Welcome to the IST September News Bulletin



September is behind us, and the third quarter has closed with a lot to celebrate. From village homesteads to bustling markets and an international stage in Colombia, here is what IST has been up to.

What happens when couples plan their future together?

In Obongi District, more than 805 GALS Champions from Aliba and Parolinya sub-counties found out. Supported by the World Food Programme, IST trained them in Gender Action Learning tools, including the Gender Balance Tree and the Vision Road Journey.

The Gender Balance Tree asked couples some honest questions: Who does the work at home? Who earns, who owns, and who decides? Many saw, some for the first time, how much unpaid care and farm work women carry, and how often decisions are

made by one person when they could be made by two. Couples left with practical ways to share workloads and decide together.

Then came the Vision Road Journey. Couples pictured the life they dream of, mapped the milestones along the way, and named the opportunities and obstacles ahead. Each left with a shared vision and a plan to pursue it as partners. Now the champions are taking these tools back to their communities to help other households chart their own road.

What does it really mean to be a man?

That was the question on the table in the marketplace. With support from WE Effect, IST held male conversation circles with vendors in Soroti Main Market (Soroti City), Bweyale Market (Kiryandongo District) and Kisanga Market (Kasese).

There were no lectures, only honest talk between peers. The men discussed how they share care and household duties, how they make decisions with their partners, and how they can back women's economic participation instead of standing in its way. Hearing other men speak candidly made many stop and ask: ***which old expectations are worth keeping, and which should change at home and in business?***

From Uganda to Bogotá.

Our Chief Executive Officer represented IST at the Fair Finance International General Assembly 2026 in Bogotá, Colombia. The assembly drove home a message that is simple but demanding: financial institutions are not peripheral to social, environmental and economic outcomes. They are central to them.

Finally, the ***Market Garden App*** Keeps Growing. Download or update the app on Google Play or the App Store to support local market women with every order!





Ready to dive in?
Read on for the full stories.





Redefining the Hearth: How over 805 GALS Champions in Obongi Are Rewriting the Rules of Gender and Food Security.

OBONGI DISTRICT, UGANDA. Before the sun climbs over the Albert Nile, the day has already begun in Aliba and Palorinya. Smoke rises from cooking fires. Hoes are lifted, water is fetched, children are fed and sent off. In most homes, the people doing these things first and last are women.

For generations, this has simply been how life works. Women carry the farm and the home. Men, for the most part, carry the money and the final word. Nobody in these villages wrote the rule down, yet everyone knows it. Gender norms and stereotypes limit the opportunities of both women and men, and few households had ever stopped to question them.

Then, with support from the World Food Programme (WFP), the Institute for Social Transformation (IST) invited couples from 10 farmer groups across the two sub-counties to do something unusual. They were asked to sit down together and draw.

The answers came slowly at first, then all at once.

"Women do not speak when the elders speak."

"A man must never be seen cooking."

"A man must always provide, even when he cannot."

"Land belongs to the men."

As each bar was named, something shifted. The women saw the cage around them. The men, to their surprise, saw one around themselves too: the pressure to be the sole provider, to appear strong, to never ask for help. For many, it was the first time anyone had suggested that old expectations could weigh on everyone.

Next came the Gender Balance Tree. Each person drew a tree for their own household, with branches for the work done, the money earned, the assets owned and the decisions made. The tool lets people analyse gender roles and responsibilities, and look at the power and rewards attached to them, along with the forces that keep things as they are.

Husbands and wives drew separately first, then laid their pictures side by side.
Imagine a couple bending over two sheets of paper. On the wife's tree, the branches sag with fruit: fetching water, cooking, caring for children, weeding, harvesting, drying, storing. On her husband's, the branches are fewer and bare, but one is heavy with a single word: decisions. Land. The harvest. The money from the market.

Nobody has to say anything. The drawings say it.
This is why the tool works. The picture was on paper, not in anyone's mouth, so couples could discuss it without blame. ***"We did not argue," a couple might say afterwards. "We looked at the tree, and we both knew."***

From those conversations came small, practical agreements: sharing household and farm tasks more fairly, planning spending together, and deciding about the harvest and the family budget as partners.



Seeing the present was only half the work. The last tool, the Vision Road Journey, turned the couples' eyes to the future.

Each pair drew a road. At the far end, they sketched the life they wanted: a full granary, children in school, an iron roof, savings that would outlast a bad season. Along the road, they marked milestones, such as the first harvest to sell together, the first sum saved, and the first year of school fees paid. They drew the hills that might slow them (drought, sickness, debt) and the opportunities that might help them along.

