

Securing grassroots women land rights through socio-cultural changes

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1. INTRODUCTION

Equal land rights for men and women are fundamental for realizing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is also mentioned by other key global development frameworks including the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGTs) and the Africa Union Framework and Guidelines. However, restricted rights to access, use, inheritance, control and ownership of land by women in Africa are still strongly felt at grassroots level and can be attributed to the imbalances of power relations between men and women based on patriarchal systems and associated social norms that discriminate against women.

The continued gender inequalities between women and men in land ownership, ironically goes against the general agreement in literature that there is “a positive correlation between ensuring women’s rights to land and other productive resources and improved household welfare, as well as enhanced enjoyment of a broad range of rights for women”, UNWOMEN (2013). Practice has shown that where women own land independently or jointly their access and control over land-based earnings be assured. FAO (2011) noted that globally there is also a positive relationship between the amount of assets (including land) that a woman possesses at the time of marriage and the shares of household expenditures devoted to food, education, health care, and children’s clothing. Security of tenure therefore enables women to have control over major decisions such as what crop to grow, where to grow it, what techniques to use, and what to consume and sell.

The project was therefore critically important in that the experience of the five partners and four countries which implemented it showed that through women’s land rights legal education and capacity building on land rights and policies (Land laws, Sustainable Development Goals, Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, Land Acts, Kilimanjaro Initiative) women gained knowledge and utilized it to their own benefit and that of their families and communities. Empowered grassroots women in this grant developed the confidence and propensity to advocate for their ownership of land with decision makers and duty bearers. As a result, between February 2019 and November 2020, a total of 1012 women in the four countries were supported in to gain land ownership using various versions of legal and formalized systems. Some women gained ownership through formalized joint ownership permits while others gained ownership as a collective using established traditional land distribution laws and systems. Compared to 2019 when the project was started, women at the end of the programme had increased their advocacy for economic and land

rights in public spaces especially during advocacy campaigns, commemorations such as the International Day of Rural Women as well as joint actions conducted by partners in their respective countries.

The consortium members identified the common patterns of gender inequalities in land ownership in the four countries and they decided to revive the Women's Land Link Africa (WLLA), which is a grassroots led structure for peer learning and for advocacy building covering grassroots organizations in nine African countries (Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) who work on promoting grassroots women's rights to land, sustainable development and responding to disasters and climate change.

2. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Key barriers

Despite legal frameworks that guarantee women's land rights in Africa in general and the four countries (Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe) where the project was implemented specifically, many women continue to face barriers to acquire, own, control and inherit land. This is due to customary norms that continue to override statutory laws in recognition and enforcement of women's land rights. Implementation of existing and progressive statutory laws brought in by land reform processes still remains a challenge because of the lack of infrastructure, resources and political will. This problem is compounded with glaring gaps and inconsistencies in some existing laws that make implementation of women's land rights even more difficult. Globally less than 15% of all land holders are women (FAO, 2018). Women land owners range from less than 20% in Honduras to slightly over 50% in Malawi. According to FAO women land owners are less likely than men to have legal documents proving ownership of their plots. In Zimbabwe, before the Fast Track Land Reform programme in 2000, women owned less than 5% of the land and after the Fast Track Land reform programme women land ownership increased to 20% (FAO, 2014). According to the Federation for Women Lawyers (2018), women in Kenya only hold 1% of land titles on their own while 5% own land jointly with men while the rest of the land belongs to men (94%). In Uganda land ownership by women ranges from 5-26% according to the statistics provided by Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development.

The Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa endorsed through the adoption of the African Union Declaration on Land Issues and Challenges by the African Heads of States in 2009 is having a strong gender component which aims at "strengthening security of land tenure for women which

require special attention” and “ensuring that land laws provide for equitable access to land and related resources”. This progressive continental policy was applied through land reforms in African countries with the endorsement of the AU commitment on the 30% of documented land to women by 2025. However these commitments are not seen on the ground because of the slow implementation of land reform processes. Grassroots women across Africa are still facing inequality in terms of rights to access, use, inherit, control and own land. It can be attributed to the imbalances of power relations between men and women based on patriarchal systems and associated social norms that discriminate against women. Ownership of land in patriarchal societies is passed on through the male lineage. Thus, women may have the right to live on and farm the land, but do not necessarily have the right to own, inherit or make decisions on land related matters. Women gain land rights through a relationship with a male (often her father or husband), where the rights are temporary and end/change when the relationship with the male ends/changes. Patriarchy assigns different roles which shape the opportunities and constraints that men and women face in acquiring, accessing, owning, claiming and making decisions on critical resources like land.

Women in Sub-Saharan Africa do not have equal rights to make key decisions on land because they are considered to be mere “guardians”, holding land in trust for their sons (Uvuza, 2016). With limited or no decision-making power, women are unable to control how land can be used neither do they have a say on its outputs. This compromises women’s position in society and incapacitates them from meaningfully contributing to household welfare and national development in the long run.

These key issues noted in literature of gender inequality in land ownership were confirmed by baseline surveys that were conducted by this programme’s partners as they started to implement this programme in 2019. For instance, in Zimbabwe at baseline in three wards in Lupane district, only 5% of women had legal title and ownership of land. In Uganda specifically in the 9 sub-counties located in Mityana district it was noted that only 10 % of women had land ownership compared to their male counterparts. Across the four countries and five implementing partners, the baseline survey results revealed a common trend of unequal distribution of land rights between men and women, legal illiteracy among women and a relationship gap between the right holders (grassroots women), duty bearers and policy makers. The underlying cause was the resource dearth among government agencies to reach out to the communities and domesticate the provisions of laws that support women’s land and economic rights.

The main actors perpetrating these issues are positioned in public and private spheres, and generally hold power and authority in corrupt, negligent or abusive ways, applying 'clientizing' instead of partnering with grassroots women and their organizations. Socio-cultural and political dynamics such as cultural codes and harmful customary practices, local authorities (traditional or statutory) who lack knowledge and/or political will, stalled devolution and decentralization due to lack of resources for implementing the policies, are also creating root causes to inequal access to and control over land for grassroots women. The roles these actors play are well known and well documented and concentrate around an abusive use of power and influence. Within civil society however, there is little to no critical review and responsibility taken for the culture of exclusion and elitism that is often perpetuated in relation to community-based grassroots women and their organizations in these circles.

2.2 Objectives

This paper is focusing on a project which purpose was to enable the consortium partners Ntengwe for Community Development, Shibuye Community Health Workers in Kenya, The International Women Communication Centre (IWCC) in Nigeria, the Uganda Community Based Association for Women and Children's Welfare (UCOBAC) in Uganda and Survivors in Action (SIAZ) in Zimbabwe to advocate for women and girls' equal rights to land and property. It was grounded in the bottom-up approaches which are reversing barriers that hinder women's access to and ownership of land in the four African countries. The initiative was designed to leverage international frameworks such as the SDGs land indicators, specifically giving attention to SDG1, indicator 1.4.2 on tenure security; indicator 5.a.1 on women access to agricultural land and 5.a.2 on progressive legal frameworks that secure women's land rights at country level to improve grassroots women's access to and control over land. Other wider alliance initiatives, such as the Kilimanjaro Initiative on women's access to and control over their land will be reinforced. Taking into account the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGTs) and the African Union Framework and Guidelines and other relevant political instruments at global, regional and national level, the objectives of the project were as follow:

- To support rural women's struggles to secure their rights to use and control of land.
- To facilitate empowerment processes, including legal information to enhance grassroots women's literacy to exercise their land rights.
- To establish a critical mass between local authorities and grassroots women's organizations to access communal and private land for women's control and use.

- To foster local and regional policy advocacy platforms of grassroots women's organizations for effective implementation of gender responsive land policies, building on existing initiatives such as the AU commitment, SDGs and other relevant commitments to organize policy advocacy and change to produce gender just land and property rights.

