PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN KENYA
**OUR MISSION**

American Jewish World Service (AJWS) is the leading Jewish organization working to pursue justice and fight poverty in the developing world. By supporting hundreds of social change organizations in 19 countries, 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.

*Above* Forest scouts patrol a newly planted reforestation area in Nessuit, Kenya, with support from Ogiek Peoples’ Development Programme, an AJWS grantee.

All photos by Jonathan Torgovnik unless otherwise noted.
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 cutting right through the heart of the country. Described as “the cradle of humanity,” this rich landscape is home to a kaleidoscope of vibrant cultures. Kenya has more than 40 ethnic groups and more than 60 languages are spoken there.¹

The majority of Kenya’s people are deeply connected to the land for their food, livelihoods and traditions. But beginning in colonial times and intensifying in recent years, the natural harmony has been disrupted by massive development projects that plunder the land that rural and indigenous people depend on for survival. While this development has yielded profit and progress for some, poverty has deepened for many others. Additionally, Kenya has been plagued by worsening droughts fueled by climate change, causing massive food shortages, hunger and conflict.

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, adolescent girls, LGBTI people and sex workers, many of whom suffer prejudice, violence and harmful traditional practices that undermine their health and wellbeing.

Today, American Jewish World Service supports 31 Kenyan organizations working to address these pressing issues and build a more just and equitable society for all Kenyans.

¹ https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/explore/countries/kenya/#kenya-reserve.jpg
OUR GRANTEEES

Bar Hostess Empowerment and Support Programme (BHESP)
Busia Survivors Self-Help Group
Endorois Welfare Council (EWC)
Fahamu
Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya
Il’laramatak Community Concerns (ICC)
Initiative for Equality and Non-Discrimination (INEND)
Jinsiangu
Katiba Institute (KI)
Kenya Natural Resources Alliance (KENRA)
Kenya Sex Workers Alliance (KESWA)

Kituo Cha Sheria (Kituo)
Malindi Rights Forum (MRF)
Minority Women in Action (MWA)
Msichana Empowerment Kuria (MEK)
Namati
National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders - Kenya (NCHR-K)
Natural Justice (NJ)
Nyanza Initiative for Girls’ Education and Empowerment (WETEC)
Oasis of Abject Images Diversion Kenya (OAIT)
Ogiek Peoples’ Development Programme (OPDP)

Pastoralist Development Network of Kenya (PDNK)
Persons Aggrieved and Marginalized (PEMA Kenya)
Q-Initiative
Samburu Women’s Trust (SWT)
Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health (TICAH)
Voices of Women in Western Kenya (VOWWEK)
The WoMin Alliance Trust (WoMin)
Western Twaweza Empowerment Campaign (WETEC)

Some grantees are not listed due to security considerations.
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 these 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, 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, but Great Britain formally took control over Kenya as a colony in 1920. They did so after the Berlin Conference—a summit where European powers carved up Africa into territories for 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 property in the Kenyan highlands—pushing native Africans off the lands they had lived on for generations. These white settlers were allowed a voice in government and came to dominate it, while native 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.

GROWING DISCONTENT AND THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE
Soon after the colony was founded, Kenyans began to resist the subjugation of British rule. Charismatic anti-colonial activists and leaders—including Jomo Kenyatta—began to rally people in protest. 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 faction, the British did little to improve the representation of native Africans in political decision-making, which led a segment of the disaffected populace to take up arms.

BACKGROUND: A Brief Political History of Kenya

ABOVE A view of the rift valley in Kenya.

