



## Women's access to land in sub-Saharan Africa

Women and in particular widows and women-headed households tend to be denied, or are assigned weaker, land rights and as a result are often amongst the most vulnerable in the society. Strengthening their rights to land contributes not only to gender equality but also to poverty reduction, since women are responsible for household subsistence production and welfare. IFAD's experience shows that improving women's economic status is essential for overall improvement in their social status and well-being. But, for women's economic status to improve, they need secure access to land. Customary land tenure systems prevail in most areas where IFAD-supported programmes are implemented. Under customary law, women tend to have weaker but nonetheless protected rights. These rights tend to be eroded in rapidly changing societies. The main challenge is managing the transition in a way that strengthens/defends the rights of the rural poor and women. Certain key legal provisions for strengthening women's rights could include the recognition of their "secondary" rights being equal to men's rights, the co-registration of spousal rights and the recognition of women's inheritance rights. IFAD has learned that defending and expanding women's rights requires comprehensive action at different levels: information and capacity building; organisational and empowerment measures; legal assistance and advocacy. Land tenure issues are inextricably linked to gender relations and thus a gender analysis is critical to design effective targeted actions. It is often necessary to put in place complementary measures to enable women to actually influence decisions regarding their rights to land.

Against a backdrop of vulnerability in rural areas of **Burundi** – where many women are unaware of their land rights – the Transitional Programme of Post-Conflict Reconstruction (PTRPC) works to restore livelihoods, build social capital, and promote dignity and food security in poor communities. In conjunction with the Ministry of Justice, the programme sponsors several "clinics" that disseminate legal information, encouraging rural women to fight discrimination and exercise their rights in land cases involving family relations and inheritance.

Although **Rwandan** law guarantees women's rights to land tenure, traditional practices still lead to gender discrimination. Consequently, many women are unable to own, control or inherit land. The Rwanda Initiative for Sustainable Development (RISD) works to increase community awareness of land rights, especially for rural women who depend on land for their livelihood. One key area of intervention is land registration, which gives wives an opportunity to secure their property rights to land that is registered in the names of both spouses.

The Southern Nyanza Community Development Project (SNCDP) in **Kenya** has as a primary objective a gender balanced empowerment of rural communities through improved health and a more rational use of natural resources. Lack of knowledge on statutory and customary rights and the highly limited capacity of local institutions are identified as the major reasons for land disputes which



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affect disproportionately women. As a part of its community empowerment component, the project put an emphasis on women's rights and rapid settlement of land disputes. Another essential component is to make women and other vulnerable groups better informed about their rights under traditional customs to foster a more secure access to land resources.

In the Community-Based Integrated Natural Resources Management in the Lake Tana Watershed (CBINReMP) in **Ethiopia**, women's representation on the Land Administration and Use Committees appears to be having a positive impact on resolving disputes over women's land ownership. Most land holdings are being registered in the name of both spouses and there is a high percentage of land registered by women. This seems to be having a positive impact on women's security of tenure and involvement in decision making over land use.

Despite equal-rights legislation on the books in **Tanzania**, customary norms continue to limit rural women's ownership and control of land. The Sustainable Rangeland Management Project – implemented by the International Land Coalition with technical support from IFAD – was set up in 2009 under the Agricultural Sector Development Programme – Livestock: Support for Pastoral and Agro-Pastoral Development (ASDP-L) to help secure women's land rights through the Village Land Use Planning process. Support for gender equity is essential to the viability of this process, which requires community-level plans for the use of land and natural resources in rural areas.

In **Ghana**, the Upper East Region Land Conservation and Smallholder Rehabilitation Project (LACOSREP), agreements were negotiated with tindanas and traditional chiefs. Negotiations also took place with husbands and male leaders. The Lowland Agricultural Development Programme (LADEP) in the **Gambia**, supported a process of devolution of land ownership from local landowners to landless farmers, mainly women. The project mobilised female labour in land-reclamation efforts by facilitating processes of intra-community negotiations between landless women farmers and traditional authorities. In **Niger**, women's land rights have long been protected by law and custom. But due to pressure on the land, these protections have weakened over time. As a result, farming has been "defeminized" in some areas, where women can no longer cultivate their own fields. Under the Project for the Promotion of Local Initiative for Development (PPIILDA) a Pilot Project for Land Security – implemented by local partners – was established to develop and test an accessible, flexible mechanism for the acquisition of land titles by vulnerable smallholder farmers, including women.

The Global Land Tool Network (GLTN), in collaboration with partners, have developed a **gender evaluation criteria tool** that can be used to assess the gender responsiveness of a land project or any land interventions. The tool has been piloted in Ghana, Nepal and Brazil. GLTN has also produced training manuals on this tool. In Uganda, an NGO affiliated with the Huairou Commission, has implemented the tool by assessing various country-wide land administration projects and interventions. In Brazil, through the piloting activities, an NGO promoting women's land rights were empowered to articulate their land tenure issues and needs and were able to convince government authorities not to evict about 55,000 slum dwellers. At present, the four slum settlements are being upgraded and regularized and GLTN is currently providing them technical assistance and supporting them in the documentation.



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## Land and Natural Resources Learning Initiative for East and Southern Africa

IFAD and UN-Habitat, through the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN), have entered into a partnership to implement the 'Land and Natural Resources Learning Initiative for Eastern and Southern Africa (TSLI-ESA)'. The initiative aims to improve knowledge management strategies and approaches towards pro-poor and gender-sensitive land and natural resource tenure rights in selected East and Southern African countries.

TSLI-ESA focuses primarily, but not exclusively, on the following five themes:

- i. Using technically advanced geographic information technologies, such as aerial photography, remote sensing technology and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for mapping land and natural resource rights, use and management.
- ii. Recognising and documenting small-scale farmers' land and water rights in irrigation schemes.
- iii. Recognising and documenting group rights, focusing on range and grazing lands, forests and artisanal fishing areas.
- iv. Strengthening women's access to land.
- v. Documenting best practices in securing land and natural resource rights through business partnerships between small-scale farmers and investors.