



AMERICAN
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SERVICE



**PROMOTING
HUMAN RIGHTS IN
KENYA**

In the village of Memirlosho, a group of Samburu women come together to talk about social issues and create ornate beadwork that they sell as a collective. These women are supported by Samburu Women Trust (SWT), a grassroots organization fighting for the rights of the Indigenous Samburu people, particularly women and girls. Learn more about SWT's work on page 18. *Photo by Lameck Ododo*

OUR MISSION

American Jewish World Service (AJWS) is the leading Jewish organization working to fight poverty and pursue justice in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. By supporting hundreds of social change organizations in 17 countries and advocating for U.S. and international policies for human rights, we respond to the most pressing issues of our time—from disasters, genocide and hunger, to the persecution of women and minorities worldwide. With Jewish values and a global reach, AJWS is making a difference in millions of lives and bringing a more just and equitable world closer for all.



A view of Lake Elmenteita in Kenya's Great Rift Valley. Photo by Christine Han

INTRODUCTION

Kenya is home to a breathtaking array of landscapes—from sandy white beaches in the east, to lakes, rivers and forests in the west, to the cliffs and savannahs of the majestic Great Rift Valley that cut through the heart of the country. Described as “the cradle of humanity,” Kenya hosts a kaleidoscope of vibrant cultures, with more than 40 ethnic groups and over 60 languages spoken there.

The majority of Kenya’s population is deeply connected to the land for food, livelihood and cultural traditions. But beginning with the rise of colonialism and until today, this natural harmony has been disrupted. Governing bodies have prevented Indigenous and rural communities from owning and managing their own lands, and massive development projects have been allowed to plunder the land that these communities depend on for survival. While this development has yielded profit and progress for some, it has deepened poverty for many others. Moreover, the environmental impact of these projects has further devastated a country plagued by worsening droughts—a consequence of the climate crisis—causing conflict, food insecurity, hunger and loss of livelihoods.

Seismic political shifts have also shaped the nation over the past century, as it shed British colonial rule. Independence and democracy afforded some Kenyans new representation in their government and new rights. But the most vulnerable in society continue to face daunting barriers to achieving equality. This is especially true for women and adolescent girls, LGBTQTI+ people, sex workers, and Indigenous and poor communities, many of whom suffer prejudice and violence that undermine their wellbeing and ability to thrive.

Today, American Jewish World Service supports 39 Kenyan organizations working to address these pressing issues and build a more just and equitable society for all Kenyans.

OUR GRANTEES

Bar Hostess Empowerment and Support Programme
 Box Girls Self Help Group
 Busia Survivors Self Help Group
 Coast Sex Workers Alliance
 Defenders Coalition
 DiploBrief Media
 Empowering Marginalized Communities - Kenya
 Endorois Welfare Council
 galck+
 Gender Sensitive Initiatives
 Hunter Gatherer Forum of Kenya
 Husika Trust
 Initiative for Equality and Non-Discrimination

Jinsiangu
 Katiba Institute
 Kisumu Sex Workers Alliance
 Kuria Foundation for Social Enterprise
 Lean on Me Foundation
 Minority Womyn in Action
 Moving the Goalposts Kilifi
 Msichana Empowerment Kuria
 National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission
 Nyanza Initiative for Girls' Education & Empowerment
 Ogiek Peoples' Development Program
 Pamoja Initiative
 Pastoralist Girls Initiative
 Positive Young Women Voices

Q-Initiative Eldoret
 Samburu Women Trust
 Save Lamu
 Sengwer Indigenous Community Trust
 Sister to Sister Initiative
 Steps Ahead Consulting Limited
 The Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health
 Upinde Advocates for Inclusion
 Urgent Action Fund Africa
 Western Twaweza Empowerment Campaign
 Wong'on Women Initiative
 Young Women's Leadership Institute





BACKGROUND: A Brief Political History of Kenya

A CROSSROADS OF COMMERCE AND CULTURE

Starting in the 7th century, Arabs began settling the coastal areas of East Africa. Over the centuries, they built trade posts that facilitated contact and commerce with the Arab world, Persia and India. As trade flourished along the coastline, some Arab traders remained in the area and contributed to the development of the language that came to be known as Swahili, which is Kenya's official tongue today.

In 1498, the Portuguese arrived on Kenya's shores, and set up a naval base and trading post in the coastal area of Mombasa. But after years of fighting with the dominant local Arab community, known as the Omanis, the Portuguese were expelled from the area in the early 18th century—paving the way for the Omanis to consolidate control over the coast. With more control over the land, the Omanis developed long-distance trade routes that penetrated the interior, extending their reach far beyond the coast.

THE RISE OF BRITISH COLONIAL RULE

While the Omanis remained the dominant power in the region for some time, they were eventually joined by the British, who set their sights on the Kenyan coast's strategic location on the route to India. Christian missionaries had been active in the

region since the mid-18th century, and Great Britain formally consolidated control with the establishment of the East Africa Protectorate—later the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya—in the late 19th century. They did so after the Berlin Conference—a summit during which European powers carved up Africa into territories for European nations to colonize by coercion or by force.