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 rebels, detaining and interning tens of thousands suspected of being part of the rebellion, and displacing massive populations.3

While the colonial administration made some reforms during these years to appease the populace—for example, in 1957, they allowed native leaders into the legislature—they continued to deny universal suffrage to non-Europeans, feeding a continuing 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 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 outlawed several opposition parties in 1969.4 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 jailed, tortured and “disappeared” dissidents. In the 1990s, international and domestic pressure finally forced Moi to reinstate a multi-party system, and in 2002, increasing discontent and opposition 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 electoral violence and more than 600,000 were displaced.5 This turmoil eventually brought the intervention of former U.N. 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 on August 2010, separated executive, judicial and parliamentary power; decentralized decision-making to 47 newly created counties; and introduced provisions that intended to better protect human rights. Yet 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 enjoyed popular support from his family’s Kikuyu tribe. He also faced charges of crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Court, because he allegedly helped instigate and finance the wave of violence during the 2007 elections. These charges were later dropped.6

When Kenyatta sought re-election in August 2017, his bid was hotly contested. He was announced the winner at first, but the country’s Supreme Court nullified the result due to irregularities. After elections were repeated in October of that year, Kenyatta was again declared victorious—yet the win was viewed as a sham because the largest opposition party withdrew from the process and directed its supporters not to cast their ballots.7 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. Today, over 21 percent of seats in Kenya’s national parliament are held by women.8

Still, as Kenya enters a second term under Kenyatta’s rule, human rights groups and advocates have expressed mounting concern over growing authoritarianism. They also report increasing suppression of their efforts to defend human rights. Against this challenging backdrop, it is ever more critical to support the growth of strong and resilient movements for social justice and equality.

3 https://www.hrw.org/blog-feed/kenya-elections-2017
4 https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?locations=KE
The legacy of Kenya’s colonial past—which entrenched a system of deep inequality—and its present-day political repression have set the stage for an array of human rights abuses that adversely affect the country’s poorest and most vulnerable citizens. AJWS supports 31 social change organizations that are leading social movements to address these ills and advance a more just future for all of Kenya’s citizens.

DEFENDING LAND, WATER AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

The majority of Kenya’s rural population relies on farming, fishing or grazing. Small villages and nomadic tribes cluster around the arid country’s few natural water sources, subsisting on the same crops and livestock that they have for generations. But since Kenya’s independence, the government has sold land and endorsed development projects that have choked vital rivers and pushed rural people off their ancestral lands.

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 still take place without the adequate consent of the people who live on the land, often to their detriment.

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 and other rural people. Along the southern coast, salt companies have forcibly evicted rural families to make way for large salt processing plants and miles of salt fields that have stripped the landscape of its life. And more 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 major transportation passageway, known as the Lamu

ABOVE  Boys carry supplies in a salt harvesting field in Malindi, Kenya. The salt industry has destroyed many communities on Kenya’s coast by appropriating lands, displacing residents and irreparably damaging the once-fertile soil of the region.
Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transportation (LAPSSET) Corridor. LAPSSET threatens to uproot thousands of people who have been given little or no say about these life-altering projects.

These challenges have been particularly devastating for Kenyan women, who do most of the farming and yet own almost none of the land. This is largely due to traditional practices that place men as heads of households and primary decisionmakers. Moreover, as the government strips more and more communities of their territory and their rights, women bear responsibility for feeding their families amidst the ever-increasing threat of crushing poverty.

AJWS GRANTEES EFFECTING CHANGE

AJWS works to empower communities to defend the land and natural resources that they depend on for their livelihoods and survival, and to ensure that local people can live in harmony with their environment.

For example:

With support from AJWS and its grantee Ogiek Peoples’ Development Programme (OPDP), in May 2017 Kenya’s indigenous Ogiek community won a landmark case at the African Court on Human and People’s Rights to stop the government from evicting this forest-dwelling group from their land in order to make way for logging. The court upheld the Ogiek people’s right to live in the forest and to seek reparations for their losses, and it recognized their status as a distinct indigenous people—setting an important legal precedent for indigenous communities across the entire continent.

Several AJWS grantees have led a successful resistance campaign against a coal-fired power plant slated to be built on 975 acres of the country’s coast. The project would endanger the area’s delicate ecosystem, threaten the livelihoods of fishing communities and pollute the air. AJWS grantees Natural Justice, Katiba Institute and the Kenya Natural Resources Alliance (KENRA) have joined forces with several grassroots, national and international organizations to halt the plant’s construction through a campaign known as “DeCOALonize.” Thanks to their efforts, in November 2016 a court temporarily blocked construction of the plant, sparing an estimated 460,000 people living in the vicinity from its toxic byproducts.

