

Women's Land Rights: From Global Commitments to Local Results

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Catherine Gatundu, an environmental and women's land rights expert working at ActionAid International, was invited to share her experiences of the major learnings, challenges to achieving equitable land rights, and the way forward. In many countries women cannot have their name on land title deeds, which means that they are not recognised as farmers. Yet women can end up doing most of the manual work on the land but are often not recognised for their labour input as usually the men are the registered as the land owners. Therefore women are unable to claim their land rights.



Women's rights to land are particularly threatened by the increased demand for land, such as biofuels and large scale land deals, especially in regards to public and customary land, as there are fewer claims for secure land rights on these types of land. Land grabs can be fuelled by the presumptions of government that parcels of land are not being efficiently used, but the implications of the land could serve as a purpose for pastoral farmers or during times of drought for others. This means that buyers or investors only need to deal with governments or chiefs whereby women and men cannot voice their concerns. Land is also a powerful political tool, which means that transferring land rights shifts the political environment.

If land rights were secured and legally recognised, then gender equality would be strengthened. Some of the positive progress made towards strengthening

women's land rights has been achieved through the development of frameworks and policies, such as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT) and the AU Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa. However, there is limited or no implementation of these frameworks in some countries, which highlights the incoherence between policy and practice.

“Land can offer a platform for action, a sense of belonging and worth; and open up possibilities of participating in nation-building.”

(From Marginalisation to Empowerment: The potential of land rights to contribute to gender equality – observations from Guatemala, India and Sierra Leone. An ActionAid report)

This provides an entry point for the empowerment of women. Women need to be able to mobilise, negotiate and consolidate their voices together, whilst also taking into account that they are not a homogenous group. Moreover, the issue goes beyond land ownership. If women's land rights are not secured or the land is insufficient or infertile, then it does not enable an empowering transformation.

The way forward:

- There is a need for additional research and sex-disaggregated data, which shows where we are starting from, in order to measure the progress of documenting land rights for women.
- Demonstrating social and economic connections for secure land rights for women.
- Assess what is already happening and upscale what has worked.
- Need to consider the bundle of rights, which is not only associated with land, but also other human rights such as access to water, health, finance, nutritious food and education.

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