



2011-2015 Impact Report Executive Summary

**STRONGER NETWORKS &
ORGANIZATIONS: GRANTMAKING
FOR RURAL WOMEN'S GROUPS IN
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

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**H=LLO. GLOBAL FUND FOR
WOMEN IS A CHAMPION FOR
GENDER EQUALITY, STANDING
UP FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS
TO BE STRONG, SAFE,
POWERFUL, AND HEARD.**

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Background.

Beginning in 2011, Global Fund for Women implemented two phases of *Rural Women Striding Forward*, a four-year learning and grantmaking initiative to support rural women's groups in Sub-Saharan Africa in their aims to increase food security and advance their human rights. The initiative was comprised of collaborations with organizations across Burkina Faso, Kenya, and Uganda in the form of grants, convenings, and research activities. These various forms of support have contributed to a number of learnings for grantees, their rural women beneficiaries, and supporters such as Global Fund for Women.

The initiative aimed to build the skills of women's groups that work with rural women to improve agricultural productivity, decrease poverty, and advance women's social position. **Our hypothesis was that, through the provision of core support to these rural women's associations and networks, Global Fund for Women could strengthen their ability to provide information, resources, and technology to their members and direct beneficiaries. This integrated approach— combining sustainable agriculture and women's rights—is its unique feature, and is critical for addressing the complex challenges faced by Africa's women farmers on a daily basis.** Global Fund for Women observed local groups playing an important role in assuring community resilience and recognized they deserved substantial donor resources. A second key goal was to generate research findings that would encourage a shift in donor investment priorities toward addressing the structural and cultural barriers to improved food security at the grassroots level.

Project activities took place in two phases, from March 2011 to October 2013, and February 2014 to August 2015. Each phase consisted of grants to rural women's groups, national grantee convenings, and field research activities. Convenings created space to discuss national and global agricultural debates, impending legislation such as seed patent laws, and the rural women's movements that were coalescing to push their agendas.

In the face of widespread food shortages across the continent over the past decade, African farmers have shouldered an increasing workload under conditions of worsening rural poverty, dependence on purchased food, and environmental degradation. These circumstances have disproportionately affected rural women. Despite the prominence of global conversations on food security in the past decade, women are largely absent from these dialogues and have limited access to information on policy initiatives with life-changing implications for their families and communities. Through the *Rural Women Striding Forward Initiative*, Global Fund for Women was intent on both improving agricultural and food security objectives at the community level and elevating the attention paid by stakeholders to rural women's rights, leadership, and engagement in policy dialogues.

Grantee Project Locations (In green)



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Global Fund for Women launched Phase I of the *Rural Women Striding Forward Initiative* in March 2011. **Our hypothesis was that, through the provision of core support to these rural women's associations and networks, Global Fund for Women could strengthen their ability to provide information, resources, and technology to their members and direct beneficiaries.** Consequently, the initiative sought to accrue learning toward specific research questions that addressed:

- Preferred strategies of rural women's groups to increase agricultural productivity and advance women's rights; and
- Perceptions of rural women's groups on the impact of core financial support, technical assistance, and the opportunity to convene, share strategies, and collaborate with similar groups.

In order to test the initiative's hypothesis, baseline, mid-term, and end-line research tools were developed. They included:

1. **Organizational surveys** completed by each grantee group that focused on: a) innovative strategies to advance agricultural productivity and women's rights; and b) organizational capacity; and
2. **Focus group discussions (FGDs) and surveys** with beneficiaries of the grantee groups.

The analysis for the impact report included 486 surveys administered since 2012. To provide more in-depth appreciation of the initiative's impact, Global Fund for Women also completed three case

studies in early 2015 – one per country – to further demonstrate how women's groups create change in the lives of the rural women they serve¹.

