

HER LAND

#Her Land



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification

HER LAND

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HER LAND

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Executive Introduction

Land is being degraded rapidly worldwide. Our current agricultural practices are causing soils worldwide to be eroded up to 100 times faster than natural processes replenish them. At this critical moment, enabling the full contribution of women to halting land degradation and tackling drought is needed now more than ever.

Women comprise nearly half of the world's agricultural workforce, producing 60–80 per cent of the food grown in developing countries¹, so are poised to lead on sustainable land management practices while keeping their families and communities fed.

Despite their vital role, it is alarming to note that fewer than one in five landowners is female.² Without land rights, women are not fully engaged in decisions on land use and management. However, studies show that when women own the land they work on, this encourages their dedication to land stewardship to fight land degradation and cope with climate shocks.

Desertification, land degradation and drought disproportionately impact women and girls, as they often do not have access to and control of land resources. They are most affected by reduced agricultural yields and increased water scarcity. Globally, women already spend a collective 200 million hours every day collecting water. In some countries, a single trip to fetch water can take over an hour.

Gender equality remains unfinished business in every part of the world. In the vast majority of countries, women have unequal and limited access and control to land. In many regions, they remain subject to discriminatory laws and practices that impede their right to inherit, as well as their access to services and resources. Women's rights to inherit their husband's property continue to be denied in over 100 countries under customary, religious, or traditional laws and practices. In all parts of the world, women face significant barriers in securing land rights, limiting their ability to thrive and prosper.

When women are empowered, entire families and communities benefit. In addition to being on the frontlines of land degradation and climate change impacts, women can also be at the forefront of global efforts to restore land back to health and boost drought resilience. Gender-responsive land restoration is a pathway to reduce poverty, hunger, and malnutrition.

Securing women's land rights can help advance global gender equality and many other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), that all countries and development partners have committed to. Investing in women's equal access to land and associated assets is a direct investment in their future and the future of humanity.



Ibrahim Thiaw
UNCCD Executive Secretary



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification

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#HerLand





President Tarja Halonen
UNCCD Land Ambassador and Co-Chair
of the UNCCD Gender Caucus

LEADER'S STATEMENT

Over the past thirty years of the UNCCD's history, we have seen how degradation can be turned into restoration. Nevertheless, over 100 million ha of healthy land is being degraded or even lost every year.

The United Nations has classified up to 40 per cent of the world's land as degraded. If current trends continue, 1.5 billion ha of degraded land needs to be restored between now and 2030 to reach Land Degradation Neutrality.

Women hold a key stake in the health of land. They are effective at using their extensive knowledge and skills to protect land, restore degraded land and build resilience to drought.

Women's contribution to the health of land is often uncompensated and they frequently lack access to, and control over, the very land they cultivate. Today, less than one in five landholders worldwide are women — despite comprising nearly half of the world's agricultural workforce and producing up to 80 per cent of food in developing countries.

Women's equal rights to land and property are grounded in the core human rights instruments.

Most countries explicitly recognize women's rights to own, manage, inherit, and use land as collateral on equal terms with men. Yet in more than 100 countries, women are limited in claiming and protecting land assets because of customary, religious or traditional laws and practices.

Being one of those who have been involved since the Millennium Goals through the Rio Process to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, I am convinced that ensuring women and girls' equal enjoyment of all human rights and participation in decision-making is not just the right thing to do. When their rights are respected and when they are fully able to use their abilities and knowledge, our societies are simply stronger.

The #HerLand campaign highlights women and girls' vital role in global land restoration efforts and in achieving environmental sustainability.

Let us work together to mobilize support to secure land rights for women and girls and to create a better and equal future for all.

Placing gender equality at the heart of land restoration and drought resilience

Karen Bernard, Gender Policy Officer, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

Gender equality is vital to deliver sustainable, progressive and meaningful action to avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation. UNCCD's goal is to make sure women and girls are empowered in the global efforts to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality. We cannot achieve Land Degradation Neutrality without gender equality and equity. And yet, gender inequality is pervasive. In a majority of the world's countries, laws or customs hinder women's access to land or ownership. Widely, women are denied equal inheritance rights.

Gender inequality affects women's access to resources and their ability to control resources or knowledge. It limits their access to financial and support structures. It lowers their influence in community, cultural and formal networks. It reduces their input into collective decision-making processes.

When land becomes degraded and usable land is scarce, rural women are usually worst affected. They are often more vulnerable to poverty and typically have weaker legal protections and social status.

But when women and girls are empowered, the benefits are manifold. When their land rights are secured, we have seen women and girls increase yields, restore land, and build resilience to drought. Women also invest more in nutrition, health and education which benefits their families, and wider societies.

Similarly, when women and men have equal land tenure rights, women are more likely to invest in soil conservation and sustainable land management practices like tree planting. The UNCCD Gender Action Plan places gender equality firmly at the core of its mandate as a vital catalyst of environmental progress.

At UNCCD we consider gender equality as a stepping-stone to achieve land degradation neutrality and equip communities to combat drought and desertification. We place women front and centre as they are instrumental in providing sustainable livelihoods for their families, societies, and contributing to land restoration activities.

Our focus is on working with partners to promote gender positive policies and governance, community awareness raising and advocacy, and documenting progress by capturing and championing transformative action.

While gender equality encompasses both men and women, it is women who tend to be at a systemic disadvantage in

many parts of the world. Gender inequalities are the root cause of why girls and women spend many hours on tasks that men often refuse to undertake. For example, in developing countries, women are responsible for collecting water. When their community is affected by desertification and their water source is dry, they are forced to walk long distances to fetch the water. The time and effort spent on water collection means girls and women have fewer opportunities to engage in income-generating activities or go to school.

Land degradation and the impact on women

Around 2 billion ha, a quarter of the global land area, is affected by land degradation, with adverse impacts on over 3 billion people, especially the most vulnerable such as poor rural communities, small-scale farmers, women, youth and indigenous peoples. Land degradation considerably contributes to food insecurity, climate change, the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services, including access to clean drinking water.¹ The costs of land degradation are estimated to be around 10 per cent of the annual global GDP² with an estimated loss in ecosystem services value of US\$ 6.3 trillion every year.³

About 74 per cent of people living in poverty are directly affected by land degradation. They often rely on natural resources for their livelihoods and a disproportionate number are women. Almost 80 per cent of employed women in least developed countries reported agriculture as their primary livelihood. Through intra-family food distribution, they play an important role in the nutritional intake and health of their children and family. When land is degraded and becomes scarce, women are uniquely impacted due to their role in agriculture, reliance on forest resources, weaker social status and legal protection and higher vulnerability to poverty.⁴

Restoration as a driver of women's economic empowerment

Although there has been progress in enhancing equal opportunities for women in legislative and regulatory economic frameworks over the past decades, women still have less than two-thirds of the legal rights available to men with a considerable gap between laws on paper and systems required for full implementation.⁵ Close to 60 per cent of women's employment worldwide is in the informal economy and can increase to 90 per cent in low-income countries.



Image: Michael Martin

Where women are employed, they are paid 80 cents or less on average for every dollar earned by a man.⁶ Women's economic empowerment and closing the gender gap in entrepreneurship and employment is estimated to increase global GDP by over 20 per cent.⁷

Land restoration can create millions of green jobs and economic opportunities with long-term multiplier effects that strengthen rural economies and contribute to rural development. These opportunities can reach beyond forestry, agriculture and conservation to new technologies and business models in renewable energy, as well as green and blue infrastructure. Limited land rights, as well as customs, traditions and religious norms can prevent women and girls from participating in and benefiting from restoration activities. Land restoration that is gender-responsive can reduce poverty, hunger and malnutrition.⁸

Women's land tenure as vital for gender-transformative change

Land tenure is about the relationship between people and the land, and how local laws and customs define that relationship. Land tenure for all — men, women, indigenous peoples — is not just a question of human rights, but an issue that impacts biodiversity, food security and migration. Those who own or control the land they work on are more likely to invest in sustainable land management practices such as tree planting and soil conservation.

When tenure leads to increases in investment, higher agricultural productivity and improved food security, it disincentivizes economic migration, benefitting society. In short, those with ownership of land are more likely to stay and care for it, which results in a range of economic, social and ecosystem benefits. There are 608 million family farms around the world, occupying between 70 and 80 percent of the world's farmland and producing around 80 percent of the world's food in value terms. Many of these farms operate in conditions where there are unequal land rights.

Although many of the 608 million family farms are run by men and women, the laws or customs in more than half of the world's countries hinder women's ownership and access to land. In many countries, women produce 60 to 80 percent of food, yet they lack equal inheritance and land tenure rights, thus undermining the economic, social and ecosystem benefits mentioned above. UNCCD recognizes the importance of promoting equal land tenure rights and access to land for all. We raise awareness of the importance of land tenure, particularly among vulnerable populations, such as women and indigenous peoples, and aim to improve the available knowledge of land tenure through better national reporting.

We also work with governments around the world to ensure equal land tenure rights. UNCCD encourages parties to follow the Food and Agriculture Organization's Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure and take measures to combat desertification, land degradation,

and mitigate the effects of drought to achieve land degradation neutrality.

In this current scenario, more efforts are needed to strengthen coalitions which can help secure women's land rights, through high level policy commitments and at the same time focusing on innovative solutions at the national and regional levels. The following key sex-disaggregated data illustrate the extent of this challenge:

- Widespread and rapid land degradation threatens rural livelihoods, food production, water availability and biodiversity conservation worldwide. For more than 3 billion people, land is core to their survival, well-being, and dignity — it is the principal asset of the rural poor
- When land is degraded and productive land becomes scarce, women are uniquely and differentially impacted due to their substantial role in land-based activities, greater vulnerability to poverty and typically weaker legal protections and social status
- In areas affected by desertification and drought, increased competition for scarce productive resources makes women and girls extremely vulnerable to these slow onset hazards
- In many developing countries, agrifood systems are a more important source of income and livelihood for women than for men. One-third of women in the labour force are employed in agriculture and related supply chains
- Despite the economic importance of the land use sector and its contribution to family welfare, women's roles tend to be marginalised, their working conditions comparatively poor, and their wages at 82 cents for every dollar earned by men
- Women and girls are important environmental stewards yet are too often excluded from participation and leadership in the management and restoration of land resources. As a result, they lack access to training, extension services, credit and markets, while facing significant social barriers to participation in development, planning and policymaking processes. Countries with more women parliamentarians are more likely to ratify environmental treaties and set aside land for conservation; for non-elected officials, only 12 per cent of 881 national environment-related ministries across 193 countries were led by women
- Despite women's vital role in food production, they are less likely than men to own and control land. Men have greater ownership and more secure tenure than women, who globally comprise less than 13 per cent of agricultural landholders. The percentage of men who have ownership or secure tenure rights over agricultural land is twice that of women in more than 40 per cent of the countries that have reported on women's land ownership



Image: UNCCD



Image: Karen Bernard

- Although most countries explicitly recognize women's rights to own, manage, inherit, and use land as collateral on equal terms with men, in more than 100 countries, women are limited in claiming and protecting land assets because of customary, religious or traditional laws and practices. If women had equal rights to land, it is estimated that agricultural production in the poorest regions would increase by up to 4 per cent and malnourishment would decline by 12–17 per cent
- Lack of secure access to land and natural resources is highly detrimental to communities and societies, exacerbating inequalities, decreasing economic productivity and increasing food insecurity.

Why a gender action plan?

In 2017, at COP13 in China, the Parties to the Convention recognized the shortcomings of their work due to their limited gender perspectives. This led to the development of a Gender Action Plan (GAP) to ensure that gender equality plays a central role in building drought resilience and achieving land degradation neutrality. The Plan helps countries improve women's access to resources and gives them opportunities that they previously lacked.

It identifies the following four priority actions:

- Ensure women participate in decision-making
- Eradicate poverty
- Strengthen women's land rights including access to resources
- Enhance women's access to improved knowledge and technologies.

Thanks to the Gender Action Plan there is now a common understanding of gender roles and how to address common inequalities.

HerLand campaign

Together with partners, activists and influencers, since 2023 UNCCD has been spearheading the campaign #HerLand to promote inspiring examples of women and girls' leadership in sustainable land management, mobilizing support to secure land rights for women and girls across the world.

Every voice and every action counts towards engaging communities in advocating the key role of gender equality in empowering women and girls to take the lead on global land restoration and drought resilience efforts. UNCCD invites everyone to discover more and join.

All of us can do our part:

- Governments can promote laws, policies and practices that end discrimination and secure women's rights to land and resources
- Businesses can prioritize gender equality and women's empowerment in their investments, facilitating access to resources and technology
- Individuals can support women-led initiatives in land restoration: help us spread the message by using the hashtag #HerLand.

The HerLand campaign was launched on International Women's Day in March 2023 and on 17 June 2023, during the Desertification and Drought Day global observance held in the United Nations General Assembly. The campaign

promotes successful examples of women and girls' contributions to sustainable land management and mobilizes support to advance land rights for women and girls around the world. Campaign materials have been developed in all six UN languages.

The campaign is achieving very high global visibility on social media, so far reaching more than 300 million viewers with the #HerLand hashtag on various social media platforms including X, LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram.

As a key element of the campaign, UNCCD Land Ambassador President Halonen has engaged female leaders worldwide to sign the HerLand HerRights Call to Action. UNCCD Goodwill Ambassador Inna Modja has led the development of a digital-first exhibition on women, girls and land⁹ and has lent her voice to the #HerLand song composed by fellow UNCCD Goodwill Ambassador and Grammy-award-winning musician, Ricky Kej.

Campaign messages have also been echoed in dozens of activities hosted by local communities worldwide. From a women's soccer game in Chad to a solo marathon across the barren Aral Sea, and from tree planting to children's gardening competitions, people around the world joined the campaign with boundless creativity and impactful actions, calling for support to women's land rights.

Across continents, people everywhere found engaging ways to unite their communities and support HerLand HerRights.

Other workstreams on gender equality and women's empowerment

Gender equality is a key entry-point for Sustainable Land Management (SLM), and UNCCD together with World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT) are working to improve gender-responsiveness of SLM practices.

Direct and indirect gender-related barriers prevent women from adopting SLM practices. These barriers include land tenure insecurity; land availability; education or literacy levels; access to seeds, fertilizers, or extension services; and access to technologies and financing. As a result, women adopt SLM technologies at a rate that is typically lower and slower than that of men.

In line with the UNCCD Gender Action Plan (GAP) and guided by the idea to build back better, the aim of this UNCCD-WOCAT project is to:

- Add a gender lens to SLM technologies and approaches and assess their gender-responsiveness
- Evaluate how gender-responsiveness of SLM Technologies and Approaches can be improved, stepping up adoption and dissemination, making SLM beneficial for women and men alike.

This will support project planners, designers and implementers to identify, realize and scale gender-responsive SLM



Image: Karen Bernard



Image: Karen Bernard

Technologies and Approaches within the framework of LD/SLM and LDN projects and programmes as well as promote the implementation of gender-responsive SLM practices in the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration.

Phase 1: Development of a gender-responsive SLM tool

In the first phase, WOCAT and UNCCD designed a tool that helps to test the gender-responsiveness of SLM Technologies and Approaches and to identify areas of improvement to support project planners, designers and implementers in their effort to scale up SLM Technologies and Approaches that are gender-responsive.

The gender-responsive SLM tool was reviewed during a UNCCD-WOCAT consultation workshop with experts from different organizations and regions, resulting in the fine-tuning of the tool.

Currently, the tool is being tested with WOCAT network partners in more than 10 countries around the globe, supporting its further refinement and facilitating a first round of data collection.

Data will be analysed and presented in the form of SLM Gender Profiles, showcasing women and men’s involvement in different SLM Technologies and providing insights and recommendations on the improvement of SLM Technologies and related Approaches in view of gender equality and women empowerment.

Phase 2: New gender tool added to the WOCAT database

The Global WOCAT SLM database will be enhanced with a gender-responsive SLM tool, enabling:

- Online assessment of the gender-responsiveness of SLM practices
- Search for gender-responsive SLM solutions
- Collection of gender-disaggregated data through a harmonized system
- Possibility to analyse and share gender-disaggregated data to support informed decision-making for gender equality in land management, particularly in relation to drought resilience
- Platform to discuss gender and land management related issues within communities.

Interested partners and institutions, including UNCCD parties and CSOs, will be trained in its application to gain country-specific gender-disaggregated data on SLM practices. Results will support the design and implementation of gender-responsive SLM projects and programmes and inform decision-makers.

Research reports

Women-led solutions for drought resilience

Launched on the occasion of the International Day of Rural Women 2024, the report on “Women-led solutions for drought resilience” calls for better recognizing and supporting women-led efforts to protect vulnerable communities from the devastating effects of drought. It also underscores that women’s land rights are crucial for achieving food security.

Droughts are the most far-reaching of all natural disasters and are increasingly impacting all regions of the world,

accelerating land degradation at an alarming rate and, in turn, disrupting livelihoods and contributing to immeasurable hardship, poverty and deprivation. Recognizing this, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is prioritizing drought and its related impacts in awareness-raising efforts, including policy studies and publications, as well as its annual commemoration of World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought. Moreover, Decision 24 from UNCCD's 15th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15), approved a “road map to guide and accelerate the implementation of the Gender Action Plan”, promoting the development and sharing of gender-responsive and transformative approaches.

In response to this decision — and acknowledging that women and girls are not only most affected by drought but are also demonstrating remarkable leadership in the face of droughts, developing innovative means to adapt to and better manage drought and to increase drought resilience within their communities — UNCCD launched a global call in early 2024 to identify women-led solutions towards drought resilience. In response, 87 promising practices were received, from which 35 were selected for publication. A Review Committee, comprising selected colleagues from FAO, IUCN and UNCCD, took into consideration each of the promising practices received and analyzed their relevance and their capacity to be replicated in drought resilience practices and programming worldwide. The 35 promising practices highlighted in this report showcase the efforts of organizations and community members, particularly women leaders, in combating, mitigating and responding to drought and its deleterious impacts.

The key findings from this report are as follows:

- Worldwide, droughts cause over 15 per cent of disaster-related damages and losses, unleashing severe hardships for women and men in affected local communities
- The impacts of droughts, as slow onset extreme climate events, have intensified in recent years due to climate change trends and underlying societal vulnerabilities. As a result, risks vary across communities and societies and among people within those societies, depending on intersecting inequalities and context-specific factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, (dis)ability, location, socioeconomic status, migration status, culture and religion. Evidence to date indicates that, in general, women are more harshly impacted by drought than men
- Gender inequalities are socially constructed drivers of risk. Therefore, efforts towards gender-responsive outcomes related to drought resilience and adaptation need to tackle the structural nature of the challenge and the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that women face
- Addressing women's land rights is imperative to combat desertification and drought. Gender equality is not possible without securing women's rights to land. The lack of secure tenure limits women's decision-making power regarding land use. It also reduces women's access to extension services and training, and it hinders women's access to finance, as banks require collateral for loans and credit
- There is a wide body of evidence on effective approaches to strengthen women's rights to land, property and territory. In accordance with this research, several of the case studies under this call explore innovative options to enhance land tenure for women by supporting their





Image: HP Linger

access to common land, fostering collective access to resources, establishing legal aid clinics that strengthen women's property rights, and registering land titles for married couples

- Inspiring examples of women-led solutions that support drought resilience are found all over the world and include practices to manage and conserve water made scarce by drought, strategically use drought-resistant seeds and crops, develop adaptations through innovative income-generating activities, devise alternatives to unsustainable soil management for recovery of drought-impacted soils and leverage climate information services
- Many of the most successful women-led approaches entail technical, science-based techniques and capacities. Therefore, it is crucial that women have equal access to scientific training, study, and certification opportunities so that their full potential for contributing to the application of science to combat drought can be realised
- Ancestral knowledge and traditional practices held by women on drought adaptation techniques are immensely effective and should be facilitated and exchanged for further development and wider application
- Drought and environmental degradation often increase women's and girls' unpaid care, domestic and communal work. Therefore, there is an urgent need to adopt gender-responsive approaches and actions (i.e. recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work) in drought

planning, drought preparedness and drought response (e.g. through National Drought Plans)

- The most gender-transformative examples of women-led solutions for drought resilience involve women taking on nontraditional roles and jobs, acting as multipliers of knowledge, leveraging weather-related climate information services, and working in groups, collectives, or associations to pool resources and increase negotiating power
- Ensuring women's equal and active participation in drought management is a first step in the right direction. This includes women's participation and engagement in the development and implementation of policies regarding drought planning, preparedness and response, to ensure that their perspectives are equally heard and integrated into all decisions taken. Additionally, the case studies reveal that establishing women's groups to act collectively has been recognized as a vital adaptation strategy.

Promising practices were received from UNCCD Annexes I, II and III — Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. As a result, only these three regions are represented in this compilation.

In Part I of the report, the practices are analyzed in relation to five drivers of gender inequality: (i) inequitable control of, and access to, natural resources including land; (ii) a lack of, or limited access to, markets, capital, training, technical assistance, financial services and technologies; (iii) patriarchal,

discriminatory and violent norms and laws; (iv) the gendered division of labour and the unequal social and economic organisation of care; and (v) the concentration of power and hierarchical relations in the public and private spheres.

Key lessons learned within the context of each of these drivers are provided alongside promising practices, offering insight into effective pathways forward. At the centre is the need to address the structural inequalities underlying each of the drivers, consider the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that women face and move towards more proactive, risk-management approaches that build resilience to drought, rather than react to it in the aftermath of environmental hazards. Gender inequality prevents women from fully realising their potential in land management and renders them more susceptible to drought and its impacts, and this is evident in land tenure, decision-making power and access to training, financial services and technology. Yet, as the promising practices compiled in this report show, women are leading efforts globally to combat drought and preserve land, supporting communities and economies.

Green job opportunities: Burkina Faso

The technical briefs “Gender-sensitive income generation and green job creation opportunities in the Central and West African Sahel within the Great Green Wall area” for Senegal and Burkina Faso examine green job and income opportunities in these countries as part of the Great Green Wall initiative, focusing on the challenges and opportunities women face in accessing these green jobs. The need for this research arose from an assessment that showed limited strategic involvement of women in the initiative, particularly in leadership roles. Conducted by GlobalCAD and led by UN Women and UNCCD, the findings from these briefs will inform policy development and resource mobilisation for the green transition.

Study on differentiated impacts of DLDD on women and men: Summary for decision-makers

Undertaking an analysis of the gender impacts of desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) requires looking at the socioeconomic issues that affect women and men differently when the land is degraded or when drought occurs. It means looking at how they are impacted, as well as at the coping mechanisms that they are able to develop in a given socio-cultural and economic context.

This study, commissioned by the UNCCD Secretariat, sheds light on the most relevant problems, as well as solutions, associated with how DLDD affects women and men differently, with an overall impact on the environment and on societies. Its purpose is to inform decision-making processes that relate to gender equality in the context of the UNCCD, specifically around the formulation of concrete policies and measures towards the implementation of the UNCCD’s Gender Action Plan.

