

A photograph of a woman with a joyful expression, wearing a white headwrap and a blue and red striped shirt. She is holding several green plants, likely okra, in front of her. The background is a lush green field of similar plants under bright, natural light.

**NTENGWE  
FOR  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

**The “Pathways to Economic Justice on  
Women’s Land Rights”  
Synthesis Report**

## WOMEN AND LAND RIGHTS

Strategies, Results, and Impacts of the “Pathways to Economic Justice on Women’s Land Rights.”



With the support of the African Women’s Development Fund, Ntengwe for Community Development in Zimbabwe has worked over the past two years in partnership with Shibuye Community Health Workers in Kenya, the International Women’s Communication Centre in Nigeria, the Community Based Association for Women and Children Welfare (UCOBAC) in Uganda, and Survivors in Action in Zimbabwe to fulfill women’s rights to have access to, and control over, land.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Ntengwe for Community Development's success on "The Pathways to Economic Justice on Women's Land Rights" would not have been possible without the support of dedicated individuals and organizations committed to women's rights issues.

On behalf of Ntengwe for Community Development (Ntengwe), we would like to offer our heartfelt thanks to the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) and our partners in Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zimbabwe for their support and collaboration of the Pathways to Economic Justice on Women's Land Rights project.

Since its inception, AWDF has always shown genuine interest in the work, activities, and results of this project that has become increasingly integrated with gender equity and empowerment of grassroots women in the 4 countries.

Our sincere thanks go to the African Women's Development Fund for their huge contribution to the success of the work implemented in the four countries. Their enthusiasm and commitment will doubtless lead to further cooperation and will contribute to boosting grassroots women's capacity to advocate from an informed point of view to further recognition of land rights. In addition, we would like to thank AWDF for capacitating Ntengwe in various aspects, including resource mobilization, financial management, monitoring, and evaluation which has ensured continued sustainability, not only for Ntengwe as an organization, but it has also strengthened the capacity of our partners and our communities.

My thanks also go to our partners, Shibuye Community Health Workers in Kenya, the International Women's Communication Centre (IWCC) in Nigeria, Uganda Community Based Association for Women and Children's Welfare (UCOBAC) in Uganda, and Survivors in Action in Zimbabwe, who are at the heart of the action. Their presence in the field is a vital factor in the collection and dissemination of information with regards to all grassroots women in the four countries. As a result of this project, our network is expanding and spreading interest to even greater numbers of women's land rights activists. This is largely due to the commitment and determination of our partners and AWDF.

Our gratitude goes to the Governments, policymakers, government officials of Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, who, despite their multiple commitments, assisted the consortium partners throughout the project duration.

Finally, we wish to thank directors, project officers, rights activists, and grassroots women leaders for showing the commitment to advancing women's land rights.

## EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

Here we are, almost at the end of a vibrant two-year project. This brief opens with an introduction as to why women's land rights are so important. Today the post-2015 Development Agenda is at the center of discussions within the international community on intensifying efforts to take up the world's major development challenges, including women's land rights. Gender equality and women's empowerment feature prominently in the post-2015 Development Agenda, and in the Commission on the Status of Women 64 and Beijing +25. Women's land rights are critical for women's own advancement first and foremost, but also to Africa's development, highlighted by the Africa Union Declaration on Land Issues and Challenges, which among other commitments resolves to strengthen security of land tenure for women and which requires special attention.

The global financial crisis, the food and fuel crisis, large-scale land-based investments, climate change, and pandemics such as COVID-19, all contribute to the pressure on land and increase the threats to women's land rights.

The experiences of the last two years during the "Pathways to Economic Justice on Women's Land Rights" have already shown community-driven development processes to women's access and control over land, in which grassroots women have developed their capacity as community information managers and monitors, and how their actions for land rights have helped build more sustainable and resilient economies in their communities.

Together with our partners, we offered grounded solutions for women's access to, and control over, land, and we offered innovative solutions to accelerate medium to long term advocacy for policy change in support of legislative frameworks in favor of women holding title deeds to their land, which today has become the basis of COVID-19 recovery for many women in the region.

