



A DECADE OF CLIMBING AND CLAIMING RIGHTS

Women's Land Rights and the Kilimanjaro Initiative Campaign

This report reviews a decade of the Kilimanjaro Initiative, a campaign advancing women's land rights across Africa. Drawing on outcome harvesting, interviews and secondary data, it assesses progress in policy influence, movement building and social change. The Initiative strengthened grassroots advocacy, increased women's participation in land governance and contributed to gender-responsive reforms in several countries. The Initiative was supported by Consortium members including ActionAid, PROPAC, OXFAM, International Land Coalition (ILC), Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS), Tanzania Gender Networking Program (TGNP) and Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) and other intergovernmental organisations and civil society organisations.

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List of abbreviations

AKIWOFF	African Kilimanjaro Initiative of Women Farmers Forum
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme
CBO	Community Based Organizations
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation
GIMAC	Gender is my Agenda Campaign
IFAD	United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LUP	Land Use Planning
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OH	Outcome Harvesting
OHA	Outcome Harvesting Approach
RWA	Rural Women Assembly
RWFF	Rural Women Farmers Forum
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
ToR	Terms of the Reference
WRL	Women's Land Rights

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Finally, we recognize the courage of the women (about 600) who assembled in Kilimanjaro of whom some representatives (10%) ascended the highest peak of Mount Kilimanjaro in 2016. To date and in the future, they will continue to stand as a building block to inspire a new generation of activists for women’s land rights, equality, justice and sustainable livelihoods.

Executive summary

Background and rationale

The Kilimanjaro Initiative was launched in 2016 through the Rural Women Assembly (RWA) and the Rural Women Farmers Forum (RWFF), with support from ActionAid, PROPAC, Oxfam International, International Land Coalition (ILC), Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS), Tanzania Gender Networking Program (TGNP), Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF), Intrepid Travel and other partners. It arose from the collective determination of African rural women to claim equal rights to land and natural resources, addressing long-standing gender inequalities in ownership and governance.

The campaign's landmark moment was the symbolic climb of Mount Kilimanjaro by over 500 women from 22 African countries. Following the ascent, rural women presented a Charter of Demands to the African Union Commission (AUC). The Charter called for secure land tenure, equitable access to resources and government accountability, aligning with the AU Declaration on Land Issues (2009) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 1 (no poverty) and SDG 5 (gender equality).

The initiative aimed to elevate women's land rights from local struggles to continental policy dialogues. Its long-term vision was to unite rural women in collective action against structural marginalization while fostering political will and building stronger institutional frameworks for gender equality in land governance.

Key findings

- **Policy influence and continental impact:** The Initiative significantly influenced continental and national policies; it continued to reshape and influence existing land policy, like the AU target of allocating 30% of land to women by 2025. Additionally, legal reforms in Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi and Zambia incorporated gender-sensitive provisions into land laws and inheritance frameworks.
- **Movement building and mobilization:** The campaign mobilized over 100,000 women across more than 20 African countries, strengthening cross-border advocacy networks. It embedded women's land rights into Africa's policy agenda and demonstrated the potential of unified grassroots action.
- **Self-determination and agency:** The Charter of Demands enabled women to engage with governments confidently and advocate for reforms. It enhanced women's visibility in decision-making spaces and reinforced their leadership in community land governance.
- **Partnerships and collective action:** The Initiative thrived through the

collaboration of ActionAid, Oxfam, CARE International and national women's networks. Partners embraced a facilitative approach that placed grassroots women in leadership roles.

- Cultural and social transformation: The movement initiated dialogue that challenged patriarchal norms and shifted perceptions of women's roles in land management, catalyzing broader social change in gender relations and rural development.

Key challenges

Despite notable success, the Initiative encountered persistent obstacles:

- Coordination gaps: The absence of a permanent secretariat limited effective monitoring, follow-up and continental coordination.
- Data limitations: Lack of gender-disaggregated land data constrained progress tracking toward the AU 30% target.
- Resource constraints: Funding shortages restricted post-Arusha follow-up and limited rural women's participation.
- Cultural barriers: Deep-rooted patriarchal norms and regional diversity continue to hinder women's full access to land rights.
- Fragmented advocacy: Overlapping mandates among NGOs and inconsistent strategies weakened collective impact.

These challenges underline the need for stronger institutionalization, inclusive financing and better coordination mechanisms.

Key recommendations

- Institutionalize coordination. Establish a continental secretariat led by rural women to oversee the implementation of existing land legislation and frameworks, harmonize monitoring frameworks and strengthen AU engagement.
- Enhance data and accountability systems. Develop a harmonized data collection system, linked with SDG and AU reporting indicators, to track women's land ownership and improve evidence-based policymaking.
- Secure sustainable financing. Broaden funding partnerships with FAO, IFAD, large foundations, European Union, bilateral donors and other actors to sustain advocacy, training and national campaigns.
- Advance policy integration (Kilimanjaro 2.0). Align the next phase with continental agendas on climate justice, food systems and youth empowerment to sustain relevance and political traction.
- Strengthen leadership and capacity building. Invest in grassroots women's organizations, documentation to capture the knowledge and strategies and mentorship programmes to build a pipeline of intergenerational women leaders.

Summary

Nearly a decade later, the Kilimanjaro Initiative's 2016 campaign marks a continental milestone in advancing women's land and resource rights. In the following years, the Initiative has reshaped policy narratives, galvanized women's movements and influenced institutional reforms across Africa. While coordination, data collection and funding presented persistent obstacles, the Initiative has proven that women's collective advocacy can drive systemic change. Beyond policy influence, the Initiative inspired a new generation of rural women activists determined to claim their rightful place in Africa's development agenda. It thus stands as a model for future gender-responsive land governance campaigns.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and context of the Kilimanjaro Initiative

The Kilimanjaro Initiative emerged during a period marked by heightened global concern over resource governance, food security and gender inequality. Its formation was a direct response to deep-seated socio-political and economic tensions that intensified across the African continent in the late 2000s and early 2010s.

The convergence of the global food, finance and fuel crises in 2008–2010 resulted in severe price shocks, rising poverty and widespread insecurity across the Global South.¹ These pressures triggered an unprecedented wave of large-scale land acquisitions, often referred to as 'land grabs', as governments and multinational actors sought to secure farmland, water resources and strategic investment opportunities across Africa, Asia and Latin America. Rural women, the primary producers of food and custodians of land, were disproportionately affected, as their already fragile tenure security became even more vulnerable amid these structural shifts.²

The socio-political climate during this period was characterized by growing scrutiny of land governance institutions, rural discontent and calls for reforms to safeguard the rights of marginalized populations. It is within this climate that African governments, civil society organizations (CSOs) and international partners began crafting new normative frameworks to address the inequities emerging from global resource pressures. Notably, the African Union (AU) endorsed the Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa in 2009, urging member states to strengthen land governance systems, address gender biases and ensure greater transparency and accountability in land administration.³ This was followed by the development of global instruments such as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGTs), endorsed by the UN Committee on World Food Security in 2012, which explicitly recognized women's historical exclusion from land rights and called for gender-responsive reforms.⁴ In 2014, AU heads of state additionally approved the Guiding Principles on Large-Scale Land-Based Investments, aimed at providing safeguards against exploitative deals and strengthening community rights.⁵

Despite these advances, rural women remained among the least protected groups. Exclusion from formal decision-making spaces, limited access to legal documentation and embedded socio-cultural norms continued to hinder their ability to assert land rights. These gaps created the conditions for new forms of social mobilization. Across the continent, CSOs, rural movements and women's rights organizations (WROs) began to organize in response to the systemic barriers that prevented women from owning or inheriting land, engaging in resource

governance or benefiting from investments in agriculture and natural resources. It is within this broad landscape of advocacy that the Kilimanjaro Initiative took shape.

Conceived in 2012 during a Rural Women's meeting in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, the Kilimanjaro Initiative was envisioned as a bold, pan-African movement dedicated to elevating the voices of Rural Women and securing their rights to land and natural resources (AKIWOFF 2016⁶). Its founders recognized that women's experiences – though diverse across regions – were connected by common structural injustices: patriarchy, economic marginalization and political exclusion. The movement sought to build a continental platform where women could collectively challenge these barriers, assert their agency and shape policies affecting their livelihoods.

By 2015, the momentum around women's land rights had accelerated. The AU Specialized Technical Committee on Agriculture, Water, and Environment issued a landmark recommendation urging all member states to allocate at least 30% of documented land to women and strengthen legal protections for equitable access.⁷ This continental affirmation further energized CSOs and rural women's movements, providing moral and political legitimacy to ongoing grassroots mobilization.

Against this backdrop, the Africa Kilimanjaro Women Farmers Forum (AKIWOFF) and its partners formally launched the Kilimanjaro Initiative in October 2016 at the foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro. The symbolic choice of Kilimanjaro – Africa's highest peak – reflected the movement's ambition: to rise above socio-political constraints and claim visibility for women historically pushed to the margins of public discourse. The event gathered over 500 women from 22 African countries, representing diverse constituencies including smallholder farmers, pastoralists, forest-dependent communities, fisherfolk and Indigenous groups (Kilimanjaro Initiative 2017⁸).

