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Land Governance and Women's Land Rights in Kenya: Advancing Gender Equality and Sustainable Development

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FOREWORD

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Editor-in-Chief



It is my honour to present this latest issue of *Pathways to African Feminism and Development*, the open-access, peer-reviewed journal of the African Women Studies Centre (AWSC), University of Nairobi, Volume 10, Issue 1 of 2025. Each publication reaffirms our commitment to advancing critical scholarship, feminist inquiry, and transformative knowledge on African women's lived realities, both on the continent and across the diaspora.

The Issue on ***Women, Land Rights and Governance*** emerges at a critical historical and intellectual moment in which questions of land, gender justice, ecological sustainability, and governance occupy a central place in African development discourse. Across the continent, land remains a fundamental socio-economic, political, and cultural resource that shapes citizenship, identity, livelihoods, and power relations. Yet, despite women's indispensable contributions to agricultural production, environmental stewardship, household sustenance, and community resilience, their rights to land ownership, access, control, participation, and decision-making continue to be constrained by enduring patriarchal systems, legal pluralism, socio-cultural exclusions, and unequal governance structures.

This collection of articles makes a significant contribution to feminist scholarship and interdisciplinary debates on women's land rights and governance in Africa. Together, the authors interrogate the intersections between gender, governance, sustainability, climate resilience, technology, and socio-economic transformation. Their analyses illuminate how women's experiences of land are mediated by both formal and informal institutions, while foregrounding women's agency, resistance, and transformative capacities within changing socio-political and ecological contexts.

A notable strength of this Issue lies in its theoretical and methodological diversity. Drawing on African feminist thought, feminist political ecology, feminist legal theory, governance studies, and sustainable development frameworks, the articles move beyond reductionist understandings of land as merely an economic asset. Instead, they conceptualise land as a deeply gendered site of power, contestation, belonging, rights, and survival. Through comparative analyses and grounded empirical studies from diverse Kenyan contexts, including Kajiado, Maasailand, Kakamega, Isiolo, Tana Delta, Murang'a, and Kenya's semi-arid regions, the issue demonstrates the multifaceted dimensions of women's struggles and negotiations over land rights, governance, and natural resources.

The articles further engage emerging governance questions related to tourism-driven development, digital land administration systems, climate adaptation, tenure insecurity, and post-retirement economic vulnerability among retired rural women. These contributions are particularly timely given the accelerating impacts of climate change, environmental degradation, land commodification, and rapid technological transitions across Africa. Importantly, the issue highlights that gender-equitable land governance is not solely a matter of legal reform, but also requires structural transformation in institutional practices, socio-cultural norms, policy implementation, and development paradigms.

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At a broader level, this Issue reinforces the centrality of women's land rights and inclusive governance to the realization of sustainable development, social inclusion, and environmental justice. The contributions collectively challenge policymakers, scholars, development practitioners, and civil society actors to rethink governance frameworks in ways that meaningfully incorporate feminist perspectives and women lived experiences. They further highlight the urgency of centring African women's voices within policy and academic spaces where decisions concerning land, livelihoods, governance, and natural resources are negotiated.

As Editor-in-Chief of Pathway to African Feminism and Development, the International Journal of the African Women Studies Centre, University of Nairobi, I commend the authors for their intellectual rigor, originality, and commitment to advancing feminist knowledge production on African women's issues. I equally acknowledge the invaluable contributions of reviewers, copy editors, and members of the editorial team whose scholarly dedication has ensured the successful development of this Issue.

It is our expectation that this collection will stimulate further critical scholarship, inform policy discourse, and strengthen advocacy efforts toward more inclusive, equitable, rights-based, and transformative land governance systems in Africa. Ultimately, the issue reminds us that sustainable development and democratic governance cannot be realized without securing women's substantive rights to land, participation, representation, and socio-economic justice.

Enjoy the read!



Prof. Elishiba Kimani
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