



About **act:ionaid** Kenya

Since 1972, ActionAid International Kenya (AAIK) has had operations in Kenya as a non-religious, non-partisan development organization to end poverty and injustices.

AAIK works in solidarity with communities living in poverty and exclusion to shift power to the communities and facilitate their own leadership by holding duty bearers accountable to Protect, Respect and Fulfill their rights in line with the constitution of the Republic of Kenya.

We have presence in twenty five counties working closely with local organisations and partners. The counties include: Baringo, Garissa, Homabay, Isiolo, Kajiado, Kilifi, Kisumu, Kitui, Laikipia, Makueni, Meru, Murang'a, Nairobi, Nakuru, Siaya, Taita Taveta, Tharaka Nithi, Turkana, Wajir, Marsabit, Elgeyo Marakwet, West Pokot, Embu, Mombasa and Migori.

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EDITORIAL TEAM

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Widow Wins Landmark Land Justice Battle

When Jane Ariyo John looks across the land she once feared she had lost forever, she sees more than fertile soil, she sees the fulfillment of a promise made to her late husband, John Ayuo Bwai, and a restored hope for her family. Her journey stands as a quiet victory that continues to inspire widows in her community in Southwest Kwabwai, Ndhiwa, Homa Bay County.

For years, Jane and her husband worked tirelessly to build a better future for their seven children. In 2008, her husband purchased a piece of land to supplement the small portion of ancestral land he had inherited from his father. The family cultivated the land for more than fifteen years, relying on it for food and income. However, after John became seriously ill and later passed away, tragedy struck again. A neighbour who owned land adjacent to the family's farm took advantage of the situation. Knowing that the land had not yet been formally registered in the family's name, he allegedly moved to register it and forcefully pushed Jane and her children off the land they had occupied and farmed since 2008. The experience left Jane devastated.

"I cried many times because I felt like everything my husband had worked for was being taken away from us," she recalls. "The land was our hope. It was the future of my children."

As a widow raising seven children, Jane sought help through local administrative structures. She reported the matter to the village elder, chief, and Assistant County Commissioner. Several attempts were made to resolve the dispute, but the alleged grabber repeatedly avoided meetings and delayed discussions.

"The pain was not only losing the land," Jane says. "It was watching someone take advantage of my husband's death and believing I could do nothing about it."



Jane looks over her land that had previously been grabbed, standing firm as she takes it back under her care.

The challenge was compounded by deeply rooted cultural attitudes that continue to affect many women in parts of Kenya. In her community, women have traditionally faced barriers to land ownership, with some people maintaining that women cannot own land because they are married into families rather than born into them.

“Many widows suffer in silence because they are made to believe they have no rights,” Jane explains. “I almost lost hope because I had never been to court and did not know where to begin.”

Fortunately, the family still had the original sale agreement from 2008 and could identify the individual who sold the land to her husband. While local administrators advised her to seek legal redress through the courts, Jane lacked both the resources and knowledge to navigate the legal system.



Jane inspects her maize in a section of the farmland as it continues drying in readiness for harvest.

A turning point came when she attended a land rights sensitization meeting organized by ActionAid Kenya. After the meeting, she approached the organization’s staff and shared her story.

“They listened to me with respect and gave me time to explain everything,” she says. “For the first time, I felt that somebody believed me and understood what I was going through.”

ActionAid Kenya supported Jane by providing ongoing education on land rights, as well as continuous encouragement and emotional support throughout her journey. The organization also assisted with follow-up processes and connected her with pro bono legal services. Through this support, Jane secured legal representation, enabling her case to be presented in court by a lawyer. Beyond legal assistance, ActionAid Kenya continued to provide guidance and psychosocial support, helping her navigate the challenges she faced throughout the process. “They taught me that I had rights as a widow and that the law protects women,” Jane says. “That knowledge gave me courage.”

Although encouraged by her legal team, appearing in court remained an intimidating experience.

“My first day in court was frightening,” she recalls. “I had never stood before a judge before. I prayed constantly and asked God to give me strength.”

The case, filed in January 2025, proceeded through the legal system for nearly a year. Throughout the proceedings, Jane remained determined to pursue justice for her family.

Eventually, the court ruled in her favour after reviewing evidence, including the original sale agreement and proof of the family's long-term occupation and use of the land.

The judgment ordered that the land be returned to the family and directed that succession proceedings be undertaken to facilitate its lawful registration.

"When I heard the court's decision, I felt relief and gratitude," Jane says. "It was proof that justice is possible, even for ordinary women like me."

Today, Jane has regained access to the land and has resumed farming. She is currently undertaking the succession process as directed by the court and looks forward to the day when the title deed will officially bear her name.

"I cannot wait for the day I hold that title deed," she says. "It will not only represent ownership of land; it will represent dignity, security, and the future of my children."

Her victory has had an impact far beyond her own household. Inspired by her experience, Jane has become a community advocate for women's land rights. Other widows increasingly seek her advice and support when facing similar challenges.