As in other colonies under their rule, the British introduced sweeping legal changes that governed land ownership, political representation and morality. They adopted land policies that allowed thousands of British settlers to acquire valuable, resource-rich property—pushing native Kenyans off the lands they had lived on for generations. These white settlers—some of whose descendants still occupy these lands today—were allowed a voice in government and came to dominate it, while Kenyans were banned from direct political participation. The British also regulated gender roles and intimacy. They enforced social norms that excluded women from leadership and governance positions and, as part of the penal code, made same-sex relations a crime punishable by up to 14 years in prison.

ABOVE Uhuru Park in central Nairobi. *Photo by Christine Han*

GROWING DISCONTENT AND THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

From the beginning, Kenyans resisted the subjugation of British rule. Local communities fought the theft of their lands and resources, and they eschewed the forced labor that the British imposed. Led by independence activists like Mekatilili Wa Menza, they mounted rebellions against colonial authorities, which were met with violence and punitive measures.

In the mid-1940s, charismatic anticolonial leaders—including Jomo Kenyatta—began to rally people to protest in large numbers. Kenyatta's organization, the Kenya African Union, called for more equitable land ownership and a greater voice for native Africans. Despite the rising pressure from this vocal bloc, the British did little to improve the representation of native Africans in political decision-making. This led to a split in the Kenya Africa Union, with a faction of the movement deciding to take up arms against the British.

From 1952 to 1960, hundreds of young African men and landless peasants, many of whom had lost their land to corrupt chiefs and European settlers, launched attacks on political opponents and raided white settler farms—in what became known as the Mau Mau uprising. The British suppressed the revolt by calling in the Royal Air Force, killing thousands of fighters, detaining and interning tens of thousands suspected of being part of the rebellion, and displacing populations en masse. The colonial administration continued to deny universal suffrage to non-Europeans, feeding a growing wave of freedom and independence movements insisting on self-rule.

In 1960, British and Kenyan leaders met in London to create a roadmap for independence, which led to the establishment of the Kenya African National Union (KANU). Kenya achieved full independence in 1963, with Kenyatta serving as its first president.

FROM INDEPENDENCE TO AUTHORITARIANISM

Jomo Kenyatta is widely viewed as modern post-colonial Kenya's founding father, but his 14-year rule, which lasted until his death in 1978, did not bring freedom for many Kenyans. The economy thrived, and yet members of the KANU party continued the British practice of appropriating land from the poor and suppressing dissent. Kenyatta's government institutionalized corruption, outlawed several opposition parties and

clamped down on dissent and civic spaces. After his death, his successor, Daniel Moi, continued this legacy of political repression and declared the KANU party the sole legal party of the country.

Moi ran a dictatorial state that quashed resistance: Over his 24-year rule, his government jailed, tortured and “disappeared” political dissidents. In the 1990s, international and domestic pressure finally forced Moi to allow a multi-party system, known as the “second liberation.” During this period, newly formed NGOs set on ensuring fundamental freedoms began to act as watchdogs for human rights violations, and the call for a representative and holistic constitution began to take root.

In 2002, increasing discontent and opposition to Moi's practices led to the election of Mwai Kibaki as the country's third president—bringing an end to 40 years of KANU rule. Kibaki presided over a period of rapid economic growth but ongoing political unrest. During his bid for re-election in 2007, over 1,200 people died in severe election-related violence and more than 600,000 were displaced. This turmoil eventually brought the intervention of former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and the African Union.

To move the country forward, Kofi Annan mediated a negotiation between the two presidential candidates, arriving at an accord that called for an overhaul of Kenya's constitution. The new constitution, adopted in 2010, separated executive, judicial and parliamentary power and decentralized decision-making to 47 newly created counties. In addition, it introduced provisions intended to better protect human rights, like guaranteeing the freedom to associate and freedom from discrimination. It also guaranteed the cultural and land rights of Indigenous communities who collectively own land. Still, in subsequent years, the government has failed to adopt and implement laws to back up many of these rights—making the lofty promises difficult to enforce.

THE POLITICS OF KENYA TODAY

In 2013, Kenyans elected a divisive new president, Uhuru Kenyatta. The son of Kenya's founding father and one of the richest men on the continent, Kenyatta also faced controversy over charges of crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Court (ICC), as he allegedly helped instigate and finance the wave of violence during the 2007

elections. These charges were eventually dropped, but only after reports of serious intimidation of witnesses and victims.

When Kenyatta sought re-election in 2017, he was again declared victorious—yet the win was widely viewed as a sham. The election was declared null and void by the Supreme Court, forcing the country to repeat it. This period was marked by widespread protests, many of which were violently muzzled by state military and police. The 2017 elections had one silver lining: Despite the corruption and protests, Kenyans also elected their first three female governors. Thanks to the powerful advocacy of women’s rights activists, today, 22 percent of seats in Kenya’s national parliament are held by women.

