

Grassroots Women: The Key to Sustainable Societies

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“The potentially powerful voice of grassroots women as a pressure group for women’s agendas are completely unharnessed in both local and national political processes” – UN Women, 2013

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the notion of sustainability has become more intricately tied to the field of development. This is in part due to the rapidly increasing human population and the impact that it has and will continue to have on the planet. In 2015, for example, the United Nations established a new framework of global development targets – The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - which stemmed from the pre-established Millennium Development Goals. The SDGs and other current development studies illuminate women’s necessary voice within the development sector. Women are important influencers on the overall quality of life and the well-being of their families and communities; their overall responsibilities allow them a unique platform to improve human well-being and to promote the conservation of the natural environment.¹ In East sub-Saharan Africa – as defined by the United Nations Statistical Division - women are essential to the agricultural sector and make up 50 percent of the agricultural labour force and 80 percent of smallholder farm labour.² Therefore, many grassroots organizations have become dedicated to promoting women’s voices and participation in sustainable development; yet, there exists uncertainty in regard to which approaches are best. This thesis focuses specifically on women and sustainable agriculture and asks: what factors are the key to successful efforts in promoting women’s involvement in sustainable agricultural development?

When discussing women’s involvement in development since the 1980s, microfinance and microcredit have become the “poster-children” of poverty alleviation, the creation of equitable

¹ UNESCO, “Women & Sustainable Development,” UNESCO, 2010, www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/mods/theme_c/mod12.html?panel=2#top (accessed August 28, 2016).

² FAO, “Gender and Law: Women’s Rights in Agriculture,” Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, 2002, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4311e/y4311e04.htm> (accessed October 31, 2016).

societies, and development. This economic-based emphasis is prominent on the International level and is a recognized form of practical and sustainable development that has been endorsed by wealthy philanthropists, The Nobel Committee, and the United Nations.³ Women's economic independence and empowerment is a crucial aspect of any development initiative; however, the creation of sustainable societies will not result from isolated programs, but rather from comprehensive approaches that first consider the overall socio-cultural restraints that exist for women.⁴

Rural sub-Saharan African women are fundamental for ensuring the sustainability of households and communities, yet their role is often ignored or overlooked⁵. Customary laws and practices play a central role in the creation of these unequal and unsustainable societies. Understanding and analyzing these social and cultural barriers to women's advancement allows for a more comprehensive approach to development practices. This thesis analyzes women's overall contribution to the agricultural sector, their disproportionate access to land, and the discrepancies that exist between customary and statutory law, as a way to illuminate the key role grassroots organizations play in creating a more holistic approach to equitable and sustainable development.

³ Aneel, Karnani, "Microfinance Misses Its Mark," Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2007, ssir.org/articles/entry/microfinance_misses_its_mark (accessed October 20, 2017).

⁴ Marissa, Wesley, Dina, Dublon, "Empowering Women at the Grassroots." Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2015, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/empowering_women_at_the_grassroots (accessed October 20, 2017).

⁵ United Nations, "On International Day, UN Highlights Rural Women's Participation in Sustainable, Climate-Resilient Agriculture," UN News Center, 15 Oct. 2017, www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=57893#.Wfp0zBNSzBI (accessed October 19, 2017).

Grassroots organizations and movements allow for “population participation” and the incorporation of local input when developing strategies to create more sustainable societies.⁶ These organizations also serve as a direct link to socio-cultural barriers present within communities and allow for individual participation in areas where governments and international-based organizations often fail.⁷ My thesis analyzes three specific grassroots organizations in three different sub-Saharan African countries – Kenya, Rwanda, and Malawi – as a way to emphasize the platform these organizations create for rural women. Grassroots organizations allow for women’s more equitable participation within rural communities, which often are restricted due to local traditional structures.⁸

Rural sub-Saharan Africa has the highest levels of gender inequality in the world.⁹ Consequently these societies remain the most unsustainable. While women are not intrinsically the most vulnerable members of societies, due to socio-cultural and political constraints they become the most susceptible to risks and vulnerabilities.¹⁰ Because of these prevalent inequalities and social challenges, sub-Saharan Africa currently hosts a large portion of the 37,000 Non-Governmental

⁶ Rebecca, Buell, “Grassroots Development: A Question of Empowerment,” *Cultural Survival*, Mar. 1987, www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/grassroots-development-question-empowerment (accessed July 1, 2017).

⁷ Rebecca, Buell “Grassroots Development: A Question of Empowerment,” *Cultural Survival*, Mar. 1987, www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/grassroots-development-question-empowerment (accessed July 1, 2017).

⁸ Farm Africa, “Listen to the Rural Women in sub-Saharan Africa,” Guardian News and Media, 23 July 2009, www.theguardian.com/advocacy/farm-africa (accessed June 5, 2017).

⁹ International Monetary Fund, “Sub-Saharan Africa: Dealing with the Gathering Clouds,” IMF, 2015, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/REO/SSA/Issues/2017/01/07/Regional-Economic-Outlook-Sub-Saharan-Africa2> (accessed September 19, 2017).

¹⁰ Rebecca, Buell, “Grassroots Development: A Question of Empowerment,” *Cultural Survival*, Mar. 1987, www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/grassroots-development-question-empowerment (accessed July 1, 2017).

Organizations (NGOs) that are currently operating on the African continent.¹¹ Yet, despite this strong presence of aid-based organizations, it appears that the overall socio-cultural inequalities within sub-Saharan Africa still persist.

Rural sub-Saharan African women face many challenges and locally established grassroots organizations are developing as a way to increase women's voices in these societies. Overall, local involvement is imperative when promoting change, yet there are necessary structural developments that must be in place in order to more successfully implement these transformations. Based on my overall analysis of three grassroots organizations – Women for Fair Development, The Rwandan Women's Network, and the Greenbelt Movement – there are three key aspects for creating successful grassroots organizations. In order to successfully increase women's role in sustainable agricultural development, a grassroots organization or movement must have: local and cultural understanding, financial backing, and a combination of a centralized and decentralized structure.

There are many cultural nuances and ethnic differences that exist in sub-Saharan Africa, and there are many aspects of particular cultures “that wouldn't be...apparent to someone who's not from there”.¹² Therefore, the success of grassroots projects rest on their ability to create solutions that work within the confines of specific cultural and societal contexts.¹³ Additionally, for the

¹¹ The Economist, “A Scramble in Africa,” The Economist Newspaper, 6 Sept. 2008, www.economist.com/node/12060397 (accessed February 3, 2017).

¹² Unite For Sight, “Module 7: Cultural Differences and Cultural Understanding,” Unite For Sight, 2015, www.uniteforsight.org/cultural-competency/module7 (accessed September 20, 2016).

¹³ Unite For Sight, “Module 7: Cultural Differences and Cultural Understanding,” Unite For Sight, 2015, www.uniteforsight.org/cultural-competency/module7 (accessed September 20, 2016).

purpose of this thesis, this concept expands beyond cross-cultural understanding. I argue that one of the only ways for grassroots organizations to be successful is in their ability to directly involve women of local communities.

Grassroots organizations are confronting critical social issues, however, often due to lack of funding, there are shortfalls that inhibit these organizations from developing successful strategies that ameliorate women's role in rural communities. Rather than funding that focuses on external initiatives, local-based goals are necessary for developing these types of organizations and movements. Therefore, financial backing that works to support local agendas is another crucial aspect to grassroots success. The last piece that is important to emphasize is the necessary combination between centralized and decentralized structures. The ability for grassroots organizations to have this structural blend allows for the creation of a platform that can pursue local agendas, while at the same time having the capacity to access financial donors and garner national and international attention. However, in order to support this structural development, it is necessary that the organization has sufficient funding, in addition to local knowledge and participation. This overall structure can be challenging to obtain because it requires the organization to be well defined.

One important acknowledgement to keep in mind throughout this report is that current and future climatological shifts perpetuate women's inequitable participation in sub-Saharan African societies. Sub-Saharan Africa is considered the most vulnerable region to climate change due to its level of dependence on the agricultural sector and its overall limited ability to efficiently

adapt to these changes.¹⁴ Shifts in climate have and will continue to greatly impact rural women who rely most heavily on land and agricultural to sustain their livelihoods and identity. It is essential that sustainable development practices highlight women's impact and presence within rural societies.

While rural women's economic independence and progress is important, a purely economic view—present both in development practices and current academic literature - provides a cursory analysis of the complexity of sustainable development. The key example of these economic-based practices is microfinance. The goal of this strategy in promoting women's equitable access to resources is to provide financial services to women who are usually excluded from mainstream financial systems.¹⁵ This type of development strategy is appealing in theory because it allows the participation of community members and allows them to “work their way out of poverty”;¹⁶ however, in practice, without addressing the socio-cultural restrictions, addressing economic inequalities will make little to no impact to women's overall inequitable participation in rural communities.

This thesis strays away from the traditional economic framework of development studies and focuses on socio-cultural barriers that contribute to rural women's lack of ability to participate in

¹⁴ Julius H., Kotir, “Climate Change and Variability in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review of Current and Future Trends and Impacts on Agriculture and Food Security,” *Environment, Development, and Sustainability*, 13 (2010): 587

¹⁵ Rodrigo, Canales, et al, “What Are the Realities of Microfinance?” *Yale Insights*, Yale School of Management, 2 Feb. 2013, insights.som.yale.edu/insights/what-are-the-realities-of-microfinance (accessed October 19, 2017).

¹⁶ Rodrigo, Canales, et al, “What Are the Realities of Microfinance?” *Yale Insights*, Yale School of Management, 2 Feb. 2013, insights.som.yale.edu/insights/what-are-the-realities-of-microfinance (accessed October 19, 2017).

the agricultural sector. One important aspect of this focus, as highlighted throughout this thesis, is women's land rights and their overall access to land. Women's access to land and land rights serves to profile women's inequitable access to resources in sub-Saharan Africa, and illuminates the socio-cultural obstacles that contribute to unsustainable societies. In addition, by analyzing three different grassroots organizations this thesis highlights the importance of rural women's voices and grassroots in sustainable development.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Women & Development

Rural women play an intricate role in the management of natural resources and are proponents of change.¹⁷ Yet within the confines of rural sub-Saharan Africa there lacks a comprehensive understanding of the important relationship between women's socio-cultural empowerment and the development of more sustainable societies. While women continue to struggle with gender-based disadvantages they remain the key to sustainable development. This concept has become more prevalent after the publication of Ester Boserup's work in the 1970s, *Women's Role in Economic Development*¹⁸ and can be explicitly seen through the creation of both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the revised, 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Both the MDGs and the SDGs have placed emphasis on the interconnectedness between gender equality and sustainable development. Including women's voices in development studies has not only influenced international initiatives but has become an important facet in development literature since the 1970s – which has examined the significant impact of women's empowerment on improving overall productivity.¹⁹

“Feminist Perspectives on Sustainable Development,” by Wendy Harcourt, or “Women and Sustainable Development in Africa,” by Valentine U. James, provided a basic introduction

¹⁷ Jenny, Hawley, "Why Women's Empowerment Is Essential for Sustainable Development," International Institute for Environment Development, 2 Sept. 2016, <http://www.iied.org/why-womens-empowerment-essential-for-sustainable-development> accessed October 18, 2017).