In April 2018, Kenya’s High Court ruled in favor of coastal communities living in Lamu, Kenya, in a six-year long case that was litigated by Katiba Institute with support from Natural Justice, both AJWS grantees. The case contended that the government of Kenya had failed to adequately consider the negative environmental, economic and social impacts of a new port in Lamu, on the LAPSSET corridor. The High Court ordered the Kenyan government to pay more than $17 million in damages to 4,600 fisherfolk whose livelihoods were harmed by the construction, and it now obligates the Kenyan government to undertake a full environmental impact assessment of LAPSSET before the port or other projects can continue to move forward.

Samburu Women’s Trust (SWT) works to ensure that women play a key role in communal resistance to the LAPSSET project. They emphasize educating and organizing women to make their voices heard, because women in these indigenous nomadic communities have traditionally been excluded from political participation and from decisionmaking related to land.

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9 http://www.fao.org/3/a-bp634e.pdf
10 http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/kenya/facts.html
SAFEGUARDING SEXUAL HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Kenya is predominantly a male-centered society, where women and girls are often denied basic rights and agency to make decisions about their own lives. Adolescent girls are an especially vulnerable group, as they are subject to damaging practices that harm their health or limit their futures. Early marriage is common and nearly half of all girls in Kenya bear children before they turn 20. The practice of female genital mutilation remains widespread and is viewed as an important rite of passage in many communities, even though it was outlawed in 2011. Moreover, one in four girls experiences her first sexual encounter as coercion or rape; and across sub-Saharan Africa, young women aged 15-24 account for 66% of new HIV infections in their age group. 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.

LGBTI Kenyans also experience extreme forms of discrimination and violence. Same-sex relations remain illegal and many gay Kenyans report having been fired or denied housing, health care and other services. In some communities, violence against LGBTI people is frequent—and even carried out without legal consequence in broad daylight. Religious leaders can be heard inciting hatred and intolerance from their pulpits. Some politicians have publicly threatened LGBTI people. Rather than preventing attacks, police often extort, intimidate and abuse LGBTI people.

But things appear to be changing. Socially, Kenyans are beginning to respect the rights of people who identify as LGBTI faster than any other African nation. In 2007, a Pew Research Study found that only four percent of Kenyans said homosexuality should be accepted; but by 2013, this number had doubled.

Sex workers* are another vulnerable group fighting to live and work in safety and without stigma. In Kenya—as in many countries—sex workers face pervasive discrimination, stigma, threats to their health and violence. They are often unfairly blamed for the country's HIV epidemic 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,

*When AJWS refers to sex workers, we are talking about consenting adults who choose this work of their own free will.
An estimated **38 percent** of Kenyan women ages 15-49 had undergone **female genital mutilation** before the practice was legally banned in the country in 2001. By 2014, that number had fallen to **21 percent**.¹⁶

**58 percent** of sex workers surveyed have been detained or arrested, often arbitrarily.²⁰

Nearly **half** of all girls in Kenya bear children before they turn **20**.¹⁹

In practice, many doctors and clinics deny services to sex workers.¹⁶

**AJWS GRANTEES EFFECTING CHANGE**

Despite these formidable challenges, Kenyan women, adolescent girls, LGBTI people and sex workers are leading efforts to advocate for their fundamental rights, including equality, health and wellbeing. 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.

We are 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. It has also provided health education and sanitary pads to over 1,000 girls so they don’t have to stay home when they are menstruating. Thanks to their efforts, Kuria girls are living safer, more independent lives.

