The Women Advancement Trust (WAT) was founded in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in 1989, to promote the interests of women through education, training and information sharing. The first major campaign was to influence the new land laws, which discriminated against women. This was successful in 1999 when new, gender-sensitive Land Acts were passed. The next stage of this programme was to educate women about the Act, and the impact it could have on their lives.

In Tanzania, men and women are afforded equality by the state. There are, however, many community and family traditions or customs which do not respect this status. One of the areas in which this is the case is land ownership - constitutionally, land is state-owned and land rights are acquired through granted rights of occupancy on a short-term basis. These rights are initially obtained through direct purchase or government allocations, and can be transferred within families. It is at this stage that the practical barriers to women's rights are erected. Land transfer through family ties is by far the most common way of acquiring land in Tanzania, with almost 95% of the rural population obtaining land in this manner. But patriarchal inheritance customs dictate that, whilst women are expected to manage the use of the land, the ownership remains exclusively male.

WAT's vision is a future in which low income people have access to and control of the land and property.
and the methods and specific aims of the various programmes and activities have this ideal at heart. These are:

- an education and land campaign bringing together lobbying, advocacy, research and information dissemination;
- the promotion of housing co-operatives;
- skills training for youth, focusing on practical building skills;
- the establishment of community credit and savings schemes.

Because WAT was born out of the communities it was working with, the inter-linking influence of each of these aims managed to create a coherent whole. The women involved understood that, through lack of secure tenure, their access to basic sanitation was extremely limited, which in turn meant they were more likely to suffer ill health. The clusters of unplanned and unmapped slums meant that personal safety was greatly at risk. Thus all the programmes undertaken by WAT have addressed, on many different levels, all these issues: personal, physical and political.

However, WAT's main focus has been lobbying against the discriminatory land laws. In 1999, members of the Tanzanian Parliament voted to accept the new Land Bill into law. The Bill resulted in two Land Acts: the Village Land Act and the General Land Act. These were both remarkable new laws, as the new Land Acts repudiate customary laws and traditions that discriminate against women's rights to use and own the land. The two 1999 Land Acts embody women's rights to acquire land titles and registration; women's rights to acquire, inherit or deal with customary land and women's rights to be represented in the bodies that deal with land matters. WAT also worked in partnership with the Gender Land Task Force, a coalition of NGOs, to lobby for gender sensitive laws. It must be noted that such a major change had to come from local community groups to be successful, and the involvement of local poor women in politics was, on its own, a milestone.

Whilst these changes ensured that women are able to gain secure tenure through ownership of land, it was only the beginning. Getting more families to understand how the laws affected them, and encouraging women to take advantage of this new situation, was the next struggle. WAT's education programme, involving television and radio plays, newspaper coverage, flyers, and a cartoon series aimed especially at children, also played a major part. Community workshops have also been held where the new Acts, and particularly their social and gender implications, were discussed. Interest had to be promoted amongst women about the role they could play in influencing their housing and local environment. WAT and Gender Land Task Force involved local women, female and male MPs' and Councillors' in awareness-raising campaigns in different regions. These MPs were encouraged to become part of the process, so that local women and men had someone close by who understood the new Land Acts, if any problems arose; their ability to converse in their local language meant that the information given was likely to be clearer. Besides language difficulties, WAT also had to be aware that many of the people with whom it works are illiterate. Despite the fact that the new Acts are law, there are still many preparations such as forms and regulations which must be made before they are fully operational. The Minister in charge has promised that they will become operational from 1 May 2001.

One of the lessons learned through the early part of the programme was that many women are scared of being reprimanded by their husbands, or even accused of inciting other women to revolt against their own husbands if found talking about land rights. This showed, first, that the involvement of Community Development Officers can be extremely useful, but also that any gender-related campaigns need the support of both men and women in order to succeed.

It is difficult to measure WAT's success in terms of how many households now have secure tenure, but its achievements can be measured in other ways. In particular, communities have understood the links between secure tenure and their own safety in terms of shelter and environment, and have been able to translate this knowledge into action. The lobbying work also assisted in building up networks in local areas between the affected communities and municipal authorities, including universities and other policy makers. Initial research showed that many people were ignorant of how the laws affected them, and WAT's education programme has begun to change this. Whilst there is still a struggle ahead, much progress has been made.