

UGANDA



Women's Resource Access Programme Voices from the Field

Women's Access to Land and Other Natural Resources in Uganda: A series of workshops conducted with women and men in rural areas



How do the rural poor, and especially women, use, value, and benefit from land and other natural resources? What processes of empowerment occur when women's access to and control over these resources improves?

The Women's Resource Access Programme (WRAP), a specialised programme of the International Land Coalition, aims at exploring such questions by listening to and documenting the views and opinions of poor rural women. The WRAP also seeks to raise awareness, particularly among policymakers, of the need to improve women's access to these resources.

The WRAP consists of a series of small community workshops held in the fields and forests in which rural women work – not in formal meeting venues that can inhibit participants from speaking openly. A local or national NGO partner of the ILC, with strong links to communities in the area and knowledge and understanding of local resource access issues, facilitates the WRAP process.

In Uganda, a series of community workshops were organized from April to July 2006 in three provinces, Apac, Kapchorwa, and Luwero, by the ILC member and local implementing partner, the Uganda Land Alliance (ULA), in cooperation with other local partners and government authorities.

The districts were selected based on geographical location, land tenure system and the presence of land rights information centres; Apac and Kapchorwa represented northern and eastern parts of Uganda where customary land tenure systems predominate, while Luwero represented the central region with predominantly a mailo land tenure system dating back to the colonial period. The main aim of this selection was to compare resource access between the areas.

The Ugandan context

In Uganda, where the mainstay of most communities is agriculture, women contribute over 70% of the work force, but only 17% of registered land titles are in their names.

Uganda's 1995 constitution prohibits discrimination based on gender and there is legislation to increase women's participation in decision-making. However, there is no legal provision for women and men to co-own land in Uganda's 1998 Land Act, though it does contain a consent clause that requires spousal consent before land is sold. Women have the right to own and inherit land, but in practice, their access to land continues to be limited by cultural norms, particularly in rural areas.

Rather than being landowners in their own right, women have access through male relatives only, usually their husbands or sons. This makes them vulnerable to losing their access to land if their husband leaves, remarries, or dies.

In all three districts, men control who can access land, what the land is used for, and how the proceeds from a piece of land are used. The majority of women who participated in the WRAP have only user rights on their husband's pieces of land and have to seek their husbands' permission before planting. None of the participants in Apac and Kapchorwa owned land, while in Luwero, 3 out of 30 women participating owned land and had a title registered in their name.

Preliminary findings

Women participants in the WRAP complained not only of a lack of control over land, but also of a lack of control over the income arising from selling produce from the land. At the same time, women generally find themselves responsible for meeting family needs.

They also emphasized that under customary practice, property rights of women after divorce are uncertain, depending on whether the woman is seen as responsible for the failure of the marriage. In most cases, women do not receive land as part of a divorce settlement.

There was a general feeling of powerlessness and frustration among the women, who complained about the power imbalance at the household level, and especially about the control their husbands have over any income made from agricultural produce. According to the women, they are left to do subsistence farming to ensure that food is available for the family, but if there is any surplus to sell, their husbands step in to collect the money made.

Many of the women participating revealed that they have devised ways selling surplus produce behind their husbands' back to save some money. There were several participants who had managed to buy small livestock and even land from their savings, and they recounted how this had changed their lives in a positive way.

One of the main problems mentioned by the women, in addition to the lack of control over land, was the lack of market access and low prices for some



of their produce. For many of the women, it was not essential to own land, but to earn an income from land, whether it be owned or rented. Those women who had their own land, whether owned or rented, stressed how positively their lives had changed.

Talking to these women showed that secure access to land can transform women's lives. The transformation can be in economic terms, providing a more secure and stable source of income and creating income-generating opportunities, and beyond, it can contribute to their self-confidence and to making them feel less powerless.

During the workshops, the women discussed how they might move forward. Their suggestions included exchange visits between different communities so that women can learn from each other on how to access productive resources, and awareness programmes so that more women would be educated about their land rights. From their many suggestions, it was evident that women need to develop the capacity to act collectively. A key lesson from the WRAP is that talking to poor women, listening to their views and learning from their knowledge, is an essential first step in the process of women's empowerment.

From a nobody to a somebody...

My husband and I lived on a piece of land that he had inherited from his late father. When my husband was still alive I witnessed some scenes where his relatives were claiming the same piece of land on which we lived. I knew that if anything happened to him and he dies, our son and I would not survive on that land. I was rearing pigs at the time and they were a source of income, although not so much. But I managed to save some money.

When my husband died I sold the pigs and bought a small piece of land where I now live with my grown up son. We worked together tilling other people's land for a fee and later I bought a cow.

I think every woman should own land. It makes life easier because land is an asset and a woman should have the power to decide on how to use her land.

– *Naluwungwe, widowed, Luwero*

WRAP activities were undertaken in Cambodia, India, Indonesia and Nepal during 2001 and 2002. In early 2003, through a contribution from the United Kingdom, a grant was made to IFAD's Sustainable Livelihoods Diagnostic and Learning Trust Fund to facilitate the use of the WRAP methodology in the design and supervision of IFAD projects and programmes in Africa, starting with a WRAP that provided input to the formulation of the Southern Nyanza Integrated Community Development Project in Kenya in 2003. The WRAP Uganda in 2006 was carried out in the context of a larger cooperative project between IFAD, The Belgian Survival Fund and ILC: the Collaborative Action on Land Issues (CALI).

The final report on the Uganda WRAP will be published shortly. For the first time, the WRAP document is being written by ULA, the implementing organization (in the past, a consultant was hired to produce the report). A video highlighting the main issues raised by participating women was also produced by ULA.

The Uganda Land Alliance (ULA) is a consortium of 47 local and international NGOs lobbying and advocating for fair land laws and policies to address the land rights of the poor men and women, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and individuals in Uganda. ULA can be contacted at ula@africaonline.co.ug.

If you would like further information on the WRAP methodology or previous WRAPs; or if you wish to become involved, or even organize community workshops using WRAP approaches, please feel free to contact us:

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