | Fax: 416-366-3876
info@rooftops.ca | www.rooftops.ca