

GENDER EQUALITY: IT'S SMART AND IT'S RIGHT

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While farming is increasingly reliant on women's labour, women's lack of secure land tenure severely limits their influence over farming decisions. Closing the gender gap in land rights would increase productivity and total output. And it would help women exercise their rights as citizens.

Women provide a significant share of agricultural labour in developing countries: FAO says 43 per cent¹, UNIFEM says 60–80 per cent²³. These figures, although sometimes debated⁴, are a plausible illustration of reality and are part of a trend towards the increasing feminisation of farm labour.

This trend is likely to continue and even accelerate as a result of a higher proportion of male outmigration, coupled with the high incidence of diseases such as HIV/AIDS. An increasing number of widows and female orphans will become heads of farm households and the main providers of family farm labour.

Women's increasingly central role in agricultural production is at odds with their still limited access to secure tenure rights over the land they farm. It is estimated that fewer than five per cent of women in the developing world have access to secure land rights, with significant differences from country to country (FAO 2011; UNIFEM n.d.). Where women enjoy secure tenure rights, farm sizes tend to be much smaller than is the case for farmland controlled by men.

In Burkina Faso and Benin, a World Bank study found that the average sizes of women's land holdings were just 12.5 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively, of men's holdings.⁵

If tenure security is achieved when community or individual rights over land are publicly recognised and rights holders are protected against arbitrary deprivation and enjoy the economic benefits attached to their land rights⁶, then tenure security is a social construct whose meaning varies depending on socio-cultural contexts.

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¹ FAO. 2011. *The State of Food and Agriculture. Women in Agriculture. Closing the gender gap for development*. Rome: FAO. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e.pdf>

² UNIFEM. "Securing the Rights and Livelihoods of Rural Women in Africa in the Context of the Food Crisis and Climate Change". No date. New York.

³ Foresight. 2011. "The Future of Food and Farming: Challenges and Choices for Global Sustainability. Final Project Report". UK Government Office for Science. London.

⁴ Doss, C.R. 2009. "If women hold up half the sky, how much of the world's food do they produce?" Paper prepared for 2010 FAO State of Food and Agriculture. Mimeo.

⁵ World Bank. 2011. *World Development Report 2012. Gender Equality and Development*. World Bank. Washington DC.

⁶ Flintan, F. Forthcoming 2012. *Who's Eaten the Land? Concepts and Analytical Framework for Investigating the Linkages Between Land and Food Security*. International Land Coalition. Rome.

Therefore, the effectiveness of means (legal and otherwise) for guaranteeing tenure security depends on the context. Land ownership can be a means of achieving tenure security, but it is rarely a sufficient condition or the only way of securing land rights.⁷

While the agriculture sector is increasingly reliant on women's labour, women's influence over farming decisions is limited due to their lack of land tenure security. This is why closing the gender gap in access to secure land rights makes good sense from an economic standpoint, as well as from the perspectives of social justice and human rights.

Increased productivity and total output of the agricultural sector would be one of the more direct and tangible results of closing this gender gap, as equitable access to land is strongly associated with improved efficiency in the farming sector⁸. Security of tenure contributes significantly to creating the incentives needed for increased agricultural investments, which leads in turn to higher productivity.

The 2011 Foresight report gives an example from Burkina Faso, where the productivity of female-managed plots was 30 per cent lower than that of male-managed plots, primarily because labour and fertiliser were more intensively applied on men's plots.

Women's lack of control over land is compounded by the obstacles they face in the various segments of the agricultural value chain – access to input services, extension services, processing, markets, etc.

FAO argues that closing the gender gap in agriculture would increase average crop yields some 20–30 per cent on women's lands, equivalent to a 2.5–4 per cent increase in domestic food production, and a 10–20 per cent decrease in the number of undernourished people worldwide (100–150 million out of 950 million people).

Evidence from around the world shows that when women have more influence over economic decisions (as is the case when they have secure land rights), their families allocate more of their incomes to food, health, education, children's clothing, and children's nutrition.

Achieving gender equality in land ownership would empower women and give them greater influence over the way that land is used.

Addressing the gender disparities in land access would also help improve rural women's social inclusion and identity. Having a land title often means having a physical address and thus access to birth certificates, identity cards, and voting documents, all of which are indispensable if women are to exercise their citizens' rights and take part in debates on issues of common interest.