To stand up for the rights of the LGBTI community, the **Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK)**, a national coalition of LGBTI advocacy organizations, is challenging discriminatory colonial era laws against sodomy and fighting to uphold the constitution’s promise of equality for all Kenyans. Thanks to their efforts, in February 2018 Kenya’s high court began hearing a case that may decriminalize homosexuality—a step that would mark a major leap forward for LGBTI people across the country and in a region known for oppressive laws against sexual and gender minorities.**Bar Hostess Empowerment and Support Programme** is ensuring that sex workers have access to justice, including helping them to learn about their rights and providing legal representation when

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¹⁶ http://spl.ids.ac.uk/sexworklaw/countries
¹⁷ http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/kenya/facts.html
¹⁸ http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/kenya/facts.html
¹⁹ http://spl.ids.ac.uk/sexworklaw/countries
²⁰ http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/kenya/facts.html
²¹ http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/kenya/facts.html
they face arbitrary or unlawful arrest. Since 2013, the organization has represented hundreds of sex workers who were arrested by police for small offenses like loitering, but then charged with prostitution, even though there is no evidence they have committed a crime. The organization has won all of these cases, including more than 116 cases in court and over 300 cases arbitrated at the police station.

**HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE**

In East Africa, including Kenya, climate change has brought rising temperatures, increasingly powerful storms, untimely rains and droughts that threaten the crops and water supply critical to the survival of rural people. Kenya’s farmers and pastoralists are living in a constant state of limbo, moving from one emergency to the next—and each time a crisis strikes, entire communities are displaced. In addition, close to half a million refugees from neighboring African nations are currently living within Kenya’s borders, adding to an already food insecure population.21 Tensions between refugees and host communities as well as pastoralists and farmers in drought affected areas have increased.

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 in Kenya, Uganda and South Sudan—which the U.N. termed “the largest humanitarian crisis since 1945.” We are providing emergency grants to address the problems that result from droughts, floods and conflict, including hunger, homelessness and poverty. Our grantees are working to address malnutrition and food insecurity, providing materials to build weather-proof shelters, training people to learn skills that can generate income, and providing seeds for small-scale farmers in displacement camps to grow food to eat.

In addition, AJWS also makes grants to organizations working to tackle some of the grave challenges faced by people who are displaced from their homes for the long-term. They are addressing psychological trauma and gender-based violence, providing services for sexual and reproductive health, giving ongoing humanitarian aid through cash-transfers, and documenting human rights violations that occur in refugee and Internally Displaced Peoples’ camps.

90 percent of all natural disasters that strike around the world are caused by severe weather, according to a 2015 UN report. These disasters are increasing—along with climate change.22

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21 http://www.unhcr.org/ke/figures-at-a-glance
### 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:

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<th>Action</th>
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<tr>
<td>Providing girls with education and leadership skills, enabling them to earn an independent living and advocate for their human rights</td>
<td>Ensuring rural and indigenous women have a greater say in decisions that affect their futures, and promoting their leadership in communities</td>
<td>Jinsiangu works to defend the rights of LGBTI Kenyans.</td>
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<td>Strengthening a national coalition of LGBTI organizations that is advocating to overturn Kenya's sodomy law and enable LGBTI people to realize their human rights</td>
<td>Creating alliances among isolated communities working on land rights, in order to share strategies, consolidate power and wield greater influence</td>
<td>Providing girls with education and leadership skills, enabling them to earn an independent living and advocate for their human rights</td>
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<td>Working to extend the Kenyan LGBTI movement to regions with the highest rates of discrimination and violence against sexual minorities</td>
<td>Attracting media attention to local land rights struggles and pressuring investors and developers to consider the human cost of their projects</td>
<td>Seeking to stop or delay the construction of megaprojects that threaten the lives of local people, advocating for communities to be consulted in the use of their land and gaining the support of local politicians for land rights</td>
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<td>Educating community leaders, clergy, police and the general public about LGBTI rights and working to build public understanding and tolerance</td>
<td>Ensuring rural and indigenous women have a greater say in decisions that affect their futures, and promoting their leadership in communities</td>
<td>Aiding people displaced by humanitarian conflicts, with trauma counseling and support for recovery</td>
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<td>Responding to humanitarian crises fueled by climate change and conflict—providing food, shelter and support so people can generate income and recover</td>
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$8.9 million invested in Kenya since 2004
AJWS GRANTEES IN KENYA: A Closer Look

The social change organizations we support 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.