The climactic activity of the launch was the delegates' ascent up the mountain, culminating in the declaration of the Kilimanjaro Charter of Demands. The Charter articulated calls for the rights to own, use, inherit, control and dispose of land and natural resources; the elimination of discriminatory laws; and the recognition of women as central actors in food systems and environmental stewardship. The presentation of the Charter to the African Union Commission (AUC) and its later recognition during the 2017 AU Gender Pre-Summit marked a historic achievement, signalling that rural women's voices had gained unprecedented legitimacy within continental policymaking circles.

Since then, the Kilimanjaro Initiative has grown into a transformative movement driving women's empowerment through advocacy, popular mobilization, policy engagement and strategic partnerships. Over the past decade, it has influenced national land policies, strengthened grassroots women's networks and catalyzed shifts in gender norms across Africa. Yet the Initiative continues to confront new and evolving challenges – including the impacts of climate change, population growth,

urban expansion and persistent socio-cultural resistance – that threaten the future of women’s land rights.

As the Initiative approaches its ten-year milestone in 2026, this review reflects on ‘A Decade of Climbing and Claiming Rights’. It documents how rural women have not only ascended a mountain but have also confronted political, social and cultural structures that historically denied them the right to land. In doing so, the report assesses achievements, identifies remaining gaps and proposes pathways for the Kilimanjaro Initiative 2.0, so that its vision of equitable land governance can become a reality for all women across the continent.



Lovelyne Nnenna, a rural woman from Nigeria, presenting the charter of demands to the AUC representative, Ms Ouriatou Danfakha, Senior Policy Officer, Bureau of the Chairperson. Photo credit: Georgina Goodwin/Action Aid

2. Objectives and methodology

2.1. Purpose and objectives of the report

This report details the realized objectives of the Kilimanjaro Initiative and the aftermath of the Mt. Kilimanjaro climb. As outlined earlier, the movement's objectives included:

- Strengthening the agency of rural women across Africa and mobilizing them to claim and defend their land and natural resource rights.
- Fostering political will among national governments, donors and regional institutions to implement an all-inclusive African Women's Charter.
- Organizing and supporting the participation of 100,000 rural women in the Kilimanjaro Initiative across at least 20 African countries.
- Raising awareness of existing frameworks and safeguards around large-scale land-based investments, and demanding their application in securing the legitimate tenure rights of rural women in Africa.

The Initiative has been a pivotal force in influencing policy across Africa, reflecting the contributions of participants from all four cardinal regions represented in the Kilimanjaro Initiative. The report explores evidence from the national to the continental level to examine these successes and the key milestones achieved.

Additionally, as the Initiative aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – including gender equality, poverty eradication, zero hunger, and good health and wellbeing – the report highlights progress towards these aims. It also outlines a roadmap for the next phase of the consolidated campaign to advance women's rights to land and resource use and control across Africa, and how its initial objectives could be measured in the next phase.

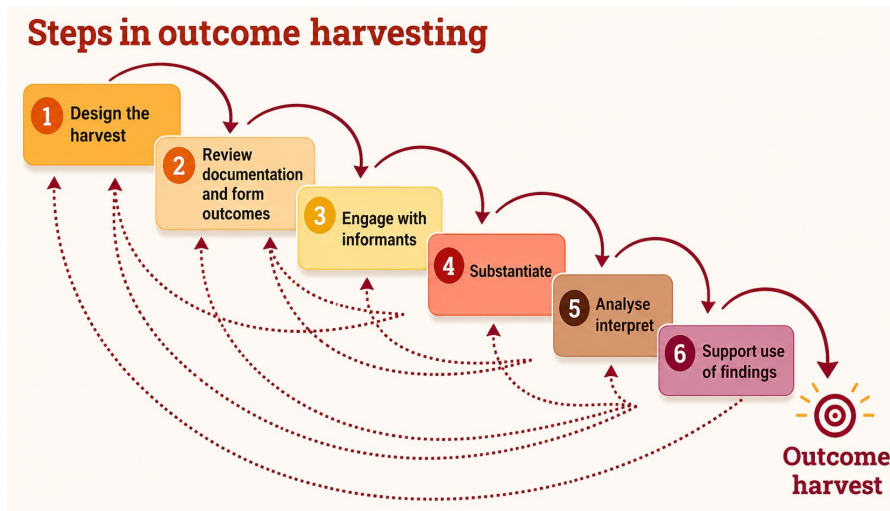
2.2. Scope of the report

The campaign, which spans the four cardinal regions of Africa, has driven action on women's rights and access to land across the continent. Through selected case studies and an exploration of the Kilimanjaro Initiative's effects at both national and regional levels, the report seeks to showcase notable examples of success while highlighting challenges that offer valuable lessons for improvement. The report covers the period from 2016 to 2026, marking a decade since the historic climb of Mount Kilimanjaro – a milestone that continues to inspire action for women's land and resource rights across Africa.

2.3 Methodology and approach

Outcome Harvest (OH) is the main guiding methodology in this study. This approach involves documenting both the positive and negative, intended and unintended results of the Initiative. These changes are identified through examining evidence, actions, relationships, policies and practices, as well as consolidating reports and materials communicated across all levels of the Initiative. By working backwards, it is then possible to determine whether and how an intervention has contributed to these CHANGES (Wilson-Grau and Britt 2012⁹).

Sketch indicating outcome harvesting applied in the report



Source: Outcome Harvesting. Ford Foundation MENA Region¹⁰

2.3.1 Data collection methods

The study involved collecting primary data through interviews as well as consulting various secondary sources.

a. Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with a cross-section of women (and men) leaders, strategically picked from various member countries and diverse institutions. The Initiative is dispersed across different member states in the African continent, and their activities are coordinated at the country level, but all are guided by the Kilimanjaro Charter.

b. Secondary data review

Manuals, guidance, training guidelines, policy briefs, workshop proceedings, blogs and other communications outputs, and strategic documents used by the Initiative were consulted. Case studies developed by Oxfam consultant Emily Brown, who interviewed rural women, including those who climbed to the top of Kilimanjaro, were also used.

2.3.2 Stakeholder mapping

Under the OH process, identified stakeholders are those who are core partners in the project, hold important information on project implementation and possess information on project outcomes. For the purposes of this report, OH stakeholders included country-level leaders and network coordinators for AKIWOFF, as well as regional, district, ward and village-level members who have been instrumental in the Initiative.

2.3.3 Data analysis and validation methods

Data was drawn from individual women (and men) who participated in the Kilimanjaro Initiative. Although not all countries were covered, diverse regional bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and individuals from varied countries, cultures and geographies were represented to paint a clear picture of the Initiative's achievements and efforts.

2.3.4 Limitations of the methodology

The main methodology used for this report, OH, has several limitations and challenges. These include, but are not limited to, its requirement for the skills and time necessary to identify and describe high-quality outcomes, the need to engage those who influenced the outcomes, and its focus on working backwards from identified outcomes. In some circumstances, interviewees who are not used to this approach find this process difficult (R Wilson-Grau and Britt 2012¹¹).

3. Findings

This section presents the findings based on a review of project documents and other secondary sources, key informant interviews, discussions with actors in the land sector and observations of campaigns across the continent. It highlights the most critical issues resulting from ten years of campaigns in Africa under the umbrella of the Kilimanjaro Initiative.

3.1 Relevance of the Kilimanjaro Initiative

The Kilimanjaro Initiative emerged at a critical juncture for Africa, where cultural norms and patriarchal traditions have long restricted women’s access to and control over land and natural resources. Across African societies, women are disproportionately affected by inequitable land governance systems, yet they remain the backbone of agricultural production and household food security. This ten-year campaign arrived at precisely the right moment – when access to land, water and natural resources had become a question of justice as well as survival. By mobilizing women from across Africa to claim their rights, the Initiative reshaped public discourse, influenced policy and inspired a continental movement at a time when the intersection of land, gender and climate change demanded urgent attention. As Everlyne Nairesiae of Landesa aptly stated: ‘The Kilimanjaro climb was not just a symbolic act – it was a declaration that African women will no longer wait to be invited to the table. They are setting the agenda.’ Her views are corroborated by case study 1, featuring Zainab, a woman from Northern Nigeria.



The 28 rural women who climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in 2016 carried with them the aspirations and

demands of millions of African women. Their ascent symbolized the collective struggle against the land rights injustices that continue to deny women equal access to, ownership of, and control over land across the continent. Photo credit: Georgina Goodwin/Action Aid

Case study 1: Zainab's journey – Fighting for her land and independence in northern Nigeria

For Zainab, a farmer from northern Nigeria, land represents life, identity and independence. Born and raised on a farm, she learned early on that owning and nurturing land was the foundation of a woman's financial freedom. She worked her family's fields from childhood, yet gaining control over her own land was a lifelong struggle. Growing up, she had to fight nine brothers who believed farming and ownership were men's domains, and with marriage came more struggle, as she had to negotiate with her in-laws for a small, unused plot to till. Even when she saved enough to buy her own land, her community imposed limits on the size and tenure security of the plot she could claim. Still, Zainab persisted. 'This is my hard-earned money, and I have the freedom to buy what I want,' she said.

