

## **NGOs as Agents of Women's Land Rights in Tanzania**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article seeks to identify the role of NGOs in promoting women's land rights in Tanzania. I begin by outlining the gendered history of land tenure in Tanzania from the colonial era through today that has systematically excluded women from formal land ownership structures through the creation of gendered land regimes. In this history, I highlight the significant movements and associations that Tanzanian women have created in order to demonstrate their agency and advocate for their rights. I situate my argument among debates about human rights theory and international human rights law by discussing responsibility, capability, and cultural legitimacy schools and feminist critiques. I analyze primary sources, including expert interviews and print documents from universities and local NGOs, and secondary sources such as books, scholarly journals, and newspaper articles. My research examines a case study of two land rights NGOs in Tanzania as agents of women's land rights, and characterizes these NGOs through Claude Welch's (1995) six roles of human rights NGOs. By demonstrating that the two NGOs successfully fulfill the education, empowerment, and enforcement roles of human rights NGOs, I argue that local NGOs in Tanzania are important agents of human rights in the context of women's land rights.

Keywords: human rights, land rights, women's rights, Tanzania, NGOs

### **Introduction**

The system of land ownership and distribution in Tanzania has disadvantaged women from the colonial period through today via the configuration of gendered land regimes. In Tanzania, discontinuities between federal laws and customary laws complicate women's exclusion from land ownership. While the constitution declares that women have equal access to land, most customary practices dictate that women cannot inherit land and can only access land through relationships with male relatives, such as husbands or fathers. Therefore, many women still lack land ownership in Tanzania. Because of the large agricultural sector in Tanzania and the importance of land to personal livelihood, the right to own land is integral to women's rights, liberty, and well-being. Due to the gendered disparity in land ownership in Tanzania, I seek to answer the question: What role do local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play in promoting women's land rights in Tanzania? By examining the role local NGOs play in promoting women's land rights, I argue that local NGOs are agents of human rights in this context.

## Methods

To answer my research question of what role NGOs play in promoting women's land rights in Tanzania, I analyze primary sources, including expert interviews and print documents from universities and local NGOs, and secondary sources such as books, scholarly journals, and newspaper articles. I conducted in-person interviews with three NGO professionals, three researchers, and one university student (Respondents #1–7) on the successes and failures of various institutions in providing land rights, and I collected primary and secondary sources from local universities and NGOs. I spent time with two NGOs in particular, one in Arusha (NGO #1) and the other in Dar es Salaam (NGO #2). NGO #1 is smaller in geographical scope and number of employees, and it works with one community in the Kilimanjaro region of Tanzania. This NGO engages in a variety of land rights issues and emphasizes guaranteeing the land rights of marginalized groups, such as women, small-scale farmers, and people with disabilities. NGO #2 has a similar focus on land rights, but it operates throughout the nation and employs dozens of Tanzanians who work in specialized areas including research, publications and documentation, and public engagement and advocacy. The day-to-day work of these two NGOs is similar: they both focus on education, advocacy, and community empowerment as tools to promote land rights for women and other marginalized groups.

## Land Tenure and Women's Associations in Tanzania: A Gendered History

Land tenure is one of many gendered systems in Tanzania, and women have organized for their liberation from oppressive systems throughout Tanzanian history. Land tenure in Tanzania has historically been a gendered process that has excluded women through patrilineal inheritance laws and patriarchal structures. Beginning in the colonial era, local elite men used the creation of the label "customary" to validate and claim power over systems such as land tenure, even though the shifting colonial economy demanded that women perform the majority of the agricultural labor (Mbilinyi 2016). These colonial legacies continued into the Ujamaa period of socialization, as President Julius Nyerere defined rigid gender roles within Tanzanian families (Lal 2010). The era of neoliberalism added value to land through commodification and privatization while further restricting women's access to land. International institutions, foreign governments, and the Tanzanian state continued to invoke the customary as a tactic to exclude women from land and credit markets. Furthermore, land grabbing increased in prevalence, making land an increasingly valuable commodity. Unfortunately, land grabbing negatively affected women as they lost access to their livelihoods. The Land Acts of 1999 began the process of equalizing the playing field for women in terms of owning land, but its implementation has not lived up to its full potential (Pendersen 2015; Whitehead and Tsikata 2003). The customary continues to exclude women from land ownership in the twenty-first century. Women continue to suffer because of their inability to access land ownership in a manner equal to men.