By the adoption of the Gender Action Plan back in COP 13 (2017), Parties to the Convention already acknowledged the specific role of women in land restoration and sustainable land management, as well as the importance of gender equality as a guiding principle in all policies and decisions associated with the fulfilment of the objectives of the Convention.

Gender Caucus

In its official statement from its 19th session, held in 2021, the Committee for the Review of Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 19/5) noted that “the Gender Caucus proved to be an excellent tool to increase gender-aware action among delegates and should be continued. To continue with the positive trend, parties are encouraged to actively participate in the next Gender Caucus planned to be held at COP 15.”

The principal objective of UNCCD’s multi-stakeholder Gender Caucus is to provide support to strengthen the gender responsiveness of the policy and programme agenda and initiatives of the UNCCD as outlined in the approved Gender Action Plan.

Specific objectives are to:

- Support the acceleration of the implementation of the UNCCD Gender Action Plan (GAP) at the international and country level for all Annexes
- Assist in identification of bottlenecks to GAP implementation at the international, country and local level
- Serve as a platform for exchange of gender expertise, information, training and tools among UNCCD stakeholders interested in gender issues and the UNCCD Secretariat.

The second edition of the Gender Caucus was held as part of the 15th Conference of Parties in Abidjan, Cote d’Ivoire from 9 to 20 May 2022. To launch the activities of the Caucus, a High level opening was held, under the theme “Gender equality for strong land stewardship”, and hosted by the First Lady of Côte d’Ivoire, Ms. Dominique Ouattara, and including the Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations, Ms. Amina Mohamed; the President of the General Assembly, H.E. Abdulla Shahid; the former President of Finland, H.E. Tarja Halonen; Jo Puri from IFAD, and other eminent personalities and experts. This High Level event featured the launch of a global research study which had been conducted by senior gender expert Lorena Aguilar. This study on the differentiated impacts of DLDD on women and men was commissioned by the secretariat in response to parties’ request to produce gender-related knowledge in the context of the implementation of the Convention. Data on these unspoken aspects had been minimal or scant. For the first time, the UNCCD was able to analyze available datasets on women’s participation in the Conference of Parties meetings, as well as on the level of inclusion of gender within various UNCCD reporting processes. The study also provided relevant information on critical aspects of land and resource management by women and men; access to land; access to financing, credits and inputs; and most importantly access to political and decision-making processes. This proved to be a highly visible occasion on which to share with decision-makers this critical information and the ensuing recommendations.

The launch of the research study provided policymakers attending the COP, and beyond, with cutting-edge knowledge and new evidence on issues affecting women in the context of desertification, land degradation and drought. The meeting served as a premiere to discuss emerging issues and policy recommendations from the ground-breaking study on the differentiated impacts of DLDD on women and men, with an



Image: Pape Mamadou Camara | UNCCD

emphasis on sustainable finance for rural women as a vehicle for effective land stewardship.

Subsequently, the 3rd edition of the Gender Caucus was convened during the CRIC21, held from 13 to 17 November in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Opening remarks were provided by the UNCCD Executive Secretary (ES), Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw, who emphasized that securing land tenure for women is crucial for necessary land restoration. Gender balance at the sessions was positive, with 54 per cent women and 46 per cent men in attendance. Country parties in attendance included: Afghanistan, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Czech Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guinea, Hungary, Jordan, Lebanon, Luxemburg, Mexico, Nicaragua, Oman, Panama, Slovakia, Spain, Syria, Türkiye, Uruguay, Uzbekistan and Venezuela. Sister UN agencies in attendance included, FAO, GEF, UNFF, UNDP, UNDRR and UN Women, as well as a number of CSOs accredited to UNCCD.

A total of 123 persons attended these sessions, including 25 via Zoom. Gender balance at the session was very positive, with 54 per cent women and 46 per cent men. Parties that presented during the panel were Mongolia, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. There was also a launch by FAO of the “Making Every Voice Count for Adaptive Management (MEV-CAM)” toolkit. The reactivation of the Gender Caucus, last convened

in May 2022, was acknowledged and appreciated in the CRIC 21 closing statements issued by EU, CSO panel, and Africa and Latin America/Caribbean regions.

The 4th edition of the Gender Caucus took place during COP 16, December 2024 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia — a decisive moment to both report on the progress to date under the GAP and its Road Map for acceleration of implementation, and for securing further commitments from parties to advance gender equalities on various levels. The purpose of the Gender Caucus sessions at COP 16 was to highlight and consider how to measure women’s unique and valuable contributions to combatting drought, land restoration and managing sustainable land and food systems.

Final remarks

From COP 16 onwards, UNCCD will continue to work with the widest range of partners to promote gender-responsive policies and governance, community awareness raising and advocacy, and championing transformative action towards the empowerment of women and girls. Addressing gender inequality is not only about fairness — it is a precious opportunity that we must not miss, to harness the untapped potential of all persons in the fight to protect and nurture the planet that we share.

WOMEN-LED INITIATIVES IN LAND RESTORATION

Her Just Transition for drylands

Bradley Hiller, Kristonia Lockhart, Rafif Alam, Islamic Development Bank, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

A just transition aims to green the economy in a way that is fair and inclusive, creating decent work opportunities, and leaving no one behind. Women and girls are central stakeholders in a just transition, particularly in the agriculture and pastoral sectors, which engages the largest and most climate vulnerable populations globally, and where women constitute over 40 per cent of workers but own less than 20 per cent of land. A just land transition is particularly urgent in global drylands, which are increasingly degraded and exposed to climate and non-climate shock events. Women and girls must be empowered to help define a gender-responsive just transition in drylands.

Setting the scene

While just transition emerged as a concept in the 1980s, today it is an accepted pathway to greening the economy, while promoting fairness and inclusivity, decent employment and leaving no one behind. Against the backdrop of climate change, just transition has the potential to improve socioeconomic conditions for local communities and country development trajectories. However, such transition will affect different demographics, and it should not be assumed that a shift towards a greener economy automatically bridges existing gender inequalities¹. For example, globally, nearly 60 per cent of women's employment is in the informal economy — a figure that can reach greater than 90 per cent in some low-



Rural women beneficiaries welcoming IsDB's New Halfa project, Sudan, to promote health and build roads, schools and irrigation systems

income countries² — and which requires targeted policy and social inclusion. Hence, while 100 million jobs may be created in a shift to low-carbon and circular economies by 2030¹, it is important that women and girls are co-designers and central actors in that transition.

UN Women (2021) recommends that the foundations of such a gender-responsive just transition be predicated on “the centrality of gender equality and care in policies and programmes towards an economy that works for all people and the planet while upholding rights and the principle of leaving no one behind, inclusive of people facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination on the basis of sex, income, age, race, ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation, among others”. In this regard, the ambitions of globally agreed commitments, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Rio Conventions (on biodiversity, climate change, and desertification), cannot be achieved without just transition as a foundational element.

Further, there is an opportunity to broaden the concept of just transition beyond climate change and the energy sector — where most focus has been to date — towards a just land transition, with a focus on drylands.

Drylands

Drylands refer to arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid regions, covering approximately 45 per cent of global land area and home to one-in-three people. However, up to 35 per cent of the world’s drylands are already degraded, and this figure is rising. The rationale for a just land transition in drylands is multidimensional³, including:

- **Mitigating food insecurity and out-migration risks:** Globally, 44 per cent of croplands and 50 per cent of livestock are found in drylands. About three-quarters of drylands are considered rangelands and used by pastoralists, primarily for extensive livestock production, while nearly 20 per cent are used to grow crops in rain-fed or irrigated farming systems⁴. Degradation can reduce yields and local opportunities.
- **Protecting vulnerable communities:** Degraded drylands risk the health and wellbeing of ~1 billion people in over 100 countries, especially poor rural communities and small-scale farmers, women, youth, and indigenous peoples⁵.



Scholarship beneficiaries in Kangole Girls Senior Secondary School

Challenges faced by women in agriculture and rural development sector

Lower wages than men
Limited job security
Less likely to be land owners due to legal and cultural constraints

More likely to face discrimination, violence and harassment
Often excluded from agricultural and training activities
Policies often designed with male farmers in mind

Gender gaps in representation
More likely to be involved in informal or seasonal labour
Limited access to markets and poor assets

Lack of care facilities resulting in limited time and exposure of children to health risks or hazardous environments
More exposed to OSH risks and hazards



Source: ILO 2024

- **Addressing gender inequities:** Women constitute 43 per cent of agriculture workers globally but own less than 20 per cent of land⁶.
- **Avoiding disproportionate transition impacts:** Agriculture employs more than a quarter of the global workforce, far greater than the less than 2 per cent for energy and related sectors⁷.
- **Mitigating climate change:** Almost one quarter of total anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions derive from agriculture, forestry and other land use (AFOLU)⁸.
- **Preventing value losses:** The costs of land degradation is estimated to be ~10 per cent of annual global GDP⁹, with an estimated loss in broader ecosystem services valued at US\$ 6.3 trillion annually¹⁰.
- **Recognizing the interconnectedness between land, climate change, and biodiversity:** Land degradation is both cause and effect of climate change and biodiversity loss, and undermines ecosystem services such as clean drinking water and air quality regulation.

In response to the significant (financial and nonfinancial) costs of inaction on the above threats, emerging efforts at global, national and local levels aim to transform the way land resources are utilized and managed. For example, the G20 Global Land Initiative, launched under the G20 framework, aims to prevent, halt and reverse land degradation with an ambition to reduce degraded land by 50 per cent by 2040. To date, over 115 countries have committed to achieving land degradation neutrality with pledges totalling more than 1 billion ha under restoration by 2030¹¹. In support of such high-level commitments, a just land transition may be defined as a shift to inclusive economies and societies that is fair, equitable, inclusive, and sustainable;

IsDB guidance on women’s empowerment and just transition

IsDB’s 2019 Women’s Empowerment Policy aims to contribute to sustainable and inclusive development in IsDB member countries and Muslim communities in non-member countries by empowering women and girls to participate in and benefit from the development of their societies and communities. The Policy aims to improve IsDB development assistance effectiveness and to bring about greater socioeconomic returns. The Policy is built around four pillars:

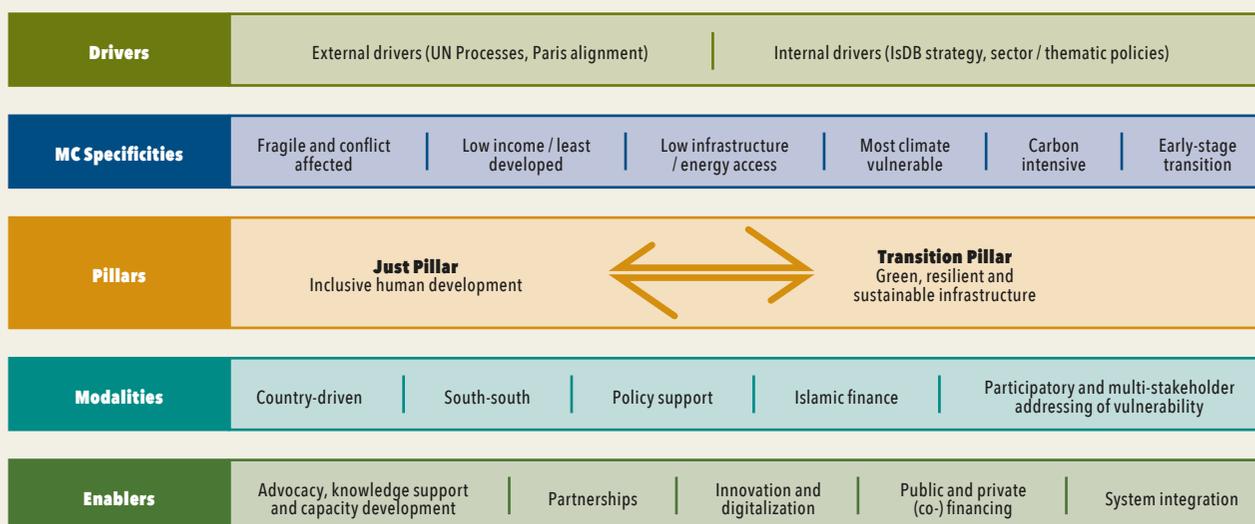
- Pillar 1: Improving access to resources and services
- Pillar 2: Mainstreaming women’s needs
- Pillar 3: Promoting women’s agency and participation
- Pillar 4: Fostering learning and capacity development.

The pillars are guided by principles on: (i) capitalizing on synergies and complementarities; (ii) making strategic choices in areas and modes of engagement; (iii) promoting innovation; and (iv) being adaptable to ensure inclusivity of all. The pillars and principles will be stimulated by key enablers that leverage IsDB’s comparative advantage and unique instruments, capitalize on its decentralized structure, and strengthen partnerships. Regarding just transition, the

Policy references equity, social justice and wellbeing; inclusion and equality; and leaving no one behind.

In 2023, IsDB launched a Just Transition Conceptual Framework and Action Plan, which aims to support IsDB member countries to chart their own transition towards low emission, climate resilient development pathways, in a just, fair and inclusive manner.

The framework is built around the principles of transparency and fairness. It aims to cater for the wide variety of IsDB member countries and their unique starting points and ambitions related to just transition, including climate-vulnerable countries, fragile and conflicted-affected countries, and least developed countries, including those in dryland regions. Women are key stakeholders in the conceptual framework, particularly in the Just pillar which is centred around inclusive human development and emphasizes people-centred principles of just transition, with special focus on the most vulnerable. This pillar includes a focus on social protection, worker rights, and inclusion of marginalized and affected communities, including women.



reduces inequalities and poverty; and upholds the human rights of communities affected by environmental degradation, including implementation support measures¹². A just land transition may support: (i) land degradation neutrality, (ii) transforming food systems, (iii) enhancing the resilience of land and water resources via SLM, and (iv) creating more sustainable cities and urban development.

Challenges for women in drylands

Women are central actors in dryland agricultural and rural economies. They constitute 43 per cent of agriculture workers globally⁶ — this figure can reach up to 80 per cent in some countries — and are responsible for more than half of small-scale food production¹³. However, despite such significant labour contributions, women own less than 20 per cent of land⁶.

Such structural inequalities — including unequal asset distribution, restricted access to productive natural resources

and resources required for adaptation and resilience, and limited decision-making authority — mean that women tend to have greater exposure to climate variability and extreme weather, compared to men¹.

Critically, women’s labour is often informal and their capacity to build livelihood and financial resilience is subsequently limited. Gender inequality in drylands remains pervasive¹⁴ and may be exacerbated by land degradation, desertification and increasing frequency and severity of shock events, such as drought.

Opportunities for women in drylands

In response to the challenges faced by women in drylands, the case for a gender-responsive just transition towards low carbon and resilient economies with quality, decent jobs for women is increasingly grounded in the coming together of the SDGs and Rio Conventions. A growing body of data and

evidence underscores the necessity of incorporating gender equality considerations in just transition policies and initiatives¹⁵. Opportunities are available to facilitate women's empowerment in drylands across a range of areas, including practical actions on land, research, policy, and dialogue, and all of which can be informed by customary and local systems to increase gender equality for land rights in drylands¹⁴.

Greater investment, covering various aspects of the SDGs and Rio Conventions — such as climate adaptation, crop and livestock development, education and health services, and social protection programmes — is needed.

The following concrete actions are recommended¹ to achieve a more gender-responsive and inclusive agriculture sector:

- Provide women with skills, information and technology to adapt to climate change and realize co-benefits from climate actions
- Ensure access of women farmers to training and tools on climate smart agriculture, digital technology and information communications technology
- Ensure access of women to education and skills related to production and technology
- Provide subsidies to make technology more affordable for both women and lower income groups and redress women farmers' lack of access to financial resources and credit
- Foster new legal frameworks to guarantee women's land rights, ensure agricultural workers are covered by labour laws and harmonize customary laws with national laws in line with international human rights commitments
- Recognize and value women and other groups' local knowledge on agriculture and forestry
- Ensure representation of women in occupational safety and health committees and include specific measures for pregnant and breast-feeding women.



Woman collecting water in New Halfa, Sudan, during an IsDB preparation mission to investigate a rural infrastructure development project

IsDB-supported initiatives empowering women in drylands

IsDB initiatives supporting women's empowerment and just transition in dryland environments include:

- **Lives & Livelihood Fund (LLF):** In 2016, the LLF was created by multiple development and philanthropic partners to lift the most vulnerable out of poverty across 33 IsDB member countries through investment in smallholder farming and rural agriculture, basic infrastructure, and primary health and infectious disease prevention and management. The US\$2.5 billion fund blends grant financing with concessional lending to unlock capital for communities that would not otherwise be able to access such financing. Women in rural communities are a major target group for LLF financial support.
- **Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development (ISFD):** The ISFD serves as the poverty alleviation arm of the IsDB and is dedicated to supporting its member countries in implementing poverty alleviation and wellbeing programmes. Such programmes target various vulnerable groups, including women and, by addressing their unique needs, aims to uplift their lives and provide the support they require to overcome obstacles and achieve sustainable development. In 2024, ISFD has launched the Harvesting Opportunities for Poverty Eradication (HOPE) Programme, which aims to create over one million jobs, improve agriculture with new technologies, and expand access to clean energy, with women as major beneficiaries.
- **Food Security Response Programme (FSRP):** In 2022, IsDB launched the US\$10.54 billion FSRP, which supports member countries in addressing the food crisis and scaling up efforts to strengthen resilience to future food security shocks. The programme provides short-term interventions on emergency food and agricultural supply, and social protection and livelihood support to the most vulnerable populations (including women). Medium- and longer-term interventions aim at (i) building agricultural resilience to climate change; (ii) Food and input value-chains; (iii) smallholders' productivity and market access; (iv) rural livelihood support; (v) livestock and fisheries development; and (vi) building resilient food supply systems. Regional agrifood value chain programmes, under the umbrella of the FSRP and on commodities such as cassava and rice, support women's empowerment.
- In 2020, IsDB received US\$11.15 million from the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi) for its Empowering West African Women Small and Medium Enterprises in Rice Value Chains (EWASME) programme, which supports the upgrading and advancing of women-owned SMEs within the rice value chain in West Africa through capacity development and grant matching, as well as increased access to local and regional markets.
- Takaful, or Islamic insurance, is a form of collective risk pooling, which can protect communities from climate- and non-climate related shock events, such as drought, extreme heat, and flooding. IsDB is a member of the Global Takaful Alliance, which will be officially launched at UNCCD COP 16, and which aims to reach 100 million people by 2030, including women-headed households and enterprises.

Islamic Development Bank support for Her Land just transition

Access to financing and related support is a major challenge to support and scale up gender-responsive just transition initiatives¹⁶. Hence, financing institutions, such as multilateral development banks (MDBs), can play a major role in just land transition.

As an MDB and the world's largest south-south development finance institution, the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) supports 57 member countries and Muslim communities, touching the lives of 1-in-5 people globally. Women's empowerment is a cross-cutting area of IsDB's 2023–2025 organizational strategy, supported by IsDB's Women's Empowerment Policy (2019), Agriculture and Rural Development Sector Policy (2018), Climate Change Policy (2019) and Action Plan (2020–2025), and Just Transition Conceptual Framework and Action Plan (2023–2025).

Beyond strategic guidance, IsDB support modalities comprise knowledge generation and exchange, technical assistance, capacity development and investment support, including for dryland communities.

Looking forward

Just land transition requires adequate political attention to both processes and outcomes, namely: (i) procedural justice, or the meaningful participation of stakeholders in planning

and decision-making, and (ii) distributive justice, or the fair and equitable distribution of burdens and benefits of a just land transition across all dimensions of sustainable development¹⁷. Further, a just land transition in drylands must mitigate potential negative impacts of change, optimize opportunities, and address structural inequalities. To be transformational, the process must be inclusive and expansive, empowering all stakeholders, including women and girls. To support systemic change for just land transition in drylands, support may be focused across four areas¹⁸:

- **New norms and standards:** Broaden just transition support to include just land transition, embodying the principles of sustainable development, SLM and restoration in drylands, and effectively addressing hunger, poverty and inequality. Such signalling can help support principles of inclusive governance and multistakeholder engagement, where just land transition is a connector between the SDGs and the Rio Conventions to activate stakeholders, including women.
- **Governance:** Just land transition requires inclusive and responsible land governance that incentivizes and empowers relevant authorities, including at local level. Governance arrangements must give voice to multiple actors, including women and girls, to facilitate nested decision scales to contribute to ongoing decision support systems. Polycentric or multilevel governance systems,



Women beneficiaries of the Integrated Rural Development project on the Plain of Djagble, Togo



Image: ICDB

Rural women beneficiaries of IsDB's New Halfa project, Sudan

that encourage systematic vertical and horizontal coordination, can foster trust, equality, and inclusivity¹⁹. At local levels, security of land tenure rights underpins socioeconomic relations surrounding natural resource use²⁰. Tenure rights protect vulnerable groups, such as women and girls, from deepening poverty and provide confidence to invest in SLM.

- **Financing:** Just land transition will require both the scaling of existing financial mechanisms and development of innovative financial mechanisms that recognize the value of dryland ecosystems and communities. A range of conventional and innovative financing modalities would be recommended to scale up finance volumes, with a focus on improved access for women. Transferable learnings may be relevant for the land sector gained from just transition vehicles such as Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs), under which significant finance has been crowded-in to support nationally impactful investments. Technological advancements, such as digital finance payments, present potential opportunities for increased access for women.
- **Social inclusion:** Just land transition requires rights-based and people-centred approaches that redress structural inequalities, ensure access to land resources and tenure security and capacity building.

Strengthening equitable land use planning and governance to manage competition and trade-offs between different land uses is essential. This includes empowering local stakeholders, including women and youth, and protecting land and resource rights of indigenous communities. Land policies and actions should foster innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth. Local green jobs and employment opportunities can be created through land restoration and land-based industries, with a focus on supporting women and girls. To level the playing field for communities, improved access to credit and incentives for sustainable/restorative livelihoods are required. In addition, linkages between rural, peri-urban and urban areas need to be strengthened via inclusive and sustainable value chains and the productive infrastructure and services they support.

Conclusions

Despite current and forecast challenges for women and girls in global drylands, increasing opportunities exist to define a gender-responsive Her Land just transition. Support for women's empowerment will be required from multiple actors — from local to international — including the scaling of knowledge, technical assistance, capacity building and financial support from multilateral development institutions.

Support to women-led initiatives in land restoration and drought resilience

Dr. Sidi Ould Tah, BADEA (Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa)

BADEA (Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa) plays a crucial role in supporting women-led initiatives in areas such as land restoration and drought resilience, particularly in African regions affected by climate change and environmental degradation. BADEA's support in these areas is aligned with its broader mission of promoting sustainable development, reducing poverty, and fostering gender equality in Africa.

Given the several ways in which BADEA's initiatives can have a profound impact on women's empowerment, one of the areas considered for supporting women-led initiatives is the rural development sector. In summary, rural development initiatives can contribute significantly to women's empowerment by improving access to education, economic opportunities, resources, healthcare, infrastructure, social participation, gender equality and environmental sustainability.

Since 1975, the total of loans and grants extended by BADEA to recipient African countries for financing the rural development sector amounted to about US\$ 985 million, with participation in 120 projects.

