



Poverty Reduction: The Role of Women's Access to Land Lessons from the Experience of the International Land Coalition

Millennium Development Goal 1:
Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Millennium Development Goal 3:
Promote gender equality and empower women

- Women's access to land is directly related to rural development, especially in agriculture. It is a basic factor in food security for families and communities. Respect for women's land rights thus benefits the population as a whole.
- The need for improving women's access to land is compelling. In developing countries, women own less than two per cent of all land and receive less than five per cent of all support services, despite playing an increasingly key role in agriculture and household food security. Women and woman-headed households are a growing majority of the extreme poor.
- The visibility of women farmers must be raised and their social and economic contributions better documented. In changing socio-economic environments, women are becoming heads of rural households at an accelerating rate. Their economic roles and contributions are increasing, but without them acquiring full rights.

- Women represent the majority of persons without deeds to the land that they use. These legal rights are needed for women to receive credit – an important factor in reducing the vulnerability of poor families. Having full legal capacity over household land is necessary for woman-headed households. Particular care should be given to ownership and inheritance rights for women and girls.
- In countries where laws allow for the names of both spouses to appear on the land certificate, rural women can benefit from assistance in understanding both their rights and land administration procedures.
- Special attention should be paid to entrenching women's rights when there is a change in tenure systems. Where shifts from customary or communal-based tenure to individual tenure systems occur, women risk losing the land provided to them under traditional tenure arrangements.
- Where there is active land reform, women may not receive an equal share of redistributed land, particularly if they lack a clear understanding of their own needs and rights. It is important that women receive the necessary assistance, from civil-society organizations or local government, so that they can obtain equal benefits from land reform initiatives.
- HIV/AIDS is creating new obstacles, such as widows losing rights to lands on which they are working. The persistent gaps between customary practices and legal frameworks remain a challenge in addressing the impact of HIV/AIDS.
- Women's equal participation in decision-making at all levels is necessary to ensure equal economic opportunities, including access to land and other natural resources.
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) process provides a unique opportunity to take stock of gender equality – both in law and in practice – at the country level. As the only international human rights treaty that specifically addresses women's rights to land, CEDAW is a powerful tool to ensure women's rights in rural development.

The International Land Coalition is a global alliance of intergovernmental, governmental and civil-society organizations. The Coalition works together with the rural poor to increase their secure access to natural resources, especially land, and to enable them to participate directly in policy and decision-making processes that affect their livelihoods at local, national, regional and international levels.

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