¹⁸ Lorraine, Corner, “Women's Role in Economic Development,” *European Review of Agricultural Economics*, Volume 35, Issue 4, 1 December 2008, Pages 598–601, <https://doi.org/10.1093/erae/jbn037> (accessed December 20, 2016).

¹⁹ Marissa, Wesley, Dina, Dublon, “Empowering Women at the Grassroots,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2015, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/empowering_women_at_the_grassroots (accessed October 20, 2017).

between gender relations and sustainable development. These books, specifically the one written by Harcourt, examine the difficulties rural women face in regard to access to resources. In addition, both James and Harcourt highlight the important contributions women have on resource management, cultural development, health, and economic growth, in order to express the broad reach of women's role in development.

As these two books serving as a base, I began to develop more targeted, regionally specific analyses of women and their role in sustainable development. I decided my research would specifically focus attention on sub-Saharan Africa due to overall cultural, social, and political similarities. Additionally, I decided to narrow my analysis of women's involvement in sustainable development by focusing my attention to gendered land and resource access. This more specific focus allowed for better understanding surrounding the importance of gender equity and equality in creating sustainable societies. I looked towards organizations, such as the Food and Agricultural Organization, World Bank, and the United Nations, for country and regional reports in order to gain better understanding of current inequalities that persist within these societies.

In sub-Saharan Africa, women account for more than half of the agricultural labour force, yet only around 15 percent of women own landholdings.²⁰ “Because women have always played significant roles in the traditional methods of food production, raising domesticated animals, and disease control in local livestock, it behooves policy makers, researchers, and planners to include

²⁰ FAO, “Gender and Law: Women's Rights in Agriculture,” Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, 2002, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4311e/y4311e04.htm> (accessed October 31, 2016).

women in all development processes”.²¹ Women in rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa are crucial contributors to land and resource management and greatly impact overall productivity and sustainability. While this relationship between women and the agricultural sectors has always been an important aspect of rural sub-Saharan African society, it was not until the 1970s that the idea of women’s role in development came into fruition.

Since the 1970s, influential publications, such as Ester Boserup’s *Women’s Role in Economic Development*, have sparked increased attention towards the inclusion of women within development studies. These publications and overall interest began to highlight the importance of including women in agricultural decisions, and at the broader level including them in decisions that promote sustainable development; according to Nazneen Kanji, Su Fei Tan, and Camilla Toulmin, who authored the updated version of Boserup’s work, the original publication of *Women’s Role in Economic Development* led to the Women in Development (WID) thesis, the UN International Year for Women in 1975, the UN Decade on Women 1976-1985, and the establishment of four world conferences on women (1975 – 1995). This book has inspired current development feminists, scholars, and activists and has provided the basis for increased attention given towards women’s role in regard to development studies.²²

Women’s involvement in the agricultural sector is directly related to women’s access to resources and is often dependent on: the implementation of formal legal structures at the national level, mechanisms at the local or village level, and rules for allocating land among household

²¹ James Valentine, Udoh, “Introduction: Sustaining Women’s Efforts Africa’s Development.” *Women and Sustainable Development in Africa*. (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1995): 4.

²² Ester, Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development*, (UK: Earthscan, 1989): 3-24

members. While “access to resources” can be widely defined, for the sake of this thesis attention is allocated towards understanding women’s access to land as a way to express women’s general access to resources. In dissecting women’s access to agriculture and land, it is important to note that even within sub-Saharan Africa, women’s access to land tenure varies considerably depending on the state. My analysis of concepts presented in this thesis seek to provide an examination of regional differences, while at the same time illuminating similarities within certain societal structures and the importance of the concept of female-based grassroots organizations. Therefore, when discussing women’s access to land, it is essential to note the extent to which women have formal and customary rights. This analysis becomes necessary when discussing women’s participation in the agricultural sector.

Women play fundamental roles in maintaining food security and are key players in providing adaptive, communal methods for responding to current and future adverse effects of climate change in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). However, within the construct of many rural households, women’s gendered roles stifle their ability to interact with resources which ultimately influences their ability to maintain food security and sustainable communities. According to the FAO Programme: Food Security “rural women are generally responsible for growing and preparing the majority of the food consumed in the household in addition to raising livestock.”²³ Because women are at the forefront of “food discrimination,”²⁴ gendered access to resources limit overall food production, which directly effects food variability and access to “adequate food supply.”²⁴

²³ FAO, “Gender and Law: Women’s Rights in Agriculture,” Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, 2002, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4311e/y4311e04.htm> (accessed October 31, 2016).

International, Customary, and Statutory Law

At the international level, specifically under International Human Rights Law, women have the right to own and administer property without discrimination²⁴ in addition to “equal treatment in land and agrarian reform” and equal rights of “ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment, and enjoyment of ... property”.²⁶ Furthermore, as stated in the Sub-Commission on the Promotion of Human Rights entitled “Women and the Right to Land, Property and Adequate Housing,” discrimination against women surrounding access to land and resources is in violation of human rights law.²⁵ And, as expressed by the Convention of Biodiversity, “women have considerable knowledge and experience in managing and conserving natural resources.”²⁶ The integration of women’s rights and gender equality into discussion and action taken towards the mitigation of biodiversity and climate change is essential in maximizing efficacy surrounding adaptive programs²⁷. While there is great international response towards issues of equitable access to resources and land; statutory law, and more importantly customary law still perpetuates gender inequalities which contribute to lack of food security.

²⁴ IJRC, “Women’s Human Rights,” International Justice Resource Center, 17 Sept. 2014, www.ijrcenter.org/thematic-research-guides/womens-human-rights/ (accessed February 23, 2017).

²⁵ FAO, “Gender and Law: Women’s Rights in Agriculture,” Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, 2002, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4311e/y4311e04.htm> (accessed October 31, 2016).

²⁶ Convention on Biological Diversity, “Gender Equality and the Convention on Biological Diversity: A Compilation of Decision Text,” Quebec: Convention on Biological Diversity. n.d, <https://www.cbd.int/gender/doc/compilation-CBD-GE-COP-decision-text.pdf> (accessed January 20, 2017).

²⁷ Convention on Biological Diversity, “Gender Equality and the Convention on Biological Diversity: A Compilation of Decision Text,” Quebec: Convention on Biological Diversity. n.d, <https://www.cbd.int/gender/doc/compilation-CBD-GE-COP-decision-text.pdf> (accessed January 20, 2017).

Women's rights to land and resource access is determined by two areas of law: general civil or statutory law (property, family and succession law) and customary law. And while certain land legislation is labeled as "gender neutral," women's rights are often curtailed by discriminatory customary, or family law. Specifically, as outlined by another publication from the FAO, these discriminatory norms appear in the restriction of married women from administering property and in the form of succession law that restrict land sales and inheritance to men ²⁸. Rights and access to natural resources are imperative for the livelihoods of rural women in sub-Saharan Africa. The ability for women to have these rights contributes to the bargaining power of women within households in addition to the ability for communities to become more sustainable and productive.

Agriculture & Climatological Shifts

With increased anthropogenic pressures and greater carbon emissions, recent climatological shifts have had pervasive effects on both human and natural structures. ²⁹ Additionally, the magnitude of warming within the climate system since the 1950s has produced unequivocal changes that in turn lead to severe weather and inconsistent patterns that have led to increased concern surrounding agricultural production and food security in vulnerable areas. Shifts in climate have caused and will continue to greatly impact the rural poor who rely on land for their livelihoods and identity. Current and future trends of climatological variability have illuminated the most vulnerable and women tend to be at its epicenter. Due to greater understanding of the

²⁸ FAO, "Gender and Law: Women's Rights in Agriculture." Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, 2002, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4311e/y4311e04.htm> (accessed October 31, 2016).

²⁹ IPCC, "Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report," IPCC, 2014, <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/syr/> (accessed September 12, 2016).

interconnectivity between ecological, societal, and political issues, the discussion of climate change is multifaceted and involves discussing gendered access to resources.

Sub-Saharan Africa is often portrayed as the most vulnerable region to the impacts of climate change based on its reliance upon agriculture, which is extremely sensitive to shifts in climate patterns such as temperature, precipitation, and light.³⁰ And, understanding the importance of agricultural systems in place in sub-Saharan Africa allows for greater synthesis between surrounding rural livelihoods as well as the impact of climatological shifts on agriculture. While the extent of the impacts of climatological shifts remain uncertain, independent sources and others, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), imply that developing countries will be most impacted and it is “the poor and vulnerable who will be most susceptible to changes in climate...”¹² The reliance on rain-fed agriculture specifically in rural sub-Saharan Africa, demonstrates the need for adaptive measures surrounding planning around land and resource management. Understanding the intricate discrepancies between customary and statutory law, the challenges surrounding gender inequalities, and environment stressors allows for a more holistic view of the necessary developments for the creation of sustainable societies.

As illustrated in the 2015 report produced by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, entitled “Regional Overview of Food Insecurity in Africa,” the agricultural sector has “great potential to generate capital surplus, release labour for other sectors, and provide a stable food supply at affordable prices...”²⁰

³⁰ Kotir, Julius H, “Climate Change and Variability in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review of Current and Future Trends and Impacts on Agriculture and Food Security,” *Environment, Development, and Sustainability*, 13 (2010): 587-605

This report is important, because it gives weight to the interconnectedness of the social, cultural, political, and economic climates of different regions and states. And, as stated in an article produced by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, we can no longer examine food, livelihoods, and natural resource management separately.³¹

Grassroots & Local Response

The other important aspect I want to review and include is the work of local and more regionally specific organizations and their efforts to promote gender equality in the context of environmental and climatological shifts, and how this can expand to create more sustainable societies. The Green Belt Movement (GBM), founded by Professor Wangari Maathai in 1977, began as a response to rural Kenyan women who reported their streams were drying up, their food supply was less secure, and their firewood supply for fuel was becoming more challenging to access. This movement soon expanded beyond food insecurity and was responsible for the promotion of re-educating rural communities surrounding resource management. Later the organization enlarged to become one that advocated for democracy and pressed politicians for change; the GBM demanded for more accountability from national leaders, fought against land grabbing, and the encroachment of agriculture into forests. In recent years the GBM has extended its reach internationally by campaigning and advocating for more awareness surrounding: climate change, the importance of Africa's rainforests in the Congo, and the established the Mottainai Campaign (instilling the notion of "reduce, reuse, recycle"). In addition, the GBM has partnered with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in

³¹ Sachs, Jeffrey D, "From Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals," *The Lancet* 379 (2012): 2206–2211

its Billion Tree Campaign.³² The work of Professor Maathai, the Green Belt Movement, and individuals within the community, illuminates the power of grassroots organizations and is important in understanding what is a necessary catalyst to instill change - community involvement. Other organizations that I have studied, but not included in this report, are ones such as Agile International which focus on food insecurity and the relationship to the specific challenges faced by women in girls in West Africa. While my focus is in East Africa, Agile International's efforts to make land available for women to develop skills to become economically independent, allows women the opportunity to produce farm goods and other materials and generate income. The work of Agile International emphasizes regional initiatives that have acknowledged the importance of the inclusion of women and resource management. These local initiatives further exemplify why land and equitable resource access is a feminist issue³³; according to UN women, less than 20 percent of the world's landholders are women. "Rural women's nexus to the land – their lifeline, home job, and social security – often teeters on the strength of their relationship to their father, husband, brother or son."¹⁴ Therefore, they often lack equitable access to resources and face discrimination.

