



IJM CASEWORK SERIES

LAND THEFT

For poor families, a small patch of land is often the only source of critical food and shelter. But scores of vulnerable widows have this lifeline stolen from them after their husbands die.

Powerful relatives or neighbours steal their land with violence, or prey on orphans in their time of need. Victims are left hungry, homeless and deeply afraid.

Too often, local justice officials treat this crime as a “family matter” and tell a widow to settle with her abusers. Without accountability, criminals continue to thrive and their victims are trapped in the cycle of poverty.

OUR IMPACT AROUND THE WORLD



3,260

Widows and orphans returned to their homes since 2004



6,016

Community members in Uganda trained on their rights since 2012



166

Criminals restrained for threatening widows and their land since 2013

QUICK FACTS



More than **115 million widows** live in extreme poverty around the world.¹

By 2020, **1.5 billion of the world's urban poor** will live in informal settlements and slums without any secure right to their property.²



An estimated **90% of rural sub-Saharan Africans** have no proof of ownership for land where they live and work.³



KAMPALA, UGANDA IJM PREVALENCE STUDY, 2014

Left theft is a common and violent experience for widows, and occurs with near-total impunity for perpetrators. Nearly **one out of every three widows** (30.3%) in IJM's project area reported experiencing this crime in her lifetime.



“I used to cry all the time. Now I laugh! I hope to have so many things ahead of me.”

—Grace, defended from violent neighbours attempting to steal her home in Uganda

Meet Grace

AS SOON AS GRACE’S HUSBAND DIED, the threats began. More powerful members of her village announced that they were throwing Grace and her five children out of their home. They would take it as their own—even threatening to kill her if that’s what it took. “I would worry about my life, wondering if I died today where my children would begin from,” she laments. “This worried me so much.”

Losing her home and small plot of farmland would mean losing her only way to provide for her children. Grace tried to stand up for herself, but found no support in her community. She tried to get help from the government—visiting offices 25 miles away over and over—but no one would listen to a poor widow like her.

The day she met IJM’s lawyers, everything changed for Grace. We advocated for her rights and her safety for more than two years, and we celebrated when Grace finally got the title to her land. Today, she and her kids are safe and secure. She says happily, “My old life has ended and a new one is beginning.” Watch her story at [IJM.ca/land-theft](https://www.ijm.ca/land-theft)

WHERE WE WORK:
LAND THEFT



AFRICA

Gulu, Uganda
Kampala, Uganda

JUSTICE SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION *Uganda*

From 2012-2017, we conducted a system reform project in Mukono County, Central Uganda, to ensure the public justice system would protect widows from land theft. We trained police, prosecutors and judges to treat land theft as a serious crime – ensuring vulnerable women won’t have to live in fear.

In 2018, an external evaluator found there had been a 50% reduction in land theft, a result connected to IJM’s capacity building and mentoring of public justice system actors.

JOIN US

Help us prove justice for the poor is possible. Use your time, talents and passion to help protect the poor from violence today. Join us at [IJM.ca/Get-Involved](https://www.ijm.ca/Get-Involved)



PO Box 336 STN B
London, ON N6A 4W1
T: 519.679.5030
F: 519.679.3358
[IJM.ca](https://www.ijm.ca)

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION CANADA is part of a global organization that protects the poor from violence throughout the developing world. IJM partners with local authorities to rescue victims of violence, bring criminals to justice, restore survivors, and strengthen justice systems.

All text and images © 2019 International Justice Mission