Santa Bingo (front) is the General Organizer of the Mtwapa Boda Boda Motorbike Association—one of the many motorcycle taxi services common in Kenya. He and other drivers used to harass—and sometimes harm—LGBTI people on Kenya’s streets. But today, they are allies and protectors, thanks to trainings on human rights and tolerance run by AJWS grantee INEND.
In 2010, as rumors of a same-sex wedding swirled in the conservative coastal city of Mombasa and its surrounds, angry Muslim and Christian religious leaders mobilized locals to “flush out the gays.”

The call to violence was heeded by many local boda boda drivers, men who earn their living transporting passengers aboard their motorbike taxis—a common mode of getting around in many parts of East Africa. Seen by many as a tough and largely uneducated group, the drivers are frequently called upon by politicians and religious leaders to carry out their dirty work.

Armed with sticks, stones and other weapons, a mob of hundreds of men and women, including many boda boda drivers and local residents, descended upon a clinic that provides HIV/AIDS services to the community in the nearby town of Mtwapa. The angry mob charged at several gay men and volunteers at the clinic, mercilessly beat them and then tried to set one of them on fire. But the police arrived in time and took the half-conscious man into custody.

“The mob wanted to burn us, to beat us,” recalled Ali Chege Omari, a gay sex worker who was among the survivors of the attack. “They wanted us killed.”

His eyes filled with tears. “I feel very emotional when I think back to what happened,” said Chege, who is still reeling from the trauma many years later.

FIGHTING HATE AND BUILDING A CULTURE OF TOLERANCE

Since this traumatic episode, human rights groups have documented a wave of attacks on LGBTI Kenyans. In an attempt to counter this rising tide of hate and anti-LGBTI fervor, a host of LGBTI organizations, including AJWS grantee Initiative for Equality and Non Discrimination (INEND) are working to build a culture of tolerance with members of Kenyan society, including religious leaders, local government officials, media professionals and others.

INEND’s charismatic founder, Esther “Essy” Adhiambo, went right to the boda boda drivers, who are often incited to carry out the violence. 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.”

Following thoughtful research to inform INEND’s engagement with these drivers, Essy launched a series of workshops to bring them on a journey from bigotry to becoming allies for the LGBTI community. “I am thankful to INEND because they have opened our eyes,” said Mohammad, a boda boda driver enrolled in the workshops. In just two years, INEND has trained at least 320 boda boda drivers like Mohammad from across the Mombasa area—and they’re already seeing a profound shift in attitudes within this community.

“I instead of seeing an escalation in violence, it’s going down,” explained Santa Bingo, a leader of one of the boda boda stands and one of the participants in the 2010 attack on the clinic. Today, he is educating fellow drivers to be allies to the gay community and is proud that “the hatred is going down.”

INEND’s workshops have turned many boda boda drivers into an unexpectedly dedicated legion of protectors for LGBTI Mombasans. Those who have gone through the training now sport special reflector vests with INEND’s logo, signaling to LGBTI people that they’re allies. Now, when gay Kenyans catch a ride with one of these marked boda bodas, they can rest assured that they will reach their destinations safely. And when these drivers see an LGBTI person being threatened, they alert INEND so its network can intervene.

LOCATION: Mombasa, Kenya
WEBSITE: www.inendkenya.com
BUDGET: $200,000
AJWS FUNDING HISTORY: $73,000 total since 2014
A LAND DESTROYED BY SALT

Known for its turquoise blue waters and beach resorts, Malindi, Kenya, is a tourist destination. But beyond these natural attractions lies another reality: large salt factories and mile after mile of salt fields have poisoned land that has been lived on and farmed for generations by rural communities. This empire of salt—owned by powerful Kenyans and foreign companies—has plunged many local families on the coast of Kilifi County into deep poverty and perpetrated a wide array of human rights abuses against local farmers and their families.

In cahoots with corrupt local police, the salt companies have bulldozed homes, razed farms to the ground, and cut down thousands of trees to make way for frothing pools of salt water needed to extract salt for large-scale commercial production. The salt leeching into the ground from these pools has ruined the surrounding land for farming, turning a once lush area barren and parched.

