

More land rights for women

Secure access to land for women is a key to sustainable, resilient and equitable land use and improved food security.

Background

Women and girls often lack secure access to land: worldwide, they hold less than 20 per cent of land rights, although they perform around 50 per cent of agricultural work. In order for women in rural regions to develop their potential for a sustainable transformation of agricultural and food systems, they need better access to land.
The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT), published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), call on national governments to "ensure that women and girls have equal tenure rights and access to land, fisheries and forests, independent of their civil and marital status". According to the Voluntary Guidelines, gender equality in land ownership is a prerequisite for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

When women have the same access to land as men, they contribute to increased and more sustainable food production, reducing poverty and hunger. This leads to social and economic benefits for everyone – households, communities and society as a whole – and reduces gender inequalities.

Nevertheless, women's equal access to land is hampered in a number of ways:

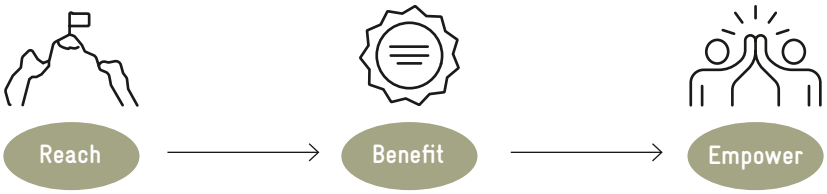
- Traditional inheritance rules generally favour men and lead to unequal distribution of land rights. They thus weaken women's economic independence and social status.
- In many societies, traditional land rights compete with formal land rights based on national legislation. This leads to uncertainties and conflicts. When land rights are not clearly documented, women can find it difficult to enforce their rights and are more vulnerable to land expropriation and discrimination.
- Land titles are often granted solely to the male head of the family. This excludes women from owning land and restricts their self-determination.
- Social values and norms which favour men and disadvantage women are culturally, religiously and politically embedded in many societies and make achieving gender equality more difficult, including equal land rights.

There can be different and competing interests in the use of land – from food security to biodiversity protection to climate mitigation measures – and the rights to the land can be formal or informal, state-recognised or based on non-recognised customary law, planned or spontaneous. This characterisation is based on the concept of the "Continuum of Land Rights" (GLTN 2015).



Published by

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH



Solutions from development cooperation

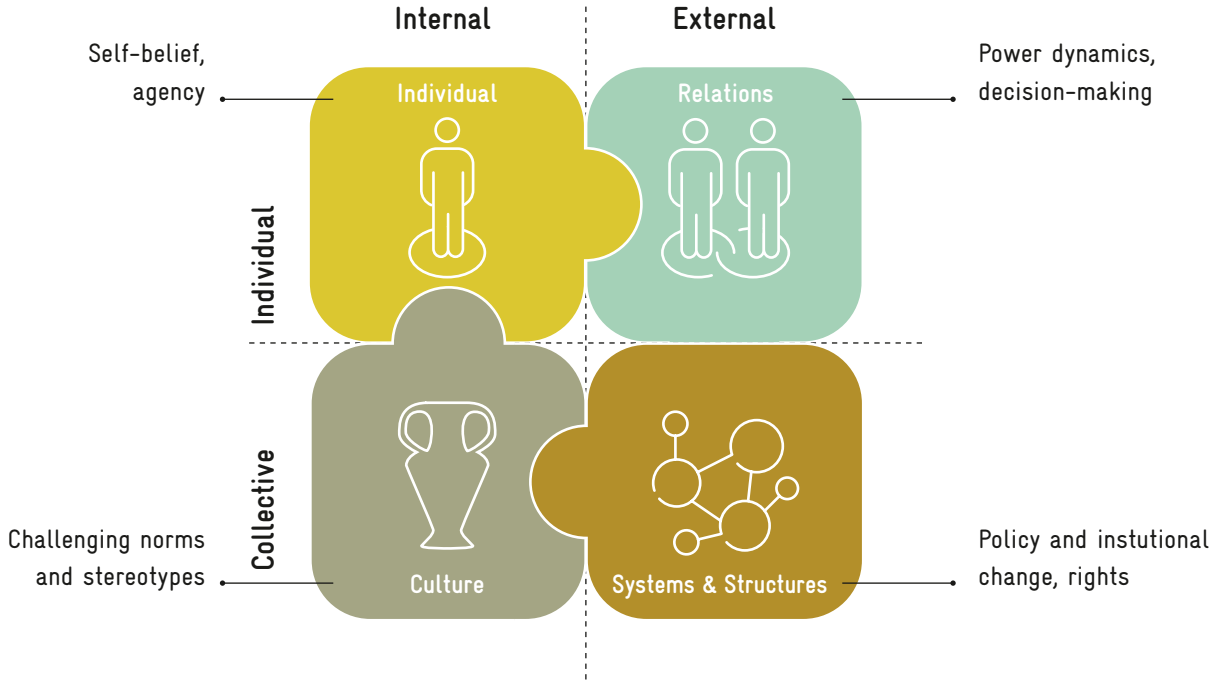
Documented land rights for women do not automatically lead to them benefiting from their land. They must also have the technical skills necessary to use their land sustainably and thus generate value from it. The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH trains women in this area so that they can become more financially independent and increase their bargaining power in land conflicts.

