

# Women's Rights and Leadership Forums

## ADVANCING THE LAND RIGHTS OF PASTORALIST WOMEN IN NORTHERN TANZANIA



*" We women have new knowledge that enables us to defend our land through the right channels. We may not know how to read and write, but we surely have tongues and we will make use of them."*

- Ndawasai Natisile, WRLF ward representative, Malambo Village, Ngorongoro District.

In northern Tanzania, new grassroots groups called Women's Rights and Leadership Forums (WRLFs) are mobilizing women and men in pastoralist communities to promote and defend local land rights. This briefing<sup>1</sup> highlights some of the WRLFs' achievements and strategies; asks how these forums, which appear to be a part of an emerging grassroots social movement for land rights, can be further supported; and explores whether such forums could be replicated elsewhere in the region.

## PASTORALIST WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS IN TANZANIA

Equitable land access and ownership are central to women's economic empowerment and livelihood sustainability.<sup>2</sup> Tanzania has long been a regional leader in terms of constitutional and statutory provisions for equality in women's and men's land rights.<sup>3</sup> Currently, the language on women's land rights in the third draft of the revised Tanzanian Constitution is arguably the strongest in the region.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, pastoralist women in Tanzania remain highly vulnerable to violations of their land rights and other rights.

While circumstances vary in each context, there are customary laws and norms, statutory law enforcement practices, and justice system weaknesses that marginalize pastoralist women, effectively denying them rights to land and a voice in public decision making. For example, often women cannot take part in decisions regarding livestock, which are typically the community's primary source of wealth. National laws recognizing women's rights to own and inherit land often go unenforced, and many women (and men) lack the information and resources needed to secure and document land tenure. Thus, despite national law, in practice, pastoralist women are often only able to meaningfully participate in public decision-making and enjoy land rights at the discretion of a male head of household.

Pastoralist women also share in their overall communities' vulnerability. Across northern Tanzania's rangelands, pastoralist communities traditionally manage grazing land in extensive, adaptive systems governed through collective governance institutions. Historically, and continuing today, these communities are subject to land loss and access restrictions due to, among other factors, the establishment of government protected areas; land-grabbing for (foreign and domestic) investment in fuel and food crops as well as wildlife tourism or hunting; population growth; and failure of authorities to adhere to agreements regarding land use and access. While there are legal protections, technical obstacles to registering land and weaknesses in the justice system also contribute to tenure insecurity.

Recently, pastoralists have become more vulnerable to land loss due to increased migration of people and a greater and more complex mix of land uses (e.g., for agricultural cultivation). Thus new solutions are needed for communities to equitably, peacefully and adaptively secure and sustainably manage their land and natural resources in this increasingly complex and crowded environment. These are community-wide challenges, and thus, pastoralist women's land rights are closely tied to pastoralist peoples' land rights.

*" As a community, our biggest challenge is land grabs, and we need to address this as a priority. Women are at the forefront in trying to secure our land through meetings with communities and with government. Our stand is that we will not give up a single meter of village land"*

- Daniel Saiyori, Sub-Village Chairperson and traditional leader, Oloipiri Village, Ngorongoro District

## WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS IN EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

While each context is distinct, pastoralist women's struggles in Tanzania mirror those of pastoralist – and non-pastoralist – women in many places in East and Southern Africa. Indeed, from local to international levels there are a growing number of efforts, instruments, and initiatives focused on gender mainstreaming, gender equality, and women's rights, many with a focus on land rights. In all cases, diverse approaches are needed in order to respond to the (historical, cultural, political, legal) context of the peoples concerned. For example:

- In Mau Forest, Kenya, an awareness-raising campaign around new constitutional provisions for women's land rights helped harmonize customary and statutory justice systems, and led to the first cases of women being elected as elders within the Maasai and Kalenjin communities.<sup>5</sup>
- In Kenya and Malawi, women have formed watchdog groups to monitor and hold leaders accountable, including for the treatment of women's land and property rights.<sup>6</sup>
- In Tanzania and Uganda, national civil society organizations are working to promote women's land rights (e.g. Tanzania Gender Networking Programme and the 'Mama Ardhi' – 'Mother Land'- campaign, and the Uganda Land Alliance).
- At regional and international levels there are new instruments that acknowledge women's right to land (e.g., Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights).
- In Kenya, the Constitution of 2010 and three related land laws adopted in 2012 protect women's right to land.