BADEA's support to women-led initiatives in areas such as land restoration and drought resilience can be given either through projects or capacity building and technical assistance operations as demonstrated below.

Funding women-led projects

BADEA provides financial support to women-led initiatives aimed at land restoration and drought resilience. These may include reforestation projects, sustainable agriculture practices, water conservation techniques and community-based natural resource management.

Women are often at the forefront of managing local ecosystems, especially in rural communities where they play critical roles in agriculture and resource management. By financing these initiatives, BADEA empowers women to lead efforts to rehabilitate degraded lands and build resilience to droughts. Some examples are presented below:

Rural development project, Guinea

Co-financed by BADEA, The OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) and the government of Guinea, the project aimed to increase production, improve quality and contribute to establishing markets for vegetables and fruits. The intended outcome was to improve producers' income,

encourage agricultural exports with optimal exploitation of natural resources and reduce the national economy's dependence on the mineral sector, thus alleviating poverty in targeted rural areas. This has been done through reclaiming new agricultural lands, improving the economic and social infrastructure for rural residents (especially roads and water supply), constructing refrigeration units and warehouses, establishing nurseries and providing agricultural input and technical support for farmers.

Rural development project, Guinea

| Result Indicator | Results Achieved |
|---|------------------|
| Vegetable Farming Area Increased (ha) | 1,015 |
| Area for Fruit trees (Mango and Cashew) Increased (hectare) | 780 |
| Rural Gravel Roads Built (km) | 350 |
| Bore Holes Dug and Equipped (number) | 400 |
| Warehouses Built (number) | 8 |
| Cold Storage Units Built (number) | 3 |
| Production Increased (per cent) | 90 |
| Direct Beneficiaries (number) | 1,400,000 |
| Women Beneficiaries (per cent) | 60 |



Planting mangrove trees in Gambia is one of BADEA's initiatives to reduce the impact of climate change, enhance preservation of biodiversity and create jobs



Image: BADEA

BADEA provides financial support to women-led initiatives that forward the progress of land restoration projects such as establishing sustainable market economies for fruit and vegetables

Cocoa project in the West Africa region

This is a syndicated facility with another 20+ lenders who provided a gross amount of US\$ 1.3 billion in 2022 to support the cocoa production sector in the targeted country.

Along with other financiers' support, the facility enabled the borrower to contribute to impressive social and environmental impacts, ranging from reforestation and sustainable farming techniques to educational projects and women's economic empowerment.

The facility contributed to the social and environmental impact³, resulting in:

- Curbing child labour through:
 - Educational scholarships for farmers' children (29,800 students have received scholarships yearly since 2011/12)
 - Building schools for needy communities in the targeted country (14 schools in 14 cocoa districts)
- Benefiting 13,241 women from training using the GIZ model of farmer business schools to improve efficiency, profitability and income, contributing towards the elimination of child labour
- Benefiting more than 547,925 farmers

- Rolling out an initiative for forest protection and restoration, including planting 20+ million trees
- Running a production enhancement programme, increasing productivity per hectare from 450 kg to 600 kg (33 per cent increase)
- Running an environmental and social sustainability programme to train farmers on environmentally sustainable and eco-friendly production practices (25,052 farmers took part).

Supporting the enhancement of agricultural productivity in integrated agricultural industrial areas and youth employment, Ethiopia

Within the framework of the Second National Plan for Growth and Transformation 2015–2019, the Ethiopian government embarked on developing the agricultural industry in the country. In 2017, the government implemented, as a first phase, a project to establish integrated agricultural industrial zones in the regions of Tigray, Amhara and Oromia and the Southern Nations, funded by a number of donors, including the African Development Bank.

Co-financed by BADEA, AfDB and the government of Ethiopia, the project comes as a second phase, complementing the scheme for the construction of integrated agricultural industrial zones. It aims to improve production and productivity in areas adjacent to these industrial zones by 15 per cent, with the purpose of providing sufficient agricultural crops to enhance the exploitation of the zones, raise their productivity and increase their attractiveness to investors.

Supporting the enhancement of agricultural productivity in integrated agricultural industrial areas and youth employment, Ethiopia

| Result Indicator | Results Planned |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Irrigated Land Developed (ha) | 15,149 |
| Soil Conservation Works Undertaken (ha) | 4,000 |
| Productivity Increased (per cent) | 15 |
| SMEs Created (number) | 40,000 |
| Youth Trained (number) | 12,500 |
| Jobs Created (number) | 200,000 |
| Share of Women in Created Jobs (per cent) | 50 |
| Increase of Total Value of New Investments (US\$) | From 0 in 2020 to 1,000,000 in 2026 |

Urban markets and marketing development of the agricultural products project (Phase II), Uganda
 The Urban Markets and Marketing Development of Agricultural Products (UMMDAP) project was part of the Ugandan government's Third Development Plan (2005–2009), which focused on poverty reduction, increasing incomes and enhancing and modernizing agricultural production. It was assumed that the construction of markets would provide

Urban markets and marketing development of the agricultural products project-(Phase II), UGANDA

| Result Indicator | Results Achieved |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Auxiliary Markets Built | 2, including 917 stalls, 337 pitches, 1,323 lockups, 56 agriculture-related facilities, and 11 auxiliary spaces, including day care, offices, meeting halls, clinic, police post and restrooms |
| Active Vendors | 1,000 |
| Women Vendors | 70 per cent of total |
| Employment Opportunities Created | 600 |
| Population Benefited | 1,000,000, including vendors, farmers, clients/ consumers, transporters, helpers and labourers |



Image: BADEA

70 per cent of dryland farmers are women. BADEA puts their empowerment at the forefront of its programmes

an opportunity for smallholders and low-income farmers to increase incomes and enhance living standards.

The overall objective of UMMDAP was to enhance and develop the agricultural sector by: (i) providing an outlet for agricultural products, and (ii) facilitating opportunities for smallholders in rural areas to sell their products for better prices than those at farm gate, leading to the improvement of incomes and hence a reduction of poverty in rural areas. BADEA approved a loan amounting US\$ 10 million, comprising 87.1 per cent of project cost.

Capacity building and technical assistance

Beyond financial support, BADEA offers capacity-building programmes specifically tailored to equip women with the skills and knowledge needed to implement and scale land restoration projects. This includes training on climate-smart agriculture, water conservation and sustainable land management techniques that improve soil fertility and reduce the impact of drought.

BADEA's technical assistance programmes also facilitate access to technology and best practices that can help women farmers and community leaders adopt innovative solutions to restore degraded lands and cope with erratic weather patterns. Some examples are presented below:

Training for women and youth in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe to deliver climate-resilient livelihood development

In 2022, The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) launched, together with BADEA, a new initiative to support climate-resilient livelihood development in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe during the bilateral meeting in Geneva between the BADEA President Dr. Sidi Ould Tah and UNITAR's Executive Director Mr. Nikhil Seth. The initiative focused on women and youth from the three Sub-Saharan African countries, which currently share similar challenges in advancing sustainable and climate resilient livelihood value chains.

The initiative is part of urgent action taken by UNITAR and BADEA to support Africa's recovery from both the COVID-19 pandemic and the energy crisis that have had devastating social and economic impacts on vulnerable communities, as governments endeavour to find the most effective responses to rising unemployment, food insecurity, and economic downturn.

BADEA supports the priority needs of the governments in the region across different sectors with special focus on agriculture and boosting livelihood opportunities through SME development. The overall objective is to inspire and empower women and youth to address key social, economic and environmental challenges in their communities through climate resilient livelihood and entrepreneurship programmes.

BADEA – ACBF – CISANET calls for women's empowerment in the agriculture sector

This call came as a result of the realisation that 70 per cent of farmers are women. As part of the partnership between the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) and BADEA towards women empowerment in agriculture in Africa, the Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET) held a Policy advocacy forum in Lilongwe, Malawi.

Support to income generating projects for women in Senegal

In 2015, BADEA partnered with the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), the Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR), and the Association of West African Women to conduct a capacity building programme for rural areas of Senegal, specifically Kaollack, Louga and Fatrik, as part of its technical assistance. The programme aimed to raise the efficiency of women in both agro-product processing and marketing in the effort to increase their economic empowerment by enhancing knowledge, productivity and marketing skills.

A total of 190 women were the primary beneficiaries of the technical assistance, 120 of whom focused on the conversion of agricultural products (40 women for each region), while 70 women benefited from the establishment of a poultry and egg farm. The impact of the assistance resulted in more than 600 rural women as secondary beneficiaries, with another 1,200 families benefiting from the programme.

Collaboration with other organizations

BADEA works with development bank partners at the levels of regional and national civil society to enhance financial inclusion and increase access to lines of finance used by SMEs in key private sector projects, with a special focus on women and youth. BADEA also finances trade improvements through the import and export of strategic commodities in various sectors, especially agriculture.

BADEA often partners with other international organizations, NGOs, and local governments to ensure that its support for women-led land restoration and drought resilience initiatives is comprehensive and impactful. These collaborations can include co-financing arrangements, technical support and knowledge-sharing platforms that bring together experts from both Africa and the Arab world. For instance, BADEA has partnered with the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) to promote agro-innovation development and enhance productivity and access to technologies in agriculture, especially for youth and women.

BADEA, in collaboration with other institutions — the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO), Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), ACBF, UNITAR, International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), IsDB and CAWTHAR — contributed to a number of operations aimed at enhancing women's empowerment in different regions in Africa.

By fostering these many and diverse partnerships, BADEA ensures that women have access to a wide range of resources and expertise, enhancing the success of their individual initiatives on the ground.

In summary, BADEA's support for women-led initiatives in land restoration and drought resilience plays a pivotal role in empowering women to take leadership roles in environmental conservation, fostering sustainable land management practices and enhancing community resilience to climate challenges across Africa.

Women's Gold — leading the charge against desertification

Global Shea Alliance

Shea is a natural and renewable crop which, together with other smallholder farm produce, forms an agroforestry landscape that acts as a carbon sink. Nearly 2 billion shea trees grow naturally across parklands, dry savannas and forests along a 5,000km stretch across 21 African countries from Senegal to South Sudan. The parklands offer tree cover, enhancing water infiltration and reducing surface runoff, which helps combat desertification and slows land degradation. In West Africa alone, the shea value chain currently sequesters 1.5 million tons of CO₂ annually. But, in the Sudano Sahelian region of Africa, where shea trees once flourished, a decline in their population has had profound consequences for local communities.

Mamatou Dfaffo is a remarkable woman from Benin whose journey began as a shea collector. Her childhood memories are intertwined with the presence of the shea tree. “Shea trees have always been a part of our landscape,” she reminisces. “But now, they are disappearing, and with them, our traditions and livelihoods.”

Also known as ‘Women’s Gold’, shea is a key source of income for over 16 million African women like Mamatou. Income generated from shea represents up to 32 per cent of the annual household cash in producing communities. The economic impact across Africa from the shea trade at a local level is US\$ 237 million. Of equal significance is shea’s status



Shea — also known as ‘Women’s Gold’ — is a key source of income for over 16 million African women like Mamatou Dfaffo (pictured) from Benin

as a woman’s crop — collection and processing being traditionally carried out by women. “The income that I generate from collecting shea and transforming it into sellable kernels, or shea butter if I choose, helps provide for my family. It is money that I earn before the main harvest comes in and it helps me with household bills and paying for things like schooling for the children, medical bills and any farming supplies we may need.”

Shea is critically important to an estimated 80 million people. The crop’s value chain serves as a significant carbon sequestration engine, beneficial not only to the environment but also for economically disadvantaged populations as it provides them with income opportunities. Shea also plays a critical role in strengthening the climate resilience of thousands of communities. Yet, shea trees are on the decline with an estimated 8 million being lost every year due to human intervention such as tree felling, charcoal production, mining and pressure from the spread of human habitation. As Mamatou explained, “Shea trees used to surround our village when I was younger. Now, women shea producers have to walk miles at dawn to gather enough shea for their families. Trees are disappearing to make way for homes, commercial agriculture and fuel, drastically changing our landscape.”

Shea is a key ingredient in many traditional African dishes. In West Africa, shea butter is used at home for hair and skin care. In traditional medicine, shea butter treats wounds, burns and insect bites due to its anti-inflammatory and healing properties. Shea trees also hold cultural significance, playing a role in many community rituals and customs.

Moreover, Shea is sought and appreciated around the world for its antioxidant and deep moisturising qualities and is used extensively in the manufacture of beauty products for skin and hair, even though much of the world’s population is unaware of its ubiquitous presence. But 85 per cent of shea exported from West Africa ends up in the food industry and is used mostly by chocolate makers in many global brands. Shea is also being increasingly used in bakery products, as well as in the widening appreciation of plant based foods. This is positively impacting demand and, while 50 per cent of shea remains uncollected, forecasts predict that demand could outstrip supply if steps are not taken now.

The decline in tree populations not only affects supply but also the ecosystem and exacerbates land degradation, drought and desertification, threatening the ecological balance and also the socioeconomic fabric of communities dependent on shea trees.



Image: Global Shea Alliance

Women are pivotal in the Action for Shea Parklands (ASP) initiative and its implementation, recently leading a call to action to renew engagement and spearheading efforts in tree planting, sustainable management practices and advocating policy change

Tackling declining shea tree populations to create a sustainable and profitable industry

In 2011 shea stakeholders established the Global Shea Alliance (GSA) to build a more competitive, sustainable and profitable industry. This unique industry association currently has 849 members from 36 countries, including women's groups, brands and retailers, suppliers, NGOs, national producer associations and affiliates. The GSA works to promote industry sustainability, quality practices and standards and demand for shea in both the food and personal care sectors.

In order to ensure that the industry addresses the threats that it faces with sustainable, effective solutions, the GSA uses a Public Private Partnership (PPP) approach, where members come together to define the challenges in the shea value chain and identify the activities needed to address them. Stakeholders, including women shea producers, government institutions, national associations and other partners, work collectively to create actionable solutions. This inclusive approach ensures the broad acceptance of initiatives and accelerates their implementation. Aware of the decline in shea populations and the need to address it, the GSA launched the Action for Shea Parklands (ASP) initiative in 2020, serving as a beacon of hope, empowering women like Mamatou to take charge of their futures. This initiative works hand in hand with the PPP approach to ensure that the strategies are practical, culturally sensitive and effective in achieving sustainable outcomes.

ASP aims to restore 4 million ha of shea parklands across West African shea producing countries, through a holistic approach that includes growing 10 million trees as well as assuring parkland governance and advocacy under its three pillars of Grow, Protect, Promote. At its core, ASP promotes coalition building among a diverse set of stakeholders including women co-operatives, NGOs, private sector entities,

national governments and research institutions, to ensure sustainable land management practices.

The initiative's first component, Grow, focuses on increasing tree diversity and promoting agroforestry models that benefit smallholder farmers. This enhances biodiversity and provides economic resilience through diversified income streams. Under the Protect component, ASP empowers communities with parkland management skills, ensuring healthy tree growth and resilience to environmental challenges like bushfires. It also establishes community bylaws that encourage inclusive governance, giving women's cooperatives a voice in decision-making processes. The Promote component aims to encourage behaviour change regarding tree removal as well as advocating policy changes at local and national levels. This relies heavily on participatory measures such as local advocacy initiatives and radio shows to encourage community engagement and support for sustainable shea tree management.

The GSA has achieved a tremendous amount in the four years since ASP was launched. Regarding tree planting, the organization has collaborated with research organizations to understand the proven grafting and planting processes for shea seedlings, ensuring maximum survivability. The GSA has also established nurseries to grow shea seedlings and other indigenous trees such as tamarind, mahogany, dawadawa, acacia, baobab and kapok — essential for creating biodiverse shea parklands. Tree species are selected through consultations with local communities to ensure that they are appropriate for their environments and beneficial to livelihoods.

To date, almost 1 million seedlings have been planted through direct seed planting and nursery seedlings. In 2024 the GSA embarked on an unprecedented effort to plant 500,000 seedlings in just six weeks in Northern Ghana alone. Through capacity building programmes, over 76,000 women shea producers have been trained in sustainable land



Image: Global Shea Alliance

Shea parkland restoration resulting in sustainable harvests

management, equipping them with the skills to protect and regenerate their natural resources. Across six countries the GSA has engaged 200 communities and provided extensive training to thousands of women shea producers and their communities, focusing on the vital aspects of parkland management with the aim of protecting this vital resource. These sessions cover various topics including agroforestry practices, soil and water conservation, agro-silvopastoral land use — which integrates trees, livestock and crops on the same land — and bushfire control.

Communities are embracing sustainable practices, exemplified by initiatives such as the Gonja Kingdom's shea tree cutting ban in Ghana, affecting more than 300,000 people

Women at the helm of change

Women are pivotal in ASP's implementation, recently leading a call to action to renew engagement and spearheading efforts in tree planting, sustainable management practices and advocating policy change. They identify the best trees for grafting, undergo grafting training and challenge gender norms by taking on significant tasks such as digging holes for tree planting. Women are also engaged in managing the community nurseries to carry out the daily care and nurturing of the seedlings, both in the nursery and after planting.

Women like Mamatou Djaffo, who began processing shea more than 40 years ago, are pivotal in raising awareness around the world to promote ASP.

Reflecting on the ASP initiative to grow, protect and promote, Mamatou comments: "Seeing how the parklands

have changed over the years since I was a child, it is not an option for me to do nothing about the decline that affects our families and communities, both in terms of income opportunities and the impact of climate change. Whenever and wherever I can, I take part in and advocate the planting of trees to replace those we have lost. I see changes that need to be made to local bylaws and I lobby the government to change them. As President of the Global Shea Alliance, I have represented the industry and shea processors by participating in key global events such as UNCCD COP 15 in Côte d'Ivoire and European and International Shea Industry conferences in Paris and across West Africa to lead the delivery of GSA's message to raise support for shea parkland restoration and take the opportunity to engage with policymakers, industry leaders and environmental advocates, sparking discussions and partnerships to drive meaningful change."

Given the lack of educational opportunities for rural women, together with restrictive social norms, demanding change individually would be challenging for many women. One key reason that women collectors feel empowered to lead ASP is the cooperative framework itself, which unites individual producers into a collective unit, providing them with power, agency and a voice. The cooperatives identify key management positions, are legally registered and, through training programmes provided by the GSA, improve their business acumen as well as the quality of the shea they produce. The cooperatives facilitate bulk selling of quality kernels, which improves market access and pricing power. Cooperatives also provide a platform for women to support

each other, share experiences and amplify their voices, both locally and internationally. Mamatou notes: “In Benin I have organized 70,000 women into one umbrella organization, giving us a powerful voice to be heard by ministers and other leading organizations. We are no longer alone, we are united.” This collective approach not only enhances women’s economic prospects but also empowers them to become influential leaders and advocates for their communities. This empowerment strengthens local economies and also enhances women’s social status and leadership within those communities, not just their cooperatives.

Making an impact

Efforts since 2020 have resulted in significant local commitment to sustainability. With shea and native trees being planted across West Africa and with more than 17,000 ha of land under restoration, communities are embracing sustainable practices.

Economically, ASP has catalysed the transition of women shea producers into sustainable micro enterprises, boosting



Image: Global Shea Alliance

In 2020 the GSA launched the Action for Shea Parklands initiative, empowering women to take charge of their futures



Image: Global Shea Alliance



Image: Global Shea Alliance

Top: a handful of fruits harvested from a shea tree. Above: fat extracted from the nut becomes shea butter

incomes and promoting entrepreneurship. Beyond economic gains, the initiative celebrates cultural preservation, promoting new initiatives like shea oil production for urban markets.

As successful businesswomen, the women shea producers now wield influence in both their households and communities. They are gaining ownership of land, actively participating in decision-making on land usage through local bylaws and collectively advocating for their rights and interests. This transformation represents significant empowerment, elevating their socioeconomic status within their communities.

Beyond the Action for Shea Parklands initiative

Reflecting on ASP’s successes, the journey ahead calls for greater support and participation. Women’s leadership and decision-making power must be amplified to tackle desertification, land degradation and drought effectively. By investing in women’s empowerment and sustainable land management, we not only safeguard ecosystems but secure vibrant futures for generations to come.

ASP is testament to the transformative power of women-led initiatives in combating environmental challenges. It embodies the spirit of collaboration and resilience essential for achieving United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 15, Life on Land. Through ASP, women shea producers highlight the impacts of desertification, land degradation and drought. By highlighting successful examples of their contributions to sustainable land management, it is evident how women are restoring shea parklands and mitigating climate risks. This serves as a call to action for stronger female leadership and decision-making power on issues that directly affect women, promoting inclusive governance and upholding their rights as stewards of their environment.

As we continue on this journey, the shea parklands and the communities that depend on them need broader development and support from the private sector. Let us heed Mamatou’s call: “Our trees are our heritage and our future. Let’s protect them: for us, for our children and for the world!”

SECURING LAND RIGHTS FOR WOMEN

The women's land rights initiative — bridging the Rio Conventions to advance women's land rights

Laura Rahmeier, Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH and Frederike Klümper, TMG Research gGmbH

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is still the only one of the three Rio Conventions to precisely prioritise the land tenure rights of women as key to its goals. The UNCCD structurally recognizes that empowering women in their role as land stewards is crucial to fostering the resilient communities needed to combat land degradation and promote sustainable development. It is high time that the UNCCD's commitment to women's land rights is systematically mirrored in its sister conventions, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The UNCCD land tenure decisions of 2019 and 2022 were pivotal in emphasizing the importance of land rights, expressly including those of women, as central to climate protection. The so-called decisions 26/COP.14 and 22/COP.15 ensure that the UNCCD's pursuit of land degradation neutrality upholds legitimate tenure rights, in line with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT), and are complemented by the UNCCD's Gender Action Plan to strengthen, as a core priority, women's land rights and access to resources.

Land is the common thread running through the Rio Conventions. All three rely on their commitments to land-based measures to achieve their goals, whether through restoring degraded land, enhancing carbon dioxide removal through nature-based solutions, or accelerating biodiversity conservation. Indeed, these land-based commitments often overlap and target the same finite land resources. For example, global commitments to set aside approximately one billion ha of land for carbon dioxide removal highlights the immense pressure on land to deliver results, with around 60 per cent of this designated area needing to undergo significant land use change, mainly to forests. This designated land is often already managed by local communities and indigenous peoples who depend on it for their livelihoods.

But tenure rights and the realities of those who work the land are often overlooked in global commitments and national plans formulated under the Rio Conventions. The uncoordinated reliance to achieve the targets of the conventions on limited land resources calls for systematic safeguards for recognizing and protecting land rights, especially of land stewards whose land rights are seldom recognized or protected but who nevertheless advance the conventions' goals on the ground.

The recognition of land rights, particularly those of women, is key to the success of all three Rio Conventions, not just the UNCCD. As Olivier Rukundo, of the UNCBD Secretariat, says: "Everything we do relies on land. You don't have to call something 'land' to work on it. When we talk about land in the context of the UNCBD, we will find that most of the 23 targets are linked to land and land rights. However, we need to navigate the complexity and ambiguity to bring land issues into the discussions in all three conventions, because if we don't, there will be consequences for local communities already using the land, and then we will have failed."

