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Strengthening Land Tenure Security and Women's Land Rights in Kenya

Policy Analysis, Implementation Gaps, and Gender-Transformative Pathways

Esther Obaikol and Augustine Iraoya

Key Messages

- In Kenya, the legal foundation for land governance was transformed by the country's 2010 Constitution and reinforced by several subsequent laws that provide important entry points to strengthen women's land rights.
- However, gaps in implementation remain significant; titles held by women represent less than 2 percent of all titled land, and women are less likely than men to own agricultural land and be named on title documentation. Evidence shows that women's tenure security improves when legal recognition is matched with accessible implementation.
- The community land agenda is equally urgent; community land covers a major share of Kenya's land area, especially in arid and semi-arid lands, yet the transition from former group ranches to registered community land has been slow.
- Investments should focus on five mutually reinforcing pathways: 1) strengthening sex-disaggregated land administration data, 2) supporting community land registration and inclusive bylaws, 3) combining legal literacy with paralegal support and alternative justice systems that meet constitutional standards, 4) promoting gender-transformative household and community approaches that shift norms around inheritance, joint titling, and decision-making, and 5) integrating women's land rights into agricultural productivity, climate resilience, and market systems interventions.

Context and Background

The contemporary landscape of land tenure in Kenya reflects a layered history of precolonial customary tenure, colonial land dispossession, post-independence titling, and constitutional reform. In pre-colonial systems, land was commonly governed through kinship, clan, lineage, and community arrangements. Rights were often held as a "bundle of rights" under which different persons or groups could have overlapping rights to cultivate, graze, collect resources, transit, or occupy land. These rights were socially embedded and flexible, but they were also mediated through gendered authority structures that often privileged control through male lineage.

The colonial administration disrupted these systems by creating a dual land regime: settler-controlled areas governed by English property concepts and "native" or trust areas where African communities were governed under customary law and administrative control. The Swynnerton Plan of 1954 intensified this shift by promoting land consolidation, adjudication, and individual freehold titles as a route to agricultural modernization. Its economic logic was that individualized tenure would incentivize investment, collateralization, and land markets. Its social effect, however, was to convert many customary trusteeship arrangements into male-headed registered ownership, weakening the secondary and use rights through which women (including widows and daughters), younger men, pastoral users, and other dependents had accessed land (Alden Wily 2018; Manji 2014).

Post-independence governments largely continued to treat individual titling as the preferred model for modernization. The 2009 National Land Policy and the 2010 Constitution marked a decisive normative break from that legacy. The Constitution recognizes public, community, and private land; elevates community land to constitutional status; and requires land law, policy, and practice to eliminate gender discrimination in law, customs, and practices relating to land and property in land (Government of Kenya 2010).

This brief therefore starts from a central proposition: Kenya's problem is not primarily the absence of progressive legal norms. The core challenge is the uneven translation of those norms into routine land administration, community governance, household decision-making, inheritance practice, dispute resolution, and agricultural and climate programming.

Why Land Tenure Security Matters for Kenya's Development Priorities

Land is central to Kenya's economy, food systems, livelihoods, and social identity. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics reported that agriculture contributed 22.5 percent of nominal GDP in 2024, while modeled estimates from the World Bank and International Labour Organization show that agriculture remains one of Kenya's largest employment sectors (KNBS 2025; World Bank 2026). Kenya is also still predominantly rural: World Bank data indicate that approximately 70 percent of the population lived in rural areas in 2024 (World Bank 2025).

Secure tenure affects agricultural investment decisions. Farmers who believe their rights are secure are more likely to make longer-term improvements, such as soil conservation, tree planting, irrigation, terracing, and other climate-smart investments. Conversely, insecure rights can discourage investments whose returns accrue over several seasons, especially investments made by women, whose claims may be mediated through husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, or community authorities.

Tenure security is also linked to access to finance. In Kenya, land titles remain a preferred form of collateral for formal lending. When women's rights are not documented or when their claims are framed only as use rights (not ownership rights), they are less able to leverage land for credit, agricultural inputs, enterprise development, or climate adaptation investments. For this reason, women's land rights are best understood as a foundation for inclusive agricultural transformation, household resilience, food security, and women's economic empowerment.

These priorities align with Kenya Vision 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and SDG Target 5.a, which calls on governments to undertake reforms giving women equal rights to economic resources, including ownership and control over land, property, inheritance, financial services, and natural resources in accordance with national laws.