In 2022, William Ruto—who served as Kenyatta’s deputy president and was also implicated in the charges at the ICC—narrowly won his bid for the presidency. This recent election saw a great degree of apathy among the electorate—with the lowest voter turnout in 15 years, as many disillusioned voters skipped the polls rather than make a choice between deeply flawed, entrenched political figures.

Among human rights and civil society groups, Ruto is being watched with a great degree of caution. Ruto and his family are religious fundamentalists with a well-documented history of homophobia, and most activists are wary that he will continue the authoritarianism that marked Kenyatta’s rule. Still, it remains to be seen whether Ruto will reinforce Kenyatta’s repressive trends or chart a better path.



A view of Kenya’s Great Rift Valley. *Photo by Jonathan Torgovnik*

FOLLOWING PAGE The staff of AJWS grantee Jinsiangu pictured outside their offices in Nairobi. Jinsiangu works to defend the rights and enhance the wellbeing of intersex, transgender and gender non-conforming people in Kenya. *Photo by Jonathan Torgovnik*



TODAY'S HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES: AJWS grantees take a stand

The legacy of Kenya's colonial past—which entrenched a system of deep inequality—and its present-day political authoritarianism have set the stage for an array of human rights abuses that adversely affect the country's marginalized communities. Against this challenging backdrop, it is ever more critical to support the growth of strong and resilient movements for social justice and equality. Today, AJWS supports 39 social change organizations that are leading these calls for change.

ACHIEVING LGBTQI+ RIGHTS BY CHANGING HEARTS, MINDS AND SOCIAL NORMS

For decades, the LGBTQI+ community in Kenya has experienced unchecked bigotry and violence. Same-sex relations remain illegal under the Penal Code Act, and LGBTQI+ people have faced discrimination in employment, housing, health care and education. Many have even been subjected to traumatic “conversion therapies.” In some communities, violence against LGBTQI+ people is frequent and carried out without legal consequence in broad daylight. In fact, rather than preventing attacks, police often extort, intimidate and abuse LGBTQI+ people.

To stand up for the rights of the LGBTQI+ community, AJWS supports a network of LGBTQI+ organizations throughout Kenya working to reverse discriminatory laws, stop violence and change cultural stigma. A main focus of their work is called **norm change**—changing both individual and institutional attitudes towards LGBTQI+ people to create a more equitable society. AJWS and the organizations we support seek to understand the root causes of homophobia and transphobia, work to change individual hearts and minds on a mass scale, and enforce legal protections to bring about structural change in society overall.

BUILDING A NORM CHANGE NETWORK IN KENYA

AJWS funds nearly 20 organizations working on norm change in Kenya and creating a roadmap to advance change across the country. Following a deeply rooted feminist approach, most of these organizations are led by women, trans and gender non-conforming activists. The work began by assembling a broad coalition of grantees to carry out a massive research and mapping project in order to better understand mainstream social norms and attitudes towards LGBTQI+ people

CHANGING HEARTS AND MINDS FOR LGBTQI+ RIGHTS:

Coaching political and religious leaders to confront homophobia and champion LGBTQI+ rights.



Expanding health policies to include trans people.



Filing court cases to overturn the penal code criminalizing homosexuality.

Encouraging media and arts spaces to include LGBTQI+ experiences and generate cultural acceptance.

in Kenya. In 2021, AJWS and our grantee **Public Health Innovations (PHI)** published the results of this multi-year project. This research, which AJWS grantee **National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC)** is disseminating to the movement at large, is helping to develop a collective vision and a guide to eliminate the attitudes in Kenyan society that fuel homophobia, transphobia and oppression.

A COLLABORATIVE ROADMAP TO JUSTICE

Beginning in 2018, AJWS has coordinated nine convenings of our norm change network. These convenings were the first time since 2012 that activists from across the LGBTQI+ movement came together to collaborate on meaningful change. Together, they developed a roadmap that is informing the movement's multifaceted strategies, including engaging with universities to develop inclusive curricula; encouraging artists, media personalities and progressive politicians to promote inclusion; expanding health care policies to include trans people; working with families and religious leaders to confront their biases; and filing cases in the courts to decriminalize homosexuality.

AJWS GRANTEES EFFECTING CHANGE

In recent years, the LGBTQI+ organizations that AJWS supports have made tangible headway in their communities. They have conducted trainings and outreach to engage a wide swath of society in combatting entrenched homophobia, embarked on complex legal battles to decriminalize same-sex relationships, and supported LGBTQI+ people to live safe and dignified lives.

For example:

To shift harmful social norms that endanger the lives and wellbeing of LGBTQI+ people, an AJWS grantee in Mombasa called **Initiative for Equality and Non-Discrimination (INEND)** is educating police, taxi and minibus operators, government administrators and past perpetrators of hate crimes to become allies. Through their trainings and advocacy to influence key decisionmakers, INEND is changing the negative mainstream narrative on LGBTQI+ people. In addition, they are coordinating with other organizations to build a movement that shares learnings, connections and strengths to advance societal change and amplify the voices and the needs of sexual and gender minorities.



