



INTEGRATED PUBLICATION: WE4R KENYA

**From Local Evidence to Systemic
Change: Three Pathways to
Women's Land Rights**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The **Women Empowerment for Resilient Rural Areas (WE4R)** project operates across nine counties in western Kenya, advancing women's land rights, access to productive resources and voice in decision-making. Guided by the 3Rs - Rights, Resources and Representation - WE4R applies a gender-transformative approach that goes beyond addressing the symptoms of inequality to challenge unequal power relations, harmful social norms and institutional barriers.

In Kenya, WE4R was deliberately built on an existing foundation rather than introduced as a stand-alone intervention. The project was layered onto relationships, organisational capacities and delivery systems strengthened through the first phase of **Women's Voice and Leadership (WVL)**, alongside CARE Kenya's established working relationships with county governments. This enabled WE4R to move more quickly from project entry to locally led action while strengthening, rather than duplicating, the existing ecosystem of women's rights organisations, community actors and institutional relationships.

This publication brings together learning from **West Pokot, Siaya and Bungoma**, where locally led organisations pursued different but complementary pathways to gender justice in land governance. In **West Pokot**, male allyship is helping transform customary institutions from gatekeepers into allies. In **Siaya**, widows' collective organising and survivor-led advocacy contributed to landmark legislative change through the **Siaya County Widows Protection Act, 2025**. In **Bungoma**, community-based Alternative Justice Systems are expanding accessible and locally trusted pathways for women to claim land and inheritance rights.



Across these diverse contexts, one lesson emerges clearly: gender-transformative change is strongest when women's lived experiences generate evidence, locally rooted organisations mobilise collective power, and existing community and institutional systems are engaged and transformed rather than bypassed.

The three county experiences therefore represent more than individual interventions. Together, they demonstrate how locally generated evidence can move from community action to changes in social norms, justice systems, institutional practice and policy - strengthening women's Rights, Resources and Representation.

Introducing the layered approach

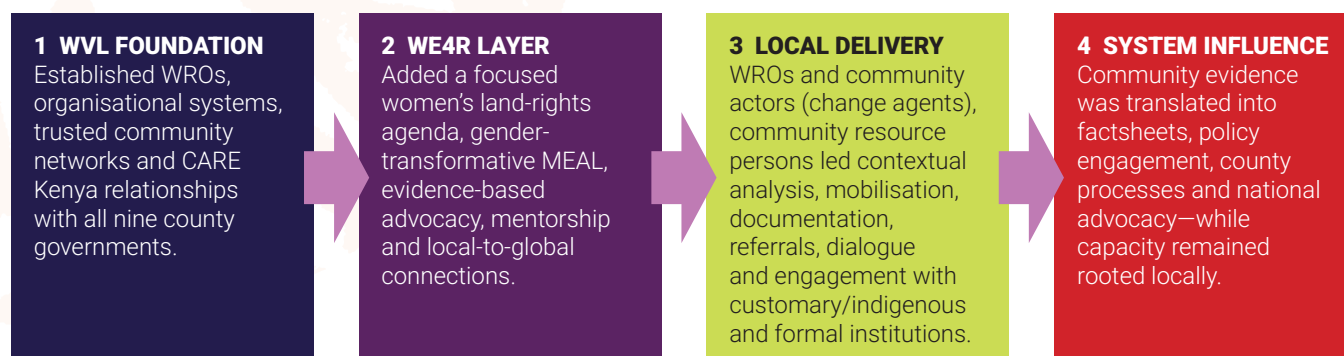
The model below illustrates the foundation that made this locally led work possible. It shows how WE4R built on established women's rights organisations, community networks and county relationships; added a focused women's land-rights and gender-transformative layer; supported locally led delivery; and translated community evidence into wider systems influence.

WE4R KENYA | LOCALISATION IN PRACTICE - Layering for locally led success

How sustained investment in women's rights organisations created a ready platform for gender-just land governance.