This synthesis report comprises a summary of the work accomplished over the last two years and a range of success stories.

I would like to wish you all a happy reading.

Elisabeth Markham  
Executive Director



## **WHY FOCUS ON WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS?**

While the majority of women rarely had full land rights, the patriarchal system on land tenure closed doors on many ways of negotiating women's land ownership. Land is considered a major source of wealth, social status, and power. In African countries where women are the major workforce on the land, the security of the rights over this key resource is a fundamental pre-condition of household food security and equitable economic development. Unfortunately, in many such countries, including Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, these rights are in fact, not secure. Women in these countries face a great deal of vulnerability – they are both the major producers of food and responsible for the management of their households, but they do not have real decision-making power in their families, or real rights over land.

## REGIONAL LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Ironically, it has also been observed that in all four countries governments have passed progressive laws to enshrine gender equity into land and property ownership. These include Uganda's National Land Policy (2013), the Constitution of the Republic Uganda 1995 as amended, The Land Act Cap 227, Land Acquisition Act Cap 226 and the Succession Act Cap 162, Constitution of Zimbabwe, National Gender Policy, the Deeds Registry Act Chap 20:05 Agricultural Land Policy, Transitional Stabilisation Programme and Communal Land Act in Zimbabwe as well as the Land Act, National Land Policy and Marriages and Divorce Act, for example.

However, although formal legislation is very clear in promoting gender equality and discouraging discriminatory practices against women, in practice, these discriminatory practices still prevail in customary systems.

It is for this reason that lead consortium partner Ntengwe for Community Development is implementing the program to promote local implementation of these progressive frameworks and policies in three wards of Lupane District (ward 22, Lupanda, 24 Kana Block, and 25 Chimwara), while Survivors in Action in Zimbabwe (SIAZ) is implementing the program in a total of six wards (four wards in Chitungwiza district and two wards in Manyame district). Consortium partner Shibuye Community Health Workers is implementing the program in four counties of Kakamega, Siaya, Bungoma, and Homabay in Kenya. Furthermore, partner Uganda Community Based Association for Women and Children's Welfare (UCOBAC) in Uganda is implementing the program in Mityana district and covers a total of nine sub-counties. In addition, the International Women's Communication Centre (IWCC) in Nigeria is implementing the same program in Ilorin of Kwara state and works with women from sixteen sub-local governments.

# “THE PATHWAYS TO WOMEN’S LAND RIGHTS” KICKOFF



The “Pathway to Economic Justice on Women’s Land Rights” is a very important and justified project in that it is empowering women in Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zimbabwe who 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.

In March 2019, the “Pathways to Women’s land Rights” kicked off during a three-day inception meeting with representatives from International Women’s Communication Centre (Nigeria), Shibuye Community Health Workers (Kenya), Uganda Community Based Association for Women’s and Children’s Welfare (Uganda), Survivors in Action Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe), and Ntengwe for Community Development which is also the leading partner in the consortium.

During this meeting, Ntengwe reaffirmed their commitment to supporting and collaborating with all partners, especially in the areas of capacity strengthening, using proven approaches, such as learning and sharing, peer-to-peer, monitoring and evaluation, and strengthening in financial processes. During this meeting, the consortium partners developed common understandings of the program, developed work plans and result frameworks, exchanged approaches to capacity building of all technical aspects of the implementation of the project, including establishments of common priorities for reporting, documentation, and publication requirements over the two-year project period.

# RAPID AND COMPELLING SUCCESS



Having taken the time to lay foundations for the structure of this project, namely the roles and responsibilities for each partner and the days, times, and places for meetings, working with key stakeholders in each country to organize activities, raise awareness on women's land rights with the aim of encouraging duty bearers to take responsibility to incorporate gender perspectives into their national policies and actions plans, grassroots women have also developed their capacity as community information managers and monitors in women's access to and control over land.

To date, as a result of this program, women in the four countries have begun to access land, socially organized, and use the group approach for advocacy as well as to own assets and livestock. The program is important in that it recognizes that for women the land offers a productive resource on which livelihoods and security of life can be guaranteed. Hence the efforts by the partners to ensure that women gain ownership, access to, and control over, land and property within these countries. The program consequently addressed Sustainable Development Goals; SDG 1, 2, and 5. Women at grassroots are adopting various strategies to secure their land rights in the four countries.