Her experience reflects the broader reality for women across Nigeria and West Africa. While Islamic law grants women in the North the right to inherit and own land, many women in the South and East are still denied these rights, often losing access when their husbands die. This injustice inspired Zainab and other rural women to join the Kilimanjaro Initiative, climbing Africa's highest peak to raise their voices for equality. Through collective advocacy, they have begun to change the mindsets of community and religious leaders, securing spaces for women to influence policies and participate in land governance. Today, Zainab continues to farm and advocate, working not only to achieve food security for her family, but to help women across Africa claim their power.

Source: summarized and paraphrased from interview notes by Emily Brown, 2025

3.1.1 Alignment with women's land rights priorities

Women's land rights have been urgent and claimed historically, however they have remained among the most neglected dimensions of social and economic justice. Although women contribute 60–80% of agricultural labour in Africa, they own less than 15% of the land.¹² In the current period which is marked by expanding commercial agriculture, mining and climate-related land acquisitions, women are especially vulnerable to dispossession. The Kilimanjaro Initiative directly confronted these inequalities by positioning land ownership and control as central to gender equality and women's economic justice. As one Tanzanian participant observed, 'land is power, and when women own land, they own their future.'

The Initiative revitalized advocacy for women's land rights across participating countries – Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, Cameroon, Nigeria, Uganda and Malawi among them – spurring reforms and national dialogues on equitable land distribution. The momentum generated by the campaign led to a measurable increase in women's visibility in land governance, with greater participation in policy formulation and

community decision-making structures. Beyond formal ownership, the Initiative also created spaces for education and solidarity. Women who had long been silent about their rights found a platform to speak openly about inequality and reclaim agency. The movement challenged deep-rooted patriarchal perceptions, demonstrating that women are not mere beneficiaries but drivers of productivity and food security. In the words of one participant from Kenya: 'Before Kilimanjaro, we whispered about rights. After Kilimanjaro, we started speaking in public squares.'

By linking gender justice to land rights, the Initiative has effectively shifted social consciousness, encouraging women to assert leadership in agriculture, climate action and rural governance. This is a profound transformation for a continent where women's land ownership was once considered taboo, as demonstrated below in case study 2.

Case study 2: Augustina Takah – Breaking land taboos in Cameroon

In Cameroon, as in much of Africa, deep-seated traditions and patriarchal customs continue to deny women the right to own or inherit land. Augustina Takah, a women's rights advocate, recalls how the Kilimanjaro Initiative gave rural women, especially widows, a voice to challenge these taboos. In many villages, a woman's claim to land is seen as a cultural transgression – widows are often dispossessed the moment their husbands die. Augustina and her colleagues took this issue directly to community leaders and traditional chiefs, the custodians of land. She urged them to rethink discriminatory customs, reminding them that daughters often contribute more to the family's welfare than sons – through sending money home, maintaining farms and caring for their parents – yet remain excluded from inheritance. Her approach began to shift perspectives, prompting some leaders to reconsider women's rights to land ownership and inheritance.

Augustina emphasizes the need for legal recognition of women's rights. She recounts the story of a widow from her region who lost everything when her husband's family seized her land and property after his death, leaving her destitute with five children. With the Kilimanjaro Initiative's support, Augustina intervened, engaging lawyers and community leaders to mediate with the in-laws. As a result, the widow's land was restored, allowing her to rebuild her life. The income from farming allowed her to pay for her children's education, one of whom later graduated from medical school.

Source: summarized and paraphrased from Emily Brown's interview with Augustina Takah, 2025

3.1.2 Responsiveness to national and regional policies

The Initiative's relevance extends beyond community mobilization through its alignment with national, regional and global policy frameworks. The campaign has bridged grassroots struggles to continental decision-making bodies such as the African Union (AU), and following the 2016 summit on Mount Kilimanjaro, multiple African countries accelerated policy dialogues on women's land rights. The Kilimanjaro Initiative contributed to significant gender-responsive land reforms across Africa. Zambia stands out for adopting a formal 50% land-allocation provision for women, first through a Presidential decree and later embedded in the 2021 National Land Policy. In contrast, other countries such as Cameroon advanced women's participation in land-governance bodies but did not enact a 50:50 allocation framework. In Zambia, representatives returning from the summit successfully pushed for women's increased participation in national land policy debates, sparking the creation of local women's advocacy networks. These changes were not isolated.¹³ Across Central, Eastern and Southern Africa, the Initiative's advocacy acted as a foundation for reform, leading to policy adjustments, renewed attention to land tenure systems and stronger accountability for gender equality.

Crucially, the Charter of Demands, presented to the African Union Commission (AUC), brought women's concerns to the highest levels of governance. This resulted in the AU's endorsement of the Charter, which was integrated into continental land policy frameworks, reinforcing women's land rights under the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). As Professor Thelma Awori of EWA, who also participates in the Gender is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) observed: 'For the first time, women's land rights were no longer a side issue – they became a pillar of Africa's agricultural and development agenda.'

The Initiative's alignment with the African Union Declaration on Land Issues and Challenges (2009), the Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa and the SDGs – particularly SDG 1 (no poverty) and SDG 5 (gender equality) – underscores its connection to continental and global priorities. By rooting itself in these frameworks, the Initiative has transformed women's struggles for land from local grievances into a continental policy movement. At the global level, SDG indicators used by FAO, UN Women and national statistics institutions measure the proportion of women with secure land rights and assess legal frameworks for women's equal land rights (SDG 5.a.2). Together, these indicators provide a standard for comparison.

A holistic approach to gender, justice and development

The relevance of the Kilimanjaro Initiative lies in its holistic framing of land rights as a human rights, justice and development issue. It recognized that women's exclusion from land ownership perpetuates a cycle of poverty, food insecurity and gender-based violence, and that by

addressing land tenure, it could tackle the structural roots of inequality. As Grace Ananda of Habitat for Humanity International reflected: 'When women have land, they transform their livelihoods. Even in conservative communities, once tenure is secure, the entire household thrives.' The Initiative also connected the dots between land rights, climate justice and sustainable livelihoods, with women's testimonies highlighting that secure land ownership improves agricultural productivity, enhances environmental stewardship and strengthens community resilience to climate shocks.

The Initiative also spurred a shift in perception among policymakers and traditional leaders, who began to view women as partners in development rather than dependents. This redefinition of women's role in land governance marks a turning point in Africa's socio-political evolution. Ultimately, the Initiative's defining achievement was its ability to bridge the gap between advocacy and policy, between grassroots movements and the continental stage. It demonstrated that when women are given the space and support to speak, they will reshape the entire narrative of justice and development in Africa. As Eileen Wakesho of Namati, formerly Oxfam, observed: 'The Kilimanjaro Initiative changed not just what we talk about, but who gets to speak, and whose voice matters.'

3.2 Effectiveness

3.2.1 Progress toward objectives

The primary objective of the Kilimanjaro Initiative was to create inclusive spaces where rural women could actively participate in decision-making processes concerning their rights to land and natural resources. Since its inception, the campaign has effectively advanced this goal, continuously igniting the flame of women's land rights advocacy across the African continent.

Member countries such as Zambia, Cameroon, Nigeria, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya have made notable progress toward the Initiative's objectives. The symbolic act of climbing Mount Kilimanjaro in 2016 marked a defining turning point from informal conversations about inequality to tangible policy shifts and sparked the birth of autonomous national-level women's movements. Without AKIWOFF's leadership, it is unlikely such sustained momentum under a unified framework would have been achieved.

As well as the actors standing behind the Initiative – from high-level institutions such as the AUC to national governments and CSOs – the direct participation of rural women in drafting the Charter of Demands was critical to the Initiative's success. The Charter served as the collective voice of African women, calling for equitable land tenure and resource governance.

Furthermore, the Kilimanjaro Consortium provided both technical and financial support. The consortium brought together African women's rights organisations, rural women's networks and civil society partners to design, coordinate and implement the Women to Kilimanjaro Initiative. This support strengthened institutional and operational capacity and helped sustain and scale the movement.

Many rural women who were previously constrained by financial barriers were able to participate in regional and national campaigns, connect with like-minded activists and expand their advocacy networks. Through the Kilimanjaro Initiative, they gained access to transport support, solidarity caravans, and community-based fundraising that made their participation possible. This opened doors for them to connect with like-minded activists from across the continent, exchange strategies for navigating customary and statutory land systems, and build cross-border advocacy networks that had previously been out of reach. For many, it was the first time they engaged directly with policymakers, national land commissions, and African Union processes by transforming them from isolated local actors into confident regional leaders. The movement not only amplified their voices but also created lasting platforms where rural women could mentor one another, coordinate campaigns, and sustain pressure for gender-equal land governance long after the climb.

Overall, these outcomes reflect measurable progress toward the Initiative's overarching objective: ensuring that African women have both the rights and voice to claim, own and manage land and natural resources.

