

HOW TO STRENGTHEN WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS AND ENRICH AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS

Smallholder women farmers are critical for the productivity and resilience of food systems.

But compared with men, women have disproportionately limited and insecure land rights and less access to agricultural inputs and services.

Without confidence in their ownership of, access to, and control over their land, farmers have less incentive and ability to make long-term investments in productive and sustainable farming.



Women make up 38% of the workers in primary agricultural production.ⁱ



At least 1/3 of married women worry they would lose their rights to land if their marriage ends.ⁱⁱ



Increasing women's knowledge about their land rights promotes women's uptake of soil and water conservation and agroforestry.ⁱⁱⁱ

Agricultural projects and agribusinesses can strengthen women's land rights—and make agrifood systems more effective and equitable—using these core approaches:



Awareness-raising
& legal literacy



Expand women's land
access & governance in
customary tenure systems



Support gender-responsive,
participatory certification
of land rights



Combine land tenure &
agricultural interventions



Address social norms
& behavior change



Awareness-raising and legal literacy

If women do not understand their rights, they cannot fully demand them. If leaders do not know women's land rights, they cannot fully uphold them. Understanding their land rights can also enhance women's influence in household decisions and improve how local land governance bodies include women in making decisions.

In-person training, short plays, traditional media, and new digital technologies can deepen understanding about women's land rights.^{iv}

LAND Project Radio Programming

Rwanda, 2014-2015

A 10-month campaign of radio dramas, talk shows, and quiz programs enhanced people's understanding of women's land rights and promoted gender equality. Informed by results from a survey of women's and men's knowledge and attitudes about women's and girls' land rights, content emphasized equitable inheritance and rights of marital property, including for informally married women. At the campaign's end, 91% of men surveyed supported daughters' rights to inherit equally with sons, compared to 71% before the campaign.

Talking Books and Town Halls

Liberia, 2021-2023

Landesa distributed Amplio Talking Books, durable handheld audio devices offering educational messaging in 13 of Liberia's 16 local languages, in combination with community town hall meetings, to raise awareness of the Land Rights Law in low-literacy areas. The Talking Books included messages about land laws, community land formalization, land and property rights for women in customary marriage, Liberia Land Authority services, and alternative dispute resolution. After the households' time with the Talking Books, people discussed the topics and posed questions to legal experts at town hall meetings. Following completion, 90-100% of users correctly answered questions on the subject matter, compared to 0-20% before distribution. Multiple chiefs also began inviting women to meetings about land.



Expanding women's land access and governance in customary tenure systems

In areas with customary land tenure systems, it is crucial to tailor activities to the gender norms and traditional governance structures at play.

As gatekeepers and social authorities, **traditional leaders** play a vital role in opening pathways to strengthen women's land rights. Promoting gender integration and **including women in local governance** can enhance women's say in community decisions about land. **Facilitating group access to customary lands for women's use and management** in alignment with existing culturally accepted roles for women can expand women's use of improved agricultural technologies and cultivation of higher value crops.

ADVANCE II

Ghana, 2014-2020

Networks of local farm service providers made the case to customary leaders on why women should have rights to manage land^{vi}. By emphasizing the contributions of women to the local agricultural economy, these service providers made the case for strengthening women's rights to land. They also shared research findings with traditional leaders showing that women's agricultural productivity was higher when they could farm land close to their homestead.

Enhanced Homestead Food Production

Burkina Faso, 2010-2012

The project worked with landowners to identify customary land that could be used for a Village Model Farm—a demonstration plot where women farmers teach other women about crop production and animal rearing—and provided initial agricultural and animal inputs. Women often applied learnings from the Village Model Farms in their own home production. Their successful production in the Village Model Farms improved community members' opinions on women's capabilities to manage land^{vii}.



Supporting gender-responsive, participatory certification of land rights

Participatory land certification can be a pathway to increasing women's and men's investment in sustainable agricultural practices, in addition to their access to agricultural inputs and commercial opportunities. **The process typically includes: raising public awareness, resolving existing land conflicts, mapping and verifying land parcels, and formally registering land.**

Agribusinesses and projects can incorporate land certification to reduce risk and disputes among their suppliers and increase crop productivity. Drawing lessons from large-scale land certification programs to ensure the process is gender-responsive is key to protecting women's land rights both legally and in practice.

Cooperative-Issued Land Certificates

Mozambique, 2016-2019

A partnership between Illovo Sugar Company and USAID issued land certificates through agricultural cooperatives as precursors to fully legally registered certificates, which took additional time and effort to obtain. Sugar companies accepted these cooperative certificates for farmers to register as outgrowers. As a result, women and men farmers' perceived tenure security improved and the strength of company's supply base increased^{viii}.