Bringing local, national and international actors together to identify practical crossover points

The need to recognize women's land rights across the Rio Conventions led TMG Research and the Robert Bosch Stiftung to launch the Women's Land Rights Initiative (WLRI) in 2023, co-hosted by the secretariats of the UNCCD, UNCBD and UNFCCC. The WLRI is a network of partners dedicated to leveraging entry points for anchoring women's land rights in the three conventions. Rather than focusing solely on years of work to replicate the landmark UNCCD Land Tenure Decision within the UNCBD and UNFCCC through a high-level campaign, the network set out to embed women's land rights within their existing agendas, processes and structures in order to creatively promote synergies and coherence between the conventions much more quickly and effectively. In the past year and a half alone, a surprising number of promising entry points have been identified for the network to tackle.

Since starting its work, the initiative has, for example, encouraged the women and gender caucuses of the three conventions — platforms that convene civil society organizations to advocate gender equality within the convention's policy frameworks — to increase coordination, share learning and align messages to better anchor land rights through the gender agendas of the UNFCCC and UNCBD. In particular, the UNCBD women's caucus has, since the first workshop in 2023, expressly centred women's land rights in their advocacy agenda. The initiative has also pointed out the need to align targets for women's land rights across the national implementation plans developed by the respective ministries, in order to facilitate harmonised implementation, monitoring and reporting. National-level processes of policy formulation and implementation bear huge potential for coherence on women's



Image: WLRI Initiative 2024, © Manuel Fraendorf

Participants challenging with key questions: How can we build momentum and elevate the conversation on women's land rights?

land rights; the way that Madagascar has already restructured its approach to the Rio Conventions to enact inclusive consultations for national plan development and develop joint policy initiatives can be of inspiration for others and in aid of the domains of women's rights and land tenure.

By working together to address the combination of multi-lateral funding mechanisms, bilateral aid and private sector investment that finances the Rio Conventions, governments and civil society groups can ensure the availability of dedicated funding for women's land rights within implementation approaches. These and many other possible entry points can help build a unifying foundation for women's land rights across the Rio Convention's frameworks, ensuring that Convention objectives reinforce each other rather than competing at the expense of women's rights to the land they tend.

Identifying and operationalizing opportunities to advance women's land rights requires collaboration between many different actors — each of particular strengths and mandates across the Convention spaces — within the WLRI. For example, national focal points — the institutions within a country responsible for coordinating the implementation of the conventions at the national level — are well placed to identify strategic national political windows of opportunity. One such proposal was made by Kenya's national focal point to UNCBD, who pledged to coordinate with her colleagues on the coherence for women's land rights in the development

of the UNCBD's upcoming national plans (NBSAPs). On the other hand, international NGOs and technical support organizations have structures in place to follow international decision-making processes and share insights, dedicate coordination capacity to networking spaces and offer support in the development of overarching communications messages. Also, the convention secretariats play a catalytic role in the WLRI by deciphering complex convention processes, clarifying knowledge gaps and spotting new opportunities.

But, just as important in this ecosystem are regionally rooted civil society organizations (CSOs) because of their links to both local communities and national politics. This puts them in an ideal position to lead advocacy efforts that ensure coherence between stated policy goals, implementation and community needs. Local and national CSOs bridge the gap between global commitments, national plans and local realities, helping to translate climate and land-related targets into practical, people-centred solutions.

Meanwhile, grassroots organizations need to serve as the compass for decision-making. Their deep engagement with communities most affected by land tenure issues and climate protection policies ensures that the solutions proposed by conventions, governments and the WLRI are informed by lived experience. By anchoring global policies in the needs and rights of local land users, many of them women, grassroots groups can lead the way to more equitable outcomes.



Image: WLRI 2024, © Manuel Fraendorf

All perspectives required to develop joint actions forward: from youth representatives, national focal points and UN organizations

Empowering grassroots women's organizations to help make national and international policy

The WLRI has already brought together more than 60 actors from different parts of the world and across the UNCCD, UNCBD and UNFCCC to develop a common strategy. The first workshop in 2023 marked the beginning of a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to promoting women's land rights within the framework of the Rio Conventions. It showed that the roles of these actors are not, and do not have to be, identical. Each brings unique strengths and levels of outreach, and the key is to use their complementarity to ensure that all voices, especially those of grassroots women, are heard.

In the end, it is grassroots women who are directly involved with the land for their livelihoods and food security, while often excluded from the decision-making processes that consider changes to land policies or environmental measures. As a result, women's grassroots organizations have to do much of the work to secure land rights for women. A key determinant of success of the WLRI is the ability of the initiative to ground the agendas and actions of all actors involved in grassroots perspectives and to clearly articulate a dedicated role for the grassroots organizations onboard.

As Violet Shivutse, the founder of the Kenyan grassroots women's organization, Shibuye Community Health Workers, and participant to the WLRI, says: "You need to make the measures realistic. It is not enough to discuss

local implementation. You need to understand the role of the community. Who is experiencing the real scenario? Our role (of grassroots) is not institutionalized, neither as rapporteurs nor as conveners, our participation is not institutionalized. It's not just about bringing people to international events. We need a more formal way to be in an equal position to inform and make decisions."

The role of grassroots organizations within the WLRI remains a work in progress. Ideally, the current co-hosts would like for a grassroots organization to formally co-host and co-design an initiative such as the WLRI that stands to affect them, and to co-create initiative formats that reflect realities on the ground. There is a need to find methods for grassroots organizations to effectively act as sounding boards, ensuring that advocacy strategies and messaging aimed at national and global decision-makers reflect grassroots needs and demands. At the same time, however, the initiative itself must carefully respond to the challenging role and various knowledge levels of the whole network of partners. As complexities of each can also be overwhelming, the initiative needs to demonstrate responsibility to facilitate learning, translation and contextualisation of global discourses and policies of the three Conventions. Continuous learning platforms, such as through webinars organized to introduce the Conventions, in addition to exchanges after each of the 2024 COPs, provide such spaces where mutual learning can occur across the network and across conventions.

The way forward is to refine these ideas and processes and to address practical challenges such as ensuring equitable representation, managing resource limitations and bridging the gap between the local and international spheres. The goal is a feedback loop in which grassroots organizations are central to the initiative’s strategic direction and its ground-level impact.

Ultimately, the WLRI must adopt a decentralized approach that relies on local, national and international partners working together to identify and leverage opportunities large and small. These include low-hanging fruit, such as engaging with women’s and gender caucuses during the three annual Conferences of the Parties (COPs) to the UNCCD, UNCBD and UNFCCC at the end of 2024 or convening funders on the question of financing for women’s land rights. Tougher challenges, such as the recognition of women’s land rights within UNFCCC agendas on agriculture or structural changes in how public funding flows, will require further groundwork.

The initiative is committed to co-creating a flexible and open space in which actors can think, share ideas, strategize and in which they can take realistic steps or dream big.

As current co-hosts, TMG Research, the Robert Bosch Stiftung and the three secretariats of the Rio Conventions are committed to driving this initiative forward strategically and designing practical measures with all actors involved. We invite others to join the WLRI in anchoring women’s land rights within the three Conventions as an enabling environment for the realisation of their objectives.



Participants brainstorming on more and better funding for women’s land rights



A map of possible entry-points identified for anchoring women’s land rights within the conventions

Securing women's land rights — towards more equitable rural realities

Oliver Puginier, Andrea Sidibé Reikat, Christian Andriamanantseheno, Jelle Roeling, Katharina Busch, GIZ

For a large part of the world's population, livelihoods depend directly on access to land and its secure long-term use. Between 713 and 757 million people have faced hunger in 2023, an increase compared to 2019.¹ Food insecurity is most prevalent in rural areas, affecting women disproportionately.² Growing inequality is an additional exacerbating factor of global hunger.³

As land is an essential factor for 90 per cent of the global food production, insecure tenure puts people at the risk of being evicted, displaced or losing access to the land or resources they depend on. This, in turn, can threaten social cohesion of nations as well as entire regions.⁴ In more than half of all countries, laws and customs hinder women's ownership or access to land, concerning both traditional and formalized tenure.⁵ Although as many women as men work in agriculture, women hold less than 15 per cent of land ownership worldwide.⁶ In 90 countries, traditional land administration systems favour their legal exclusion from access to land, while in 35 countries, neither daughters nor widows can claim their rights in the same way as male relatives.⁷

Reach, Benefit, Empower — gender approach of the Global Programme Responsible Land Policy

As a response to this situation and to support the feminist development policy of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)⁸, the GIZ Global Programme on Responsible Land Policy (GPRLP, Promotion d'une Politique Foncière Responsable, or ProPFR in French) aims to improve access to land, especially for women and marginalised groups in target countries. Gender equality is promoted as both a fundamental human right as well as an essential approach to improve women's access to land⁹. After an initial assessment of where the programme stands, a Gender Roadmap based on the principle of Reach, Benefit, Empower was developed that took stock of gender related aspects, achievements and shortcomings. This was subsequently enhanced by country specific assessments and recommendations summarized in Gender Action Plans. Reaching women is not sufficient, hence approaches are developed that benefit women and even empower them.

Documented land rights are an important step, accompanied by measures that allow women to benefit from their land, while empowerment requires additional measures that build capacities, foster and teach skills as well as

promote self-confidence for women to capitalise on land rights. Progress is jointly assessed with actors from government, civil society and academia. While there is no uniform approach and the gender action plans need to account for the specific barriers to equal land access for women, the following country examples highlight success factors.

Examples from Madagascar, Uganda and Burkina Faso *Madagascar: reforestation and community empowerment in Diana region*

Madagascar is committed to rehabilitating 4 million ha of forest landscape by 2030, as forests are generally poorly managed nor protected. Overall, 70 per cent of the land is used for low-yield, extensive, self-subsistence agro-pastoral purposes, often under unclear and complex land tenure conditions. Even in cases where forest management has been transferred to local user groups, the lack of tenure security often leads to land conflict and hinders the sustainable management of forest resources. This is vital for storing carbon to mitigate the harmful effects of climate change.

Through individual village reforestation initiatives, villagers have been trained in nursery management and independent seedling production. Each registered farmer voluntarily takes responsibility for planting seedlings in relation to the targeted areas, while the GIZ-supported project provides legal security for the land developed through a multi-disciplinary team led by an agent from the State Land Department. Reforestation is combined with land ownership for personal empowerment, as securing individual land rights and community user rights is key to forest resource management. In the Diana region of northern Madagascar, reforestation efforts have helped to restore forest landscapes, which works only if local communities are involved in resource management and derive tangible benefits thereof.

Julia Marie Zafy Florence is one such dedicated participant in this type of restoration. In addition to other household chores, collecting wood for cooking the family meal was part of her daily routine. In order to improve her living conditions, on her own initiative, Zafy Florence was able to seize the opportunity to create a forest estate. Thanks to the support of the Protection and Sustainable Exploitation of Natural Resources Programme (PAGE), she was able to acquire a 4.2 ha plot of land on which she planted trees. In addition, with support by GPRLP, she was able to obtain a legal title deed. The trees she planted have now reached maturity and she transforms them



Image: Angelika Jakob

Women in Madagascar with land titles



Image: Giz

Julia Marie Zafy Florence from Diana region, Madagascar, showing her title deed

into charcoal using an efficient carbonisation technique that is low in CO₂ emissions. Most of the charcoal is sold in towns, where around 80 per cent of the urban population depends on it, while gas remains a fuel beyond household purchasing power. Florence Zafy's income has now increased and, to run her micro-enterprise, she can apply for bank loans thanks to the legal title deed to her land. By taking out a loan, she also intends to invest in the purchase of a lorry to transport the products of her reforestation efforts. Life for her family has improved considerably, as she can now send her children to school and provide them with food on a daily basis.

A total of 3,000 reforested plots covering 4,320 ha have thus been secured, belonging to 3,130 beneficiaries, 33 per cent of whom are women. However, the status of the land on 8,031 plots covering a total area of 7,800 ha is currently being assessed for subsequent titling. This represents a potential of 36,000 tons of sustainably produced charcoal, or around 36 per cent of the needs of urban households. In addition, 4,800 ha of natural forest have been preserved, with beneficial effects on the climate.

Julia Marie Zafy Florence observes: "Now that I have a legal title deed, I can be sure that the land and the plantations on it really belong to me."

Uganda: the journey of a group of women farmers to secure land rights

Women in Uganda face severe challenges in securing land rights due to cultural norms and legal barriers. Traditionally, land is inherited through and by the male family lineage, excluding women from inheritance and legally recognized ownership. This, in turn, impacts their economic stability as, without land, women struggle to invest, access credit or farm effectively, creating a state of self-perpetuating poverty.

Beyond individual titling, the GIZ Responsible Land Policy in Uganda (RELAPU) together with the Dutch NGO, ZOA, supported the formation of farmers' groups, to benefit from pooling the required resources and watching out for each other. The Loketa Farmers Group, a group of female refugees, faced significant challenges when they began farming for commercial purposes. Female refugees struggle in a unique manner, fighting for equal opportunities both due to their gender and their citizenship status. At first, the group relied only on verbal agreements for renting land, which led to numerous issues. The chairperson of the Loketa Farmers Group recalled: "(...) crop theft was rampant, and no one was held accountable, deepening the mistrust between [us] farmers and the local community". After one of the

awareness-raising events of the project, the group of women farmers decided to shift from verbal to written tenancy agreements. This not only reduced the potential for disputes but also brought about a significant improvement in the livelihoods of both refugees and host communities. The clarity and security provided by written agreements allowed for more stable and predictable farming activities, fostering a sense of trust and cooperation between all parties involved, showing the strength of group action. Solidarity between women was supported and cultivated through this joint initiative, leading as an example case of shared land use rights for women in rural communities.

Addressing cultural complexities, such as the often deeply ingrained gender disparities, requires a delicate and thoughtful approach that aims to include both women and men. Throughout the implementation, a total of 10,216 participants were reached, including 5,804 male and 2,714 female nationals as well as 1,015 male and 683 female refugees, all benefiting from awareness-raising events. As a result, from 100 arising conflicts, 82 could be resolved in the process of land mapping. Overall, 1,514 Certificates of Customary Ownership (COO) were issued, which give assurance to the beneficiaries that their land-rights are secured for generations to come.



The Loketa Farmers Group, comprising female refugees, supported by the GIZ Responsible Land Policy in Uganda



Aminata Ouedraogo in front of her home, Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso: increasing resilience for vulnerable Internally Displaced Persons

Due to the ongoing security crisis in Burkina Faso, thousands of people have been forced to flee their homes, becoming Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). According to the latest estimates in March 2023, the number of IDPs in the country stood at 2,062,534, an alarming figure that underlines the scale of the humanitarian crisis. In this context, women are among the most vulnerable. Faced with this crisis, many IDPs find themselves in precarious conditions, with no access to land to meet their basic needs. In order to improve livelihoods of vulnerable groups through access to land, ProPFR has provided crucial support to IDPs by facilitating access to land loans in accordance with the land law of 2009, which regulates land tenure in rural areas and its implementing decrees. Although the country has a legal framework for regulating procedures for registering and securing plots of land, the agencies provided for by the law often do not exist or are not operational, particularly at communal and village level. There is thus a strong need to install decentralized land administrations, while at the same time working to improve the conditions of various vulnerable groups such as women, the youth, IDPs and migrants.

To this end, ProPFR has helped IDPs benefit from land loans in order to farm in newly settled areas. The IDP approach is implemented in various stages and consists of a two-fold approach to build trust between landowners and displaced persons, whereby landowners obtain full title deeds and, in exchange, lend plots to IDPs. The formalization of land loans is essential to protect IDPs from disagreement with the landowners, such as reclaiming their land before the end of the loan period. At the same time, the landowners do not run the risk of losing their land either, as they have

obtained a secure title deed with the support of the project and partner communes. Through its IDP Approach, ProPFR has succeeded in working with the customary authorities, lineages and landowners to obtain land loans for IDPs. Thanks to this initiative, IDPs are able to cultivate the land, produce their own resources and regain a degree of economic autonomy, while preserving their dignity and wellbeing.

By working with customary and religious authorities, local communities and administrative authorities, a glimmer of hope is offered to IDPs, helping them to overcome the challenges they face and rebuild a more stable future through secure access to land. As a result of the various activities in the commune of Kourinion (in the Hauts-Bassins region), 105 ha of land have been leased to 27 IDPs, including 4 women. Likewise, in the commune of Boni (Hauts-Bassins region), 15 ha were leased to 14 IDPs, including 7 women.

40-year-old beneficiary of a land loan, Aminata Ouedraogo, testifies: “Originally from Bourzanga in Burkina Faso, I fled to Badara Pindié because of the insecurity. We lost all our possessions and, at first, it was difficult to farm without land. I now have access to a plot of land to feed my family.”

The gender approach of the various implementing country modules of GPRLP highlights the intersectionality of challenges that women face when trying to secure land rights and seeks to reach the empowerment stage in all countries. The urgency to overcome these barriers is in line with the orientation stated in the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT). Achieving gender equity in land tenure is also an important prerequisite towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, hence the above examples are suitable elements to illustrate that land rights matter.

Endupoto! Securing pastoralist women's land rights through collective land use planning and customary occupancy certificates in Tanzania

Fiona Flintan, International Livestock Research Institute

Land use conflicts between Tanzanian farmers and pastoralists have grown in intensity over the last decade as the two groups are pushed closer together, grazing lands are converted to crop farming or urban and industrial development and livestock mobility routes are blocked. Although the undertaking of village land use planning has progressed significantly in the last decade, the allocation of grazing lands is often given low priority and there is a failure to ensure that grazing shared by pastoralists across administrative village boundaries are kept joined up. This is creating a critical situation for all pastoralists who are finding that they really have no place to go. For pastoralist women, it is making it very difficult to provide a stable and productive family and home environment.



Participatory land use planning gives back 'the stick' to pastoralist men and women, giving them greater control over their lands and related decision-making processes

Enabling policy and legislation while recognizing remaining challenges for marginalized pastoralists

The Village Land Act No. 5 of 1999 states that all villages in Tanzania must produce a village land use plan. As of April 2024 only 3,681 of Tanzania's 12,318 villages have done so. This process is meant to be participatory including all land users in the village, led by the elected village council and village land use management (VLUM) team and the plan endorsed by the village assembly i.e. all village members. However, pastoralists are often not included because they have not registered in the village, they may be away at distant pastures, they may not know about a meeting or its importance, and/or they may be purposefully excluded by farming-dominated village leaders. This means that there is less demand for grazing land allocations being made and, even if there are pastoralists present, their demands are often over-ridden by the stronger (in numbers and voice) farming community. As a result, insufficient grazing lands are allocated for the number of livestock in a village, meaning that pastoralists must find what they can, which includes encroaching on cropping lands — often leading to conflicts with farmers — or the necessity to move out of the village.

Traditionally, pastoralist women have not been involved in community-level decision-making processes, so have been even more marginalized. To overcome their marginalization, some well-meaning NGOs have been working outside of traditional customary institutions and organizing for women to be issued with individual land holding titles for a plot of land to grow vegetables or crops. Although this may benefit women in the short-term, it can further disrupt pastoral land use systems, encouraging privatisation of what had otherwise been collective resources, and weakening customary institutions leading to a longer-term vulnerability.

Joint village land use planning and accessing land through collective certificates of customary rights of occupancy

In the mid-2000s the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) started working with local pastoralist communities in Kiteto District Manyara region, along with the National Land Use Planning Commission (NLUPC), the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries (MOLF) and local CSOs Kinnapa Development Association and the Tanzania Natural Resource Forum. This was supported by an IFAD-funded



Women's rights leadership forums meeting in Tanzania

project working through the International Land Coalition, and more recently by the CGIAR Research Initiative on Livestock and Climate. A review of the current policy and legislation was undertaken to seek solutions for the above challenges, and it was found that, in Section 33 of the Land Use Planning Act, 2007, a provision states that a village planning authority: “in respect of resources shared with other villages, prepare jointly with other villages planning authorities a village resource management sector plan.”

Following on from this advice the partners worked together to develop and pilot joint village land use planning for pastoral areas, which encourages communities sharing a grazing land and important water points to plan their village land use together and ensure that the grazing land allocated is not only sufficient for livestock populations but also remains contiguous and accessible to all the villages involved. Additionally, a joint village land use agreement is established across the villages that states, among other considerations, that the use of the grazing land and its boundaries cannot be changed without the consent of all.

Once the agreement is in place then all livestock owners in the village establish a livestock keepers' association issued with collective Certificates of Customary Rights of Occupancy (CCRO) to protect their access and use rights for perpetuity. The land is demarcated and marked with concrete posts and signboards. With the development of a grazing land

management plan the lands can be listed on the MOLF registry for grazing lands, adding another layer of protection. This collective commitment is enshrined in the names given to the shared grazing lands. The first, OLENGAPA, is derived from the names of the four villages — Olkitikiti, Lerug, Engongwangere and Ngapapa — which covers more than 30,000 ha of land. A second area, ALOLLE, is derived from the four villages where 95,000 ha of shared grazing land had been protected.

To date the partners have supported six clusters of villages, 21 villages in all, to undertake joint village land use planning, two of which have been issued with the CCROs, and with planning underway in another two clusters. Once completed, these secure around 120,000 ha of grazing land.

Long-term benefits for pastoralist women

Through this approach, the pastoralist or livestock keepers' group has gained long-term security from multiple sources including through the village land use planning process and the joint village land use agreement, the issuing of the group CCROs, demarcating and marking the grazing land, and through registration with the MOLF. This has incentivized pastoralists to implement a collective participatory rangeland management system, improving the productivity of the pastures and restoring lands where needed, for instance removal of bush and reseeded. This visible use and improved management together add a final layer of protection.



Women now have the confidence to stand up in community meetings and express their needs and opinions

Pastoralist women and men can now enjoy this long-term and multi-layered land and resource tenure security. With the group itself strengthened, women benefit as members of the group. The supported processes not only resulted in this tenure security but also offered an opportunity to address gender imbalances traditionally found in pastoralist societies. From the outset, the partners engaged in dialogue and encouraged community leaders to support an increase in women's participation in community-level decision-making. This was somewhat easier given that new land use planning committees and rangeland management institutions (RMIs) were being set up, rather than attempting to change existing ones. The main argument for their inclusion was that women are users and knowledge holders of the grazing lands and natural resources, and thus need to be active participants in their management and decisions related to it. In most circumstances women's inclusion was accepted if not encouraged by community leaders, and more than 30 per cent of the RMIs were made up of women, with several in leadership positions.

At the same time, the capacity of women to participate and take up leadership roles was built through mentoring, dialogue and women's rights and leadership forums. These

forums comprise around 40 women members and two male elders in each cluster of villages. Involving these male customary leaders is crucial as they hold significant sway in decision-making and their participation legitimizes discussions, decisions and activities. It is also an opportunity to influence them — transforming the perceptions of customary leaders can make them valuable advocates for women's rights. The forums have seen income-generation spin-offs with some women forming a beading group making necklaces and other items. And at the end of 2023, the forums took a central role in a 600-strong pastoralist women's demonstration¹ protesting to the Kiteto District Council at the encroachment of their grazing lands by crop farmers.

