

131 Leverage women's tenure security in collectively held lands for equitable and sustainable food systems

Note: additional background information for this idea and the following one can be found in Annex 1.

The Solution: Women's tenure security in collectively held lands as a lever for equitable and sustainable food systems.

Source(s) of the Solution: This solution (and Solution 11) was contributed by representatives from government, civil society and research institutes from across the globe, including (but not limited to) LANDac/Netherlands Land Academy and Utrecht University (Mr. Guus van Westen), the Dutch governments' LAND-at-scale programme (Ms. Gemma Betsema), the World Resources Institute (Ms. Celine Salcedo-La Vina), Espaço Feminista, and their numerous partners across the world. The proposed solutions build on years of research and practice in the field of strengthening women's land and property rights and the various linkages to food and nutrition security, as captured in case studies combining policy, literature review, and fieldwork.

Problem addressed within food systems: Despite the crucial role of women as guardians of household food security, in many collective communities, women lack secure access and rights to land and productive resources. Of the total global population of agricultural landowners only 14% are women, and that number is dramatically lower across Africa and East Asia (UN Women 2020). An analysis of 80 legally established community-based tenure regimes in Asia, Africa, and Latin America found that less than a third explicitly extend community membership rights to women (RRI 2017).

Advocacy for women's land rights is rooted in significant evidence of the benefits. Studies have shown a direct correlation between secure land rights for women and improvements in household food security. When women own a larger share of household farmland, families allocate a larger portion of their household budget to food (Doss 2006). Children whose mothers have secure land rights are up to 33% less likely to be severely underweight (Allendorf 2007) and up to 10% less likely to sick and absent from school (Menon et al 2014). Secure land rights also enhance women's status in their household and community and empower them to participate more effectively in community assemblies and hold positions in community governance bodies. Women's participation in decision-making is fundamental to their contribution to food security.

How this solution will address that problem: Case studies of five collective communities conducted by the World Resources Institute and Resource Equity show that where women possess tenure security in collectively held lands, two sets of enabling conditions are present. The first is the formal recognition of women's tenure rights under the rules governing collective land rights, while the second is the mix of interventions on the ground by external and internal actors that catalyse rights in practice. Formal recognition confers legitimacy and allows women to claim rights, while operational interventions, particularly interventions to economically and socially empower women, pave the way to the exercise of rights in practice.

1. Formal Recognition of women's tenure rights

In the case studies reviewed, the rules that legitimised rights for women are laws that recognise rights or devolve control over communal lands to the community and at the same time explicitly mandate gender inclusion. The recognition of communal land rights accorded women, as members of the community together with men, legal protection against outsiders. The gender mandate allowed women to overcome customary tenure systems that accorded them only secondary tenure rights or no rights at all, ushering in land rights for women in their individual capacity. For example, in

Cameroon, the 1994 Forestry Law recognised community forestry and the 2009 Community Forestry Manual mandated women's inclusion and representation in the community forest association; these entitled women in the case study community to be formal members or rights holders as individuals, either representing the household together with the husband or in their own capacity as female household heads. The inclusion of women as members in their own right enabled them to participate in decision-making regarding the use and management of the community forest (e.g., what to plant), as well as decisions on what community projects to prioritise with the income earned from the sale of forest products and how to allocate the income distributed to household members. Among other uses, the women voted to install potable water wells and solar panels in the community, supplying clean water and energy, both of which are critical inputs to food safety and security and would otherwise be hard for them to acquire individually. As full-fledged members, they are also entitled to decide with their husbands how to spend the income distributed to households. Among others, women acquired homewares and cooking implements that contribute to food safety and help ease their domestic burdens. The women also received training on agricultural practices and marketing that otherwise would not have been available to them.