Project activities of the **Rural Women Striding Forward Initiative** took place from June 2011 to August 2015, and included:

- \$400,000 in total grants in Phase I, with an average grant size of \$18,182, to 22 grantees to implement activities in sustainable agriculture and women's rights;
- In February 2014, Global Fund for Women began Phase II of the initiative to 19 of the original rural women's groups; \$224,000 in total grants in Phase II², with an average grant size of \$11,789, to 19 women's groups³;
- Grantees used funds for activities with rural women, including agricultural training, building women's rights awareness, business skills training, and advocacy training;
- Technical assistance to grantee groups via in-country consultants;
- Annual grantee convenings at the country level, and one regional convening; and
- Research activities at baseline and endline to gather data on grantees and their rural women beneficiaries, with a focus on the essential factors that lead to improved social status and economic well-being, as well as increased farming expertise of rural women.

A unique feature of the initiative was to train grantees in monitoring and evaluation skills so they could conduct research activities themselves. The initiative further enriched grantees' evidence-based programming capacity, creating and enhancing valuable feedback loops between women farmers and grantee staff.

¹ Project highlights are documented in a brief video available on Global Fund for Women's website.

² Gates Foundation awarded Global Fund for Women a smaller grant in Phase II to continue the initiative.

³ Global Fund for Women made 19 grants in total, but only 18 of the groups completed research tools because one group did not conduct agricultural activities. All of Phase II grantees were also grantees in Phase I.

CONVENINGS



A key component of the initiative was annual workshops (convenings), which brought together grantee groups per country to exchange strategies and help mobilize a community of activists for women's rights and food security. Specific issues discussed over two days included: 1) women's rights laws and trends; 2) national political context; 3) innovations in agriculture and adaptation to climate change; 4) overviews of agricultural policies; 5) skill-building on monitoring and evaluation skills; 6) training in post-harvest management and marketing skills; and 7) visits to demonstration farms. Over time, the convenings created a community of practice, where colleagues remained connected and could call on each other for support. Global Fund for Women invited government officials, NGOs, and implementing partners to a stakeholder workshop with grantees at the end of Phase I in order to provide an audience for the important work of rural women's groups and to help foster new partnerships. We also convened agriculture, gender, and climate change organizations to share project learnings and their implications in San Francisco and New York City in 2014 and 2015.

This summary provides an assessment of cumulative project data and learnings of the initiative from 2011 to 2015, drawn from the 2015 impact report. Global Fund for Women has been able to gather and evaluate longitudinal data, gaining a valuable and holistic perspective of how rural women's groups utilized grant funds to pursue a variety of organizational and beneficiary objectives. Grantee partners were central to this process, acting as data collectors and surveyors in their communities.

Key Impact Findings.

The broad findings of the initiative provide a strong endorsement of Global Fund for Women's approach in the *Rural Women Striding Forward Initiative*: a commitment to providing unrestricted support to local women's

organizations that work directly with rural women. This strategy enabled the grantee groups to pursue their agricultural and women’s rights objectives by designing culturally appropriate programs tailored to the communities they serve.

Evidence from the initiative suggests that organizational strategies to integrate agricultural and rights-based objectives were highly successful. Through an integrated approach, grantees demonstrated the extent to which women’s success in agriculture and as farmers is closely correlated to knowledge of their rights and the opportunity to assert themselves within their communities and at higher levels. According to grantee survey results, the most frequently reported strategy across countries for integrating agriculture and women’s rights was to build women’s leadership capacity by increasing knowledge and awareness of their rights. Women’s capacity gains via advocacy training and learning about their rights enabled more comprehensive progress towards advancing agricultural objectives.

To advance agricultural objectives, grantee groups at the outset of Phase I reported the two key objectives of raising women’s farming income and improving household diets. Meanwhile, at the beginning of Phase II, the most frequently reported responses were increased productivity through new farming methods and improvement of post-harvest management. This shift in responses suggests that, over time, grantees became more specific in their goals.