Next steps

The joint village land use planning approach has been taken up by the National Land Use Planning Commission and is currently being incorporated into the new edition of the national guidelines on village land use planning. It is vital that the approach is rolled out to more clusters of villages that still have intact grazing lands, and before these are swallowed up by other land uses.

“Now we have secured our land and women are part of the decision-making process”

Naitapuaki Kilel Saniniu is a Maasai woman from Loolera village, part of the ALOLLE joint village land use planning cluster in Kiteto district, Manyara region. She is a member of the ALOLLE women’s rights and leadership forum and sees the grazing lands as critical for her family and the whole community, ensuring that livestock are healthy and productive. Additionally: “These lands are a symbol of our heritage and used for communal gatherings and cultural ceremonies. For my family, they provide both economic and social benefits, ensuring our livestock can thrive year-round.”

Having participated in the planning process, not least ensuring that women’s voices were heard, she appreciates the land security it has brought. She described how land conflicts between pastoralists and other land users, especially farmers, has reduced as clear boundaries have been established. She added that it has also enhanced collaboration among villages, ensuring equitable access to grazing areas and water points, and empowered women and marginalized groups, giving them a voice in land-related issues and ensuring their land rights are protected.

The issuing of their Certificate of Customary Rights of Occupancy has also been important, improving the community’s sense of security and ownership of the land, stability and peace. “Before the CCROs, our grazing lands were constantly threatened, and women had no say in decisions. Now, we have secured our land, and women are part of the decision-making process,” she explains. She describes how the certificates make it clear that the grazing lands are the community’s responsibility, and that they have to be managed wisely. There has now been a noticeable shift towards more sustainable grazing practices, reducing overgrazing and ensuring that the lands remain productive.

She highlights how the group CCROs have empowered women. “We have started income-generating activities like beading, and the forum has given us confidence. Last year, we led a protest against land encroachment, and the district council listened.” She concludes: “The CCROs have brought security to our community, and we’re working to protect the land for future generations.” For the future she would like to see more leadership opportunities for women and access to resources and education. There is also a need for better infrastructure for livestock and products such as milk.



Naitapuaki Kilel Saniniu is a Maasai woman from Loolera village and a member of the ALOLLE women’s rights and leadership forum



Community members proudly show off their recently purchased Boran bulls

For the pastoralists of Kiteto district where joint village land use planning has been carried out, they are investing in improving the productivity of their livestock and grazing lands including restoration where necessary. The recent purchase of two Boran bulls and the turn-out of dozens of community members to clear bushland is testimony to this. Pastoralist women are keen to benefit from their tenure security by increasing their opportunities to earn an independent income from beading, trading or by other means. The communities appreciate the tenure security that they experience and watch sadly as neighbouring villages have lost much of their grazing lands and/or are seeing significant encroachment.

When women gain access to and control over land, they gain the power to shape their communities and secure their futures. Empowering women with land rights is not just about justice, it’s about unlocking their potential in economic empowerment and sustainable management of natural resources.

Ensuring land justice in climate action — the role of women’s land rights and reporting tools under the UNCCD

Frederike Klümper and Ilse Pelkmans, TMG Research gGmbH

Land rights are indispensable to tackling both the climate crisis and inequality. They create the necessary incentives for communities to invest in adaptation strategies such as sustainable agriculture or watershed management. Moreover, securing women’s land rights advances gender equity as well as increasing household resilience. This spells rewards for entire communities. However, climate action and global land restoration initiatives tend to prioritise technical measures and solutions that neglect the rights of rural communities, especially those with customary or informal land rights.

An immense amount of land is required to achieve climate targets

Climate action requires land — an immense amount of land. Close to 1 billion ha of land have been committed to restoration targets under the three Rio Conventions (UNFCCC, UNFCCC, and UNCCD)¹. This includes actions such as restoration of degraded land, reforestation and afforestation, sustainable land management practices, combatting soil erosion, establishing conservation areas, preventing desertification, carbon sequestration and water management practices. But, as countries step up their efforts to achieve these targets, there is a growing risk that local communities, especially women, will lose control of the land they have stewarded for generations. In response to these threats, mechanisms such as reporting tools, accountability structures and broader community participation are emerging as vital mechanisms to ensure that land-based climate action does not come at the expense of the land rights and livelihoods of women and their communities.

The tenure rights and livelihoods of vulnerable people living on this land are at risk. The women’s land rights reporting tool helps protect land rights

At the heart of these global environmental commitments is a fundamental issue — land justice. Land justice refers to the fair distribution, governance and access to land and ensures that the rights of all, especially vulnerable groups, are protected. When land is hastily allocated for climate purposes, there is a real risk of land conflicts, displacement and even human rights violations, especially for women. These risks emphasize the need for robust mechanisms that can protect land rights and prevent exploitation.

To address these risks, the women’s land rights reporting tool was developed to monitor and report on land rights violations and gender-based violence in land governance. The tool contributes to increased accountability in land use decisions and helps protect women’s tenure rights in the face of growing demand for land for climate action.

Climate actions can be effective and sustainable only when they account for tenure rights and livelihoods of local communities

Land tenure refers to the formal or informal and customary rights of individuals or communities to own, access and use land. Secure land tenure is vital for achieving environmental targets because it provides individuals, communities and governments with the stability and legal assurance necessary to make long-term investments in land restoration, conservation and sustainable use. For the land-based goals of the three Conventions to be realized and sustained, their impacts on tenure rights and livelihoods of local communities must be acknowledged and addressed.

The effectiveness of these global commitments is ultimately determined by how well they account for the lived experiences of communities residing on the land designated for climate action. Climate action must actively involve local communities in shaping locally adapted solutions and ensuring that communities share in the benefits of land-based measures. The women’s land rights reporting tool helps ensure that women’s tenure rights are respected as part of broader climate action.

Local communities in general, and women in particular, are stewards of land and therefore need to be in the driver’s seat of climate action

Women play a particularly important role in land management, as they make up 43 per cent of the agricultural workforce in developing countries². But despite their vital role as land stewards that nourish communities and ecosystems, women are often not empowered and are therefore not in the driver’s seat of climate action. By empowering women and giving them a voice through reporting mechanisms such as the women’s land rights reporting tool, climate action becomes more inclusive and effective. Women’s knowledge and leadership are indispensable for shaping locally adapted solutions and ensuring that land-based climate measures are sustainable.



Image: TMG Research, gGmbH

Local farmer, Linet Ronde, reported a land rights violation through Haki Ardhi, which prevented her from being evicted

Instead of empowering women, climate action risks driving women off their land, contributing to loss of land and livelihood and an increase in gender-based violence

Climate action increases the risk that women are being excluded from decision-making and control over the land they depend on. Tenure security of women is often challenged due to weak implementation of legal frameworks, discriminatory social norms (such as patriarchal inheritance practices), lack of awareness regarding tenure rights and lack of formal land titles. Despite women's vital role in food production, they are less likely than men to own and control land. Worldwide, less than thirteen per cent of agricultural landholders are women³. The rush for land leads to increased land conflicts, posing another threat to women of losing access to and control over land and livelihoods, leading to exploitation, displacements and evictions. In many land conflicts, women even experience gender-based violence, as men often try to keep or gain control of land and its resources through intimidation or even physical forms of violence.

The UNCCD Land Tenure Decision is an important step forward in protecting women's tenure rights in climate action, but more is needed

Through COP14 Decision 26, UNCCD championed the mainstreaming of land rights. This decision underscores the importance of secure land tenure for achieving environmental commitments. It draws on the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT) which explicitly refers to a state's obligations to respect and protect legitimate tenure rights in mitigation and adaptation policies, as well as the rights of vulnerable communities to consultation and participation. The UNCCD land tenure decision was a landmark in highlighting the central importance of land rights in the global sustainability agenda. Pathway 3 and 4 of the Technical Guide on the Integration of the VGGT into the Implementation of the UNCCD and Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) also supports policy and decision-makers and relevant stakeholders in shaping tailor-made responses to secure women's tenure



Image: TMG Research gGmbH

Jemimah Oronga from Kakamega County, Western Kenya, reported a land rights violation via the Haki Ardhi tool, with in a successful outcome

rights and improve access to justice through accessible dispute resolution mechanisms. While these are critical steps forward, a significant gap remains in terms of their implementation.

Women need better access to justice to claim their rights.

Haki Ardhi allows for reporting of land rights violations

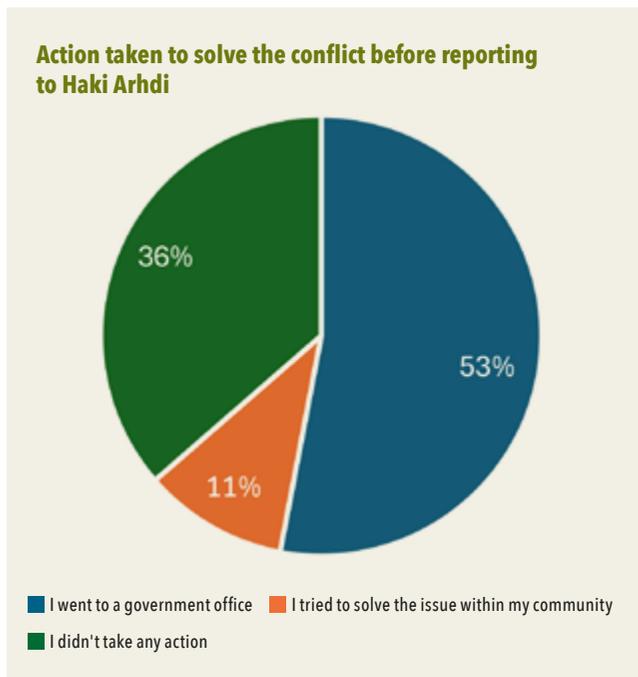
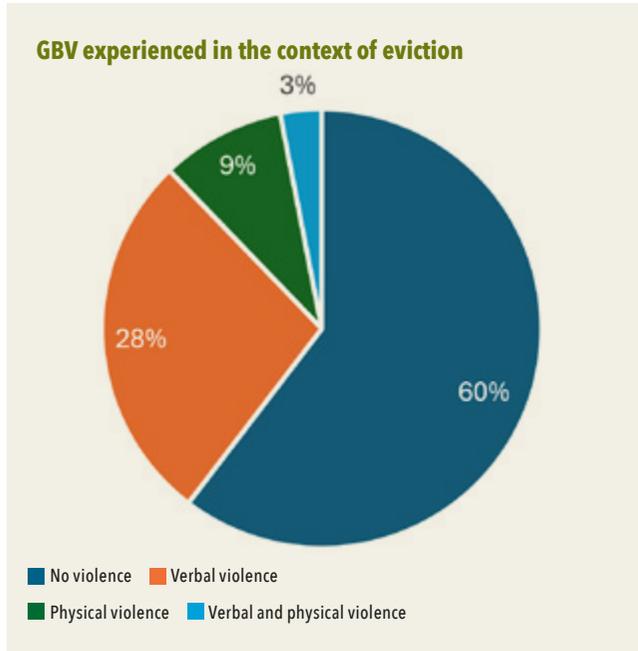
In response to these needs, TMG Research, Kenya Land Alliance, and Rainforest Foundation UK, alongside the community organizations Shibuye Community Health Workers, Sauti ya Wanawake, and Taita Taveta Human Rights Watch, and with the financial support of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, have developed and piloted Haki Ardhi, a powerful digital tool designed to monitor and report land rights violations from the ground up. Haki Ardhi, meaning ‘land justice’ in Swahili, enables women to claim their rights with the support of their communities.

Haki Ardhi provides women with a safe opportunity to report land rights violations and get support from community-based organizations to seek redress. The tool operates via a toll-free, automated SMS hotline that connects women with paralegals and community workers from well-established and trusted community-based organizations in order to prompt action to resolve tenure violations. The SMS feature reduces women’s transportation costs, time and visibility,

thereby reducing the risk of conflict associated with reporting rights violations. Women also have the option to report violations through in-person office consultations if preferred.

By joining forces with well-established community-based organizations, Haki Ardhi works to place justice in the hands of local organizations, thus enhancing local legal redress mechanisms and strengthening government’s accountability. Data collected through the pilot programme has enabled organizations to provide targeted support to women in need. Additionally, the data gathered has allowed local organizations to gather evidence of recurring and urgent issues, enabling them to carry out targeted advocacy work. The data has enabled direct appeals to traditional authorities and local/national governments for the development and implementation of more effective gender-transformative policies in land governance, including climate action.

Jemimah Oronga from Kakamega County, Western Kenya reports: “The conflict started when my husband got a second wife. He evicted me from our land that I rely on for farming. When I went to the local authorities, they ignored my case. When I sent an SMS to Haki Ardhi, the Shibuye Community Health Workers responded straight away. They got me a lawyer to defend my case — this was a strong sign for my husband. He knew that the law would acknowledge my right to land, so he then let me stay.”



Haki Ardhi shows alarming trends that call for action

Since its launch in 2022, Haki Ardhi has been piloted in two Kenyan counties: Kakamega and Taita Taveta. During the 16-month testing phase, 276 cases were reported using the tool. 46 per cent of these involved forced eviction, with 96 per cent of those reported cases taking place on family/private land. Alarmingly, 40 per cent of these women reported experiencing either physical or verbal violence during the eviction process.

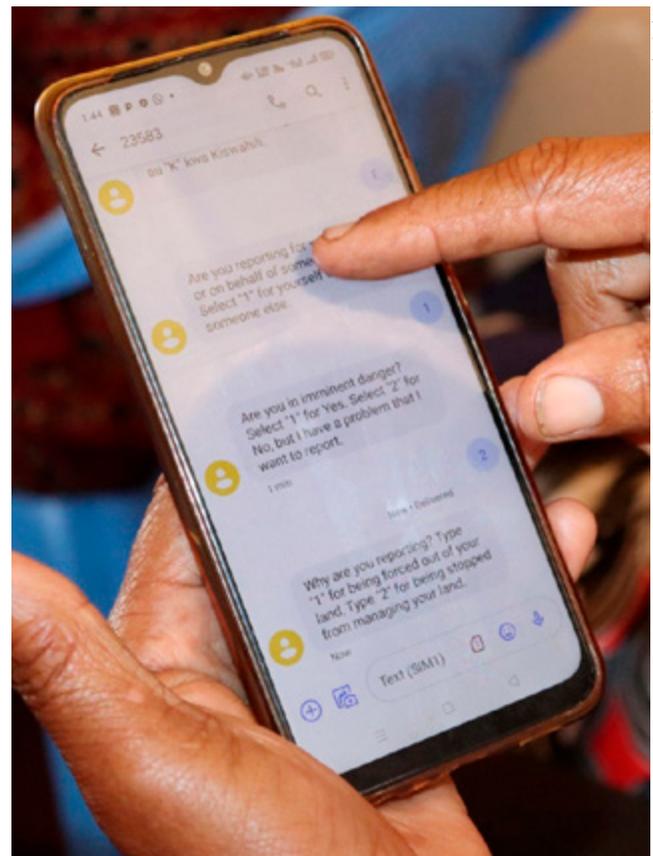
Widows are particularly vulnerable to forced eviction, accounting for almost half of the cases, in which it is often the husband's family who pushes her off the land. The rising value of land due to climate action can incentivize men to evict women and take control over land.

Even though many land tenure violations had already been reported to government authorities (53 per cent of the eviction cases), women did not receive support to settle the violations. Women then turned to the Haki Ardhi tool, harnessing its accessible reporting power to seek support from community-based organizations.

Through focused outreach campaigns and radio broadcasts, Haki Ardhi has already reached over 2,000 women, raising awareness of land rights and providing an accessible pathway to justice. Haki Ardhi is a crucial investment in the effort to harness data for creating gender-responsive and equitable pathways, while also accelerating progress towards these commitments. By expanding the reach of Haki Ardhi in coming years, TMG Research and its local partners will continue to work with communities to hold governments accountable and ensure that climate action and land governance are truly inclusive.

Haki Ardhi can contribute to gender-responsive climate action

The data gathered through Haki Ardhi is used for evidence-based advocacy in improved protection of women's tenure rights. Haki Ardhi data is a crucial resource for developing gender-responsive and equitable policies, including climate action under the three Rio Conventions, while accelerating progress towards achieving the climate goals. By fostering local collaboration and creating tools for justice, Haki Ardhi is paving the way for more inclusive, sustainable land management and land-based climate measures that contribute to just transitions for all.



The Haki Ardhi SMS feature in use

Image: TMG Research gGmbH

Unlocking the transformative power of women to build a resilient future for Africa's land and agriculture

Agnes Kalibata, AGRA

As climate change intensifies, desertification and drought are reshaping landscapes across Sub-Saharan Africa, with women bearing the brunt of these challenges. Women are often the primary food producers, water collectors and overall managers of the land that they work on and draw from for the wellbeing of their families and communities at large, yet they face systemic barriers to land ownership and access to critical resources. Current drought in regions such as the Horn of Africa and in southern Africa have left millions of women and their families in crisis, exacerbating poverty, hunger, displacement and vulnerability. With secure land rights and equal participation in decision-making, women can be protected and will be able to build the resilience needed to withstand external shocks such as escalating climate impacts.



Monica Modesta Kamange, a rice farmer at Itunundu, Kamange Ward, Pawaga Village, Iringa, Tanzania

The urgency of addressing land degradation and drought through a gender-sensitive lens has never been more apparent. In Sub-Saharan Africa, where communities depend on land for sustenance, women's access to land and resources is essential to combating the region's growing rate of desertification. Securing women's land rights is a matter of justice and a necessary step towards sustainable development. Women are pivotal in restoring land and driving sustainable agricultural practices, yet they remain underrepresented in leadership roles on land management. By elevating women's voices and ensuring their active participation in land management, communities' resilience can be transformed, unlocking new pathways for economic stability in the face of environmental degradation. This potential for positive change should inspire hope and motivation in all of us.

AGRA believes that, when women take the lead, their commitment to safeguarding their farmlands fosters healthy soils, higher-yield crops, nutritious food for healthy children, and overall functioning landscapes that enhance and protect livelihoods. To achieve this however, they must have the power of choice which leads to resilient communities. This ethos drives the spirit of the #HerLand campaign, which champions the leadership of women and girls in sustainable land management and advocates their right to secure land ownership and management. Yet, in many regions, this potential remains largely unrealized, missing out on untold progress and opportunities. Across Africa, women are the bedrock of farming communities and make up more than half of the agricultural workforce, yet far too often their contribution to building sustainable food systems is often undervalued, unrecognized, with their voices underrepresented and their access to land, resources, and markets severely constrained. Their stories are not just about survival, they are stories of innovation, resilience, hope and prosperity.

The missed opportunity of not having equity between men and women on matters of land management is glaring, particularly now, as the continent faces some of the most significant challenges yet. The ongoing El Niño-induced drought in southern Africa, the worst in 100 years, has left an estimated 56.8 million people food-insecure during the 2023–24 farming season, affecting Malawi, Zambia and other regions in Africa. Similarly, unprecedented flooding has devastated countries in west and central Africa including



Image: AGRA

Loise Muriithi harvests sorghum at her farm in Tharaka North Sub County, Kenya

Nigeria, Mali and Ghana, which has led to the displacement of millions, destruction of infrastructure, and severe damage to agricultural lands. In Nigeria's Borno state for instance, around 40 per cent of the state capital, Maiduguri, was submerged, affecting over 1 million people and severely affecting food security across the country. Similarly, 17 locations in Niger State experienced flooding, with 16,559 individuals in 2,337 households affected.

The disproportionate impact of drought and land degradation on women is clear. The burdens of these climate-related impacts fall on the most vulnerable — most women. For young women and girls, this crisis has compounded existing inequalities, leaving them at a heightened risk of violence, exploitation, and marginalization. Women, who play a critical role in small-scale agriculture, are often the first to feel the impacts of a failing crop or dry season. Unsustainable farming practices have led to soil erosion at a rate 100 times faster than natural processes can restore, leading to up to 40 per cent of the planet's land being in a state of degradation. This erosion undermines food production, threatens biodiversity, leads to land degradation and/or desertification, and further exacerbates the climate crisis. For women, the consequences are particularly dire, as they are more likely to suffer from food shortages as well as endure water scarcity. Despite these challenges, they often have the least control over land and resources.

Yet these crises also highlight a pivotal moment for change and an opportunity to shift the status quo. If we fail to act, millions of women will remain trapped in a cycle of poverty and limited opportunity. The urgency of addressing land degradation and desertification, particularly in agriculture landscapes, has never been more pronounced, especially for women across Sub-Saharan Africa. Seizing this moment to support women's leadership, providing them with the tools and ensuring they have a seat at the table on land matters, not only enhances the possibilities for Africa's food systems transformation but also for combating desertification across Africa's landscapes.

Stories of resilience that are shaping a new reality

AGRA's work in Nigeria offers a compelling example of how targeted interventions are transforming the lives of women farmers. A baseline survey conducted in the first year of project implementation in Kaduna and Niger states revealed a stark reality — despite women farmers being a majority, they receive less than 10 per cent of the credit available to small-scale farmers and have limited access to agricultural inputs like improved seeds and fertilizers due to high cost. Further, women are 5 times less likely than men to own land.

To address these challenges, in 2021, AGRA launched the Enhancing Resilience and Upscaling of Gender-Inclusive Rural Economy for Increased Productivity, Livelihoods,



Image: AGRA

Vegetable input, distribution and production plots, Nigeria

and Food Security initiative. This intervention focused specifically on women and youth in agriculture, aiming to enhance their resilience and productivity. As of June 2024, the programme has made substantial progress: over 173,880 women and 231,612 youth farmers have been trained in Good Agricultural Practices (GAP). Additionally, 46,285 women have received input financing, 487 women have been trained as seed out-growers, and 3,509 women have been trained in vegetable production. This has led to the cultivation of over 11,571 ha by women and youth farmers.

A key element of this initiative has been improving last-mile delivery services through training and engaging 1,094 female and 1,692 youth community-based advisors (CBAs). The advisors provide crucial support to women farmers, offering advisory services and facilitating last-mile input delivery. In Kaduna, AGRA's advocacy efforts with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Kaduna Agricultural Development Agency (KADA) contributed to developing and validating a Gender Policy in Agriculture, ensuring that women's needs are integrated into policy decisions. Moreover, two rural agro-processing centres were established in Kaduna and Niger states to reduce post-harvest losses and support women's income generation.

The impact of these efforts can be seen in stories such as that of Asibi Hassan, a member of a local cooperative. As she puts it, "Before now, we operated blindly in farming operations, but now the difference is clear." Her cooperative successfully organized a day event to mark the end of

the season and achieved a 100 per cent loan repayment rate, made possible by the improved presence of off-takers in their community. As a result, the cooperative has continued to access inputs from reputable agro-dealers and seed companies without relying on loans.