There are approximately 55 WRLFs actively engaged in Kiteto, Simanjiro, Loliondo and Longido Districts.<sup>7</sup>

While change is being seen, women and pastoralist communities remain highly vulnerable to discrimination, land loss, and land access restrictions. In this context, the emergence of Women's Rights and Leadership Forums in Tanzania provide an effort to strengthen women's ability to collectively organize and mobilize to confront these challenges. In this context, it is important to understand how to appropriately support their growth and development, and to explore whether or not, and how, this innovative approach can be adopted elsewhere.

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND LEADERSHIP FORUMS

Courageous women in northern Tanzania, supported through legal training and technical support from Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT) and Pastoral Women's Council (PWC), are forming WRLFs to, among other things, collectively address threats to women's and communities' land rights, demand accountable governance, and ensure participatory decision making, including with respect to land management.

WRLFs vary in size and are flexible, grassroots forums. They are comprised solely of women, with members and leaders democratically elected by women in the village.



## ACHIEVEMENTS OF WRLFS IN NORTHERN TANZANIA

WRLFs have helped pastoralist women move from being mostly observers in public decision-making, including on land issues, to being leaders in what appears to be an emerging grassroots social movement for land rights. Their influence has been greater and farther-reaching than expected.

### Examples Of Strengthened Women's And Communities' Land Rights

Achievements	Evidence of Change
<p>Nurturing women leaders within the community</p>	<p>Through WRLFs, women have taken on leadership roles and gained confidence in their own leadership abilities.</p> <p><i>"I know I am a leader... I am courageous and am now able to stand in front of men and say 'you are the ones who are wrong' – sit down!"</i></p> <p>- Miriam Oleberika, Malambo Village, Ngorongoro District</p>
<p>Increasing women's presence and influence in public decision making, including with regard to livestock management</p>	<p>Village governments report that more women are active on village councils and committees. WRLFs are also working with the customary (male) leadership, as well as being recognized as a customary leadership institution in their own right.</p> <p><i>"Nowadays there are no meetings held without women present. We are becoming satisfied that men are respecting our rights in meetings. If a woman has an issue to raise at a meeting, she can do so even if the meeting is dominated by men. We have come to realize that the best tool to use to get our voices heard is the women's forum."</i></p> <p>- Nembaso Lesayori, WRLF Chairperson, Oloipiri Village, Ngorongoro District</p>
<p>Enhancing recognition and acceptance of women's rights among local leaders (though some men and women still resist this change)</p>	<p>Women are influencing and strengthening the capacity of customary and statutory governance bodies to recognize and protect women's rights. For example, women are working with customary leaders to ensure women's rights are reflected in the ongoing effort to document customary law in the form of a Maa Constitution.</p> <p><i>"... We've gained a lot now and we've formed a women's council. But we thought to make it work, we need to be unified with our men. From there the truth will prevail. So we called upon the village government to join with the traditional leaders. We met and talked at length, and afterwards we came to understand each other better. Hear me, these things will only work if we all sail together in one boat."</i></p> <p>- Nembaso Lesayori, WRLF Chairperson, Oloipiri Village, Ngorongoro District</p>