Achieving gender equality in land ownership would empower women and give them greater influence over the way that land is used (what, when, and how to produce) and how farm products are used or disposed of.

The current inequities in land access also raise a human rights issue^{9,10}. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the right to property for all. This includes the right to land, which is the most important physical asset in poor agrarian economies. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) calls for equal rights of both spouses in terms of the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment, and disposition of household property (Article 16).

In addition to international norms calling for fairer gender allocation of resources—examples include the already cited CEDAW but also the recently adopted Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests—many governments have adopted land-

⁷ In this note we use the term "tenure security" in its broader meaning, although the statistics used often refer to it exclusively as land ownership.

⁸ Jayne, T.S., D. Mather, and E. Mghenyi. 2005. "Smallholder Farming in Difficult Circumstances: Policy Issues for Africa", in International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). *The future of small farms: Proceedings of a research workshop*, Wye, UK, June 26–29, 2005. Washington, DC. pp.103-123.

⁹ Sida. 2010. "Quick Guide to What and How: Increasing Women's Access to Land". Swedish International Development Agency (Sida). Stockholm.

¹⁰ GLTN. 2008. "Secure Land Rights for All". UN-HABITAT/Global Land Tools Network (GLTN). Nairobi.

related laws which often have progressive provisions for addressing gender inequities. According to the World Bank, 115 out of 124 countries studied specifically recognise women's and men's property rights on equal terms.¹¹

Why then are we not seeing broad-based rapid progress? Part of the answer lies in the fact that the cultural, religious, and social norms and beliefs that confine women to secondary decision-making roles are among what Roland calls "slow-moving institutions"¹² that contain and delay social change. Gender disparities in other key areas such as education and reproductive health also prevent women from fully benefiting from the opportunities created by progressive land policies, where these are adopted.

Many governments have adopted land-related laws which often have progressive provisions for addressing gender inequities.

Even in contexts where there are well-intentioned policy-makers, the number of practical, low-cost, and culturally acceptable means of addressing gender inequities in the allocation of key productive assets such as land is limited.

A number of promising innovations for improving women's access to land are being tested. For example, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Colombia, Peru, and Nicaragua have introduced joint land titling for spouses. In Nepal, a tax exemption (of 10 per cent in 2008, subsequently increased to 25–40 per cent) helped raise the number of households reporting women's access to land ownership from 11 per cent in 2001 to 35 per cent in 2009¹³.

These measures are, however, more relevant in contexts of state-led redistributive land reform processes than in contexts of market-led reforms. Where an open land market exists, the risk of widening gender inequalities in land access can be reduced by establishing land funds or land banks (as in Colombia or Nicaragua), which provide financial support to women to purchase land or to pay land title registration fees.

These measures are seldom envisaged without strong pressure for change, starting with efforts to raise the awareness of decision-makers and the general public on the rationale for, and benefits of, achieving gender justice in land access. Targeted land literacy (focusing on the land-related laws and institutions) can help women better understand their land rights.

Support for women's land claims, strengthened women's roles in land rights movements, and keeping land issues high on the agenda of the most influential global women's organisations are all areas where organisations like mine, the International Land Coalition, have a key role to play in the future.

Addressing gender inequalities is also an obligation in pursuing the fulfilment of fundamental civil and political rights.

Addressing gender inequalities in access to secure land rights is justified from an economic point of view—the 2012 World Development Report refers to this need as "smart economics". It is also an obligation in pursuing the fulfilment of fundamental civil and political rights, as well as social and economic rights.

A better understanding of intra-household resource allocation and governance, as well as documentation of good practices, could help serve as the basis for more relevant, better targeted, and more

¹¹ UN Women. 2011, based on the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law Database. UN Women. 2011. "In Pursuit of Justice, 2011–2012 Programme on World's Women". UN Women. New York. <http://progress.unwomen.org>

¹² Roland, G. 2004. "Fast-Moving and Slow-Moving Institutions". CESifo DICE Report 2. pp.16-21. <http://www.ifo.de/portal/pls/portal/docs/1/1193608.PDF>

¹³ ILC. 2012. "How Can Women's Land Rights be Secured? Synthesis of the online discussion". International Land Coalition. Rome. http://www.landcoalition.org/sites/default/files/publication/1242/ILC%20CSW%20online%20discussion%20synthesis_EN.pdf

easily implementable policies and laws. Academic institutions, development agencies, and civil society advocacy organisations all have a key role to play.

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