Wambui Mating'i (left) is a legal assistant for the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission in Kenya. *Photo by Lameck Ododo*

To end discrimination against LGBTQI+ people in the legal system, other organizations AJWS supports are taking to the courts. In 2019, several AJWS grantees—among them **galck+** and the **NGLHRC**—challenged Kenya's cruel anti-homosexuality law in the country's High Court. This section of the Kenya's penal code criminalizes sexual relationships between consenting same-sex adults, which can be punishable by up to 14 years in prison. Despite national and international opposition to these archaic laws, Kenya's High Court ruled to uphold them, citing a lack of evidence that these laws violated human rights. But the activists were not deterred. NGLHRC and galck+ jumped into action and filed an appeal, and NGLHRC additionally applied to formally produce evidence to the court. In 2021, they were finally approved to submit evidence, which will strengthen the case for repealing this unconscionable law.

To build strong LGBTQI+ networks and community spaces, **NGLHRC** also acts as a hub for LGBTQI+ life in Kenya. They host social events to strengthen connections, offer counseling to those in crisis or processing trauma, and provide legal aid and representation to dozens of people every month who are targeted by police or prosecuted in court. And in response to an uptick in attacks on LGBTQI+ rights in Kenya, **galck+** has created an Emergency Security Response program to provide relocation and tele-

counseling services to LGBTQI+ people under threat. Launched in 2020, this initiative provides a platform and tools to help LGBTQI+ people cope with mental health struggles, difficulties resulting from COVID-19, and security threats related to their activism.

To increase the visibility of LGBTQI+ people in Kenyan society, AJWS grantees are also promoting the leadership of intersex people. For example, Dr. Dennis Nyongesa Wamalwa has recently stepped into the spotlight—achieving an important victory for intersex representation. Following extensive advocacy by AJWS grantees **Jinsiangu** and the **Intersex Persons Society of Kenya**, in 2022, Dr. Wamalwa was voted onto the Kenyan National Commission on Human Rights, making him the first openly intersex person to assume such a high-profile state position in Africa. Jinsiangu has long been central to the fight for intersex rights in Kenya. In 2019, they worked closely with a task force established by Kenya's Attorney General to create a report on the needs of the country's intersex people—which led Kenya to legally recognize intersex people as a third sex and ensure they are counted in the next census.

SAFEGUARDING SEXUAL HEALTH AND RIGHTS

In Kenya, women and girls are often denied basic human rights and the agency to make decisions about their own lives. Adolescent girls and young women are an especially vulnerable group, as they are subject to damaging practices that harm their health or limit their futures. Early marriage is common, as is sexual harassment and abuse, and in certain communities, female genital mutilation remains a pervasive practice. Though laws exist to increase girls' access to education, information and health services, these are seldom implemented, especially in rural areas and among the urban poor.

Sex workers* are another marginalized group fighting to live and work in safety and with dignity. In Kenya—as in many countries around the world—sex workers face pervasive discrimination, stigma, threats to their health and violence. They are often unfairly blamed for the country's HIV rates and denied medical care. Many are raped, beaten and robbed by their clients, and fined, detained, arrested and sometimes abused and extorted by police. And although access to healthcare is guaranteed under Kenya's constitution, in practice, many doctors and clinics deny services to sex workers.

*When AJWS refers to sex workers, we mean consenting adults who choose this work of their own free will.

AJWS GRANTEES EFFECTING CHANGE

Despite these formidable challenges, Kenyan women, adolescent girls and sex workers are leading efforts to advocate for their fundamental rights, including equality, health and safety. In order to help advance their efforts and amplify their voices, AJWS is supporting a constellation of organizations that are creating access to quality sexual and reproductive health care, giving girls the knowledge and tools to thrive and become self-sufficient, and advancing gender equality and tolerance.

For example:

In Kenya, seven women die every day from complications related to unsafe abortions, despite the fact that abortion is a constitutional right under certain conditions. Still, Kenya's Ministry of Health has made it nearly impossible to access abortion by constantly changing its guidelines on eligibility and even banning the training of abortion providers. But AJWS grantee **TICAH—Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health**—has been fighting to change this. In 2019, TICAH helped secure a groundbreaking High Court ruling that the government must allow medical schools to train abortion providers and ensure that clinics can access the medicines and equipment they need. Today, TICAH is pushing the Kenyan government to implement its abortion policies, and they are working to ease the social stigma around abortion and expand access to reproductive healthcare.

We are also supporting grantees like **Msichana Empowerment Kuria**, which works with adolescent girls in the Kuria community in western Kenya, where there are high rates of female genital mutilation and early and child marriage. Msichana supports girls and young women, including those who have run away from home to escape these practices. And through engaging cultural and religious leaders, strengthening relationships with local government, training law enforcement agencies and influencing policy, Msichana is successfully changing cultural norms to reduce these harmful practices.

