

Scaling for impact: building a women's land rights movement in Senegal

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.
- Support initiatives which recognise local people's land tenure, especially as land is scarce due to factors like urban expansion and foreign investment. Use these mechanisms to gather data and track, record and analyse applications. Disaggregate data by gender to monitor the progress of women's land rights.
- Improving local land governance is key to women realising their rights. Support practices which promote women's rights to land at the local level, including granting rights of use and involving women in decision-making.
- Access to land is key to food security and economic empowerment. But it must be combined with access to finance and microcredit and means of production, especially for women.
- Support initiatives to create knowledge and spread awareness of land governance issues and women's rights, for example, through radio broadcasts in local languages and using a participatory action research approach.
- Stimulate a dialogue at the national level to create synergies and integrate women's needs in national as well as local politics.



Whose land rights matter?

In Senegal, national law states that women and men should have equal access to and control over land and natural resources. The law is progressive, but in practice, land governance is highly decentralised and decisions follow customary and traditional practices. While women have

['This battle for the participation of women in the development of our country, security and respect for human rights must be everyone's business.']

President Macky Sall, 22 March 2018, International Women's Day



access to land through their husbands, fathers or brothers or customary authorities like the village chief, women are often excluded from participating in land governance and – if single, divorced or widowed – may even lose their access to land. Also, in most cases, women cannot inherit land: it is family property, managed by the head of the family. And in Senegal, 95 per cent of households are headed by men (Sall 2010).

A recent action research programme Securing Women’s Land Rights in Africa (WLRA) has shown how women can have a stronger voice in demanding change. The programme has combined concrete grassroots activities by the Senegal-based NGO Enda Pronat with action research by LANDac, the Netherlands Land Academy. The challenge now is to optimise the use of emerging best practice WLRA has identified – and drive the women’s land rights agenda in Senegal forward.



Box 1. The role of local champions in Senegal

Local champions – also known as land animators – carry out sensitisation, mobilisation and communication tasks related to women’s access and control over land at village level. Local champions work closely with customary and religious leaders as well as with leaders of women’s associations. They make the community aware of women’s land rights by initiating discussions that allow changes in the mind-sets of community members that encourage women to take part in decision-making processes concerning family property. They also help farmers to obtain tenure security.

Women’s land rights in Senegal

In Senegal, land is an increasingly scarce resource. Rural communities experience high levels of tenure insecurity due to a growing population, urbanisation, public and (foreign) private investments. According to the law, local communities can only obtain user rights to land: it cannot be sold or bought. In addition, according to local practices, land is considered family property. Rural communities are resistant to the (legal) attribution of land to any individual – women or men.

[‘If we cannot even give land to men, how can we give it to women?’]

Male participant, community workshop in Keur Socé, February 2018

Accurate data about the percentage of women who have claimed land or have decision-making power over land use is lacking. But the situation for women seems especially dire. Democratic processes at local level which should empower women are usually overruled by customary practices. And

while women’s associations are promoted as a means of accessing land under a collective title, in practice, small pieces of land are often shared between too many women and often hinders women’s individual claims and real economic autonomy. As such, women should not be restricted only to this collective model.

Knowledge is needed for change

Generating knowledge to understand what change is needed is key. It is essential to understand the different customary land governance systems and the position of women in these systems before strengthening the position of women and using this information to scale successful initiatives. The WLRA programme has identified three issues which are key to understanding women’s access and control over land in Senegal.

- **Insecurity of land tenure:** During WLRA workshops, participants expressed their concerns about protecting community land from land grabbing or rapid urbanisation. A recurring issue was also the scarcity of land. If there is not enough for men, how then can it be shared with women?
- **Lack of awareness of land tenure issues:** Many participants were shocked to learn that they do not own the lands they inherited from their forefathers, unless they can secure it with the municipality.
- **Costs of securing land tenure:** Tenure security is costly and linked to other aspects of citizenship. Many women are unable to register their rights because of time, costs, corruption or the need for a national identity card. In addition, to keep a plot of land, by law it must be used productively. This is particularly hard for women with limited access to capital.