AGRA's work in Malawi further highlights how addressing the challenges of climate change and poor land management requires innovative and targeted approaches. This is evident through the transformative impact of sustainable land management, particularly in the groundnut value chain; a critical sector for Malawi's food systems and soil health. Malawi faces the continuous threat of aridification due to a combination of climate change and unsustainable land practices. To address this, AGRA implemented an Integrated Approach Pilot programme (IAP) in partnership with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and a consortium of partners, including the African Fertilizer and Agribusiness Partnership (AFAP), Agro-Input Suppliers Limited (AISL), Milele Agro, and Fortune Gardens. This initiative focused on environmental management, food production, and improved market access, particularly for women in the groundnut value chain.

The project targeted 21,900 farmers, including 9,184 women, promoting sustainable agricultural practices such as double-row planting techniques, which led to a 36 per cent increase in yield per ha (from 0.955 MT/ha to 1.3 MT/ha). Through this approach, AGRA demonstrated the effectiveness of integrating sustainable food systems in reducing

climate shocks by improving land management. Central to the project's success was the consortium approach, which engaged multiple stakeholders across the value chain, from input suppliers to market off-takers. This facilitated technical assistance, access to financing, and the implementation of greening processes that aimed to make the groundnut value chain both resilient and sustainable. The project also underscored the importance of extension services, training 292 Community Agribusiness Advisors (CAAs), 135 of whom were women, to help transfer natural resource management practices to farmers.

As a result of the initiative, 4,380 ha of groundnuts were cultivated, and farmers gained access to improved seeds and practices, contributing to a more resilient farming system. Further, the project increased women's participation and leadership in the decision-making processes at the farm level through their management of the groundnut value chain, amplifying their voices in local agricultural economies as well as overall landscape management.

This example of the work in Malawi underscores the potential of integrating greening principles with market-driven approaches. By targeting women and strengthening value chains, it is possible not only to promote crop diversification in a sustainable manner and build social and ecological resilience, but to empower women to become active managers of land. These approaches centre on ensuring that women can be active decision-makers and leaders in sustainable land management through targeted programming to improve women's access to productive assets.

Looking ahead through the Value4Her initiative

These success stories reflect a broader truth that has driven AGRA's work — the future of Africa's food systems depends on recognizing and harnessing the potential of women. However, the journey is far from complete. While AGRA's programmes have made significant strides in supporting women farmers, these efforts are part of a broader landscape where challenges remain. The scale of the impacts on women of desertification and drought demands concerted action across all levels: local, national, and regional.

True transformation in agriculture and rural economies for women will be achieved by moving beyond one-off interventions. It will require creating an ecosystem where women can access real, lasting business opportunities that empower them to gain control over resources and drive sustainable change. This is the philosophy behind AGRA's Value4Her, a continental effort to place entrepreneurship at the centre of women's economic empowerment in agriculture.

AGRA's Value4Her initiative stands as a powerful example of women's leadership in sustainable land management, echoing the mission of the #HerLand campaign. Through Value4Her, AGRA connects and supports women agri-entrepreneurs in dryland areas across Sub-Saharan Africa, enabling them to thrive in the agricultural sector and secure vital land rights. By leveraging a digital marketplace and networking platform, Value4Her has empowered thousands of women with access to new markets, business opportunities and crucial resources that strengthen their roles in sustainable agriculture.

Beyond providing visibility, Value4Her focuses on what truly drives change: access to financing, investment, and market opportunities that can elevate women from small-scale operations to thriving businesses. This approach tackles the systemic barriers that have long hindered women's participation in the agricultural market and fosters a more equitable playing field. By facilitating access to networks and capital, Value4Her allows women-led enterprises to scale up, moving from subsistence to surplus. Women are no longer limited to traditional roles in agriculture; instead, they are positioned as business leaders with the capacity to influence and transform entire value chains.

The initiative goes beyond practical support by mobilizing partnerships with local governments, financial institutions and NGOs to secure legal recognition of land rights for women. This comprehensive approach empowers women economically and positions them as key stakeholders in agricultural policy and development. Through Value4Her, AGRA has enabled women to access micro-finance services and market linkages, driving agricultural productivity and community resilience. By spotlighting these women's achievements, Value4Her aligns with the #HerLand campaign's mission to promote women's leadership in sustainable land management, illustrating that, when women have equal rights and access to resources, they can drive transformative change in dryland regions.

These initiatives have been key in empowering women to being active participants in decision-making processes on key issues that affect their wellbeing. They demonstrate the power of women in the management of sustainable food systems. As Africa continues to face the challenges of climate change, ecological declines and the increasing threat of desertification, we recognize the importance of sustainable food systems that are fully inclusive of women as being central to Africa's prosperity. By empowering women not only do we provide them with economic means, but we set the stage for them to become owners and managers of sustainable land management systems that will be key in combating the increasing threat of desertification.



Margaret Chamwambia holds green grams at her farm in Tharaka North Sub County, Kenya. In 2016, Margaret and other farmers in the area delivered their grain to Mukothima Grain Aggregation Centre, set up with the help of AGRA

Giving voice to smallholder women farmers in the Mekong Region

Land Equity International

Over the past decade, securing land tenure for smallholder farmers has been a key focus of the Mekong Region Land Governance (MRLG) project. Designed by Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), co-financed by Germany and Luxemburg, implemented by Land Equity International and GRET, and shaped by political economy thinking, the project has intentionally committed to over a decade of momentum building activities.

IN 2024, Andreas Gerrits, SDC's Deputy Director of Cooperation, noted that: "Land tenure issues are complex, even more so across borders, requiring a myriad of interventions and the resolute dedication of the women and men involved. Switzerland is committed to securing equal access to and control over land in the Mekong Region and to ensure that no one is left behind." The long duration of MRLG's operation has meant that trusted and meaningful relationships have been built between technical assistance experts, governments, civil society, academia and some active private sector investors. This engagement lays the groundwork for directly and indirectly influencing policy and law and tackling irresponsible practices that have been causing serious injustices for people and nature. Women particularly benefit from a long investment timeframe, as illustrated by the champions interviewed below.

MRLG was designed with the understanding that gender-equitable land governance results in men and women participating equally in land issues, both through formal

institutions and informal social practice. Significant research and consultations were undertaken to unravel and illustrate gender inequalities, particularly in relation to the rapid agrarian transition occurring throughout the Mekong Region. MRLG has produced several publications on gender in the Mekong, including most recently in 2024, 'Gender Outlook in the Mekong Region'¹ and the thematic study covering Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos 'Towards Gender Equitable Policy and Law Making in the Mekong Region'. The reports reveal key challenges in the region, including:

- A lack of empowerment and capacity building for women to meaningfully engage in land decision-making
- The inadequate participation of women in community leadership, family and community decision-making processes
- The limited support for gender champions
- Inequities within legal frameworks.

The presence of discriminatory or gender-blind provisions within the legal and administrative framework for land point to a continued need to focus on issues of women's land access and inheritance rights, paying particular attention to customary arrangements. In support of this objective, MRLG used its network of more than 80 organizations across government, private sector, civil society and academia to engage in regional cooperation, peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and learning activities. Evidence-based research, capacity development and grant facility funding round out a suite of activities supporting gender-equitable land governance, with actions ranging from rights-awareness to national policy and law reform.

Interview with Dr. Sochanny Hak

Dr. Sochanny Hak (Dr Channy), Senior Researcher at the Analyzing Development Issues Center, Phnom Penh, comments: "It is vitally important that women participate in the land and policy formulation process. This is a legal obligation — according to the Cambodian constitution, women and men have equal rights to participate in the political, economic and cultural life of the nation."

Across 2022 and 2023, MRLG conducted research around the status of gender-equitable legal and policy processes in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, publishing the outcomes in the thematic study 'Towards gender-equitable land policy and lawmaking in the Mekong Region'. The results in Cambodia



Farming the mountain slopes in Phonexai District, Lao, PDR



Image: Leonard Reyes

Women engaging in training and information awareness raising

starkly demonstrated how consultations around Cambodia’s draft Contract Farming Law had barely reached the women farmers that the law would dramatically impact. When held, consultations became simply information-sharing sessions with little consideration of community dynamics, and top-down approaches that discounted feedback when given. The research revealed that women’s participation in policy consultations is often impeded by a lack of confidence, alongside limited language and education. Gender stereotypes and a limited understanding of the policy process itself exacerbated women’s limited participation.

Armed with these empirical findings, MRLG set out to improve women’s capacity to participate in national policy discussions in Cambodia. In addition to ongoing support to MRLG Alliance Members on policy participation, the team sought a more direct route via a capacity development workshop with 30 women farmers and the civil society organizations supporting them.

Dr. Channy was a lead researcher in the Cambodian component of the thematic study, and facilitator at the workshop. She notes that, in Cambodia, land is often described as a men’s issue. Women face social pressure to save face by staying quiet in public consultations, speaking out only



Image: Leonard Reyes

Dr. Sochanny Hak sharing her wisdom during an MRLG Regional Workshop



Image: Leonard Reyes

to their husbands or fathers. Technical experts, too, are often men. Women's issues are often limited to topics such as gender-based violence, family planning and child nutrition. So, women are rarely trained to confidently articulate their specific concerns around land issues in national policy forums, thus perpetuating policy makers' perceptions that women don't have the technical skills to contribute to law reform — an idea reinforced in a cycle that only serves to further exclude women from policy discussions.

Dr Channy emphasises the fundamental role of community-based organizations in supporting women to grow their confidence and expertise. She notes the following steps to grow confidence — first, by gaining financial independence through raising pigs or chickens, then, with support, to discuss and contribute to decision-making on local-scale decisions, and then building confidence in their expertise to participate beyond the local level. Because of women's household and farming duties, “to ensure equitable and equal participation in public policy discussion or law formulation process, time, place (location), and space (private and confidential) need to be considered so that women can contribute their inputs and insights.” More than this, ongoing capacity building is also required to support women's confidence as well as exposure to different communities and places, so that they can observe practical solutions from their peers. “Continuing to strengthen women's network is critical to support them.”

As women gain in confidence, social recognition of their expertise is also important. Dr Channy describes a local NGO working in Kratie province that facilitated local women to enter leadership as commune councillors “so that local councillors at district and commune level recognize the capacity of the women participating.” This recognition is not simply of women individually, but also of different forms of leadership and power. “The way that (women) deal with local authorities is a softer way, not in a confronting way. Compared to a male leader, a woman receives more attention

and support.” This attention and support can frequently be used strategically.

In Kampong Cham province, Dr Channy notes that confidence also leads to perspective changes in the women participating. In the past, they focussed more on their area of expertise and didn't really want to talk about issues linked to companies' activities, or commune or district-level decision-making. “But when I went back for MRLG work, they were more interested in policy discussions — they asked if they had a chance to join in any policy dialogue on issues around pesticides. So it was a really significant change that women are taking a step further outside their comfort zone”.

“Without MRLG that agricultural cooperative would not have the chance to link to provincial or district agricultural officials, So, it's not one factor — MRLG cannot work alone, and the Farmer and Nature Network (FNN) cannot see this success alone without women securing their livelihood factor. The factors are therefore both internal and external” adds Dr. Channy.

Interview with Dr. Hue Le

Dr. Hue Le is another researcher and gender and land expert who contributed to the thematic study in Vietnam, examining the consultations around Vietnam's Land Law Reform. She observes a similar pattern of top-down consultation as that observed in Cambodia: “The government just conducted consultation meetings, but at the meetings, most of the time the government official just presented the draft law. They didn't present the entire law, just the parts of the law that they thought was important for the people in that place. Most of the time people just listened. If someone spoke, most of the time men did that. If they spoke, they did it just for the purpose of saying something.”

Dr. Hue remarks, however, that during the breaks, people would get together and talk — they just didn't feel comfortable talking officially or in public. And, as many gender researchers



Image: Leonard Reyes

Dr. Hue leading a discussion on the importance of women's engagement in law making process at the MRLG Regional Workshop



Image: Leonard Reyes

MRLG set out to improve women’s capacity to participate in national policy discussions via a capacity development workshop targeting rural women farmers and the civil society organizations supporting them

know, the timing of consultation is key. “In the daytime, it can be very hard, especially for women from minority ethnic groups to attend because they spend most of their time in the field. We therefore need to follow their schedule, not our schedule.”

Women’s past experiences of powerlessness can lead to disempowerment. Dr. Hue recalls that women from the Vietnam Women’s Union were invited to participate in the process of drafting the law, “but they had a feeling that they didn’t have any power at all. They would be invited to give comment or opinion but the draft was the same through the next round.” NGOs can both support women, but also perpetuate inequalities, Dr. Hue highlights the example of one participant, from a local NGO, who found herself continually overlooked for comment, whereas male counterparts from international NGOs were able to voice their opinions.

But the clear benefit of local NGOs was evident — giving women opportunities to participate in projects and grow their confidence and awareness of their rights to then be in a position to advocate for themselves. MRLG’s work played directly into this, providing MRLG local NGO Alliance Members with stronger connections to district and regional institutions, further empowering NGOs through direct training and support and ultimately enabling women across the Mekong Region to build a platform for engagement at a larger scale.

There remain challenges. Reflecting on visiting a Hmong village and asking the women what they thought about empowered women, Dr. Hue notes that the responses were stark: “If I become an independent woman, people will look at me badly, like I’m not a good wife”. To counteract this, Dr. Hue and Dr.

Channy advocate engagement and research at the household level, thus uniting husband and wife under the banner of the household. Language, too, is important — women from minority ethnic or indigenous groups may be more fluent in their mother tongues than in national languages.

One particularly compelling example presented by Dr. Hue was of training support provided to women to promote their orchards and farms on social media, learning the arts of eye-catching photos, attractive captions and marketing their goods for buyers and tourists. According to Dr. Hue, with growing business success the women reported that their husbands looked at them differently, and their knowledge became more respected. The training too, was acknowledged as two-way, with trainers learning about customary weeding methods, soil management, conservation and local biodiversity. In this way, sustainable land management and land governance can be mainstreamed alongside training in finance, tourism and other business enterprise.

Says Dr. Hue: “I think institutions like MRLG or other local NGOs in Vietnam play a very important role to promote sustainable land management or land governance because the government doesn’t have the long arms to reach the local people in the remote areas. But, at the same time, I would also like to improve the capacity of the officials who lead consultation meetings, show government how to facilitate meetings so that everyone can have a voice and so that people don’t feel afraid or scared and can speak. We also need to capacity-build for the local people so that they can feel more comfortable in talking about their wants and needs.”

Gender justice and transformative action in land rights for women

Annabel Kennedy, WECF International; with the support of Agnes Mirembe (ARUWE); Dorothee Lisenga (CFLEDD); and Sevidzem Ernestine Leikeki (CAMGEW)

Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF) is a global network organization founded in the wake of the 1992 Earth Summit, which established the three Rio Conventions. Since its foundation, WECF has been working together with partners around the world on gender-just, ecofeminist solutions to interconnected global challenges. Working across three broad thematic pillars — sustainable development, climate justice action, toxic-free healthy environment — the organization takes a dual action-advocacy approach, supporting grassroots and community-based organizations to implement and scale their community-level work, while also ensuring that their voices are heard and their visions and demands reflected at all levels of decision- and policy-making. While only a handful of WECF’s partners might explicitly describe their work’s sole focus to be women’s land rights, by its nature the issue is deeply bound up in the kind of community-led development and environmental projects they implement.

At the core of ecofeminism is the understanding that gender equality and environmental sustainability are intrinsically connected. On one hand, women, girls, gender-diverse people and other marginalized groups are disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and land degradation due to underlying structural inequalities. Despite the barriers posed by multiple and intersecting systems of oppression, women in all their diversity hold an immense wealth of knowledge and solutions which are vital to land restoration, climate mitigation and adaptation, and safeguarding biodiversity. Yet these solutions, which are effective precisely because they are rooted in people’s lived



Women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with their newly granted land titles after being supported by CFLEDD

realities and deep understanding of their specific contexts, are still insufficiently acknowledged and resourced by institutions and authorities. WECF therefore works at diverse levels and fora to change this scenario.

It is evident that WECF’s messages and actions are strongest when developed cooperatively and collaboratively within communities and alliances. The organization has been pleased to add its voice to the burgeoning conversation on women’s land rights, driven in no small part by Landesa and other founding organizations behind the Stand for Her Land campaign, with whom WECF has collaborated on joint events during recent conferences. Being engaged in strategy workshops organized by the Women’s Land Rights Initiative, facilitated by the TMG Thinktank and the Robert Bosch Foundation together with the UNCCD and other Rio Convention Secretariats, has also been a valuable source of learning and exchange.

WECF was invited to join the latter in its capacity as a member of the UNFCCC Women and Gender Constituency, together with the Women and Youth Caucus leads of the UNCBD and UNCCD, underscoring the vital role of these strong civil society collectives. During the 2023 strategy workshop, the CSOs present highlighted that one of their needs from donors and allies is flexible financial, technical and legal support, which can cover not only direct project costs but also coordination and movement-building. This desire for partnerships was also expressed in discussions about the importance of mapping existing initiatives and stimulating collaboration.

Insecure land rights as a barrier to women’s autonomy

When women are denied their land rights — rights which are legally enshrined in many countries and are set out in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), amongst other international frameworks — it has a negative impact on other aspects of women’s social, economic and political standing, and reduces their ability to autonomously make decisions about their lives.

In Togo, for example, the organization Yokoumi was one of the 2022 winners of the ‘Gender Just Climate Solutions Awards’ (GJCSA) for its work to support women’s shea butter cooperatives. One of the project’s objectives was to improve the sustainability of production by installing a photovoltaic plant to power the mill. However, the issue of unequal land rights



CFLEDD director and indigenous woman, Dorothee Lisenga, accepting the Gender Just Climate Solutions Award for her work on women's land rights during UNFCCC COP24

came to the fore when the cooperative was faced with a challenge: they were offered a low-interest loan that was dependent on land as collateral, which no one had the possibility to offer without first gaining permission from male relatives.

In India, too, the right to make decisions about land posed a challenge to a solution intended to support the livelihoods of women farmers, improve their resilience to both drought and flooding, and increase food security. The innovative and affordable Bhungroo water management system, developed by GJCSA winner, Naireeta Services, is disseminated to women's groups and operates on a co-ownership model, with Women Climate Leaders trained to build and maintain the systems. However, in several communities, women's groups who wanted to install the technology were unable to do so without the consent of the male household heads who officially owned the land. The women had to persuade their male relatives to be able to use the land, and the contracts had to be signed in the men's names.

Yet the scenario of gender injustice due to non-existent or insecure land rights can be reversed. WECF's partners' work in many countries has shown that when women are informed of and enabled to take up their land rights, they often gain other benefits such as community leadership roles and income-generation opportunities.

Participatory mapping in DR Congo and advocating equitable laws

For women in all their diversity to enjoy their full land tenure rights, a clear prerequisite is the existence of secure legal frameworks. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Coalition of Women Leaders for the Environment and Sustainable Development (French: CFLEDD) works tirelessly to ensure that laws and policies at every level are gender-just, alongside organising training and dialogues to ensure that women are aware of their rights.

Dorothee Lisenga, director of the CFLEDD, Indigenous woman and 2018 GJCSA winner, observes that: "Women in the DRC represent around 70 per cent of the agricultural workforce but they have almost no access to land tenure nor to decision-making processes. Women at CFLEDD act to transform the land laws and empower women to fight against deforestation [organising] participatory mapping workshops to help women claim their land rights."

The most obvious land degradation challenge faced in DRC is extensive deforestation, driven by both subsistence agriculture and charcoal production, but also by illegal logging and mining activity. Women, particularly Indigenous Batwa women, disproportionately face the consequences of land grabbing and land degradation due to their lack of land tenure

rights. Determined to overcome the patriarchal norms and customs preventing women from decision-making over and ownership of land, in 2016 the CFLEDD conducted a study on women's land use and held multi-stakeholder dialogues with local governments, traditional leaders and community women. The women's coalition then led a concerted advocacy campaign based on the recommendations from the dialogues and findings from the study.

At the local level, this resulted in the ground-breaking adoption of eight provincial ordinances guaranteeing women's land tenure. Furthermore, in 2021, women leaders from the coalition engaged extensively in the development of the DRC's historic new land and forest law, noting the need for gender mainstreaming and ensuring that specific attention was paid to women's land rights. Recommendations from a position paper developed by the CFLEDD were integrated in both the new law and in the DRC's revised climate Nationally Determined Contribution.

Alongside these impressive legislative achievements, the CFLEDD trains women to develop practical skills in participatory mapping and supports them with advocacy tools to claim their rights. The participatory mapping is an extensive process which involves meeting with women to assess their needs and knowledge; identifying the areas to be mapped; training local cartographers to draw the maps; and finally validating the mapped areas with local authorities. Using a training-of-trainers peer model, to date at least 600 women have been equipped

with skills to claim their land rights, concerning an area of over 1,600 ha. Between 2023–2024 alone, around 100 women were able to obtain customary land tenure titles. While this is a considerable achievement in itself, the CFLEDD further supports women to adopt agroforestry practices on their land, with ancestral and traditional knowledge contributing to land restoration and sustainable use.

Securing land rights for sustainable community-owned energy in Uganda

In Uganda, a country grappling with significant land degradation challenges such as deforestation and soil erosion, WECF partner Action for Rural Women's Empowerment (ARUWE) is dedicated to empowering rural women and their communities through locally owned, gender-just development strategies. Using participatory methodologies such as the Gender Action Learning System (GALS), ARUWE assesses rural women's priorities and develops work programmes accordingly. One such programme supports the establishment of women-led and decentralised renewable energy cooperatives.

Given high energy needs for both household and agricultural tasks, lack of electricity in rural areas forces women to rely on firewood and other unsustainable energy sources, exacerbating land degradation. In response, ARUWE supports energy cooperatives — primarily composed of women farmers — to construct, install, and operate



Women members of a Ugandan renewable energy cooperative with their eco briquettes which help to reduce firewood demand



Ugandan women who are part of the renewable energy cooperatives, with energy efficient stoves which they produce themselves

sustainable energy technologies such as solar panels, biogas, energy-efficient stoves, and briquette charcoal production from degradable wastes. This not only addresses energy needs but also promotes environmental sustainability and resilience in the face of the climate crisis.

However, ARUWE identified unequal land ownership and limited decision-making power over land as critical barriers to women's autonomy in selecting and benefiting from these technologies. To address this, ARUWE has an arsenal of tools at its disposal: organising a series of participatory dialogues; holding legal clinics and making referrals to pro bono services; conducting land rights campaigns; and empowering community-based paralegals to document land claims and support mediation. In all of these initiatives, community members are invited to exchange knowledge about tenure rights as outlined by the Ugandan constitution, policy, and law, while also addressing women's and human rights perspectives.

A significant focus of these campaigns has been to garner the support and allyship of men, ensuring sustainability and mitigating potential backlash as a result of shifting household power dynamics. Engaging men as allies not only fosters understanding but also promotes a shared vision for equitable resource management and decision-making.

Land dialogues participant, Arombo C., testifies that: "The dialogues on land rights helped me realise that I need to claim back the land my mother left me [...] I gained the courage to initiate a discussion with my maternal uncles about the land and my need to utilise it [...] I have also taken a step to discuss with my husband the need to avail our four daughters with land just like he has done for the boys."