For many couples, it was the first time they had planned their lives together on one page.

It might seem far from a pencil sketch to a full plate. But when women and men plan, work and decide together, a household uses its land, labour and income better. Shared decisions mean fewer conflicts over money, clearer priorities for the planting season, and more of what the family earns reaching the whole family. In farming communities, a conversation about gender at home is also a conversation about food security.

The 805 champions who took part are not the end of this story. Each will return to their farmer group and community, paper and pencil in hand, to guide other households through the same three tools. A couple who finds a new way of working together in Aliba may well help another couple in Palorinya do the same.

The cooking fires will still be lit before dawn, and the hoes will still rise at first light. In a growing number of homes in Obongi, though, the work, the money and the decisions are beginning to be shared.







Men in Soroti, Kiryandongo, and Kasese Rally for Household Equity

Across Uganda's bustling urban hubs and agricultural markets from Soroti Main Market to Bweyale Market in Kiryandongo and Kisanga Market in Kasese an important conversation about manhood, money, and domestic stability is taking center stage.

Under an initiative spearheaded by the Institute for Social Transformation (IST) with support from WE Effect, male market vendors recently gathered for intensive Male Conversation Circles. The primary goal: address the recurring post-harvest conflicts that threaten family well-being and shift men from sole controllers of wealth to equal partners at home.

In many farming and trading households, the primary producers of food and market commodities are women and youth. Wives and children invest months of intensive physical labor tilling land, weeding, harvesting, and preparing produce for sale. Yet, when harvest season arrives and commodities hit the market, a familiar cycle of tension unfolds.

During the conversation circles, male participants candidly acknowledged that household disputes most frequently erupt during this marketing phase. Once produce is converted into cash, men historically take exclusive control of the earnings, sidelining the women who drove the production.

> "Women and youth do the heavy lifting from planting to harvest," noted one participant during the Soroti market dialogue. "But when money comes in, men take over the wallet. That injustice is where household fights begin."
>
> **-Sulaiman Kizito, Sweet Potato Vendor, Kisanga Market.**



The sessions pushed men to take an honest look at spending patterns within their homes. Participants admitted to a pervasive double standard in how income is allocated:

When men hold sole control of market proceeds, a significant portion of the income is often diverted toward personal leisure, entertainment, and social outings.

In contrast, when women manage or co-manage income, earnings are overwhelmingly reinvested into immediate household needs purchasing nutritious food, settling school fees, and securing medical care for children.

Men acknowledged that while a father might walk away or detach himself during lean financial periods, women remain at home, facing the daily reality of caring for hungry children with little to no financial support.

From Uganda's Markets to Bogotá:
Who Does Finance Really Serve?

What will it take for financial institutions to recognise the potential of women who sustain our families, feed our communities and keep our markets thriving?

This question guided my participation in the Fair Finance International General Assembly in Bogotá, Colombia, in September, where I represented the Institute for Social Transformation.

It comes from the realities we encounter in Uganda's markets and communities. A woman may have loyal customers, business experience and clear ambitions, yet struggle to meet collateral requirements. She may have a phone but lack affordable connectivity or the skills to use digital financial services safely. Even when she receives a loan, she may have limited control over how it is used.

In Bogotá, discussions with fellow civil society organisations brought these experiences into a wider conversation about financial power. Lending and investment decisions influence which businesses grow, which energy projects proceed and how people's land, labour and livelihoods are protected.
Who benefits from these decisions and can the people affected help shape them?

During the gender discussions, I shared IST's experience of working with women in informal markets, including our Market Garden App. The app helps women vendors reach customers beyond their stalls. But our experience also reminds us that technology needs practical support: digital skills, affordable connectivity, reliable delivery, fair payment systems and accessible help when something goes wrong.

For me, meaningful financial inclusion must consider what happens after a woman opens an account or receives a loan. **Can she understand the costs, use the service safely, strengthen her business and retain control over her earnings?**

These questions connect closely to IST's work at household level. In Obongi, couples using Gender Action Learning System tools are examining who works, who owns and who decides. In our market programmes, men are reflecting on how control over income affects family relationships. Alongside these conversations, we must engage financial institutions on the conditions that help women build secure livelihoods.

The assembly also examined climate finance and the importance of a just transition. Renewable energy investment can create opportunities, but affected communities need a meaningful voice in decisions about their land and livelihoods. Women and local enterprises should share in the benefits.