2.3 Methodology

This paper will focus on the results of a multi countries project which aims at creating a pathway to economic justice on women's land rights to empower women in Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. The project is targeting grassroots women that are affected by unequal land and property ownership, to be at the forefront of demanding the implementation of the existing progressive policies to achieve equity and equality in property and land ownership. It has been observed that in all the four countries, governments have passed progressive laws to enshrine gender equity into land and property ownership. Additionally, all the four countries where the project is being implemented have ratified and signed international women's economic frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the African Union declaration on land, Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the context of National Food Security (VGGTs) among others. However, women remain without rights and control over land and property which is explained by the non-domestication of these progressive international and national frameworks whose main thrust is reducing inequity and building community resilience to climate effects and other external disasters. Therefore the collaborative project utilized the core competencies of Ntengwe and partners such as reach in resourcing advocacy, campaigns and community initiatives at the national and international and engaging a consortium of organizations with experience; proven track record in empowering grassroots women groups to build strong practices and partnerships that formalize and expand their public leadership in advancing gender just communities. The project worked directly with grassroots women and local communities in selected rural localities. In Zimbabwe, lead consortium partner Ntengwe for Community Development implemented the project in three wards of Lupane District (ward 22, Lupanda, 24 Kana Block and 25 Chimwara), while Survivors in Action in Zimbabwe (SIAZ) was in a total of six wards (four wards in Chitungwiza district and two wards in Manyame district). Consortium partner Shibuye Community Health Workers targeted groups of women in four Counties of Kakamega, Siaya, Bungoma and Homabay in Kenya. Furthermore, partner Uganda Community Based Association for Women and Children's Welfare (UCOBAC) worked in Mityana district and covered a total of nine sub-counties. In addition, the International Women's Communication Centre (IWCC) in Nigeria

implemented the same programme in Ilorin of Kwara state and worked with women from sixteen sub-local governments.

They used existing empowerment and capacity-building tools to mobilize local communities to realize equitable land governance and full realization of women's land rights. Ntengwe and partners built grassroots women's capacity to organize, document and advocate for their own priorities, mobilize their communities and partner with local authorities and service providers. This was undertaken through:

- the development of grassroots centered methodology to track and monitor the SDGs implementation (shadow reporting, grassroots data collection, evidence-based research and documentation, enumerating land ownership and control in poor communities and the formal and informal actors and institutions influencing communal land distribution and effective women-led strategies for accessing land);
- the coaching and peer exchange for grassroots women's groups driving the process of implementation of the SDG commitments at the local level in four countries taking into account the grassroots women's work within on-going land policy implementation;
- the formation of policy and advocacy coalitions, linking local authorities, grassroots women's organizations, professional land rights advocates (lawyers etc.) that establish a critical mass capable of accessing communal land tenure security for women's control and use;
- the use of innovative public policy training programs that significantly enhance grassroots women literacy and use of development policies and legal statutes to establish and defend their land rights;
- the building of strong partnership and alliance movement building at regional level, linking with existing platforms such as land alliances, multi-stakeholders platforms on land, local level using existing platforms such as women's land rights organizations and Community Practitioner Platforms.

This project recognizes that for both men and women land offers a productive resource on which livelihoods, security of life can be guaranteed hence the efforts by the partners to ensure that women gain ownership, access and control over land and property within these countries. In addition, the project takes land as an opportunity that can be used to create pathways for economic development as ownership of land enables women to invest in the land and use it as collateral in financial and capital markets. More importantly the project is also working to leverage the capacity of grassroots women to be at the epicentre of the implementation of policies and frameworks that ensure their economic,

property and land rights. This means that the project is dealing with the underlying cause of ensuring access to land which works as the engine for achieving development goals such as poverty reduction, reduced food insecurity and economic development that are envisaged in the international frameworks and national policies.