To end discrimination against sex workers and promote their wellbeing, AJWS grantee **Bar Hostess Empowerment and Support Programme** is ensuring that sex workers have access to justice, support and health care. Since 2013, the organization has successfully represented hundreds of sex workers who were arrested by police for small offenses like loitering, but then charged with prostitution. To pursue broader



Members of the Bar Hostess Empowerment and Support Programme present on their work to ensure the health, safety and dignity of sex workers in Kenya. *Photo by Christine Han*

change, they are working closely with the International Commission of Jurists to challenge the petty offences in Kenya's Penal Code that are used to arrest and harass sex workers. And in addition, Bar Hostess has ensured that sex workers in Kenya have access to healthcare by running drop-in clinics and providing sex education and safe-sex materials.

DEFENDING LAND, WATER AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

The majority of Kenya's rural population relies on farming, fishing or grazing. In arid regions of the country, small villages and nomadic tribes cluster around the few natural water sources, subsisting on livestock as they have for generations. But since Kenya's independence, the government has sold land and endorsed massive development projects that have choked vital rivers and pushed rural people—who were never consulted on these projects—off their ancestral lands. Meanwhile, the government has further marginalized some arid regions by failing to invest in them, leading to a dearth of essentials like schools, hospitals and infrastructure for the Indigenous communities that live there.

While Kenya's new constitution says that the land and natural resources must benefit the people, legislation to back up this claim has yet to be seriously implemented. Development and mining frequently take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the people who live on the land, often to their detriment. And although the constitution

allows communities to collectively own and manage their lands—further codified by the passage of the Community Land Act in 2016—very few communities have been able to officially register their land thus far.

For example, in the Rift Valley, the government has allowed timber companies to acquire and raze pristine land that had been inhabited for generations by Indigenous communities who are deeply rooted to and reliant on their ancestral forests. And recently, following the discovery of oil reserves, the government is steamrolling huge tracts of land and villages through the heart of the country to build a vast network of ports, highways, oil refineries and coal plants, known as the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transportation (LAPSSET) Corridor. LAPSSET threatens to disrupt thousands of fisherfolk and pastoralists (herders) who are already struggling with the ongoing and devastating droughts that have decimated their livelihoods.

These challenges have been particularly damaging for Indigenous people, and especially Indigenous women, who do most of the farming and bear responsibility for feeding their families, while owning almost none of the land.

AJWS GRANTEES EFFECTING CHANGE

AJWS works with Indigenous groups and marginalized rural folk who are resisting these attacks on their land and the environment. The organizations we fund help communities wage strategic legal battles to secure the right to own and sustainably manage the lands, forests and water that they depend on for survival—

and of which they are the best and rightful stewards. In addition, these groups support communities' efforts to restore degraded land and conserve habitats for future generations.

For example:

In 2022, the Indigenous Ogiek community of Kenya won a landmark court case against the government 13 years in the making—securing the rights to their ancestral lands as well as reparations for the violations committed against them. The Ogiek people are deeply connected to the Mau Forest, a fragile ecosystem where their ancestors have lived for time immemorial. For decades, the Kenyan government violently evicted Ogiek communities and burned down their homes to allow commercial loggers to strip trees from this delicate forest. But with support from AJWS grantee **Ogiek Peoples' Development Program (OPDP)**, the Ogiek community took legal action. After years of setbacks, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights finally ordered the Kenyan government to guarantee the Ogiek unhindered use of their land—and pay \$1.24 million dollars in reparations for years of abuse.

Several AJWS grantees have led a successful resistance campaign against a major coal-fired power plant that was slated to be built in the coastal county of Lamu. The project would have endangered the area's ecosystem, threatened the livelihoods of fishing communities and polluted the air. AJWS grantees including **Save Lamu**, **Katiba Institute** and **Natural Justice** joined forces in 2016 to help create **deCOALonize**, a coalition of organizations turning



Ogiek people celebrate outside of the Africa Court of Justice in Arusha after receiving their long-awaited reparations verdict in 2022. Photo courtesy of Ogiek Peoples' Development Program

the tide on rampant industrial development in Kenya. Thanks to their multi-year efforts, in 2019 Kenya's National Environmental Tribunal revoked the license for development of the plant. Now, deCOALonize is leveraging the strength of their movement to fight other harmful development and promote alternative solutions to fossil fuels through renewable energy.

The members of the movement have also partnered to aid coastal communities that were being harmed by construction of a massive new port in Lamu, Kenya, which is on the LAPSSET corridor. Over the course of six years, Katiba Institute (with support from Natural Justice) litigated a case contending that the government had failed to adequately consider the negative environmental, economic and social impacts of the port. In 2018, the court ruled in their favor through a landmark victory that ordered the government to pay more than \$17 million in damages to 4,600 fisherfolk whose livelihoods were harmed by the construction and conduct a full environmental impact assessment of all of the LAPSSET projects before they can move forward. Save Lamu has since been working to hold the government accountable to the court's mandates.