Despite the barriers they face to equality in land ownership and other areas, women have been active agents in promoting their own human rights. In Tanzania, women have a deep history of organizing for their rights: "the history of Tanzania shows women's active involvement in such associations at all times. Within such organizations women have been mobilized, encouraged, motivated, and given the chance to engage in 'formal politics' which used to be the male-domain" (Koda and Shayo 1994, 16). Through developing and mobilizing NGOs, political parties, and grassroots organizations, women have historically been their own greatest advocates in Tanzania (Tsikata 2012). In response to women's organizing, the

government has taken “steps towards the revision of national legislation that is discriminating against women” and promoted educational campaigns regarding women's rights (Macha 2013, 31). The government's actions, although important, would not have happened without the advocacy of women and women's associations.

Women played a key role in the decolonization efforts of the mid-twentieth century, and they successfully created organizations and institutions to serve as vessels for their goals. Perhaps the most significant women's association that participated in decolonization was the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). Thousands of women joined the efforts of TANU in the 1950s and were crucial agents in the nationalization and democratization movements (Geiger 1999). Many of the organizations that formed during the decolonization period started within political parties as a way for women to become involved in politics within male-dominated political institutions. Even today, associations within parties are important structures for women organizing in the political sphere (Koda and Shayo 1994).

One of the most influential women's associations in Tanzanian history is the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP). Founded in 1993, TGNP is a non-profit activist group that strives for gender equity on a national level. In the 1990s, TGNP played an important role in structural adjustment programs and other economic policies harmful to women (Rusimbi and Mbilinyi 2005). By working on issues such as democracy, agriculture, education, and health, TGNP has both academic and advocacy impacts in many sectors around the country. Today, TGNP serves a crucial role in educating the nation, the nation's leaders, and the international community on gender equity issues in Tanzania. NGOs such as TGNP serve a crucial role in advocating for and raising awareness about women's rights and human rights in the country.

During the 1990s and beyond, Koda and Shayo note, “an increasing number of women associations” have been “challenging the balance of power between men and women at both the household and community levels” (1994, 16). They emphasize the increasing power of informal associations that exist outside the government that, although not widely recognized, are successful in “consciousness raising, decision making, and action geared towards women's advancement and gender equality” (Koda and Shayo 1994, 16). It is these NGOs that prove to be so successful for women in Tanzania, as they attempt to deconstruct the historical and contemporary patriarchal systems in local and national government institutions and other NGOs. For these reasons, women's rights to land might also be effectively promoted by local NGOs, particularly those that emphasize the voices and experiences of local women.

### **Theoretical Debates on Human Rights and the Role of NGOs**

Debates around human rights on the continent of Africa are extensive and diverse, as scholars examine the ethics of international human rights law, NGOs, and the role of international and African institutions (Viljoen 2012; Welch 1995). Human rights scholars such as Welch (1995) focus on Western constructions of human rights and argue that human rights law has largely excluded African voices. However, this claim erases the significant work of African scholars, activists, and institutions who have contributed significantly to the field of human rights. Viljoen (2012) addresses this by providing an in-depth analysis of the impact of African institutions and sub-regional institutions in his book, *International Human Rights Law in Africa*. Viljoen's (2012) work reminds us to acknowledge and center the influence and agency of African institutions in conversations about human rights on the African continent, and to continue to see African institutions and organizations as agents of human rights on the international stage. Abdullahi An-Na'im (1990) expands on Viljoen's emphasis on African agency by arguing that

cultural legitimacy in human rights law is key to the implementation of human rights around the world. In conjunction with this argument, An-Na'im and Jeffrey Hammond (2002) assert that cultures are never static, and thus that international human rights law should not treat them as such. Therefore, I argue that NGOs effectively serve as human rights agents as they are able to provide culturally competent services to community members. With these assertions and taking into account arguments from other human rights scholars that claim NGOs are important agents of human rights, I center the voices of local NGOs in examining women's land rights as a feminist human rights issue (Laliberté 2015; Miller 2002; O'Neill 2001).