Achievements	Evidence of Change
<p>Mobilizing, leading, and taking action to defend both women’s property rights and community land rights</p>	<p>Women across northern Tanzania are finding innovative ways to defend their land and property rights. For example, in Kimotorok Village (Simanjiro District) women protested by padlocking the village government office for more than a month until the village government agreed to address their concerns (for the full story see Box 1). In Loliondo (Ngorongoro District), women have been at the forefront of recent community actions to defend local land rights to a 1,500 km<sup>2</sup> hunting block that covers 12 villages and that was allocated to a foreign-owned game hunting operation. One effort included collecting more than 2,000 ruling party membership cards and delivering this message to local district and party officials: “Here are your cards. Your party and government have abused our rights and taken our land, and we can no longer vote for you. If and when you return our land to us, we may come and ask for our cards back. Until then we will not vote for you.”</p> <p><i>“Without security of land tenure, we Maasai will disappear as water runs through sand. Realizing this, women have become very strong in the struggle to acquire land tenure security in this district.”</i></p> <p>- Susanna Koila, Activist and women’s leader, Sakala Village, Ngorongoro District</p>
<p>Facilitating substantial expansion of women’s ownership of land plots</p>	<p>WRLFs have helped almost 500 women (most of whom are widows) acquire land plots for homes, farms, and small businesses, based on an acknowledgement letter from the village council.</p> <p><i>“We were given seminars on our rights and about land rights, and this has really opened our eyes a lot, that is, to know that we do have rights. We learned that land belongs to everyone, not just a few. We learned that even in a polygamous family, each woman has rights to property. So now women are trying to get their own plots and are securing their own property.”</i></p> <p>- Helena Mbarnoti, WRLF representative, Loiborsiret Village, Simanjiro District</p>
<p>Supporting women’s economic empowerment</p>	<p>WRLFs are contributing to community-level women’s income-generating groups by providing a focal point for knowledge sharing, financial management, and access to information on rights. They are also using their knowledge of their rights to put pressure on local decision-makers to improve women’s economic opportunities (e.g., in tourism) and girls’ access to education.</p> <p>In Loiborsiret village members of the WRLF raised funds, hired transport and went directly to the Regional Commissioner to lodge a public complaint against a local prominent authority (male) who was illegally giving land away to migrants. The women run a cattle dip business in Loiborsiret, which is how they were able to raise funds for this advocacy initiative.</p>
<p>Promoting solidarity within and across communities, particularly around land issues</p>	<p>Women helped bring together women leaders, (male) customary leaders, and village leaders in a Joint Village Leadership Forum, which, among other things, has helped resolve an intra-village conflict regarding contested acquisition of community land by a private tourism company.</p>

## Box 1: Closing the Door on Unfair and Inequitable Practices

In Kimotorok Village (Simanjiro District), women were struggling, with little luck, to have their land rights recognized by the Village Council. At the same time, village land was being given by the Village Council to pastoralist men from other regions who were coming with their livestock during the dry season. When the dry season ended, these men did not leave (and were not asked to leave by the Village Council) because they had lost grazing land in their own areas. Women in the WRLF agreed that it was unjust for men from other regions to be given land while their own land claims were going unheard. They decided to take action. They organized themselves, contributed money to buy padlocks, and locked the doors to the village government office. These courageous women kept the doors locked and took control of the office for an entire month, with women from the WRLF taking on the role of village chairperson, until the issue was resolved. A Village General Assembly was called (this is the decision-making forum open to all village residents). Prior to the Assembly, the women burnt land allocation papers that had been issued in violation of proper procedure, and said that the allocation of land had to start afresh and follow correct procedures. Ultimately, the General Assembly agreed that, while the pastoralists from other regions could stay and graze their animals during the dry season, they would have to move on afterwards and would have no rights to the land.

### A grassroots social movement?

WRLFs are illustrating the vast potential for change when empowered and courageous women work with and help lead their communities. There appears to be a growing social movement for pastoralist women's and peoples' land rights at the village level in northern Tanzania, and WRLFs seem to have played an important role. However, there are challenging, open questions about how this nascent movement can be supported, and whether or how it can grow and be replicated elsewhere.

*" Now women stand and speak directly to the meeting... This effects a positive change, especially in regard to the community regaining control over the land and trying to own it. Women are particularly strong on this, stronger than men. The attitude of women to land has been noticed by the customary (male) leadership, who have admired their strength, determination, and knowledge, and who have decided to join them in the struggle for land rights"*

- Merwoyo Nepapai, WRLF member, Mokilal Village, Ngorongoro Conservation Area



## INNOVATIONS AND STRATEGIES CONTRIBUTING TO WRLFs' ACHIEVEMENTS

There are important innovations and strategies that are contributing to the achievements of WRLFs. For example, WRLFs are working with both customary and statutory leadership and governance institutions. Through this engagement, they are supporting locally appropriate harmonization of customary and statutory rights, and universal human rights, in ways that strengthen women's rights and the collective rights of the pastoralist system.