Building capacity with local communities

The WLRA programme has begun data collection by combining action research with community workshops. In addition, Enda Pronat organised trainings, including training for land



Box 2. The success of Enda Pronat's land tenure application templates

Developed by Enda Pronat with the help of a land jurist, the application template initiative has resulted in more than 41 per cent of land claims in the community of Chérif Lô, 46 per cent in Darou Khoudoss and 43 per cent in Keur Socé. It was a first step in negotiating access to land with customary leaders at the community level. In addition, the application reports take stock of the specific constraints and real needs of women in terms of access to land, local initiatives (organisational forms and local strategies) and progress in terms of land security and women's access to land. As such, it serves as a basis for feeding into discussions on women's land rights and sharing knowledge at different levels for advocacy.

animators: local champions who act as brokers between local communities and authorities (see Box 1). Enda Pronat has also developed a land tenure application template (*fiche de demande de parcel*). In Senegal, to legally secure land, an application needs to be made to the municipal council. But the vast majority of local people – particularly women – lack the ability to draft these applications. During the WLRA programme, 361 people used the template to file applications. Of these, 160 (44 per cent) were filed by women (see Box 2).

Scaling for impact: building a movement

The WLRA programme in Senegal has shown that it is vital that women and men have equal access and power in land governance. And it has shown that change is possible, from the grassroots upwards. To date, the WLRA programme has had an extensive reach, involving at least 526 individuals within different communities. To scale up its success, the challenge

is to optimise the momentum it has gained through its work with trained land animators, cultural and religious leaders, radio shows, and the National Rural Women's Advocacy and Sensitisation workshop on women's land rights.

Support local champions

It is of crucial importance to support local grassroots champions to act as role models, contribute to movement building and engage with communities, local authorities and others to increase the social legitimacy of women's land rights.

Support economic empowerment for women

Access to land is key to food security and economic empowerment. It must be combined with access to finance and microcredit and means of production (such as agricultural equipment and seeds). This will enable women to invest in farm and non-farm activities to generate income, which can then be reinvested in agro-inputs to develop or add value to farmland.

Promote solidarity among grassroots women

Actions of solidarity are key so that women can support each other. Local savings groups and groups involved in alternative income-generating activities, such as producing and selling soap, are good examples of how local women can work together to overcome constraints. In addition, local leaders must ensure that collective land allocation for women provides them with adequate land to sustain their livelihoods.

Support initiatives to increase awareness

Radio broadcasts in local languages have allowed participants – local leaders, leaders of women's and youth associations and experts – to increase public awareness of land governance issues and women's rights.

Development mechanisms to record and track data

Many people – particularly women – lack the ability to draft applications for land allocation. Support initiatives which facilitate local people's land tenure procedures, such as the application template discussed earlier. These mechanisms have a dual purpose: they allow tenure security of communal





land and they can be used to gather data and track, record and analyse applications, including disaggregating data by gender, which in turn helps to monitor the progress of women's land rights.

Support multistakeholder platforms

Multistakeholder platforms are key to driving the women's land rights agenda forward and to discussing women's land issues at the national level. By involving decision makers, they can be held accountable for improving women's access to and control over land for more inclusive local development.

[Through the sensitisation activities I believe [that] other women can see what I have realised, that I have constructed a well so I can grow vegetables, that my trees are growing. The men say to themselves, 'Awa, her field is well equipped, how she has managed. I will do the same and give my wife a field.']

Awa, local champion, Cherif Lô

Optimising momentum

Much remains to be done. Regardless of the land tenure system, structural change is needed at both local and national levels: building on the many existing grassroots women's associations and 'handing over the stick' to local role models and champions, both women and men.

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About the Securing women's land rights in Africa programme

LANDac – in cooperation with Enda Pronat – 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) or the LANDac secretariat (landac.geo@uu.nl).

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