With their traditional ways of earning a living undermined, many residents have had no choice but to take jobs at the same salt plants that kicked them off their land, earning a pittance for their back-breaking labor. Many laborers suffer from debilitating eye problems, even blindness, caused by the glare from pools of salt water or daily exposure to salt crystals and other particles. Laborers have also reported respiratory problems, skin ailments, miscarriages and birth defects.25

COURAGEOUS RESISTANCE

Residents who have protested the loss of their land or the brutal conditions in its aftermath have faced arrests, physical attacks and even murder. But many have persisted despite the risks.

In 2014, Patience Mbegu Choga and her family refused to move when a salt company tried to push them off their land in Marereni, offering less than $100 U.S. dollars in compensation. Unable to have their way, the company had Patience's husband, Joel, arrested on trumped-up charges, and a court subsequently sentenced him to seven years in prison.26 When Patience remained defiant, they sent a bulldozer to demolish her home.

But Patience would not be cowed into giving up her land. “This land is paramount in my life,” she said. Patience stood in front of the bulldozer, forcing them to withdraw.

Sadly, Patience’s ordeal didn’t end there. Eventually, the company had her arrested, demolished her home, and took over the land.

AN EMBOLDENED ADVOCATE FOR OTHERS

Refusing to give up, Patience turned to a local advocacy group, Malindi Rights Forum (MRF), an AJWS grantee that works to protect the land rights of rural communities in the coastal region. As both Patience and her husband Joel struggled through a web of intimidation, legal obstacles and court cases, MRF helped draw international attention to their plight. Eventually, a court reduced Joel’s unjust sentence to two years upon appeal, and the fabricated charges pending against Patience were finally dismissed in 2017, she said.

For years, MRF has been educating local residents about their rights and organizing them to defend their land from salt mines. In its first few years of existence, the group gathered compelling new evidence of the human rights abuses inflicted upon the community and revived old cases against the salt companies. In recent years, with MRF’s support, the community has taken salt companies to court and won back some portions of their land. And in 2016, thanks to MRF’s support, a group of farmers successfully negotiated with a salt company to stop it from encroaching on their land.

MRF has also provided paralegal training to residents like Patience, so they can support their neighbors in defending their precious land through MRF’s network. “Now I’m aware of my rights,” she said. “I’m able to stand up for myself, my family and other people.”

TOP Community members whose lands and livelihoods have been destroyed by salt production meet with paralegals and attorneys in a free legal aid clinic hosted by MRF in collaboration with local lawyers’ association Ituo Cha Sheria.

LEFT Salt fields in Malindi.
RIGHT Patience Mbegu Choga was forcibly removed from her land by a salt company, but she has fought back with help from MRF.

LOCATION: Office in Marereni, Kenya  FUNDING HISTORY: $120,187 total since 2012
ORGANIZATIONAL BUDGET: $33,000
Women work in a rice paddy in rural West Bengal. “Nowadays most things have changed, including our way of life,” said 67-year old Wilson Memusi. A tall and slender man with prominent cheekbones sitting high on his face, Memusi is an elder belonging to the indigenous Ogiek community, which resides in the heart of Kenya’s Mau Forest.

Long dependent on hunting, gathering and other traditional activities, the Ogiek people are one of Kenya’s last remaining forest-dwelling communities. But over the decades, many Ogiek families have been pushed off their lands as the country’s once abundant woodlands have fallen prey to logging and agriculture. The Ogiek, now numbering around 45,000, have had to adapt to new realities—but they are also turning into a formidable force to protect the forest they have lived in for generations.

THE FOREST AS LIFELINE
The vast Mau Forest feeds many of Africa’s rivers and lakes, sustains much of the continent’s rich wildlife and supports the livelihood of millions of its inhabitants. For the Ogiek people, this forest is more than a home. It is the source of their traditional way of life, where many generations of Ogiek hunted, gathered, harvested honey and procured medicinal herbs among its trees. The forest is synonymous with their cultural identity.

“The forest is our lifeline, the forest is my heart,” explained Memusi. “We derive our livelihood from the forest.”