At the same time, WRLFs are not formal governance institutions. Rather, WRLFs provide a dedicated, parallel space solely for women. In this space, women are able to demonstrate their courage and capabilities to respond to pressing threats to individuals' and community land. In turn, this helps women and men in the community understand women's importance and accept their new roles and powers. WRLFs are becoming their own 'customary' institutions, rather than trying to be formally embedded within existing bodies.

WRLFs receive appropriate, respectful legal training and technical support from partners that they have a strong, trusting relationship with (i.e. UCRT and PWC). In turn, WRLFs work with both women and men, to promote changes in existing norms around the treatment of women's rights. WRLFs have also closely linked legal empowerment with economic empowerment. WRLFs typically raise the funds needed to take action (e.g., hiring cars and traveling to distant government offices). They also recognize that women need access to their own resources in order to have the flexibility to participate in public decision-making or action.

Finally, WRLFs are developing over time, allowing women to emerge as leaders, to develop their agenda and demonstrate their capabilities, and allowing women and men to accept changing norms.

## CHALLENGES WRLFs FACE

Despite, and in some cases because of, their notable successes, WRLFs face a number of challenges. They are spread over a wide geographical area and there is rapidly growing demand to support new forums and to strengthen existing ones. This creates new challenges in terms of resourcing and for effectively monitoring WRLFs' impacts.

There are also challenging balances to be struck between maintaining flexible, endogenously developed forums, and establishing clear roles and external linkages. WRLFs, and the nascent social movement they are part of, would likely benefit from forming horizontal and vertical links with other forums and with supportive national, regional, and international institutions. At the same time, if not approached carefully, such linkages could undermine or co-opt their grassroots, locally-driven agenda. Further, as more WRLFs are established, and as existing ones grow larger, they may need to clarify their roles in the community, while maintaining their adaptability to changing community and political circumstances.

Finally, realizing deep and widespread change takes time. Despite WRLFs' relatively wide acceptance, some men and women continue to question and resist the expansion of women's rights and power. Lack of confidence, exacerbated by high levels of illiteracy, also continue to make women reluctant to take political positions in the village, such as village chairperson.



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING, EXPANDING, AND REPLICATING THE WRLF APPROACH

## Supporting and learning from WRLFs in northern Tanzania

- In all cases, ensure that any external support is invited, respectful, appropriate, and well-informed; WRLFs must be led by local women.
- Assist women in maintaining a dedicated forum in which they can, on their own terms, learn, share information, develop positions and strategies, and identify and nurture leaders.
- Support women's capacity and opportunity to effectively engage with customary and statutory decision-making bodies, including regarding livestock and land management.
- Promote women's economic empowerment, including through livestock ownership and management.
- Make legal awareness and other training available to WRLFs, other women and men in the community, and to decision-makers at the village, ward, and district levels.
- Consider expanding availability of mediation and legal support, e.g., through strategic partnerships for paralegal support.
- Design tailor-made training to enable women to actively take political positions and to become leaders, empowering them to become more involved in decision-making.

## Fostering a social movement for pastoralist women's and peoples' land rights

- Continue to support the development and expansion of individual WRLFs (see above).
- Assist WRLFs in making links and strategic partnerships amongst one another, as well as with relevant national and international initiatives, ensuring appropriate and respectful engagement that does not undermine or co-opt their local agenda.
- Support WRLFs in continuing to work with both women and men, and with both customary leadership and statutory decision-making bodies.
- Help WRLFs explore innovative, long-term solutions for securing adaptive rangeland management in the context of mixed land-use, competing land pressure, and in-migration (in addition to addressing more immediate threats).
- Focus on making existing WRLFs effective before expanding to new areas.