"I tell them not to give up," she says. "Keep your documents safe, seek help, and know your rights. Being a widow does not mean you lose your voice or your property."

Jane believes her story carries an important message for communities across Kenya.

"Women have rights under the law, and those rights must be respected," she says. "No widow should be chased from her land simply because her husband has died."

Kenya's Constitution guarantees every person's right to own property and protects individuals from arbitrary deprivation of property. The Constitution also prohibits discrimination based on gender and upholds equal rights for women and men.

The Matrimonial Property Act further recognizes women's rights in matrimonial property and acknowledges both financial and non-financial contributions made during marriage, including farming, childcare, and household management.

Despite these protections, many widows continue to face land dispossession and inheritance-related challenges due to cultural practices and lack of awareness of their legal rights.

Jane's successful court battle demonstrates that legal remedies exist and that women can claim and protect their land rights when supported with information, legal assistance, and community solidarity.

As she continues the succession process, Jane remains hopeful that her victory will encourage other women to stand up for their rights and pursue justice.

"My husband bought this land for our family's future," she says. "Today, that future is alive again. I thank God, for everyone who stood with me. My message to other widows is simple: do not lose hope. Justice is possible."

Empowering Change Through Sustainable Livelihoods

Rebecca Cheruto, a mother of six grown children and a grandmother of three, lives in Baringo North Sub-County, Saimosoi Location, Chabatsiat Village.

For many years, Rebecca depended on charcoal burning as her main source of income. Like many women in her community, she had limited livelihood options. To provide food and pay school fees for her children, she cut down trees, despite the environmental damage and government restrictions. Though harmful and exhausting, it was her only means of survival. Her life took a difficult turn when she developed obstetric fistula during childbirth. The condition not only affected her health but also exposed her to domestic violence.

Eventually, her husband abandoned her and married another woman. With the help of a well-wisher, Rebecca received medical treatment. Although her husband later returned, he had fathered more children, placing additional strain on the already limited family resources.

For years, Rebecca had heard about organizations working in her community but believed such opportunities were meant only for educated people. Deep-rooted cultural norms often excluded women from decision-making processes, reinforcing the belief that women could not lead or benefit from development initiatives.



Rebecca Cheruto caring for her poultry flock with dedication and passion.

This changed when ActionAid Kenya began working in her area through the Africa Women Voices for Peace project, which seeks to promote peace and includes a strong component on women's economic empowerment. Through community sensitization, the organization introduced programs focused on building skills, opportunities, and leadership among women, something Rebecca and many others had never experienced before.

Rebecca participated in a poultry farming training organized by the project, which covered production, pest management, and disease control. The training completely changed her perception of poultry farming, which she had previously seen as having little economic value. For many participants, it was their first experience with formal training.

Following the training, the women received incubators to support chick hatching. With her new knowledge, Rebecca learned how to operate and manage the equipment. During the first hatching cycle, she successfully hatched 230 chicks, proving poultry farming could be a reliable source of income.

She sold some chicks and raised others for egg production, steadily increasing her household income. Her improved earnings also enabled her to contribute more to her Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA), strengthening her financial stability.

Today, poultry farming is Rebecca's full-time livelihood. She manages every aspect of production, hatching, feeding, vaccinating, cleaning, and monitoring the health of her flock. She has upgraded from a basic structure to a modern poultry house, raised above the ground to protect against predators, fitted with wire mesh for ventilation, and designed to maintain high hygiene standards.

Rebecca is now preparing to expand her enterprise to supply poultry at a wholesale level, having already secured a bulk buyer.

Her journey reflects resilience and transformation. Moving from environmentally destructive charcoal burning to sustainable poultry farming,

Rebecca's story highlights how empowering women with skills and opportunities can restore dignity, protect the environment, and create lasting change. "I didn't see value in keeping chicken, but after being trained on poultry farming, I have seen its double advantage. I can use chicken for domestic consumption, improving my family's nutrition, and earn income from selling eggs and chicken. This is far better than charcoal burning, which was climate-unfriendly and exhausting," says Rebecca Cheruto.

Rebecca has adopted agroecological practices to manage pests, using homegrown pepper and aloe vera as natural remedies for her chickens. This approach has reduced her reliance on industrial insecticides and medications, making her farming more sustainable.

Rulia Nelline, Project Officer for Africa Women Voices for Peace Project, notes the broader impact:

"The training on alternative livelihoods was widely embraced by the women. Most have diversified their sources of food and income, leading to increased savings in local Village Savings and Loan Associations. This has significantly strengthened women's empowerment in the community."

The Africa Women Voices for Peace project, which has enabled stories like Rebecca's, is supported by the Judith Neilson Foundation.



Rebecca Cheruto (second from right), together with members of the Cherkaa Women Group, with Rulia handing over the incubator, solar panel, and battery. This support helped the women hatch more chicks.

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