In northern Kenya, AJWS grantee **Samburu Women Trust (SWT)** is defending the land and expanding women's leadership in Indigenous communities. SWT has led processes that ensure that Indigenous women in various life circumstances—single, married, widowed and those living with disabilities—are for the first time ever included in the process of registering their community lands. As they fight against unbridled development that is encroaching on their ancestral lands, they're ensuring that women are leading the charge side by side with men.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

In Kenya, climate change has brought rising temperatures, prolonged droughts and severe floods that threaten the crops, livestock and water supply critical to the survival of Indigenous and rural people. Kenya's farmers and pastoralists live in a constant state of limbo, moving from one emergency to the next—and each time a crisis strikes, entire communities are displaced or brought to the verge of starvation.

AJWS GRANTEES EFFECTING CHANGE

AJWS responded to the food insecurity that raged in East Africa in 2011-2012, and we are again responding to the resurgence of this crisis that began in 2022,

when the deadly convergence of the climate crisis and disruptions in the food supply chain created a global hunger emergency. We are supporting grantees like **Samburu Women Trust** to distribute food, press for government aid, and help communities prepare for future droughts and learn new ways to earn their livelihoods. Indeed, dozens of our grantees in the global climate justice movement are addressing the root causes of the crisis and ensuring that those most unjustly affected have the tools to build resilience, survive and thrive.

When COVID-19 first emerged, devastating communities the world over, AJWS mobilized swiftly to help our grantees survive the crisis. Organizations tended to the urgent needs of their communities, disseminated lifesaving information about the virus, defended human rights under attack and built resilience for the future. For example, on the island of Lamu in northern Kenya, communities were initially skeptical that the threat of COVID was real. **Save Lamu** realized they had a role to play in spreading the truth, and they took charge. They recruited the island's "town crier," Shee Kibwana Shee, to circle public areas with his megaphone and educate communities about COVID-19. By using this age-old local form of communication and distributing protective equipment, they were able to dramatically slow transmission of the disease.



Shee Kibwana Shee, the "town crier" enlisted by Save Lamu to educate communities about COVID-19, uses his megaphone to spread the word. *Photo courtesy of Save Lamu*



OUR COMMITMENT IN KENYA

AJWS is committed to supporting the growth of strong Kenyan grassroots movements to build a more just and equitable society for all Kenyans. Our grantees are:



Providing girls with education and leadership skills, enabling them to earn an independent living and advocate for their human rights.



Seeking to stop unbridled development projects that threaten the lives of local people, and advocating for Indigenous and rural communities to be consulted about the use of their lands.



Working to bolster the movement for LGBTQI+ rights and overturn harmful laws that criminalize same-sex relationships.



Organizing local land rights struggles and pressuring the government, the media, investors and developers to consider the human cost of their projects.



Responding to humanitarian disasters fueled by the climate crisis, pandemics and conflicts—providing food, shelter and support so people can recover, rebuild and prepare for the future.



Creating alliances among isolated Indigenous and rural communities working on land rights, in order to share strategies, build strength in numbers and wield greater influence.



Educating community leaders, clergy, police and families about LGBTQI+ rights in order to change societal norms, such that LGBTQI+ people will be able live with dignity, safety and freedom.



Promoting the leadership of Indigenous women in movements for land rights, and ensuring women have a greater say in decisions that affect their futures.

\$19 million invested in Kenya since 2001

ABOVE In downtown Nairobi, deCOALonize leads a demonstration to oppose a proposed coal plant as part of their efforts to fight harmful development and champion renewable energy. *Photo courtesy of deCOALonize*

AJWS GRANTEES IN KENYA: A Closer Look

The social change organizations AJWS supports in Kenya are making progress against tremendous odds. Their stories show how grassroots activists are empowering local people to bring about change and achieve justice.



INITIATIVE FOR EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Changing norms, hearts and minds—from bigotry to empathy

When Esther “Essy” Adhiambo moved to the conservative and religious coastal city of Mombasa, she was horrified at the persecution that she saw. LGBTQI+ people were being beaten in the streets; preachers were inciting this violence from their pulpits; and police couldn’t be counted to defend them. In some cases, the police actually joined in on the abuse. Essy, who grew up as a rural herder and eventually became a prominent lesbian activist, knew she had to act—and she set out to make a difference.

Essy joined the staff of PEMA Kenya, a former AJWS grantee working to reduce stigma, improve access to health services and reshape Kenya’s laws and culture to welcome LGBTQI+ people. At PEMA, Essy led a program to transform clergy and police into allies by introducing them to LGBTQI+ people, after they got to know them first as individuals. When they formed bonds, and learned face to face about the struggles of this community, something clicked—many former abusers finally saw the humanity they shared with LGBTQI+ people and the larger community.

TRAINING PERPETRATORS OF HATE CRIMES

In 2014, with support from AJWS, Essy founded the **Initiative for Equality and Non-Discrimination (INEND)** to continue to tackle anti-LGBTQI+ violence and pursue norm change in the broader society. She found immense success in an unlikely place: with the city’s “boda boda” motorbike taxi drivers, some of whom had been incited by religious leaders to perpetrate brutal attacks against LGBTQI+ people in the past.

Essy was determined to transform these drivers’ homophobia and prejudice into empathy and tolerance. “Don’t protest to ignorant people,” she said. “Bring them to the table, sit with them, educate them and inform them so they’re in the know.”