Policy, Legal, and Institutional Framework

Constitutional framework

The legal regime governing land in Kenya is anchored in the 2010 Constitution of Kenya, which establishes the normative foundation for land governance. Article 60 requires land to be held, used, and managed in a manner that is equitable, efficient, productive, and sustainable. It identifies the principles of land policy as equitable access to land, security of land rights, sustainable land management, transparent and cost-effective administration, sound conservation of ecologically sensitive areas, and the elimination of gender discrimination in law, customs, and practices related to land and property. Article 61 classifies all land as public, community, or private, while Article 63 recognizes community land. Article 40 protects the right to acquire and own property individually or in association with others, and Article 66 permits state regulation of land use in the public interest.

The Constitution provides strong protection for women's land rights. Under Article 2(4), any law, including customary law, is invalid to the extent that it conflicts with the Constitution. Customary rules and practices relating to land ownership, inheritance, access, use, participation, and benefit must therefore comply with the Bill of Rights and the land-policy principles set out in Article 60. Any custom, tradition, or norm that discriminates against women in relation to land has no legal effect to the extent of that inconsistency.

Statutory framework and key points for women's land rights

Although Kenya's statutory framework contains multiple protections, these operate differently depending on whether the issue relates to registration, disposition, matrimonial property, inheritance, or community land governance. This distinction is critical because concerns around spousal rights, contribution, and customary inheritance arise from the interaction of several laws, rather than from a single statute.

Table 1: Core legal framework and implications for women's land rights

Law/policy	Key provisions	Relevance for women's land rights	Implementation gap or caution
Constitution of Kenya, 2010	Articles 2(4), 27, 40, 60, 61, 63, 67, 68, and 159.	Makes equality and nondiscrimination binding; recognizes community land; requires elimination of gender discrimination in laws, customs, and practices related to land.	Constitutional standards do not automatically change local practice; legal empowerment and accountability are needed.
National Land Policy, 2009	Recognizes historical injustices, gender discrimination, and the need to secure customary and community rights.	Provides policy basis for gender-equitable land reform, registration, and institutional reform.	Implementation depends on statutory regulations, institutional capacity, budgets, and political will.

Land Registration Act, No. 3 of 2012	Unifies land registration; recognizes co-ownership and relationships between spouses; Section 93 links spousal co-ownership and matrimonial property to the law on matrimonial property.	Supports joint registration and documentation of spousal interests. Earlier law also listed spousal rights as overriding interests, but this was narrowed by the 2016 amendments.	Practice still tends to register land in the name of the household head unless registrars and adjudication teams actively require sex-disaggregated and spousal information.
Land Act, No. 6 of 2012	Regulates public and private land; Section 79(3) protects the matrimonial home in the context of charges by requiring execution or assent by the chargor and spouse living in the matrimonial home.	Protects against secret charging of a matrimonial home and creates due diligence obligations in mortgage transactions.	Protection depends on proof that the land is a matrimonial home and on financial institutions and registrars enforcing consent requirements.
Matrimonial Property Act, No. 49 of 2013	Defines matrimonial property; Section 2 defines contribution to include monetary and nonmonetary contribution; Section 7 vests ownership according to contribution; Section 12 restricts alienation of matrimonial property without spousal consent; Section 14 creates rebuttable presumptions around trust between spouses.	Recognizes domestic work, child care, companionship, management of family business or property, and farm work as contributions; provides the main framework for division of matrimonial property.	The contribution requirement can be difficult for women to prove, especially where unpaid labor and care work are not documented. Courts have applied the contribution standard unevenly.
Community Land Act, No. 27 of 2016	Gives effect to Article 63; recognizes customary land rights; establishes community assembly and community land management committee; requires inclusive community governance and respects national values including the two-thirds gender rule.	Provides a legal route for registering customary/community land and embedding women's participation in governance, bylaws, benefit-sharing, and land use planning.	Slow registration, elite capture, limited information, conflicts, and costs have impeded the transition from group ranches and trust lands to community land.
Law of Succession Act, Cap. 160	Provides intestacy rules, but Sections 32 and 33 exclude agricultural land, crops, and livestock in specified districts and defer distribution to the deceased's applicable community or tribal custom.	Inheritance is a primary route to land acquisition; the Act's general equality promise is weakened by the customary-law exception in specified districts.	The exception affects mainly ASAL/pastoral and agropastoral districts where agricultural land, livestock, and crops may be the main estate assets. Discriminatory customs can leave widows and daughters without secure rights.

