

CASE STUDY

Kenya: Haki Ardhi A Digital Tool for Women's Land Rights

OVERVIEW

Submitting Organization	TMG Research GmbH https://www.tmg-thinktank.com/
Type of Grievance Mechanism	Innovative / Hybrid
Level of Operation	Provincial /Community
Geographic Scope	Kenya

SYNOPSIS

This case study introduces Haki Ardhi, a digital platform developed to strengthen land governance, advance women's land rights, and enhance accountability in Kenya. Designed to address persistent land disputes, tenure insecurity, and limited access to justice—particularly for women and other marginalized groups—it enables users to document, track, and resolve grievances in a transparent, data-driven manner while reinforcing Kenya's constitutional commitment to equitable land access and tenure security. Beyond resolving individual cases, the platform builds a national evidence base on land rights blind spots and emerging conflicts, helping policymakers and institutions identify systemic weaknesses, strengthen accountability, and inform more inclusive land governance reforms.¹

BACKGROUND

Kenya's Constitution and land laws promote equitable access to land for all citizens, regardless of age or gender. The elimination of gender-based discrimination in laws, customs, and practices related to land and property is enshrined as a guiding principle in the management, use, and ownership of land in Kenyan society. However, despite these progressive legal provisions, many unmarried women and widows in rural areas continue to face systemic barriers in claiming land left by deceased spouses and relatives. They are frequently denied access to land to which they had legitimate rights prior to the death of their spouses. The failure to enforce legal protections that guarantee gender equality in access to, use, and ownership of land is driven by several factors, including limited prioritization of these laws by land and administration officers, the persistence of cultural norms that discourage women's land ownership, and low levels of awareness among women that hinders their ability to advocate for and assert their rights.

¹ TMG. 2024. Haki Ardhi land rights reporting tool - A path to gender-responsive climate action
<https://www.foodfortransformation.org/land-and-soil/details/haki-ardhi-land-rights-reporting-tool-a-path-to-gender-responsive-climate-action.html>.

Weak implementation of legal provisions designed to protect women from infringements on their land rights remains a key factor contributing to the widespread denial of these rights in rural areas of Kenya. This challenge is further compounded by the limited human resource capacity within national and subnational land governance institutions, as well as the continued dominance of customary norms and practices that discourage women's land ownership. Together, these factors have exacerbated the persistent disinheritance of widows and unmarried women from land to which they hold legitimate claims.

Grassroots women's organizations play a vital role at the local level by supporting women to assert their land rights and seek redress when those rights are violated. However, the manual logging of cases significantly limits their ability to systematically track trends and patterns in land rights violations. As a result, these organizations are constrained in their capacity to generate data-driven insights that could inform more strategic, evidence-based advocacy and engagement with policymakers.

MECHANISM

To address these challenges, Haki Ardhi was developed between 2022 and 2023 through a partnership between TMG Research (lead institution), the Kenya Land Alliance (KLA), Shibuye Community Health Workers (SCHW), and the Rainforest Foundation UK (technology provider).

Rather than serving as an informal or parallel dispute-resolution system, Haki Ardhi functions as a dedicated land rights reporting tool focused on women's land rights violations. It complements and reinforces both formal and informal justice mechanisms established under Kenyan law to promote gender equality and non-discrimination in land governance, in line with the National Land Policy (2009), Article 60 of the Constitution, the Land Act (2012), the Matrimonial Property Act (2013), and the Community Land Act (2016).

Haki Ardhi – A Digital Tool for Women's Land Rights

Haki Ardhi is a digital monitoring and reporting platform that enables women to safely report land rights violations while strengthening the capacity of local CSOs and Community-based Organizations (CBO's) to respond quickly and effectively. Through real-time alerts, secure data storage, and case-tracking tools, it provides reliable evidence to hold duty bearers accountable and advocate for gender-responsive land governance. Rather than replacing existing support structures, Haki Ardhi enhances them by improving the speed, coordination, and transparency of case management and policy engagement.