Lastly and most importantly, by developing a regional component using the Africa region example, building on existing initiative such as the AU commitment on 30% of documented land for women by 2025 or the Kilimanjaro rural women initiative, and an international regional exchange workshop to expose land rights activists to African strategies and successes in relation to collective organizing, policy advocacy and policy change to produce gender-just land, control and ownership, the project united women from across Africa with one common cause, to amplify the voice of African women against the tyranny of injustice with regards to land and property rights. In this sense it is working to bring the marginalized, socially, culturally and economically excluded grassroots women to the mainstream where they can challenge inequalities and champion their own development.

3. MAIN RESULTS

This project was critically important in that the experience of the five partners and four countries which implemented the project showed that through women's land rights legal education and capacity building on land rights and policies (Land laws, Sustainable Development Goals, Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, Land Acts, Kilimanjaro Initiative) women gained knowledge and utilized it to their own benefit and that of their families and communities.

3.1 Grassroots women's empowerment and leadership

The trainings on land rights, advocacy and lobbying and gender justice undertaken by the program enabled grassroots women to develop their own advocacy strategies which they are using to engage the relevant government departments to address the land rights issues affecting them. The training of grassroots women in Land laws, Sustainable Development Goals, Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, Land Acts, Kilimanjaro Initiative resulted in increased knowledge among grassroots women. This helped create a critical mass of women across countries who increased agency through advocacy for their rights armed with legal literacy and this compelled stakeholders to speak about these laws and support the grassroots women's struggles. Our key lesson from this is that when grassroots women engage based on knowledge and evidence, their

issues become more legitimate and acceptable than when civil society partners are on the forefront. In future, there is need to strengthen evidence gathering by grassroots women so that they use this evidence to power their advocacy issues.

The project directly worked with 5183 women and girls. In Zimbabwe, Ntengwe had 380 women actively advocating for their rights of ownership to land as well as assets accumulation which has led to 224 women directly owning land through Joint Land Ownership with their husbands, 60 women owning land through group approaches, thereby increasing their influence in decision making. Out of 966 women that SIAZ reached, 370 were actively advocating for economic justice and land rights. This has resulted in direct involvement of these women in the drafting and adoption of the 20-point Grassroots Women's key Land, Economic and Inheritance Rights Demands Advocacy paper that has widely been circulated among duty bearers as well as 240 other women. 4 grassroots women groups had been awarded gardening land in Tandaroni farm by traditional leaders. While in Kenya 27 women and girls were realized to have increased their participation in decision making in various levels. In addition to the above, women were also seen advocating in public spaces where they conducted advocacy awareness campaigns on women's land rights, economic justice, property and inheritance rights and during international commemorations. UCOBAC has been working with 6 paralegals to lead community level advocacy on women's land rights for economic justice. These have been trained in gender and the various legal that protect and strengthen women's land and property rights. In Nigeria, 100 women actively advocated for land and gained ownership giving them the opportunity to participate in decision making in the household and community levels.

The project also helped 1012 women in the four countries to gain ownership of land through different means such as secured land leases, which result in increasing productivity and contribution to the household economy on acquired land through their engagement in self-initiated grassroots women led income generating activities in the form of groups. This motivated the partners to strengthen these community lead initiatives resulting in grassroots women increasing their assets (utensils and small livestock). The overall objective of ensuring women own and control land spurred their agency in agricultural production, asset creation and food security. We learnt therefore that when women gain control of land, they tend to work tirelessly towards their household livelihoods and support and this tends to reduce their dependence on men and well as their vulnerability. We used this lesson and evidence to create awareness among women and stakeholders especially during commemorations of the inherent potential in women when they own productive resources such as land.

The partners in the project also sought to build sustainability by partnering women as leaders and implementors in the project. In some countries we had women as Community facilitators whose role was to facilitate all aspect of the project. In other instances, women were trained to monitor and track SDGs indicators, undertake research and apply tools such as the Gender Evaluation Criteria. This by nature increased women's agency and participation as they moved away from the idea of being mere beneficiaries of the project. We learnt that engaging women as partners helps build their confidence and generates awareness in communities of their potential resources in development. In this sense, communities do not become mere recipients of development but active contributors. In future this lesson will help engage communities through a human rights and participatory approach throughout the projects.