Source: Government of Kenya 2009, 2010, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2013, 2016a.

Note: ASAL = arid and semi-arid lands.

Reconciling spousal rights with the Matrimonial Property Act contribution standard

Spousal protection under Kenyan land law involves two related but distinct questions. The first is protection during the duration of the marriage: can one spouse sell, transfer, lease, mortgage, or otherwise use matrimonial property as collateral for a loan without the other spouse's knowledge or consent? The second is division of property upon the dissolution of marriage: what share of matrimonial property does each spouse receive?

During marriage, the law seeks to prevent secret alienation of matrimonial property—the unauthorised sale, transfer, lease, mortgage, or other disposal of matrimonial property without the other spouse's knowledge or consent. Section 12 of the Matrimonial Property Act restricts alienation of matrimonial property without spousal consent. Section 79(3) of the Land Act also provides that a charge of a matrimonial home is valid only where the relevant document is executed by the chargor and any spouse living in that matrimonial home, or where there is evidence that such spouse assented to it. In this sense, spousal consent is an administrative and transactional safeguard.

Upon the dissolution of the marriage, Section 7 of the Matrimonial Property Act applies a contribution-based standard. Contribution includes both monetary and nonmonetary contributions, including domestic work and management of the matrimonial home, child care, companionship, management of family business or property, and farm work. This is progressive because it recognizes unpaid and reproductive labor.

However, it still places evidentiary burdens on the spouse claiming a share. As Human Rights Watch and Kenyan women's rights organizations have noted, women often struggle to quantify and prove that they provided unpaid care work, farm labor, and household management in court (Human Rights Watch 2020; KELIN 2019).

The practical implication is that spousal consent and the contribution standard should not be treated as inconsistent or mutually exclusive. Spousal consent protects matrimonial property from unilateral dealings during the marriage, while the contribution standard is used to determine each spouse's beneficial share when matrimonial property is being divided. The policy gap is that women may have real but undocumented beneficial interests during marriage and may face difficulties proving those interests later. Programmatic responses should therefore support joint registration, spousal disclosure during transactions, household land records, wills, simple documentary evidence of contributions, and paralegal assistance for women seeking to assert matrimonial property claims.

Institutional framework

Land governance is shared across several institutions. The State Department for Lands and Physical Planning, within the Ministry of Lands, Public Works, Housing and Urban Development, is the main national administration responsible for land registration, land records, surveying, physical planning, valuation functions, and the National Land Information Management System, known as Ardhisasa. The National Land Commission (NLC), an independent constitutional commission established under Article 67, manages public land on behalf of national and county governments, advises on land policy, monitors land use planning, conducts research, and investigates historical land injustices.

The relationship between the Ministry and the NLC has historically generated institutional friction, especially around registration, title issuance, registry management, public land management, and information systems. The Supreme Court's 2015 Advisory Opinion clarified that land registration functions remain primarily with the national executive, while the NLC has constitutional responsibilities for public land management, policy advice, monitoring, and historical land injustices. The operational lesson is that land reform requires coordinated work planning, clear protocols, and data sharing between the Ministry, NLC, county governments, the judiciary, and civil society.

Situation on the Ground

Formal land categories and registry integrity

Kenya's land tenure system now recognizes public, community, and private land. Private land has historically received more administrative attention through adjudication and titling. Yet decades of corruption, incomplete records, double allocations, missing files, overlapping claims, and land grabbing have weakened confidence in the registry. Digital reforms through Ardhisasa are a major opportunity to improve transparency and service delivery, but digitization alone cannot create gender-equitable records. If historical records are male-dominated, digitizing them without corrective data protocols can reproduce the same exclusion at scale.

Community land and the group ranch transition

Group ranches were a legal form of property ownership introduced mainly in Kenya's pastoral areas under the former Land (Group Representatives) Act. They allowed a defined group of members to hold ranch land through elected group representatives, usually for communal grazing and livestock-based livelihoods. In practice, group ranches often became sites of elite capture, uneven membership recognition, male-dominated decision-making, and pressure to subdivide pastoral rangelands into individual parcels. The 2010 Constitution and the Community Land Act created a pathway for such lands to transition into registered community land, with the community collectively holding the title and managing the land through a community assembly and elected Community Land Management Committee (CLMC).