As acknowledged by authors such as Welch (1995), Miller (2002), Laliberté (2015), and O'Neill (2001), NGOs can serve as crucial agents of human rights. Building on the framework of Welch (1995), I employ the roles that he establishes to structure my presentation of the work that two local human rights NGOs do in Tanzania related to women's land rights. Welch (1995) categorizes six roles that NGOs play by defining the three Es (education, empowerment, and enforcement) and the three Ds (documentation, democratization, and development). While he notes that all of these roles are important, he also explains that not every NGO focuses on or fulfills each role to the same extent. NGOs may center their work on specific roles depending on the issues they address and the tactics they use to promote human rights. Due to the scope and focus of the two NGOs I researched for this study, I only examine Welch's three Es, as neither NGO significantly fulfills the roles defined by the three Ds.

NGOs that perform education related activities work to ensure citizens understand their human rights. They believe that having an educated citizenry is fundamental to promoting human rights (Welch 1995, 51–54). In the education role, NGOs must work alongside the government as a partner; therefore, NGOs with an education focus are often located in cities and their staffs are often composed of highly educated individuals (Welch 1995). In their empowerment role, an NGO emphasizes the political mobilization of the communities with which it interacts (Welch 1995, 54–56). Here, NGOs often challenge the status quo by encouraging communities to demand their rights and even challenge the government; therefore, NGOs that center empowerment may be seen as a threat to the government (Welch 1995). The third E that Welch outlines is enforcement, which includes utilizing national court systems, international treaties, and other forms of bureaucratic measures of accountability (1995, 56–60). This role requires a certain level of structure and capacity within the state so that NGOs have systems and institutions to call upon for the enforcement of human rights. NGOs that focus on enforcement may hold the state accountable in order to have it provide rights to its citizens or to stop human rights abuses that the state may be perpetrating. Welch's (1995) model of the roles of NGOs allows us to critically examine the work that NGOs are doing and how their strategies fulfill their roles as agents of human rights.

### **NGOs as Agents of Women's Land Rights: Two Case Studies**

In communities in Tanzania, NGOs are promoting women's land rights in accordance with the demands made by women community members and women's associations. Today, there are thousands of NGOs that operate in Tanzania, with over six hundred formally recognized by the Tanzanian Association of NGOs (TANGO), and it can be assumed that several hundred of these organizations focus on land tenure and/or women's issues (TANGO 2020). Most land-focused NGOs in the country use a multi-pronged approach to land rights, focusing on education, community empowerment, and enforcement (Tanzania National NGO Coordination 2020; Welch

1995). NGOs have also played an important role in holding the government accountable to the Land Acts of 1999 and in continuing to pursue equitable land policies (Mallya 2006).

Women in Tanzania, particularly in rural areas, struggle to take advantage of their legal right to own land because of patriarchal systems of inheritance and ownership. Land is a crucial resource for women in Tanzania as they perform the majority of the agricultural labor in the nation, but they own a highly disproportionate ratio of land. Furthermore, access to and ownership of land is fundamental for the economic and political status of women in Tanzania, as without land they are vulnerable to poverty and social isolation. Next, I examine the strategies used by two NGOs to promote women's land rights, with Welch's (1995) roles of NGOs in Africa as a framework, in order to examine the purpose and use of each element of the NGOs as described above. These NGOs provide culturally legitimate and individualized resources and programs using flexible, multi-pronged approaches to promote women's land rights, with an emphasis on their roles in education, empowerment, and enforcement.