Land Investment for Transformation Project

Ethiopia, 2013-2021

This project delivered tailored messages for different groups within the community to encourage seeing women's land rights and joint registration as practical protection for children and a moral good. Key to engaging women throughout land certification steps was the project Social Development Officer (SDO), who spent time in communities to identify women who were experiencing land disputes, vulnerable to harm during the certification process, or likely to be left out of the certification process. These SDOs were key in raising awareness of women's legal rights, facilitating conversations about violations of women's land rights, and ensuring the participation of women at key steps throughout registration^{ix}.



Combining land tenure and agricultural interventions

Projects that seek to both expand women's access to agricultural inputs and services and strengthen their land rights can have better outcomes than projects that address only one.

Such outcomes include: smallholder women farmers feeling more tenure secure or having access to more land; women having greater access to financial services; women having greater roles in decisions about production, land use, or income use; and higher use of agricultural inputs and sustainable agricultural practices.

Land Investment for Transformation Project

Ethiopia, 2013-2021

This large-scale land certification program worked with local microfinance institutions and the Government of Ethiopia to pilot leveraging land certificates to access loans. The land use rights validated by the certificates served as collateral, and landholders could apply for loans as individuals instead of in a group, enabling flexibility in loan size and repayment options. More women having land certificates in their name meant more women farmers could access agricultural finance. More than 22,000 first-time borrowers—34% women—received loans using their land certificates, with only a 2% default rate^x.

Integrated Land and Resource Governance Project

India, 2018-2023

A component of this project partnered with PepsiCo in India to support landless women, mainly from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and religious minorities, to collectively rent land and farm potatoes for PepsiCo's supply chain. Women in these land-leasing groups received agronomic training through PepsiCo's extension services, which the project supported to make more gender-responsive. Over the course of the project, these women increasingly saw themselves as farmers in their own right rather than as helpers, and their families and communities began to see them as farmers too^{xi}.



Social norms and behavior change

A woman's ability to exercise her land rights is often influenced by social norms in her community.

Engaging men, identifying and supporting champions, and facilitating local solutions can address norms that present barriers to women's land rights. **Successful behavior change practices include repeated interactions to build trust, opportunities for people to practice new behaviors, and influencing a core group of people before pursuing widespread reach.**

Rising Up! Project

Democratic Republic of Congo, 2020-2022

This project incorporated women's empowerment and gender-based violence prevention approaches into training on women's land rights for male community leaders. Trainings encouraged male leaders to reflect upon and shift norms and customs that limited women's access to land, use gender-sensitive practices in dispute resolution, and provide referrals for gender-based violence survivors. After a "step-down" training where these male leaders trained husbands of women interested in obtaining customary land titles, all male leaders served as role models by granting land to their spouses to register in their names, and 95% of the men they trained did the same^{xii}.

Integrated Land and Resource Governance Project

Malawi, 2018-2023

As part of customary land registration, this project facilitated household dialogues on harmful gender norms. During these dialogues, community gender champions were identified and worked in pairs to spread messages door-to-door and at community gatherings. Support to the champions included training to facilitate discussions about the benefits of gender-inclusive land ownership and decision-making, a discussion guide and FAQ document, a comic booklet, posters, t-shirts, and a small stipend^{xiii}.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ☐ To find entry points for strengthening women's land tenure and avoiding harm, research existing laws, company policies, customary rules, and social norms that may be barriers or opportunities for women to engage.
- ☐ Engage land experts as advisors in design and implementation.
- ☐ Combine multiple approaches as appropriate for the context and project/company.
- ☐ Ensure awareness-raising and norm change activities are tailored, iterative, and locally led.
- ☐ Include men, especially traditional leaders.
- ☐ Incorporate or support land certification efforts when appropriate and able to engage the needed skills.
- ☐ Make deliberate efforts to increase women's participation and decision-making in activities.
- ☐ Collect data on women's land tenure and land management and share "how-to" lessons and outcomes of approaches to improve women smallholder farmers' land tenure.

CONCLUSION

Enhancing women's land rights in agricultural programs can increase women farmers':

- ✓ Access to land
- ✓ Confidence that they will not lose land against their will
- ✓ Use of agricultural inputs and good agricultural practices
- ✓ Participation in commercial agriculture

Combined, women's enhanced land rights, women's increased agricultural production, and women's greater role in decisions about land, production, and income are building blocks of women's economic empowerment, overall food security, and healthy rural economies.

+ LAND RIGHTS

+ AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

+ DECISION-MAKING POWER



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