The transition has been slow. Monitoring by Namati and the NLC reported that, as of May 2023, only 46 of 315 undissolved group ranches had fully transitioned to registered community land, which represents about 14 percent of such group ranches. The main barriers to this transition include conflicts among group members, financial constraints, lack of information on transition processes, and registration challenges (Namati and NLC 2023).

The delay has high gender and livelihood costs. Until community land is registered and governed through inclusive bylaws, women's membership, use rights, participation in land use planning, and access to grazing, water, forests, household plots, and benefit-sharing can remain unclear or controlled by male-dominated governance. Community land registration should therefore be treated not only as a titling exercise but also as a governance reform process.

Gender gap in documented ownership

In the debate over women's land rights in Kenya, the most important distinction is between actual access, self-reported ownership, beneficial interests, and documented ownership. Women may have use rights, spousal interests, customary claims, or joint beneficial interests that are socially recognized but not reflected in the register. Where those interests are undocumented, women face high burdens of proof in disputes, divorce, succession, compensation, land acquisition, and financial transactions.

The Kenya Land Alliance's disaggregated analysis of title deeds issued between 2013 and 2017 provides a clear depiction of the formal registration gap. Table 2 presents the data by recipient category to underscore the distinction between land area and number of titles.

Table 2: Kenyan land title issuance by recipient category, 2013–2017

Recipient category	Land area covered by titles issued (hectares)	Share of titled land area	Number of titles issued	Share of titles issued
Women-only owners	163,253.498	1.62%	103,043	10.30%
Men-only owners	9,903,304.372	97.76%	865,095	86.50%
Joint women–men ownership	35,586.127	0.35%	19,313	1.93%
Other entities	27,560.725	0.27%	12,648	1.27%
Total sampled titles	10,129,704.722	100.00%	1,000,099	100.00%

Source: Kenya Land Alliance, Land Issuance Disaggregated Data Analysis (2018).

The data demonstrate that formal titling during the 2013–2017 period overwhelmingly favored men. Women received about 1 in 10 titles but only 1.62 percent of titled land area, suggesting that women's titles were concentrated in smaller parcels. The very low proportion of joint women–men titles also suggests that joint registration and spousal documentation were not systematically embedded in the registration process. This does not mean joint ownership did not exist in practice; rather, it means that many joint or spousal beneficial interests were likely undocumented and therefore harder to prove.

Evidence from the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey: Self-reported ownership and documentation

By capturing self-reported ownership and documentation, the 2022 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey provides evidence to complement the Kenya Land Alliance's data on formal title issuance. The Survey shows that 27 percent of women and 34 percent of men own land either alone or jointly. However, when agricultural land is separated from other assets, women are much less likely than men to own agricultural land alone, and women who report land ownership are less likely to be named on title documentation (KNBS and ICF 2023; KIPPRA 2024).

Table 3: Selected indicators on land ownership and documentation

Indicator	Women	Men	Interpretation
Own any land, alone or jointly	27%	34%	Men report higher land ownership overall, but the gap is larger when documented agricultural ownership is examined.
Do not own agricultural land	75%	66%	Most women do not own agricultural land, while many men also lack land, especially younger men awaiting inheritance.
Own agricultural land, alone	3%	24%	Women's rates of individual agricultural land ownership are very low compared with men.
Among women who own agricultural land, no title deed	62%	N/A in this indicator	Reported ownership often does not translate into documented legal control.
Among women who own agricultural land, name appears on title deed	13%	22% among men who own agricultural land	Documentation remains a major barrier to enforceability and access to collateral.
Do not own nonagricultural land	93%	Approx. 91%	Nonagricultural land ownership is also limited, especially for women.

Source: KNBS and ICF (2023); KIPPRA (2024); Food Systems Dashboard (2025).

This evidence confirms the need to distinguish "access" from "ownership" and "ownership" from "documented ownership." A woman may cultivate land, manage household food production, and be locally considered entitled to use a parcel, but if her name is absent from the title, register, community land membership register, or succession documents, her rights are vulnerable when the marriage breaks down, the husband dies, land is acquired for public purpose, compensation is paid, or a household seeks credit.