### *Education*

The two NGOs I engaged with have a definite emphasis on education and empowerment, and often these two roles overlap in their work. NGO #1 identifies human rights education, or what they call "awareness creation," as their main activity, but they also engage in empowerment and enforcement activities (Respondent #1, Arusha, 2019). They define awareness creation as efforts to educate the community about land tenure issues, including the land rights of Tanzanian citizens, and the work of the organization (Respondent #1, Arusha, 2019). Their awareness creation is centered on the work that they do directly in communities near the Kilimanjaro region and on weekly radio program broadcasts that aim to reach beyond their immediate audience. NGO #1 sees an educated population as one of the best and most effective ways to promote women's land rights.

A challenging aspect of the work that NGO #1 performs is working against the deeply gendered system of land tenure in the country. In order to counter the patriarchal definition of customary law and land tenure, the organization presents alternatives to the "traditional" practices that exclude women from land ownership by educating individuals in the community about women's land rights. This process of integrating gender equality and land rights into cultural practices through education is known in the organization as "sensitizing" (Respondent #1, Arusha, 2019). Sensitizing is conducted through navigating peer networks in local communities—effectively relying on the strength of peer education to carry out their role as educators of human rights.

Community sensitization is not the only tactic NGO #1 implements to conduct their education initiatives. They also rely on radio programming to spread their message to women who may not be engaged by the methods of community sensitization. In collaboration with local radio stations, the organization broadcasts weekly programs that discuss land rights for women and other marginalized groups. NGO #1 estimates that around fifteen hundred women listen to the programs each week in the areas in which they mobilize women to advertise these programs (Respondent #1, Arusha, 2019). Similar to the peer education model of community sensitization, they reach out to a select few women in each village and ask them to tell other women to listen to the broadcast. NGO #1 is able to reach thousands of women through their community sensitization methods and education programs (Respondent #1, Arusha, 2019).

Many of the human rights education practices of NGO #1 are also used by NGO #2. For example, NGO #2 also uses peer education models and on-site programming to educate women

about land rights. In addition, NGO #2 produces print resources, such as pamphlets, calendars, and publications, for their clients and individuals in the communities they engage with to detail the work that they do and educate communities about land rights for marginalized groups. Publications include stories of women landowners who have been served by NGO #2 as well as current events and information about the organization itself. NGO #2 successfully demonstrates the agency of human rights NGOs through its utilization of various strategies to carry out education in Tanzania.

Another key element of NGO #2's education mission is its land monitor program. Because NGO #2 is located in the largest city in the country and employs a highly educated staff, it often receives criticism for elitism or an urban bias because it is located in the city while it works with people in rural areas. People from urban areas may be considered outsiders by rural community members or may be seen as having a savior complex. In order to overcome this divide, NGO #2 stations employees, called land monitors, to live and work in these communities (Respondent #2, Dar es Salaam, 2019). Land monitors help bridge the urban-rural divide between Dar es Salaam and surrounding villages. NGO #2 uses land monitors to compensate for the outsider mentality and pursue cultural legitimacy in the communities they engage with (Respondent #5, Dar es Salaam, 2019). Land monitors lead programs and trainings, educate community members about land rights issues, and provide case management for legal issues, all while learning from the community about the issues of that community and where advocacy and education are needed most (Respondent #5, Dar es Salaam, 2019). While this system is different from the NGO #1 model of community-based peer education, it still embodies the values of community-centered education and addresses the needs of the communities.

### ***Empowerment***

Human rights education and empowerment go hand-in-hand for both of these human rights NGOs. Many of their programs, such as community sensitization, function both to educate community members and to empower local communities to educate each other and demand their rights. Community sensitization is an intricate process that revolves around the existing structure of the community. During an interview, Respondent #1 described this process:

We ask the community, through the village leaders, to identify a number of women whom we want to work with in the first place....So we go to their leaders, the chairman of the village and the executive officer, to identify key women and...we will treat [these women] as train[ers] of trainers...we train them and then after training we ask them to train others in their day-to-day meetings.

We deliver [our message] through these groups of women, and now these women disseminate through other women. But not only to other women, but even to traditional leaders because these are the holders, these are the upholders of the cultural practices, the traditional leaders and religious leaders (Respondent #1, Arusha, 2019).

