

WHAT WILL SAVE THE WORLD?

# WOMEN AND DIRT

**Confront the Climate Crisis,  
Uproot Gender Inequality**



**A bold, transformative investment in rural & indigenous women's rights to the soil and forests they steward ensures more sustainable life for all on this planet.**

***There is urgent need for effective climate action.*** The planet is warming. Unequivocally. Quickly. We must reduce carbon emissions. But just as crucially, we must protect the forests, wetlands, grasslands, and coasts that store vast amounts of carbon. We must restore the carbon rich topsoil that feeds our growing global population.

2.5 billion people in rural and indigenous communities worldwide already safeguard these ecosystems crucial for human survival; women within these communities play a key role for sustainable land and resource management and food security. But only a minority of this land is legally recognized, leaving these communities at risk of exploitative land grabs and

without the foundation needed for long-term planning and accessing government services. As climate impacts worsen, long-term sustainable land management has never been more critical. Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by climate change, and their rights to land and resources are constrained in law and in practice. For all of us—worldwide—food, health, safety, and sustainability depend on securing gender equitable land rights. Land rights matter because it matters who benefits as we seek to conserve ecosystems, move to regenerative agriculture to feed all of humanity and protect biodiversity, and contribute to drawdown. And we can only effectively address the climate crisis when these rural and indigenous women - and their communities as a whole - benefit. →

***There is also urgent need for action on gender equality.*** In 2021, the UN Secretary General named gender inequality “the unfinished human rights struggle of this century,” and the Generation Equality Forum seeks to swiftly and strategically accelerate gender equality, including women’s land rights as a part of feminist climate justice.

Around the world, women are critical actors and allies in the fight against climate change. In both rural and urban areas, women are disproportionately impacted by climate change, but are also uniquely positioned to act because of their role as natural resource managers and caretakers—and because they see their relationship with the earth as one of care, mutuality, and stewardship.

Women often lack recognition and rights as land stewards due to deeply entrenched patriarchal social norms that regard land as a male purview. And women face discrimination or even violence if they try to claim their rights or have a voice in decision-making spaces. These inequalities blunt women’s crucial leadership on climate action and violate their human rights.

Increasing women’s control over land increases their decision-making ability at the household and community levels and boosts their political engagement, increasing their influence as changemakers to build climate resilience. ***Land rights for women flips the***

***script of gendered power***—it challenges patriarchy at its root, by fundamentally changing women’s economic, social, and political status. And key to climate action, research shows efforts to protect biodiversity and address climate change are more successful when women have strong land rights.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification’s lead scientist states that an investment of \$300 billion dollars in restoring land and ecosystems (the amount spent on defense globally in 60 days) would buy the global community time to reduce fossil fuel use and avoid climate catastrophe. Rural and indigenous women should be supported to lead these restoration projects, starting with land rights. Their leadership would ensure that climate action means climate justice: sustainable livelihoods, fulfilled human rights, and a more resilient planet for all. →



***Livelihoods and Land Degradation Neutrality***

*In West Bengal, Landesa advances women’s land rights so that women can tend their own livestock on their own land. Landesa advocates for land rights as a means to achieve land degradation neutrality and secure livelihoods for women farmers, pastoralists, forest dwellers, and fishers around the world.*



In rural Senegal, women farmers supported through the S4HL campaign employ agroecological practices to protect the soil, increase productivity, and protect human health and well-being; secure land rights make these practices possible.



In Yangon Region women from a community forest — newly certified with the support of Landesa — sort the seafood that will provide protein to their community. Myanmar’s mangrove forests not only sequester carbon, they feed families. Before Landesa began working with community forests in Myanmar, only men’s names were included on certificates.

## WOMEN AND DIRT: LANDESA DIGS IN

### Building climate resilience through strengthened land rights for women

The Stand for Her Land (S4HL) Campaign works to strengthen land rights for women around the world by closing the gap between law and practice and helping fulfill promises of gender equality, by supporting coalitions of grassroots women and women-led organizations. As Secretariat, Landesa amplifies the linkages between women’s land rights and climate mitigation and adaptation in its work in six countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

### Bolstering participatory & gender-equitable land governance to support land degradation neutrality

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the sole legally binding international agreement linking the environment, poverty, and development to sustainable land management in the drylands. At the request of the UNCCD Secretariat in 2022, Landesa drafted an awareness raising strategy to support integration of gender-equal tenure rights as a foundational component of achieving land degradation neutrality goals. Following review by Parties at COP15, the strategy guides 197 signatory countries’ implementation of land tenure in pursuance of UNCCD goals.

### Mitigating climate change and sustaining women’s livelihoods in Southeast Asian mangrove forests

Southeast Asia’s 4.6 million hectares of mangrove forests sequester vast amounts of carbon, harbor rare biodiversity, shield communities from extreme weather events, and support vital coastal livelihoods. Women are central to the stewardship of these coastal forests. Building on years of experience bolstering women’s forest-based livelihoods in Myanmar, Landesa is embarking on an ambitious initiative to strengthen tenure rights for women and men in coastal communities throughout the region so they can defend and restore these indispensable mangrove forests. With engagement in six countries and the greater region, this work seeks to shape laws and policies that would help mitigate 947 million metric tons of carbon, improve the livelihoods of 73 million people, and elevate the profile of women smallholders as powerful agents for climate action. ■