The project helped also in catapulted the targeted grassroots women into a larger regional network of like-minded organizations through the Women's Land Link Africa (WLLA) which is a close-knit network of grassroots women's organizations working on promoting grassroots women's rights to land, sustainable development and responding to disasters and climate change present in nine African countries (Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). This larger network can now be used as a larger vehicle for pushing for women's land rights and gender justice across countries. This grant therefore laid the string foundation for the continued struggle for women's land and economic rights.

3.2 Partnership's building/strengthening and advocacy work

The consortium partners used a number of approaches to motivate and compel governments agencies and other stakeholders such as traditional authorities to publicly acknowledge and invest in roles and contributions of grassroots women working to develop themselves and their own communities. These included:

- Ensuring the total participation of government stakeholders from stakeholder mapping through all the project phases enhanced ownership and control of the project. Collected data which was validated with government stakeholders created indisputable evidence that compelled government agencies to implement laws that promoted women's land rights. We used this lesson to continue to work together in data collection and validation with government stakeholders so that our advocacy efforts would not be based on disputable evidence. Our grassroots groups were also coached to use evidence when amplifying their voices and issues in the face of power.
- Provision of regular updates to the line ministries through sharing of monthly reports as well as during district stakeholder meetings. Once government stakeholders became aware of the self-

initiated livelihoods diversification project initiated by women, they were more motivated to invest in the roles of grassroots women as this also created a good name and results for their particular agencies. The major lesson was that government agencies are prone to supporting initiatives that are self-initiated by women and are showing results. This also helps build a good reputation for their ministries especially when they have been participating in the implementation of project activities. We will use this to increase the purview of government stakeholders that can be engaged in future.

- In some instances, where government stakeholders had mandates to fulfil obligations such as the commemorations of the International Rural Women's Days, we deliberately organized joint activities with them. These joint platforms enabled them to meet their obligations while at the same time working as safe advocacy platforms for grassroots women to relay their narratives in the face of power. This way, government stakeholders were compelled to engage and support grassroots women's issues and initiatives. Equally because we contributed towards supporting government stakeholders' mandates, they were motivated to invest in grassroots women's roles while at the same time helping meet our goals under this grant. The lesson we picked was that if CSOs design programmes that seek to complement government efforts as the main development player, government stakeholders become duty bound to support these initiatives as they help fulfil their duties. These become low hanging fruits that can be used as a launch pad for building relationships with government and opening up of opportunities to engage on more sensitive issues. We used this to start engaging government stakeholders in collaborating on women's rights before we engaged on the more sensitive issues of women's land ownership and control.

According to FAO (2018) the focus on land is an explicit acknowledgement that ownership of and/or control over land is critical for poverty reduction, food security, inclusiveness and overall sustainable development objectives in both rural and urban settings. In order to ensure that existing debates on land reform and the SDG targets and indicators requiring governments to report on increases in the number of women with land security take up these issues holistically, acknowledging their centrality to the economic empowerment and income security of millions of rural and urban poor women across the African continent, this programme did the following activities which also brought important lessons during the process for the five partners:

- Stakeholder mapping and participation in the project from the onset is key: Prior to project implementation, partners took time to undertake stakeholder mapping process to identify the

appropriate project beneficiaries and allies. This helped to identify the power brokers, movers and shakers when it came to women's land rights and to tailor make interventions that brought all stakeholders such as community leaders, government stakeholders, women, males, local authorities and like-minded CSOs. The key lesson here was that the power that hindered women's ownership of land was both formal and informal hence there was need to apply a holistic approach towards addressing the issue. We thus used this lesson to gain women's ownership of land both from formal institutions as well as from community leaders who traditionally retain predominant customary power over land.