In many sub-Saharan African countries, the political processes are being transformed in order to better represent women.³⁴ At the forefront of these changes are grassroots organizations (GROs), or local organizations. GROs are generally distinguished from national or regional

³² The Green Belt Movement, "Our History." *The Green Belt Movement*, The Green Belt Movement, n.d. www.greenbeltmovement.org/who-we-are/our-history (accessed August 22, 2016).

³³ Tzili, Mor, "Why Land Is a Feminist Issue," *Landesa: Rural Development Institute*, n.d. www.landesa.org/why-land-is-a-feminist-issue-blog/ (accessed November 22, 2017).

³⁴ Gwendolyn, Mikell, "Introduction." *African Feminism: The Politics of Survival in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Pennsylvania: (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016): 1-31

organizations and are typically associated with “bottom-up” development strategies.³⁵ These types of organizations tend to be more focused on collective action that highlight the importance of community involvement;³⁶ they provide mechanisms to smallholder farmers to communicate and express locally-specific challenges and can provide a more time-efficient response to important issues, such as gendered access to land and resources, climate change, and inequalities surrounding health. “Meaningful change arises from deep and long-term commitment” and generally the people most committed to change are community members themselves.³⁷ Because there are many factors contributing to rural poverty and inequalities, it is crucial to examine local level participation and knowledge when considering the complexities that surround reducing the impacts of climatological shifts and gendered access to resources.

³⁵ N., Uphoff, “Grassroots Organizations and NGOs in Rural Development: Opportunities with Diminishing States and Expanding Markets,” *State, Market and Civil Organizations*, 21 (2002):168-201.

³⁶ P., Asibey-Bonsu, “Farmer's organizations in West and Central Africa: high expectations, hard realities - Ghana Country Report” (pp. 5-81, Country Report), Fondation pour l’agriculture et la ruralité dans le monde, May. 2012, http://www.fondation-farm.org/zoe/doc/etudfarm_201302_rblein_opghana_1.pdf (accessed August 2, 2017).

³⁷ Grassroots International, “Overview: Grassroots International” n.d., <https://grassrootsonline.org/our-impact/overview/> (accessed October 12, 2017).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The field of International Affairs is an incredibly diverse, interdisciplinary field of study which incorporates a variety of research methods. This thesis pulls from an assortment of methodologies and different fields of study, including political science, women and gender studies, and history. This comprehensive methodological approach allowed for the development and legitimization of the interconnectivity between the more empirical discussion surrounding women's rights and the more theoretical one that encompasses development studies. Therefore, in order to produce an interdisciplinary approach to analyzing gender and the role it plays in sustainable development, this thesis draws on a multitude of research methodology that work towards creating a synthesis of empirical and theoretical studies. The correlation between grassroots movements in sub-Saharan Africa and the promotion of women's equitable voice within rural communities is important when discussing the topic of: the distribution of vulnerabilities, access to resources, and governmental and international interest and action.

Sub-Saharan Africa is considered the most vulnerable region due to its level of dependence on “agriculture[e], natural resources, and warmer baseline climates.”³⁸ Unfortunately, these vulnerabilities are being felt today, due to its already severe climate, the slow adoption of technological improvements and shifts, the lack of state policies focused around adaptation to climatological shifts, and the lack of involvement of women in local and regional political decisions.

³⁸ Kotir, Julius H, “Climate Change and Variability in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review of Current and Future Trends and Impacts on Agriculture and Food Security,” *Environment, Development, and Sustainability*, 13 (2010): 588

With the conclusions drawn from researched scientific data and analysis, I used evidence that utilized methodologies from different fields of studies - political science, women and gender studies, and history - to continue my examination of this topic. My research covered a variety of topics, such as women's land rights, gendered access to resources, state action, and customary versus statutory law. Using sources such as, but not limited to, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, the Food and Agricultural Organization, individual country reports, academic journals, and opinions pieces allowed for the creation of a more comprehensive understanding of the importance of giving women a voice both in resource management and community-based decisions. Wangari Maathai expresses in her chapter, "Women are Drivers of Forest Restoration to Combat Climate Change," that women are often most susceptible to socio-cultural inequalities, but they are also "a critical force for sustainably managing national resources and increasing energy access, which helps to...improve livelihoods and community health..."³⁹ This vital understanding of the significance of women in resource management and areas that engulf community life, provided a guide and the initial building blocks for the research, case study analyses, and overall structure of this paper.

In regard to the arguments presented in this thesis, it was challenging to find information and sources that explicitly discussed the correlation between women's equitable access to resources and the creation of more sustainable societies, because women's development studies have often placed more emphasis on economic empowerment. Due to this focus and the overall literature, it

³⁹ Maathai, Wangari, "Women Are Drivers of Forest Restoration to Combat Climate Change," *Why Women Will Save The Planet*, (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2018, Google Books)

was imperative to use a variety of methods in order to gather sources and conduct research; the use of Country Reports and the library system available through the University of Colorado at Boulder allowed me to access relevant books, academic journals, and reports from conferences, such as COP21. In addition to some of the sources mentioned above, supplementary research was conducted and information gathered from newspapers and other outlets, such as *The New York Times* and *National Geographic*. And, while the above resources proved useful, the most substantial sources used come from academic journals, individual state reports, and the websites surrounding each case study analyzed. To ensure the validity and authority of my research, I included research conducted both by western scholars and regional specialists.

The gaps in literature that expand women's sustainable development beyond the confines of economic empowerment exemplify the neglect of this field of study and reveals the necessity of understanding the importance of examining socio-cultural barriers that persist within sub-Saharan African countries. Through my application of various methodologies crossing over numerous disciplines, this thesis works to illuminate the importance between gender and its relationship to vulnerabilities and creating the necessary synthesis between promoting equitable access to agricultural and how this can procure a more sustainable society; in addition, my hope is that this report will serve as a source itself, illuminating the importance of grassroots organizations in the development of more sustainable and equitable societies.

Countries Analyzed: Rwanda, Malawi, and Kenya

In regard to my decision surrounding the countries I chose to analyze, there are a few stipulations that I used to make my decision. Due to the restrictions surrounding the length of this thesis, the

first requirement was to select countries that were in the same, relative geographic location; this would allow me to keep my research more controlled and would require less specifications surrounding cultural, political, and geographical differences. My other decisions stemmed from both recent state initiatives to promote gender equality and increased recognition of women as key proponents to sustainable development.

I chose Rwanda due to the significant increase of female involvement after the Rwandan Genocide in 1994; and Malawi due to the international attention last year surrounding their amendment to Malawi Constitution which provided a historic step towards ending child marriage, removing a constitutional provision that allowed children between the ages of 15 and 18 to marry.⁴⁰ Raising the minimum age of marriage under the Malawi Constitution to age 18 illuminates the state's recognition of women and girls as key to the promotion of human rights which includes rights to health, education, freedom from violence, and equal access to resources.⁴¹ Finally, due to the international success of the Green Belt Movement, I decided to choose Kenya, as the last country I would analyze. Using resources such as Human Rights Watch, academic journals, and individual country reports, provided me with a starting point for choosing each of my countries. My hopes were that increased recognition of rights meant a higher promotion of women's equitable access to resources.

⁴⁰ Annerieke, Smaak, "Malawi Amends Constitution to Remove Child Marriage Loophole," Human Rights Watch, 24 Feb. 2017, www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/23/malawi-amends-constitution-remove-child-marriage-loophole (accessed March 20, 2017).

⁴¹ Annerieke, Smaak, "Malawi Amends Constitution to Remove Child Marriage Loophole," Human Rights Watch, 24 Feb. 2017, www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/23/malawi-amends-constitution-remove-child-marriage-loophole (accessed March 20, 2017).

In examining the countries, I decided to delve further into sub-Saharan African politics, women's rights, and access to resources. I chose to analyze countries that have publicly pushed for more gender equitable societies. Throughout this thesis there is a large emphasis placed on socio-cultural barriers and its contribution to rural women's lack of ability to participate in the agricultural sector. In addition, by discussing three different grassroots organizations, this thesis highlights the importance of rural women's voices and grassroots organizations in creating more sustainable societies.

The Green Belt Movement, Rwanda Women's Network, and Women for Fair Development

Grassroots organizations, as argued in this paper, provide the necessary link between women's access to resources and the creation of more sustainable societies. In each of the countries I chose to analyze – Kenya, Rwanda, and Malawi – I researched and focused my attention to one, grassroots, or local organization. My decision for choosing the organizations or movements was based on three specific requirements: 1) each movement or organization had to focus attention on women's role in agricultural production – or access to resources; 2) the organizational structure had to include women as head decision makers; 3) lastly, each movement had to identify and examine the intersectionality between women's inequitable access to resources and other important societal issues.

As a way to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the spectrum of grassroots movements, I carefully chose ones that differed in their leadership. The Green Belt Movement, established by Wangari Maathai - a well-educated Kenyan woman - was based on her initial vision of environmentalism but later developed into an internationally recognized and revered example of

a successful grassroots movement. In contrast, Rwanda's Women Network, which is now locally-based grassroots, found its origins from a US-based organization. Finally, Malawi's Women for Fair Development was established by a group of rural women. Selecting organizations with common goals, but different leadership, allowed for a more in-depth analysis of what makes grassroots organizations successful - promoting more equitable access to resources. The overall structural analysis of each organization played an important role in highlighting ways in which an organization or movement can influence the local, national, and international sphere.