Customary law, bridewealth, and inheritance

Customary law remains a powerful force in rural land relations. Many Kenyan communities follow patrilineal inheritance norms under which land is expected to pass through the male line. Daughters may be viewed as marrying out of the birth lineage, while wives may be regarded as outsiders whose land claims are mediated through husbands or sons. These norms are not uniform across Kenya, and customary law is dynamic, but they continue to affect how families and local dispute resolution bodies interpret women's claims.

Bridewealth or dowry is relevant to this customary framework. In some settings, bridewealth may be intended to recognize the daughter's value and strengthen the social legitimacy of marriage. However, studies of women's land rights in Kenya indicate that dowries can reinforce the view that a daughter has received her "share" through marriage or that she has transferred from her birth family to her husband's family. This can reduce her claim to inherit land from her father's estate and make her access to land dependent on the stability of her marriage (KELIN 2024a; Landesa 2009). Under the Constitution, however, bridewealth cannot lawfully justify discrimination in inheritance, ownership, or control of land.

The persistence of trusteeship language also requires careful treatment. Historically, men were often described as trustees of family land, while women held guaranteed use rights. Legally, Kenya's post-2010 framework rejects any interpretation of trusteeship that deprives women of equal rights. Practically, however, land can be registered in one man's name, while women's use rights are not recorded, spousal consent is not enforced, or local elders treat widows and daughters as temporary or derivative land users. The issue is not that modern law still authorizes male trusteeship over women's rights, but that administrative practice and social norms may continue to convert women's socially recognized rights into undocumented, hard-to-enforce claims.

Key Challenges

Implementation gap and administrative capacity

Kenya's most significant challenge is the gap between progressive law and actual implementation. Land administration remains affected by incomplete records, costly transactions, delayed registration, missing files, corruption risks, contested boundaries, weak public awareness, and uneven county-level capacity. These barriers affect all citizens but disproportionately affect women, the poor, pastoralists, widows, divorced women, youth, and people with secondary or seasonal land rights.

A second administrative constraint is the absence of routine sex-disaggregated land administration data. The Kenya Land Alliance audit was influential precisely because routine official data were not consistently available to show who receives titles, over what land area, under what form of ownership, and through what process. Without these data, it is difficult to track progress toward constitutional equality, SDG 5.a, and agricultural transformation outcomes.

Legal pluralism and the succession exception

The Law of Succession Act is central, as inheritance is a major pathway through which land is acquired. Although the Act's general framework is intended to govern intestacy and protect dependents, Sections 32 and 33 create a significant exception. Section 32 excludes agricultural land, crops, and livestock in specified districts from the ordinary intestacy provisions, and Section 33 ensures that the distribution of excluded property is governed by the law or custom applicable to the deceased's community or tribe.

The specified districts include West Pokot, Turkana, Marsabit, Mandera, Wajir, Garissa, Tana River, Narok, Samburu, Isiolo, Lamu, and Kajiado. These districts are largely ASAL, pastoral, or agropastoral areas, though they may include both communal rangelands and individual or household parcels where adjudication and subdivision have occurred. The legal problem is that the excluded property—agricultural land, crops, and livestock—may be the principal estate of the deceased. If discriminatory customary rules are applied in such cases, widows and daughters can be excluded from the most economically valuable assets (Government of Kenya 2012c; KELIN, 2019).

This challenge should not be framed as a rejection of customary law. Rather, the task is to support constitutionally compliant customary justice and inheritance practice. Chiefs, elders, clan leaders, paralegals, county administrators, and courts should be supported to apply these laws only when consistent with equality, dignity, property rights, and nondiscrimination.

Matrimonial property and proof of contribution

The Matrimonial Property Act's recognition of nonmonetary contribution is progressive, but it also creates evidentiary challenges. Women's contributions to land acquisition and improvement often include farm labor, child care, domestic work, household management, unpaid work in family businesses, and social support that enables a spouse to earn income. These contributions are real, but they may not be recorded in receipts, bank statements, purchase agreements, or title documents. As a result, women may be required to litigate the value of their labor after the relationship has ended, when evidence is limited and social pressure is high.

This underscores the importance of joint registration, spousal declarations during land transactions, household asset inventories, simple contribution records, will-writing, and community-level legal literacy. The goal is not only to win disputes after they arise but also to prevent women's contributions from being made invisible.