- Simplifying and translating into local vernacular of international, regional and national statutes and regulations on land: The partnership was very aware of existing international, regional and national laws that are progressive and provides for women's land and economic rights. These were simplified and translated into local languages so that they became intelligible to grassroots women and local leaders. The major lesson was that if you communicate to people in their language the issues get simplified and accessible for all, which built confidence and brought the debate on land right to the doorsteps of communities compared to the ivory towers where jargon always maintains it. Grassroots women advocated for land from formal authorities as well as within their traditional leadership hence the result that women accessed land individually and as collectives within their communities.
- Generating evidence to amplify the existing debates on land: we strategically engaged relevant government departments in adopting tools such as the Gender Evaluation Criteria to collect data on land ownership patterns. The criteria evaluated existing land legislation as well as the Sustainable Development Indicators on Land. The evidence so generated was validated together with government partners so that the evidence became co-owned and indisputable. We eventually used this evidence to point to existing legal provisions that could easily be used to help solve the debates on land ownership which resulted in the domestication of land rights laws. Our key lesson was that advocacy requires a lot of undisputed evidence in order to compel duty bearers to play their part. We will use this lesson in future to evaluate gender disparities in such issues as access to credit, markets and inputs in other programmes.
- Using locally generated evidence and achievements to contribute to higher level debates on Land.

3.3 Challenges and lessons learnt

The key challenge in promoting women's ownership and control of land has always been the predominant cultural norms that treat women as minors and mere guardians of land. In order to overcome this, the partners in this project used male involvement of traditional leaders such as chiefs, village heads and spouses to ensure their understanding of the need to ensure gender equality in land ownership between men and women. These men, who have power over women traditionally and in terms of land governance were also trained in land laws and governance enabling spouse to appreciate the need to support joint ownership and the traditional custodians of land to also formally parcel out common land to women groups as plot holders. The key lesson from the project was that where all actors involved in land governance are engaged to explore both customary and formal pathways of promoting gender equality in land ownership, gradual support can be enlisted paving way for women to own land.

In addition, and ancillary to the foregoing argument, we also noted that the formal government agencies responsible for facilitating gender equality in land ownership in Africa can act as road blocks due to inadequate evidence and resources to implement existing and progressive policies on land. However, using evidence generation approaches such as the baseline surveys, gender evaluation criteria and monitoring of SDG land indicators, the partners motivated many land authorities to use the evidence and apply provisions in existing legislations across nations. Collaborative implementation with these agencies was helpful in buttressing the support from male spouses and traditional leaders hence the results from the programme. The key lesson for Civil Society partners is that there is need to develop reliable and valid research methods that can be validated by all partners. These can be used as a powerful information tool to engage local authorities and influence policy implementation.

The Coronavirus outbreak affected also the programming in the four countries. The lockdown and the subsequent banning of Informal Trading leading to grassroots women losing businesses products and life savings through running battles with the police. This situation also created increasing cases of gender-based violence. Women and girls suffered increasing cases of violence including spousal violence, child rape, sexual harassment at water points, transactional sex and name calling amongst others in the wake of COVID-19. As an example, 203 Cases in Zimbabwe (Lupane and Chitungwiza) were received between April 2020 and October 2020 which was a record increase as compared to an average of 3 cases of Gender Based Violence per month prior to COVID-19. The partners applied adaptive programming in that work from home cultures were adopted in response to the pandemic effects. Partners also adhered to government regulations and policies and ensured that programme staff were accompanied by government representatives to ensure compliance to Covid-19 regulations.

Decentralisation of meeting venues was also done as a way of reducing travelling distances by programme participants. UCOBAC in collaboration with local leaders and duty bearers organized and held radio talk shows on a popular local radio station called Mboona FM to ensure continuity of the project. Audiences were sensitized on land laws and policies, this enhanced and increased their knowledge levels on women's land and economic rights.

Engaging of the direct beneficiaries in the category of youth and adolescents has been a challenge as majority were away in school during the times of implementing project activities and few have interest in engaging on discussions relating to technical issues on economic and land rights. In some instances, project teams tailored training content and organized community training on land issues specifically targeting beneficiaries in the youth age bracket. In Uganda for instances, participants were introduced to basic subjects such as gender, Uganda's land tenure systems and their land rights as young people. In Zimbabwe, during commemorations, we also engaged youth to provide entertainment while using messaging to target them.