This thesis focuses on the socio-cultural barriers that inhibit rural women's ability to fully participate in the agriculture sector. Each chapter that follows begins with a brief overview of each individual country, which includes a discussion surrounding women's role in agricultural development, the discrepancies that exist between customary and statutory law – specifically relating to land rights -, and the presence of climatological pressures within the region. Kenya, Rwanda, and Malawi remain heavily reliant on agricultural production and rural women make up on average, 75 percent to this sector. Yet, due to inconsistencies between customary and statutory law, women are systematically denied equal access to land and land rights. According to a report written to CEDAW, “the areas in which most customary laws disadvantage women is in respect to property rights and inheritance.”⁴² This report analyzes the importance of grassroots organizations in restructuring women's role in agricultural production, because this is one of the most important and unequal sectors within sub-Saharan African society.

⁴² Federation of Women Lawyers- Kenya, “Women's Land and Property Rights in Kenya: Promoting Gender Equality,” International Women's Human Rights Clinic, 2009, <http://fidakenya.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Women-Land-rights-Handbook.pdf> (accessed September 14, 2017).

While each individual grassroots organization in this report does not focus solely on promoting women's equitable access to land and land rights it is an important socio-cultural concept that restricts women's participation in society. Focusing attention to the agricultural sector allows for a more succinct and manageable approach to discussing the overall success of each grassroots organization and its contribution to promoting sustainable development.

CHAPTER 4: MALAWI & WOMEN FOR FAIR DEVELOPMENT

Malawi, or the Republic of Malawi, is a landlocked, low-income, agriculture based country, and is one of the world's poorest nations.⁴³ Agriculture accounts for more than one-third of the country's GDP and around 84 percent of the population lives in rural areas, making around 11 million Malawians dependent on smallholder, subsistence farming. However, even though there is great demand for land access, only around one-third of the land is suitable for cultivation. This lack of arable land accounts for most smallholder farmers having less than one hectare on which to grow their food.⁴⁴ Because of this shortage of arable land and high population growth more pressures have been placed on natural resources, which has resulted in inadequate soil and water conservation. This has placed women, in particular, most at risk to climatological shifts and food insecurity.⁸⁶

In Malawi women account for 70 percent of smallholder agriculturists and are therefore highly dependent on agricultural production.⁴⁵ However, due to insecure land rights and inequitable access to resources, women often are left with minimal to no financial gain for their contribution to the agricultural sector, even though they generally spend twice as much labour time in farming.⁸⁹ Women are key players in natural resource management and maintaining the security of household consumption. And with Malawi's food security crisis, women continue to be at the forefront of societal insecurities and poverty, in part due to insecure access to land and resources.

⁴³ Cathy, Green, Sally, Baden, "Women and development in Malawi," Brighton: The Commission of the European Communities Directorate-General for Development, May 1994, <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/sites/bridge.ids.ac.uk/files/reports/re23c.pdf> (accessed September 24, 2017).

⁴⁴ Gladson, Makowa, Levi Z., Manda. "New Agriculturist: Country Profile – Malawi," *New Agriculturist*, Mar. 2012, www.new-ag.info/en/country/profile.php?a=2488 (accessed August 22, 2017).

⁴⁵ Cathy, Green, Sally, Baden, "Women and development in Malawi," Brighton: The Commission of the European Communities Directorate-General for Development, May 1994, <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/sites/bridge.ids.ac.uk/files/reports/re23c.pdf> (accessed September 24, 2017).

Present-day Malawi, like many sub-Saharan African countries, has made efforts to improve women's access to land and resources.⁴⁶ In 1996, President Bakili Muluzi's made strides to find a solution to land-related problems;⁴⁷ the most important contribution was the 2002 revision of Malawi's National Land Policy. This document outlines women's rights to property inheritance to be equal to that of men.⁴⁸ However, customary law provides one of the largest barriers to women's secure tenure rights.

Even though Malawi has both matrilineal and patrilineal customary practices⁴⁹ – differentiating it from Kenya and Rwanda - decisions surrounding customary land are still primarily made by men. According to a report produced by CEDAW “the precarious situation of women in rural areas, who constitute the majority of women in the State...are disproportionately affected by the lack of adequate health services, education, [and] ownership of land and inheritance...”⁵⁰

Women's marginalized position in Malawian society and their overall lack of access to income and credit means that they also have little to no voice in decision making or agricultural production, and consequently become victims of climatological shifts.

⁴⁶ Randi, Kaarhus, “Women's Land Rights and Land Tenure Reforms in Malawi: What Difference Does Matriliney Make?” *Forum for Development Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2 (2010): 171–192.

⁴⁷ Paul, Kishindo, “Customary Land Tenure and the New Land Policy in Malawi,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2004): 213–225.

⁴⁸ Government of The Republic of Malawi, “Malawi National Land Policy.” Government of The Republic of Malawi, 17 Jan. 2002, <https://cepa.rmportal.net/Library/government-publications/National%20Land%20Policy%202002.pdf> (accessed September 1, 2017).

⁴⁹ Paul, Kishindo, “Customary Land Tenure and the New Land Policy in Malawi,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2004): 213–225.

⁵⁰ United Nations, “Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women- 45 session.” United Nations, 1998, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reports/18report.pdf> (accessed September 20, 2017).

Malawi's heavily agricultural based economy contributes to the state's overall vulnerability to climatological shifts; changing temperatures and unpredictable precipitation patterns are harmful to agricultural production and growth.⁵¹ With a predicted increase in erratic rainfall patterns and more catastrophic natural events, climate change risks undermining basic human rights – access to health, food, safe drinking water, and adequate standards of living. Rural communities within Malawi threaten to see the greatest impacts of climate change, due to their reliance on agricultural for survival.⁵² Climatological shifts will continue to threaten economic growth and livelihoods of a population of which 90 percent are dependent on rain-fed agriculture.⁵³ Sensitivity towards climate change varies between men and women, and because women represent a greater proportion of the rural population that rely solely on subsistence agriculture, they are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate variability.

Women for Fair Development

Like many organizations discussed in this section, local Malawi based organization, Women for Fair Development (WOFAD), is working towards ending discrimination based on gender by empowering women and strengthening their knowledge and skills needed to maintain a

⁵¹ USAID, "Malawi Climate Change Fact Sheet," U.S. Agency for International Development, Sept. 2016, www.usaid.gov/malawi/fact-sheets/malawi-climate-change-fact-sheet (accessed August 14, 2017).

⁵² Mtila, Kingsley, "The Impact of Climate Change in Malawi," *MBC*, n.d., www.mbc.mw/index.php/radio-2/item/1082-the-impact-of-climate-change-in-malawi (accessed November 22, 2016).

⁵³ Mtila, Kingsley, "The Impact of Climate Change in Malawi." *MBC*, n.d., www.mbc.mw/index.php/radio-2/item/1082-the-impact-of-climate-change-in-malawi (accessed November 22, 2016).

sustainable and healthy life.⁵⁴ However, what differs with this organization is its structural organization, historic origins, and overall lack of large amounts of monetary support.

WOFAD started as a small group of rural women, mostly widows, who decided that there was need for psychosocial support in order to promote improvement of familial living standards. At the start of WOFAD women met in each other's homes to provide support. But with increased development, as of 2005, it became officially recognized as a community based organization under the Government of the Republic of Malawi.⁵⁵ Currently the organizational structure of WOFAD has three levels of leadership; 1) the executive director - Linnah Mayanya – who is responsible for the overall management of this organization; 2) the Board of Trustees, consisting of both men and women, has the authority of organizational management; 3) and, finally there is general membership, which is responsible for the election of members to the Board of Trustees. However, due to overall lack of financial support, the organization currently does not have the capacity to develop or maintain more social involvement – which would consist of the addition of volunteers. And due to this overall shortage of periphery assistance there exists many overall program challenges; unfortunately, this inadequate access to resources means the inability to carry out goals and objectives. These challenges illustrate the importance of access to monetary support and highlight the common problem within community organizations, which can be summarized as a lot of passion, but a lack of financial backing and organization.

⁵⁴ Women for Fair Development, "Women for Fair Development" n.d., wofadmalawi.wordpress.com/ (accessed August 20, 2017).

⁵⁵ Women for Fair Development, "Roles and Responsibilities," WOFAD, 9 Apr. 2013, wofadmalawi.wordpress.com/wofad/roles-and-responsibilities/ (accessed September 15, 2017).

The analysis of WOFAD serves to highlight the importance of understanding ways in which organizational structural and access to financial support influences an organization's ability to participate in sustainable development. In addition, the analysis of one of WOFAD's main goals, its Permaculture Initiative, emphasizes the importance of community initiatives in providing direct support to rural communities.

As a result of the inconsistencies between statutory and customary laws, one of the current goals of this organization is to implement a project, called Community Empowerment on Productive Land Use (CEPLU). Through the understanding of the interconnectivity between women, resources, and the environment, CEPLU desires to empower communities in regard to productive land use by employing local and indigenous knowledge about resource and land management. Because of overall patterns of land degradation, the CEPLU project wants to work to improve knowledge of Permaculture concepts as a way to promote more sustainable societies and livelihoods. Through the use of Permaculture alongside the promotion of innovative technology and information, according to WOFAD, it will centralize lifestyles around the idea of "caring for the earth, people, sharing of surplus, reducing consumption and building a sustainable lifestyle."⁵⁶ And, this transition and dissemination of knowledge will allow women the ability to create sustainable livelihoods, through better understanding of development practices that will "improve community crop diversification and to mitigate risk in crop failure."⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Women for Fair Development, "Permaculture and Herbal Gardens," Women for Fair Development, n.d. <https://wofadmalawi.wordpress.com/issues-wofad-is-addressing/core-activities/permaculture/> (accessed September 2, 2017).

⁵⁷ Women for Fair Development, "Permaculture and Herbal Gardens," Women for Fair Development, n.d. <https://wofadmalawi.wordpress.com/issues-wofad-is-addressing/core-activities/permaculture/> (accessed September 2, 2017).

Grassroots movements are built around local needs and often are developed due to shortcomings in national and international support to ameliorate community based issues. However, due to the overall nature of grassroots movements, there are enduring challenges that persist:

Focus upon local sensitivity, reliance upon bottom-up activity, and faith in practical rather than political problem-solving, means grassroots innovation movements will always have to learn to live with three enduring challenges: Attending to local specificities whilst simultaneously seeking wide-scale diffusion and influence, Being appropriate to existing situations that one ultimately seeks to transform, and working with project-based solutions to goals (of social justice) that fundamentally require structural change.⁵⁸

However, despite these challenges, movements that lack overall funding and great attention, still contribute to the overall discussion of grassroots movements and their important contribution to women's rights and access to agriculture. Women, as exemplified through Malawi's country analysis, are important agents for sustainable development. They are catalysts to the transformation of sub-Saharan African economic, societal, and environmental structures.

However, due to insecure access to resources and the constraints of environmental and social forcing, women often become the most vulnerable members of society.

