

# Optimising momentum: taking women's land rights forward in Mozambique?

## Policy pointers

- Invest in strengthening initiatives of rural grassroots women and their movements. Build their capacity and support them to engage with policymakers to advocate for change.
- Be aware of the different causes of tenure insecurity such as the increasing pressure of foreign investments and the way its impacts are gendered.
- Develop an implementation framework for land laws and programmes such as Terra Segura, which focuses on the provision of DUATs to farmers including women.
- Raise awareness in local communities about women and men's equal rights to land and other natural resources by storytelling, poetry, theatre, and radio. Video documentaries in particular make women's voices more visible, enabling them to share experiences, concerns and demands.



## Whose land rights matter?

The Mozambique government has put gender equality and land high on its agenda. Its 1997 Land Law, Family Law and programmes such as Terra Segura are progressive. The Land Law ensures equal rights for women and men related to land. But many women are still severely disadvantaged in their access to land and other natural resources. There is clearly a huge gap between Mozambique's innovative land laws and the reality on the ground.

[ 'In Mozambique, the women do not have a voice, so they have less power than men... We try to empower women to work in groups. That is what makes them stronger.' ]

*Inez, activist and member of the Sofala women's group*

The Securing Women's Land Rights in Africa (WLRA) programme has shown how women in Mozambique can have a stronger voice in demanding change. By combining action



research by LANDac, the Netherlands Land Academy, with concrete grassroots activities by the Mozambican civil society organisation Acção Académica Para O Desenvolvimento Das Comunidades Rural (ADECRO) and the non-governmental organisation Fórum Mulher (Women's Forum) the WLRA programme has moved the women's land rights agenda forward in Mozambique by empowering women to claim access and control over land and other natural resources.

### Women's land rights in Mozambique

Mozambique officially recognises women as co-title holders of land, for example through DUATs (*Direito de Uso e Aproveitamento da Terra* or the right to use and exploit land) and its new government programme Terra Segura (Secure Land). All community members (including women) have the right to participate in making decisions. But in practice, customary land governance systems often only allow women secondary rights and access to land through a male relative. Very few women hold land titles in their own names. And women are rarely allowed to take part in decision-making processes.

Once a woman does have access to land, her access is very insecure. WRLA's research has shown that single, divorced or widowed women are particularly vulnerable to losing their land to their (former) family in-laws. Their vulnerabilities are aggravated by external factors too. The HIV-AIDS crisis has widowed many young women. Land is being reclaimed by refugees returning after the civil war that ended in 1992 with the signing of the Rome peace agreement between the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) and the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) government. And both men and women are concerned about losing their land



to the government or the private sector due to increasing land scarcity and the growing pressure of large-scale (private) land acquisitions.

### Towards social change

Access to information, local knowledge and data from the grassroots is crucial to understanding the complexities of women's land rights on the ground, to designing tailored interventions and to advocating for women's access to land and natural resources at local, national and international levels. It also provides a space for the cross-fertilisation between knowledge and action.

*[ 'The important challenge people are facing, is the lack of knowledge. We want to support women with getting a DUAT for instance. That is one of the best defence mechanisms.' ]*

*Inez, activist and member of the Sofala women's group*

On the basis of action research, community workshops and movement building, the WLRA programme has identified three practices that are crucial to scaling up proven approaches in Mozambique and to lead the way in putting women's land rights on the national – and international – agenda.

### Evidence-based advocacy

Community workshops helped generate data about the communities and offered clear insights into the priorities of women when it comes to land issues. This local information is crucial as it makes the priorities of the communities visible and provides them with the necessarily insights to stimulate action on the ground and influences policymakers and other authorities.





### Collective action and building a grassroots movement

Through collective action, women can help each other in raising awareness about women's land rights, pursuing land titles or fostering solidarity among victims of oppressive patriarchal systems. Collaboration between community-based organisations, farmers associations and women's groups helps, such as in the national rural women's conference. It supported rural women to express their concerns about losing land to the government and the private sector and demanded that the legal frameworks (such as the Land Law and Family Law) are respected and enforced. It also gave women a stronger voice against external threats and provided space for cross-fertilisation between knowledge and action.

### Local champions

Mobilising local champions (activists, militants) to act as role models and bridges between communities and authorities is key to scaling up local initiatives. In Mozambique, both ADECRU and Fórum Mulher make use of a widespread local network of local champions who share their knowledge, experiences and create common ground for action.

### Practical steps for scaling up women's land rights

In Mozambique, WLRA has shown the complexities that lie beneath women's access and control over land. Fórum Mulher, ADECRU and LANDac have successfully collaborated to reach a large number of people and gain a better understanding of the dynamics of women's land rights in Mozambique. The challenge now is to continue to build on the momentum created by WLRA.

### Educate to build capacity

- Community members are often unaware that, by law, they have user rights over their community land and can claim them if necessary. Provide education on land laws so that women – and men – can understand their rights.

- Invest in providing rural grassroots women with the skills to pursue their land rights. Women must be facilitated to build on their own experiences, narratives and perceptions.
- Realising women's land rights needs a change in patriarchal culture. Land allocations, succession, transfers and community land registration processes must strive to respect and uphold women's rights.

### Invest in grassroots women's initiatives and movements

- Invest in building and strengthening grassroots women's movements so that women's voices are enhanced: advocating for their own priorities, engaging in policy dialogue and demanding accountability, especially on policy implementation.
- Support local grassroots champions as role models and engage with local authorities and other influential social figures in joint action for social transformation and to increase the social legitimacy of women's land rights.
- Give women a stronger voice. An effective strategy is supporting women's groups and local initiatives of collective action.

### Documentation and advocacy

- Make women's voices and stories more visible through community meetings and the use of videomaking to document their experiences and concerns. This stimulates community cohesion and collective action on the ground.
- Raise awareness in local communities about women and men's rights to land even under customary law without





formal DUATS. Activities by local partners show that space for this is needed and what works in practice, such as storytelling, poetry and documentaries.

- Promote collaboration with the Mozambique National Institute of Statistics to capture baseline status data on the current situation relating to women's right to land in the country.

### Implementing change

- Target policies and actions which give women stewardship of natural resources. For example, streamline the process of applying for DUATs through the Terra Segura programme.
- The declarations of the Women, Land and Development Alternatives Conference (ADECRO and Fórum Mulher 2018) outlines grassroots women's demands and a path to change. Support the development of a framework to implement changes on the ground. This will require backing and investment from those involved in land issues, including CSOs, state agencies, county governments, the judiciary and development partners. Fast-tracking implementation of some key actions is a priority investment for making women's land rights a reality.
- Multistakeholder platforms – working with government, local authorities, development partners, grassroots women and others – are where the most transformative action will take place. Key to success is providing rural grassroots women with sufficient space to participate.

### References

ADECRO and Fórum Mulher (2018) Declaração da Conferência da Mulher, Terra e Alternativas de Desenvolvimento. <https://adecro.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/declarac3a7c3a3o-das-mulheres-rurais.pdf>

### About the Securing women's land rights in Africa programme

LANDac – in cooperation with ADECRO and Fórum Mulher – has implemented a year-long action research programme Securing Women's Land Rights in Africa: Scaling Impact in Senegal, Kenya, Malawi and Mozambique (WLRA programme). Funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the programme aims to identify, build upon and scale successful practices and experiences of grassroots organisations and movements that work to strengthen women's access and control over land and natural resources in Africa. For more information on this working paper or the programme, please contact Griet Steel ([g.steel@uu.nl](mailto:g.steel@uu.nl)) or the LANDac secretariat ([landac.geo@uu.nl](mailto:landac.geo@uu.nl)).

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