The programme experienced climate induced droughts during the two-year period of implementation. High food insecurity and water challenges negatively affected grassroots women as they spent most of their time searching for food and water hence exposing grassroots women and girls to food and water insecurity induced domestic violence. This was aggravated by grassroots women discriminatory land tenure system and policy implementation challenges as stated earlier on. All the four countries have good women rights related laws yet gender inequalities in land, housing, property rights and inheritance distribution remain a challenge for grassroots women. Duty bearers also pointed to resource challenges as a cause for non-domestication of laws to uphold women's land and economic rights. Through the implementation of the project, grassroots women became empowered enough to engage their male counterparts in addressing some of the challenges affecting their groups. They were advocating in public spaces for duty bearers to get their concerns and embraced platforms brought through joint actions such as the International Rural Women's Day as safe spaces to voice their concerns. This also served as key spaces to speak in the front of power given that policy makers and duty bearers alike graced such events.

3.4 Case studies

The project realised positive change in the lives of grassroots women in acquiring their land and economic rights. These have been achieved through advocacy trainings and engagement of relevant stakeholders and grassroots women leaders in the four countries. It was translated into an increase in the number of grassroots women gaining knowledge and utilizing this knowledge to their advantage.

There has been an increase in the number of women owning land in the four countries because out of the 4262 grassroots women, 1021 have gained land ownership. The project aim was to empower and strengthen grassroots women to have access to, control over and ownership of land and property. These change stories are informed by the baseline survey results that was conducted prior to programme implementation between March and May 2019 by all partners. Baseline results indicated that communities lacked knowledge and advocacy skills and some were not aware of their rights, therefore women and girls were not fully empowered to advocate for the economic rights. The interventions have motivated women to mobilise themselves to become assertive on land and economic challenges hindering their development and, in this case, there are cases of inheritance disputes that Allen and Esther from Uganda and Kenya overcame after acquiring advocacy skills. Of importance to note also is that Allen and Esther are now leading other women in their communities to advocate for their rights. Below are their stories that came out of the two years of the project implementation. Stories give different scenarios of how women advocated for land and became legal land owners.

Case of Allen, a Ugandan woman

In Uganda, women especially those in rural communities tend to perceive their rights to family property particularly their spouse's land secure as a result of bearing children in the home. This has left many women vulnerable and landless when they lose ties (due to separation or death) with their spouses because in most cases, they have no legally recognized documents to prove their ownership or control rights. Allen, a middle-aged widow with 5 children like many women suffered the fate of being deprived of the right to access the family land to grow food to support her family. This was as a result of Allen's late husband excluding her in decision making relating to their family property. In her own words she had this to say about her plight: *"My husband would usually take the key decisions concerning our land or property like for instance when it came to purchasing land, buying and selling of our agricultural produce. I was okay with this arrangement because he provided for the family welfare. I never imagined that I would not be able to freely use our land."* Allen's brother-in-law started threatening her with violence and death because he wanted her to vacate her family home. Due to fear of loss of her life, her children and the main source of livelihood – she sought help from the village local council who after listening to her story referred her to a community volunteer who was trained by UCOBAC in land matters. The volunteer worked with various leaders to ensure that the widow would obtain justice and also retain custody of all her children despite of the fact that she was not legally married to her late husband.

Case of Esther, a Kenyan woman

Through women land rights program, Shibuye expanded to Homa Bay County to carry out sensitization, advocacy and trainings on land succession, land leasing guidelines and land access and control for women and girls. It is through these meetings that Shibuye identified Esther Adhiambo Obudho, a grassroots women leader of Stepping Stone CBO from Kanjira location, Karachuonyo Constituency of Homa Bay County. Esther is a widow with 3 daughters. On 12th June 2019 Esther was among the widows and other women who attended the stakeholder sensitization on women land rights in Homa Bay County at Pala Social hall. Esther attended this meeting as a widow who was really affected with Land Disinheritance. Her father in-law and family had taken over Esther's Land for the past 3 years since she became a widow. She did not have any place to grow food. Esther's father in-law is a senior village elder. Luckily, he also attended the same forum on that particular day. Esther gave her sad testimony showing how the family had subjected her to poverty. She related how this was affecting her more as a woman living with HIV who needs to attend ARV clinics. This meeting built on Esther's testimony to give the real experience of Widows and land rights in the context of communities affected with HIV.