Grassroots organizations play important roles in providing synthesis between promoting rural women's access to resources, specifically within the confines of patriarchal customary practices. The WOFAD's CEPLU project serves as recognition of the shortcomings of statutory law and its promotion at the rural, or community level. In addition, CEPLU continues to illuminate the importance for rural communities to look at the interconnectedness of: insecure access of resources, gender inequalities, and environmental degradation in sub-Saharan Africa.

⁵⁸ Adrian, Smith, et al, "Grassroots Innovation Movements: Challenges and Contributions," *Journal of Cleaner Production* 63 (2014): 120.

Developing an understanding of women's access to land, and the complexities of women's rights in rural Malawi is important to understanding the overall role of grassroots organizations. Organizations, specifically when constructed by communities – like WOFAD - provide an important reflection to social inequalities felt within rural communities. With community backing grassroots can become proponents of change. This chapter sought to provide an analysis of Women for Fair Development: Malawi, as a way to emphasize the importance of grassroots mobilization and to highlight the challenges of creating successful mobilization efforts. In addition, by providing an analysis of WOFAD's permaculture initiative and the organization's systemic challenges, this section illuminates the significance of having access to funding and community based involvement. Empowering women, through intersectional approaches to development, is important in rural communities specifically where there exists inequitable access to resources and opportunities.

While WOFAD and its CEPLU project are working towards improving women's role in the agricultural sector, their overall lack of community involvement and the inexistence of a decentralized structure decreases its ability to lobby and improve women's equitable access to resources. According to WOFAD's website, due to overall lack of financial support, there exists: high dropout rates for trained staff, no volunteer management program to promote active community involvement, and inadequate resources that does not allow WOFAD to carry out all of its goals and objectives.⁵⁹ As discussed in the introduction of this report, successful of grassroots organizations must have three key aspects: local and cultural understanding, financial

⁵⁹ Women for Fair Development, "Challenges," Women for Fair Development (WOFAD), 18 June 2012, wofadmalawi.wordpress.com/issues-wofad-is-addressing/organizational-challenges/ (accessed October 20, 2017).

backing, and a combination of a centralized and decentralized structure. WOFAD only has one of these aspects. While the organization was developed solely out of community based needs its lack of a centralized and decentralized structure and financial backing has led to its overall unsuccessful promotion of sustainable development.

CHAPTER 5: RWANDA & THE RWANDAN WOMEN'S NETWORK

Rwanda is a small land-locked country located in East sub-Saharan Africa, and is perhaps most well-known for the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. However, this catastrophe has brought the emergence of a new Rwanda, one that has placed greater emphasis on the leadership of Rwandan women.⁶⁰ Immediately following the genocide, around 60 to 70 percent of the population were women, which drastically altered the workspace, and has allowed for greater expansion of women's involvement within society.⁶¹ However, there are still socially imbedded constructions that present challenges to women, specifically rural women, in expressing their rights.

Rural women contribute significantly to the nation's economy and represent approximately 43 percent of the agricultural labour force, and are responsible for preparing and producing the majority of the food.⁶² Around 80 percent of Rwandan women work in the agricultural sector, and like many other sub-Saharan African countries, the majority are subsistence farmers.⁶³ Due to the direct relationship between the Rwandan economy and agriculture production, rural women's access to land and resources is significant. And, as a result of rapid population growth and resource scarcity women's insecure access to land is significantly amplified.⁶⁴ Issues

⁶⁰ Swanee, Hunt, "The Rise of Rwanda's Women," *Foreign Affairs*, May 2014, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/rwanda/2014-03-30/rise-rwandas-women (accessed August 24, 2017).

⁶¹ Swanee, Hunt, "The Rise of Rwanda's Women," *Foreign Affairs*, May 2014, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/rwanda/2014-03-30/rise-rwandas-women (accessed August 24, 2017).

⁶² The Republic of Rwanda, "Rural Women Play a Significant Role in the Country's Economic Growth," Republic of Rwanda, 26 Oct. 2015, www.gov.rw/news_detail/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=1363&cHash=da74500d5f4a48986239dd45c9b380b9 (accessed October 1, 2017).

⁶³ Gaafar, Reem, "Women's Land and Property Rights in Kenya," Landesa, 14 Oct. 2014, <https://www.landesa.org/wp-content/uploads/LandWise-Guide-Womens-land-and-property-rights-in-Kenya.pdf> (accessed September 14, 2017).

⁶⁴ Chris, Huggins, "Agricultural Policies and Local Grievances in Rural Rwanda," *Peace Review* 21, (2009): 296–303.

surrounding access to resources are important for three reasons. The first is due to Rwanda's person-to-land ratio, which is the highest in Africa according to 2016 data from the World Bank - 483 people per sq. kilometer.⁶⁵ Second, due to the 1994 civil war and genocide, population shifts have resulted in displaced persons and this has caused overlap of land tenure. And, third, due to increased climate variability, food security and equitable access to resources are becoming overextended.

Rwandan agriculture contributes to 32 percent of GDP and is vital for the livelihood of 80 percent of the population. It is necessary to understand the interconnectivity between agricultural production, climatological shifts, and women's role in procuring a more sustainable society. In Rwanda, as is true in other sub-Saharan countries, climatological shifts pose a threat to the majority of the population that lives in rural areas where livelihoods are determinant on agriculture and climate predictability. Climatological shifts could cause the intensification of severe weather patterns – particularly droughts. And these shifts will have the most perverse affects for the most vulnerable sector - smallholder agriculture - which remains dominated by Rwandan women.⁶⁶ As examined when discussing Kenyan politics, lack of coherency between statutory and customary law often remain one of the greatest hurdles standing between women's equitable access to resources.

Since 1999 the Rwandan Government has made strides to correct women's property rights, which started with the Inheritance Law granting equal rights to both men and women, in addition

⁶⁵ World Bank, "Population Density," The World Bank, 2016. data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.DNST (accessed October 12, 2017).

⁶⁶ New Partnership for Africa's Development, "Gender, Climate Change, and Agriculture Support Programme," n.d. <http://www.nepad.org/node/5390> (accessed September 12, 2017).

to providing protection to property rights within marriage.⁶⁷ This Post-Genocide reconstruction carried over into the 2003 Constitution which further commits the country to gender equality and commits 30 percent of parliamentary seats to women.⁶⁸ However, the power that is allocated to female politicians often becomes muddled with familial structures and like Kenyan politics customary law often undermines women's rights.⁶⁹ Unfortunately many of Rwanda's customary laws inhibit women from inheriting their father's or husband's land and much of the rural population remains unaware of the laws established after 1994 that allow and promote women's rights and equitable land access. Grassroots organizations have become necessary and through the empowerment of women, they also promote more equitable access to resources.

Rwandan Women's Network

The Rwanda Women's Network (RWN) - a national humanitarian non-governmental organization - is dedicated to promoting and improving the socio-economic situation of women in Rwanda, with a particular emphasis on supporting rural women.⁷⁰ Unlike Women for Fair Development, RWN came into fruition as a result of the intervention of US-based organization, Church World Service, but has transitioned today into a locally classified organization. Because of the enormity of Western based Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) present on the

⁶⁷J., Brown, J., Uvuza, "Women's Land Rights in Rwanda: How can they be protected and strengthened as the Land Law is implemented?" Rural Development Institute Reports on Foreign Aid and Development, Sept. 2006.

https://s3.amazonaws.com/landesa_production/resource/459/Brown_Women%27s_Land_Rights_in_Rwanda_2006.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAICR3ICC22CMP7DPA&Expires=1510100305&Signature=LrRxJAqzvpGhR8mkSvsuOT%2B%2B%2FOI%3D (accessed November 22, 2016).

⁶⁸ The Republic of Rwanda, "The Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda" 2003, <http://www.rwandahope.com/constitution.pdf> (accessed November 21, 2016).

⁶⁹ Gregory, Warner, "It's The No. 1 Country For Women In Politics - But Not In Daily Life," NPR, 29 July 2016. www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2016/07/29/487360094/invisibilia-no-one-thought-this-all-womans-debate-team-could-crush-it (accessed September 12, 2016).

⁷⁰ Rwanda Women's Network, "About Us," *Rwanda Women Network*, n.d., www.rwandawomennetwork.org/about-us.html (accessed August 5, 2017).

African continent, grassroots, or community based organizations developed by local leaders are often overshadowed both in available information and the ability to garner national and international attention. Therefore, in this section, it is important to note that apart from the RWN's website, there is relatively little outside information surrounding its overall impact on rural communities. In addition, based on the available information, it is uncertain to what extent the US-based organization, Church World Service, has had in the formation of its current organizational structure and goals. In order to fill in some of these gaps in knowledge, certain aspects of this section will serve to be more hypothetical, rather than concrete.

The overall mission of the RWN is to “empower poor women and widows in...rural...areas through competent financial and managerial systems, [as] [a] [way] to foster economic and social growth within households and communities, to improve [the] [overall] health status of women and children...”⁷¹ This network illuminates the importance of examining the “holistic” nature of issues and problems affecting women in Rwanda. In addition, it focuses on the power of community based organization and “mainstreaming gender” as a way to provide the necessary tenets for transforming women's inequitable access to resources and participation within rural societies. The importance of women's equitable access to resources and land rights and the significance of the intervention of grassroots organizations is exemplified in both a 2011 report produced by the RWN, “*Experiences of Women in Asserting their Land Rights*,” and through the analysis of a collaborative effort between RWN, the United Nations, and German based organization, Atmosfair.

⁷¹ Rwanda Women's Network, “About Us,” *Rwanda Women Network*, n.d., www.rwandawomennetwork.org/about-us.html (accessed August 5, 2017).

In the 2011 report, the RWN examines the important, and valid discrepancies that persist within Rwandan society – specifically surrounding customary and statutory law. According to RWN, “vigilante groups at the grassroots level can help with furthering and deepening awareness of land rights among women as well as hold land administration institutions accountable for their actions.”⁷² This report serves as a brief discussion of the role of the RWN in promoting of women’s equitable access to resources; additionally, it further exemplifies the importance of women’s participation in developing higher functioning, sustainable societies. After the 1994 Genocide, one of the key aspects of the RWN was working to promote women’s right to land and resources. Since then, through its involvement with other advocacy networks, such as Profemmes/Twesehamwe, Landnet-Rwanda, LegalAidForum and Rwanda women Legal Policy Task Force, it has been able to establish a network of community paralegals who are trained to assist women with property and inheritance cases.⁷³ The institutional framework for land administration in Rwanda, as discussed previously, is divided into two sectors, the informal and formal; generally the informal sector consistent of traditional hierarchies that perpetuate gender discriminatory practices. Therefore, “the way forward for Rwanda is for advocacy [and] [community] [organizations] to focus on points that have [great] capacity to affect women’s land rights.”⁷⁴ Focusing on campaigns that go beyond raising awareness, according to the RWN, is

⁷² Rwanda Women's Network, “About Us,” *Rwanda Women Network*, n.d., www.rwandawomennetwork.org/about-us.html (accessed August 5, 2017).

