



YOUTH HOLD THE KEY

Unlocking pathways to
economic opportunity,
gender equity, and
agricultural innovation
through land rights



Secure land rights are central to unlocking the potential of youth around the world; to activating a new generation of agricultural innovators and empowered young women.

Photo Credit: Deborah Espinosa

Across the world, land is a vital asset and source of income, livelihood, security, and status. This is especially true for communities in rural areas. While there are increased efforts to strengthen land rights for women and other groups with historically constrained access to land, youth (ages 15-34) are often left out of the conversation. This is especially true for young women, who encounter gender-based barriers on top of the age-related obstacles also experienced by young men. Without secure rights to land, young women and men lack the essential ingredient needed to earn a living and participate in the rural economy. As a result, millions of youth in rural areas are unemployed, under-employed, or forced to migrate to urban areas hoping to find adequate employment.

Today, as the world grapples with the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, there is greater need than ever to bring youth to the forefront of the conversation on secure land rights. Investing in and engaging rural youth, including through secure land rights, is critical for creating the economic opportunity and stimulus to help recover from this global crisis.

Land is also foundational to our ability to address the most urgent challenge of our time. Secure land rights unlock the potential for land users to make investments in sustainable practices that can help address both climate mitigation and adaptation, forming a bulwark against climate change. Youth as innovators and tech-users are often more inclined to embrace new technologies and bold solutions to climate change.

By working to strengthen land rights for youth, Landesa is working toward a more equitable, dignified, sustainable, and prosperous future for all.

Quick Facts



Nearly
80%
of the world's **2.3 billion youth**
aged 15-34 live in low- and
middle-income countries

>60% of Africans are
under the age of 35
(Brookings)

>50% of Southeast Asians are
under the age of 30 (IMF)

~1/2 of youth in Africa
live in **rural areas**

1 in 10 in sub-Saharan Africa is
the sole owner of a plot
of land, compared with
~1 in 3 adults (IFAD)

36 million youth in Asia are
unemployed, with
another 300 million
underemployed,
without accounting for
the informal economy
(McKinsey)

Daw Than Than Aye, a young woman from Myanmar,

was laid off from her job in Thailand and moved to Yangon, where she lived hand-to-mouth sometimes earning \$1.50 a day at a restaurant. Around that time her family in Ayeyarwady received its 5 acres of paddy land back from a confiscation 30 years earlier and Daw Than Than Aye returned to her village. While they wait for paddy planting season, she will grow high value crops: watermelon, peas, and beans.



In times of crisis, youth are especially in need of a safety net. Laid off by the millions in 2020, many young people who had originally left rural landlessness in pursuit of jobs in the city returned home to their villages. Those whose families have been allocated land now have farms and productive livelihoods to fall back on.

Daw Than Than Aye's family is one of nearly 300,000 families who were allocated land in Myanmar over the past five years, through reforms that Landesa supported. She, and hundreds of other young people, have shared with Landesa stories illustrating how the land they received became their safety net.

WHY YOUTH LAND RIGHTS?

Young men and women struggle in many ways to secure their land rights, which is detrimental not only to youth themselves, but to societies as a whole. Whether through a lack of access to resources, unfavorable customary practices, or a lack of provision for youth in state-sponsored land allocation programs, youth encounter barriers within every mechanism used to access land—from inheritance, to land purchase and rental. These barriers exclude youth from rural economic activities, hamper innovation and sustainability in agriculture, and ultimately contribute to food insecurity, poverty, and gender inequity.

The good news: land rights can unlock the full potential of rural youth. Access to land can tap into latent enthusiasm among young people for careers in agriculture, strengthening their earning potential. Leveraging secure land rights to empower youth to participate in agriculture can bolster food security and agricultural productivity.

Land is frequently a precursor to accessing finance, resources, training, and markets that are necessary for aspiring farmers to succeed.

Key Barriers to Youth Land Rights



- Unfavorable land tenure systems and customary practices
- Over reliance on inheritance to access land
- Undeveloped land rental and sales markets
- Lack of access to finance and resources to buy or rent land
- Inadequate access to information and legal protection of land rights
- Lack of provision for youth in state-sponsored land redistribution programs
- Low participation in land governance and decision-making



ECONOMIC GROWTH

In sub-Saharan Africa, 10-12 million young people enter the labor market each year, with the pace of new job growth unable to meet the demand. Further, youth face systemic barriers that undermine their employment opportunities. In rural areas, youth have few options for accessing land, constraining their ability to pursue farming careers. With scarce prospects for off-farm work, many migrate to urban areas, putting added pressure on cities through unsustainable urbanization.

Therefore, access to land is central to harnessing the power of youth in rural economies.

While there are many challenges, they are not insurmountable. Strong and persistent advocacy for youth participation in land-related decision making, in tandem with youth programming aimed at building capacity and agency, is a path to creating land policies and institutions that strengthen the abilities of youth—and rural economies—to flourish.

By the Numbers

In 2020, the ILO estimates that **young workers experienced employment loss of**

15-24 years

8.7%,

25+

far outpacing employment loss of **3.7%** for workers aged 25+.





EMPOWERMENT OF YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS

In many areas of the world, women and girls encounter a variety of challenges and systemic barriers that jeopardize their social and economic wellbeing; including limited formal education, constrained mobility, child marriage, gender-based violence, and constrained ownership and control of productive assets like land. These challenges often begin early in life and may be reinforced through discriminatory laws or social norms. It is in the interest of everyone, regardless of gender, to invest in the empowerment of women and girls to build peace, prosperity, and sustainability.