Meanwhile, grantee organizations and their beneficiaries overwhelmingly agreed that the provision of rights-related training to increase knowledge was a key strategy for success in promoting women’s rights awareness. The benefits of the integrated approach are reflected in the key project outcomes from 2011 to 2015:

Phases I and II Accomplishments	
Phase I (22 grantee organizations)	Phase II (18 grantee organizations)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16,194 direct beneficiaries of agricultural activities • 5,251 rural women trained in agricultural practices through hands-on learning • Farmers acquired 100+ acres of land • Over 10,000 rural women and men attended community awareness trainings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18,104 participants in agriculture techniques trainings • 898 direct beneficiaries of gender rights workshops, literacy trainings • Multiple land rights trainings, leading to land titles and collective fields for women • Women formed advocacy networks and joined local and county development committees

In Phase I, total crop yield was 4,958 kilograms across all three countries, of beneficiaries' top three crops. This represented an increase ranging from 28 to 43 percent from baseline in Kenya and Uganda. In Phase II, with fewer grantee groups and much less Global Fund for Women support, total crop yield was 4,339 kilograms across all three countries, of beneficiaries' top three crops. Burkina Faso and Uganda produced the largest yields. Initiative findings across both Phases I and II indicate that grantees successfully increased agricultural production and food security for beneficiaries across all three project countries, primarily by training rural women in diverse farming techniques, promoting knowledge-sharing and networking, and supplying loans for women to purchase agricultural inputs and equipment.

Across both phases, the vast majority of beneficiaries reported consuming their top crops at home, reflecting a priority on household food security. By the end of Phase II, over 65 percent of respondents in all three project countries reported eating at least three satisfying meals per day. The most significant gain occurred in Uganda. Rural women themselves reflected this progress in their surveys and discussion groups, as illustrated by the quote below:

We are now having three meals a day which wasn't the case before the Global Fund for Women project. We sometimes used to have one meal a day and in the worst cases, just tea. – MAFA beneficiary (Uganda)

Beneficiaries' strides in ensuring food security for themselves and their families were evident in the crops they preferred to grow, which indicate prioritization of staple over cash crops; they expanded the diversity of their diets by increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables; they reintroduced and relied more heavily on indigenous, drought-resistant crops; and they continued to sell excess produce for cash income. Beneficiaries' ability to earn cash income from this surplus further empowered them to purchase additional agricultural inputs and construct storage units for post-harvest management. Furthermore, rural women beneficiaries reported that they have fundamentally shifted their views of agriculture as a means of increasing not only food security but also their own health.

The agricultural techniques most relied upon by women beneficiaries during the initiative also reflect a trend toward adopting locally available and non-chemical inputs. Grantee groups educated beneficiaries in a variety of agro-ecological farming practices such as composting and mulching, irrigation techniques, post-harvest management, soil

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health, organic fertilizers, and natural pest control. Beneficiaries and grantees demonstrated their ability to replicate important traditional knowledge about seed diversification and harvesting, intercropping, soil restoration, and water catchment. They maximized available land by doing kitchen gardening.

Throughout the initiative, grantee organizations aimed to increase their beneficiaries' earned income, either as a product of increased agricultural output, related income-generating activities, or use of micro-credit or loan funding. Rural women's ability to earn additional income has larger implications for their status in their households and communities, changing the way they are treated by their husbands/partners.

Across both phases of the initiative, survey gains in women's rights knowledge and advancement were not as strong as agricultural productivity gains. Nevertheless, grantee organizations and their women beneficiaries are adamant that economic gains provide leverage for women to advocate for social rights and greater voice. As evidence, responses in the Phase II beneficiary survey indicate that more than 93 percent of beneficiaries across all three countries agree with the statement: "When I am economically independent, I have more control over other aspects of my life as a woman." Through trainings and capacity-building activities, beneficiaries learned about a wide variety of rights-related issues including land rights, and strategies to end gender-based violence (GBV) and female genital mutilation (FGM). These knowledge trainings often gave them the confidence to take on advocacy roles within their communities.

In Kenya, Likii has been able to mobilize seven groups to form a farmer's network now working to influence public policy and county budgets, acquiring a collective voice to lobby for resources and to influence for change. Furthermore, a strategy used to enhance women and girls' inheritance right collectively is the community land and property watchdog group made of women, men and youth volunteers working together and closely with local chiefs to safeguard women and girls inheritance rights.