Men and women should have the opportunity to participate equally in the drafting of land use agreements and in the management of land. For sustainable land management, for example, it is important that women can participate in decision-making and that society increasingly recognises the benefits of their contributions. Land conflict resolution also benefits when women share their views on the dispute with the relevant bodies. GIZ supports women's participation by involving female representatives in Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) working groups.

Finally, GIZ supports awareness-raising measures to increase gender equality. In order for women to develop their potential, men are also encouraged to question their ideas about gender roles. Particularly traditional decision-makers should be convinced of the necessity of land rights for women, as they have a significant influence on the scope for cultural change.

With these gender-transformative approaches, German development cooperation is improving women's self-determination. It helps to make rural communities more resilient and equitable, challenging rigid gender norms and power imbalances and breaking them down at different levels. Support is provided for holistic change processes, which are intended to improve women's social status and agency (individual level) and include power dynamics and decision-making processes (relationship level). It is equally important to transform cultural norms and political and institutional structures.

Quadrants of change for women's empowerment



Uganda: How women support sustainable solutions to land conflicts

In Uganda, traditional courts often rule in favour of culturally embedded and unequal gender roles. However, in some districts of northern and central Uganda, land disputes are also resolved out of court through ADR – based on a structured, community-oriented approach that uses mediation and arbitration and involves all stakeholders. In the ADR committees, local leaders and representatives of marginalised groups such as women and young people mediate disputes, inform the parties to the conflict about land laws and document solutions.

GIZ's Global Programme Responsible Land Policy supports the work of the ADR committees, which have helped to resolve 80 per cent of reported land conflicts. The ADR's awareness-raising campaigns reached over 150,000 people – over 40 per cent of whom were women.

Women acquire knowledge about land rights through GIZ training courses so that they can fulfil their role in the ADR committees. Their participation in the committees also changes the power dynamics within families and communities, helping to ensure that their voices are heard in negotiations on land rights. In this way, the ADR approach often breaks down deep-rooted gender-specific role patterns.

In addition, women themselves benefit from the ADR approach, as it often ensures that they receive officially recognised land rights from the land administration. This can also have a positive effect on land administration practices.



Ethiopia: Entrepreneurship training promotes women's autonomy

In Ethiopia, women have limited scope to be economically productive and exercise self-determination in their lives. Patriarchal structures are firmly embedded in society, the country is severely affected by food insecurity, and land rights are often poorly documented.

GIZ's Global Programme Responsible Land Policy strengthens private micro-enterprises, works with civil society organisations and trains and raises awareness of women's land rights in local and regional authorities. The programme strengthens women's land rights in Ethiopia, for example by promoting the issuance of over 280,000 formalised land titles in the name of women or both spouses.

The training courses are designed to provide the women with important skills for starting and running their businesses and cover topics such as financial literacy, marketing strategies, leadership development and networking. Training is held close to the participants' homes to encourage participation and engagement, with timing adapted to the women's schedules. The initiative uses a training-of-trainers approach that involves women and GIZ's policy partners in delivery to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the training objectives. The training courses have equipped 400 women with skills in vegetable growing, poultry farming and finance. On this basis, 26 of them founded their own micro-enterprises and thus became more financially independent. With the help of easily available small loans, the women were able to invest in their land and earn their own income.