Community land, elite capture, and subdivision pressures

The Community Land Act provides an opportunity to secure communal tenure, but implementation is vulnerable to elite capture. In some group ranch areas, influential actors have pushed for rapid subdivision into private parcels before inclusive community governance, membership registers, and bylaws are settled. This can exclude women from membership lists, weaken collective rangeland management, fragment grazing corridors, and create unviable parcels in pastoral economies (Santini 2025; Namati and NLC 2023).

These concerns are particularly relevant for arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) where pastoral livelihoods depend on mobility, negotiated access, dry-season grazing, water points, and shared natural resources. Tenure reform that ignores the ecology of pastoral systems can produce insecurity, even where it creates individual titles.

Access to justice, gender-based violence, and social sanctions

The formal Environment and Land Court is essential for legal precedent and accountability, but it is often costly, adversarial, and geographically inaccessible for rural women. Alternative Justice Systems (AJS) and customary dispute resolution are more accessible but may be male-dominated and apply discriminatory norms unless mediators are trained and monitored. Women who assert land claims can also face social sanctions, intimidation, or gender-based violence (GBV), particularly widows resisting eviction or divorced women seeking shares of matrimonial property (Human Rights Watch 2020).

A credible access-to-justice model should therefore combine legal literacy, paralegal accompaniment, rights-compliant AJS, referral pathways to formal courts, psychosocial and GBV referral services, and public education targeting men, elders, religious leaders, chiefs, and land officials.

Climate, investment, and development pressures

Climate change is changing land use in ASALs and increasing competition over water, grazing, and arable land. Droughts and erratic rainfall push pastoralists into new routes, increase farmer–herder tensions, and complicate boundary adjudication. Women in female-headed households are particularly vulnerable where they lack secure rights to invest in irrigation, drought-resistant crops, tree planting, or alternative livelihoods.

Large-scale infrastructure, renewable energy, conservation, carbon markets, and corridor projects also target community lands. Where land is unregistered, communities may face weak bargaining power and inadequate compensation. Where women are excluded from negotiations, compensation and benefits may be captured by male leaders or household heads even when women lose access to firewood, water, grazing, cultivation areas, medicinal plants, or household plots.

Opportunities and Promising Approaches

Interventions that are implementation-oriented, evidence-driven, and gender-transformative offer potential to support women's land rights and intersect with agricultural transformation, food systems, livelihoods, and climate resilience.

Legal empowerment linked to practical support

Legal literacy is necessary but not sufficient to support land rights. Women and men need to be aware of constitutional, matrimonial, succession, and community land rights. However, evidence on legal empowerment shows that knowledge is most effective when paired with practical support: paralegals, documentation assistance, mediation support, help navigating land offices, and referral to lawyers or courts where needed (Landesa 2013; Namati 2014).

The most promising model is therefore a "legal-empowerment-plus" approach, which includes community legal education, household dialogue, paralegal support, dispute resolution, will-writing clinics, joint titling assistance, and targeted support during community land registration and succession processes.

Rights-compliant Alternative Justice Systems

Kenya's Judiciary has recognized AJS as part of a people-centered justice architecture. This creates an opportunity to work with elders, chiefs, community mediators, religious leaders, women leaders, paralegals, and courts to create constitutionally compliant pathways for local justice. The goal is not to replace courts, but to ensure that community-level dispute resolution is accessible, timely, affordable, and aligned with equality, dignity, and women's property rights.

Community land registration as a gender-transformative governance process

The Community Land Act creates structured entry points for gender-transformative implementation, including through community mobilization, membership registers, election of CLMCs, development of community bylaws, land use planning, benefit-sharing rules, natural resource governance, and dispute resolution mechanisms. Each step can either reproduce exclusion or transform it.

A strong community land-registration model should require the inclusion of women in community membership registers; accessible and adequately publicized community meetings; facilitation in local languages; and the systematic documentation of widows, divorced or separated women, daughters, youth, persons with disabilities, and holders of secondary or overlapping rights. Registration should also be supported by gender-responsive community by-laws and clear rules governing the distribution of compensation, conservation payments, tourism revenues, carbon-finance proceeds and benefits derived from grazing areas, water sources, and other communal resources.