⁷³ Rwanda Women’s Network, “Experiences of Women in Asserting their Land Rights: The Case of the Bugesera District,” Rwanda Women’s Network, Mar. 2011. http://www.rwandawomennetwork.org/downloads/Experiences_of_Women_in_Asserting_their_Land_Rights_The_Case_of_Bugesera_District_Rwanda.pdf (accessed October 12, 2017).

⁷⁴ Rwanda Women’s Network, “Experiences of Women in Asserting their Land Rights: The Case of the Bugesera District,” Rwanda Women’s Network, Mar. 2011.

imperative for changing community sentiment surrounding women's equitable access to resources.

The RWN's project - Cooking Against Climate Change - reinvigorates the organization's core value of providing holistic approaches when discussing women's access to resources, while promoting the development of sustainable societies. It works to promote RWN's belief that campaigns should go beyond raising awareness. The goal of this particular project was to support women's access to basic needs, while at the same time promoting necessary response for adaptation to climatological shifts. In collaboration with German organization, Atmosfair, and the United Nations, RWN worked to provide households with access to affordable and energy efficient cook stoves.⁷⁵ Developing initiatives that work to implement changes in daily tools, such as the application of more efficient cook stoves, could drastically change women's involvement in agricultural production; and, could allow for their more active involvement in land and agricultural management. By reducing the travel time and amount of natural resources needed to complete day-to-day tasks, women are allotted a platform that could empower women to enter the commercial agriculture market. Through the implementation of this project, this programme contributes to Rwanda's overall goal to decrease the rate of wood use from 94% to 50% by 2020.⁷⁶ While there is no concrete data surrounding the impacts of the implementation of

http://www.rwandawomennetwork.org/downloads/Experiences_of_Women_in_Asserting_their_Land_Rights_The_Case_of_Bugesera_District_Rwanda.pdf (accessed October 12, 2017).

⁷⁵ Rwanda Women's Network, "Cooking against Climate Change," Rwanda Women's Network, 2015, www.rwandawomennetwork.org/Cooking%20against%20Climate%20Change.html (accessed October 1, 2017).

⁷⁶ Rwanda Women's Network, "Cooking against Climate Change," Rwanda Women's Network, 2015, www.rwandawomennetwork.org/Cooking%20against%20Climate%20Change.html (accessed October 1, 2017).

these stoves on rural Rwandan women, it can be predicted that by allowing women access to more time-efficient methods to completing daily tasks, they will ultimately be able to utilize their time to procure better diets, and create more sustainable societies.⁷⁷ Empowering women through grassroots organizations is essential when promoting equitable access resources and the development sustainable alternatives to daily tasks is necessary for the creation of sustainable societies.⁷⁸

While the overall success and breakdown of the history of RWN is unknown, its current organizational structure and overall goals and values provide insight into the potential success of the organization. RWN highlights the importance of voluntary community participation. According to information presented in the 2015 Rwanda Women's Network Report, its organizational structure, while complex, is moving towards a more well-defined combination of a centralized and decentralized structure. The current RWN organizational structure is working to combine centralized and decentralized structures; at the top part of the organization is the General Assembly – the elected members from RWN founders. The General Assembly is the policy and decision-making body that provides leadership and overall guidance to the RWN.⁷⁹ And, as you decrease to the bottom of the organization's structure you find a semi-decentralized

⁷⁷ Wangari, Maathai, "Introduction." *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience*, (New York: Lantern Books, 2006): 79–108.

⁷⁸ Dede, Amanor-Wilks, "Opinion: How Women Can Transform African Agriculture - and the Economy," *Devex*, 10 Oct. 2017, www.devex.com/news/opinion-how-women-can-transform-african-agriculture-and-the-economy-91236 (accessed October 11, 2017).

⁷⁹ Rwanda Women's Network, "Rwandan Women's Network: Strategic Plan 2016 – 2020," 2016. http://www.rwandawomennetwork.org/downloads/STRATEGIC_PLAN%202016-2020.pdf (accessed October 15, 2017).

body of local participatory, partner groups. However, due to overall lack of information, it remains unsure to the extent of interaction between the top and bottom actors of the RWN.

This section seeks to provide a succinct analysis of the Rwanda Women's Network as a way to emphasize the importance of grassroots mobilization in Rwanda. And, by providing an analysis of two important initiatives of this movement, this section works to illuminate the significance of community based involvement and grassroots initiatives that go "beyond raising awareness." Empowering women, through intersectional approaches to development is important in rural communities specifically where there exists inequitable access to resources and opportunities.

In comparison to the grassroots organization, Women for Fair Development, Rwanda Women's Network is more successful; in part due to its expansion beyond having the individual aspect of local and cultural understanding. With international donors and supporters, such as the United Nations RWN is allowed a more developed platform to complete projects; this can be seen with its involvement with German company, Atmosfair, and the United Nations in promoting and implementing affordable and energy efficient cook stoves into private households. However, while Rwanda Women's Network has financial backing and local and cultural knowledge, based on the information provided on its the website, the overall structure of the organization is still ill-defined, which is one reasons this grassroots organization is only marginally successful.

Furthermore, because this organization was developed from US-based organization, Church World Service, it did not initially start at the local level, but rather started as a common, inefficient top-down approach to development. While this organization has made important steps towards ameliorating rural women's participation in sustainable development, its origins and

current lack of a clearly defined structure limits its ability to successfully interact with international donors and local community members.

CHAPTER 6: KENYA & THE GREEN BELT MOVEMENT

Kenya is situated on the Equator and is one of the most developed economies in sub-Saharan Africa. However, around 70 percent of the population still relies on agriculture for their livelihoods and most of this refers to small-scale farming families.⁸⁰ And of this population, women manage 40 percent of the country's smallholder farmers, additionally, they make up 80 percent of Kenya's total farm labour. However, despite their role, women only own around 1 percent of agricultural land.⁸¹ This gendered access to agricultural and land serves as a severe obstruction for development.⁸²

In addressing women's land insecurity, there are generally two main groups of laws that govern women's access to resources. This part of the overall country analysis will focus on both the formal legal sector, statutory law and the more informal, customary law within Kenya.

As established in the 2010 Kenyan Constitution, there are three broad categories of land that are recognized – public, private, and community.⁸³ And, for the purpose of this thesis, this section will provide more commentary and focus to understanding community land – which, according to Landesa makes up 65-70% of total land in Kenya.⁸⁴ Community land refers to: land that is

⁸⁰ Global Agriculture, "Training Small-Scale Women Farmers in Kenya: Escaping Poverty within Four Years," *Global Agriculture*, n.d. www.globalagriculture.org/flagship-projects/women-farmers-in-kenya.html (accessed August 24, 2017).

⁸¹ Allison, Stancliffe, Karen, Attfield, "Empowering Rural Women in Kenya," Ecologia Youth Trust, 13 Oct. 2016, www.ecologia.org.uk/2016/10/empowering-rural-women-kenya/ (accessed December 12, 2016).

⁸² Andrew, Harrington, "Women's Access to Land in Kenya. Justice for the Poor Briefing," Volume World Bank, Jan. 2010, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/10942> (accessed October 12, 2017).

⁸³ Reem, Gaafar, "Women's Land and Property Rights in Kenya," Landesa, 14 Oct. 2014, <https://www.landesa.org/wp-content/uploads/LandWise-Guide-Womens-land-and-property-rights-in-Kenya.pdf> (accessed September 14, 2017).

⁸⁴ Reem, Gaafar, "Women's Land and Property Rights in Kenya," Landesa, 14 Oct. 2014, <https://www.landesa.org/wp-content/uploads/LandWise-Guide-Womens-land-and-property-rights-in-Kenya.pdf> (accessed September 14, 2017).

legally registered to a group, land declared by Parliament community land, or lands that were traditionally occupied by hunter-gather communities.⁸⁵ However, while the Kenyan Constitution recognizes community law, it becomes invalidated when there is conflict between the provisions established within the Constitution; and while, this provision is supposed to protect women against discriminatory customary law, inequitable practices persist.

While, the Constitution and laws in place surrounding land legislation do not limit women's ownership, customary law in many communities do. Even if there remains substantial interaction between the formal and customary systems these interactions are often ill defined by law and these gaps contribute to the overall weak nature of women's rights. In addition, while formal courts do have jurisdiction over land rights and succession, few Kenyan women take established communal land rights to formal courts due to the time commitment and necessary financial backing; therefore, for many rural women, customary land tenure wins over established statutory law.⁶² The complexity of community, or customary law is highlighted where there exists an ill-established relationship between statutory and customary law; and, according to a report CEDAW submitted to the Kenyan government, "the area in which most customary laws disadvantage women is in respect of property rights and inheritance."⁸⁶ And because of this inequality, women experience discrimination surrounding agriculture-based decisions. Established patriarchal and customary norms limit Kenyan women's ability to enforce their

⁸⁵ Reem, Gaafar, "Women's Land and Property Rights in Kenya," Landesa, 14 Oct. 2014, <https://www.landesa.org/wp-content/uploads/LandWise-Guide-Womens-land-and-property-rights-in-Kenya.pdf> (accessed September 14, 2017).

⁸⁶ Reem, Gaafar, "Women's Land and Property Rights in Kenya," Landesa, 14 Oct. 2014, <https://www.landesa.org/wp-content/uploads/LandWise-Guide-Womens-land-and-property-rights-in-Kenya.pdf> (accessed September 14, 2017).

rights to land, and with increasing climatological shifts within this region, it places further stresses on sustainable livelihoods.