3.2.2. The enabling factors supporting rural women's land ownership and control

Many enabling factors drove the success of the Kilimanjaro Initiative and created a supportive environment for rural women to claim and exercise their land and resource rights. Chief among these was the courage and conviction of women themselves, who increasingly recognized their entitlement to land ownership and refused to remain silent in the face of discriminatory customs. This new consciousness was matched by their willingness to organize, speak out, and challenge patriarchal norms at the household, community and policy levels. The Initiative's iconic climb of Mount Kilimanjaro in 2016 was both a literal and symbolic ascent, signifying women's determination to rise above social and political barriers that had long excluded them from land governance and decision-making.

A critical catalyst for this transformation was the active engagement of non-state actors and CSOs such as Oxfam, the International Land Coalition (ILC), ActionAid, WILDAF and CARE International.¹⁴ These partners provided essential technical, moral and financial support, ensuring the campaign's continuity and visibility across the continent. Their collaboration helped amplify women's voices from the grassroots to platforms such as the AU and support the transition from fragmented local efforts to a cohesive, continent-wide movement.

Community acceptance and solidarity were equally important. Local leaders, cultural custodians and policymakers gradually became more receptive to women's demands, recognizing that inclusive land governance benefits entire communities. Grassroots mobilization flourished, giving rise to local women's movements that linked with regional and international platforms to share experiences and sustain advocacy. Young women's involvement and the creative use of music, storytelling and cultural expression further energized the movement, turning advocacy into a shared celebration of resilience.¹⁵ As a result, the Initiative not only redefined the conversation on women's land rights but also inspired institutional and cultural shifts across Africa.

Specific enabling factors

- Women's courage and awareness of their rights to own and control land.
- Support from non-state actors such as Oxfam, ILC, ActionAid, WILDAF and CARE International.
- Expanded policy space created by sustained advocacy and engagement with national and continental institutions.
- Grassroots mobilization and collective action among rural women's movements.
- Progressive legal and policy reforms emerging from national land policy reviews.
- Community acceptance and shifting cultural norms in favour of women's land ownership.
- Young women's involvement and creative advocacy, including music and storytelling that reinforced solidarity.
- Recognition by the AU, which placed women's land rights at the centre of its rural economic agenda.

3.2.3 Hindering factors and structural barriers to women's land rights

Despite the Kilimanjaro Initiative's success in advancing policy change and raising awareness, deeply entrenched patriarchal systems and discriminatory cultural norms remain the most persistent obstacles to women's land rights. In many African societies, customary practices continue to favour men in land ownership and inheritance, relegating women to secondary users rather than rightful owners. Traditions such as polygamy, patrilineal inheritance and male-dominated decision-making restrict women's control over land and natural resources. As Andersson Djurfeldt (2020¹⁶) notes, women's access to land across Africa often depends on male relatives – fathers, husbands or sons – rather than on independent legal rights. Without deliberate cultural transformation, these discriminatory social norms and laws will continue to undermine legal and policy gains achieved through the Kilimanjaro Initiative.

Economic inequality further compounds these structural barriers. Lack of

financial power and access to credit prevents many rural women from purchasing or securing land even when legal avenues exist.¹⁷ Corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies in land administration systems exacerbate the problem, making it more difficult for women to navigate title registration processes. In some countries, such as Malawi and other SADC states, the dominance of formal tenure systems has marginalized customary users – particularly women – who rely on traditional land access. Government failures to allocate land equitably, coupled with weak enforcement of gender-sensitive land laws, leave many women excluded from the benefits of national land reforms.

Institutional and coordination challenges also hinder progress. Fragmented responsibilities across ministries of gender, land and agriculture result in weak policy harmonization and limited implementation of the Kilimanjaro Charter of Demands. The lack of data on women's land ownership makes it difficult to track progress or design evidence-based interventions. Moreover, after the initial momentum from the Arusha meeting, which was a launching pad for the Kilimanjaro Initiative, inadequate funding and limited follow-up mechanisms left many rural women disconnected from the movement. Persistent gender stereotypes in agricultural programmes – such as unequal access to extension services, markets and inputs – continue to reinforce marginalization and limit women's economic justice.

Key hindering factors

- Entrenched patriarchal systems and discriminatory customary norms.
- Lack of financial resources and limited access to credit for women.
- Corruption and bureaucratic barriers in land administration.
- Government failure to equitably allocate land.
- Dominance of formal tenure systems over customary practices in some regions.
- Poor policy harmonization between land, gender and agriculture ministries.
- Insufficient funding and weak implementation of the Kilimanjaro Charter of Demands.
- Persistent gender stereotypes in agricultural programmes and decision-making.
- Inadequate data and monitoring on women's land ownership and control.

3.2.4 Pathways to address barriers to women's land rights in future campaigns

The barriers outlined above continue to prevent women from attaining their rightful access to and control over land. In follow-up campaigns, these barriers must be systematically addressed through strategies that actively enhance women's agency and participation.

Women's economic justice

Women's limited financial capacity remains one of the most persistent obstacles to their meaningful participation in land rights advocacy initiatives. Insufficient resources restrict their ability to attend meetings, engage in community forums and participate in decision-making processes that directly affect their rights.¹⁸ Although women contribute substantially to household and national economies – through agriculture, informal trade, care work and extractive industries – much of their labour remains unpaid or undervalued, reducing their economic bargaining power.

Future campaigns should therefore prioritize economic justice as a foundational strategy. Ensuring that campaigns are allocated sustainable financial resources will mobilize greater numbers of women and support long-term engagement. Additionally, investing in women's access to income-generating activities, financial literacy and entrepreneurship can enhance their capacity to advocate effectively for land rights. A well-designed and sustainable plan for financial support should be integrated into all future campaign models.

Education as a transformative tool

With far-reaching effects on individuals, households and communities, education is a critical driver of social transformation. Historically, patriarchal norms have privileged men's education while sidelining women, contributing to persistent gender disparities in knowledge and opportunity. In Africa, gender gaps in education remain evident, yet research consistently demonstrates that women's education leads to numerous positive outcomes, including enhanced political participation, improved family health and reduced child mortality.¹⁹

Incorporating education into future campaigns – both formal and informal – can therefore strengthen women's capacity to claim their land rights. Educational interventions should extend beyond land-rights literacy to encompass long-term investments in general education that improve women's overall agency, confidence and decision-making abilities.

Political inclusion and representation

Across many African contexts, political structures remain heavily influenced by patriarchal norms, which limit women's participation and undermine their influence even when they are formally included. Although numerous initiatives have attempted to promote women's political engagement, progress has often been slow or insufficient due to deeply entrenched gender biases.²⁰

Future campaigns must therefore advocate for meaningful political inclusion that goes beyond token representation. Strengthening women's leadership capacities, supporting women candidates and challenging discriminatory political norms are essential steps toward ensuring that

women have a strong voice in land governance. When women are meaningfully represented in political processes, policies related to land ownership and distribution are more likely to reflect gender-equitable principles.

3.2.5 Examples of impact at community, national and regional levels

The Kilimanjaro Initiative has produced tangible outcomes at community, national and regional levels, demonstrating its strength as both a grassroots movement and a policy driver. Evidence from participating countries highlights how localized actions have generated continent-wide impact.²¹ In Nigeria, land ownership has allowed women such as Zainab (see case study 1) to claim their power: ‘The land is so dear to me ... just to have a portion you can call your own – it changes everything.’ Her testimony illustrates how land ownership fosters independence and dignity among rural women. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Initiative’s advocacy has drawn attention to the systemic exclusion of women from income control despite their central role in agricultural production, prompting new dialogue around equitable resource distribution.²² Similarly, in Malawi, sustained campaign efforts have influenced agricultural and land policy reviews, enhancing women’s participation in food systems governance and promoting their inclusion in decision-making spaces previously dominated by men.²³

Case study 3: Solange Kwindja’s strategy for mobilizing rural women and engaging traditional authorities

Solange Kwindja’s success in advancing women’s land rights in eastern DRC emerged from a deeply rooted, community-based strategy built on trust, dialogue, cultural sensitivity and evidence of shared benefits. Her approach can be summarized in five key components:

1. Grounding the movement in women’s lived realities: Solange began by listening to rural women – widows, young women and daughters – whose lack of inheritance rights excluded them from land ownership and the benefits of their own agricultural labour. She channelled this understanding of their struggles into mobilizing women through a cooperative, Echima Coffee, that offered economic opportunity, solidarity and a platform for collective action.
2. Respectful engagement with traditional authority structures: Recognizing that the king and village chiefs held the cultural and political power to authorize change, Solange approached them through dialogue rather than confrontation. She presented women’s challenges respectfully, framing access to land not as a legal demand, but as a community need. This culturally grounded approach meant traditional leaders became allies rather than opponents.
3. Using dialogue, not legal declarations: Solange deliberately avoided invoking external legal frameworks or international human rights rhetoric, which she knew could generate resistance in rural contexts. Instead, she appealed to shared values, family wellbeing and communal prosperity. By showing that land would remain in family hands – and that women’s farming strengthened families and communities – she

reduced fears and conflict.