A particularly useful lesson from other Fair Finance coalitions was the importance of sustained engagement after a bank assessment. Credible research should lead to specific recommendations, dialogue with institutions and follow-up to establish what has changed.



As Fair Finance Uganda continues its bank policy assessments, IST will bring its experience with women, markets and communities into this process. We want technical findings to become understandable, practical proposals that banks can act on and stakeholders can monitor.

Bogotá also opened opportunities for further exchange with fellow coalitions, Oxfam teams and Sida representatives interested in learning more about IST's work. We look forward to following up these conversations and exploring areas of collaboration.

I returned convinced that the knowledge women vendors, farmers and communities hold deserves a stronger place in financial-sector discussions. Their experiences can help shape better products, stronger safeguards and more responsive institutions.

The question we brought to Bogotá remains our task at home: **How do we make finance work better for the people whose efforts sustain our communities?**



Our Chief Executive Officer, Wagubi Moureen making a presentation at the Fair Finance International General Assembly in Bogotá, Colombia.

Count GBV, Fund the Response: From Commitments to Action.

Every woman who seeks help after violence deserves safety, dignity and services she can reach. Yet, across our region, too many still face costly journeys, fragmented referrals and support systems with inadequate resources.

These concerns shaped the East Africa Regional Convening on Gender-Based Violence Action Coalition Commitments, held in Nairobi. Organised by Akili Dada with support from UN Women under the SHIRIKIANA Initiative, the meeting brought together women's-rights organisations and regional partners to review progress and strengthen collective action.

Representing IST and bringing a GIMAC perspective, Our Chief Executive Officer, Wagubi Moureen highlighted the importance of including rural women, refugees, market vendors and women in the informal economy. Their experiences must inform the policies, services and budgets intended to protect them.



Participants developed the proposed campaign ***"Count GBV, Fund the Response,"*** with a proposed launch on 25 November. It calls for safe documentation of violence, effective investigations, coordinated survivor services and transparent government financing, alongside sustained support for women-led and community-based organisations.

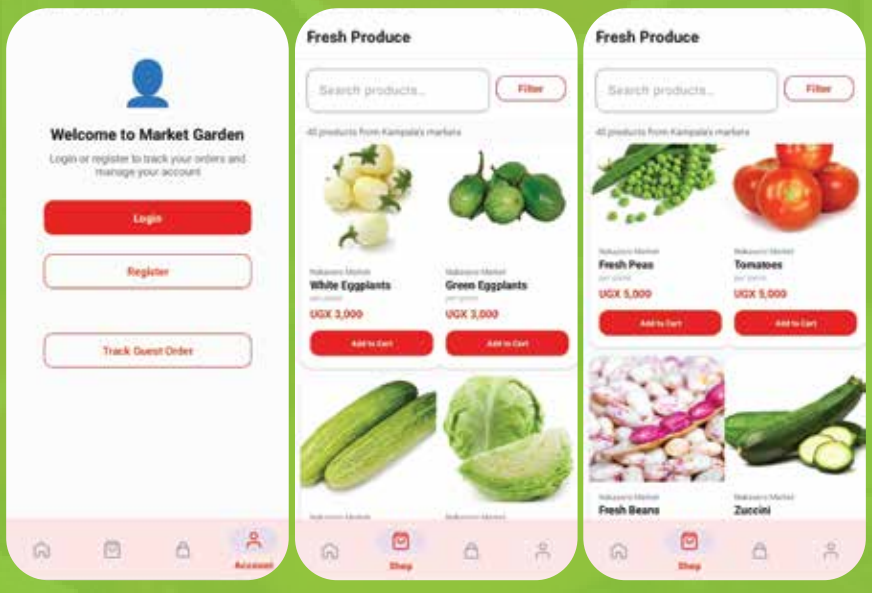
For IST, the convening reinforced the connection between preventing violence and advancing economic justice. Limited control over land, income and resources can restrict women's choices and their ability to leave abusive relationships. Our GALS and Training for Transformation approaches help communities examine unequal power and harmful gender norms, alongside the need for professional support and reliable referrals.

Through our GIMAC engagement, we will work to connect these community realities with regional and continental advocacy.

Connecting Markets to Doorsteps:
The Market Garden App Keeps Growing

Digital innovation remains at the heart of our economic empowerment work. ***The Market Garden App*** continues to connect women market vendors directly to urban consumers, cutting out middlemen and bringing fresh produce straight from local market stalls to doorsteps.

Download or update the App on Google Play or on the App Store to support local market women with every order!



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Available on the App Store

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