This is an intentional system of utilizing existing networks and leadership structures to disseminate the educational programs and change the status quo of patriarchal land systems. By first addressing the leaders of each village, the organization recognizes and respects local hierarchies and customs by asking them to engage in this process of sensitization together. NGO #1 then accesses existing networks of women by identifying leaders in various women's groups and creating a trickle-down effect, whereby these women are trained as facilitators to train their

own respective networks and communities (Respondent #1, Arusha, 2019). Drawing on research from An'Na-im (1990) and the concept of cultural legitimacy, it is the ability of NGO #1 to engage with these communities in such a culturally affirming and empowering way that enables the success they claim from these programs. The organization estimates that in one year, they can reach approximately 3447 women from 16 villages in 4 wards (wards in Tanzania are typically composed of several villages in rural areas) (Respondent #1, Arusha, 2019).

NGO #1 operates most of its programs through a peer education model, wherein this local organization engages individuals within the community, equips them with knowledge about their land rights and skills to advocate for themselves, and empowers them to disseminate information throughout their community. Establishing links through social networks is key to making community-wide change, and NGO #1 demonstrates its agency in human rights by employing this tactic (Respondent #4, Dar es Salaam, 2019). The organization's relationship with community leaders gives the organization legitimacy within these communities and allows them to rely on the authority of local hierarchies to carry out their work (Respondent #1, Arusha, 2019).

The land monitor program that NGO #2 implements as part of its education initiative also has an empowerment component. Because NGO #2 is located in the city, its staff emphasize valuing and appreciating the voices of small-scale farmers and pastoralists, women, and other marginalized groups because these groups understand their own way of life better than the employees of the organization (Respondent #3, Dar es Salaam, 2019). The intentional work of NGO #2 to center community voices and cultural legitimacy in their work reinforces the empowerment role of this NGO. Furthermore, while performing the community-level work of land monitoring, the organization emphasizes working with traditional and religious leaders, and specifically men (Respondent #3, Dar es Salaam, 2019; Respondent #4, Dar es Salaam, 2019). Respondent #3 explained that if one only works with women, they may be on board and understand the material while they are in the program or workshop, but when they return home, they may experience resistance from the men in their families. He narrated a hypothetical conversation in which, when women return to their homes from educational workshops, their husbands may say, "you receive this education there, it needs to remain there. This is my family, you want to live in this marriage, you will follow our procedure" (Respondent #3, Dar es Salaam, 2019). This reinforcement of patriarchal norms by men demonstrates two things: that the gendered history of land tenure still pervades the everyday lives of Tanzanians, and that human rights agents must engage with and empower local men in the land conversation in Tanzania. If the organization were to address men directly and explain the importance of women owning and accessing land, men would be more likely to be receptive to this cultural transition because of the emphasis on cultural legitimacy and empowerment of local structures of power (Respondent #3, Dar es Salaam, 2019). NGO #2 is able to galvanize the power and influence of local men to shape the local customs and conceptualizations of land and women's rights, thus playing a crucial role in advocating for and legitimizing these rights. However, the method of engaging with local power structures is not a perfect system for promoting women's rights because they continue to validate the patriarchal systems of local governance.

Although these NGOs demonstrate the agency that local human rights NGOs have in promoting women's land rights in Tanzania, unfortunately, the government does not always commend the advocacy and empowerment work that local NGOs are doing. As Welch (1995) warns, the empowering nature of human rights NGOs often encourages individuals and communities to push back against the patriarchal status quo, thus threatening sources of power