CORE INSIGHT WE4R was not established as a parallel, stand-alone project. In Kenya, it was deliberately layered onto relationships, organisational capacities and delivery systems strengthened through the first phase of Women's Voice and Leadership (WVL), alongside CARE Kenya's established working relationships with the nine county governments. This enabled WE4R to move quickly from project entry to locally led action, while deepening—not duplicating—the existing ecosystem.

THE LAYERED MODEL



EVIDENCE THAT THE MODEL WORKED

REACH BUILT ON EXISTING CAPACITY	LOCAL EVIDENCE ⇒ LOCALLY RELEVANT INFLUENCE
• 14 WROs/WLOs across nine counties—Kakamega, Bungoma, Siaya, Homa Bay, Migori, Vihiga, Kisumu, Busia and West Pokot—formalised roles in implementation. • 56 change agents engaged—42 women (75%) and 14 men (25%)—with 33 stakeholders trained in evidence-based advocacy (20 women and 13 men). • Established county level relationships accelerated access: CARE Kenya's working relationships with all nine (9) county governments created trusted entry points for referrals, dialogue, policy engagement and locally led influence.	• Siaya: lived experience of widow dispossession and inheritance barriers informed advocacy around protection, justice and county structures. • Bungoma/Mt. Elgon: women's reliance on clan mediation informed recognition and strengthening of community-led and alternative justice pathways. • West Pokot: WRO leadership and trusted male allies/CRPs supported norm change, mediation, referrals and women's recovery of land rights.

PROJECT THEORY OF CHANGE: THE 3Rs

RIGHTS	RESOURCES	REPRESENTATION
WROs and change agents generated and used locally grounded evidence to advance women's land and inheritance rights, challenge discriminatory norms and strengthen access to justice and accountability pathways.	WE4R strengthened women's access to and control over land, productive resources and services, while equipping local actors with advocacy skills, mentorship, evidence tools and links to opportunities.	Women, WROs and supportive male allies carried community evidence into county decision-making spaces—enabled by established government relationships—and onward to national, regional and global processes.

THE DESIGN LEARNING Layering succeeds when established local systems and national and sub-national governments' relationships advance women's rights, expand access to resources and strengthen representation—leaving stronger organisations, institutional linkages and accountability pathways beyond the funding cycle.

2. THREE LOCALLY ADAPTED PATHWAYS TO CHANGE



Across West Pokot, Siaya and Bungoma, WE4R worked through a common gender-transformative logic while adapting its approach to the specific power structures, social norms and justice systems shaping women's land rights in each county. The result was **one systemic-change architecture expressed through three locally grounded pathways**.

WEST POKOT

Male Allyship & Customary Transformation

In West Pokot, sustainable change required working with the institutions and people that traditionally influence land allocation, inheritance, and dispute resolution. Through POWEO, WE4R engaged the **Pokot Council of Elders, chiefs, Land Control Boards, community mediators, and male family members** to strengthen their support for women's land rights.

The shift was from male control to male allyship: elders increasingly recognised women's land rights, chiefs supported women in dispute resolution, land boards became more responsive to women's claims and women gained stronger voice in mediation spaces.

PATHWAY: *Gatekeepers* ⇌ *Allies*

SIAYA

Survivor-Led Advocacy & Legislative Change

In Siaya, the pathway began with widows organising collectively around experiences that had long remained hidden by stigma and harmful cultural norms. Through Muungano Rural Empowerment Centre and SWINET, widows built solidarity, documented lived experiences, participated in public forums and carried those experiences into county policy processes.

This organising contributed to the **Siaya County Widows Protection Act, 2025**, translating grassroots voice into an institutional framework for widows' protection, welfare and accountability.

PATHWAY: *Silence ⇒ Collective Voice ⇒ Legislative Change*

BUNGOMA / MT. ELGON

Alternative Justice & Community Mediation

In Mt. Elgon, women's land rights were constrained not only by discriminatory norms but also by limited access to affordable and trusted justice systems. Through ADS Western Kenya, WE4R strengthened community-based and Alternative Justice Systems involving **elders, chiefs, interclan committees, peace ambassadors and other local actors**.