When Esther's father in-law stood up, he pleaded to be sorry. He shed tears and hugged Esther for the 1st time. He promised to give Esther her land and said she would be the custodian of the family title deed until the whole land has been subdivide formally through land survey. After the advocacy meetings communities, the father in-law gave Esther her a share of the land back, which she has fenced off for agricultural practices.

Already Esther brought her support group to help her till the land. Shibuye Community Health Workers gave Esther banana circus to plant for her food security. Esther has also planted tree nursery which she will sell some of the tree seedlings to the other farmers and she will plant some on the land. Esther is now the trainer on climate change adaptation and mitigation in Karaj Wong sub county.

4. CONCLUSION

Despite the progressive frameworks and instruments promoting women land rights in Africa, the lack of implementation of policies and the system of patriarchy which dominates social organization and most African societies remain pervasive and continue to discriminate against women when it comes to ownership and control of land resources. The lack of or inadequate knowledge on legal provisions that protect women's land rights has resulted in many women's loss of property and failure to benefit from their land-based enterprises particularly agriculture. Women continue to face several economic

injustices such as lack of access to finances or productive resource to sustain their businesses, social norms that limit women's participation in socio-economic and political spaces, patriarchal superiority which does not recognize women's land rights, threat of violence or harassment, due to ignorance of the law, lack of information on existing empowerment opportunities and how to maneuver through for justice at a minimal cost. By the end of the project in November 2020, the targeted grassroots women had improved access, ownership and control of productive assets including land, crops like coffee plantations, banana plantations, vegetable gardens and livestock such as cows, goats and pigs.

The trend and reporting from the five partners indicate that during the baseline surveys in 2019, women and girls were highly involved in reproductive roles than the productive roles which included cooking, taking care of family member hence they had limited time to engage in other developmental activities. In Zimbabwe the baseline survey revealed that decision making by women were done towards food purchase (44%), choice of meals (78%), clothing (51%), medication (59%) and education (35%) of children. It was also noted that women had less influence on high value assets like livestock (cattle), land and farming equipment (scotch cart, ox drawn plough). However, at the end of the reporting period in November 2020, across the five partners, the programme realized a gradual increase in number of women making influential decisions towards handling of financial resources, food provision, participating in community activities for example nominated in development committees. In Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe women who had acquired land are playing a big role in provision of farm products like sweet potatoes, coffee plantations, vegetables which are being used for consumption at household level and income generating purposes.

The project has therefore helped build onto the practice that when women gain secure ownership of land, they tend to invest a lot in its production, household, food, education and property needs. The partners recommend that while the ownership and control of land is necessary, there is greater need to support women with the capacity to increase production, access finance, reliable water and markets. This will act to motivate other women to advocate for their rights to land and increase the resilience of women to respond to food insecurity, disasters and climate change. The partners must also strengthen the WLLA, a grassroots women led platform for peer learning and for advocacy building which aims at fostering grassroots leaders to become advocate for women land rights and promote tools used to secure tenure, as a regional mechanism for building the critical mass of grassroots women and organizations that leverage space and amplify the voice of the African women in their struggles for women's land rights and gender equality across sectors. WLLA could then become a vehicle to enhance partnership building at regional level with ongoing civil society initiatives such as the Kilimanjaro

Initiatives and its Charter of Demands, or with the Africa Land Policy Center through its gender component. It is also important to look into initiatives led by Regional Economic Committees to promote women's land rights.

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7. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the authors were part of the project implementation team in Zimbabwe, Kenya and Uganda with the support of M. Ramarason for the regional component of the work.

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