CHANGING HEARTS TO TRANSFORM SOCIETY

Following thoughtful research to inform INEND’s strategy for change, Essy launched a series of workshops to take the boda boda drivers on a journey from hate to allyship. INEND worked with these men, often one by one, to change their attitudes. “I am thankful to INEND because they have opened our eyes,” said Mohammad, a boda boda driver enrolled in the workshops. To date, INEND has trained hundreds of boda boda drivers, and they’ve begun to train “matatu” minibus drivers as well. They’re already seeing a profound shift in attitudes within this community.

“Instead of seeing an escalation in violence, it’s going down,” explained Santa Bingo, a leader of one of the boda boda stands and a past attacker of LGBTQI+ people. Today, he is educating fellow drivers to be allies to the LGBTQI+ community and is proud that “the hatred is going down.”

INEND’s workshops have turned many boda boda and matatu drivers into an unexpectedly dedicated legion of protectors for LGBTQI+ Mombasans. Those who have gone through the training now sport special reflector vests with INEND’s logo, signaling their allyship to the community. Now, when LGBTQI+ Kenyans catch a ride with one of these marked taxis, they can rest assured that they will reach their destinations safely.

LOCATION: Mombasa, Kenya

WEBSITE: www.inendkenya.com

AJWS FUNDING HISTORY: \$257,000 since 2014

PREVIOUS PAGE Esther “Essy” Adhiambo leads a workshop on LGBTQI+ issues and rights for “boda boda” motorbike taxi drivers. Though some of these drivers used to harass LGBTQI+ people on the streets, today they are allies and protectors—thanks to the trainings on human rights and tolerance run by Essy’s organization, INEND. *Photo by Jonathan Torgovnik*

SAMBURU WOMEN TRUST

Women helm a movement for Indigenous rights

In the remote reaches of the bushlands of Northern Kenya, a sprawling network of villages called Lenguruma stand out against the scrubby trees, sandy embankments, and zebras and giraffes that roam freely through the land.

It is here that over 2,500 Samburu people live as they have for generations—herding and grazing goats, and continuing their mostly nomadic lifestyles. But in 2016, everything changed: Kenya's Community Land Act required Indigenous communities to obtain legal titles to their land—a complex and arduous process—without which the government could exercise free reign to mount massive development projects on their lands.

STANDING BY THE COMMUNITY

Not long after, AJWS grantee Samburu Women Trust (SWT) stepped in to help. SWT, which supports Indigenous pastoralist communities to stand up for their rights, led the Lenguruma community to create bylaws, register every member and file every document requested by the government. But while the Lenguruma community submitted their application to the local government years ago, the government has yet to process it.

In the meantime, the government has revealed major development plans as part of Kenya's LAPSSET Corridor project—which include an oil pipeline bisecting Lenguruma; an artificial lake and dam; and a highway leading to a resort city. Every one of these projects has been planned without consulting the community, despite the fact that if carried out, their effects will be catastrophic for the Lenguruma lands.

"Our children deserve to own their family's land legally," says Nolmeki Lensharu, a young leader in Lenguruma. "You don't know if your children will live here even tomorrow. We could be evicted at any time."

PROMOTING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Nolmeki is one of the many women that SWT has emboldened to take the lead. "Each and every opportunity we get to empower women, we take it. Mentorship, workshops, trainings, educating girls as young as nine about their basic human rights," says

Rufina Rhoda, an SWT project officer. "When they are given the knowledge, they can stand up and say 'No.' But if you don't know your rights, you don't know that you can say 'No.'"

Rufina is referring to a spectrum of human rights. SWT works to address challenges within the community, like the fight against female genital mutilation and the struggle for women to hold leadership positions. And they also tackle issues with entities outside the community, like the battle to legally register their land, and advocating for the government to increase its investment in schools and hospitals in often neglected remote areas.

IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL

In Lenguruma, SWT will continue to stand by the community's side until their rights are recognized. Lemundirioni Lemuruasi, one of Lenguruma's oldest residents at 85, wants his community treated with dignity and equality.

"When we speak about this land, it's something we truly love... Everything we have comes from this land, and we thank SWT for guiding us and helping us with the registration," he says. "We stand together, and we'll work together for as long as it takes. We're holding on to hope. We refuse to give up. We'll never tire of this fight. Just like the acacia tree at the center of our village will not move—neither will we."

LOCATION: Nanyuki, Kenya

WEBSITE: www.samburuwomentrust.org

AJWS FUNDING HISTORY: \$351,962 since 2015

FOLLOWING PAGE (clockwise from top)

As SWT fights against unbridled development, they're ensuring that women like Jane Lesanja, Salante Lebulkash and Silankon Lesamparag (left to right) are leading the charge. "These issues affect us all," says village elder Lebulkash, "so we must all be included."

Njapanese Lengoisigi welcomes visitors to the Lenguruma community.

SWT's team hold a meeting in their offices in Nanyuki, Kenya.