## Exploring replication of the WRLF approach in the region

- Explore what factors are contributing to the forums' achievements, including to better understand how to support them and to identify what elements might be replicable in other contexts.
- Further explore pastoralist women's and peoples' (land) rights initiatives and movements in other places, to understand what is working elsewhere, how history and current context inform the effectiveness of different initiatives, and what key gaps and challenges are.
- If there is interest among WRLFs, seek ways for forums in Tanzania to share knowledge with other pastoralist women and initiatives.
- Explore ways that the WRLF approach could support other poor or vulnerable women, including farmers and agro-pastoralists.
- Make a long-term commitment to continue follow-up and to document the successes and impacts of WRLFs.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This briefing summarizes key findings from a 2013 review carried out by Carol Sorensen, which explored the impacts and achievements of WRLFs. It also draws on the experience of PWC and UCRT as well as selected papers on lessons and experiences regarding women's land rights more broadly in East and Southern Africa (as cited). The briefing was prepared by Jessica Campese and Paine Eulalia Mako.
- <sup>2</sup> cf. Maliasili Initiatives (2012) "Securing Community Land Rights: Local experiences and insights from working to secure hunter-gatherer and pastoralist land rights in Northern Tanzania". Pastoral Women's Council (PWC) and Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT) with Maliasil Initiatives. Tanzania: Arusha; and Carpano, F. (2010). "Strengthening Women's Access to Land: The Tanzanian experience of the Sustainable Rangeland Management Project". Prepared for IFAD. Available at: [http://www.ifad.org/english/land/women\\_land/WomenAndLand\\_Tanzania\\_Report\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.ifad.org/english/land/women_land/WomenAndLand_Tanzania_Report_Eng.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> cf. Maliasili Initiatives 2012
- <sup>4</sup> PWC and UCRT are members of Mama Ardhi, a campaign calling for the inclusion of specific clauses in the new constitution to protect women's rights to own and inherit land. <https://www.facebook.com/MamaArdhi>
- <sup>5</sup> The campaign was supported by Landesa and USAID. Description adapted from: Tenure Security Learning Initiative for East and Southern Africa (TSLI-ESA) (Global Land Tool Network, IFAD, and UN-HABITAT). (No date). "Strengthening Women's Access to Land – Learning Note". Available at: <http://www.glttn.net/index.php/resources/publications/publications-list/finish/3-glttn-documents/165-strengthening-women-s-access-to-land-learning-note-eng-2012>
- <sup>6</sup> Adapted from: ACORD, Oxfam, and ActionAid. (2012). "The Right to Land and Justice for Women in Africa" Report from the African Women's Land Rights Conference (30 May – 2 June, 2011, Nairobi, Kenya). Available at: <http://www.acordinternational.org/silo/files/the-right-to-land-and-justice-for-women-in-africa.pdf>; and TSLI-ESA (nd.)
- <sup>7</sup> As of October 2014



Through education, economic empowerment, and strengthened rights and leadership skills, the Pastoral Women's Council addresses the root causes of social and gender injustices and helps pastoralist women become self-reliant so that they can take control over their own development. PWC has been working with pastoralist communities in northern Tanzania since 1997.

[www.pastoralwomenscouncil.org](http://www.pastoralwomenscouncil.org)



The Ujamaa Community Resource Team works with approximately 60 pastoralist, agro-pastoralist and hunter-gatherer communities in northern Tanzania to support sustainable natural resource management, including a focus on strengthening land rights and local capacity for natural resource governance. Since the 1990's, UCRT has used a wide range of legal and institutional measures to secure pastoralist lands and resources.

[www.ujamaa-crt.org](http://www.ujamaa-crt.org)



Maliasili Initiatives is a non-profit organization that supports the growth, development and performance of leading civil society organizations and social enterprises working to advance sustainable natural resource management practices in Africa. Through long-term and adaptive organizational development services, targeted bridge financing, and technical expertise, Maliasili Initiatives is helping our partners achieve their full potential and scale up their impact – for people and nature.

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