Community governance institutions should comply with Kenya's two-thirds gender rule. Under Article 27(8) of the Constitution, the State must take legislative and other measures to ensure that not more than two-thirds of the members of an elective or appointive body are of the same gender. Article 81(b) applies the same principle to elective public bodies. The rule is gender-neutral: neither men nor women should constitute more than two-thirds of the relevant body. In settings where women have historically been underrepresented, it operates in practice as a requirement that women constitute at least one-third of the membership, without preventing women from attaining equal or majority representation.

In the community-land context, the two-thirds gender principle should be applied to Community Land Management Committees, adjudication and registration teams, dispute-resolution committees, benefit-sharing bodies and other elected or appointed structures exercising authority over community land. The Community Land Regulations expressly require elections to Community Land Management Committees to take account of the two-thirds gender rule, together with cultural diversity, special interests, youth and persons with disabilities. The Regulations also apply the rule to community representatives co-opted to certain land-dispute committees.

Compliance should involve more than numerical representation. Women should be able to attend meetings, receive information in accessible forms, speak and vote freely, contest leadership positions, participate in negotiations and sign or scrutinize agreements affecting community land. Meeting times, venues, notice procedures, quorum rules and facilitation arrangements should therefore be designed so that domestic responsibilities, mobility constraints, literacy levels and prevailing social norms do not prevent women from participating meaningfully.

These measures give practical effect to Article 60(1)(f) of the Constitution, which requires the elimination of gender discrimination in laws, customs and practices relating to land. They are also consistent with section 30 of the Community Land Act, which guarantees every community member equal benefit, use and access and requires equal treatment of women, men, youth, minorities, persons with disabilities and marginalized groups in all dealings concerning community land.

Gender-transformative household and community approaches

Gender-transformative approaches move beyond including women as beneficiaries and seek to transform the power relations that constrain their rights. Household methodologies such as Gender Action Learning Systems can help couples and families visualize shared prosperity, analyze the costs of unequal asset control, and plan for joint decision-making, joint registration, will-writing, and inclusive inheritance. When designed carefully, these approaches can reduce resistance by showing that women's tenure security benefits the entire household through greater investment, lower dispute risk, improved food security, and stronger resilience.

Digital land systems and gender-disaggregated accountability

Ardhisasa and broader digitization reforms provide an opportunity to improve transparency, service delivery, and data quality. However, gender-responsive digitization requires specific safeguards, including capturing the sex of proprietors; distinguishing sole, joint, and entity ownership; recording spousal information, where relevant; generating routine public dashboards; linking community land membership records to gender-disaggregated monitoring; and creating grievance mechanisms for people whose rights were omitted during data conversion.

Digital systems should also be designed for accessibility. Women with little digital access, limited documentation, low literacy, or restricted mobility need assisted registration channels through land offices, Huduma Centres, paralegals, community land registrars, and civil society partners.

Tenure security linked to agriculture, climate, and market systems

Women's land rights can be integrated into agricultural and climate programming in practical ways. Agricultural extension, input subsidies, irrigation schemes, conservation agriculture, climate finance, carbon projects, farmer organizations, and producer cooperatives should all include tenure security diagnostics. Projects should ask: who owns the land, and whose name is on the document? Who makes decisions on land use, receives compensation, signs agreements, controls proceeds, and bears the burden of labor?

Where women's claims are undocumented, projects can support documentation, joint consent procedures, benefit-sharing agreements, and community bylaws before investments proceed. This reduces the risk of land-related conflicts and improves the durability of development outcomes.

Conclusion

Kenya has the legal foundations for equitable land governance. Its Constitution, land laws, matrimonial property framework, and community land regime provide a strong platform for securing women's rights. Yet the evidence shows that women's land rights remain fragile where they are undocumented, socially contested, or mediated through male headed household and community structures.

The path forward requires not only providing more titles but also ensuring better implementation: inclusive registration, documentation of spousal and customary rights, gender-disaggregated land data, accessible justice, constitutional customary practice, and gender-transformative engagement with households and communities. For development partners, the strongest investments will be those that convert legal promise into enforceable rights and connect tenure security to food systems, women's economic empowerment, and climate resilience.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Esther Obaikol is a lawyer and land governance expert.

Augustine Iraoya is a PhD candidate in Sociology of Development and Change at Wageningen University & Research.

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1201 Eye Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005 USA | T. +1-202-862-5600 | F. +1-202-862-5606 | Email: ifpri@cgiar.org | www.ifpri.org | www.ifpri.info

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