2. Interventions that catalyse rights on the ground

Economic interventions: Research shows that the establishment of women's collective enterprises helps empower women to exercise land tenure rights granted under formal laws or rules. The creation of livelihoods and independent income for women increases their skills and personal endowments, in turn leading to greater self-confidence and the capacity to claim greater access to household and community resources and decision-making arenas (see Mello 2014; Schmink and Gómez-García 2015). Women's collective enterprises created as part of natural resource management interventions also demonstrate recognition of women as predominant users of natural resources in most rural communities and the important role they play in their day-to-day management (New Course 2010). For example, in the Nepal case study, a donor-funded collective enterprise established for female members of the community forest user group—the processing and marketing of a fruit native to the communal forest—expanded livelihood opportunities for women. As the business took off, the men asked to join, eventually making it a community-wide enterprise and the principal income-generating activity in the community. Women and men benefit both individually, through livelihoods and wage income for those who participate and provide labour, and collectively, in terms of community development projects funded through the profits earned. Among the projects funded is piped water to all member households, easing women's burden of daily water collection and contributing to food safety. Community members also derive environmental benefits from improved forest conditions, including increased tree cover as they planted more trees in the communal forest and on their household plots. Increased income from the community enterprise and improved forest conditions contribute to food security in the community.

Social interventions: The case studies also demonstrate that social interventions such as gender sensitisation and capacity-building initiatives help overcome discriminatory customary norms that may hinder women from exercising their land tenure rights under new or existing rules (Agarwal 2001; Flintan 2008). For example, in Jordan, a government and donor-led initiative granted four pastoral tribal communities exclusive land rights to restore degraded pastures using the hima system, a traditional rangeland management system. The initiative required the four communities to manage the hima through a pasture association. Traditionally, women are excluded from pasture associations because of cultural norms barring them from working outside the home. While women are traditionally responsible for grazing livestock, it is considered part of household duties and therefore

not work outside the home. Men make the decisions on buying and selling animals and animal products.

A national women's NGO proposed to the donor an initiative to raise awareness about the benefit of including women in pasture management under the hima system. Their main message was that women knew much about the land given their day-to-day use of it in grazing livestock and collecting natural resources like herbs. Therefore, their skills and knowledge were crucial for improving community livelihoods and reviving degraded pastureland. The NGO employed a culturally sensitive approach, deliberately avoiding connecting the discussion to religion or political rights, knowing it would threaten men and close the doors to change. After a year of gender sensitisation, coupled with the NGO-organised women's collective enterprise — herbal tea production and marketing, which allowed women to contribute financially to the household and community — attitudes of men and women alike shifted. Men recognised women as legitimate stakeholders in the hima, and the women acquired abilities and confidence to become members of the pasture association and its executive committee. As members of the association, women's first-hand knowledge of pasture management has helped regenerate vegetation on the land. As in Nepal, the increased income from the women's collective enterprise and the improved pasture conditions contribute to food security in the community. Moreover, the women gained the ability to organise around other issues of importance to them and effect changes, something they were unable to do before the project. For example, the women successfully organised a council for children's education.

Solution's alignment to the 'game changing and systemic solution' criteria:

Impact potential at scale: Addressing women's tenure security reaches a vast target population of poor people, if not the majority, and the impact on food and nutrition security among needy people is amplified because of the effect on children, as well. The inclusive nature of collective rights promotes impact among a large population: around 2.5 billion people, of which more than half are women.

Actionability: The widespread acceptance of collective tenure arrangements, rooted as they are in customary institutions, enhances the opportunity for implementing these reforms. Moreover, current fit-for-purpose land administration approaches also increasingly depart from the existence of collective tenure.

Sustainability: Social sustainability can be derived from the rooted nature of customary arrangements as well as the inherent spread of benefits. Collective tenure arrangements, given proper conditions, aim at preserving natural resources on which the community depends.

Existing evidence: See the report *On Equal Ground: Promising Practices for Realizing Women's Rights in Collectively Held Lands*, which is based on case studies of five diverse indigenous and customary communities in five countries that have all secured women's rights to communal lands and resources. In all five communities, laws and policies granted women rights, and livelihoods and social interventions enabled women to realise them.

Current/likely political support: There is broad support for securing women's land rights. The SDGs recognise women's land rights as essential components for achieving the goal of gender equality (Goal 5, Target 5A) and a crucial element of the goals of ending poverty and hunger, attaining food security, and promoting sustainable agriculture (Goal 1, Target 1.4; Goal 2, Target 2.3). Other key international instruments include the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests, which designate gender equality as one of 10 essential implementation principles for the

responsible and equitable governance of land tenure. Most countries have enshrined gender equality in their constitution, and many have elaborated this to specify land and property rights in legislation.

Contexts where this is well/not well suited: This solution is suited for collectively held lands, such as Indigenous Peoples' lands and customary communities in rural geographies.