Strengthening land rights for women and girls is one way we can invest in comprehensive and transformative solutions that dismantle the socio-economic barriers contributing to gender inequality, by increasing women's bargaining and decision-making power.

By the Numbers

In rural areas,



young women are half as likely as young men to have sole title to a plot of land. (IFAD)

Project Spotlight

Security for Girls Through Land Project (Girls Project)

In West Bengal, India, Landesa worked with West Bengal's Department of Women and Child Development (WCD) to implement the Security for Girls Through Land Project (Girls Project).

Through this project, Landesa and WCD worked to improve the capacity of girls by training them on their land rights, assets, and land-based livelihood options in village-level girls' groups. The project also educated boys and communities about girls' vulnerabilities and rights, as well as the benefits associated with land rights for women and girls.



Larwu is a young woman from Boway, in Bong County, Liberia, one of the 14 communities Landesa worked in through the LRSD project. In the past, Larwu's father did not recognize her hard work and contributions to support her parents and family. He initially denied her request for land to plant some crops. As a result, Larwu lost more than 300 cocoa seedlings. After participating in gender training from Landesa through our partner DEN-L, Larwu's father is now aware of how secure land rights can benefit women like his daughter.

Thanks to their engagement in this project Larwu's father's now sees his daughter with a new lens, gave her a portion of land and is committed to supporting Larwu as she uses this land to become a successful cash crop farmer. For Larwu herself, she is excited about the changing relationship she now has with her parents, especially her father, who has been supporting her in her farming activities. Together they have cultivated a large area and expanded their oil palm plantation.





CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION & AGRICULTURAL GROWTH

Strengthening youth land rights may help advance innovations aimed at boosting agricultural productivity and confronting climate change. Youth may have a stronger propensity than older farmers to adopt new farming technologies and make investments in new ways of farming.

Such investments depend on youth having secure rights to land. We need to engage a new, educated generation of young farmers that can help create and employ new agricultural technologies related to climate resilience.

Strengthening youth land rights is one way we can build incentives for younger farmers to invest in creating and implementing new technologies and techniques that are both suitable to increasing agricultural productivity and adapting to changing climatic conditions.

By the Numbers

In 2013, young migrants (aged 15-24) represented 12% of the world's total migrant population (28.2 million people), **with rural youth outmigration driven in part by climate change, land degradation, and landlessness.** [\(UN\)](#)





Diana Kyalo, 26,

is a land rights advocate and founder of [Land Pages](#), a resource portal for land issues across Africa. She lives in Kenya. Diana shared some challenges and opportunities in the fight against climate change, why youth are leading the drive for action, and her vision for a climate secure future.

“I do what I know best – I advocate for secure rights for all, especially the youth. There are linkages between land tenure and climate change. I know we are energetic and given the opportunity we can make decisions which will be impactful to our lives.”

LANDESA'S WORK:

EMPOWERING YOUTH THROUGH SECURE LAND RIGHTS

Landesa works with international organizations, local civil society organizations (CSOs), and governments to strengthen land tenure security of rural youth by taking a holistic approach to identifying and addressing socio-cultural, economic, legal, and political barriers to youth land rights. This approach is gender-sensitive, intersectional, cross-sectoral, and context specific; and addresses barriers at the individual, community, and systems levels. We focus on promoting youth access to land, advocating for policies and institutional changes that are inclusive of youth, and building youth agency and capacity to secure and defend their land rights.



PROMOTING YOUTH ACCESS TO LAND

Youth living in low-income rural communities often lack the necessary resources and knowledge needed to leverage their land rights as opportunities to thrive.

Landesa works through civil society, youth-led organizations and other local partners to increase youth's knowledge of their land rights, while also facilitating youth inclusion and participation in land allocation and redistribution programs.

In Liberia, Landesa is implementing the Liberia Land Rights for Sustainable Development Project (LRSD), which seeks to strengthen land rights for Liberian communities and individuals, including women and youth. This project, through the work of implementing partners Development Education Network of Liberia (DEN-L) and Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI), focuses on building enthusiasm for youth land rights and elevating youth voices in land management discussions.

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ADVOCATING FOR YOUTH-INCLUSIVE POLICIES & INSTITUTIONS

In rural communities, youth often face constraints on their agency and ability to contribute to land-related decision-making. These constraints can result from discriminatory policies, laws, norms, beliefs, and practices. Landesa advocates for and informs the framing of youth-inclusive policies, and works with governments, NGOs, and corporate actors to reform current laws and build institutions that are supportive of youth.



STRENGTHENING YOUTH AGENCY AND CAPACITY

Young people living in rural areas in low-income countries often have limited agency or ability to employ their assets and aspirations to make their own land and livelihood decisions.

Landesa works with youth-focused civil society organizations and partners to train youth and youth leaders in skills such as organizing and public speaking, to strengthen their individual, societal and global bargaining power for land rights.

Landesa also trains youth on existing land and natural resource rights to make sure they have access to accurate information.

In Tanzania, Landesa is focusing on assessing the youth land rights situation, raising awareness of barriers to and benefits of youth land rights, while also directly contributing to youth capacity to secure and defend their rights over land. Through village-level trainings, Landesa staff are building awareness and understanding of land rights issues and challenges among young women and men.

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**Join us in activating
a new generation
of agricultural
innovators.**

As the world endures and recovers from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, strengthening livelihood opportunities for youth is paramount. Youth are key to shaping our future—when you invest in youth land rights you are investing in climate resilience, gender equity, and strengthened rural economies across the globe.

*Invest in our shared future.
Invest in Landesa.*

Contact Sr. Land Tenure and Youth Specialist Tizai Mauto at tizaim@landesa.org to learn more.