These mechanisms provided more accessible pathways for women to report disputes, seek mediation and claim inheritance and land rights while maintaining links to formal justice systems where required.

PATHWAY: *Exclusion ⇒ Accessible Community Justice*

Closing synthesis

Different contexts required different entry points - but all three pathways worked by engaging existing systems, strengthening women's agency and shifting the power relations that determine whose rights are recognised, whose voices are heard and whose claims are acted upon.

3. FROM LOCAL ACTION TO COLLECTIVE IMPACT



Across the three counties, change occurred through different pathways, but the outcomes converged around a common goal: shifting the power, norms and institutions that shape women's access to land, justice and decision-making.

WOMEN'S AGENCY & VOICE

Women increasingly moved from being recipients of support to becoming rights-holders, advocates and participants in decisions affecting their lives.

- In **West Pokot**, women reported greater awareness of inheritance rights, increased confidence to report disputes and stronger participation in mediation.
- In **Siaya**, widows organised collectively, spoke openly about harmful practices and carried their lived experiences into public participation and legislative processes.
- In **Bungoma**, women and widows increasingly reported land disputes and demonstrated greater confidence in claiming inheritance and land rights.

SHIFTING SOCIAL NORMS

The interventions created space to challenge practices and beliefs that had historically normalised women's exclusion from land and justice.

- Male elders and traditional actors in **West Pokot** increasingly recognised women's voice and land rights.
- Widows in **Siaya** challenged the silence surrounding harmful widowhood practices and brought previously private experiences into public debate.
- In **Mt. Elgon**, community justice actors became more aware of women's constitutional rights and their role in protecting them.

STRONGER LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

Change extended beyond individual empowerment to the institutions and systems that determine whether women's rights can be exercised in practice.

- **West Pokot**: stronger collaboration among POWEO, chiefs, elders and Land Control Boards.
- **Siaya**: grassroots advocacy contributed to the **Siaya County Widows Protection Act, 2025**, creating formal county structures for widows' protection and welfare.
- **Bungoma**: community mediation and Alternative Justice Systems strengthened accessible pathways between women, local justice actors and formal institutions.

LOCALLY GENERATED EVIDENCE BECAME A TOOL FOR INFLUENCE

Across all three counties, women's lived experiences were not treated simply as stories. They became evidence for advocacy, dialogue, institutional engagement and policy influence.

This is one of WE4R's most important collective outcomes: local knowledge moved upward - from women and communities into institutions, governance processes and wider advocacy - while leadership and capacity remained rooted locally.

COLLECTIVE GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE OUTCOMES

AGENCY

Women increasingly claimed their rights, spoke up in mediation and public forums, and participated more actively in decisions affecting land, inheritance and justice.

NORMS

Harmful beliefs and practices that had normalised women's exclusion were challenged through dialogue, organising and community engagement.

INSTITUTIONS

Customary, community and county-level institutions became more responsive to women's claims through stronger collaboration, mediation pathways and formal structures for protection and welfare.

INFLUENCE

Women's lived experiences became evidence for advocacy, shaping mediation outcomes, county decision-making, institutional reform and legislative change.

4. ONE ARCHITECTURE, THREE LOCALLY ADAPTED PATHWAYS



The three county experiences demonstrate that WE4R's gender-transformative approach is consistent in its underlying logic but flexible in how change is achieved. Across West Pokot, Siaya and Bungoma, three common patterns stand out.

1. CHANGE STARTS WITH POWER, NOT ONLY SERVICES

The interventions did more than provide information, legal awareness or support. They addressed the **power relations, harmful social norms and institutional practices** that determine whether women can exercise their land and inheritance rights.

In West Pokot, this meant engaging men and customary leaders as allies. In Siaya, it meant placing widows at the centre of organising and advocacy. In Bungoma, it meant strengthening community justice structures so that women's claims could be heard and acted upon.

2. LOCAL SYSTEMS BECAME PLATFORMS FOR CHANGE

Rather than bypassing existing institutions, each pathway worked through systems that communities already knew and trusted.