4. Demonstrating mutual benefits to earn trust: Solange's advocacy highlighted the practical, visible benefits of women's land access: improved household income, children's education, food security and stronger village economies. Seeing that women's work uplifted entire families, traditional leaders became active partners who ultimately allocated land, set up nurseries and protected women's rights through decrees.
5. Building alliances and elevating the movement beyond the local level: Solange connected local struggles to regional networks like AKIWOFF, which amplified women's voices, provided solidarity and strengthened advocacy at national and continental levels. This link ensured that local wins fed into a broader movement for systemic change.

Source: Summarized and paraphrased from Emily Brown's interview with Solange Kwindja, 2025

Overall, the campaign has proven highly effective in mobilizing rural women, influencing legislative reforms and strengthening grassroots movements across Africa. Its multi-level approach – combining local organizing with continental advocacy – has shifted perceptions of women's roles in land ownership and agricultural governance. While traditional resistance persists in some regions, the Initiative continues to reshape gender norms and policy frameworks through solidarity, visibility and advocacy for women's rights to land and natural resources.²⁴ Its grassroots successes are corroborated by case studies like the one from Tanzania below.

Case study 4: Elias Mtinda – From awareness to ownership: Tanzania's land rights success

Elias Mtinda of ActionAid Tanzania highlights the Kilimanjaro Initiative's major success in transforming women's access to and ownership of land through community-led advocacy and collaboration. Working with partners such as HAKIARDHI, LEAT and local CSOs, the initiative supported district councils in Rukwa and Katavi to issue land titles to women through land use planning processes. As a result, hundreds of rural women across regions such as Singida, Chamwino, Mafia and Sumbawanga have demanded and secured land rights previously denied to them. Concrete results include 165 women now holding land titles in Kishapu District, 70 in Singida, 67 in Chamwino and 156 in Bahi, with many others in the process of formalizing ownership. The initiative also encouraged a 60-day activism campaign at district level, which raised awareness and promoted budget allocations for women's land rights, linking local advocacy to national and continental policy spaces.

According to Elias, these achievements stem from women's growing awareness that they can own and control land despite restrictive norms. The Kilimanjaro Initiative fostered solidarity among women at the grassroots level, strengthening their collective voice to influence governance and policy. However, economic barriers and limited political will remain challenges, as many women lack the financial means to purchase or develop land. Looking ahead, Elias calls for a broader second phase of the campaign – one that expands to more districts, involves private sector actors and engages decision-makers from the ground up.

With increased resources and coordination, he believes the movement can further consolidate its gains and continue to transform women's land rights across Tanzania.

Source: Personal communication – Elias Mtinda, October 2025

Advocacy and visibility

Through this process, women from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Malawi reported increased visibility in policy dialogues, access to decision-making forums and confidence in articulating land tenure issues. This was exemplified by the Charter of Demands, co-created by women from 22 African countries, which became both a symbolic declaration and a practical negotiation tool for policy engagement. As Chikondi from CARE International, Malawi reflected: 'Before Kilimanjaro, we used to talk about land in whispers. The Charter gave us confidence – it told us we have the right to be heard.'

Movement building and collective agency

Perhaps the Initiative's most notable achievement is its success in galvanizing a continental women's movement. Over 100,000 rural women spanning linguistic, cultural and political divides participated in advocacy caravans, leadership training and mobilization activities. As Eileen Wakesho (Namati, formerly Oxfam) observed: 'The movement brought together women who had never imagined they could speak to ministers – let alone climb a mountain to make their demands visible.' AKIWOFF continues to coordinate these networks, drive regional advocacy, monitor policy implementation and sustain solidarity across Africa.

3.3 Efficiency

3.3.1 Optimizing resources and gender transformation

Women – traditionally viewed as the primary caretakers of household resources – have proven to be the backbone of agricultural production, contributing nearly 80% of farm labour yet historically owning only 15% of the land.^{25,26} The Initiative's emphasis on women's land rights brought this disparity to the forefront, sparking advocacy that linked gender equality to productivity, food security and community well-being (ActionAid 2016²⁷).

By focusing on this single, concrete demand – women's right to land – the Initiative demonstrated remarkable efficiency in leveraging its limited human and financial resources. Not only did it challenge long-standing traditions that perpetuated male dominance in land ownership and

governance,²⁸ but it ensured that every resource it mobilized generated a multiplier effect on women’s social justice.²⁹

3.3.2 Effective resource utilization and tangible outcomes

By combining grassroots leadership with continental advocacy, the campaign achieved significant results with minimal overhead.³⁰ This efficiency was reflected in the tangible policy and social changes recorded across participating countries following the 2016 Kilimanjaro climb. When participants descended from the mountain, they carried with them a renewed sense of agency and collective purpose that rippled across their home countries.

In Kenya, for example, women delegates engaged national policymakers, contributing to land and inheritance reforms that enable widows to legally inherit land from their spouses – a critical milestone in women’s property rights. These reforms also gave rise to a broader recognition of women as independent landowners and contributors to rural economic development. Delegates from Nigeria also gained confidence following their participation in the Kilimanjaro Initiative, as captured in case study 6 below.

Case study 6: Successes of the Kilimanjaro Initiative – Constance Okeke, ActionAid

Constance Okeke of ActionAid highlights the Initiative’s greatest success as the creation of a strong sisterhood, which grew women’s courage and awareness of their rights, so that they returned to their communities empowered to act. The impact is tangible – over half of the land in Nigeria allocated to cooperatives now belongs to women, with many women holding positions in cooperatives, traditional leadership and government.

Advocacy tools like the Women’s Land Rights Scorecards and the Charter of Demands also strengthened policy accountability and visibility for women’s priorities, while the Initiative succeeded in linking grassroots voices with national and continental decision-makers, leading to greater recognition of women’s roles in land governance. These scorecards provide strong foundations by creating robust national scorecards for women’s land rights.

Despite persistent cultural and funding challenges, the Kilimanjaro Initiative continues to unite local movements under one continental vision supported by non-state actors such as ActionAid, Oxfam, ILC, and WILDAF. Okeke stresses that sustaining this progress requires stronger collaboration, government investment in women’s agency and unwavering advocacy to dismantle the patriarchal barriers that limit women’s land ownership.

Source: Interview with Constance Okeke, ActionAid (Nigeria), 21 October 2025

3.3.3 Cost-effectiveness and strategic partnerships

The Kilimanjaro Initiative was highly cost-effective given its continental scope. It relied heavily on strategic partnerships, volunteers and in-kind support, ensuring that limited resources achieved maximum impact.³¹

International organizations such as ActionAid, Oxfam, ILC and PLAAS contributed technical expertise, financial resources and logistical support, while national and local women’s networks led mobilization efforts, community dialogues and advocacy training.³²

This multi-layered partnership model ensured that ownership of the campaign rested with the women themselves.³³ By leading caravans, policy dialogues and public engagements, women participants reduced operational costs while enhancing the legitimacy of the movement. This participatory structure had the additional advantage of developing the skills and leadership capacity of community actors.

However, the Initiative’s efficiency was occasionally undermined by inconsistent funding streams, overlapping mandates, and limited monitoring and reporting mechanisms during its early years.³⁴ These gaps hindered systematic follow-up and documentation of outcomes. As Chikondi Chabvuta from CARE International, Malawi, reflected: ‘After Arusha, many of us went home with energy but no resources to continue. The spirit was there, but we needed more coordination.’ Despite such challenges, shared ownership and solidarity among the Initiative participants compensated for financial limitations’.

3.4 Impact and outcomes

The Kilimanjaro Initiative’s results span policy reform, institutional development, social change and individual agency. The Initiative has demonstrated that when women mobilize around a shared vision, they can reshape not only laws and institutions but also the narratives that have historically silenced them.

Policy uptake and institutional change

The policy and institutional shifts observed across participating countries provide strong evidence for the Initiative’s long-term impact. Following the 2016 Kilimanjaro climb, national delegations returned home and translated what they had learned into advocacy and institutional reform. In Zambia, advocacy by women’s coalitions influenced policy shifts where traditional leaders and institutions began to support women’s land rights, including directives aiming for 50% land allocation to women.³⁵ The Zambian national land policy, launched in 2017, included provisions that women should be allocated 50% of land and enabled to own land without restrictive conditions.³⁶

Women’s successes linked to the Kilimanjaro Initiative are similarly noticeable in Uganda, as illustrated by case study 7 below.

Case study 7: Polly from Uganda – Driving change through women’s collective power
Polly from Uganda attributes the success of the Kilimanjaro Initiative to women’s unity, determination and growing political influence. She explains

that women have learned to use their collective power to hold leaders to account and are demanding that politicians address women's land and livelihood issues, or risk losing their votes. This activism has helped shift long-held cultural norms that once denied women land ownership, with many communities now recognizing married women as rightful family members and therefore entitled to family land. Rising literacy levels and women's participation in savings groups have further strengthened their financial independence, enabling them to contribute to household needs and community development. Polly also highlights the collaboration between cultural institutions and government systems, where both customary and state laws are used to advance women's rights. However, she stresses that continued awareness-raising and stronger implementation at local levels are essential to sustain and deepen these gains.