Women's dependence on natural resources is imperative when understanding the vulnerabilities of rural community in the context of climatological shifts. Increased extreme weather events, along with improper land use has brought about crop failures and increased food insecurity. Women's insecure access to land and agricultural decisions only reduces sustainability and higher productivity. According to the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW),⁸⁷ economic theory alone exemplifies the value of the inclusion of women in resource management, specifically surrounding land rights. This theory suggests that tenure security and economic ties to productivity are more likely to ensure greater emphasis on long-term sustainability. For example, when there is more secure tenure, there tends to be shifts to slower-growing crops, which allows for greater outputs, while increasing the quality of the land. ⁶⁷ "There is no reason to think that women farmers respond less rationally to negative economic incentives than their male counterparts;" ⁶⁷ in fact, impacts surrounding negative economic incentives are sometimes more noticeable for women, because insecure land rights directly impact women's access to credit and other vital resources. In many ways these unequal relationships and heightened vulnerabilities can be seen in the discussion surrounding climate change. Kenya's increased

⁸⁷ Rekha, Mehra, "Women, Food Security, and Agriculture in a Global Marketplace," International Center for Research on Women, 2008, <https://www.icrw.org/publications/women-food-security-and-agriculture-in-a-global-marketplace/> (accessed September 16, 2017).

climate variability since 2000 and its negative impact on the agriculture sector has been more prominently felt by women.⁸⁸

Green Belt Movement

Women, particularly those living in rural communities, tend to face additional burdens in regard to access to resources, and with climatological shifts these inequalities are only heightened.⁸⁹

What sparked the origins of the Green Belt Movement predominantly surrounds land degradation and inequitable access to resources. Inequitable access to resources, specifically when discussing efficient forms of transportation, is not an uncommon issue in sub-Saharan Africa. In rural communities, women are responsible for collecting water and fuel, which generally requires walking large distances, leaving less time towards other responsibilities and opportunities.⁹⁰ And, the impacts of the systematic inequitable access to land and resources denies women the ability to provide themselves with economic sustenance, and contributes to overall food insecurity and agricultural degradation.

In 1977 the Green Belt Movement was founded out of response to “the needs of rural Kenyan women who reported that their streams were drying up, their food supply was less secure, and they had to walk further and further to get firewood for fuel and fencing.”⁹¹ Wangari Maathai,

⁸⁸ Reem, Gaafar, “Women’s Land and Property Rights in Kenya,” Landesa, 14 Oct. 2014, <https://www.landesa.org/wp-content/uploads/LandWise-Guide-Womens-land-and-property-rights-in-Kenya.pdf> (accessed September 14, 2017).

⁸⁹ Amanda, Richardson, “Challenges and Opportunities for Rural Kenyan Women,” Thomson Reuters Foundation, 14 Feb. 2013, news.trust.org/item/20130214131500-km0pr/ (accessed September 12, 2017).

⁹⁰ Amanda, Richardson, “Challenges and Opportunities for Rural Kenyan Women,” Thomson Reuters Foundation, 14 Feb. 2013, news.trust.org/item/20130214131500-km0pr/ (accessed September 12, 2017).

⁹¹ The Green Belt Movement, “Our History,” *The Green Belt Movement*, The Green Belt Movement, n.d. www.greenbeltmovement.org/who-we-are/our-history (accessed August 22, 2016).

the architect of the Green Belt Movement, revolutionized what it meant to be a rural woman, through the weaving of environmentalism, women's rights and access to resources, and political activism. Because the majority of Kenyans remain in rural areas Maathai's vision began at the local level and was originally only aimed at combatting environmental degradation. She initially created the company, Envirocare Ltd., which was aimed at hiring constituents to "clean up homesteads...and plant tress."⁹² However, due to overall lack of resources and available governmental support, Envirocare "soon folded."⁹³ But due to the overall interest of the population for planting trees, when Maathai was elected to the Executive Committee of the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK) she continued to lobby for rural community involvement through the development of a more sustainable society – specifically focusing on forestation. Under the tutelage of the NCWK, Envirocare and its efforts were continued and reinitiated under the title "Save the Land Harambee."⁹⁴ This new development encouraged collective action and dedication to "active participation in forestation and reforestation."⁹⁵ On June 5, 1977, the first ceremonial tree planting was initiated; but, due to infrastructure challenges and neglect, only two out of the seven trees survived. At this beginning stage of the organization, it became clear that institutional funding was crucial to the development and this is illuminated with the donation of sixty trees from Mobil Oil (Kenya) Ltd., which provided an important turning point for this movement; "had Mobil Oil not supported it in its initial stages when it was

⁹² Wangari, Maathai, "Introduction." *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience*, (New York: Lantern Books, 2006): 79–108.

⁹³ Marc, Michaelson, "Wangari Maathai and Kenyas Green Belt Movement: Exploring the Evolution and Potentialities of Consensus Movement Mobilization," *Social Problems*, 41 (1994):540-561.

⁹⁴ Maathai, Wangari. "The History of the Greenbelt Movement." *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience*, (New York: Lantern Books, 2006): 112–341.

⁹⁵ Maathai, Wangari. "The History of the Greenbelt Movement." *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience*, (New York: Lantern Books, 2006): 112–341.

more an idea than a movement...” The Save the Land Harambee movement might have never grown into the expansive Green Belt Movement.⁹⁶

With mass media and oral communication outreach, The Save the Land Harambee campaign quickly mobilized thousands of women to become tree planters and because of this participation; it drastically “changed the landscape” of rural Kenya.⁹⁷ As exemplified in Maathi’s book, “The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience,” the implementation and utilization of local communities, specifically women, is imperative to creating more sustainable practices and livelihoods:

The women of Naaro narrate[d] stories of the difficult past, when they used to walk long distances to fetch or purchase wood fuel and then slowly walk home carrying backbreaking loads. They also talk of times when they had to change their diets because there was not enough fuel to cook with. Today, however, they proudly tell how they can quickly obtain sufficient supplies of wood fuel at no cost since it is now available on their farms. They also acknowledge a decline in soil erosion, the return of wildlife to their farms, and the benefits of cleaner air and shade. The men are grateful and full of praise for the women because of the wonderful work that they have done for the community.⁹⁸

The short excerpt above highlights the nature of what was then the Save the Land Harambee initiative and it provides a direct analysis and discussion of how women’s empowerment and access to decision making processes surrounding resource management contributes to the creation of more equitable and sustainable societies.

⁹⁶ Marc, Michaelson, “Wangari Maathai and Kenyas Green Belt Movement: Exploring the Evolution and Potentialities of Consensus Movement Mobilization,” *Social Problems*, 41 (1994):540-561.

⁹⁷ Maathai, Wangari. “The History of the Greenbelt Movement.” *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience*, (New York: Lantern Books, 2006): 112–341.

⁹⁸ Maathai, Wangari. “The History of the Greenbelt Movement.” *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience*, (New York: Lantern Books, 2006): 112–341.

The progression of this campaign, and successful stories such as the one of the Naaro community, led to the request from communities for more tree seedlings, which sequentially brought about Maathai's goal to plant 15 million trees throughout Kenya.⁹⁹ And with increased sponsorship from Mobil Oil and community interest, Save the Land Harambee worked with Kenyan government foresters in order to facilitate seminars to teach the basics of tree nursery management to women; however, due to lack of social awareness, these management training courses failed to use comprehensible concepts for semi-literate women. Once the campaign realized that these women would be unable to use the information presented in these seminars, it began to emphasize the importance of employing the knowledge of rural women and their historic connection to the cultivation of the sub-Saharan agricultural landscape, rather than undermining it. Therefore, the campaign shifted to promoting and encouraging the use of traditional skills and wisdom. With the support of this mobilizing movement and the promotion of rural knowledge women quickly employed innovative techniques that allowed them to propagate trees to meet their needs, replenish indigenous tress, and promote and protect local biodiversity. With the initial support of Mobil Oil Ltd., increased community interest, and success in local tree-planting the Save the Land Harambee movement transitioned from small ceremonial plantings to a rural campaign which became known as the Green Belt Movement (GBM).

The emergence of the GBM brought about success on both a regional and international level due to its unique organizational structure and overall goals and values. And, according to Michaelson

⁹⁹ Maathai, Wangari. "The History of the Greenbelt Movement." *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience*, (New York: Lantern Books, 2006): 112–341.

(1994), there are two delineations necessary when analyzing organizational characters of social movements: 1) the degree of formalization, and 2) the degree of centralization.¹⁰⁰ The GBM, is formally structured yet it is also characterized by a mix of centralized and decentralized structures.¹⁰¹ This unique organizational structure is highlighted through the history of the movement and is one of the hallmarks for its success. The GBM had a very particular start;¹⁰² from the beginning preexisting organizations enabled its development and provided necessary support. “The movement was established under auspices of the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK), [which] [was] as legitimate and respected organization with a massive nationwide member-ship,” making it unique to other grassroots organizations.¹⁰³ At the center of the operational structure there exists an important duality; at the core of the movement, there exists paid office staff, but they are directly linked to decentralized grassroots members through the presence of field workers.¹⁰⁴ In brief the success of the GBM is based on its organizational structure; after the dissemination of information surrounding environmental problems, the success of GBM is based on local individuals taking initiatives. The philosophy behind the movement is one of self-help, and at each stage of the process, action is non-coercive and local. This organizational structure emphasizes both the importance of rural actors, but regional and international supporters.¹⁰⁵ The bureaucratic aspects of the organization serve to facilitate the

¹⁰⁰ Marc, Michaelson, “Wangari Maathai and Kenyas Green Belt Movement: Exploring the Evolution and Potentialities of Consensus Movement Mobilization,” *Social Problems*, 41 (1994):540-561.

¹⁰¹ Marc, Michaelson, “Wangari Maathai and Kenyas Green Belt Movement: Exploring the Evolution and Potentialities of Consensus Movement Mobilization,” *Social Problems*, 41 (1994):540-561.

¹⁰² Marc, Michaelson, “Wangari Maathai and Kenyas Green Belt Movement: Exploring the Evolution and Potentialities of Consensus Movement Mobilization,” *Social Problems*, 41 (1994):540-561.

¹⁰³ Marc, Michaelson, “Wangari Maathai and Kenyas Green Belt Movement: Exploring the Evolution and Potentialities of Consensus Movement Mobilization,” *Social Problems*, 41 (1994):540-561.

¹⁰⁴ Marc, Michaelson, “Wangari Maathai and Kenyas Green Belt Movement: Exploring the Evolution and Potentialities of Consensus Movement Mobilization,” *Social Problems*, 41 (1994):540-561.

¹⁰⁵ Marc, Michaelson, “Wangari Maathai and Kenyas Green Belt Movement: Exploring the Evolution and Potentialities of Consensus Movement Mobilization,” *Social Problems*, 41 (1994):540-561.

movement's work and establishes a method of accountability; this structure plays a complementary role in promoting the involvement of rural women.

In many ways, the Green Belt Movement is a case of a mobilization effort established at “the right time and in the right place.” The ability for the movement to garner attention from its beginning and maintain that regional importance established it one of the most successful grassroots organizations. The unique nature and organizational structure of this movement can be seen in understanding the enormous amount of success that it has garnered in comparison to other grassroots, or local movements. The mobilization of rural communities was started by a unique and passionate woman who grew up in the cultural and social confines of Kenya. But, due to her ability to access and obtain a Bachelors, Masters, and PhD, she created herself as an activist. And, due to her ties to the National Council of Women of Kenya, she was able to lobby for the interconnectedness of rural development, women's rights, and environmental degradation – or the GBM.