# KENYA

## Traditional Chiefs realize women's land rights



In Kakamega, counties where patriarchal customary law typically prevails, women are often significantly devalued compared with men. Over the last two years, Shibuye Community Health Workers worked with traditional leaders, who in the past chose to ignore equitable or shared land rights. Women's rights and customary law were often understood as being in opposition to one another. But, as enshrined in Kenya's constitution, more traditional leaders have taken the initiative to normalize discrimination against women in terms of land ownership. Chiefs moved to the forefront to work hand-in-hand with local government to cement the equal ownership of land. A greater commitment by the traditional leaders to land and feminist movements, to women's land rights and the implementation that strengthened women's natural resources as a basis of improved livelihood, has been observed.

A sharper understanding of women's land rights issues leading to recommendations for best practices and actions to advance women's rights to land, has increased and new guidelines, approaches and commitments were made thereof by traditional leaders, with more women now holding the title deeds over land.

# NIGERIA | The impossible was made possible



The International Women's Communication Centre (IWCC) in Nigeria is implementing the same program in Ilorin of Kwara state and works with women from sixteen sub-local governments. In Nigeria, land tenure laws remain discriminatory, leaving most women landless and in poverty. When women are able to own land rights, they are frequently lost due to divorce, separation, widowhood, and cultural beliefs. IWCC, over the last two years, through advocacy and the implementation of local, national and global policies that will ensure progressive improvement, security, and protection of women's rights to land, has seen more women empowered to claim their rights. With the development of a paralegal manual on land dispute resolution, more women now have shared ownership of land with their husbands. Whereas, before this program, women could not advocate and manage conflict on land acquisition. Most of the disputes were around borrowed, purchased, or inherited land for economic usage, which has caused a lot of controversies in terms of land acquisition. However, IWCC organized capacity strengthening of women leaders who are now able to address these challenges without going to court or to the police.

# UGANDA | Mission to Empower



In Uganda, land is a key productive asset and is central in promoting the livelihoods of several families, especially rural smallholder farmers who depend on subsistence agriculture for their survival. The agricultural sector, being the backbone of the country's economy, provides about 70% of employment, contributes approximately 21% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 90% of the total export earnings (UBOS, 2016). Despite the development of numerous national-level land policies, laws, and guidelines, there is a great gap between law and practice.

Implementation of these is lacking at local level, increasing insecurity of tenure which condemns many women to hunger, poverty, and vulnerability. In the last two years UCOBAC has managed to empower women in Uganda to be at the forefront of demanding the implementation of the existing progressive policies to achieve equity and equality in property and land ownership.

To date, women have begun to access land, socially organize, and use the group approach for advocacy as well as own assets and livestock as a result of this program. UCOBAC details a story of how their awareness campaigns on land have managed to recover land for women with legally binding agreements. As a result of six-weekly radio talk show on a local radio station called Mboona FM, with a coverage of 14 neighboring districts (Mityana, Mubende, Kassanda, Kibaale, Mpigi, Sembabule, Kalangala, Masaka, Luwero, Kiboga, Wakiso, Nakasongola, Kabarole, and parts of Kampala), and with a listenership of 2-3 million, local governments are now offering essential services for women on land laws, rights, and information on succession and inheritance.



# ZIMBABWE

Promoting dialogue

## Survivors in Action in Chitungwiza Harare

The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 and all the subsequent Land Acts, Inheritance Laws and Policies passed through the Act of Parliament in Zimbabwe before the 2013 New Constitution of Zimbabwe, asserted that men have the right to own and inherit land, housing, and properties, while women will inherit and own land through their spouses or elderly sons or male relatives in line with traditional and cultural belief systems. Traditionally, women in Zimbabwe had no rights to own land, or means of production to undertake economic activities. Land in Zimbabwe is distributed and inherited through the male lineage, while women can only enjoy land access, control and management by being part of a nucleus or extended family. 90% of land in Chitungwiza and Manyame District is owned by men while the elite learned women, widows, and other minority interest groups own the remaining 10%.