Women's entrepreneurship training strengthens cultural perception and promotes adaptability and innovation. The women develop a mindset that values change and diversity and encourages collaboration and creativity. Women's active participation in income-generating activities motivates traditional leaders to support women's increased access to land ownership. Overall, the training improves systems and frameworks, which increases the resilience and success of enterprises run by women.

Results of GIZ's Global Programme
Responsible Land Policy (GPRLP) (2016–2026)

Access to land
has been improved for approximately
650,000 households,
over **60 per cent** of which
are **headed by women.**

Almost 200,000
smallholder farmers took part in
awareness-raising campaigns
and familiarised themselves with land rights
and responsible land use.

↓

More than 30 per cent of them
were women.

Key messages

1 Secure land use rights for women are an essential basis for their food security and social participation, for productive and sustainable agricultural systems, and for the protection and sustainable use of natural resources.

2 Land rights are an important element of women's empowerment, as they form a basis for their investment decisions, the improvement of farming and cultivation methods and the development of entrepreneurship.

3 Women's knowledge of sustainable agricultural practices, which has grown over generations, can generate more value and be shared more effectively if women have more agency and options for action through secure tenure and land rights.

4 Combining secure land rights for women with the strengthening of land use and entrepreneurship capacities is an effective approach in implementing comprehensive development policies that promote everyone's equal participation.

Land rights
enable women to better realise their
economic and **social**
potential.







Recommendations for development cooperation

1. Analyse specific barriers for women: The analysis of the barriers that limit women's rights, access to and ownership of resources and their representation in decision-making processes is a prerequisite for any intervention. It is important to distinguish between established patriarchal behaviours and cultural norms. This distinction promotes behavioural change without questioning the existing culture.

2. Systematically integrate land and use rights: Strengthening of land rights and tenure, especially for women, should be systematically taken into account in all initiatives on agricultural and food systems and the protection and sustainable use of natural resources. Their secure access to land should be a cornerstone of investment in rural development, as its absence could jeopardise all other intended effects.

3. Raise awareness of gender inequalities: Interventions that stimulate behavioural change are particularly successful when they address gender issues in the context of improving livelihoods for all, are open to women and men, young and old, migrants and local people, and reflect on shared societal roles, constraints and opportunities. The aim is to show whether and how women's rights are in line with national and international legal frameworks. Women should be educated about their rights and encouraged to see themselves as development actors and pioneers who have an influence on key decisions.

4. Legal integration of land rights for women: If women are registered on land certificates together with their spouses, they are entitled to an equal division of the land in the event of a divorce – with far-reaching effects. Such regulations strengthen women's voices and self-confidence – both within the family and in society – and reduce their dependence and vulnerability to violent partnerships.

5. Promote collective land rights beyond the family: These types of land rights benefit women, young people and other marginalised groups and thus take account of intersectionality. Collective land rights can be used to transcend social boundaries such as property rights, restrictions on cultivation, and access for migrants.

6. Cooperation with stakeholder groups: Social change in favour of women's rights is a whole-of-society task but is embedded in the local context. Close cooperation with national and local authorities, civil society organisations – especially women's organisations – and traditional authorities is therefore essential.

Women
should be encouraged to see
themselves as **development actors**
with influence on important
decisions.



Learn more

BMZ (2023): Feminist Development Policy – For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide

CGIAR Collaborative Platform for Gender Research (2019): Implementing Gender Transformative Approaches in Agriculture

FAO (2012): Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT)

GIZ (2024): Women Empowerment for Resilient Rural Areas (WE4R)

GLTN (2015): The Continuum of Land Rights

International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI): Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index

TMG Think Tank for Sustainability: The Women's Land Rights Initiative

UNCCD (2024): Her Land

As a federal enterprise, GIZ supports the German federal government in achieving its goals in international cooperation for sustainable development.

On behalf of

Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development

Published by:
Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

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Design:
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Bonn, October 2025