



We Are
Changing The
Narrative!



Highlight Story from the ZGF Partners Convening | Gulu, May 2025

Some stories arrive like whispers. Others come like floods, unstoppable and unrelenting. And then, there are stories like Albertine's, stories that arrive with the quiet thunder of truth and refuse to be forgotten.

At the Zishaye Grassroots Fund (ZGF) Partners Convening in Gulu, held from May 5th to 9th, 2025, over eighty grassroots changemakers gathered under the nurturing umbrella of CIVFUND, not just to share progress reports or best practices, but to sit in sacred witness of one another's work. It was a convening of courage, of contradictions, of clarity. And at its heart was a name none of us will ever forget; *Albertine*.

In the north, land is not just soil. It is memory. It is identity. It is legacy. But for generations, women have been severed from it. Silently, they've tilled borrowed land. Quietly, they've planted for households that would deny them ownership. Loudly, they've birthed life and nurtured community; only to be locked out of decisions, inheritance, and dignity.

Albertine refused that silence.

With strength forged from centuries of exclusion, she rose, not just for herself but for every woman whose worth had been measured in domesticity rather than dignity. Supported by a grassroots women's group strengthened through the ZGF, and by the CIVFUND model that funds movements, not just projects, Albertine became a force. She gathered women beneath mango trees and in seed banks, whispering truths that felt forbidden: *"You belong. You deserve. You are enough."*

She taught them how to read land deeds. She showed them how to challenge customs that shrink them. She helped them believe they could plant more than crops, they could plant freedom.

And then, she was taken.

Albertine was killed by her husband, the man who should have been her safety. The disagreement? Two bulls she had sold. Money, she planned to use for her children. Her independence, her hard-earned agency, was seen as a threat. And for that, she was butchered.

But Albertine did not die quietly. The echo of her life carried across the convening, through testimonies, through the wind that moved the prayer flags, through the soil of seed banks where her hands once worked.

The women's group she helped build refused to mourn in silence. They rose, fists full of seed and story. They kept going, not because they were unafraid, but because fear had become too expensive a currency to keep paying. They speak her name not as a tragedy, but as a totem. Albertine is now shorthand for courage. For fracture. For fire.

In every circle we formed in Gulu, whether listening to stories from Zombo, Adjumani, Samburu, or Lira, Albertine's ghost sat with us. She challenged our language, dared our funding models, haunted our silence.

CIVFUND's Lead, Lillian Tamale, had said it best on day one:

"As feminists, we aim to disrupt traditional ways of doing things."

But the disruption we witnessed was not just structural. It was spiritual. In a hall where mothers breastfed while taking notes, where male allies asked questions about co-existence instead of dominance, where a seed bank visit in Omoro District became a pilgrimage site for collective memory, we began to see what feminist funding actually looks like when it takes root.

This was not an event. It was a reckoning.

Albertine's life reminded us why land rights are not just about ownership, but about voice. Why community resilience cannot exist without safety. Why food sovereignty is not possible without bodily sovereignty. And why philanthropy, especially feminist philanthropy, must learn to weep, to listen, and to follow.

At the convening, 23 partner organizations from Uganda and Kenya presented stories of resistance, rewilding, and resourcefulness. We met women who had reclaimed land titles. Others who were saving sheer nut trees. Others who now earned money from lemon grass tea, organic fertilizers, or "shero clubs" investing in cassava. And yet, beneath every win was a shared undercurrent: "We are building what should have been ours all along."

The visits to GWED-G's Lacan Kwo ki Lwete VSLA seed bank and Dero Wa's fertile land in Palaro were more than site visits. They were rituals. Participants were welcomed with dance, food, and stories about mulching, half-baked soil, and indigenous vegetables making their way to local markets. These gardens were not just gardens. They were living memorials to women like Albertine, who had poured sweat into land they weren't allowed to claim.

We danced, we laughed, we cried. We debated strategy by day and sang under the stars at cultural night. We left no part of ourselves behind.

In her closing reflection, Lillian Tamale named what many were feeling: *"Systems don't shift through sentiment. They shift because people, like Albertine, risk everything. And because movements, like those supported through CIVFUND, refuse to be silenced."*

To support feminist organizing is to support seed banks and stories, risk-takers and rhythm, pain and policy; all at once. It's knowing that a convening isn't successful because it was held, but because something refused to be left behind.

We left Gulu not just with field notes and phone numbers, but with flame in our bones.

Albertine lit the match.

We owe her a fire.