Survivors in Action worked closely with the government, key stakeholders, traditional leaders, and grassroots women groups to spearhead lobbying for women's land ownership. The grassroots women groups went out of their way to demand the review of the Cultural Justice System that has stopped women from owning, managing, and controlling land. As a result of this initiative, an increase of knowledge of land rights among grassroots women, traditional leaders, and key stakeholders has been noticed.

There is an increase of grassroots women being formally appointed into 3 traditional leadership councils, and more women are now influencing Local Authority Planning, Policy-making, and budgetmaking processes. Traditional leaders are acknowledging that development will not continue to happen without the involvement and participation of grassroots women. Hence, peer educators are now being given time to educate community members on women's land and economic rights during community gatherings. The Tandaloni Village Head and his leadership council defied the odds by allocating 3 hectares of land to 56 grassroots women. 56 women are now landowners: they own, manage, and access the land collectively as women.

# ZIMBABWE

## Most significant change



## Ntengwe for Community Development

Ntengwe has been implementing the “Pathways to Economic Justice on Women’s Land Rights” program in Lupane’s three wards, since February 2019 with the overall aim of empowering women so that they gain access, control, and ownership, of land and property. As opposed to the patriarchal societies where land ownership is solely aligned to the male counterparts, the project has made strides in putting an equilibrium in the wards of operations and things are not going to stay the same, as knowledge on land rights has been imparted in the concerned areas. The policy gaps that were missing on land distributions have been filled through the trainings and stakeholder engagements. The traditional leaders (who are the custodians of the patriarchal setup and male dominance tradition) have played a significant role in facilitating the land documentation exercise after they have been unlocked through the trainings. According to the baseline survey of April 2019 conducted under the Pathways program, only 5% of women had full control of, and access to, land - with the majority serving under their male counterparts. The advocacy work undertaken during the first year of implementation changed the scenario and has since seen women taking the lead and advocating for joint ownership of land with their husbands.

Women Affairs, Local Government, Agritex, and the local authority, which is the Kusile Rural District Council, were engaged to facilitate the trainings, community dialogue, and joint activity monitoring. This was purposively done so that the documentation process of land will be done from an informed point of view, with an informed policy framework with a good foundation being laid down. These interactions with the community evoked widespread advocacy work by the trained women as supported by the traditional leaders in the communities. This changed the mindset of both the traditional leaders and the men who eased up their grip on biased land ownership. The knowledge dissemination neutralized the traditional dynamics on land-ownership, hence the processing of the land ownership documents (Permits and Offer letters) went into motion. The project worked mostly with the District Lands Officer and the District Development Coordinator in this regard. This resulted in 194 offer letters being processed with the old ones, which had one name appearing, being nullified. This caters for 16% of the women having land ownership, as compared to the 5% at the beginning of the program.

This development brings about the results that are first of its kind in the district, where women are now able to have a voice in decision making concerning the land that they work on. Having women's names appear on the ownership paperwork makes them gain significant status in a household set up. The ultimate result will even ensure women increase their chances of accessing credit facilities from the financial institutions as they can produce their land ownership documents as collateral, unlike before when they would struggle to access such privileges. Finally, the women have the papers appointing them as landowners, which is the main aim of the program.

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# **CASE STUDY**

Lupane in Zimbabwe is a district in which poverty is widespread. Women in this district represent the poorest and the majority of these live in poverty. Informal settlements cover vast areas of the district. It includes two communities: Chimara and Kana block. Here some 5,000 families live in severe poverty. These areas are wildlife areas, but over the years and due to migration, it has become a battleground for residents who claim their rights to remain. Over the past two years, a group of 30 women residents from these communities have struggled for their land rights. With the support of the “Pathways to Economic Justice on Women’s Land Rights”, women and traditional leaders are building up their capacity and claiming space in the land regularization, making policymakers understand the real meaning of gender equality and women’s empowerment. In the case of these area’s regularization, a permanent committee was set up (with at least 60% female representation) to plan and monitor the entire process and it serves as a space for dialogue around issues that arise during the process. And also a space to address and face many disputes. The committee comprises different institutions and community leaders.