around the nation. In Tanzania, not only does the government often feel threatened by the advocacy work of human rights NGOs, it also has actively taken measures to weaken and stifle the civil sector over the past few years. Respondent #2 explained: "We cannot maintain the relationship [with the government] because at the end of the day, they can say...what you [the human rights NGO] are doing is making people rise against the government, being stubborn, et cetera" (Dar es Salaam, 2019). This explanation of the organization's relationship with the government reveals the tension that exists between these institutions. The government interprets the advocacy and empowerment work by NGOs as an affront to its power. This tension between the government and NGOs results in government regulation of NGOs, such as through policies that restrict empowerment and education-related programs in favor of direct service provision, what I categorize as enforcement (Respondent #2, Dar es Salaam, 2019). In the case of human rights NGOs, these regulations mean they are encouraged to spend less time on community empowerment programs and education and to instead direct more of their attention toward the attainment of land title deeds, for example. The problem with this is that "if we will end up only having the service provision NGOs, you cannot really achieve the rights of the disadvantaged groups, like women or minority groups because [service provision by itself] will never assure their right[s]" (Respondent #2, Dar es Salaam, 2019). The education and empowerment focuses of these human rights NGOs are fundamental to their roles as agents of human rights, but the government is actively trying to limit their activities. Regardless, the two NGOs are still able to fulfill the empowerment role of human rights NGOs as described by Welch (1995), and to demonstrate their agency as promoters of human rights.

### ***Enforcement***

While both NGO #1 and NGO #2 have specific emphases on education and empowerment, they do still engage with the enforcement role in some capacities. When the government is unable to hold itself accountable for providing land rights due to its lack of resources or female representation, NGOs are able to act as watchdogs and pressure the government to improve. Respondent #5 attributed much of the work done by the government in terms of land rights and women's rights to the lobbying and enforcement work of local NGOs (Dar es Salaam, 2019). This type of advocacy and lobbying work is a core priority for both NGO #1 and NGO #2. NGO #1 approaches enforcement through collaboration, navigating government institutions on behalf of its clients in order to ensure that land title deeds are allocated to women and other marginalized groups. NGO #2 plays a different enforcement role through lobbying and external pressure. As mentioned in previous sections, the Tanzanian government, on paper, has progressive land policies in terms of gender equality, notably the Land Acts of 1999. Some local human rights agents argue that the laws themselves are not flawed, as they allow for equal rights and equal access (Respondent #5, Dar es Salaam, 2019). The problem is that the government lacks the resources for the implementation of these laws and lacks the incentive to enact new laws that may aid in this implementation. Moreover, both the government and the Tanzanian elites benefit from upholding the patriarchal land tenure system that developed out of the colonial era.

In order to hold the government accountable for providing land title deeds, NGO #1 works with clients to petition the government in a case management capacity by working with individual women to address their unique land needs. The organization itself does not have the power to distribute deeds, but they advocate on behalf of their clients to local governments to ensure they provide these documents that grant women ownership of parcels of land (Respondent



#1, Arusha, 2019). NGO #1 works with clients one on one to gather the necessary documents (e.g., pictures, divorce papers, court documents, birth certificates) and petition local land councils to grant them the title deed for the land. By navigating the legal and judicial systems of the Tanzanian government, NGO #1 plays an enforcement role as a human rights NGO to ensure that women are able to own land pursuant to Tanzanian law. NGO #1 estimates that over 90 percent of the women they work with have successfully gone through the process of acquiring land title deeds (Respondent #1, Arusha, 2019). This organization further demonstrates their agency as a promoter of human rights in their capacity as an enforcer of human rights law.

NGO #2 plays a slightly different enforcement role that emphasizes lobbying and placing external pressure on the government instead of navigating government systems. This organization is also successful in its enforcement efforts and effectively pressures the government to follow through on laws and government programs (Respondent #5, Dar es Salaam, 2019). Both NGOs promote women's land rights through an enforcement role by holding the government accountable and navigating government systems to promote women's land rights.