Maathai examined the poisonous, cyclical nature of cash crops and land degradation and how it impacted rural women and the environment - “local people were poverty-stricken from a lack of sustainable income and malnourished from a lack of local produce.”¹⁰⁶ The birth of Maathai's initiative focused on the empowerment of rural communities, specifically local women, through the creation of a movement that promoted equitable and sustainable access to resources and land management, by highlighting the importance of women's voices. What started as an initiative to

¹⁰⁶ Lynnette, Zelezny, Megan, Bailey, “A Call for Women to Lead a Different Environmental Movement,” *Organization & Environment* 19 (2006): 103–109.

plant trees and promote more sustainable agriculture development, transitioned into an organization that advocated for gender equality and actions to tackle climate change. Its success has prompted the creation of seminars surrounding civic and environmental education, Community and Education Seminars (CEE), that encourage individuals, particularly women, to become involved in their political, economic, and environmental spheres.¹⁰⁷ In recent years, the GBM has extended its influence on the international level through the *Mottainai* Campaign, which established the notions of “reduce, reuse, and recycle,” which is well known worldwide.¹⁰⁸

Maathai’s emphasis on the interconnectedness between women’s empowerment, resource management, and sustainable development has placed more weight on the importance of local developments and paved the way for others initiatives, such as foundation of Ngugi Mutura’s NGO *Sustainable Agriculture Development Program* (SACDEP). This organization continues Maathai’s vision which stresses the importance of straying away from traditional, cash-crop production and places more emphasis on: sustainable forms of agricultural production that do not deteriorate the land, giving local communities access to knowledge and skills that allow them to become more empowered, and increasing access to food security.¹⁰⁹ Women’s contribution to food and agricultural production is significant. It is essential not only create gender-aware agricultural policies, but also acknowledge the importance of grassroots organizations in

¹⁰⁷ The Green Belt Movement, “Our History,” *The Green Belt Movement*, The Green Belt Movement, n.d., www.greenbeltmovement.org/who-we-are/our-history (accessed August 22, 2016).

¹⁰⁸ The Green Belt Movement, “Our History,” *The Green Belt Movement*, The Green Belt Movement, n.d., www.greenbeltmovement.org/who-we-are/our-history (accessed August 22, 2016).

¹⁰⁹ SACDEP, “About Us,” Sustainable Agriculture Community Development Programmes, n.d., www.sacdepkenya.org/ (accessed October 15, 2017).

instilling change where significant gaps between statutory and customary law and practices persist.

This section provides a succinct, yet exhaustive analysis of Kenya's Green Belt Movement, as a way to emphasize the importance of grassroots mobilization. The overall success of the GBM is due in part to the organization's ability to successfully integrate the three main points of grassroots success in sustainable development: having local and cultural based understanding, financial backing, and the combination of a centralized and decentralized structure. However, the overall evolution of the GBM from an environmentalist movement to a politically active organization is unique and unmatched. And, Wangari Maathai is no exception to the distinct nature of the GBM. Her prowess in activism, overall cultural awareness, and educational background provided her the capacity to institute change in a place that was just beginning to acknowledge the interconnectivity between women, agriculture, and sustainability. This organization is considered to be one of, if not, the most successful grassroots movement. Thus, it is unfair to use this as template for grassroots organizations. Yet, this case study is important because it serves as an example of the power that is behind locally-based organizations and the importance of utilizing rural women's knowledge when promoting sustainable development.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Grassroots organizations are “authentic and operational relays for [sustainable] development projects at the local level”¹¹⁰ because they encourage direct participation from the community level, while facilitating training and education that acknowledge and confront the marginalization of women. To challenge the existing socio-cultural restraints within rural Kenyan, Rwandan, and Malawian societies female led grassroots organizations and movements have become necessary actors in sustainable development.

Through the analysis of individual states, women’s role in agricultural production, and the discrepancies of statutory and customary law, this thesis has demonstrated the overall importance of the establishment of grassroots organizations. And, according to the three individual case studies of grassroots organizations – in Kenya, Rwanda, and Malawi – the success of a movement is dependent on three basic aspects: 1) local and cultural understanding, 2) financial backing, 3) and, the combination of centralized and decentralized actors. Because “empowered grassroots women” do in fact “help transform traditional gender and power relations.”¹¹¹

Rural women are keys to development and the mobilization of grassroots movements illuminates their significance. Within the context of sub-Saharan Africa, socio-cultural transformations are intrinsically linked to women’s empowerment. Acknowledging gender disparities within access

¹¹⁰ Heather, Hamilton, “Rwanda's Women: The Key to Reconstruction,” *ReliefWeb*, 10 Jan. 2000, reliefweb.int/report/rwanda/rwandas-women-key-reconstruction (accessed January 22, 2017).

¹¹¹ Anga, Timilisina, “Grassroots Women: Game Changers in the Fight against Corruption.” United Nations Development Program, 14 Mar. 2014. www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2014/03/14/grassroots-women-game-changers-in-the-fight-against-corruption.html (accessed October 19, 2017).

to land and land rights, allows grassroots the ability to improve women's roles in creating sustainable societies. In sub-Saharan Africa it is crucial that women's rights and equitable access to resources are at the forefront of development strategies. But in order for grassroots organizations to have the platform to support women, it is imperative they briefly touch on each aspect of what allows for the creation of a successful grassroots organization.

This thesis used women's access to land and land rights as a profile to women's inequitable access to resources in sub-Saharan Africa. And, the examination of women's role in agriculture played a significant part in developing an understanding for the necessity of including women's voices in the field of sustainable development. Women particularly in sub-Saharan Africa are the most vulnerable members of society and their overall contribution to the agricultural sector requires significant analysis.

As seen in the analysis of Kenya, Rwanda, and Malawi, due to discrepancies between customary and statutory practices women are barred from asserting their state rights.¹¹² And, due to gender-biased socialization, lack of access to monetary support, and knowledge of their state rights, many rural women remain imbedded in these patriarchal systems. Lack of access to land and resources, limits women's productivity and confines them and their livelihoods to the land.¹¹³ This lack of access to land tenure contributes to the cyclical nature of poverty and

¹¹² Rekha, Mehra, "Women, Food Security, and Agriculture in a Global Marketplace," International Center for Research on Women, 2008, <https://www.icrw.org/publications/women-food-security-and-agriculture-in-a-global-marketplace/> (accessed September 16, 2017).

¹¹³ Lorraine, Corner, "Women's Role in Economic Development," *European Review of Agricultural Economics*, Volume 35, Issue 4, 1 December 2008, Pages 598–601, <https://doi.org/10.1093/erae/jbn037> (accessed December 20, 2016).

underdevelopment. “Women’s access to, use of and control over land and other productive resources are essential to ensuring their right to equality and to an adequate standard of living.”¹¹⁴

Sub-Saharan Africa has been identified as the most vulnerable part of the world,¹¹⁵ due to the overall percent of population that relies on agriculture, the drastic increase in the estimated 2050 sub-Saharan African population, and the current and future impacts of climate change. It is imperative to advocate for women’s equality and empowerment, and it starts at the local level. While there is shortage of data that examines each individual movement’s impact on transforming rural societies, the information that has been produced in this report highlights the importance of allowing women access to land and resources. This thesis argues that women are catalysts to sustainable development, and through the agendas of locally-based grassroots organizations, they are allowed a significant platform to address current socio-cultural restrictions that inhibit their equitable participation in society. Therefore, when considering policy implications, it is important for grassroots organizations to have a rural voice but a network of support.

Looking Forward

Women’s role in the creation of sustainable societies far extends this discussion surrounding female-led grassroots organizations and the promotion of sustainable agricultural development.

¹¹⁴ OHCHR, “Realizing Women’s Rights to Land and Other Productive Resources,” United Nations, 2013, <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/RealizingWomensRightstoLand.pdf> (accessed October 25, 2017).

¹¹⁵ Dim, Coumou, et, al, “Climate Change impacts in sub-Saharan Africa: From Physical Changes to Their Social Repercussions, 1436 – 3798,” *Journal of Regional Environmental Change* (2016): 4 -16.

When completing my research and delving into the complexities of this subject, I noticed four areas of possible expansion and or the creation of separate projects:

i. Corporate Partnerships with Grassroots Organizations

One important area of expansion would be to analyze corporate partnerships with grassroots organizations, both on a national and international level as a way to more fully contextualize the role grassroots organizations play in the creation of sustainable societies. For example, in 2009, the Nestlé Cocoa Plan launched an initiative rooted in improving the livelihoods of cocoa farmers and partnered with a women-run cocoa cooperative on the ivory coast.¹¹⁶ In continuing my research, it would be interesting to analyze the benefits and downfalls of corporate-grassroots partnerships. Additionally, within this discussion it would be necessary to discuss whether these western-based corporations are truly promoting grassroots women, or if these partnerships are another form of neo-colonialism.

ii. Gender Relations in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Additionally, being able to connect the information presented in this thesis to a broader analysis of gender relations within sub-Saharan Africa would be important in continuing this research. This thesis focused on rural, cisgendered women's access to resources; an important continuation of this discussion would be to further analyze men's relationship to land and resources. Furthermore, it would be interesting to add and examine the spectrum of gender and how each relates into the discussion of sustainable development.

¹¹⁶ Marissa, Wesley, Dina, Dublon, "Empowering Women at the Grassroots." Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2015, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/empowering_women_at_the_grassroots (accessed October 20, 2017).

iii. Health implications & Grassroots Organizations

Another area that is extremely prevalent to sub-Saharan Africa politics and socio-cultural structures is the HIV/AIDS epidemic. There has been much data produced surrounding the interconnectivity between this crisis and women's role in economic development and land management. In continuing the analysis of grassroots role in empowering women, another important aspect of this discussion would be the examination and investigation of the role these organizations play in alleviating inequalities felt by the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

iv. Local Grassroots

The last aspect of expansion would be to analyze the cross-cultural difference and similarities between impoverished areas in Western nations and sub-Saharan Africa. It would be interesting to apply the same level of analysis surrounding what constitutes a successful grassroots organization, and see the model is culturally based or more universal.

Gender inequality in sub-Saharan Africa takes many forms, and with increasing climatological and persisting societal pressures, women's voices are increasingly important. Women comprise 43 percent of global agricultural labour and make essential contributions to overall agricultural and economic production within sub-Saharan Africa.¹¹⁷ However, women are often overrepresented in unpaid work and lack secure, and equitable access to resources making them the most vulnerable members of sub-Saharan African societies. It is necessary that significant changes be implemented within development policies that highlight rural women's role in creating sustainable societies. The overall presence of aid-based organizations on the African

¹¹⁷ Mehra, Rekha. "Women, Land and Sustainable Development"

continent illuminates the importance of moving beyond economic-centered and western based development practices to ones that highlight the voices of local communities. This is accomplished in part through the promotion of rural women's equitable participation in society and the presence of grassroots organizations.

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