A HISTORY OF INJUSTICE
Since colonial rule, the Ogiek people have faced derision and discrimination. British colonialists refused to recognize them as a tribe and labeled them as “a savage and barbaric people.” Following independence, successive governments have offered them little in the way of services. Moreover, an estimated 90 percent of the Ogiek people are illiterate, stunting their ability to effectively advocate for their rights.

Since colonial days under the British and following independence in 1963, successive governments have forcibly evicted the Ogiek people from their ancestral lands to allow timber and forest plantation companies to plunder the precious forest and put its delicate ecosystems and remaining inhabitants at risk. Other tribes have also moved into the area and cut down trees, threatening the Ogiek’s traditional way of life.

“The wild animals that we used to hunt have disappeared. The bees that once gave us generous batches of honey have migrated, leaving us with little nectar as the trees have been cut down,” Memusi said. “We are fading.”

A LANDMARK VICTORY
But with help from AJWS grantee Ogiek Peoples’ Development Programme (OPDP), the Ogiek community fought back. They mounted a legal battle against the government to defend their right to the land and stop the devastation being wrought all around.

Following years of sustained legal support from OPDP and a series of court cases, in May 2017, the African Court of Human and Peoples’ Rights—the continent’s highest human rights court—delivered a landmark ruling in favor of the Ogiek people. The court upheld their right to live in the Mau Forest and to seek reparations for their losses. Moreover, the court recognized the Ogiek’s status as a distinct indigenous people—setting an important legal precedent for other indigenous communities across the entire continent.

Meanwhile, OPDP has helped the community preserve their traditions and forest and find new sources of livelihood to adapt to the changing landscape. As a result of OPDP’s efforts, women in the community are engaged in raising poultry and bee-keeping, men are planting new trees and guarding the woodlands, and children are attending school, so they can explore more opportunities in the future.

“We have come this far because of OPDP,” Memusi said. “OPDP has empowered us to understand our rights so that we are able to champion what is rightfully ours... Thanks to them, I am once again hopeful in life and see a bright future for our people.”
TOP Memusi, an elder of the Ogiek people, sits at his homestead in the hills, surrounded by the lush Mau forest. AJWS grantee OPDP is helping the Ogiek community protect this forest—their ancestral home—from logging and agriculture. BOTTOM Members of the Ogiek community.

**LOCATION:** Office in Nakuru, Kenya  **WEBSITE:** www.ogiekpeoples.org  
**BUDGET:** $856,000  **AJWS FUNDING HISTORY:** $192,250 since 2012
In Kenya, about one in five women have undergone female genital mutilation, and the rate is even higher in some communities that believe the ritual is crucial to gaining social acceptance and increasing their daughters’ prospects for marriage. Although the country banned the practice in 2011, the ethnic Kuria community—made up of about 260,000 people in southwest Kenya—continue to see female genital mutilation as an important rite of passage that marks the transition from childhood to womanhood.

Despite the ban, the practice remains deeply entrenched in the Kuria culture, and estimates show that four in five girls in the community are at risk of cutting. Once cut, girls are usually married off and forced to drop out of school—stifling their ambitions and limiting their possibilities.

ESCAPING THE CUT
As a young girl, Natalie Robi Tingo averted this fate that generations of Kuria girls had lived through. Thanks to her mother’s decision to send Natalie away to boarding school, she escaped “the cut,” as she refers to it.

But girls and women like Natalie, who choose to not get cut or are protected from this practice, bear heavy stigma and isolation in the Kuria community. Natalie recalls being shunned by her peers. “Growing up was very hard. I didn’t have friends because I had not been circumcised,” she said. “If I walked around the community, I would be abused.”

What is female genital mutilation?
Female genital mutilation—also known as female genital cutting or circumcision—involves cutting a girl’s clitoris and labia, often using unsterilized blades and knives. It can lead to severe bleeding, infections, infertility and even death. Many young girls experience trauma months and years after the procedure, and some die during childbirth due to complications.

A FORCE FOR CHANGE
Remarkably, as an adult, Natalie turned her personal experience into a force for transforming society. She became the first girl from her village to attend university. After graduation in 2011, she returned to her community to start informal clubs, where Kuria girls could come together to talk openly about their struggles and challenges. In 2013, Natalie founded Msichana Empowerment Kuria, a grassroots organization made up of young men and women, many of whom belong to the Kuria community, who are working to give girls greater control over their bodies and futures.