- **West Pokot:** Pokot Council of Elders, chiefs and Land Control Boards.
- **Siaya:** widows' groups, public participation processes and county institutions.
- **Bungoma:** elders, chiefs, interclan committees and community mediation structures.

This increased the **local legitimacy, ownership and sustainability** of change.

3. LIVED EXPERIENCE BECAME EVIDENCE FOR ADVOCACY

Across all three counties, women's experiences were documented and translated into evidence that could influence dialogue, decision-making and institutional practice.

POWEO documented women's land-rights realities in West Pokot. Widows in Siaya used testimony and collective advocacy within public participation and legislative processes. ADS Western documented cases and mediation experiences in Mt. Elgon.

WHAT MADE EACH PATHWAY DISTINCTIVE?

- **WEST POKOT – TRANSFORMING POWER HOLDERS**
Male allyship was the entry point for shifting customary land governance.
- **SIAYA – TURNING VOICE INTO LAW**
Survivor-led organising connected women's lived experience to county-level legislative change.
- **BUNGOMA – BRINGING JUSTICE CLOSER**
Alternative Justice Systems created more accessible, locally trusted pathways for women facing land disputes.

THE CORE LEARNING

Localisation is not about applying the same intervention everywhere. It is about holding a common gender-transformative goal while adapting the pathway to the institutions, relationships and power structures that shape women's lives in each context.

5. KEY LESSONS FOR GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE LAND GOVERNANCE



1. LOCALLY LED CHANGE IS STRONGER WHEN IT BUILDS ON EXISTING CAPACITY

WE4R demonstrates the value of investing in women's rights organisations, trusted community networks and established institutional relationships rather than creating parallel delivery structures. This enabled locally rooted actors to lead contextual analysis, mobilisation, documentation, referrals and advocacy.

2. WOMEN'S LIVED EXPERIENCE IS A FORM OF EVIDENCE

Across all three counties, women's experiences became more than testimony. They informed advocacy, mediation, public participation, institutional engagement and legislative change, strengthening the link between local realities and wider decision-making.

3. GENDER TRANSFORMATION REQUIRES ENGAGING POWER HOLDERS

Women's empowerment alone cannot shift systems if the institutions and actors that control land, inheritance and justice remain unchanged. Sustainable progress requires engaging male allies, elders, chiefs, community justice actors and formal institutions as part of the transformation process.

4. LOCALISATION REQUIRES DIFFERENT PATHWAYS TO THE SAME GOAL

The three county experiences show that there is no single route to gender justice. Male allyship, survivor-led advocacy and community justice all became viable pathways because they responded to the specific power structures and institutional realities of each context.

PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE ACTION

Building on the collective experience, future programming should:

- **Deepen investment in women-led and locally rooted organisations** so that advocacy capacity, community trust and institutional relationships remain beyond individual funding cycles.
- **Strengthen women's leadership and representation** within customary, community and formal land-governance and justice structures.
- **Expand engagement with male allies and other power holders** to accelerate social-norm change while keeping women's agency at the centre.
- **Strengthen links between community justice and formal systems**, including referral pathways, legal literacy and gender-responsive mediation.
- **Support implementation of the Siaya County Widows Protection Act, 2025** and translate legislative gains into accessible protection, accountability and support for widows.
- **Invest in documentation and evidence systems** so that locally generated knowledge continues to inform county, national and wider advocacy.

CONCLUSION

Women's land rights are about more than ownership. They are about power, dignity, security, livelihoods and whose voice carries weight in decisions that shape everyday life.

The experiences of West Pokot, Siaya and Bungoma demonstrate that gender-transformative change becomes possible when interventions are locally rooted, evidence-driven and willing to engage the systems and power holders that sustain inequality.

WE4R's strongest lesson is therefore not that one model can be replicated everywhere. It is that locally led organisations can use different pathways to pursue the same transformative goal: stronger Rights, Resources and Representation for women.

Different pathways. Shared purpose. Locally led change that moves from evidence to influence - and from influence to systemic change.

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