Source: Summarized and paraphrased from Emily Brown's interview with Polly, 2025

Comparable progress has been documented in Malawi, Kenya, Cameroon and Nigeria, where local and national governments have revised or initiated gender-sensitive land frameworks. The involvement of the AUC and its endorsement of the Kilimanjaro Charter as part of its land policy framework further legitimized the movement's objectives at the continental level. As Everlyne Nairesiae of Landesa reflected: 'The Charter became a tool for negotiation between citizens and the state. It changed how ministries spoke about women's rights.'

The sustainability of the Kilimanjaro Initiative's achievements and its ability to build on them depends on how effectively the movement consolidates its gains, strengthens coordination, and mobilizes lasting financial and institutional support. The Initiative's future will be shaped by both opportunities for growth and persistent structural barriers. Below are some of the crucial opportunities:

3.5.1 Opportunities for strengthening future campaigns

The Kilimanjaro Initiative has laid a robust foundation for continuity. Its cornerstone achievement – the Kilimanjaro Charter of Demands – has provided a unifying framework on women's rights, land governance and equitable resource management. The Charter's continued use by regional coalitions, civil society organizations and advocacy networks has kept the movement's objectives alive across borders, and this foundational work can act as a strategic blueprint for future campaigns.

3.5.2 Institutionalization of coordination mechanisms

The Initiative's consortium – anchored in AKIWOFF, Oxfam and allied networks – provides an established platform for future coordination. Formalizing this structure into a Continental Secretariat or permanent coordination office would enable systematic tracking of commitments,

cross-country learning and consistent engagement with the AU and Regional Economic Communities (RECs). As Everlyne Nairesiae (Landesa) cautioned: 'The Initiative lacks a strong coordination mechanism. To sustain progress, we must track outcomes and strengthen engagement with the African Union.'

3.5.3 Data and Monitoring Systems

Existing regional networks – such as Stand for Her Land, Home Equals and GIMAC – continue to advocate for monitoring systems that track the 30% AU target on women's land ownership. Integrating these efforts with SDG and AU Agenda 2063 indicators would ensure long-term accountability and data-driven decision-making.

3.5.4 Strengthened funding architecture

Financial sustainability is central to the Initiative's future. To ensure continuity beyond donor cycles, the movement must diversify funding streams – linking international partnerships (for instance with FAO, IFAD, large foundations, charities, the EU and bilateral donors) with domestic resource mobilization through governments, private sector partnerships and community-based financing models. As Thelma Awori (EWA) emphasized: 'The next frontier is to fund the women who are already leading change – from the grassroots to the national level.'

3.5.5 Knowledge transfer and leadership succession

Alongside its training modules and advocacy strategies, participants of the Kilimanjaro Initiative have gained a wealth of experience that can inform Kilimanjaro 2.0. Investing in intergenerational mentorship programmes will help sustain the leadership pipeline of young women activists who can carry the movement forward.

Other resources that can springboard the next wave of advocacy include the Initiative's existing networks, reputation and evidence base. If leveraged strategically, these assets can transform the Initiative from a historic campaign into a permanent continental institution for women's land and resource rights.

Barriers and challenges to sustaining results

Despite its achievements, several critical challenges threaten the long-term sustainability of the Kilimanjaro Initiative. These barriers are both structural and contextual, reflecting Africa's diverse socio-cultural and political realities.

- Persistent gender norms and cultural resistance: Deep-rooted patriarchal traditions continue to undermine women's access to land in many communities. Although policies have shifted, implementation lags behind legal reform. In societies where customary law dominates, women's land rights remain fragile and often subject to male relatives' discretion. The cultural diversity across Africa also

means progress is uneven – what is achievable in Zambia or Malawi may still face resistance in parts of Nigeria, DRC or Somalia. This underscores the need for sustained community-level engagement and norm change programming alongside legal advocacy.

- **Fragmented coordination and institutional weaknesses:** The absence of a formal coordination body has limited the Initiative’s ability to track outcomes, share lessons and maintain consistency across regions. Without a permanent secretariat, progress depends heavily on individual champions and external partners, making it vulnerable to turnover, donor fatigue and shifting priorities.
- **Financial insecurity and reliance on donor support:** Funding remains one of the most significant barriers to sustainability. While organizations such as Oxfam International, CARE and ActionAid International have provided generous support, the Initiative lacks a self-sustaining financial model. The overreliance on external donors leaves grassroots women’s networks exposed to volatility in funding cycles.
 - Many local groups struggle to maintain operations once project grants end. As the report found, limited access to finance and women’s ongoing economic marginalization create a vicious cycle that constrains long-term advocacy. Sustainable financing will require exploring community savings groups, microcredit schemes and government budget allocations for women’s land programmes.
- **Uneven policy implementation:** While several countries have adopted progressive policies, implementation remains inconsistent. Where reforms do exist, weak enforcement mechanisms and inadequate institutional capacity at the local level limit their effectiveness.
- **Accountability gaps:** With a lack of disaggregated data and coordinated monitoring systems, it becomes difficult to measure progress or hold governments accountable for the AU 30% land ownership target.
- **Socio-economic inequality and climate pressures:** Increasing land commercialization, urbanization and climate change present new challenges that risk reversing progress. Women’s limited economic power means they are often displaced by large-scale agricultural or mining projects. Without integrating climate justice and women’s economic and food security into future advocacy, sustainability gains may be undermined by external shocks.

Pathways toward long-term sustainability

While sustainability challenges persist, they can be addressed through deliberate institutional reforms, capacity strengthening and inclusive financing. Key pathways include:

- Institutionalizing the movement through a Continental Secretariat under AKIWOF and Oxfam to ensure structured coordination and policy engagement.
- Developing diversified financing mechanisms, including public-private partnerships and social enterprise models, to reduce dependency on

international donors.

- Embedding monitoring and reporting frameworks that track progress at national and regional levels, linked to AU and SDG reporting systems.
- Investing in local leadership and young people's engagement to secure intergenerational continuity.
- Integrating land rights with climate resilience and food security programmes to broaden the movement's appeal and impact.

Synthesis

The Kilimanjaro Initiative's sustainability rests on its ability to evolve from a campaign into a structured, institutionally grounded movement. The Initiative has already proven that collective action can transform policies and perceptions across Africa. To preserve these gains, stakeholders must now focus on strengthening coordination, diversifying funding and embedding accountability systems that ensure women's land rights are protected for generations to come.

4. Lessons Learned

Over the past decade, the Kilimanjaro Initiative has demonstrated how grassroots movements can evolve into a continental force for policy reform and social transformation. Its success was driven by strategic timing, strong partnerships, symbolism, evidence-based advocacy and community mobilization. However, the experience also highlights the need for improved coordination, sustained financing and continuous engagement to translate advocacy into systemic change.

4.1 Grassroots movements drive policy transformation

A central lesson from the Initiative is that organized rural women can shape continental policy agendas. Its bottom-up mobilization gave women moral and political legitimacy to influence decision-making processes traditionally dominated by men. The Kilimanjaro Charter of Demands, rooted in community consultations, became a bridge between grassroots realities and AU policy frameworks. As Eileen Wakesho (Namati, formerly Oxfam) remarked: 'The power of this campaign was not in resources but in solidarity. When women united, governments had to listen.' This demonstrates that genuine policy transformation in Africa can emerge not only from top-down reforms but from the collective strength and moral authority of organized grassroots voices. Indeed, as the case study from Kenya illustrates below (case study 8), when women are mobilized, they can have significant influence at the local, county and

national levels as well.

Case study 8: Elizabeth Ngimor's voice, Kenya's change: A grassroots path to land rights reform

Elizabeth's experience in West Pokot, Kenya illustrates how the Kilimanjaro Initiative helped elevate rural women's struggles into national-level action. After participating in the climb with other Kenyan women – some of whom had lost land through discriminatory inheritance practices – Elizabeth and her peers returned home and engaged their local governor, county officials and national Women Representatives. Their testimonies, widely visible after the Initiative's campaign, reached the President, who responded by calling for strengthening and strict enforcement of legal frameworks to secure women's land rights. This included enforcing joint land titling for married couples, ensuring widows' rights to inherit land and affirming that single women could legally purchase and own land.

At the same time, Elizabeth's story showcases the strategic grassroots methods rural women used to influence change long before formal policies shifted. She mobilized women through church groups, community education, local dialogues and example-based storytelling that highlighted the injustices widows and daughters faced. When customary leaders resisted, she escalated cases through administrative structures – chiefs, county officials, Women Representatives and finally national government – to ensure women's grievances could not be ignored. She and other activists complemented government sensitization efforts in barazas and churches, reinforcing why reforms were necessary for family wellbeing and community stability.