Like any action intended to bring about transformative change, changing mindsets has taken time and persistent effort, but over five years, ARUWE has witnessed a significant reduction in cultural barriers to women's access to land. Women report benefits such as more equitably distributed household income and a sense of self-confidence which encourages them to become more involved in local development. Not only can they make decisions about sustainable energy technologies, but they also promote actions leading to more sustainable land use.

Cameroonian women's leadership and knowledge for land restoration

In north-west Cameroon, as in many parts of the world, communities are dependent on the natural environment for their subsistence and livelihoods. This can be a sustainable traditional practice, for example, the age-old history of women gathering herbal medicines and food products from the forest. Unfortunately, due to a combination of pressures including climate change-induced rising temperatures and increased food insecurity in a growing population, practices such as swidden or 'slash-and-burn' agriculture, plus conflicts over the land by stakeholders with competing demands, were resulting in intense bushfires. The organization, Cameroon Gender and Environment Watch (CAMGEW) therefore works with communities on holistic, gender-responsive projects which centre their needs while protecting the natural resources on which they depend.

In the areas where CAMGEW is active, decision-making about land use is typically a collective process led by traditional community leaders. While these tribal leadership bodies play an important role in preserving Indigenous communities' cultural heritage, women previously had little voice in them. The CAMGEW team works to sensitise male leaders about women's role in land management, forest preservation and bushfire prevention, facilitating an extensive participatory process through which they arrive at understandings about the value of women's and youth participation in decision-making. Over time, CAMGEW has witnessed a monumental shift in attitudes, with women leaders being elected to traditional councils and gender parity being achieved in no less than seven community forest institutions. They equally engage with various national authorities and government ministries, organizing roundtables and advocating women's land and forest rights.

Not only in formal leadership roles do women play a role in preventing bushfires and protecting their forests. CAMGEW leads multiple projects — almost always based on traditional ecological knowledge — supporting women in their diversity to sustainably use and manage land, while providing them with income-generating opportunities. Practical ecosystem regeneration initiatives include tree nurseries, where saplings of native tree species are brought to maturity before being planted and monitored by community forest monitors. Some trees are planted by women on their farmland to benefit soil health and reduce erosion. Furthermore, thousands of community members have been trained in agroforestry and organic agricultural practices, with the intention of improving food security while reducing soil degradation. Intergenerational knowledge sharing has proven an effective tool for increasing environmental literacy, with a special focus on disseminating the knowledge of Indigenous elders.

Finally, one of CAMGEW's longest running projects focuses on beekeeping, whereby women are first equipped with local and Indigenous knowledge on apiculture before being provided with locally produced beehives made from sustainable natural materials. Alongside being supported to develop honey and beeswax value chain products, often in solidarity cooperatives, women are also incentivised to prevent wildfires as a way of protecting their hives, many of which are placed in or near the forest.



Women in Cameroon during a community planting drive during which they plant the native saplings

CAMGEW board chair and women's empowerment officer, Sevidzem Ernestine Leikeki, says: "I have a passion to take care of the environment and empower Indigenous women to preserve the Kilum Ijim forest, so together we transform lives and the local economy."

A rallying call for inclusive, rights-based and gender-just action for women's land rights

These examples of successful community-level action on women's land rights — a small snapshot of the work being carried out daily in communities across the world — are not an exception, but a rule. WECF is constantly reminded that women's organizations and collective feminist civil society movements already have many of the solutions to interconnected global crises: they simply need to be supported.

That is not to say that advocating women's land rights should be done with an instrumentalist view to fixing problems that women in the Global South bear the least responsibility for. Although supporting women's right to land inevitably supports progress towards the goals of the Rio conventions and SDGs, it must be seen first as ensuring an inherent human right.

In that vein, attention must be paid not only to the symptom but to the root, with a need for policy coherence and redirecting resources away from harmful activities which exacerbate land degradation and make women more vulnerable to land grabbing. Funding and other resources should instead be channelled towards grassroots women's organizations, which currently receive only a tiny proportion of international

climate, biodiversity and land funding. It should be flexible and reliable, with the understanding that women's ability to take up their land rights is connected to their enjoyment of other rights.

Policy coherence also means ensuring that land and tenure policies and/or laws are aligned with gender strategies and action plans. At all stages and levels, women, girls and gender-diverse people should be meaningfully involved in the development and implementation of policies, frameworks and programmes which impact their communities and lands. They must be equipped to take their rightful seat at international policy tables, which requires capacity-strengthening and technical support.

It is the responsibility of every one of us to ensure women's rights to information, training, representation, governance and access to resources, alongside sincerely recognizing their agency, knowledge and skills. Gender justice is not about mainstreaming women into 'business as usual', nor merely including them in interventions which have been designed without their input. Rather, it is a vision of transformative system change centred around the needs, priorities and wisdom of communities, in which everyone has complete access to their full bundle of rights.

WECF firmly believes that the most effective approaches for securing women's land rights — both the recognition of individual land tenure as well as having decision-making power in situations of collective ownership — are those which are community-owned, respect diverse forms of knowledge and land management practices and challenge underlying structural inequalities.

Securing women's land rights in Nigeria

Rita Otu, Beau Haven Farms

Land provides the basis for agriculture. Half of the world's habitable land is used for agriculture¹. And it is evident that there is a direct relationship between women's right to land, economic empowerment, food security and poverty reduction. Together with other productive resources, women's right to land is essential for realizing their right to equality and an adequate standard of living, among many other just requirements².

In Nigeria, about 10.1 per cent of women in rural areas have access to land, against 46.1 per cent of men. Women's land rights are fragile and transient and their land ownership depends on many factors including age, marital status and the number of male children, among other considerations. The 1978 Land Use Act of Nigeria established a state-owned land system that allowed similar opportunities for men and women to acquire or inherit land³. But, what does it take for women to

have their land rights secured? This article examines Nigeria's inheritance laws, focusing on women's rights and potential gender biases. It assesses the role of media advocacy, citing the instance of Radio Fantasee in advocating women's land rights within the country.

Why women's land rights?

Women, who on average comprise 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force, nevertheless own less than 15 per cent of the world's land and suffer most from the consequences of this inequality⁴. When they do own land, it's usually of poorer quality and consists of smaller plots. When women have access and rights to land, the economic benefits extend to their households and their communities⁵. For example, during an outreach in one of the rural areas in Akwa Ibom State, one of the women farmers in the village, Rebecca Solomon Effiong, said: "When a woman acquires land, she has a bargaining power which gives her an opportunity to partake in decision-making". In addition to that, when women have access to land, they have greater incentives to protect and invest in its sustainability, especially women farmers who grow their food organically. Also, ownership of land by women is one way of ending violence against them. When women own the land they till it, families are well fed and better educated and the children are happier and healthier.

Bridging the gap to women's land rights⁶

Agriculture is a huge employer, providing jobs to more than half of the total labour force in Nigeria. It is especially important in rural areas, where small-scale farming is the means by which most people provide for and feed their families. In the southern part of Nigeria, over 3 million small farmers, especially women living in the Uyo local government area of Akwa Ibom State, know very little about the risks associated with land and climate change. Lack of secure rights to land is associated with a lack of access to credit, marital status and gender of children. These factors limit women's agricultural productivity but, in addition, climate change increases the challenges for Nigerians, leading to food and economic insecurity and making the country's people more vulnerable.

Although women in rural Nigeria have the same legal rights to land as men, they are not always aware of these rights. For example most women don't know they can claim land certificates in their own name. In certain cases, local customs and harmful gender norms discriminate against women and prevent them from realizing their land rights.

Over the past two decades, the Supreme Court of Nigeria and its Court of Appeal have delivered pivotal decisions on



Image: Beau Haven Farms



Image: Beau Haven Farms

Top: a new generation of women entrepreneurial farmers encouraged and supported at Beau Haven Farms. Above: Radio Fantasee outreach, 2022



Image: Beau Haven Farms

Celebrating the Yello Nutrition (Yello Nut) campaign at Farmerette's Hangout and Farm Therapy

women's inheritance rights, particularly in Igbo communities in the eastern part of the country⁷. In order to create effective solutions that work for women, embracing an overarching gender-responsive and human rights-based framework is essential. Addressing land inequality must begin with rebalancing power in favour of women.

Media platforms are instrumental in propelling women's rights, with media serving as a key driver of public and international awareness of critical issues affecting women such as hunger, malnutrition, gender-based violence and climate change issues. The question of how the gap to women's land rights can be bridged prompted an idea created at Radio Fantasee, with co-founder and UK paediatrician, Dr. Unenobong Udoka and partners, together with the Semek group of companies and RskLess Inc., Canada, along with producer, Otobong Willie.

Radio Fantasee and land rights advocacy

Radio is an obvious medium for sharing knowledge, connecting communities and empowering society, particularly when facilitating two-way interaction. Radio is also a cost-effective way to share weather and climate information with geographically isolated farming communities. In December, 2023, listeners tuned in to the debut radio broadcast entitled, Radio Fantasee, a programme on XL FM (106.9), which is a station local to Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The broadcast covered various topics related to women's land rights, ranging from exploring rules related to inheriting property to women's roles in governance. Each radio segment was complemented by a live question-and-answer session to give listeners the opportunity to actively engage in discussion on women's land rights. The 30-minute broadcasts were made on a weekly



Image: Beau Haven Farms

Radio Fantasee has been set up to broadcast coverage of various topics related to women's land rights

basis on local radio stations during evening prime-time, featuring lawyers, expert in land litigation.

By increasing Nigerians' knowledge of women's land rights, Radio Fantasee has helped to shift attitudes and behaviours by openly and widely disseminating information to women, their families and communities about the benefits of land. The radio programme especially increased women's confidence in becoming more engaged in decision-making pertaining to land, and encouraging institutions and stakeholders to actively advocate equitable land rights practices across Nigeria. The availability of the platform is extended by sending additional information via SMS messages to those who have consented to be contacted, mapping feedback received online and providing podcasts for downloading. These discussions are broadcast to hundreds of thousands of farmers in the most remote locations, in local languages. Approximately 200,000 women accessed the climate change

CASE STUDY

Widow's Ordeal

Aisha (not her real name) was thrown out of her home by her brothers-in-law after her husband's sudden death. Despite having lived on the property for over a decade, she was told that she had no right to either the land or the house. This is a common experience for many women in eastern and northern Nigeria, where customary laws often prioritise male inheritance over women's rights.

LEGAL REMEDIES

- Through The Law Series programme, legal literacy and awareness programmes are promoted, such as the Nigerian women's land rights Initiative, which not only educates women on their land rights but also empowers them to advocate for themselves.
- Enacting and enforcing gender-equitable laws, such as the Nigerian Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill, which aims to eliminate discrimination and ensure equal access to land and property.
- Implementing international agreements such as The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.
- Nigeria has ratified CEDAW, recognizing women's rights to equal access to land and natural resources.
- Providing legal aid and representation services through organizations such as the Nigerian Women's Trust Fund and the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA). This organization offers free legal services to women seeking to secure their land rights.
- Supporting women's land rights organizations and advocacy groups such as the Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative. This organization advocates policy reforms and provides legal support to women.

Examples of successful initiatives include:

- The Kaduna State Government's issuance of Certificates of Occupancy to women, recognizing their ownership rights.
- The Nigerian Women's Land Rights Initiative's training of female paralegals to provide legal assistance to rural women.

radio programme, and half of all listeners reported implementing the climate-smart practices they learned about on the radio.

The way forward

The impact of a food security strategy and efforts to reduce extreme poverty can only be fully realized once land rights are secured across the developing world. Access to land is one of the key elements necessary for eradicating hunger. Improved food security depends on economic investment, good governance, gender equality, conflict prevention and management, climate change mitigation and adaptation and sustainable natural resource management.

By raising awareness and driving advocacy for change, media platforms are instrumental in propelling forward the women's land rights movement.

Conclusion

Securing women's land rights in eastern and northern Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach that addresses cultural, legal and social barriers. By advocating gender-equitable laws, promoting legal literacy and supporting women's land rights organizations, we can work towards a more just and equitable land tenure system that empowers women and promotes sustainable development.



A facilitator (left) pictured with Beau Haven Farms' CEO and creative agriculturist, Rita Robert Otu

CASE STUDY

Securing Women's Land Rights in Nigeria: Challenges and Legal Remedies in Eastern and Northern Nigeria

Author: Barr. Blessing Udofa-Poromon

In Eastern and Northern Nigeria, women face significant cultural and legal barriers in accessing and controlling land, perpetuating gender inequality and hindering economic empowerment. The region's land tenure system, largely based on customary law, often prioritises male inheritance and ownership. This article explores the challenges faced by women in securing land rights and examines possible legal remedies to address these injustices.

CHALLENGES

- Customary law and patriarchal norms prioritise male inheritance and ownership. For example, in some communities, women are denied inheritance rights, and their brothers or sons are favoured instead. Limited access to education and information hinders women's understanding of their rights. According to UNESCO, in 2020, the adult literacy rate for women in Northern Nigeria was 41.8 per cent, compared to 64.5 per cent for men.
- Discriminatory practices and gender bias in land allocation and management. For instance, women may be allocated smaller plots or less fertile land than men.
- Lack of representation in decision-making processes and land governance structures. Women hold only 16 per cent of political offices in Nigeria, limiting their influence on land policy decisions.

Women’s land rights In Ethiopia — supporting land degradation neutrality

Landesa; International Senior Lawyers Project (ISLP); Population, Health and Environment Consortium-Ethiopia (PHE); Movement for Ecological Learning and Community Action (MELCA); Union of Ethiopian Women and Children Association (UEWCA)¹

In collaboration with Landesa and the International Senior Lawyers Project (ISLP), Stand For Her Land Ethiopia Coalition members undertook a case study on land degradation neutrality (LDN) policy in Ethiopia, its impact and relationship to women’s land rights. The study² provides recommendations to strengthen LDN efforts in Ethiopia by incorporating gender-transformative approaches to improve implementation of equitable land tenure practices. This article summarizes key points from the study.

Gender-equitable land tenure as a basis for action to achieve LDN in Ethiopia

Prior to Ethiopia’s land certification programmes, land tenure in Ethiopia was highly insecure. The country carried out a First Level Land Certification (FLLC) from 1998 to 2010 and a Second Level Land Certification (SLLC) from 2005 to 2020. Both certification programmes significantly increased the country’s land tenure security, which also led to increased adoption of good land management practices to combat land degradation. Evidence shows that increased land tenure security for Ethiopian farmers led them to invest more in various forms of soil and water conservation and climate-smart agriculture. One study found that farmers who received an SLLC certificate were 13 per cent more likely to invest in soil and water conservation and maintenance, while another study found that farmers who received a SLLC certificate were 15 per cent more likely to plant more trees or long-term crops. The effect of certification on female-headed households’ investments in soil and water conservation was dramatic. Prior to receiving certificates, female-headed households were far less likely than either male-headed or dual-headed households to make soil and water conservation investments. Eight years after receiving certificates, female-headed households were just as likely as male- or dual-headed households to make soil and water conservation investments — closing an approximate gap of 20 percentage points. Further, widows who received SLLC certificates had an increased probability of making soil and water investments of 46.8 percentage points.

Women’s land rights and the sustainable land management project in Ethiopia

In 2020 the Independent Assessment Group of the World Bank undertook an evaluation of a two-phase Sustainable Land Management Project (SLMP) funded by the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility in Ethiopia, implemented

between 2008 and 2018. The report acknowledged that land tenure insecurity was recognized from the design of the project as a driver of land degradation, and committed significant funding to supporting land tenure, particularly for small-scale farmers, through Ethiopia’s SLLC. The report notes that the SLLC provided equal land rights to married women, which benefitted them in the context of SLMP activities, and highlights strengthening women’s land tenure as one of the more successful efforts at gender-inclusion applied by the SLMP. In summary, women are key users and stewards of land. When women have secure land tenure, they are particularly likely to invest in sustainable land management and soil conservation. Interventions to secure land tenure for all — but especially for women — can lead to stronger outcomes for LDN. Any strengthening of land tenure, or LDN policies or programmes that fail to meaningfully include women, not only entrench existing gender inequalities but are also likely to be ineffective if they do not leverage women’s skills and knowledge related to land.

Gudifecha — a fresh approach to environmental stewardship

Rooted in the Oromo language and traditionally associated with the care and custody of children, the concept of Gudifecha has taken on a new meaning in the realm of environmental conservation. Integrated into a project aimed at safeguarding rainforests, the concept seeks to instil a sense of love and responsibility towards plants, akin to the care provided to human offspring.

Werko Roba, a dedicated member of the Munamuno Sacred Natural Site women’s group in Dinsho Woreda, embraced the Gudifecha initiative from its inception. Engaging in both economic and environmental endeavours, Werko has witnessed the growth and impact of her planted seedlings over the years. Reflecting on her journey, she shares her pride in nurturing the trees and expanding her agricultural ventures beyond sheep breeding to include bee farming. With a keen awareness of the benefits of diversification, Werko’s commitment to Gudifecha has yielded tangible results. The matured trees now provide a supportive environment for her flourishing beekeeping enterprise, showcasing the interconnectedness of sustainable practices. By fostering a culture of responsible stewardship and environmental consciousness, Gudifecha stands as a beacon of innovation in promoting sustainable practices and nurturing a harmonious relationship between communities and nature.



Image: MELCA

By inviting people to adopt tree seedlings from nurseries and plant and raise them with care, project planners at MELCA aim to convey a powerful message of environmental stewardship and sustainable living

Overview of women's land rights in Ethiopia

Ethiopia has taken significant steps to recognize, protect, and promote Women's Land Rights (WLR). Notably, core legal provisions recognize equality and women's property rights. Further, the country's SLLC included joint titling of land by married couples and supported the distribution of land certificates to women. While these efforts have supported greater gender equality, LDN and progress towards the achievement of many other important outcomes, more is needed to ensure consistent implementation and to promote understanding and social acceptance of WLR. Further, some legal gaps could still be bridged to fully secure WLR. The following sections provide an overview of key legal standards for WLR in Ethiopia, and key social norms and practices that still present a barrier for the realization of these rights. As detailed above, where women's rights to land are weaker, their investment in SLM is limited due to a lack of security and therefore a lack of incentive to engage in SLM practices. Gaps in the realization of WLR from both a legal and social standpoint are presented in the following sections to support uptake of the recommendations included in this case study and other policy solutions for WLR. Implementation of stronger WLR will support realization of women's human rights and support the strong LDN programming crucially needed in Ethiopia.

Legal standards for women's land rights in Ethiopia

Ethiopia's national government has broadly defined the foundation for land rights through the Constitution (1995), related international and regional instruments, the Revised Family Code Proclamation (2000) and the Rural Land Administration and Land Use Proclamation (2005). Article 35 of the Constitution is particularly relevant in the context of WLR, affirming the right of women to be free of harmful customs; to full consultation in the context of national policies and projects; and to equal rights to land, including inheritance rights. These Constitutional provisions are further complemented and strengthened by several global and regional instruments, which Ethiopia has ratified. This includes the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which mandates elimination of discrimination against women in rural areas and equality in property rights. Regionally, Ethiopia has ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women (Maputo Protocol), both of which include important guarantees for women's rights and participation related to land and natural resources. The Revised Family Code Proclamation (No. 213/2000) contains important provisions on property

for married couples, including recognizing that property acquired during marriage is generally common property of the spouses. The law includes a further presumption of common property and a requirement for joint management within marriage and equitable division upon divorce.

While these provisions appear to provide strong equity provisions for women, in practice, because much land is acquired through patrilineal inheritance and inherited property is not common property, women have far fewer opportunities to gain land rights. The Rural Land Administration and Land Use Proclamation (No. 456/2005) recognizes that “women who want to engage in agriculture shall have the right to get and use rural land.” In terms of land holding registration and certification, the law says: “Where land is jointly held by husband and wife or by other persons, the holding certificate shall be prepared in the name of all the joint holders”—a practice that was followed during SLLC.

Women’s land rights in a federal system — example provisions and implications from Amhara for integration with LDN programming

This Federal legislation sets the broad foundation for the country’s rural land administration, while the details are left to the states. Under Amhara law, both women and men have equal right to receive land holdings and, in some instances where land is scarce, the law gives priority to women, disabled people and orphans. The law specifies two ways for persons to obtain land holdings, either as distributed from the kebele (local government unit) that administers the land or by bequest or gift. Highlights of some key findings are:

- While both women and men have equal rights to receive land holdings, the provisions on inheritance are troubling when it comes to the rights for spouses to maintain land rights
- The Amhara law includes several provisions on land surveying, registration and the issuance of land holding

certificates that touch on WLR. These are positive provisions, so long as the public and implementers are aware of them and they are well implemented

- Regarding land administration, the law calls for balanced membership of women and men on elected land administration and use committees (LAUC)
- In terms of dispute resolution, “any civil dispute that may arise in connection to land holding or using right shall priorly be seen and resolved in arbitration.” While the provision is positive, it may be difficult for local people to actualize any benefits from this provision, especially women whose interests may be more likely to be harmed by customary practice.

Conclusion

Ethiopia had implemented vital policies to move towards achieving LDN. Recognizing the connection between secure land rights and sustainable land management, Ethiopia implemented two land certification programmes between 1998 and 2020. Prior to the implementation of these programmes, land tenure in Ethiopia was highly insecure.

As important stewards of land, women play a key part in shaping land management practices. The concept of Gudi-fecha is an example of how environmental conservation has been infused into social norms which has influenced a change in the political landscape and remains a pillar of sustainable land management practices.

Land tenure policies that do not meaningfully include women not only entrench existing gender inequalities but also fail to leverage women’s skills and knowledge around land management.

Given the importance of women’s land rights in the effort to achieve LDN, it is essential to eliminate barriers to women’s participation in decision-making processes, raise awareness about women’s land rights and ensure that policies are implemented in a gender-equitable way.



Women are key users and stewards of land. When they have secure land tenure, they are particularly likely to invest in sustainable land management and soil conservation

Granting land tenure security to women helps combat desertification — the example of Bani Hashem, Jordan

Celine Salcedo-La Viña, World Resources Institute; Renée Giovarelli, The Global Center for Gender Equality

Secure land rights for women are deemed a vital component of the global blueprint for a more sustainable world, enunciated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN Women 2016). Beyond the self-evident goal of achieving gender equality (SDG 5) and, given the key roles that they play in their communities, the achievement of women's land rights is recognized as essential and a crucial element of the goals of ending poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2), attaining food security and promoting sustainable agriculture. Meanwhile, life on land (SDG 15), calls for the protection of lands and ecosystems, particularly forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands that women depend on for resources and livelihoods.

However, women continue to face multiple barriers to securing land rights, including gaps in legislation, weak implementation of laws, lack of knowledge of their rights, and discriminatory cultural norms and practices. In some indigenous communities, giving women rights to land is viewed as discordant to group cohesion, resulting in the weakening of the collective tenure system¹. But, even as indigenous women subscribe to the vision of collective identity and the traditions of territorial rights, many are asserting their right to access and land use, and so participate in community land and resource governance². Case studies demonstrating how this nested system of women's rights within collective land rights is achievable can yield valuable lessons for those working on women's land rights as an enabling condition for achieving the SDGs.