Another promising finding is that, from 2011 to 2015, beneficiary women increased their access to government officials and services. Also of note, most grantee groups consider themselves to be part of a larger social movement on rural women's rights. These findings point to the structural impact of the initiative and the ability to create linkages between and among rural women in order to achieve a broader goal. Grantees' perceptions of involvement in a wider social movement also speak to the success of Global Fund for Women's goals of building movements for women's rights through its initiatives, but also to the extent to which they have successfully integrated a rights-based approach in their agriculture-oriented programming.

Recommendations for Global Fund for Women.

As evident from grantee and beneficiary feedback, donor support is essential for enabling rural women's organizations and networks to adopt the strategies described in this report to increase agricultural productivity and advance women's rights. Grantee groups and beneficiaries provided a number of recommendations for Global Fund for Women. These recommendations are also relevant for other donors interested in promoting sustainable agriculture, food security, and rural women's empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa. The recommendations are part of a larger set of learnings outlined below for improving on similar future initiatives.

- It is important to note that not every grantee and its beneficiaries exhibited consistent gains across all areas through both phases of the initiative. For example, grantees' mixed progress in advancing women's rights could be due to the fact that such shifts in norms require more time than was offered by the grant period. The initiative dutifully documented and discussed challenges with grantee organizations and stakeholders at the country level.
- Provide long-term, sustained, and higher levels of funding – \$75,000-\$150,000 over three years – to ensure the continuity of grantee activities and to better tackle the barriers to advancement of women's rights, and to better measure gains in advancement of women's rights.
- Enable grantee groups to provide more trainings that involve other rural women, scaling up the beneficiaries reached through such trainings, peer-learning, and local capacity-building activities. This includes sharing of best practices on how to advance women's rights goals, and sharing the possible outcomes available via agro-ecological methodologies.
- Emphasize advancement of women's economic activities as a means of advancing women's rights, enhancing their success as farmers, and elevating their status.
- Scale up organizational linkages to contribute to movement-building among grassroots women's groups. These linkages increase the capacity of individual grantee groups to function as key actors mobilizing to overcome women farmers' most complex challenges at both local and national levels. This approach will enable women to advocate for improved roads and other infrastructure services to support their agricultural and entrepreneurial initiatives.
- As a form of organizational linkage, continue to offer grantee convenings for actors from different communities and contexts to come together to learn and to strategize, particularly around policy actions related to sustainable agriculture.

- Reinforce the need for grantees' continuous learning of research design and implementation, to inform future initiatives.

All of the women members of AZPF in Burkina Faso are lacking the words to thank you. Thank you for all these years of accompanying us. Thank you for having built the organizational capacity of our group, demonstrated through the impacts of our interventions for vulnerable populations. While assuring you of our efforts to move forward for the conquest of women's legitimate rights, we ask you to accept our gratitude. — Mariam Maiga, AZPF grantee group

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Grantees/Field Researchers

Association Burkinabé pour la Promotion de la Jeune Fille – Burkina Faso

Action for Rural Women's Empowerment – Uganda

Akwenyutu PHAS – Uganda

Association pour la Promotion Féminine de Gaoua – Burkina Faso

Association Solidarité des Productrices Agro-Pastorales de Ouahigouya

Association Zoodo pour la Promotion de la Femme – Burkina Faso

Council for Economic Empowerment for Women of Africa – Uganda

Community Initiatives for Rural Development – Kenya

Daughters of Mumbi Global Resource Center – Kenya

Fédération Nationale des Organisations Paysannes – Burkina Faso

Foundation for Women's Rights in Kenya – Kenya

Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood – Kenya

Humanitarian Support Uganda – Uganda

Likii HIV/AIDS Home Based Care Group – Kenya

Maganjo Farmers Association – Uganda

Mothers Delights Moments – Kenya

Ntulume Village Women Development Association – Uganda

Shibuye Community Health Workers – Kenya

Women's Center for Job Creation – Uganda

Women and Rural Development Network – Uganda



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