Photos by Lameck Ododo



EMPOWERING MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

Raising funds and chickens to fight LGBTQI+ stigma

Nelson Mutugi Silas was born into a Christian family in Meru, Kenya. From an early age, Nelson—who uses they/them pronouns—felt that “there was a conflict in me. I was attracted to boys, and I didn’t know why. But I did know it was a sin.” Terrified, they buried these feelings while studying at an all-boys school and then in university.

“I trusted God that this feeling would go away. I prayed, I fasted. But my feelings were very strong,” says Nelson.

On the advice of their preacher, Nelson eventually married a close female friend from university. But within months, the couple was estranged. When Nelson’s wife filed divorce papers, Nelson sank into depression and considered suicide. Desperate to hold on, they knew they needed to find answers.

A LIFELINE IN THE LGBTQI+ MOVEMENT

Nelson turned to Facebook, and soon was introduced to AJWS grantee **galck+**. With immense bravery and still rattled by fear, Nelson reached out to galck+ to help navigate the divorce. There, Nelson met the future head of **National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC)**, Njeri Gateru.

“She told me it was fun being queer—and I saw that she was so comfortable with who she was. I finally began to accept myself, and to understand myself,” Nelson says.

Then, Nelson had a realization: There had to be other religious Christian Kenyans struggling with their gender and sexual identity. In 2016, with the guidance and support of NGLHRC, Nelson launched AJWS grantee **Empowering Marginalized Communities (EMAC)**, initially a support group helping LGBTQI+ churchgoers accept their authentic selves. Nelson traveled around Eastern Kenya, visiting both churches and bars, to expand this community. Within a year, EMAC had grown to serve over 500 LGBTQI+ people.

Today, EMAC assists 25 groups across Kenya to build a grassroots movement for sexual minorities and fight stigmas against LGBTQI+ people. To support

this work, EMAC has turned to an unusual source of revenue—chicken farming.

HATCHING CHICKS AND MENDING RELATIONSHIPS

In 2017, program leaders at EMAC had the unconventional idea to begin raising chickens in order to aid the work of their partner organizations. Armed with wood, wire and determination, EMAC built its first hatchery—which soon began to produce over 5,000 chicks each month. This provided EMAC with steady income, which they used to support their partners’ work.

In 2020, the uncertainty of the early pandemic days caused external funding to dry up, and dozens of groups faced the threat of closure, leaving LGBTQI+ people who relied on their services nowhere else to turn.

EMAC realized that by expanding the poultry project, they could generate more revenue and train beneficiaries who wanted to begin their own poultry projects. And indeed, once EMAC’s partners installed their own poultry projects, they were able to become self-sufficient, earning their keep and supporting their own advocacy work.

The hatcheries also led to an unlikely consequence: easing tensions between EMAC and local communities.

From its inception, EMAC endured stigma, police raids, and violence from neighbors and community members who inaccurately viewed the organization as a “brothel” and “homosexuality recruitment center.” But once EMAC expanded the poultry project, the attitudes of local people started to change. “Once they came and saw the work that we are doing, they changed their perspectives.” Nelson shares. “Now they are friends—they have become allies.”

LOCATION: Tala, Kenya

WEBSITE: www.emac.or.ke

AJWS FUNDING HISTORY: \$157,295 since 2020



TOP Nelson Mutugi Silas, founder of Empowering Marginalized Communities (EMAC), tends to tomato plants at the organization's farm in Machakos County, Kenya.

BOTTOM The staff of EMAC gather outside their offices in Tala, Machakos County.

Photos by Lameck Ododo

Participants join hands during a training led by the Initiative for Equality and Non-Discrimination (INEND), which is transforming former perpetrators into allies by educating them on the issues that affect Kenya's LGBTQI+ community. Photo by Jonathan Torgovnik

Beyond Grantmaking: How Does AJWS Make a Difference?

AJWS provides financial support and accompanies grantees to strengthen their organizations and scale up social movements. To accomplish this, we:

- Support grantees for multiple years, because sustainable change takes time
- Invest in nascent organizations and help them grow bigger and stronger
- Address the root causes of human rights abuses
- Convene organizations that work on similar issues, enabling them to learn from each other and form strong movements
- Help our grantees access global media platforms and foster their leadership on the international stage
- Ensure that women, Indigenous people, LGBTQI+ people, ethnic and religious minorities, and other marginalized groups remain at the center of all our social change efforts
- Advocate on Capitol Hill for foreign policy that promotes and advances human rights worldwide
- Conduct research and share our findings with grantees and fellow funders, advancing the field of human rights



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Our deepest gratitude to Bill Resnick and Michael J. Stubbs for their leadership and support of AJWS grantees addressing homophobia and transphobia in Kenya.

FRONT COVER The National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC) was founded to be a safe harbor for LGBTQI+ people in crisis. Today, NGLHRC's vibrant, young staff—pictured in their offices in Nairobi—offer legal representation, provide psychological counseling, and run social and educational events for the LGBTQI+ community. *Photo by Lameck Ododo*

BACK COVER A rainbow appears after a shower in Samburu territory in Kenya, where rain is a rare and much longed-for occurrence. *Photo by Lameck Ododo*



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