Source: Summarized and paraphrased from Emily Brown's interview with Elizabeth Ngimor, 2025

4.2 The role of partnerships and coalitions

The Initiative underscored the critical importance of partnerships and coalitions in sustaining cross-border advocacy. Strategic alliances between international NGOs (Oxfam, CARE, ActionAid), regional platforms (ILC, GIMAC, Stand for Her Land) and national women's networks created a multi-tiered ecosystem of support. Partners mobilized resources, provided technical expertise and amplified visibility at continental and global levels. This broad collaboration enabled the campaign to maintain local ownership while achieving regional coherence, ensuring that women's land rights remained central to Africa's development agenda. As Eva-Maria Okoth (ILC) observed: 'The coalition's diversity was its strength. Each partner brought a unique lens – from gender justice to legal expertise – and that is what made the campaign powerful.' However, coordination gaps occasionally weakened momentum, highlighting a need for clearer governance structures, transparent accountability systems and defined leadership roles in future coalitions.

4.3 Symbolism as an advocacy tool

The ascent of Mount Kilimanjaro became a symbol of women's resilience and determination to overcome systemic injustice. It captured the world's attention, turning an abstract policy issue into a compelling story of courage and hope. As Chikondi Chabvuta from CARE International, Malawi reflected: 'Climbing the mountain was a statement. It said that if we can climb Kilimanjaro, we can challenge any system that denies us land.'

4.4 Importance of evidence and data

While the Kilimanjaro Initiative succeeded in amplifying women's voices, the lack of comprehensive, gender-disaggregated data continues to impede monitoring of progress toward land ownership equality. As Everlyne Nairesiae (Landesa) emphasized: 'Without data, advocacy becomes invisible. We need to show who owns what, where, and why if we are to transform systems.' Future campaigns must invest in systematic data collection, monitoring and reporting frameworks that go beyond counting beneficiaries to assessing the quality and security of women's land ownership.

4.5 Cultural transformation takes time

The Kilimanjaro Initiative demonstrated that legal reforms alone cannot dismantle patriarchal systems. Social transformation is a gradual process that requires persistence, inclusion and continuous engagement at all levels of society.³⁷ Engaging traditional leaders, men and young people is essential for changing entrenched attitudes toward women's ownership of land and leadership in land governance.^{38, 39} As Grace Ananda (Habitat for Humanity International) noted: 'It takes generations to shift mindsets. We need to keep the conversation going – from the household to the parliament.'

4.6 Resourcing movements for sustainability

While the Kilimanjaro Initiative achieved significant impact with limited resources, financial sustainability remains its greatest challenge. The movement's dependence on short-term project funding from international partners has limited long-term planning and institutionalization. As Thelma Awori (EWA) asserted: 'The next phase must combine advocacy with economic justice. Access to finance, markets and technology is how women will turn rights into livelihoods.'

In future campaigns, the Initiative must diversify funding sources,

establishing multi-year, programmatic investments that support both advocacy and livelihoods. Linking women's land rights to economic justice, market access and climate resilience will increase the campaign's relevance and attract a broader range of stakeholders.

4.7 Specific practical lessons

In addition to the broader strategic insights, participants identified several practical lessons that should guide the next phase of the Kilimanjaro Initiative (Kilimanjaro 2.0):

- Grassroots solidarity: Women at the local level must continue to build solidarity and maintain one unified voice to influence decisions at national and continental levels.
- Knowledge and awareness: Deepen women's knowledge and awareness to create a strong foundation for deeper policy influence.
- Documentation and knowledge management: Systematic documentation of all campaign activities and progress is essential for tracking achievements, learning and accountability.
- Follow-through with the AU: There is a need for continued engagement with the AUC to ensure that the Charter of Demands is actively shared, implemented and monitored across member states.
- Continued research and evidence building: Commission follow-up research on the long-term outcomes of the Initiative to inform future campaign design.
- National-level campaigns: Support sustained, country-level campaigns that connect local demands with continental policy spaces.

Integration with food systems: As Africa's discourse increasingly centres on food systems and climate resilience, women's land rights advocacy must align with agricultural policy, food security and environmental sustainability.

The Kilimanjaro Initiative's decade-long journey demonstrates that grassroots-led, women-centred movements can drive systemic change when grounded in solidarity, evidence, and strategy. The lessons from this report highlight both the Initiative's strengths and the critical pathways for its future. As Thelma Awori (EWA) eloquently summarized: 'When women are given space, knowledge blossoms. What was hidden under weeds now grows into a change that can no longer be ignored.' Kilimanjaro 2.0 must build on these lessons, scaling what worked, addressing what hindered progress and ensuring that the spirit of the climb continues to inspire collective action for generations of African women to come.

4.8 Emerging issues

Several emerging and cross-cutting issues will shape the next decade of the Kilimanjaro Initiative and the future of women's land rights advocacy

in Africa. These issues include climate change, urbanization, young people's inclusion and technological transformation – all of which intersect with land governance and demand renewed strategies for resilience, equity and sustainability.

4.8.1. Climate change and environmental degradation

Climate change has become one of the most urgent and complex threats to women's land rights in Africa.⁴⁰ Increasingly erratic weather patterns, droughts, floods and desertification are shrinking arable land, intensifying competition over natural resources, and triggering displacement across rural communities.⁴¹ Rural women – who heavily rely on land for food production and livelihoods – are disproportionately affected by these environmental shocks, as they often bear the brunt of food insecurity and economic instability when land becomes unproductive.⁴²

In several regions, women are losing access to land due to climate-induced degradation and the expansion of commercial projects such as biofuel production and carbon offset initiatives.⁴³ These pressures deepen gender inequality, as many women lack secure tenure or legal protection to reclaim their land after displacement. As Grace Ananda (Habitat for Humanity International) emphasized: 'Climate justice and land rights are inseparable. If women lose land to climate shocks, their livelihoods collapse.' Her statement underscores the interconnectedness of environmental resilience, gender equality and sustainable development.

The next phase of the Kilimanjaro Initiative must therefore integrate climate adaptation and environmental resilience into its advocacy agenda. This includes advancing gender-responsive climate policies, supporting sustainable land use practices and promoting climate-smart agriculture to ensure that women not only retain access to land but also benefit from emerging green investments. Such integration will strengthen women's ability to adapt to extreme weather, safeguard livelihoods, and position them as central actors in Africa's transition toward climate-resilient, equitable development.

4.8.2 Urbanization and changing land dynamics

Rapid urbanization and land commercialization are transforming traditional land use patterns across Africa. Rural-to-urban migration, large-scale infrastructure projects and booming real estate development are driving up land values and accelerating land grabs, often at the expense of women's access and tenure security.⁴⁴ Peri-urban areas are becoming new frontiers of dispossession, where women – especially widows and smallholder farmers – are displaced by speculative development and weak enforcement of tenure rights.⁴⁵ At the same time, urban expansion presents new opportunities for women's cooperatives, urban agriculture and housing rights movements to advocate for inclusive frameworks that promote equitable access to land and

property.⁴⁶ On this basis, future campaigns should therefore expand the Initiative's focus to include urban and peri-urban land issues, ensuring that women's land rights are protected not only in rural areas but also within the rapidly changing urban landscapes of Africa.

4.8.3 Young people's inclusion and intergenerational leadership

Another emerging issue is the limited inclusion of young women and men in land governance and advocacy processes. While the Initiative has mobilized over 100,000 women, young people's voices remain underrepresented in leadership and decision-making forums. This generational gap poses a long-term risk to the sustainability of the movement.

Land in many African contexts is a deeply intergenerational resource, yet young people, particularly young women, often face barriers in accessing land due to customary systems, inheritance restrictions and limited access to finance. Integrating young people's perspectives into the next phase of the Initiative is therefore essential.

Future efforts should focus on:

- Establishing mentorship and leadership development programmes to nurture young women advocates.
- Incorporating land rights education into youth and school programmes to promote awareness from an early age.
- Supporting youth-led innovations in digital land mapping, agroecology and entrepreneurship and connecting new technologies and approaches to the broader women's land rights agenda.

As one young participant from Tanzania expressed: 'We need to inherit not just land, but also the courage of those who climbed the mountain before us.'

4.8.4 Digital transformation and access to information

The rapid advancement of digital technology presents both opportunities and challenges for the women's land rights movement. Digital mapping, mobile-based land registries and online advocacy platforms can enhance transparency, accountability and data collection.⁴⁷ However, digital exclusion – driven by gender gaps in access to technology, education and internet connectivity – continues to limit the participation of many rural women.

Exceptionally, the benefits of digitalization remain unevenly distributed. Digital exclusion, shaped by gendered disparities in access to mobile devices, internet connectivity, education, and digital literacy, continues to marginalize rural women – the very custodians of Africa's land, seed systems, and ecological knowledge. Without deliberate policy interventions, digital land-governance systems risk reproducing the same

structural inequalities that have long undermined women's rights. Closing the digital gender gap, therefore, requires targeted public investment, community-based digital training, and regulatory frameworks that ensure women's meaningful participation in emerging digital land-administration platforms. An Afrocentric policy approach must place rural women at the centre of digital transformation, ensuring that technology becomes a tool for liberation rather than a new frontier of exclusion.⁴⁸ Future campaigns must leverage technology to democratize access to land information while addressing the digital divide that prevents rural women from benefiting fully.⁴⁹

4.8.5 Intersectionality and inclusive land governance

There is a growing need for intersectional approaches that address the overlapping vulnerabilities of women facing discrimination based on ethnicity, disability, age or marital status.⁵⁰ Women in conflict-affected areas, pastoralist communities and Indigenous groups often face compounded barriers to land access and representation.⁵¹ Recognizing these differences is vital to ensuring that the Initiative's future efforts are inclusive and context-specific, rather than one-size-fits-all. The movement's strength lies in its diversity – its next phase must amplify the voices of all women, especially those most at risk of exclusion.