Together, they are monitoring the regularization through regular meetings. In these meetings, many women residents who are in leadership positions are participating, as well as women leaders who are not formally part of that committee. They are acting collectively to make visible their demands, demonstrating their capacity both to understand the technicalities of the process and to act on knowledge from their own communities. Some of the most important outcomes from the process are:

- the recognition that community leaders, especially women leaders, are the ones who know their communities best and are, therefore, best placed to effectively and practically contribute to the design and implementation of public policy;
- that community leaders are proving that they can, and should be, more than just beneficiaries, and should have roles that are more than mere support to land specialists; they are proving that they themselves are specialists in finding solutions for their own communities and solving disputes among residents;
- finally women’s groups are learning from the process that it is possible and beneficial for all to create a dialogue between different stakeholders and sectors in a horizontal process of knowledge-sharing, in which differences are not just recognized but also respected, and women in Chimara have received documents papers showing them as land owners.

# UNITED WOMEN FROM ACROSS AFRICA



Lastly, and most importantly, the program has united women from across Africa in one common cause - to amplify the voice of African women against the tyranny of injustice with regards to land and property rights. A regional meeting with Women Land Link Africa was hosted by Ntengwe for Community Development, with funding support from the AWDF and the Huairou Commission.

Since 2004 the Huairou Commission and its African members have laid the groundwork to empower grassroots women's groups to take the lead in organizing their communities and to influence public policies to ensure access to, and control over, land, housing, and other key productive resources through Women's Land Link Africa (WLLA). WLLA is a self-help platform by grassroots women, for grassroots women striving to change the course of their own development by gaining secure access to land and housing through innovation and collective action. This group is distinguished by its grassroots foundation and its use of grassroots land and housing rights as the critical entry point for women's empowerment.



WLLA disbanded about 10 years ago and has thereby lost the momentum of fighting as a unified movement for women's land rights. This project gives the opportunity for the WLLA members to gather and look at strategies on how to revive the platform and take it to a higher level by identifying like-minded partners and to start raising grassroots expectations in the African agenda, through the participation in the Africa Land Policy Conference, as an example. This joint action also enabled the partnerships to consolidate the capacity and strength of grassroots women and increased their voice on land issues across the attending countries.

During the conference, the attendees agreed that it was important to work in a more organized and structured way to make WLLA more presentable and accessible as an organization. They redefined WLLA as a:

- movement building coalition of grassroots women;
- platform for collective action;
- peer learning community;
- strategy driven global coalition that is based in communities but has over arching regional strategies;
- a means of advancing the regional strategy.

Ntengwe for Community Development was identified and voted upon to be the host organization of WLLA for Ntengwe to host and distribute any WLLA funds, to develop a website for WLLA, and put in place communication systems. Ntengwe, on behalf of WLLA, is to raise funds for a strategic plan. Once the strategic plan is in place, WLLA can fundraise for other agenda items.

# LAND RIGHTS & WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT CENTRAL TO COVID 19



The experience of Ntengwe for Community Development and its partners has already shown that the current COVID-19 crisis is having a direct impact on women's economy. The COVID-19 pandemic presents a devastating threat to the lives of women's livelihoods in Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Owning land, or having access to productive land, provides the grassroots women with a way to secure their income. Therefore, strengthening women's land and property rights is critical and helps them from being unfairly insubordinated in political and economic situations that increase the effects of marginalization and poverty. The measures such as curfews, lockdowns, etc., imposed by governments to fight against the spread of the COVID 19 virus, impacted strongly on the grassroots women groups with regards to protecting their rights to land and housing, bringing an increase in eviction because of watchdog groups not being able to work for example. Thanks to AWDF's initiative to avail budget changes towards equipment and tools during this crisis, Ntengwe and partners have purchased equipment and tools that have helped and facilitated our working from home more effectively. We are now in a better position to raise our voices virtually to get attention paid to gender-specific risks and impacts of the outbreak. Collectively, we are at the forefront, helping to rebuild more sustainable and resilient economies for grassroots women.