Funding was provided by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through the SEWOH Lab project implemented by TMG Research, with subsequent capacity-building support under GIZ's "Women's Empowerment for Resilient Rural Areas (WE4R)" programme.

Stakeholder Engagement and Evolution

The development of Haki Ardhi drew on the combined expertise of the Kenya Land Alliance (KLA), with its extensive experience in advancing women's land rights at the national policy level, and Shibuye Community Health Workers (SCHW), which has a strong record of supporting women at the grassroots level to advocate for their rights and seek justice in land-related cases. To ensure inclusiveness and responsiveness, extensive consultations were held with grassroots organizations—including SCHW, Taita Taveta Human Rights Watch, and Sauti ya Wanawake—which played a key role in guiding the tool's design.

These partners also piloted Haki Ardhi in September 2023 in Kakamega and Taita Taveta counties, providing valuable insights that helped refine its functionality to address the real challenges women face when pursuing justice. Particular attention was given to safety and accessibility, with robust data privacy safeguards and personal security features that allow women to report violations confidentially and without fear of reprisal.

The tool, now in use in Siaya and Homa Bay counties continues to evolve based on feedback from grassroots women's organizations supporting land rights cases. Initially focused on documenting disinheritance and forced evictions, Haki Ardhi has been expanded to include cases of women's exclusion from decision-making over matrimonial or communal land. Improvements proposed by local partners are discussed collectively and agreed upon before implementation by the technology provider, which also delivers regular training to strengthen local CSOs' capacity to use the tool effectively and make minor backend updates that improve data entry, case tracking, and analysis.

Accessibility

Haki Ardhi targets women of all backgrounds. The reporting process is intentionally simple and inclusive. Cases land-rights violations can be logged through several channels: via toll-free SMS, by phone to local CSOs, or through direct contact with community paralegals or local CSO offices. These multiple entry points ensure affordability for women in rural areas and accommodating differing literacy and technology levels.

PROCESS

Once a case is reported, the tool directs users to redress mechanisms recognized under Kenyan law. These include formal legal action through the courts, engagement with relevant government institutions, and alternative dispute-resolution options such as customary processes, provided they align with constitutional principles of gender equality and non-discrimination. Throughout the process, local civil-society partners provide continuous support to complainants.

When recurring patterns of violations are identified, the national partner (KLA) can escalate the issue by engaging the Ministry of Lands or other authorities to prompt targeted interventions. This layered structure links individual case resolution with broader systemic reform.

Timeframes for resolution vary. On average, straightforward cases may be addressed within three to four weeks, while more complex or contested claims can take several months, depending on institutional responsiveness and cooperation among parties.

BOX: KEY BENEFITS OF THE HAKI ARDHI TOOL FOR

Women

- **Accessibility:** Women can initiate reports via a toll-free short message service (SMS) service, reducing barriers related to distance and cost.
- **Safe and trusted reporting:** Reports are submitted through local CSOs, CBOs and grassroots women's organizations deeply rooted in the community, offering a more familiar and secure setting.
- **Timely support in urgent cases:** The system enables rapid response and direct assistance in emergencies involving rights violations.
- **Referral pathways:** Women receive guidance and referrals to appropriate services, including legal aid, counselling, or relevant government agencies, tailored to the nature of the violation.

Community -based Organizations

- **Structured follow-up:** Cases can be tracked systematically, with follow-up actions recorded over time.
- **Trend monitoring:** A centralized database enables pattern identification, such as recurring types of violations or hotspots where cases are frequent and urgent.
- **Evidence for advocacy:** Aggregated data helps strengthen and better target advocacy efforts.
- **Targeted awareness-raising:** Real-world cases and trends support credible, informed public engagement and education campaigns.