4.8.6 Linking land rights to broader development agendas

There is an opportunity to position women's land rights at the centre of Africa's broader development discourse. Emerging conversations around food systems, climate adaptation, green economy and sustainable cities provide entry points for advocacy. Integrating land rights into these frameworks will help ensure that women's ownership, control and access are not sidelined but recognized as essential for achieving Agenda 2063 and the SDGs. As Thelma Awori (EWA) noted in one of the review meetings: 'Land is not just a piece of earth – it's the foundation for justice, climate resilience and the future of Africa's daughters.'



Ten years later, rural women still lead the struggle to secure land rights. The spirit of the Kilimanjaro Initiative remains with them as they continue to fight for Africa, where they can own, access, and secure land freely. Photo credit: Jullie Cisse/GIPS/WAR

5. Conclusion

The Kilimanjaro Initiative (KI) marked a defining moment in Africa's struggle for women's land and natural resource rights. In a context where gender disparities persist and men continue to dominate land ownership even in countries with progressive legal frameworks, the Initiative boldly confronted centuries-old customs, taboos and patriarchal norms that have long restricted women's voice, agency and access to land. Through collective organizing, grassroots mobilization and the symbolic ascent of Mount Kilimanjaro, rural women from more than twenty African countries transformed individual struggles into a continental demand for justice, dignity and equality. Women returned home with renewed confidence, championing policy reforms, sparking local campaigns and shifting community attitudes toward women's ownership and control of land. These efforts catalysed policy change, strengthened advocacy networks and reinforced women's recognition of themselves not as passive beneficiaries but as rightful custodians and decision-makers over Africa's land and resources.

Over the past decade, the Initiative's influence has expanded far beyond its original participants. It fostered cross-country collaboration, built enduring solidarity movements and led to the creation of institutional structures such as AKIWOFF, which continues to champion women's land rights at scale. The Initiative also contributed to regional and national policy reforms – most notably influencing the implementation of the AU's commitment to allocate 30% of land to women by 2025 and promoting gender-responsive land governance reforms in Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, Cameroon and beyond. By aligning its mission with the SDGs, particularly SDG 1 on poverty eradication and SDG 5 on gender equality, the Initiative bridged global development agendas with grassroots realities. Although not directly stipulated as UN policy documents, the timing and the aftermath aligned with the transition period, which was also mirrored in the respective member countries such as Zambia, Cameroon, Uganda, Malawi and the AU at large recognition of women's land rights priority at the continental level.

As Africa prepares for Kilimanjaro 2.0 (2026–2030), the Initiative's legacy offers both direction and urgency. The road ahead requires sustained action, institutional coordination and vigilance against backlash and regression. To solidify and scale the gains achieved thus far, the movement must now transition from symbolic ascent to systemic change.

6. Recommendations

Recommendations for the Kilimanjaro Initiative

- Institutionalize coordination mechanisms: Establish a Continental Secretariat under the leadership of rural women to coordinate the implementation of the Charter of Demands, track national progress and facilitate AU-level engagement.
- Institutionalize policy dialogue platforms: Establish platforms where grassroots women, governments and CSOs can co-create solutions and monitor progress.
- Strengthen data and evidence systems: Create a Women's Land Rights Observatory to collect, analyse and disseminate gender-disaggregated data aligned with AU and SDG frameworks.
- Ensure sustainable financing: Develop a pooled funding mechanism involving Oxfam, ILC, FAO, IFAD, large foundations, the EU and bilateral donors to provide continuous support for grassroots and national women's networks.
- Deepen policy engagement: Reinforce partnerships with the AUC, RECs and national governments to ensure accountability for the AU 30% target and equitable implementation of land reforms.
- Integrate land rights with broader agendas: Embed women's land rights within climate justice, food systems, urban development and youth empowerment frameworks to maximize policy coherence.
- Support tomorrow's leaders: Invest in leadership training, inter-generational mentorship and knowledge exchange programmes to sustain the campaign's momentum and support future women leaders.

Recommendations for governments, civil society, development partners and grassroots organizations

- Coordinate continent-wide action: Establish a dedicated continental secretariat that is led by rural women to harmonize strategies, strengthen collective advocacy and champion unified action on women's land rights.
- Measure progress through data and accountability: Create an African Women's Land Rights Observatory to track advances, expose gaps and promote evidence-based policy engagement.
- Empower local leadership: Establish a capacity-strengthening fund to support grassroots women leaders, ensuring that their voices shape

policy processes at all levels.

- Sustain the movement through joint financing: Build a diverse, long-term financing mechanism to support women's land rights initiatives, ensuring continuity, resilience, and independence of the movement.

Responding to training requests from key stakeholders

While the Initiative has received substantial support from various partners, capacity gaps remain among certain stakeholders, especially at the grassroots and consortium levels. These gaps limit the movement's sustainability and the consistency of engagement across countries.

Future knowledge-sharing efforts should focus on:

- Enhancing organizational and financial management skills among consortium members to strengthen institutional resilience.
- Investing in training programmes on advocacy, negotiation and data-driven policy engagement.
- Establishing a dedicated fund to support continuous learning and cross-country peer mentorship.

Supporting stakeholders to develop their skills and leadership abilities will ensure that the Initiative remains dynamic, coordinated and impactful.

Future directions – Toward Kilimanjaro 2.0

The next phase – Kilimanjaro 2.0 – should consolidate past achievements while expanding the Initiative's scope to include economic justice, youth engagement and climate resilience.

Key priorities include:

- Building on existing scorecards, developing national scorecards to track progress on women's land ownership and policy implementation.
- Linking land rights advocacy to financial inclusion, climate adaptation and food security programmes in Africa.
- Promoting South–South learning exchanges to support women farmers' movements to learn from each other and build solidarity. As Thelma Awori of EWA stated: 'Kilimanjaro Initiative 2.0 should be about climbing higher – not in altitude, but in influence. We have built the path; now we must pave it with accountability.'

7. Annexes

7.1. List of key informants

Country	Name	organization
Uganda	Thelma Awori	Empowering Women in Agriculture Initiative
Nigeria	Constance Okeke	ActionAid International
Kenya	Grace Ananda	Habitat for Humanity International
Malawi	Chikondi Chabvuta	Care International
Kenya	Everlyne Nairesiae,	Landesa Africa, formerly Oxfam
Kenya	Eva-Maria Okoth	ILC - Africa
Tanzania	Elias Mtinda	ActionAid Tanzania
Kenya	Eileen Wakesho	Namati, formerly Oxfam

Notes: Key informants included individuals who have worked with the Kilimanjaro Initiative at different stages over the past 10 years of the campaign's implementation. While some members are still working with their respective organisations, staff turnover within institutions has resulted in some organisations losing institutional memory or being unable to provide the information requested by the consultant. Nevertheless, the individuals listed above, together with the case studies from AKIWOFF members, provided valuable information that enriched this report.

7.2. African Union biennial CAADP review

Table 1: Regional performance: 2021 biennial review

Region	Score against 7.28 benchmark	Agricultural land accessibility	Key challenges
Central Africa	3.33	Improvement in a few countries	Land conflicts and low participation of women in agriculture, with a score of only 1.25
East Africa	4.56	Some recognition of a bundle of rights for diverse land users' rights	Competing narratives between statutory and customary tenure rights
North Africa	4.62	Some improvement, with Morocco and Tunisia scoring especially high	Severe land shortages are aggravated by a rising population and loss of arable land due to climate change
Southern Africa	4.11	Not much progress has been made	Complex dual land governance structures established by statutory and customary laws
West Africa	4.75	Significant improvement made	Public investments in agriculture remain weak

Source: AU, 2022⁵²

Notes: The African Union's 2021 Biennial Review of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) assessed progress toward the 2014 Malabo Declaration on agricultural transformation in Africa by evaluating member states against seven key commitments, including ending hunger, reducing poverty, increasing agricultural productivity, expanding intra-African trade, strengthening resilience, and ensuring mutual accountability, with land rights cutting across many of these indicators. The review found that while some regions have made progress in advancing women's land rights through policy and land governance reforms, women across the continent still face major barriers to secure land tenure, ownership, control, and participation in land-related decision-making, limiting their ability to fully contribute to agricultural productivity, food security, and economic empowerment, as illustrated in Table 1 above.

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The over photo features a group of rural women farmers and their supporters standing at the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro, using the climb as a powerful symbol of challenging and overcoming land inequalities around the world. Photo credit: Amy Bolger & Brad John-Davis, 2016.

For further information on the issues raised in this paper, please email naomi.shadrack@oxfam.org

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