### **Limitations of Human Rights NGOs**

While I argue that these two human rights NGOs have agency and play important roles in promoting women's land rights in Tanzania, I also acknowledge the limitations that NGOs face in this context. NGOs are agents of neoliberalism in Tanzania, and the NGOs I engaged with are not excluded from this. Although neoliberalism influences the actions and outcomes of the civil sector in innumerable ways, I see the impact of these NGOs as being in two distinct areas: the way that the NGOs interact with land tenure systems, and the influence of donors and donor interests on their work as human rights NGOs. Both NGO #1 and NGO #2 strive to change the patriarchal status quo of the land tenure system in Tanzania; however, neither attempts to challenge the commodification and privatization of land that occur as a result of neoliberalism in the modern era. As noted earlier, the gendered nature of land tenure and neoliberalism are intimately intertwined; therefore, the continued maintenance of one system will likely result in the continuation of the other. If human rights NGOs continue to comply with and perpetuate the system of land title deeds, they may encounter more difficulty in deconstructing the patriarchal aspects of this system.

Mutua (2009) provides one such critique of human rights NGOs as agents of neoliberalism. He argues that "human rights NGOs in East Africa are...a response to state despotism in the region, and an inspiration from the international human rights movement" (Mutua 2009, 20). He believes that because the explosion of human rights NGOs in East Africa occurred in the era of neoliberalism, East African NGOs are simply replicas of NGOs around the world. Furthermore, Mutua (2009) attributes the human rights dialogue as a Western construction and argues that East African NGOs are therefore simply playing a part in Western neoliberalism. His assumption that the field of human rights does not have history or originality in East Africa is ahistorical. This argument ignores the vast history of organizing around human rights issues in East Africa, and it erases the agency of East African activists, organizers, lawyers, and human rights specialists. Unfortunately, arguments like Mutua's (2009) have been pervasive in the human rights field for decades, excluding the voices, contributions, and experiences of Africans from the human rights cannon.

While I do argue that NGOs are important agents of human rights in Tanzania, an important critique of NGOs in Africa is presented by Issa Shivji (2006). He challenges NGOs in Africa as

potentially harmful institutions born out of neoliberalism in the post-Cold War era. Shivji's criticism focuses on the intent and impact of NGO formation in the neoliberal era, and he argues that the anti-state and vain interests of NGO donors corrupt the missions and programs of NGO work in Africa (2006, 18). Because NGOs were created with the intent to offset the power of the state instead of with the genuine goal of addressing root causes of poverty or inequality, the mission of these organizations has been corrupt from their inception (Shivji 2006). Additionally, NGOs have often been constructed on more superficial issues that are internationally popular and attractive in order to appeal to donors' interests; however, these issues are not always the most urgent ones to address (Shivji 2006). Shivji (2006) argues that because NGOs are comprised of and led mostly by the elite and in the name of donor interests, their work can never be truly ethical or impactful as they fail to address the root causes of inequalities or crises. By qualifying NGO work as having an "act now, think later" approach, Shivji attempts to highlight the lack of sustainability of NGOs doing human rights work in Africa (2006, 21). Shivji's (2006) critique brings an important context to this conversation, but the efforts and impact of human rights NGOs in Tanzania, such as NGO #1 and #2, are clear examples of the importance and agency of such NGOs in the movement for women's land rights.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that local NGOs in Tanzania are important agents of human rights in the context of women's land rights. By discussing the roles of human rights NGOs described by Welch (1995) and in relation to the work of the two NGOs I investigated, I have shown that these two NGOs are important agents of women's land rights. I have further highlighted that the work of the NGOs falls in line with a vibrant history of women's organizing and civil sector engagement in Tanzania that is not simply the product of Western impositions or neoliberalism, as scholars such as Mutua (2009) would argue. Finally, I have acknowledged the impact of neoliberalism on women's land rights and the ways that human rights NGOs operate as agents of neoliberalism. This article provides important groundwork to validate the importance and strengths of NGO work in promoting human rights. Moving forward, we must examine the implications of the role of local NGOs in human rights promotion, their strengths, and their weaknesses in the broader human rights dialogue.

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## Interviews

- Respondent #1. 2019. Author's interview. Arusha, Tanzania.
- Respondent #2. 2019. Author's interview. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Respondent #3. 2019. Author's interview. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.  
Respondent #4. 2019. Author's interview. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.  
Respondent #5. 2019. Author's interview. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.  
Respondent #6. 2019. Author's interview. Arusha, Tanzania.