Hima Bani-Hashem, Jordan: how granting land rights to women helped combat desertification

Bani Hashem consists of four communities located in the Zarqa River Basin in the northern highlands of Jordan, with a population is about 15,000, predominantly Bedouin herder tribes. Bani-Hashem is a desertification hotspot because of climate change and human activity, particularly overgrazing and stone quarrying. The Bedouins in Jordan traditionally had an expansive range extending across Syria, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, which allowed their rangelands to regenerate, but border restrictions between countries put a stop to this practice. In the 1970s, rights over tribal lands in Jordan were

transferred to state ownership, resulting in the rangelands becoming open access without restrictions or rules, which led to overgrazing and land degradation. In the 1980s, a government subsidy for livestock feed encouraged herders to grow their herds beyond the carrying capacity of the rangelands³. The Bedouins also shifted from pastoralism to settlement, causing livestock to overgraze in specific areas. Exacerbating this condition is the operation of three stone quarries in the area owned by private companies. The quarries affect the groundwater, roads and infrastructure as well as the physical health of community members due to the dust. The region has also suffered drought, and vegetables and fodder that once grew on the rangelands must now be grown on smaller areas using drip irrigation⁴.

Bedouin women are traditionally responsible for grazing the herd animals, while men are responsible for making decisions, marketing, and buying and selling animals and animal products. All financial matters related to animals are in the realm of men, but women can sell small items (such as detergent) for money. Women do not deal with banks; rather, they have their own savings groups. There has been little space in Jordan for women's participation in the economic, political and social life. The cultural expectation is that men will provide for their families and women will not work outside their homes, thus they often lack economic, social or political power. But Jordan had been making investments in favour of women, including in education and health, raising literacy levels, lowering child mortality and fertility rates (thus boosting labour participation) as well as raising life expectancy and improving the overall quality of life for women⁵. Women are now integrated into strategic planning in each of the government ministries. These positive developments are a result of the combined promotion of women's rights by the government and increased support and awareness-raising by civil society organizations.

The hima system

In 2010, Jordan was chosen as one of four country sites for a rangeland restoration and sustainable management project funded by the European Union and implemented by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, Regional Office of West Asia (IUCN-ROWA). The project — Securing

Rights and Restoring Lands for Improved Livelihoods — was implemented with the Jordanian Ministry of Agriculture and Arab Women's Organization (AWO), a Jordanian NGO with 12 women's groups in Amman as well as women's groups in the governorates (local government units similar to states or provinces). The project supported the revival of the hima system in Bani-Hashem and three other villages — Duliel, Hashemeyeh, and Hallabat — within the Zarqa River Basin, with a combined population of around 100,000 people. Hima, in Arabic, means a protected area. The system originated more than 1,500 years ago where it spread along the Arabian Peninsula as a tribal system of sustainable management of natural resources for organizing, maintaining, regulating and using natural pasture and rangelands. The parties believed that, because hima had its roots in traditional practice and Islamic law and at the same time recognized the needs and rights of local people, the system would be an acceptable and effective alternative to a centralized scheme under which pastureland is managed at the national level through protected area regulations.

The project had two components. The first was to secure the right of access to a specific area of land for the community together with the right of exclusion of non-community members. The tenure regime consisted of the right to access the land; the right to withdraw or obtain products or derive income from the land; and the right to manage access to the land and resources, control how the land is used, and exclude outsiders from access. Excluded in the tenure regime is the right of alienation⁶. With the prime minister's approval, the

Ministry of Agriculture identified and designated 100 ha of land to Bani Hashem to use and manage. The area is a part of 1,500 ha of treasury land and consists of a narrow wadi (valley that is dry except for the rainy season) surrounded by rocky mountains and hills on two sides.

The second component was to improve governance of the pasture. The project began to facilitate stakeholder dialogue to explain and discuss the hima system of pasture management. Stakeholders included land users from the local community and government and nongovernmental service providers that support the community. IUCN worked in the community for one year to convince people of the benefit of the system. In parallel, the AWO raised awareness about the benefits of including women in pasture management. AWO established a committee of women from the community and worked with them to conduct community gender sensitization. At first, the tribal leader of Bani Hashem was opposed to the women's involvement but was later convinced of its value. AWO's strategy was to avoid talking directly about religion and political and human rights for women per se, as these topics tend to be sensitive and may shut down the conversation immediately. Rather, it focused on environmental and agricultural issues. The AWO's message was that women are holders of significant knowledge and skills related to mitigation, adaptation and reduction of risk relevant to land degradation. This makes them crucial agents of information and knowledge sharing, which are necessary to improve community livelihoods. The tribal leader accompanied one of the most active and respected senior women



Image: UNEP / Lisa Murray

Women have begun exploring the market for tea made from local medicinal herbs, showing evidence of potential new revenue streams from restored rangelands



Image: IUCN / Lara Nassar

The Arab Women's Organization conducted community training on pasture management and the hima system, teaching women to identify and make use of medicinal herbs on the land to earn additional income

in the community to visit people who were against women participating and helped convince them that women should be part of the Bani Hashem Pasture Association.

The AWO also conducted community training on pasture management and the hima system, teaching women to identify and make use of medicinal herbs on the land to earn additional income. Some training was in mixed groups of women and men, while other sessions were women-only as some men objected to women being trained because they disagreed with the idea of women working. Even though women traditionally took livestock to the pastures, men did not consider that 'outside' work because caring for livestock was part of the household duties. Managing the pastures and using the pastures for herb collection or other economic reasons was, however, considered work. At first, it was only older women who were able to attend community meetings. It was a new idea that it was important for women to work to improve household welfare.

For its part, IUCN supported women's inclusion by stipulating that the management committee convened to establish the hima should comprise 40 per cent women and, following the year of gender sensitization, the committee was founded with seven men and six women who volunteered for the position. When the committee members were later elected, the community kept the same membership split. Many women credited the most active senior woman in the community, who was their de facto leader, for organizing women to join

the hima. Notably, women who were committee members were either well known themselves, or their husbands were well known.

To formalize the pasture user association for the hima, a tribal charter was drafted and signed by community members, pledging protection from violation. The charter called for the hiring of private guards to exclude nomads or outsiders and enforce fallows to allow the pasture to regenerate (rotational grazing). Protecting the pilot area allowed shrubs and grasses to regenerate, restoring the land's vegetation to 1990 levels. Some indigenous species, such as *artemisia herba-alba* (desert or white wormwood), subsequently reappeared on the hima site. A total of 36 native plant species were recorded on the site, mainly on the northwestern slope, which receives the highest amounts of rainfall. After one year of activities and protecting the hima area from herders, biodiversity benefits could be observed through the increase of biomass and restoration of indigenous floral species.

After the fallow period, women are the first people allowed back into the recovered rangeland to pick medicinal plants. Women make tea bags out of medicinal herbs and sell them. Part of the earnings are passed to the pasture user association. A group of women from the community made a field visit to another hima site, Al Mujeb, set up by an independent national organization, the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) to learn from the RSCN's experience in the production and marketing of medicinal plants.



Image: Celine Salcedo-La Vina and Renée Giovarelli

Women discuss positive changes for themselves and their communities brought about by the rangeland restoration project during a focus group held in Adrooh, Jordan



Image: Celine Salcedo-La Vina and Renée Giovarelli

Hima Bani-Hashem

With funding from the European Union, Bani Hashem purchased a drying and packaging unit for medicinal plants to help the women's tea enterprise. Herb collection is difficult, with women working from dawn until 10:00 a.m., again returning to the pasture at 4:00 or 5:00 p.m.

Women have gained confidence from working and earning. Their first-hand knowledge and experience of pasture management — as those primarily responsible for grazing livestock — is being recognized and integrated into the management of the hima. Before the project, men did not

want women to work. During the project and subsequently, men have been happy with the two incomes.

Women earning an income has changed the household dynamic so that they are now able to make household decisions, believing in their decision-making ability because of their new-found economic power. Men have verified this impression, stating that, now women are earning an income, there is more confidence in their opinions. The women are proud of their new ability to organize around issues they care about and to make changes, something they said they were not able to do before the project. For example, they successfully organized a council of education for the children in the community, with eight members composed equally of women and men.

However, the conclusion of the project and end of donor funding in 2013 has brought challenges, such as lack of funds to pay for the private guards needed to protect the hima from outsiders. The community has discussed with the government about processes to protect the pastures, which may include movable fencing. The women's enterprise also slowed down after the project, as most of their sales were brought about by project activities. Large companies have offered to buy the herbs but will sell them under their own, rather than the hima brand that is important to the women. The current difficulties faced by Bani Hashem, while not undoing any of the rights and achievements gained by women, make it challenging for both women and men in the community to sustain the benefits from the hima that they have come to expect. This underscores the importance of public investment to ensure the sustainability of gains achieved in the project.

Stand for Her Land

Beth Roberts, Director, Landesa Center for Women's Land Rights

Victoria, a farmer from Chogongwe Village, Morogoro, Tanzania, came to know her rights as a woman via the mentorship of another woman, Rehema, a champion trained by Stand for Her Land, the global advocacy initiative working to realize women's right to land and natural resources, in practice worldwide¹. Rehema herself came to understand her rights and opportunities related to land through local training designed to support women in Tanzania to know and defend their rights, and to practice agroecology to support better livelihoods and healthy soil. When she encountered Victoria, whose rights to use and care for her land were limited by gender-based violence and a lack of access to justice, Rehema was able to get her the assistance she needed. Now Victoria can also farm her land and feed her family and community.

The goal of Stand for Her Land is to encourage women to champion other women in order to both realize their rights and care for the planet, woman by woman, around the world. This approach is grounded in growing evidence and growing hope — at scale, the solution of securing gender-equitable tenure rights can result in the seismic and urgent transformation needed towards gender justice and a sustainable future for all of humanity on one shared planet.



Rehema, one of the women's land rights champions trained by Stand for Her Land Tanzania

The problem at scale

Globally, approximately 2.5 billion land users in indigenous and local communities are vital stewards of about 50 per cent of the world's land. Including recent progress, their rights are formally recognized in relation to only 11 per cent of this land and, even when legally recognized, those rights might not be secure².

In addition, approximately 1 billion people worldwide live in informal settlements, leaving them more vulnerable to climate impacts and less able to adapt. This number is predicted to grow to 3 billion within 30 years³. The lack of recognition and security of tenure across the urban-to-rural spectrum violates human rights for billions and hinders progress towards addressing the interrelated land, climate and biodiversity crises. A lack of secure tenure rights is recognized by the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) as a key driver of land degradation⁴.

Tenure rights for women and girls are weaker relative to men and boys in most settings worldwide, due to inequitable legal frameworks (both formal and customary) and to strong patriarchal and discriminatory norms. This means that roughly 2.7 billion women within the communities described above can be hampered by inadequate tenure security in their roles as land and resource stewards and in their contribution to sustainable, equitable urbanization.

Women's tenure rights are also tied to and determined by other identities such as indigeneity, age, religion, marital status, caste and class. Actors from grassroots to global levels must coordinate in numerous ways to effectively and swiftly strengthen equitable tenure rights as a basis for a just and sustainable future. But this need for coordination is not well charted or resourced, and women and other marginalized groups are often excluded from decision-making at all levels.

There is significant and increasing global recognition of the importance of tenure and of efforts to ensure gender-just tenure rights. Over the last several years, the global community and actors in the human rights, gender equality and climate spaces have:

- Adopted the Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure (2012)
- Adopted the Sustainable Development Goals, which recognize gender-equitable tenure in several targets and indicators (2015)
- Declared women's rights to land and natural resources to be "fundamental human rights" (CEDAW, 2016)
- Adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants, which includes strong standards on tenure (2018)



A farmer in Karamoja, where Stand for Her Land Uganda works to change attitudes to support women's rights to land

- Adopted landmark decisions on tenure (UNCCD, 2019/22)
- Integrated land rights into the accelerated efforts for gender equality under the Generation Equality Forum (UN Women, 2021)
- Established and articulated the relationship between land and human rights (CESCR, 2022)
- Launched an initiative on women's land rights in the Rio Conventions (2023).

These are just a few of many global efforts. In addition, over the last few decades, numerous countries globally have taken strong steps to enshrine gender equality related to land, property and natural resources in constitutional and legislative guarantees.

Despite these commitments, countries' legal and policy frameworks vary in guaranteeing and protecting women's land rights in a fully inclusive manner, and in whether their frameworks are harmonized across formal, customary and religious tenure regimes. But, even in countries where legal frameworks are relatively equitable, women's land rights are frequently unrealized in practice. Strong laws and policies mean little to individual women such as Victoria without effective implementation and enforcement.

There have also been significant efforts to implement women's land rights in practice, including work to improve coordination between local, national and global actors.

Substantial work to strengthen women's land rights is ongoing in many countries worldwide. While contexts differ, women still face similar challenges to claim and secure their land rights. First, governments are unlikely to marshal the resources needed to close the gap for equitable tenure rights without strong dual incentives, namely: demand from the public, civil society and development and private sector partners; and clarity on the importance of equitable tenure among numerous competing policy objectives. Second, women often lack the information, support, allyship and social freedom they need to exercise agency and realize their rights, especially in rural areas. Entrenched patriarchal norms and weak implementation are mutually reinforcing barriers to equitable tenure rights, discriminatory norms stifle and dissuade implementation, and a lack of implementation in turn lends legitimacy and impunity to those who actively deny women their rights.

Numerous national and local civil society organizations hold invaluable expertise and long experience on women's land rights, and are working tirelessly to address these complex dynamics. Crucially, they have often lacked both

the needed resources and a coordinating mechanism to identify and act on shared goals to achieve the systems change needed to realize those secure and equitable tenure rights.

The solution at scale

Land tenure is not a new problem, but it is increasingly recognized as fundamental to both justice and survival for humanity. And new and powerful solutions are emerging.

Stand for Her Land is a global initiative designed to address the gap between the strong standards that exist at global, regional and national levels to ensure gender-equitable tenure rights and the lack of those rights in practice. The goal is to empower women like Victoria and Rehema to realize their rights and become leaders in their communities. When women hold rights to land and lead on decisions related to land and natural resources, there are a host of benefits, including equal dignity and agency for women, greater food security and nutrition, increased resilience to climate impacts, greater contributions to mitigation, and a reduction in conflict within and between homes and communities.

Stand for Her Land responds to organic demand from grassroots women and local organizations around the world to achieve these goals. Collectively, the initiative recognizes that closing the gap between law and practice for gender-just tenure requires building political will from local to global levels. Coordinated advocacy under a unifying and systematic strategy has been the missing piece. Stand for Her Land seeks to radically accelerate the pace and scope of gender-just tenure implementation through coordinated advocacy.

How does this solution at scale work?

Stand for Her Land works via collective, locally-developed and locally-led advocacy, supported by capacity-sharing between actors at global, national and local levels, to ensure that land tenure governance, reforms and processes equitably include, benefit, and are led by women. The Stand for Her Land initiative operates via national-level coalitions comprising grassroots, subnational and national-level civil society organizations and individual women's land rights advocates, and is facilitated by a global steering committee⁵. These national coalitions work in partnership with governments and collaborate with international NGOs, multilateral and bilateral development partners and institutions (including the UNCCD and its sister Rio Conventions), academia and other key stakeholders, to realize gender-just tenure rights in practice.

The Stand for Her Land model includes four key aspects to increase political will for women's land rights, and to accelerate strengthening these rights in practice:

- Public advocacy — increasing awareness and demand from the public at large for stronger women's land rights
- Policy advocacy — working from local to global levels to strengthen and bridge standards related to gender-just tenure
- Community engagement — building awareness, legal literacy and local advocacy
- Social norms and behaviour change — engaging women, men, youth, community and institutional leaders to identify and transform gendered discriminatory norms in order to effect gender justice related to land.



Stand for Her Land Bangladesh — Monoara Begum was given a piece of land by her father, overcoming discriminatory gendered norms



Stand for Her Land works for gender justice. Starting with land rights for women helps men and women benefit equitably

In all efforts, from local to global, Stand for Her Land prioritises and resources the leadership of grassroots women who have championed equitable tenure rights for decades and whose engagement and expertise is often under-recognized and under-resourced. Coalitions also engage with civil society actors or groups focused on issues adjacent to tenure rights, including farmers' rights, youth rights, indigenous peoples' rights and climate action, and whose vision, capacity and activities align with the women's land rights movement. Coalitions serve as the catalyst for unified strategies among these actors to help close the implementation gap and spur additional reforms needed for equitable tenure. Coalitions support these actors to leverage the power of tenure as a foundation for achieving the goals of their movements in turn.

Stand for Her Land currently has active coalitions working for implementation of women's tenure rights in six countries: Bangladesh, Colombia, Ethiopia, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda; is gearing up to launch in Kenya; and has ongoing efforts at national and local levels in Libya, Lebanon and Tunisia. In response to growing momentum from global, national and grassroots partners, the initiative is also actively working to establish a presence in several more countries, including: Albania, Jordan, Ghana, Rwanda, India, Liberia, Indonesia, Malawi, Pakistan, the Philippines, Argentina, Guatemala and Peru.

Stand for Her Land also collaborates with formal global partners and is co-leading in several global spaces to further the links between gender-just tenure, gender equality and climate action. This includes efforts with the UNCCD Secretariat and partners to support awareness-raising at the intersection of land restoration and gender-equitable and socially inclusive

tenure rights and integration of tenure into UNCCD Parties' efforts to achieve land degradation neutrality (LDN).

In Ethiopia, Stand for Her Land has worked to strengthen the links between local level work on land restoration and gender-just tenure, to national level policy work on tenure and LDN, to the UNCCD's global efforts to raise the profile of women's land rights as a basis for LDN. This has supported greater collaboration between members of the Stand for Her Land coalition at this intersection, provided recommendations for the Ethiopian government at this critical nexus, supported increased locally-led advocacy in global venues and leveraged the strengths of Stand for Her Land's global partner, the International Senior Lawyer's Project (ISLP)⁶.

The vision at scale

Stand for Her Land works for nothing less than a transformed world: one where gender justice has been achieved and societies live free of conflict and within ecological boundaries. Land — and the power and resources it represents — underlies the world's current conflicts within homes and between states, while current arrangements of control over land drive the climate, soil and biodiversity crises.

But with every effort to ensure that land is held more equitably, more democratically — and to ensure women and girls can know, claim and defend their rights to land and natural resources, and can increasingly assume equal leadership in decision-making spaces related to land at all levels — the closer we get to this envisioned and longed-for world. Stand for Her Land seeks to catalyze and multiple these efforts; to drive greater collective action until every Victoria has a safe place to call her own.



United Nations
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Desertification

HER LAND

#HerLand





Inna Modja
Goodwill Ambassador
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

#HERLAND EXHIBITION

Telling the stories of women, girls and land through a unique fusion of nature, technology and art

In the vast deserts of Ordos City, Inner Mongolia, China, a woman named Yi Yuzhen sows the seeds of change. Braving sand storms, she has turned the desert into an oasis, controlling over 40,000 hectares of shifting dunes. Her resilience and actions inspire, leading hundreds of households to plant trees, fostering work, equality and a sustainable future. Awarded and globally recognized, Yi Yuzhen is a beacon, shining light on our ability to heal our world.

The story of Yi Yuzhen is among many inspiring examples featured in Her Land virtual exhibition. Through immersive experiences and rich imagery in the digital realm, Her Land tells stories of women and girls from around the world who are role models and land champions who have been using their knowledge, wisdom and commitment for more sustainable land practices and making this world a better place for us all.

We must dare to invent the future. I saw that dare come to life in the resilience and bravery of communities, and within them, the fierce strength of women, relentlessly fighting to protect their land, their homes, their communities. The empowerment of women is absolutely essential in our fight against land degradation and desertification.

That's why, together with UNCCD, we wanted to celebrate the voices, experiences and creativity that shape #HerLand campaign and, above all, showcase the transformative power of women's leadership in sustainable land management.

Although the imagery of HerLand exhibition harnesses the power of technology and artificial intelligence, these are true stories of women, which unveil their bond with the land.



Image: Inna Modja

Through this exhibition, we invite you to reflect on the transformation of our environment, its interconnectedness, and the challenges posed by desertification. To experience the beauty and complexity of our evolving relationship with the planet. And to explore the various elements that together create a tapestry of awareness that leads to change.

Every voice and every action counts, and you too can help by engaging your communities to support more women and girls to lead global land restoration and drought resilience efforts.

#HerLand Virtual Exhibition

Through the creative efforts of Inna Modja and Marco Conti Sikic, Her Land exhibition brings together immersive digital experiences, poignant photography and artful videos in support of a world in which women's rights to land are recognized and their contributions are celebrated.

To learn more, visit:
<https://herland.global/>



Ricky Kej
Goodwill Ambassador
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

CLOSING REMARKS

UNCCD's #HerLand campaign is absolutely inspiring. Imagine a small village in a developing nation, where land degradation has turned once-fertile fields into barren patches. Women in these communities often bear the brunt of this crisis, as they're the ones who manage the land, grow the food and care for their families.

#HerLand shines a spotlight on these incredible women and their vital role in restoring their lands. It's not just about raising awareness; it's about making a real difference in their lives. The campaign provides them with resources, training and a platform to share their stories. This helps them get the support they need to turn degraded land back into productive fields, which means more food, better livelihoods and stronger communities.

What's powerful here is the personal touch. For these women, it's more than just a campaign — it's a lifeline. It acknowledges their daily struggles and amplifies their voices, ensuring they're not just part of the solution but leading it. The campaign also removes barriers that have long held them back, such as lack of access to resources or decision-making power.

This campaign is a movement that's truly changing lives on the ground. It's about recognizing and empowering women who are profoundly impacting their communities, helping them build a more sustainable and hopeful future for themselves and their families. I am proud to be associated with his groundbreaking project and to lend my support to it.



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Landesa is an international non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of millions of those living in poverty worldwide, mostly rural women and men, by securing land rights, enabling economic opportunities, advocating for gender equity, and advancing climate justice.

International Senior Lawyers Project (ISLP) is an independent non-profit organization that provides pro bono legal support to governments and civil society in the Global South to advance the rule of law and development initiatives that are locally led, inclusive, accountable, and sustainable. ISLP recognizes with gratitude the research support of volunteer lawyers from Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP.

Population, Health and Environment Consortium-Ethiopia (PHE) works in four regions: Amhara, Oromia, Gambella and Beneshangul Gumuz. PHE employs two basic interventions: 1) policy advocacy with the national government, and 2) capacity sharing with regional and local governments.

Movement for Ecological Learning and Community Action (MELCA) works in four regions: Amhara, Oromia, Gambella and Southwest Ethiopia (SWE). At the federal level MELCA works with the Ministry of Agriculture, Environmental Protection Authority, Ethiopia Biodiversity Institute, Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, and Ministry of Education.

Union of Ethiopian Women and Children Association (UEWCA) works in four regions: Amhara, Tigray, Afar and Beneshangul Gumuz (BG). At the federal level, the Environmental Protection Authority is a primary partner for UEWCA.

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