Msichana believes education holds the key to more opportunities for girls and women. To ensure girls can remain in school, Msichana has provided health education and sanitary pads to over 1,000 girls so they don’t have to stay home when they are menstruating, as pads can be unaffordable for many. Msichana has also paid school fees for dozens of girls who have run away from home to escape the cut or early marriage.

In addition, Msichana has offered hundreds of young people a safe space through its youth community center—the first of its kind—where young people can understand and explore their potential.

COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS
Msichana’s young leaders have broken the silence surrounding female genital cutting and sparked much needed conversations in the community—even crossing the gender divide. Natalie and Msichana works with men and boys in an effort

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MSICHANA EMPOWERMENT KURIA
Giving girls control over their bodies and futures
to upend the Kuria custom that dictates that men cannot marry uncircumcised women. By involving men in its campaigns, Msichana hopes to bring an end to the practice.

Natalie has also engaged conservative elders in the community—a daring act in its own right. But some elders expressed their dismay. They warned her to stop challenging this practice or she would be killed, she recalled.32 Despite the threats and opposition, Natalie has not been deterred from acting as a formidable advocate for change. “We can’t expect things to change overnight,” she said. But as long as such conversations are happening, Natalie believes there is hope.

“Just keep on doing what you’re doing, in the small space that you’re doing [it],” she said. “Be the change you want to see in your community.”

32 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBtR8jYzSdM
Beyond Grantmaking: How Does AJWS Make a Difference?

AJWS provides financial support and more to strengthen social change organizations and larger 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
- Bring clusters of similar and complementary groups together, enabling them to learn from each other and from experts in order to build strong, united movements
- Promote our grantees in the media and foster their leadership on the international stage
- Ensure that women, indigenous people, LGBTI people, ethnic and religious minorities, and other groups remain at the center of all our social change efforts
- Conduct research and share our findings with grantees and fellow funders, advancing the field of human rights and development

ABOVE Trevenia Manga, Chairwoman of MRF, attends a training for Mamae Silk Group, a collective formed by MRF to empower women by offering small loans for the members to start their own businesses.
1. Archeologists have uncovered Paleolithic remains in the Turkana Basin, leading scientists to believe that Kenya might be the birth place of humanity.

2. Kenya is an incredibly diverse country: it is home to more than 40 ethnic groups and more than 60 languages are spoken here.

3. Over the decades, hundreds of thousands of refugees have flocked to Kenya from neighboring countries to escape violence—many from Somalia and South Sudan—putting additional strain on the nation.

4. Swahili is the lingua franca of the land. The Swahili language, also known as Kiswahili, has its roots in Bantu languages, Arabic, Persian, Portuguese, Hindi and English.

5. Kenya was ruled by the British from 1895 until its independence in 1963.

6. In 2010, after 20 years of political struggle, Kenyans ratified a new constitution that decentralized power in the country by distributing governance across 47 counties.

7. Kenya’s constitution guarantees freedom of religion. More than four-fifths of Kenyans practice Christianity, and Muslims make up a sizable minority. There are also small pockets of Jews, Jains, Hindus, Sikhs and Bahá’ís.

8. More and more women are assuming leadership roles in the country. In 2017, Kenyans elected their first three female governors and over 21 percent of seats in Kenya’s national parliament were held by women.

9. Over the last century, Kenya’s population has grown from 2.9 million to 47 million inhabitants. This rapid growth has caused intense competition for land, especially among tribes in rural areas.

10. Kenya is roughly the size of Texas—about 240,000 square miles.
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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.

And with special thanks to leading supporters of our Kenya work:
Pritzker Pucker Family Foundation
Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation
Tikva Grassroots Empowerment Fund of Tides Foundation

This publication was written by Sumit Galhotra and edited by Leah Kaplan Robins and Tamar Karpuj. Design by Kristen Kendrick and art direction by Elizabeth Leih.

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