OUTCOMES

Haki Ardhi functions as an end-to-end reporting and tracking system, documenting cases from the initial complaint through to resolution. It creates transparency and allows systematic monitoring of progress, types of support provided, and emerging trends. As case resolution can take a very long time, intermediate outcomes should be reported throughout the process. Outcomes may include:

- Urgent attention needed
- Case ongoing
- Case referred to litigation
- Case withdrawn
- Case resolved in favour of woman who reported violation
- Case resolved against woman who reported violation

Beyond resolving individual cases, Haki Ardhi contributes to prevention and policy reform through its data-driven approach, which strengthens local support structures and fosters an enabling environment for protecting women's land rights nationally.

As deployment expands to new counties, the platform enhances the national evidence base on women's land-rights violations, enabling both quantitative analysis of case patterns and qualitative insights into their social complexity. This context-specific data supports policy monitoring, helps assess progress on international commitments such as the Rio Conventions, and informs targeted awareness campaigns, budget allocations, and gender-responsive land governance reforms.

LESSONS LEARNED

The success of the Haki Ardhi tool depends on a coordinated network of actors ranging from national CSOs to community-based actors, including land rights defenders, community paralegals, and local CSOs who can support women to protect their tenure rights through each step of the reporting and redress process. For local CSOs and their teams to effectively use the tool, the following enabling conditions must be met:

- **Digital literacy and accessibility:** The Haki Ardhi tool is designed to ensure inclusivity and usability for all level of digital literacy.

- Local ownership of the tool: Data collection processes are led by users and those closest to the users.
- Informed consent of the women reporting land rights violations, including clear communication to users on how their data will be used.
- Data justice principles: Users must understand how their data is collected, who can access it, and how it might affect them.
- Upholding of the tool's security protocols to ensure safe reporting, including data protection and privacy, ethical data management.
- Building trust among affected women: Local CSOs should build and maintain trust by ensuring a safe space for reporting, using clear respectful language, obtaining explicit consent from women, and including victims in all relevant follow-ups.
- Risk assessment and safeguards: To identify potential threats and vulnerabilities associated with collecting personal and sensitive data and develop appropriate safeguards.

Challenges and areas for improvement

Despite progress, limited awareness of the Haki Ardhi tool constrains uptake. Many women continue to rely on traditional complaint channels, missing the opportunity for structured reporting that can also feed policy advocacy. Broader use of the platform would strengthen evidence-based engagement with authorities and help drive systemic reforms.

Another challenge concerns expectations of quick outcomes. Trust-building among women users is closely linked to whether cases are resolved satisfactorily. However, timelines are influenced by factors beyond the tool's control—such as the complexity of violations or institutional delays. This creates a communication gap between the tool's long-term accountability objectives and women's immediate need for resolution. Achieving credibility therefore requires balancing systemic goals with tangible, timely results at the individual level.

To address these barriers, increased investment in a targeted outreach and communication strategy promoting the use of the tool is recommended. Such a strategy should:

- Convey the platform's wider benefits in terms that resonate with grassroots women.
- Position women not only as users but also as local advocates and champions of the tool.
- Demonstrate tangible results to build confidence and sustained engagement.
- Combine awareness-raising with capacity-building to strengthen digital and legal literacy.

Ultimately building trust through visible impact at the personal level will be key to sustaining engagement and expanding grassroots ownership of the tool.

The long-term success of Haki Ardhi in advancing women's access to justice and equitable land rights depends on its sustained use and the strategic application of the data it generates to inform policy interventions and guide reforms in land governance. Once this foundation is firmly established, the tool's approach could be extended to other areas—such as environmental conservation and rural development—where secure land access is vital for household food security, sustainable livelihoods, and community resilience.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- [Haki Ardhi land rights reporting tool - A path to gender-responsive climate action - Food4Transformation](#)
- [Blog: Haki Ardhi: Women, Land and Climate Justice - Rainforest Foundation UK](#)
- [TMG_InfoBrief_HakiArdhi_.pdf](#)
- [Her Land #HerLand](#)